

# **The Post-Expressivist Turn:**

*Four American Novels and the Author-Function.*

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*for my Mother and Father*

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## Abstract.

“The Post-Expressivist Turn: Four American Novels and the Author-Function” proposes a model of the author-function as a “diagnostic” tool. An “author-centred” mode of critique can interrogate the hegemonic narrative of liberal humanism, or “liberal modernity”, in Western culture. The argument in this thesis proceeds from the recognition that the hegemonic convention of the author in contemporary Western culture (that is, the “expressivist” convention of the author) has been disarmed of its claims to ideological innocence and commonsensicality.

This thesis utilises the insights of poststructuralism, specifically the discourse theory of the French philosopher Michel Foucault, to deploy a new model of the author-function which foregrounds the ideological and discursive precepts that the expressivist model of the author has been assumed to transcend. The thesis examines four novels: *The Bostonians* by Henry James, *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, *V.* by Thomas Pynchon, and *Democracy* by Joan Didion. Taken together, these encompass a hundred-year trajectory defined by the literary schools of late realism (*The Bostonians*), modernism (*The Great Gatsby*), late modernism (*V.*), and postmodernism (*Democracy*). Each of these novels is deployed as a stage in a cumulative trajectory which foregrounds a “post-expressivist” operation of the author. This post-expressivist model of the author presumes no claims to epistemological self-evidence or commonsensicality. Consequently, the author-function in each of these novels is freed from its traditionally displaced, reified position in the cultural milieu. Instead, the author is re-engaged in the Western body politic as a discursively-situated material event. It is this discursive engagedness which once more installs the author as a productive diagnostic, as a productive means of interrogation of the hegemony of liberal modernity. This is effected through an interrogation by this post-expressivist author-model of the perceived efficacy of the project of American liberal humanism as a basis for the realisation of a democratic, rational utopia. In tracing a progressive denaturalisation of the author as an extra-contextual function (*The Bostonians*), through to a foregrounding of the author as an enunciative function (*Democracy*), this thesis delineates an “author-centred” model of critique relative to a trajectory that recognises the position of pre-eminence still enjoyed by the author in late-capitalist Western culture.

## **Declaration.**

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the university library, being available for loan and photocopying.

Mark Caldicott  
May 2005

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## **Introduction.**

The position of hegemony enjoyed by the convention of the expressivist author in Western culture – or, strictly speaking, the “mainstream”, “populist” representations of this culture – is itself a reflection of the status of the expressivist author in Western society as an implicitly accepted norm. The convention of the expressivist author – the convention which valorises the author as an autonomous, ideologically innocent locus and initiator of a coherent, univocal meaning position within a text – has been installed within the Western body politic as an adjunct to the ethos of liberal modernity which developed in England, Europe, America, and ultimately across the world, as a result of the philosophical and political transformations effected by Renaissance humanism and the eighteenth-century Enlightenment.

The expressivist model of the author is the progeny of the Romantic period, during which, in the United Kingdom for example, figures such as William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Percy Bysshe Shelley helped institute a convention of artistic production which privileged, first, the poet, and eventually the artist generally, as an entity possessed of a superior “organic”, “imaginative” sensibility (Wordsworth 1974, p. 126) in human society. Emerging concurrently with the rise of liberal modernity, which privileges the individual subject as a centred, self-determining origin and agent of individual liberty and individual and collective progress (Coates & White 1970, p. 6), the expressivist convention of the author was initially developed as a response to both the incorporation of the artist into the newly emergent commercial “literary market” and of opposition to the emergence and expansion of industrial capitalism (Williams 1967, pp. 30-36). It is as a result of these developments that the expressivist author was first instituted in Western culture as a “diagnostic”, as a means by which a specific cultural



embodiment of certain human values – validated in the domain of art – could be used to critique or (in the specific case of the Romantic movement) criticise both the epoch of industrial capitalism and the ethos of liberal humanism, or modernity, which had risen to prominence by the early years of the nineteenth century (Williams 1967, p. 36).

The question, however, as to *how* the author might operate as such a diagnostic of industrial capitalism and modernity is a problematic one. The author-function is a term that comprises not only a definition of the author as the origin and privileged arbiter of meaning in a text, but also implies that the text is brought into the world as a coherent and unproblematic reflection of the semantic and artistic intent of the author. The effectiveness of this model of the author-function as a mode of meaning production grounded upon “commonsensical”, “ideologically innocent” precepts was interrogated during the twentieth century, a phenomenon initiated by the New Criticism of the 1940s and 1950s, and brought to a kind of fruition in the 1960s and 1970s by the field of poststructuralism. Indeed, the assault by the poststructuralists (most notably Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault) upon this hegemonic model of author-centred criticism (hegemonic in the sense that it has been incorporated into mainstream Western culture, at least, as a cultural norm) resulted in the “expressivist” model of the author being contested within the academy as a productive basis for exegesis of a text. This thesis attempts to argue a “post-expressivist” model of the author-function, a model which proceeds from the insights of poststructuralist criticism, but which at the same time attempts to show how a model of “author-centred” meaning production can nevertheless be deployed as a workable means of critique of liberal modernity.

This thesis examines four well-known, even canonical, American novels: *The Bostonians*, by Henry James, *The Great Gatsby*, by F. Scott Fitzgerald, *V.*, by Thomas Pynchon, and *Democracy*, by Joan Didion. The thesis uses these four novels to delineate a trajectory that progresses from the latter part of the nineteenth century to the latter part of the twentieth. In delineating this trajectory, I establish a model of the author-function which recognises the original *modus operandi* that first motivated the emergence and privileging of the expressivist author convention as the means by which the narrative of modernity can be interrogated. The four novels discussed in this thesis are consequently employed to disarm the claims of modernity as an ideologically innocent project founded upon absolute, or foundationalist, precepts. Contrary to the fundamental model of modernity, the author-function – often seen as exemplary of such foundationalism – might in fact articulate modernity as something other than a project aiming and able to institute a set of “universal”, “rationally grounded” precepts of knowledge which serve as an absolute, incontestable basis for understanding. The operation of the author-function in each of these novels is therefore deployed to interrogate the modern project’s declared ideal of instituting a rational model of knowledge to realise a rational utopia. In outlining a post-expressivist model of the author-function, I in a sense seek to valorise an “author-centred” model of exegesis as a productive basis for criticism. I do not, however, seek to reject poststructuralism and return to the modern model of the expressivist author. A post-expressivist model of the author instead engages with the material processes of culture and history and thus functions as a viable basis for criticism – a viable diagnostic – after poststructuralism.

The four-novel trajectory presented in this thesis, from *The Bostonians* to *Democracy*, is deployed as the basis for an argument which seeks to delineate a productive model of

author-centred critique by foregrounding the author-function in each novel as a reflexive rather than formalist function. As will be argued in the following chapters, the operation of the author-function in *The Bostonians* marks an inaugural moment when an explicit break is made with the expressivist convention of the author. Examined in relation to the concurrent tradition of nineteenth-century realism, the author-function in James's novel is treated as an implicitly, or unconsciously, grounded context-specific function, thus disarming any notion of the author-function in James's novel as an expressivist formalism. In *The Great Gatsby*, narrative viewpoint is seen to participate in an exegetical process whereby the novel's modernist poetics also locate both authorial and narrative viewpoint in a contextual sense, this time in a deliberate or explicit sense, thus demarking a *conscious* differentiation from the perceived self-evidence of the expressivist authorial model. In *V.*, the author-function undergoes a further process of denaturalisation, as the novel's late-modernist poetics, engaging in a critique of the aesthetic of modernism, transform the author-function into a kind of "myth-shaped hole" – an ontological space where the author exists only as a kind of relativistically-grounded absence.

In the final novel discussed in this thesis, *Democracy*, the dissolution of the claims to self-evidence of the expressivist author are seen to have made available a new *enunciative* space, a semantic position in which a non-autonomous, reflexive model of the author foregrounds the collaborative role played by the reader, not just the author, in the generation of meaning in a text. As a postmodern artefact, *Democracy* therefore not only engages in a critique of modernity, but also deploys its enunciatively-situated model of the author-function as a self-conscious metafictional basis for this critique. Taken together, the trajectory of all four novels puts in place a narrative which counters the

modern, liberal humanist narrative of rational emancipation – of progress towards a rational liberal utopia – by reflexively undermining its absolute truth-claims. A productive, author-centred critique of this narrative thus becomes possible.

Each of the reflexive modellings of the author-function in the four novels is subjected to a further reflexive interrogation through Michel Foucault’s conception of the author as a function of discourse. That is, the thesis explores some of the various cultural and historical contexts and relationships specific to each of the four novels in locating the author as an historically-specific function. Indeed, the reflexive, contextual models of the author-function argued for in each of the chapters reflect a central insight of Foucault’s, as outlined in his essay, “What is an Author?”; namely, that although the academy has questioned the absolute truth-claims of the expressivist author model, it continues to occupy a hegemonic position in mainstream culture. The argument I present proceeds from this recognition, delineating a model of the author-function which reflects this position of hegemony, while seeking to argue for an author-centred model of the author reflexively engaged with the conditions of culture and society – as an engaged *material event* – rather than as an abstracted, formalist mentality.

# 1.

## **From Romanticism to Poststructuralism: A Critical Account of the Author-Function.**

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It is a commonly-held view throughout contemporary Western society that the author of a text, most especially a literary text, is at once the initiator, the central motivator, and the guiding rationale behind the written artefact he or she has created. This conception of the author is the inherent means by which a text is brought into being and by which it is ultimately understood. The text is regarded as the direct expression of the author's "genius", of the specific mode of rhetoric which the author has conceived and which the text exemplifies. It is perhaps not surprising that the author is understood in this way in relation to the text, since this approach locates the author in much the same fashion that the individual human subject is positioned and broadly understood in a modern, "individualistic" – or "humanist" – society. As with the individual, the author is seen as the "obvious", "self-evident", "commonsensical" basis of understanding. This authoritative, unproblematic point of reference seems to allow the reader direct, transparent recourse to the interpretation of the text. As the individual human subject is privileged in modern, democratic society as the self-evident, commonsensical origin of all human discourse, so also the author is privileged as the self-evident origin-position of a text.

However, over the course of the twentieth century, this position, within the confines of the academy at least, has come under attack. With the emergence at the end of the

nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth of modernist literature, and the rise in the 1940s and 50s of New Criticism, the position of hegemony enjoyed by the author has been questioned. New Critical theorists such as J.K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley argued that meaning in a text was not to be found in any perceived idea of the author and authorial intent in a text, but in the text itself. The idea that the text reflected the intent of the author, Wimsatt and Beardsley argued, was a fallacy born of theories of the author which first came to prominence in the era of the Romantic poets in the early decades of the nineteenth century (Wimsatt & Beardsley 1954, p. 6). Proponents of New Criticism argued that the meaning of a text was to be found, independently of the author, in the words of the text itself. Further, the text stood independent of social, political and cultural contexts. Meaning was not to be found in any hypothetical region exterior to the text, but in the formalist, trans-discursive properties of the text itself.

During the 1960s and 70s the New Critical position also came under attack. Under the aegis of the new fields of structuralism and poststructuralism, both originating in France, theorists such as Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault argued that the conventional idea of the author was a historical construct, an ideological position whose historical conditions reflected the position of privilege accorded to the individual human subject by the eras of empiricism, modern democracy, and industrial capitalism. Like the proponents of New Criticism, Barthes and Foucault took issue with the idea that the meaning of a text was to be found in its author's intent. Barthes argued that, rather than serving as a Godlike initiator of meaning in a text, the author undergoes a death, a disappearance, when he or she writes it (Barthes 1977, p. 146). The meaning of a text does not exist in the author's mind prior to a text's creation. The author is not an author in the commonly understood sense of the word but a *scriptor*:

The author is thought to *nourish* the book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it, is in the same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to his child. In complete contrast, the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate; there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written *here and now*.

(Barthes 1977, p. 145)

This model of the author does not exist relative to a text in any autonomous, trans-textual sense, but in relation to the field of the enunciation – meaning as made possible by the contextual relation of the author to the text and to the reader. This denaturalises the traditional idea that writing records and represents the intent of the author:

[The author's] only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them. Did he wish to *express himself*, he ought at least to know that the inner 'thing' he thinks to 'translate' is itself only a ready-formed dictionary, its words only explainable through other words, and so on indefinitely.

(Barthes 1977, p. 146)

Michel Foucault also argued that the assumption that a text (specifically a literary text) is a spontaneous expression of the author's intent should not be taken at face value. For Foucault, an assumption such as this is a culture-specific convention rather than a function perceived as ideologically innocent, and was not applied to literary texts until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Its emergence in Western society, and its incorporation within culture as a "natural" and "innocent" representation of the function of the author and the relation of the author to a text, parallels the similar privileging within Western culture of the "autonomous", "free-willing" individual subject. Like the modern convention of the author, this model of the subject – the subject of Western modernity – is the privileged basis of human understanding. Discussing this modern, "expressivist" concept of the author, Foucault argues:

[T]his author-function ... does not develop spontaneously as the attribution of a discourse to an individual. It is, rather, the result of a complex operation which constructs a certain rational being we call 'author.' Critics doubtless try to give this intelligible being a realistic status, by discerning, in the individual, a 'deep' motive, a 'creative' power, or a 'design,' the milieu in

which writing originates. Nevertheless, these aspects of an individual which we designate as making him an author are only a projection, in more or less psychologizing terms, of the operations that we force texts to undergo, the connections that we make, the traits that we establish as pertinent, the continuities that we recognize, or the exclusions that we practice.

(Foucault 1988, p. 203)

In questioning the commonsense assumptions underpinning this expressivist concept of the author, Foucault instead argues that the “author-function” is a concept produced by the operations of discourses of knowledge, rather than *vice versa*. This problematising of the expressivist author parallels a general endeavour by Foucault to problematise the commonsensical truth-claims of the project of modernity as it first emerged in the eighteenth century and then rose to hegemony as a dominant model of cultural representation and understanding. Founded upon the idea that we can posit a rational, epistemologically neutral basis of understanding which transcends the provisional, culturally-situated contexts of society, politics, and history, the ideology of modernity,<sup>1</sup> as a mode of cultural production, is grounded upon a privileging in Western culture of the individual subject as autonomous and rational. Foucault’s works are often used to exemplify the concept of poststructuralism, a concept in part motivated by a deliberate questioning of the specific truth-claims of modernity. In problematising the modern

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<sup>1</sup> The term “modernity” is an umbrella term. It covers a broad period of history in Western culture, beginning with the rise of humanism in the Renaissance and coming to a conclusion of sorts in the latter part of the nineteenth century when the broad precepts of modern philosophy were themselves problematised. Modern philosophy – succeeding the period of the Middle Ages in Europe – seeks to privilege humankind, not God, as the basis of all understanding. Humanist thought sought to privilege the perceived autonomy of the rational human individual as a basis of truth and right, as a central arbiter of understanding and moral values. With the onset of the early modern period of the seventeenth century, and then the era of the Enlightenment, modern thought was lent a new political and scientific dimension. Early modern thinkers such as John Locke, in England, and Benedict de Spinoza in the Netherlands, theorised the concept of modern democracy as a guarantor of individual liberty and a means by which a person was able to exercise their individuality. Locke pioneered the democratic concept of civic society, whereby free individuals, equal under the rule of law, shared a respect for each others’ individual rights. The tradition of the rule of church and monarchy in England indeed reflected a long tradition of individualism, setting the scene for the rise of the era of the Enlightenment in France and Europe – which employed many of the ideas of the nascent liberalism prevalent in early modern England. For example, the seventeenth-century philosopher René Descartes sought to explicate the human subject as an absolute foundation for general understanding. Through a method of epistemological scepticism, he sought to privilege the perceived autonomy and rationality of the human mind as a basis for discriminating between ‘true’ and ‘false’ propositions about reality. His famous dictum, *I think, therefore I am*, endeavoured to posit the



concept of the author, Barthes and Foucault situate their critiques in relation to a wider critique of modernity. Their respective essays, “The Death of the Author” and “What is an Author?” thus stand as specific instances in a general poststructuralist endeavour to problematise the modern conception of the human subject.

This thesis will undertake a discussion of four American novels relative to the question of the author-function outlined above. Taken together, *The Bostonians*, *The Great Gatsby*, *V.*, and *Democracy* cover a time period (the 1880s to the 1980s) which embraces the development of the novel from late nineteenth-century realism, to modernism in the early part of the twentieth century, to late modernism after World War Two, to postmodernism in the latter part of the twentieth century. This period is important because the literary mode employed in each of the four novels signals a successive moving away from the broad realist form developed in the novel during the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth; a shift which, with regard to this thesis, is also important because at one level it also signals a parallel move away from the expressivist model of the author-function.

The late realist form of the novel – emerging after the 1850s – already sought to challenge some of the assumptions that underpinned eighteenth- and earlier nineteenth-century realism.<sup>2</sup> The late realist novel, of which *The Bostonians* is an example, questions many of

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unimpeachability of the individual human mind as a ground for being, and as an absolute basis of rational understanding.

<sup>2</sup> Although there are precursors in literature (such as the writing of Geoffrey Chaucer and Daniel Defoe), literary realism is strictly a product of the nineteenth century. Emerging with a new culture of industrial capitalism, it can be broadly defined as a movement in literature which set out to represent reality according to precepts of “self-evidence” and “commonsense”. It originated in France, beginning in the 1830s, in reaction to the counter-rationalism of the preceding Romantic movement, and regarded the proper task of the literary artist as the depiction of ordinary, everyday external reality, rather than indulging in some Romantic “idealisation” or “fancy” of the imagination. Honore de Balzac’s *Illusions Perdues* (1837-43) stands as an epitome of realism, along with Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* (1857), and in England, the

the assumptions that motivate the more traditional realist form, most especially the idea that the general realist approach was founded upon “foundational”, or “commonsensical” modes of representation. The late realist novel seeks to denaturalise the assumed innocence of these precepts by arguing that the model of understanding upon which they rest is not foundational or commonsensical at all.

The broad literary models which succeed late realism – modernism, late modernism, and postmodernism – in many respects follow on from the overtly denaturalising manoeuvre which late realism effects. The project of literary modernism, of which *The Great Gatsby* is an example, can be seen as a cultural form that emerged as a result of the denaturalisation of the realist aesthetic.<sup>3</sup> Works such as *Gatsby* assume that the convention

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realist movement was championed by authors such as William Makepeace Thackeray and Charles Dickens. The movement in America took its example from Russia as well as France, the work of both William Dean Howells and Henry James standing as scrupulously worked examples of the form. Indeed, James’s realist experiments ultimately problematised the perceived naturalness of the realist form. Along with Joseph Conrad, James pioneered a new psychological brand of realism and laid the path for the emergence of modernism proper in the twentieth century. These experiments problematised the school of realism as a commonsense, mimetic mode, opening it to new methods of critique which asserted that realism was essentially an ideological convention rather than an unproblematic depiction of the world and human society.

<sup>3</sup> The term “modernism” describes a broad, many-faceted artistic movement – encompassing poetry, fiction, drama, music, painting, architecture, and other art forms – which rose to prominence in the latter part of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, and whose effects upon the character of art throughout the twentieth century were far-reaching. Modernism was an experimental and avant-garde movement, concerned with rejecting nineteenth-century artistic traditions – especially nineteenth-century realism – and also the bourgeois values that dominated conventional liberal society. Both pioneers of modernism (Joseph Conrad, Marcel Proust, and Henry James) and practitioners of “high” modernism (such as T.S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, and James Joyce) rejected the realist tradition of art by embracing narrative techniques such as montage, collage, allusion, and techniques of stream of consciousness which – in mediating narrative through the individual perspective of character consciousness – disengaged their work from the empirical representationalism of realism and naturalism. New counter-rationalist theories of psychology often motivated such disengagement. These innovations were both preceded and paralleled by many artistic movements, such as Cubism, Fauvism, Imagism, Constructivism, Dada, and Surrealism; all of them were concerned to overcome the nineteenth-century tradition of rationalism and representationalism, which they regarded as no longer equal to the task of explicating the new conditions of culture, society, and individualism. Modernism was interested in grounding itself as an autonomous, self-constituting aesthetic; its self-consciously formal concerns were often motivated by a desire to preserve the domain of the aesthetic from new forces of culture, society, thought and history which it saw as threatening the aesthetic realm with extinction. Nevertheless, modernism was implicitly bound up with many of the preoccupations – military, political, ideological – of its times. Poets such as T.S. Eliot employed their art to announce the collapse of the whole tradition of Western art and culture, although with hindsight modernism should perhaps more accurately be seen as announcing an end to the specific tradition of modernity in Western culture and the subject-centred tradition of understanding that was bound up with it. The period in which

of realism has not only been disarmed of its truth-claims, but also that the project of philosophical modernity no longer holds any absolute valency either. The genres of late modernism and postmodernism, represented by *V.* and *Democracy* respectively, use this denaturalisation of the realist narrative as a philosophical starting point, both of them proceeding from the consequent recognition that the genre of modernism can also be denaturalised. In *V.*, Thomas Pynchon sets in play a highly self-conscious parody of modernism, effectively writing its epitaph. It is possible, also, to argue that Joan Didion in *Democracy* foregrounds a denaturalising manoeuvre, installing a postmodern narrative that recognises its own ideological grounding, thus eschewing any narrative approach positioned according to absolute terms.<sup>4</sup>

With regard to the question of the author, this sequence of novels exemplifies the general historical period in which the expressivist or “modern” author function was problematised by that of modernism, New Criticism, and poststructuralism. This thesis will directly link

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modernism flourished centred around the 1920s, but it was not until the 1950s and 1960s that modernism was clearly succeeded in the field of criticism by the newly-emergent, and closely related, field of postmodernism.

<sup>4</sup> Postmodernism is a term that has occupied much contemporary debate, not least because it is seen as somewhat conflictual, and is bound up with many of the characteristics of contemporary culture. Taken as a historical term, postmodernism refers to a late twentieth-century period of contemporary Western culture – often described as postindustrial culture – whose origins lie in the 1960s, with the emergence of the post-war capitalist consumer culture. Defined thus, the parameters of the phenomenon of postmodernism are represented by the various new media of this commercial culture: advertising, television, commercial design and the pop video. Media such as these engage with the superabundance of styles, symptomatic of a culture of fragmentary sensations, eclectic nostalgia, disposable simulacra, and promiscuous superficiality. This representation of a culture bereft of values of authenticity, depth, and coherence is applicable to the phenomenon of the postmodern when considered in relation to the fields of literature and the arts. Here, postmodernism is seen as a further response to the crisis of modernity as first elucidated by late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century modernism. Modernism’s problematisation of the perceived “self-evidence” of modernity is played out in the arena of the postmodern by “depthless” works of, for example, fabulation and pastiche, where a perceived ontological absurdity and meaninglessness is foregrounded. Postmodernism, then, like modernism, is often contrasted with absolute modes of meaning and understanding and positioned as symptomatic of the loss of such modes. But where works of modernism such as *The Waste Land* sought to deploy the formalist and aesthetic properties of their art form as a kind of stay against this meaninglessness, postmodern art generally foregrounds this meaninglessness. As with works of modernism, the methodology of postmodernism – exemplified in novels by writers such as Thomas Pynchon, Vladimir Nabokov, Italo Calvino, and Angela Carter – does not apply across the board to all artistic artefacts in Western culture. Nevertheless, as a consequence of its self-conscious response to the

the denaturalisation of the expressivist author-function with this development of the novel from the modern to the postmodern, as other writers have done. However, it will also argue that each narrative mode, beginning with the late realism of *The Bostonians*, differentiates the author-function from its perceived expressivist/commonsense definition, and ultimately redefines and repositions the author-function in post-expressivist terms, but does so without abandoning or rejecting outright the author-function. By locating the author-function contextually, these novels question whether it occupies an empirical, idealist position anterior to the discursive operations of the text. The four novels reposition the author-function as a symptom of modes of discursivity rather than as their position of origin. This author-function does not define the process of textual interpretation as the passive deciphering of some supposedly extra-textual idea of the author-function, but as the context-dependent (as opposed to context-transcending) relation of the author to the text.

With this prioritisation of context in mind, the fact that the four novels discussed in this thesis are American, for example, also enables one to question whether the nature and operation of the author-function in these texts is in some ways specific to America. As will be argued below, the expressivist model of the author-function first came to prominence during the Romantic era in the early decades of the nineteenth century. The American literary tradition drew on this predominantly European literary heritage; one need only think of the importance of the Romantic movement in Europe to American Transcendentalism. The emergence of a literary tradition in America must be seen as more than a consequence of European influences insofar as the “American” ideal can be

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perceived ending of Western modernity, the importance of this idea of the postmodern can hardly be overestimated.

coupled with the naturalising of the expressivist conception of the author.<sup>5</sup> As Jonathan Arac argues in *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, the rise to hegemony in the nineteenth century of the expressivist model of the author-function signalled a moment when American literature became severed from the popular narrative of the nation itself. With the emergence of the literary writer as a prestigious cultural type came a crisis in the public's relation to the literary artefact (Arac 1995, p. 777).

The emergence of the expressivist model of the author paralleled a moment in American history when the American national narrative of liberal democracy and progress was no longer unproblematically defined as a narrative of social progress.<sup>6</sup> As the author became

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<sup>5</sup> In addition, the tradition of New Criticism, which questioned the relevance of the author in the interpretation of a text, originated in America, and the world-wide impact during the 1970s of French poststructuralism was of course felt in America by the prominence of the Yale school of deconstruction.

<sup>6</sup> The origins of liberalism lie partly in the Enlightenment, beginning in France during the eighteenth century, with a rebellion by various French thinkers against the absolutism of the French monarchy and the dogma of the Catholic church. Although proceeding from a different starting point, Enlightenment thought in France drew upon the English Enlightenment tradition in order to formulate its doctrines. The Enlightenment in France sought to replace the absolutism of the monarchy and the church with a new emphasis on the rights and capacities of the individual and empirical models of knowledge, including a process of scientific reasoning. Broadly, at least, the French Enlightenment differed from the Enlightenment-cum-liberal tradition in England, which propounded a doctrine of the rights of the individual which was perceived as a refutation, not expression, of divine will. In France this new tradition of thought was ushered into social and political forums by an organised movement – the *Philosophes* – who openly opposed the monarchy and the church. Indeed, *Philosophes* such as Marquis de Condorcet proposed as a central tenet of Enlightenment thought a meliorist doctrine of human progress which regarded the individual and secular society as able to achieve a “perfect” society, where all natural evils are suppressed and war, tyranny, and intolerance are abolished. Rational thought was seen as able to provide a coherent, incontestable conceptual and moral foundation for human society, a position made possible by the privileging of the human individual as a ground for general understanding.

Not all of the *Philosophes* subscribed to the meliorist doctrine of human progress, but the French Enlightenment stands as a crucial intellectual movement, a bridge between the era of early modernity and the era of modernity proper, exemplified during the nineteenth century by the ethos of liberalism. Liberal thinking is of course central to the makeup of Western society, not only during the nineteenth, but also the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as well. Transforming Western society at the beginning of this period, liberalism holds that constitutions, laws, and political proposals should be formulated to promote and enshrine individual liberty, and that individual liberty is founded upon the exercise of rational will. Liberalism thus stands as a kind of culminating example of modern thought, a political movement whose success in dominating Western political thought during and after the period of the nineteenth century reflects the transformations effected by the rise of individualism in England from the early-modern period and revolutions in eighteenth-century America and France. The term “liberal” is now applied to a type of constitution characterised by the establishment of the rule of law, freedom of political organisation, an independent judiciary, and a government response to public opinion. The task of liberal government, in its most abstract sense, is seen as the affirming of given individual freedom. Classical liberalism, prevalent in

a form of autonomy that stood anterior to both the text and the nation, so also the literary narrative of settlement and expansion began to generate narratives that propounded positions which were no longer ideologically subordinated to the popular democratic rhetoric of the nation. As Arac argues, novels such as Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, in prioritising their own narrative over that of the nation, effectively situated the emergent field of American narrative in ways which critiqued and problematised that narrative (Arac 1995, p. 735). The formulation during the Romantic period of an autonomous, expressivist conception of the author paralleled the emergence during the modern period of the autonomous, self-identical human subject, and foregrounds an antithetical relation between the author-function and the narrative of modernity. As a consequence, it is possible to argue that twentieth century problematising of the expressivist conception of the author has the effect of also denaturalising America's national narrative.

### **The Rise of the Expressivist Model of the Author.**

The concept of the author as it is understood today has not always occupied the position of hegemony that it currently enjoys within mainstream Western culture. Although a genealogy detailing the emergence of this model of the author can be traced as far back as the times of Plato and the Socratic definition of a poet in his work *Ion* (Williams 1967, p. 36), the author did not truly emerge in its modern form until the early years of the

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England during the earlier part of the nineteenth century, advocates a minimum of state intervention in political life. However, the premise of a political movement founded upon a concept of the perceived "freedom" and "liberty" of the individual has proved to be problematic. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, in both England and Europe, deliberate state intervention was often perceived as necessary for the freedom and well-being of the individual. The plight of the poor and other underprivileged social groups was seen as remediable only through such state intervention. By the end of the nineteenth century, and during the twentieth, liberal politics had ceased to be seen as a system enabling individuals to live autonomously, without collision, in society; it became, instead, a powerful agency able to bring about a given political purpose. This fact served to place a question mark next to the idea of liberalism as a mode of social agency able to promote individual liberty. Thus, the rise of socialism in England and Europe at the end of the nineteenth century served to underline the constructedness of liberalism as a concept. Rather than privileging a "natural", "commonsense" model of the individual and the perceived inalienability of one's rights, such ideas came to be seen as ideological.

nineteenth century with the rise of the Romantic movement in England and Europe.<sup>7</sup> As will be argued below, the Romantic poets have been especially attributed with developing what M.H. Abrams termed the “expressivist” model of the author and art (Abrams 1958, p. 70). Although their views at first challenged commonly accepted conceptions of the author and art, the Romantic authorial model was eventually naturalised as a perceived commonsensical form in Western society throughout the nineteenth century.

As Abrams argues, the idea that there was a specific Romantic “movement” in England and Europe is largely a convenient fiction employed by historians (Abrams 1958, p. 100). However, throughout the early years of the nineteenth century, when figures such as Wordsworth and Coleridge were commencing careers as poets, a common set of ideas – such as that of the expressivist author – attained a new cultural and historical emphasis. Abrams, for example, describes Wordsworth’s famous preface to his and Coleridge’s

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<sup>7</sup> The Romantic movement, which came to prominence in most countries of the Western world during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, emerged from an explicitly theorised reaction against the objectivist and rationalist slant of philosophy and art during the eighteenth century: a reaction, in short, against the doctrines of the Enlightenment. As a philosophy, the origins of the Romantic movement lie in Germany. Philosophers such Friedrich von Schlegel and Immanuel Kant devised an aesthetic and a poetics which placed sensibility and transcendent insight above that of rational experience. Right across Europe, in England, France, and Germany, and also in America, certain artists and thinkers reacted against the Enlightenment and the privileging of the rational faculty, and turned instead to direct emotional experience and expression. They aimed to elicit imaginative truths which transcended the emphasis upon the rational, the impersonal, and the artificial (and, with Newtonian science, mechanical models of the universe). The figure of the artist as genius – typified by the expressivist model of the author – first rose to prominence as a consequence of this movement. Simultaneously, the tradition of aristocratic patronage of the artist was superseded by a new relation of the artist to the forces of capitalism, and the free market took its place. The Romantic movement was a dominant force in American literature between 1820 and 1865. Looking to Europe to provide literary models, writers such as James Fenimore Cooper gave precedence to the American cultural experience with his five Leatherstocking novels (1823-41), employing the model of the historical novel as pioneered by the English writer, Sir Walter Scott. Edgar Allen Poe built on the model of the English Gothic novel for his own writing. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow also used the English model of the historical novel to popularise many of the ideas of Romanticism in America. The essayist, lecturer, and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson, who pioneered the Transcendentalist movement in America, and is seen today as an inaugurator of the first specifically American tradition of art and expression (the “American Renaissance”), employed many of the precepts of English and German Romanticism to champion this “organic” approach to art and thought. Other American novelists, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville among them, built upon the new Romantic tradition. Melville’s most famous novel, *Moby Dick* (1851), is generally regarded as exemplary of the American Romantic tradition, rivalled only by Walt Whitman’s volume of poetry, *Leaves of Grass* (1855), which in a new mode of free verse championed the Romantic ideals of individualism, personal expression, and the love of freedom.

collection of poetry, *Lyrical Ballads*, initially published in 1800, as a manifesto of sorts for Romanticism; not necessarily because it was a self-conscious herald of a new movement, but because it provided a series of artistic and philosophical propositions which were to become widely embraced by Wordsworth's contemporaries (Abrams 1958, pp. 100-1). Among the propositions that Wordsworth put forward was a new formulation of the nature and function of the artist:

[A]ll good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; but although this be true, poems to which any value can be attached, were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility had also thought long and deeply.

(Wordsworth 1974, p. 126)

There are a number of important ideas in this argument which set the Romantic poet apart from the perceived character of the poet as formulated, for example, in artistic circles in England and Europe during the previous century. The most important of these is the idea, new in the nineteenth century, that the artist is possessed of a specific, singular "genius", a "more than usual organic sensibility", that sets him or her apart from the everyday citizen. Furthermore, the poetry that a poet creates is an expression of this singular sensibility, an embodiment of the feelings of the poet (Abrams 1958, pp. 101-2). This setting apart of the poet (a gesture which was eventually to embrace the artist generally) was new in Western culture, and marks a moment when art became established as a specialised mode of production (Williams 1967, p. 32). The social factors which helped bring about this transformation will be discussed at greater length below, but this new privileging of the artist in society paralleled the rise to prominence of the idea that art in its "highest" forms was able to convey a "superior" reality, a reality founded upon the privileged concept of "imaginative truth" which was new to nineteenth-century society (Williams 1967, p. 32).



Some of the manifestos and philosophies of other Romantic poets mirror this new concept of the artist and his or her art. In his essay “A Defence of Poetry” (1821), Shelley, like Wordsworth, accorded the poet a privileged cultural position:

A poet, as he is the author to others of the highest wisdom, pleasure, virtue, glory, so he ought personally to be the happiest, the best, the wisest, and the most illustrious of men. As to his glory, let time be challenged to declare whether the fame of any other institutor of human life be comparable to that of a poet.

(Shelley 1991, p. 230)

Shelley’s position in “A Defence of Poetry” iterates his theories of Romantic Platonism, derived from Plato and the Neoplatonists, as well as the poetic theory of Wordsworth and other commentators (Abrams 1958, p. 126). As Shelley argues, the poet is able to discover “the eternal Forms discerned through the veil of fact and particularity” (Abrams 1958, p. 127). The poet possesses the power to transcend the mutable conditions of everyday society and lay bare “the eternal, the infinite and the one”:

[P]oets, or those who imagine and express this indestructible order, are not only the authors of language and music, of the dance and architecture, and statuary and painting: they are the institutors of laws and founders of civil society and the inventors of the arts of life and the teachers.

(Shelley 1991, p. 207)

This stress upon the domain of human feelings, of human emotions rather than rationality as a mode of understanding, is characteristic of all the Romantics and is echoed also by Coleridge. Coleridge argued that poetry,

as distinguished from other modes of composition, does not rest in metre, and that it is not poetry, if it make no appeal to our passions or our imagination. One character belongs to all true poets, that they write from a principle within, not originating in anything without; and that the true poet’s work in its form, its shaping, and its modifications, is distinguished from all other works that assume to belong to the class of poetry, as a natural from an artificial flower.

(Coleridge 1985, pp. 227-8)

Raymond Williams argues in *Culture and Society* that it was this specific historical period which saw the expressivist model of the artist-as-genius become “a kind of rule” (Williams 1967, p. 32). Williams, however, points to the culturally specific (as opposed to the self-evident or given) conception of this model, arguing that the concept of the expressivist artist, emerging concurrently with that of the English and European industrial revolution and modern capitalism, was a conscious, culture-specific reaction to this new ethos (Williams 1967, p. 36). Williams argues that the rise of the expressivist artist went hand in hand with a number of other significant transformations, including the attitude of writers to their public, and the transformation of art into a specialised mode of production (Williams 1967, p. 32).

The change during the Romantic period of this relation of the writer to his or her readers took place during the third and fourth decades of the eighteenth century, with the growth of a large, new, middle-class reading public (Williams 1967, p. 32).<sup>8</sup> It was commonplace for a writer to express a sense of dissatisfaction with the “public”, but this sentiment became both more acute and more general during the early nineteenth century (Williams 1967, p. 33). As Williams notes, this attitude is linked to the emergence of the novel as a commercial commodity. It was as a result of this tendency to commodify art that the concept of art as a superior reality, and the expressivist model of the writer and artist, became installed within culture and eventually cemented as an implicitly understood convention of capitalist society. As Williams argues, the rise of individual capitalism

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<sup>8</sup> As Williams argues, this change in the writer/reader relationship signalled the end of the system of patronage of the artist by the upper classes, as subscription publishing and the emergence of commercial publishing took their place. He writes: “These developments affected writers in several ways. There was an advance, for the fortunate ones, in independence and social status – the writer became a fully-fledged ‘professional man’. But the change also meant the institution of ‘the market’ as the type of a writer’s actual relations with society” (Williams 1967, p. 32).

facilitated the perception of art as a superior cultural form and the installation, as a general kind of rule, of the notion of the artist as a person possessed of an exceptional sensibility:

It is tempting to see these theories as a direct response to the actual change in relations between artist and society. Certainly, in the documents, there are some obvious elements of compensation: at a time when the artist is being described as just one more producer of a commodity for the market, he is describing himself as a specially endowed person, the guiding light of the common life. Yet, undoubtably, this is to simplify the matter, for the response is not merely a professional one. It is also (and this has been of the greatest subsequent importance) an emphasis on the embodiment in art of certain human values, capacities, energies, which the development of society towards industrial civilization was felt to be threatening or even destroying. The element of professional protest is undoubtably there, but the larger issue is the opposition on general human grounds to the kind of civilization that was being inaugurated.

(Williams 1967, p. 36)

As Williams goes on to argue, the theory of Romantic art and philosophy, rather than being dissociated from the political, social, and cultural transformations of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, reflected an active and self-conscious reaction by Romanticism to the ethos of these times. Only later in the nineteenth century was this Romantic model of the artist dissociated from society, divorced from social and historical concerns.<sup>9</sup>

However, with this privileging of the role of the poet during the Romantic period there occurred, also, a specialisation of the poet as a social and cultural figure. Parallel to the attempt by the Romantics to laud the poet as an entity which transcended the material processes of industrial capitalism and as a bedrock for values which they saw capitalism as destroying, came a displacement of the Romantic artist within society:

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<sup>9</sup> As Williams argues, the political activities of the Romantics did not occupy a marginal position in their lives. He writes: “[T]hese two generations of poets lived through the crucial period in which the rise of both democracy and industry was effecting qualitative changes in society: changes which by their nature were felt in personal as well as in a general way. In the year of the French Revolution, Blake was 32, Wordsworth 19, Coleridge 17 and Southey 15. In the year of Peterloo, Byron was 31, Shelley 27, Keats 24. The dates are sufficient reminder of a period of political turmoil and controversy fierce enough to make it very difficult even for the least sensitive to be indifferent. Of the slower, wider, less observable changes that we call the Industrial Revolution, the landmarks are less obvious; but the lifetime of Blake, 1757-1827, is, in general, the decisive period. The changes that we receive as record were experienced, in those years, on the senses: hunger, suffering, conflict, dislocation; hope, energy, vision, dedication. The pattern of

The matter is exceptionally complex, and what happened, under the stress of events, was a series of simplifications. The obstruction of a certain kind of experience [i.e. the values the Romantics perceived capitalism as threatening] was simplified to the obstruction of poetry, which was then identified with it and even made to stand for it as a whole. Under pressure, art became a symbolic abstraction for a whole range of general human experience: a valuable abstraction, because indeed great art has this ultimate power; yet an abstraction nevertheless, because a general social activity was forced into the status of a department or province, and actual works of art were in part converted into a self-pleading ideology.

(Williams 1967, p. 47)

Throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century this displaced, specialised model of the poet ceased to be the preserve of the Romantics alone and was installed within Western society as an implicitly understood “norm” that embraced all kinds of artists; not only poets, but also painters, novelists, and dramatists. John Ruskin, the English author, art critic, and social reformer, was a key figure who, after the 1840s, was to pioneer the application of the Romantic model of the poet to that of the artist generally. He not only endeavoured to define and situate the artist as the embodiment of the characteristically Romantic idea of “Universal Truth”, but as the means by which the path towards a perfect society could be realised:

The purpose of art, according to Ruskin, is to reveal aspects of the universal ‘Beauty’ or ‘Truth’. The artist is one who, in Carlyle’s words, ‘reads the open secret of the universe’. Art is not ‘imitation’, in the sense of illusionist representation, or an adherence to the rules of models; but *Art is* ‘imitation’, in the older sense of an embodiment of aspects of the universal ‘ideal’ truth.

(Williams 1967, p. 135)

In America, the cementing of the expressivist model of the artist as an implicitly accepted convention broadly mirrored that of England and Europe, and the emergence of literature as a distinct cultural form also occurred there concurrently with the rise of the popular novel. As Jonathan Arac argues, along with Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Nathaniel Hawthorne was the figure around whom “the recognition of literature was established in

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change was not background, as we may be now inclined to study it: it was, rather, the mould in which general experience was cast” (Williams 1967, p. 31).

the United States” (Arac 1995, p. 693). It was with works such as those written by Hawthorne that the term “literature” first took on the character that defines it today. Indeed, the success of novelists such as Hawthorne was accompanied by a conscious bid by other American writers like Edgar Allen Poe to promote “this new, specialised sense of the word ‘literary’” (Arac 1995, p. 693). Writing for various American journals, Poe consciously sought to distinguish books of the “ordinary” novel form, such as those by Catherine Maria Sedgewick, which had “a certain adventitious hold upon the public” from other works, such as those by Hawthorne, whose Romances were more “properly” literary (Arac 1995, pp. 693-4). Other American writers, such as Herman Melville, cemented the distinction between the ordinary novel and the novel as a work of literature by modifying their approach to the craft of fiction. Whilst Melville’s first two works, *Typee* and *Omoo*, were, in a broad sense at least, non-fiction travel narratives, his third book, *Mardi*, was also a Romance:

In the winter months of 1848, Melville had decided as he wrote to his publisher John Murray, to “change” his mode of writing to “Romance”, “downright and out,” “real” romance as opposed to the relative factuality of his earlier books. He explained that *Mardi* “opens like a true narrative,” but from there “the romance and poetry” would “grow.” By this departure from personal narrative, Melville hoped to gain a greater play of “freedom and invention” and to achieve a work that was “original.”

(Arac 1995, p. 696)

The term “Romance”, as used in America, at first took the place of the term “literature” and reflected the debates concerning the new term “Romantic” in German literary theory around 1800, the period in which the Romantic model of the artist was in the process of being privileged (Arac 1995, p. 697). Arac notes that, for the writing of *Mardi*, Melville’s reading included Shakespeare, Montaigne, and “the most important critical book of English Romanticism”, Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria* (Arac 1995, p. 696), a fact that typified the trans-Atlantic influence of the European concept of literature upon the

American. Indeed, as Arac also argues, the rise of this concept of literature in mid nineteenth-century America connected in other ways with the rise of Romanticism in England and Europe, with specific regard to the Romantic idea of the relation of the writer/artist to the public:

In both of these cultures, the basis of what is now understood as “literature” was laid through the sharp sense of an absent public sphere. The French Revolution seemed to promise free speech among equals, but the promise failed, and in England, Wordsworth and Coleridge turned from public life. *The Prelude*, Wordsworth’s great poem of vocation, demands epic scale and length, only to recount “the growth of a poet’s mind.” Deprived of an acceptable world of political exchange and no longer in a position to enjoy patronage, the Romantic writers had to develop their work in relation to market concerns. The relation they chose was opposition.

(Arac 1995, p. 697)

Writers such as Melville were to draw a sharp distinction between what he described as “the public”, that majority of the American nation who had no interest in this new field called “literature”, and that of “the people”, the more obviously idealised members of the republic who represented all the liberal ideals of American democracy (Arac 1995, pp. 697-8). As with the Romantics in England and Europe, then, the character and status of the American writer also grew from what many people in Western society saw as the failure of capitalism and democracy. In England, both Wordsworth and Coleridge became disillusioned with the democratic experiment, especially after the events of the Terror in France during the revolution, and thus withdrew from an active involvement in public life. In the case of America, the divisions across the nation that were brought about by the debate over the legality of slavery (prevalent during the 1850s and the years which led up to the American Civil War) typified a number of other divisions that complicated the national ideal of democracy. The resulting ruptures and differences problematised the faith of Americans in the notion of the United States of America as a democratic nation and made many individuals question the idea of their country as a successful embodiment of the democratic principles laid down in the Declaration of Independence. In short, the “manifest destiny” of the United States as a true democracy had come under question

(Arac 1995, p. 701). Whereas the Declaration of Independence had sought to found a national democracy upon a set of unequivocally codified principles with which to direct life in the republic, the transformations of democratic life across the nation demonstrated that what had once appeared as “clear cut” and “determinate” within the American body politic had been succeeded by a “a set of possibilities that left much open to interpretation” (Arac 1995, p. 704).

Like the example of the literary author in England and Europe, the American author convention reflected certain specific cultural, social, and political processes rather than any *a priori* given. It follows from this that the author-function, in America as well as in other Western capitalist democracies, does not align itself with the democratic body politic as though such a relationship is given. Rather, as will be argued in this thesis, the author-function can be situated as a mode that offers up an *interrogative* position in relation to modernity and democracy.

### **Problematising the Model of the Expressivist Author.**

Although the expressivist model of the author-function became installed within literary studies during the second half of the nineteenth century as an implicitly accepted orthodoxy, this position was to come under attack as early as 1919, when T.S. Eliot published his essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent”. Eliot’s essay, in turn, partly motivated the emergence of the American New Criticism in the 1940s and 50s, headed by figures such as W.K. Wimsatt, Monroe C. Beardsley, and Cleanth Brooks. Eliot and the New Critics sought to shift the emphasis in the interpretation of literary meaning from the author to the literary artefact itself. They argued that meaning in a work of literature was not to be found in some perceived idea of authorial intent, but in the formal properties of

the text. With the emergence at the end of the 1960s and during the 1970s of the new discipline broadly referred to by the term “poststructuralism”, the orthodoxy of the expressivist author was to come under a different kind of attack. Poststructuralist theorists such as Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault argued that meaning in a text was not to be found in the intent of its author, that the author itself was an ideological construct – an elision and falsification, even – of the actual linguistic and cultural functions that produced meaning in a text. Taken together, the criticism of T.S. Eliot, the New Critics, and the poststructuralists represented a concerted assault upon the orthodoxy of the expressivist author. However, as will be discussed below, it is possible to argue that in many ways both Eliot and the New Critics remained trapped within a particular methodological approach that reiterated some of the philosophical premises defining literary interpretation exemplified by the expressivist author model. It was only with the theories of Barthes and Foucault that a model of literary production was propounded that genuinely radicalised theoretical approaches to the author within the field of literary studies, and these also signalled a genuine departure from the philosophical idealism of the expressivist author.

Although the emphasis of Eliot’s argument in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” is specifically directed towards the poet rather than a more general conception of the author and the literary artefact, his focus upon the example of the poet in this essay can be broadened to encompass these wider concerns. Eliot’s discussion of the nature and function of the poet and the poem begins by questioning the validity of the expressivist convention of the author as a basis of interpretation and understanding in a poem. Eliot makes specific reference to the poetry of the Romantics in his critique of the expressivist author, and also argues that the concept of the expressivist author has become a generally



accepted orthodoxy by the time of his writing. Although focussing, then, upon the specific example of the poet, Eliot's essay stands as a general critique of the expressivist author as an implicitly accepted model of production and of understanding.

Instead of arguing for a model of appreciation and understanding of poetry which is centred upon an author, Eliot attempts to theorise what he terms an "Impersonal theory of poetry" (Eliot 1987, p. 40). Eliot argues that we are wrong to assume that the meaning of a poem can be found wholly in the psychology and perceived semantic intent of the poet. As he writes: "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone" (Eliot 1987, p. 38). Rather than finding the meaning of a poem in the perceived intent of the poet, we should look to the poem itself as a basis of meaning: "[S]ensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry" (Eliot 1987, p. 40). In placing the emphasis upon the poem rather than the poet, however, Eliot does not conceive of the poem as occupying some autonomous, free-standing space apart from culture. Rather, he conceives of it as occupying a position relative to the general poetic tradition (Eliot 1987, p. 38). This tradition comprises the entire body of literature, beginning with Homer, and it is with respect to this tradition that Eliot sees the poet and the poetry that he or she writes as being both defined and produced. Poets should consciously try to create poetry by seeking a cognizance both of the literary tradition and their contemporary position in relation to it, thus attaining an "historical sense" which reflects the poet's consciousness of tradition.

Eliot argues of this conception of the poet and tradition:

[I]f the only form of tradition, of handing down, consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes, 'tradition' should positively be discouraged. We have seen many such simple currents soon lost in the sand; and novelty is better than repetition. Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the

timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity.

(Eliot 1987, p. 38)

Eliot writes that, in order to obtain this historical sense, poets must surrender themselves to the historical process, which he sees as being more valuable than the individual poet:

“The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality” (Eliot 1987, p. 40). This “extinction” of the poet’s personality shifts the emphasis from the poet to the poetry. By sacrificing him or herself in the name of poetry that exhibits a genuine historical sense, the poet becomes an “impersonal medium” for this historical sense:

[T]he mind of the mature poet differs from that of the immature one not precisely in any valuation of ‘personality’, not being necessarily more interesting, or having ‘more to say’, but rather by being a more finely perfected medium in which special, or very varied, feelings are at liberty to enter into new combinations.

(Eliot 1987, pp. 40-1)

Eliot describes the impersonal function of a poet as being “scientific” in its character, and uses the example of a chemical reaction by way of analogy. When a bit of finely filiated platinum is introduced into a chamber containing oxygen and sulphur dioxide, the presence of the filament of platinum causes the two gases to form sulphurous acid. The formation of the acid only takes place if the platinum is present, “yet the newly-formed sulphurous acid contains no trace of the platinum” (Eliot 1987, pp. 40-1). The reaction, Eliot argues, functions as a scientific analogy for his impersonal conception of the poet. The poet brings about a poetic effect, but by negating rather than insisting on personality. The personality of the poet plays no substantive role in the writing of a poem that engages with the past, with the whole of literature, and which exhibits a genuinely historical sense.

In signalling a break from a conception of poetry, indeed of art in general, which regards the poem as an unproblematic expression of a poet's personality, Eliot's essay stands as an important moment in literary theory in the twentieth century. In attempting to "de-personalise" the role of a poet in the conception of a poem, and in shifting the focus of the meaning from that of the poet to the poem, Eliot foreshadows much of the theory that was to emerge with the rise of New Criticism several decades later. However, there are some deep problems with Eliot's attempt to formulate an impersonal theory of poetry. For example, the question must immediately be asked whether Eliot's theory of poetry is in fact impersonal. If shifting the emphasis in understanding the creation of a poem from a poet's expressivist capacities as an artist to that of a "medium" downplays the personality of the poet in the name of an "impersonal" historical sense, it can be argued that the poet is located contextually rather than impersonally in a poem. The poet is positioned in relation to an artistic tradition which, in influencing and helping to form the artist, de-centres, or de-autonomises him or her (that is, disarms the artist as a universal, independent, self-constituting formalism relative to a literary artefact), rather than de-personalising them. In addition, Eliot's conception of the artistic tradition which the poet surrenders him or herself to is ultimately complacent. To assume that an artistic tradition can be engaged with and comprehended so inclusively would require an artistic tradition which was far more monolithic, far less contradictory and conflictual, than it could ever possibly be. Eliot's insistence that the poet must attain a state of impersonality in the writing of poetry is complacent also. The chief contribution of "Tradition and the Individual Talent" thus lies in its questioning of the expressivist model of the poet/artist and the shifting of interpretation with regard to a literary artefact from that of the author to the artefact itself, rather than any "impersonal" or "scientific" model of poetry and literature generally.

Eliot's emphasis upon the literary artefact rather than the perceived intent of the author as the basis for interpretation was to influence the position of the American New Critics in the 1940s and 50s. Academics such as John Crowe Ransom, Brooks, Wimsatt, and Beardsley pioneered the New Critical position, instituting a discipline which became widely adopted throughout universities and would largely overturn the position of pre-eminence enjoyed by the intentionalist approach to literary exegesis in the academy. Wimsatt and Beardsley's essay, "The Intentional Fallacy", first published in 1946, laid down some of the key precepts of the movement.

In their questioning of the expressivist conception of the author and the intentionalist approach to interpretation, Wimsatt and Beardsley argued that the design or the intention of the author is "neither available nor desirable as a standard for addressing the success of a work of literary art" (Wimsatt & Beardsley 1954, p. 3). As they go on to argue, a literary artefact is not created as a result of a series of accidents; a poem, for example, must "come out of a head, not a hat" (Wimsatt & Beardsley 1954, p. 4). However, to acknowledge a designing intellect as the motivator of a poem does not mean that this designing intellect is the standard by which the artistic success of a poem is to be judged and understood:

One must ask how a critic expects to get an answer to the question about intention. How is he to find out what a poet tried to do? If the poet succeeded in doing it, then the poem itself shows what he was trying to do. And if the poet did not succeed, then the poem is not adequate evidence, and the critic must go outside the poem – for evidence of an intention that did not become effective in the poem. "Only one *caveat* must be borne in mind," says an eminent intentionalist in a moment when his theory repudiates itself: "the poet's aim must be judged at the moment of the creative act, that is to say, by the art of the poem itself."

(Wimsatt & Beardsley 1954, p. 4)

In declaring that a poet's intent must be judged by the poem itself, rather than by the poet, J.E. Spingarn, the intentionalist from whom Wimsatt and Beardsley quote, in effect validates Wimsatt's and Beardsley's argument. Authorial intent must be perceived by

approaching the artefact and not the artist. As Wimsatt and Beardsley go on to argue, the poem is neither the author's nor the critic's. The literary artefact belongs to the public; it is detached from the author after the moment of its birth "and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it" (Wimsatt & Beardsley 1954, p. 5). Thoughts and attitudes of a literary artefact are not to be attributed to the author but to a dramatic speaker, "and if to the author at all, only by an act of biographical inference" (Wimsatt & Beardsley 1954, p.5). Wimsatt and Beardsley use the analogy of a pudding or a machine to argue their position. As we judge the success of a pudding or machine by the fact of whether it works or not, so too we judge a poem. A poem simply *is*, can only *be*. A poem can only *be* through its medium of words: "it *is*, simply *is*, in the sense that we can have no excuse for enquiring about what part is intended or meant" (Wimsatt & Beardsley 1954, p. 4):

Poetry succeeds because all or most of what is said or implied is relevant; what is irrelevant has been excluded, like lumps from pudding and "bugs" from machinery.

(Wimsatt & Beardsley 1954, p. 4)

The position argued by Wimsatt and Beardsley is certainly radical in the sense that, like Eliot's, it signals a break from the expressivist model of the author and literature. However, as Catherine Belsey argues in her book *Critical Practice*, their position is not without its problems. Chief amongst these is the fact that the New Critics did not recognise just *how* their position might radicalise literary practice, not least because their argument remained trapped within the empiricist-idealist model which also defined the expressivist literature model. By positing a poem, for example, as an autonomous locus of meaning, as a "verbal icon" containing a meaning-presence that stood independent of either authorial intent or reader reception, the New Critics argued that the literary artefact occupied a trans-historical, trans-social idealist space much like that seen in the case of

the expressivist author. As Belsey goes on to argue, a kind of *implicit* intentionalism, “a quest for what it *appeared* the author had in mind on the evidence of the text itself”, was to be found in the position argued by the New Critics (Belsey 1989, p. 16). Wimsatt and Beardsley’s essay can then be seen as initiating a process whereby the text is gradually prised away from the author, rather than making any unequivocal break.

Reasons for the failure of New Criticism to make a genuine break from the expressivist model of the author can be found in its attempt to theorise “the relationship between the poem made of words, the verbal icon, and the language within which it exists and signifies” (Belsey 1989, p. 17). As Belsey continues, at base the problem in the New Critical position lies in “the failure to recognise that meaning exists only within a specific discourse, and that it cannot therefore inhere timelessly within the words on the page” (Belsey 1989, p. 18). Assertions by the New Critics, exemplified by Wimsatt’s claim that, “though cultures have changed and will change, poems remain and explain” (Wimsatt & Beardsley 1954, p. 39), underline the shortcomings inherent in the New Critical position. New Criticism essentially argues that, like the expressivist model of the author, the text exists in isolation outside the changing, discursive conditions of society and history. Thus it reiterates the argument by intentionalists that meaning occupies an extra-discursive position outside society and history and provides the critic with a “timeless”, “trans-historical” conditionality of meaning that occupies an extra-textual idealist space. Yet if one accepts that meaning in a literary artefact is to be found in the words of the artefact, meaning must be seen to occupy a discursive position *because* it is to be found in language rather than an extra-textual idealist space. The argument of New Criticism thus refutes itself.

## **Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels.**

In their essay “Against Theory”, Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels seek to overturn dominant approaches to the text and interpretation by eschewing any interpretive approach that rests upon theoretical premises. The rejoinder they make against theory in their essay not only stands as an attack upon New Criticism and poststructuralist theory, but any approach to the problem of textual interpretation in which methods are grounded in theory. Knapp and Michaels apply the term “theory” to any account of interpretation which seeks to “govern interpretations of particular texts by appealing to an account of an interpretation in general” (Knapp & Michaels 1982, p. 723). They argue:

Contemporary theory has taken two forms. Some theorists have sought to ground the reading of literary texts in methods designed to guarantee the objectivity and validity of interpretations. Others, impressed by the inability of such procedures to provide agreement among interpreters, have translated that failure into an alternative mode of theory that denies the possibility of correct interpretation. Our aim here is not to choose between these two alternatives but rather to show that both rest on a single mistake, a mistake that is central to the notion of theory per se. The object of our critique is not a particular way of doing theory but the idea of doing theory at all.

(Knapp & Michaels 1982, p. 723)

Knapp and Michaels argue that a theory-based approach to interpretation is invalid because it separates terms involved in interpretation – such as the author and the text – that are in fact inseparable. Theorists such as E.D. Hirsch, for example, seek to elucidate meaning in a text by an appeal to authorial intentions, thus drawing a divide between the intention of an author and the meaning that is evident in a particular author’s text (Knapp & Michaels 1982, p. 725). However, Knapp and Michaels argue that it is impossible to draw such a divide because meaning in a text “is simply identical to the author’s intended meaning. Consequently, the project of grounding meaning in intention becomes incoherent” (Knapp & Michaels 1982, p. 724).

Knapp and Michaels define their position by arguing that meaning in a text reflects a fundamental inseparability of the text's elements, an inseparability that theoretical approaches to textual interpretation have simply failed to recognise. Other theorists (such as the New Critics) who argue that an author's intended meaning is irretrievable, make precisely the same mistake, because they also split apart the elements of a text (Knapp & Michaels 1982, p. 723). Indeed, in their essay, they field their pragmatic conception of a text and its meaning by seeking to problematise the reader response theory of Stanley Fish and the poststructuralist deconstruction of Paul de Man by way of a more general assault upon theoretically-based approaches to interpretation. However, it is possible to argue that Knapp and Michaels' pragmatic model of meaning and interpretation is essentially flawed, chiefly because it rests upon a complacent conception of the author/text relationship. One need only recall Proust's narrator in *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* to develop this point:

I was not one single man, but the steady march past of a composite army manned, depending on the time of day, by passionate, indifferent or jealous men. ... The individuals in a crowd may, without our noticing be replaced one by one, and others may again come to suppress or supplement them, so that at the end of the day a change has been accomplished which would be impossible to imagine in a single, unitary being.

(Proust 2002, p. 456)

Proust's conception of the author-function as an army of multiple, conflicting voices rather than a sovereign, single consciousness, serves not only to denaturalise any sovereign, extra-textual conception of the author, but to de-centre the author as a prior locus of consciousness and meaning in a text. In addition to this, the narrator in Proust's novel shows how, in entering (via the act of writing) a discursive field that makes up a text, the figure of the author is disarmed of any extra-textual status in specific relation to that text. The act of writing serves to foreground that the author is constituted in discourse. By engaging in the process of writing, the author enters into the discursive field



that is the “army” of all the multiple voices that together construct the text the author writes and which, within the specific rhetorical domain of the text, also constructs the author. As much as Knapp and Michaels might insist otherwise, a pragmatic, non-theoretical author/text position does not exist. Because the author occupies no pragmatic position within a text, the text itself possesses no pragmatic positionality of meaning either. A pragmatic, non-theoretical condition of meaning is an impossibility. As a theoretical problem, then, the question of the author-function and meaning is as pertinent as ever.

### **Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault.**

The denaturalisation by Barthes and Foucault of the modern, or expressivist, model of the author can be understood as instituting the kind of break with the expressivist model that both Eliot and New Criticism attempted and which Knapp and Michaels have argued is a distortion of an essentially ineluctable, pragmatic author/text relation. At the heart of this break is a recognition not only of the complacency of the interpretive approaches devised by figures such as Eliot and Knapp and Michaels, but also a further recognition that neither the text nor the author occupy a trans-discursive – or formalist – position in relation to society and history. In recognising that the author of a text is not available as an extra-contextual positivism accessed via the text, both Barthes and Foucault argue for a model of the author and meaning-production that is a *product* of culture and society, and which is thus installed and defined by the contingent, *context-specific* conditions of society. Barthes and Foucault in effect reverse the terms of the expressivist author model by arguing that it is the material conditions of culture and society which define and project the convention of the author, and not *vice versa*.

In his essay, “The Death of the Author”, first published in 1968, Barthes argues that the expressivist model of the author is essentially an ideological position which emerged after the Middle Ages; a position first privileged during the era of the Enlightenment, and during the emergence and rise to hegemony of modernity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries:

The author is a modern figure, a product of our society insofar as, emerging from the Middle Ages with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual, of, as it is more nobly put, the ‘human person’. It is thus logical that in literature it should be this positivism, the epitome and culmination of capitalist ideology, which has attached the greatest importance to the ‘person’ of the author.

(Barthes 1977, p. 143)

The “prestige” attached not only to the individual, but also to the author, thus grounds the author as an ideological position such that

the image of literature to be found in ordinary culture is tyrannically centred on the author, his person, his life, his tastes, his passions, while criticism still consists for the most part in saying that Baudelaire’s work is the failure of Baudelaire the man, Van Gogh’s his madness, Tchaikovsky’s his vice. The *explanation* of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice, of a single person, the *author* ‘confiding’ in us.

(Barthes 1977, p. 143)

As the expressivist model of the author is a cultural and historical effect, it consequently follows that it is possible both to denaturalise this model and theorise a new model with which to replace it. In tracing a brief genealogy of writing which challenges the expressivist model – from Stephane Mallarmé, to Marcel Proust, to the Surrealists – Barthes stresses an “essentially verbal condition of literature” (Barthes 1977, p. 144). He argues that writers such as Mallarmé and Proust propounded a position which understood that, through the act of writing, the author neutralises him or herself as a “genius”, a position of origin, with regard to the written artefact produced because “to write is, through a prerequisite impersonality (not at all to be confused with the castrating objectivity of the realist novelist), to reach that point where only language acts,

‘performs’, and not ‘me’” (Barthes 1977, p. 143). By engaging in the act of writing, authors engage in a process where language effectively neutralises them *through* the act of writing, with the effect that the author loses any authority as a “genius” perceived to “own” and “explain” the artefact that is seen as a product of the author’s self-expression.<sup>10</sup>

Barthes consequently emphasises the way Mallarmé deliberately and continually stressed the linguistic nature of the literary artefact, “militat[ing] in favour of the essentially verbal condition of literature, in the face of which all recourse to the writer’s interiority seemed to him a pure superstition” (Barthes 1977, p. 144). Likewise, Proust’s narrator, “despite the apparently psychological character of what are called his *analyses*” (Barthes 1977, p. 144), serves to blur the relation between the narrator and the characters in his novels by “making of the narrator not he who has seen and felt nor even he who is writing, but he who *is going to write*” (Barthes 1977, p. 144). The novel begins with the writer as a young man who wants to write but is unable, and ends “when writing at last becomes possible” (Barthes 1977, p. 144). The status of Proust as the writer of the novel is thus defined in relation to his status as a fictional character rather than as the flesh and blood author of the sequence. *Writing* situates the author, not *vice versa*. Likewise with the Surrealists, the spontaneous act of automatic writing disarms the authority of the author as the creator of the written artefact, by trusting the act of creation to the “automatic” gesture of the writing hand rather than any deliberate, conscious thought in the head of the author. The primacy of the author as a creating “ego”/ “artist” is thus undermined because expectations of an expressivist conception and act of writing are frustrated (Barthes 1977, p. 144).

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<sup>10</sup> Barthes’s impersonal model of the author might be seen to share a degree of common ground with Eliot’s notion of the relation of the author to that of tradition: in both cases, the author is at once decentred and yet defined by a genealogy of intertexts that orients authors in their culture, and not *vice versa*. However, Barthes’s concept of the author/text relation can be distinguished from that of Eliot’s because the relation of the author to this textual tradition is not seen by Barthes to situate the author in any “absolute” or

For Barthes, the innovations of writers such as Mallarmé and Proust signalled an effective end to the hegemony of the expressivist author, a hegemony whereby “[t]he Author, when believed in, is always conceived of as the past of his own book: book and author stand automatically in a single line divided into *before* and *after*” (Barthes 1977, p. 145).

Consequently, Barthes rechristens the author a *scriptor* (that is, “writer”), whereby the author is defined in relation to a literary artefact, not as some autonomous entity who has created it, or projected it, from this perceived position of autonomy, but as someone who lives solely within the field of the words and writing that comprise the literary artefact.

The scriptor, available only in the writing that comprises the artefact, thus stands as a function which, in neutralising the expressivist author convention, also signals the “death” of such a convention:

As soon as a fact is *narrated* no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively, that is to say, finally outside any function other than that of the symbol itself, this disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins.

(Barthes 1977, p. 142)

It follows from this that the perception of a text as a vehicle of meaning to be interpreted by the person reading it also changes. Because the act of writing has neutralised the presence of the author as an entity both outside and preceding the text, the task of the reader is no longer to uncover passively the semantic “intent” of the author in a text. We no longer see the text as foregrounding an anterior position of meaning initiated by the author: “a text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of

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“objective” sense; rather, the author is a pre-eminent arbiter of this tradition and the culture that has fostered it.

writings, none of them original, blend and clash” (Barthes 1977, p. 146). The reader, engaging in the task of responding to a text, does not interpret in the traditional sense:

In the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be *disentangled*, nothing *deciphered*; the structure can be followed, ‘run’ (like the thread of a stocking) at every point and at every level, but there is nothing beneath: the space of writing is to be ranged over, not pierced; writing ceaselessly posits meaning ceaselessly to evaporate it, carrying out a systematic exemption of meaning. In precisely this way literature (it would be better to say *writing*), by refusing to assign a ‘secret’, an ultimate meaning, to a text (and to the world as text), liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases – reason, science, law.

(Barthes 1977, p. 147)

In his 1969 essay, “What is an Author?”, Michel Foucault also questions the efficacy of the expressivist author model.<sup>11</sup> Like Barthes, Foucault talks of the author having undergone a death or a decentring “effacement”. However, in outlining his position, and installing the author-function as an effect of discursive practices, Foucault takes issue with the argument propounded by Barthes in his essay of the previous year. As Foucault argues at the beginning of “What is an Author?”, the death of the author in contemporary culture is a product of two effects: the freeing, firstly, of writing as a perceived effect of expression (Foucault 1988, p. 197); and, secondly, the inversion of the perception of writing as a process deployed to ward off death (Foucault 1988, p. 198). In relation to the first effect, Foucault argues that the disarming of writing as a dimension of expression reflects “one of the fundamental ethical principles of contemporary writing [*écriture*]” (Foucault 1988, p. 197). Because writing is today perceived as an interplay of signs which operate such that the meaning emerges from the differential relation of one signifier to another, the act of writing constantly redefines and transgresses the boundaries and limits of the meanings it ceaselessly generates. The author, or the writing subject, thus uses writing to create a space into which the subject continually disappears (Foucault 1988, pp. 197-8).

Of the second effect, Foucault notes that, as early as emergence of the Ancient Greek epic, writing was perceived as a means to ward off death. The Greek epic was seen as a means by which to immortalise the epic hero: “if he was willing to die young, it was so that his life, consecrated and magnified by death, might pass into immortality; the narrative then redeemed this expected death” (Foucault 1988, p. 198). In the different example of Arab culture and its most famous narrative, *The Thousand and One Nights*, the telling of stories through the night and into the morning was seen as another means to ward off death, to forestall the silencing of the narrator by death. Scheherazade’s stories, renewed each night, thus stand as an endeavour “to keep death outside the circle of life” (Foucault 1988, p. 198). However, as Foucault goes on to argue, from the standpoint of contemporary culture this life/death interrelation has been inverted:

Our culture has metamorphosed this idea of narrative, or writing, as something designed to ward off death. Writing has become linked to sacrifice, even to the sacrifice of life: it is now a voluntary effacement which does not need to be represented in books, since it is brought about in the writer’s very existence. The work, which once had the duty of providing immortality, now possesses the right to kill, to be its author’s murderer, as in the cases of Flaubert, Proust, and Kafka. This is not all, however: this relationship between writing and death is also manifested in the effacement of the writing subject’s individual characteristics. Using all the contrivances that he sets up between himself and what he writes, the writing subject cancels out the signs of his particular individuality. As a result, the mark of the writer is reduced to nothing more than the singularity of his absence; he must assume the role of the dead man in the game of writing.

(Foucault 1988, p. 198)

Initially at least, Foucault’s analysis of the death of the author seems to mirror that of Barthes. By engaging in the act and assuming the artifices of writing, the author effectively erases himself as a differentiated or autonomous subject and is superseded by the play of writing. However, at the same time, Foucault also distances himself (to a degree) from Barthes. As Foucault goes on to argue, the death of the author, explicitly

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<sup>11</sup> Although Foucault first published this essay in 1969, he was to revise it before his death. This thesis draws on the revised version of the essay.

elucidated in linguistics, philosophy, and literature, has for some time been recognised; however, the radical consequences of such a recognition have not been fully understood (Foucault 1988, p. 198). Instead, a number of strategies have been formulated in conscious response to the disappearance, or death, of the author. Theorists and critics have deployed these to replace the once privileged position of the author, effectively preserving the position once occupied by the author and thus failing to acknowledge the genuinely radical consequences of this proposition. Foucault notes that, rather than recognising the radical implications of the idea of the death of the author, Barthes' concept of *écriture* – functioning as a model of meaning which eschews both the expressivist model of the author and any notion of writing understood to *express* an idealist, extra-textual positionality of meaning – nevertheless accords a privileged *a priori* status to the author. As Foucault argues:

This usage of the notion of writing runs the risk of maintaining the author's privileges under the protection of writing's *a priori* status: it keeps alive, in the grey light of neutralization, the interplay of those representations that formed the particular image of the author.

(Foucault 1988, p. 200)

For Foucault, then, it is not enough to declare that the author is dead. Rather, “we must locate the space left empty by the author's disappearance, follow the distribution of gaps and breaches, and watch for the openings that this disappearance uncovers” (Foucault 1988, p. 200). The openings revealed by the author's absence effectively dislodge any assumption that the author functions as a position or figure which initiates, or motivates, meaning and becomes instead an effect of discourse.

Foucault's concept of discourse is central to his corpus. Briefly, in contrast to Anglo-American formulations of the term, “discourse” for Foucault refers to the various bodies of knowledge which govern the way we function in relation to social objects – or bodies

of knowledge – and which determine the way we deploy statements to define these social objects. Many of Foucault’s works – for example, *Madness and Civilization*, *The Birth of the Clinic*, and *The History of Sexuality* – concern themselves with objects or disciplines of knowledge (that is, madness, psychiatry, and sexuality). Crucially, Foucault uses such conceptions of discourse to overturn the assumption – central to Western modernity – that the human subject initiates and masters disciplines of knowledge. He contests the idea that the human subject is a sovereign entity, an autonomous agent independently able to deploy and elucidate a cumulative, teleological narrative of social progress, rationality, and truth – an idea central to formulations of the project of modernity for many theorists. For Foucault, these disciplines or bodies of knowledge demarcate the boundaries of the kinds of understanding human society apprehends at a given time. Consequently, he turns the modern individual subject-knowledge relation on its head. Instead, Foucault deploys the discourses of the various disciplines/knowledges that govern human understanding at a given time in human history to argue that discourses at once enable yet constrain the various and specific ways we are able both to understand and write about them.

Returning to the example of the author-function, it is Foucault’s contention that the death of the author has foregrounded an opening in Western culture which has disarmed the expressivist model of the author and revealed the author-function to be a product of specific bodies of discourse. Focussing upon the specific question of the author relative to the literary text, Foucault defines four ways discourse positions the concept of the author in the contemporary period, and which thus distinguish them from the way the author was previously positioned. Firstly, Foucault argues that the expressivist model of the author has been privileged by specific forms of ownership and questions of individual monetary



cultural prestige that have realigned the author as a figure of transgression rather than, as in previous epochs, a figure that made sacred understanding in society:

Once a system of ownership for texts came into being, once strict rules concerning author's rights, author-publisher relations, rights of reproduction, and related matters were enacted – at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century – the possibility of transgression attached to the act of writing took on, more and more, the form of an imperative peculiar to literature. It is as if the author, beginning with the moment at which he was placed in the system of property that characterizes our society, compensated for the status that he thus acquired by rediscovering the old bipolar field of discourse, systematically practicing transgression and thereby restoring danger to a writing which was now guaranteed by the benefits of ownership.

(Foucault 1988, p. 202)

This assertion clearly agrees with William's argument that the expressivist model of the author is thus a product of the new author/artist relation emerging alongside capitalist models of the individual and the concomitant specialisation of the author/artist. This incorporation of the artist into the marketplace as function of market forces altered the figure of the artist, who then produced artefacts of cultural transgression in culture rather than working to sacralise any dominant cultural narrative (such as the narrative of Christianity). This new model of the author reflects the three further realignments of the author as a function of discourse.

Secondly, as Foucault argues, prior to the privileging of the expressivist model of the author, literary discourses were not always endowed with an author-function (Foucault 1988, p. 203). Indeed, prior to the seventeenth or eighteenth century, it was scientific discourses –not literary discourses – that were endowed with an author-function. Such a reversal, which saw scientific discourses lose the author-function, and which took place simultaneously with the rise of rationalism and the emergent philosophies of modernity, thus reflected the new privilege accorded to the individual human subject in Western culture. By effectively taking the place of the Christian God as the arbiter of

understanding in Western culture, the individual subject discovered a new, ontologically-privileged, pre-eminence. The concomitant grounding of a text as the “self-evident” creation of the “genius” of an author thus stands as an example and adjunct of this.

Thirdly, Foucault argues that the author-function “does not develop spontaneously as the attribution of a discourse to the individual” (Foucault 1988, p. 203). The expressivist model of the author is instead the product of a complex discursive operation which “constructs a certain rational being we call the author” (Foucault 1988, p. 203). Various qualities which define the author as an individual – a “deep” motive, a “creative” power or design – are thus a projection, in specifically psychologising terms, “of the operations that we force texts to undergo” (Foucault 1988, p. 203).

Fourth and finally, an author is not a simple, commonsense construction that we automatically retrieve from a text. The signs a text contains which refer to the expressivist author in our culture – personal pronouns, adverbs of time and place, and verb conjugation – play a different role in discourses provided with the author-function from those lacking it (Foucault 1988, p. 205). Likewise, in a novel narrated in the first person, which employs grammatical conventions such as the first-person pronoun and present indicative, neither convention “refer[s] exactly either to the writer or to the moment in which he writes, but rather to an alter ego whose distance from the author varies, often changing in the course of the work” (Foucault 1988, p. 205). We arrive once again, then, at the Barthesian notion of the “death” an author undergoes when he or she proceeds to write a text, where the process destroys the author as a coherent, unified, extra-textual presence in relation to a text. Like Barthes’s elucidation of the relation of the author to writing, Foucault’s positioning of the author as a function of discourse disarms the author

as a commonsense function in a text, with the difference that (unlike Barthes's privileging of the field of writing) Foucault does not privilege discourse as a transcendent domain of understanding which occupies the space once understood to have been occupied by the author.

### **The Author-Function: Towards a Workable Diagnostic.**

The Romantic privileging of the author of a text as an "organic sensibility", or "genius" possessed of a superior conception of human reality, marks a moment in human history when the author was first flagged in modern society as a privileged locus of cultural critique. In privileging the author in the manner that they did, the Romantics were effectively deploying the author as a means by which they could not only critique the society of industrial capitalism, but also situate the author as a repository of the values that industrial capitalism was perceived as threatening. Shelley's insistence that the Romantic poet was a medium through which an "indestructible order" could be apprehended – that poets "are the institutors of laws and the founders of civil society and the inventors of the arts of life and the teachers" (Shelley 1991, p. 207) – clearly delineates the way in which the author was first oriented during the Romantic period as a figure able not only to diagnose the ills of a society it saw as lapsing into degeneracy, but also as a purveyor of values able to redeem this order.

As a diagnostic of industrial capitalism, the Romantic conception of the expressivist poet/author was a kind of moral bedrock to which citizens of the industrial epoch could have recourse. This expressivist concept of the author, broadened during the nineteenth century to encompass not only the poet but also the prose writer and the visual artist, served to install the author as a figure whose perceived status as an unchanging, timeless autonomy

transcended the temporal, mutable makeup of society. In short, the expressivist model of the author was founded upon the assumption that the author stood anterior to society; that he or she embodied a formalist, extra-contextual situatedness which installed the author as an incontestable absolute. The author was a kind of secularised Christian deity.

As Raymond Williams argues, the expressivist author is a cultural construct as historically specific and partial as the culture of industrial capitalism from which it seeks to differentiate itself. It is possible therefore to argue that the differentiation and privileging of the author that first took place during the nineteenth century was a *critical* phenomenon, which situated the expressivist author in a *partial* and *culturally contingent* diagnostic position. As a function which, in England, differentiated itself from the processes of industrial capitalism and, in America, differentiated itself from the national narrative, the expressivist author convention was thus situated as a historically-specific – not timeless and unchanging – symptom of the forces of modernity. This fact holds important consequences for the perceived “ideological innocence” of the project of modernity and democracy. The dislodging of the author as an autonomous term of reference in the twentieth century – as initiated by New Criticism, and culminating with the critiques by Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault – has had the effect of repositioning the expressivist author as a product of the conditions of modernity rather than an autonomous function able to critique modernity. Implicated within the ideology of modernity rather than differentiated from it, the expressivist author would thus appear to possess no efficacy as a diagnostic of modernity.

It must be emphasised, however, that the expressivist model of the author is still hegemonic within mainstream Western culture today. As Foucault himself argues in

“What is an Author?”, the expressivist author – even when disarmed as an absolute – is still positioned by various operations of discourse in our capitalist culture as a pervasive author model. The author may have disappeared as an *implicitly* accepted “commonsense” function in certain critical discourses, but the various material institutions which instituted a new system of ownership with regard to a text and an author still operate today. An author may be an effect of operations of specific bodies of discourse (rather than *vice versa*), but these operations still situate the author so that he or she appears to valorise the position of cultural privilege accorded the author during the Romantic period. Theorists such as Foucault may have disarmed the epoch of modernity and its concomitant privileging of the individual subject as a ground of general understanding, but he recognises also that the discourses of modernity – with regard to the author at least – continue to operate in our own cultural milieu, often designated as “postmodernity”. Whilst acknowledging the disarming by both Barthes and Foucault of the functionality of the expressivist author, yet also recognising the continued hegemony of author-centred regularities of discourse, is it not possible to argue a productive model of the author as a privileged arbiter of meaning?

This thesis will show that the denaturalisation of the expressivist author, especially within poststructuralism, suggests it is possible to reposition the expressivist author-function as a workable diagnostic. Such an approach, I will argue, turns upon the recognition by post-structuralist thinkers (but heralded in the work of New Criticism) that the expressivist author convention is not necessarily an extra-discursive function. Barthes’s argument that the author disappears, or undergoes a kind of death, in the act of the writing of a text, and Foucault’s argument that the expressivist author is in fact the construction of specific operations of discourse, reposition the author as an operation both specific to and

*implicated in* the text and thus serve as the starting-point for such an argument. I wish to argue for an imbrication of the continued valency of the expressivist author convention with the recognition by poststructuralists that such a position *is* culturally specific. The author-function can be deployed as a mode of meaning-production *implicated in*, rather than differentiated from, modernity. The manner in which poststructuralist theory situates the expressivist author convention as a contingent effect of culture can be deployed to realign this model of the author capable of critiquing modernity without installing it as an absolute, trans-cultural given.

This thesis will examine the deployment of the author-function in *The Bostonians*, *The Great Gatsby*, *V.*, and *Democracy* to delineate a specific historical trajectory for just such a position. The historical period embraced by these four novels paradoxically witnessed both the challenging of the expressivist author-function as an implicitly accepted diagnostic and yet, at the same time, thanks to the emergence during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of a culture of mass literary production, also witnessed the expanded hegemony of the capitalist operations of discourse as a means by which the expressivist author-function has continued to enjoy its position of pre-eminence. It is possible to argue that Barthes's and Foucault's insights prepare a space for a new, more productive tradition of author-centred criticism, foregrounding a new effectivity – a partial, contingent effectivity – of the author-function as a diagnostic. They install a model of criticism which does not situate the author as a function which totalises and reifies meaning, but rather, realigns the expressivist author-function as a discursively-specific function, thus making possible a *post*-expressivist model of the author. This process is tracked in the argument of this thesis, which examines the positionality and the functionality of the author in *Bostonians*, *Gatsby*, *V.*, and *Democracy*. My argument reconciles the paradox of the

continued hegemony enjoyed in capitalist culture by the expressivist author with its denaturalisation by poststructuralism.

In the concluding section of his essay, “What is an Author?”, Foucault talks of the need to set aside the privileges of both the modern subject and, by way of example, the author – to deprive the author of his or her perceived commonsense functionality as an originator of meaning in a text (Foucault 1988, p. 209). One way in which Foucault effects such a manoeuvre is by foregrounding the concept of the author as an originator of meaning as an ideological rather than a given function in modern culture:

We are accustomed ... to saying that the author is the genial creator of a work in which he deposits, with infinite wealth and generosity, an inexhaustible world of significations. We are used to thinking that the author is so different from all other men, and so transcendent with regard to languages that, as soon as he speaks, meaning begins to proliferate, to proliferate indefinitely.

The truth is quite the contrary: the author is not an indefinite source of significations which fill a work; the author does not precede the works, he is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction. In fact, if we are accustomed to presenting the author as a genius, as a perpetual surging of invention, it is because, in reality, we make him function in exactly the opposite fashion. One can say that the author is an ideological product, since we represent him as the opposite of his historically real function. (When a historically real function is represented in a figure that inverts it, one has an ideological production.) The author is therefore the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning.

(Foucault 1988, p. 209)

Both Barthes and Foucault recognise that the author naturalises itself by *limiting* meaning. It is this limiting or proscribing function which defines the theological model of the author – the author as “Creator-God” – since according to this model the author operates as a kind of semantic totality with respect to a text. The author, in other words, is taken to be the arbiter of everything that it is possible for a text to mean. Barthes’s counter-theological model of the text and meaning, and Foucault’s categorisation of the author as a principle not of illimitability but of thrift (Foucault 1988, p. 209), thus denaturalise the

expressivist author model. As a consequence of this, the tradition of close reading – the tradition exemplified in France by that of the *explication de texte* – is also denaturalised.

However, it still may be possible to recuperate a tradition of close reading which recognises the denaturalising critiques of poststructuralism. Surely it is possible to practice author-centred criticism without naturalising the author-function in the fashion that the strictly expressivist model does, and thus evade the problems that arise when expressivist criticism installs the author as a given, or even absolute, function? If we instead install the author as a *context specific*, as opposed to an autonomous, trans-contextual function of the text, it is possible to deploy the concept of the author in such a manner that it operates as a contingent function *implicated within* the text. Such a manoeuvre disarms the author as an absolute or determinate function, while at the same time allowing the author-function to operate as a workable diagnostic; as a diagnostic, for example, of American modernity and the American national narrative. As with Barthes's model, whereby the author is positioned relatively rather than absolutely by a non-theological approach to interpretation, a relative and partial (as opposed to autonomous and absolute) conception of the author-function is able to operate as a challenge to the naturalising tendencies of modernity. In short, it operates as an *internalised* mode of meaning production and, rather than eliding the conditions of culture, or installing itself as an ideological function, the author-function engages with the conditions of its cultural context without seeking to valorise itself as a position which installs meaning according to absolute, commonsensical terms. This post-expressivist convention of the author makes possible a (different kind of) challenge to the hegemony of modernity and, arguably, allows for a productive approach to author-centred exegesis.



The argument in this thesis proceeds by employing an examination of the operation of narrative viewpoint in each of the four novels to apprehend an “original” authorial intention; that is, it explicitly employs what is understood as the “mimetic” operation of close reading. Each chapter proceeds by submitting a novel to such close reading, rehearsing the modern exegetical approach by which the expressivist model of the author was installed and valorised. Crucially, however, rather than deploying this method of reading to situate the author as an expressivism – as an anterior, extra-textual, unchanging formalism – the author is located reflexively. That is, the author is considered in this thesis in a manner which foregrounds some of the various social, cultural, and historical contexts which position and define him or her, thus denaturalising both the author and these contexts.

For example, if the author in *The Bostonians* is considered as a reflection of a specific social, cultural, and historical context – for example, the nineteenth-century tradition of fictional realism – it is no longer merely a formal category. The discursive conventions which install and define the author-function in *The Bostonians* are thus *reflexively* foregrounded. As a work of *late* realism, emerging at a time when the realist tradition, operating concurrently with the modern tradition of liberal capitalism, was being questioned as a viable, culturally applicable form, the *unconscious* dislodging of the author-function as an expressivism in *The Bostonians* (as argued in Chapter Two of this thesis) stands as an inaugural moment when the commonsense truth-claims of the expressivist model were being questioned. This clearly parallels the period of crisis that beset democratic capitalism as a social model able to realise a modern, rationalist utopia. My analysis of the three subsequent novels deploys a similar interpretive approach of “close reading” which further disarms the expressivist author model. The situatedness of

the author-function in *The Great Gatsby*, examined in relation to twentieth-century “high” modernism, is *consciously*, or explicitly, dislodged as an expressivism, while in *V.*, the author-function is deployed to denaturalise, or to dissolve, the expressivist model altogether. The space once occupied by the expressivist author, to borrow Michael Bell’s terminology, becomes a kind of “myth-shaped hole”<sup>12</sup>, into which all interpretation is sucked. However, with the expressivist author model now situated as a model of non-determinate, “text-specific” meaning, a new stage in the trajectory – through Joan Didion’s novel *Democracy* – is made possible. As with the other three novels, the author-function in Didion’s novel is understood as a relative rather than autonomous term; a term which, in recognising the inapplicability of the expressivist author, serves to institute the complete, and previously repressed, enunciative function that makes interpretation of a text possible. The author-function in *Democracy* foregrounds the critical interrelationality of the author, the text, *and* the reader’s act of text reception as an interdependent, relative, meaning-producing function.

The operation of the author-function in each of the four novels discussed in this thesis is thus positioned to ask how a workable model of author-centred criticism can be made possible in the wake of the denaturalisation of the expressivist author convention by postmodern theory. Each novel deploys a narrative viewpoint which, although oriented in this thesis by the modern convention of close reading, at once interrogates the truth-claims of the expressivist author convention whilst instituting in its place a contingent, contextually situated model of the author.

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<sup>12</sup> Michael Bell’s discussion of modernist literature and modernist mythopoeia will be discussed in the chapters in this thesis on *The Great Gatsby* and *V.*

The trajectory traced in this thesis from *The Bostonians* to *Democracy* broadly reflects the progressive interrogation by late realism, modernism, late modernism, and postmodernism of the epoch of modernity as a narrative of absolute, incontestable precepts, and a narrative able to institute a rationalist utopia. This trajectory delineates a set of positions which denaturalise the function of the author as an expressivism or formalism. However, at the same time, in recognising the continued hegemony of author-centred interpretation as a function of discourse in mainstream culture, the argument in this thesis recognises the continued applicability of the author as a meaning-producing function. Instead, this model of the modern author foregrounds its specificity and mutability as (after Foucault) a discourse-specific rather than absolute position. Such contingent situatedness goes a significant way to providing an explanation of the mutation of the author-function that occurs in the historical trajectory of this thesis. As a concluding point of argument in each of the chapters, therefore, the context-specific model of the author-function presented in each novel is subjected to a Foucauldian reading, and oriented as an overt function of discourse. In the case of Didon's *Democracy*, this discursive orientation of narrative viewpoint is explicitly situated as a function of the enunciation – the relation between both the author and the reader as meaning producing-functions – thus foreshadowing a more extended discussion of the Foucauldian author model in relation to this novel.

As a consequence of this, the author-function can no longer be understood as absolute or ideologically innocent. The authors in *The Bostonians*, *The Great Gatsby*, *V.*, and *Democracy* are implicated in the very culture that locates them. The author-function is thus positioned as a partial term and yet at the same time is perpetuated as a kind of positivism in late modern Western culture. The author-function still elicits a situated and therefore positive effectivity, but because this effectivity is partial rather than innocent, it

is able to operate as a genuine, because critically and discursively engaged, position of critique. It is this situatedness which thus engages it as a diagnostic of modernity and, as this thesis will conclude in the chapter on *Democracy*, as a diagnostic able at once to engage with and critique the American national narrative.

In denaturalising the expressivist model of the author, the trajectory that begins with *The Bostonians* and concludes with *Democracy* also offers a model of author functionality which addresses the problems which arise from the objectivising and totalising tendencies of subject-centred reason – epitomised by the Cartesian model of consciousness – installed “as the founding methodology of modernity” (Waugh 1992, p. 2). The Cartesian subject model has prompted, to quote Patricia Waugh, the formulation of a perceptual model that, in privileging a knowing subject and an inert object of knowledge,

has led to a world in which the detached superiority of the scientist becomes the model and ground of all existence. Instead of experiencing the world as a texture through which we came to be, world is observed as an inert material body to be manipulated through a series of dualisms generated by the subject-object split (mind/body, spirit/matter, reason/emotion, masculinity/femininity). ...A detached superiority has come to stand over an inert nature, speculating observing, judging and manipulating it for its own ends. All relations become instrumental.

(Waugh 1992, p. 2)

Although, strictly speaking, it is a product of Romanticism – reflecting the privilege accorded to the imaginative rather than reasoning faculties of the mind – the expressivist author convention, in installing the author in relation to a text as a detached, eternal formalism, might be seen as simply iterating the modern subject model. The expressivist author seeks to subjugate the world in relation to the perceived autonomy of its consciousness. However, the contextual author model argued for in this thesis posits a model of author functionality which, in engaging as a contextuality that does not seek to subjugate the world, perhaps overcomes the totalising tendencies of the Cartesian subject-consciousness-versus-world relation. The model of author centredness – of the author as

diagnostic – presented in this thesis situates the author as a mutable and provisional function, with the effect that his or her functionality rests upon his or her changing, contextual specificity. The four transformations of the author-function discussed in this thesis – from the unconscious contextual author-function in *The Bostonians* to the enunciatively situated author-function in *Democracy* – thus install the author as a relational symptom of context, as opposed to some detached, imperialising consciousness.

The fact that the post-expressivist author-function rests upon an explicit interrogation of the narrative of modernity, and therefore by implication the American national narrative, underlines the usefulness of these four novels as a basis for the argument in this thesis. The overt problematising of modernity by the narrative mode in each novel also serves to privilege *The Bostonians*, *The Great Gatsby*, *V.*, and *Democracy* as key exemplars of the contextual interrogation of modernity and the expressivist author convention that is undertaken in this thesis. One does not have to read “against the grain” of the narrative in any of these novels to make this argument. Instead, their capacity to foreground a contextual model of the author can be used to situate the four novels relative to a genuinely productive, “author-centred” critical trajectory. Furthermore, the operation of such author-centredness in each novel, grounded as a contextual rather than formalist function, means that the author does not initially have to be disarmed as a perceived commonsense or absolute function in order that the trajectory argued in this thesis be successfully deployed as a discursive critique of modernity. In effecting this critique, the operation of the author-function in each of the four novels thus avoids the trap of replacing a theological model of author-centred meaning production with another model of the author that is also theological. As a critique of the hegemony of modernity, the operation of the author-function in each of the novels, located in relation to the trajectory

presented in this thesis, is instituted by a “post-expressivist” conception of author-centredness which (following Foucault) produces a discursive rather than expressivist ontology of the author.

## 2.

### Contextualising the Author.

#### *The Bostonians*

(1886)

I am but the reporter of his angry *formulae* ...

(Henry James, 1990, p. 45)

Raymond Williams' recognition that the expressivist model of the author is a cultural construct reflecting the incorporation of the Romantic model of the author as an explicitly accepted convention throughout the nineteenth century, is symptomatic of the more general reification of literature – as a specialised mode of production – during this period. In America the contemporaneous differentiation of the writer of literature from the American narrative of nationhood is also symptomatic of this reification. Crucially, the specialisation of the author/artist and, at the same time, the newly-emergent body of American literature demonstrated that the narrative of modernity could no longer be automatically posited as “self-evident”, “rational”, or “given”. This differentiation of the national narrative highlighted the essentially conflictual, polyvocal makeup of modernity. This was also reflected in the emergence during the 1830s and 1840s of the American Transcendentalist movement, a movement which took umbrage with the course democracy was taking during this period.

*The Bostonians*, first published in 1886, concerns itself with characters and social issues whose themes reflect directly upon the nature and “progress” of democracy in America, especially during the period of Reconstruction after the American Civil War. James's declaration early on in the novel, that he is “but the reporter” (James 1990, p. 45) of the

events that comprise *The Bostonians* is thus somewhat problematic. Eschewing any emphatic partisan position in the narrative as he recounts the progress of his three central characters – Verena Tarrant, Olive Chancellor, and Basil Ransom – it is nevertheless impossible to understand his position as an impartial one. Rather, the narrative viewpoint taps into the pluralised and differentiated character of a liberal nineteenth-century society which rendered problematic both modernity and modern democracy.

This chapter argues that narrative viewpoint in *The Bostonians* does not position meaning as if it were a commonsense given or absolute, but instead seeks to demystify such claims to givenness. My close reading of narrative viewpoint in the novel argues that James employs the progress of the character of the young *naif-cum-ingenuë*, Verena Tarrant, to undermine the opposing politics of the two other major characters in the novel – the conservative Southerner, Basil Ransom, and the radical Boston feminist, Olive Chancellor – as they attempt to win Verena over to their respective political positions, either through marriage to Ransom or conscription to Olive’s feminist cause.

This demystification by the novel’s narrative viewpoint of the ideological positions of both Ransom and Olive is employed here as a starting point for a further train of discussion which seeks to situate James and *The Bostonians* in relation to several contemporaneous traditions of nineteenth-century thought: the traditions of nineteenth-century Transcendentalism in America, and those of nineteenth-century liberalism in England and Europe. James’s demystification of these movements is implicated in the manner in which the character of Verena Tarrant is positioned in the novel as a thematic exemplar typical of much of the Jamesian corpus, referred to by Merla Wolk via a discussion of his “figure in the carpet theme” (Wolk 1989, p. 50). This chapter links



James's further demystification of nineteenth-century modernity as a project founded upon given truth-claims with a discussion of the contextual rather than formalist situatedness of the author-function in *The Bostonians* with respect to modernity. Consequently, this chapter will conclude by arguing that, in demystifying modernity as a project based upon foundational truth-claims, James also demystifies his own narrative viewpoint as an expressivist function. James's denaturalisation of this narrative viewpoint is essentially an unconscious, or implicit, effect in the novel, symptomatic of its foregrounding of both the project of modernity and narrative viewpoint in *The Bostonians* as modes which, rather than transcending ideologically-complicit questions of society and individual and cultural context, are in fact products of these contexts. Treating this break with the expressivist author in a Foucauldian sense, it is thus possible to understand the break James effects with the expressivist author convention as symptomatic of his status as a writer, reflecting a crucial turning point away from realism to modernism. It is this turning point which defines James as an author. Disarmed as an expressivism, he is a discursive reflection, not an institutor, of a key moment in nineteenth-century literary aesthetics.

### **Situating James's Narrative Viewpoint.**

Scholarly discussion of the central plot of *The Bostonians* – of the attempts by the Boston feminist, Olive Chancellor, to mould Verena Tarrant as a propagandist for the feminist cause and that of Basil Ransom, the conservative lawyer from the deep South, to win Verena's heart in marriage – has been varied, to say the very least. This divergence in critical response is symptomatic of widely divergent opinions concerning James's perceived authorial intent in this novel. The first part of this chapter will examine the analyses of some of these commentators – principally, Lionel Trilling, Leon Edel and

David Howard – to argue that an examination of authorial intent and narrative form in *The Bostonians* enables one not only to address some of the problems inherent in a critical approach which seeks to locate meaning in a text relative to an expressivist, author-centred model of interpretation, but also to consider some of the ways in which the author-function in James's novel is situated within the nineteenth-century political and philosophical tradition while also breaking free of the expressivist model.

In an essay on *The Bostonians* published in his 1955 collection, *The Opposing Self*, Lionel Trilling argues that James adopts a broadly conservative position regarding the respective endeavours by Olive and Ransom to win over Verena. Essentially, Trilling argues that James comes down on the side of Ransom, because Ransom himself stands for a representation of America that recent history (specifically, the American Civil war) threatens to relegate to the past. As Trilling argues, the defeat of the South by the acquisitive, industrialised North signifies for James an assault upon traditional forces in America, and the loss of “a kind of realism which the North, with its abstract intellectuality, was forgetting to its cost” (Trilling 1955, p. 113). Indeed, Trilling argues that James's decision to present the contest between the burgeoning feminist suffragette movement and traditional forces opposed to women's liberation in Boston is also a collision between the reformist North (represented by the feminist movement in New England) and the conservative South (the conservative Southerner, Ransom). Further, it locates the suffragette movement within a wider historical process. Trilling writes:

James conceived Basil Ransom as if he were the leading, ideal intelligence of the group of gifted men who, a half-century later, were to rise in the South and to muster in its defense whatever force may be available to an intelligent, romantic conservatism. ... Ransom ... has the courage of the collateral British line of romantic conservatives – he is akin to Yeats, Lawrence, and Eliot in that he experiences his cultural fears in the most personal way possible, translating them into sexual fear, the apprehension of the loss of manhood.

(Trilling 1955, p. 113)

At a well-known moment in *The Bostonians*, Ransom expresses his apprehensions to

Verena:

“I am so far from thinking, as you set forth the other night, that there is not enough woman in our general life, that it has long been pressed home to me that there is a great deal too much. The whole generation is womanized; the masculine tone is passing out of the world; it’s a feminine, a nervous, hysterical, chattering, canting age, an age of hollow phrases and false delicacy and exaggerated solicitudes and coddled sensibilities, which, if we don’t look out, will usher in the reign of mediocrity, the feeblest and flattest and the most pretentious that there has ever been. The masculine character, the ability to dare and endure, to know and yet not fear reality, to look the world in the face and take it for what it is – a very queer and partly very base mixture – that is what I want to preserve, or rather, as I may say, to recover; and I must tell you that I don’t in the least care what becomes of you ladies while I make the attempt!”

(James 1990, p. 322)

Trilling refers to this as an encapsulation of Ransom’s attitude to the suffragette movement and the female sex, arguing that it represents one pole (of course, the conservative one) of a conflict between radical and conservative principles which – at the risk, he admits, of a degree of oversimplification – characterises the James *oeuvre* (Trilling 1955, p. 108). Alluding to *The Princess Casamassima* (published in book form in the same year as *The Bostonians*), Trilling points out that, although both of these novels seem to differ from the rest of James’ canon because they deal overtly with public and political themes, “their representation of large, overt, opposed forces” (Trilling 1955, p. 108), rather than distinguishing them from the overall canon, is a source of common ground. The collision between conservative and radical principles in both *Bostonians* and *Casamassima* exemplifies a theme typical of James’s novels, though in this case they are played out at a public level. Trilling also argues that by making the conflict between Olive and Ransom not simply a personal one, but a conflict between North and South, James is able to represent the nineteenth-century feminist movement as somehow embodying the loss of a “kind of realism” that had been found in an earlier era in American history. For Trilling, in this novel James is not merely concerned to present the suffragette movement in New England, but to show how it reflects what he argues is a far more intrinsic and fundamental predicament. He writes:

When he involved the feminist movement with even a late adumbration of the immense tragic struggle between North and South, he made it plain that his story had to do with a cultural crisis. Nor could this crisis, if properly understood, seem particular to America, for North and South, as James understands them, represent the two opposing elements in that elaborate politics of culture which, all over the civilized world, has been the great essential subject of the literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

(Trilling 1955, pp. 112-13)

Trilling notes James's declared intention when conceiving the novel to write "a very *American* tale" (James, in Trilling 1955, p. 111). He refers to James's concern to elucidate "the most salient and peculiar point of our social life": "the situation of women, the decline of the sentiment of sex" (Trilling 1955, p. 111). Trilling argues that, for James, the rise of the suffragette movement stood for more than a simple, isolated quarrel regarding the equality of women. It signified, rather, "the sign of a general diversion of culture from the course of nature" (Trilling 1955, p. 111). For Trilling, James's novel exemplifies such sentiments, not in the fashion of some light-hearted literary "comedy of manners" as in that of other nineteenth-century figures such as George Meredith or George Bernard Shaw, but in the sense that the battle of the sexes stood for "the bitter total war of the sexes which Strindberg conceived" and which was given "its fullest ideological and artistic expression by D.H. Lawrence" (Trilling 1955, pp. 110-11). In presenting this argument, Trilling is positioning James as a proto-modernist, and a conservative one at that, in spite of the fact that it is usually only with regard to the three later novels – *The Wings of the Dove*, *The Ambassadors*, and *The Golden Bowl* – that he is seen as such. In arguing that Ransom's anxieties in *The Bostonians* are presented in such a way that they reflect the more universal anxieties of the age in which he lives, anxieties which other American cultural figures such as Walt Whitman and Henry Adams also expressed, Trilling appears to be arguing that Ransom is afflicted by the anxieties of a culture and tradition that feels threatened by the onset of the new (Trilling 1955, p. 114).

Trilling concludes his discussion by bringing forward a crucial autobiographical connection concerning James and *The Bostonians*, a connection which he speculates played a crucial role in the conception of the novel. Trilling points out that James returned from England to America in 1881, his first return since 1876, visiting Boston (which on this occasion he disliked) to visit his family and to stay with the American historian Henry Adams. In January of that year he received a telegram telling him that his mother was ill, and which prepared him for her impending death (Trilling 1955, p. 115). Trilling sees the anxieties expressed by Ransom in *The Bostonians* as reflecting those of James himself; the death not only of his mother, but also his father shortly afterwards, perhaps came to encapsulate the loss of an older America in the post-Civil War era (Trilling 1955, p. 115). He concludes his discussion by pointing out that James wrote the initial scenario for *The Bostonians* during this final visit to America, when his family connections had been severed. Trilling summarises James's novel thus:

[It is] a story of the parental house divided against itself, of the keystone falling from the arch, of the sacred mothers refusing their commission and the sacred fathers endangered.

(Trilling 1955, p. 117)

There are, it seems to me, some very explicit problems with Trilling's argument. For one thing, his argument could be construed as sexist, a fact which in itself may align with James's own opposition to the feminist movement in the nineteenth century, but which I believe nevertheless caricatures the function of the narrative viewpoint in James's novel. Thus Trilling's position is not only a reflection of the fact that his essay on *The Bostonians* was written in the 1950s, in the decade before the post-war women's activist movement truly took hold in America, but also because it can be argued that Trilling has seriously misconstrued the function of James's narrative viewpoint in this novel. In speculating upon the relevance of James's own familial associations with Boston to his

novel, and arguing that the death of his parents impelled him to conceive *The Bostonians* as a kind of elegy for a lost America, Trilling's interpretation of the novel as a work of conservative proto-modernism seems problematic to say the least. Discussing an elegy James wrote in his notebooks for his mother after she died, in which he celebrated what he described as her "exquisite maternity" and her "divine commission", Trilling concludes: "Perhaps nothing that James ever wrote approaches this passage in the explicit cognizance it takes of the biological nature of moral fact" (Trilling 1955, p. 116). However, Trilling's argument, endeavouring as it does to enshrine *The Bostonians* as a work of conservative modernism, surely runs counter to James's actual narrative approach. At the conclusion, in fact, of the same passage in the novel in which Ransom launches into his invective against the rise of the women's movement and declares that "the masculine tone is passing out of the world," the narrator proffers the following aside:

The poor fellow delivered himself of these narrow notions (the rejection of which by leading periodicals was certainly not a matter for surprise) with low, soft earnestness, bending towards her so as to give out his whole idea ...

(James 1990, p. 323)

This aside by the narrator seems conclusive enough, and is supported by a number of other comments he makes regarding Ransom. For example:

[H]e had a certain sentimental provincial respect for women which even prevented him from attempting to give a name to it in his own thoughts. He was addicted with the ladies to the old forms of address and of gallantry; he held that they were delicate, agreeable creatures, whom Providence had placed under the protection of the bearded sex; and it was not merely a humorous idea with him that whatever might be the defects of Southern gentlemen, they were at any rate remarkable for their chivalry. He was a man who still, in a slangy age, could pronounce that word with a perfectly serious face.

(James 1990, p. 184)

In view of this and other observations the narrator makes about Ransom, it seems remarkable that Trilling can adopt the position he does. Trilling does not appear to be interpreting *The Bostonians* according to any specific "close reading", but rather from a

position he infers with regard to James himself. Yet in pointing out such inadequacies in his argument by recourse to some of the narrator's asides in *The Bostonians*, can one draw the conclusion that James is on the side of the radical feminist movement, at least as represented by Olive? His opposition to the women's movement, after all, is well known. In the opening chapter of the novel, when Ransom is first introduced to Olive, the narrator effects a moment of overt symbolism so as to position her thematically. He writes:

Basil Ransom had got up just as Mrs Luna made this last declaration; for a young lady had glided into the room. ... She stood there looking, consciously and rather seriously, at Mr. Ransom; a smile of exceeding faintness played about her lips – it was perceptible enough to light up the native gravity of her face. It might have been likened to a thin ray of moonlight resting upon the wall of a prison.

(James 1990, p. 6)

The young lady entering the room, for whom Ransom stands up, is, of course, Olive. The recourse to simile by which James describes the woman appears to speak volumes about James's narrative viewpoint regarding this character and how she is positioned in the novel as a propagandist for the feminist movement. As readers of *The Bostonians* are aware, the narrator, to say the very least, is derisive in his general presentation of her. The portrait the narrator invokes is of a woman whose feminist convictions have been distorted by a personality that is almost pathological in its singlemindedness; she attempts to mould reality in such a way that it is delimited wholly by her own worldview, smacking of out and out absolutism. This is demonstrated by the nature of the relationship she instigates with the young orator (and social innocent) Verena Tarrant. Initially encountering Verena when she speaks on behalf of women's rights at a public meeting hosted by a long-time supporter of radical causes, Miss Birdseye, Olive is overwhelmed by Verena's oratorical gifts and takes the young woman under her wing.

In virtually bribing Verena's parents, Mrs Tarrant and the quack mesmerist Selah Tarrant, with payments of money so that Verena can share Olive's lodgings in Charles Street, it

becomes clear that her designs on the young orator reflect her absolutist outlook. Olive seeks not only to educate Verena in the literature of the women's movement, but also to wield absolute control over her new protégé. Olive, for one thing, is repulsed by Verena's humble background and desires to have as little as possible to do with the parents. Consequently, she resolves that her first visit to their house, will be her last (James 1990, p. 105). She not only finds the company of Verena's family repellent, but is tormented by the prospect that the young men visiting Verena at Selah and Mrs Tarrant's home might cause her either to stray from the feminist cause or even marry. For, as the narrator in *The Bostonians* observes at one point, "[Olive] was haunted by the fear that Verena would marry" (James 1990, p. 111). Olive's express fears regarding Verena's being betrothed cuts to the heart of James's presentation of the doctrinaire motivations that drive this character. Olive is repelled by anything that appears to stand at odds with her own conception of the world, hence her fears that any company Verena keeps outside Olive's circle of influence could see her ultimately stray from the fold. Olive's fears that Verena will marry and consequently abandon the feminist cause are of course compounded by the appearance of Ransom.

Leon Edel, discussing *The Bostonians* in his biography of James, also has recourse to biographical details of James's life – for example the author's own associations with Boston; his familial and personal connections in the city – to come to a rather different set of conclusions. In the chapter devoted to *The Bostonians* Edel discusses the view (held by other academics as well as Trilling) that James takes the side of Ransom. Edel acknowledges that many contemporary critics have interpreted Olive's interest in Verena as being essentially lesbian in character, particularly because in the novel she has coaxed



Verena to come and live with her.<sup>1</sup> Although conceding that Olive's hatred of men and interest in Verena is certainly suggestive of a latent homosexuality on Olive's part (Edel 1963, pp. 76-7), Edel points out that the friendship between these two women was characteristic of many female friendships in New England during the period in which James's novel is set (Edel 1963, p. 76). Elaborating on this point, Edel remarks that critics who regard Olive's attachment to Verena as lesbian have come to see James as essentially siding with Ransom, "for they read him in the belief that he is rescuing Verena from Olive's depravity" (Edel 1963, p. 78). However, as Edel sees things, James in fact has little sympathy for either Olive's or Ransom's position. For Edel, it was the struggle between Olive and Ransom for possession of Verena that transfixed James while he wrote the novel:

It is their struggle for power which he finds fascinating; they are ruthless, self-seeking, blind to the feelings of others and aware only of their own needs. Olive wants to make Verena a projection of herself; Ransom is sufficiently of the post-war South to still believe that some persons should be enslaved by others.

(Edel 1963, p. 78)

For Edel, James was ultimately so transfixed by the struggle between Olive and Ransom that he lost control of the novel. Edel argues that the reasons for this centre upon James's personal connections with Boston. Having spent his youth in this city, far more than the philosophical clash in the novel between conservative and radical forces was at stake for James. His novel about Boston thus tapped into many of the preoccupations and anxieties that had taken hold of James during his last visit, when it seemed to him that his ties with his home country were severed. Again, Edel writes:

The paradox of *The Bostonians* was that while Henry intellectually was holding up a satirical mirror to the city of his youth, another and younger self within him seemed to plead almost fearfully that nothing be altered, that he could not face the severing of the cable of

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Thomas Samuels, in his book *The Ambiguity of Henry James*, takes this position. He writes: "Though there is a touch of malice in James's perception of the lesbianism underlying Olive's convictions, his discovery is remarkable. Its prescience places James among those who, from angles as different as those of Marx and Freud, challenged the simple-minded nineteenth-century conception of the disinterestedness of belief" (Samuels 1971, p. 97).

his old anchorage. ... *The Bostonians* was the novel in which James wrote out the hidden emotional anguish of the collapse of his old American ties, and he coupled this with a kind of vibrating anger that Boston should be so unfriendly as to let him go.

(Edel 1963, p. 81)

For Edel, James's obsession with Olive's and Ransom's conflict thus reflects this intensely personal connection with the reformist city that was Boston as James himself knew it. If James was in some ways ultimately disdainful of anything in this conflict that was typical of Boston, in other ways he was terrified of letting it go.

Edel talks of how, in writing the novel, James displayed an exhaustive, even overworked naturalistic minuteness (Edel 1963, p. 75). For Edel, the material had seemingly hypnotised James, resulting in a novel that, although noteworthy – Edel opens his discussion of *The Bostonians* by describing it as “the most considerable novel of its decade” – was in the final analysis both too densely wrought and too long. As proof of this, Edel observes that the first nine chapters in *The Bostonians* are devoted to the first evening in the narrative (Edel 1963, p. 75). James himself conceded this, observing in a letter to his brother William: “I should have been more rapid and had a lighter hand” (Edel 1963, p. 75). Because he was so close to the material of the novel, and because it seemed to him that he had lost control of it, James excluded the novel from the New York Edition of his works. For Edel, proof of James's failure to control his novel was the fact that, in concentrating so much narrative detail on the contest between Olive and Ransom, he in many ways overlooks the character of Verena. Edel feels that the lack of attention paid to this character undermines the novel's power, since the battle between the two protagonists to win over Verena cannot really be seen as having any consequence.

It is possible, however, to question Edel's belief that James fails to delineate Verena effectively, that she has no coherent function in the narrative. Edel's conviction that Verena is not fleshed out enough as a character is in many ways a consequence of the role she plays in the story. Edel observes that, throughout the course of the novel, Verena "develops into a finished Boston parrot, with all the orotundities and reflections of the old-time speech-makers in her voice" (Edel 1963, p. 76). From one point of view this is certainly an accurate summary, since we first encounter her at a public meeting with her mesmerist father, Selah. The speech she presents for everybody attending the gathering is seemingly brought into being by a ritual laying on of hands by Tarrant (James 1990, p. 51). Verena herself, remarking upon her oratorical gifts, compounds this view when she says to her mother that "it isn't me" (James 1990, p. 50) – an observation that effectively epitomises her capacity throughout the novel to seemingly ventriloquise other characters' points of view. This is demonstrated by the way in which she not only lets Olive pay off her parents in order to take her into her household and perhaps win total possession of her, but also by the way in which Verena eventually switches her allegiances and deserts the women's cause to marry Ransom. As David Howard comments: "[Verena] enters the book as the passive instrument of her father and leaves 'enslaved' by Ransom" (Howard 1972, p. 73).

Such a description of Verena, summarising as it does a woman who appears to elide her discrete self to accord with the desires of others, would seem indeed to be explanation enough for Edel's reservations about the novel. However, it is surely also possible to contend that Verena's behaviour, as well as effectively rendering her subservient to either her father's, Olive's, or Ransom's desires, also serves to demystify – or desanctify – their respective absolutist positions. As William McMurray argues, Verena neither "exercise[s]

nor act[s] out of any exclusive and discriminatory self-reference or self-intention. ...[S]he wants the saving grace of an enlightened self-interest” (McMurray 1968, p. 163). Such an “anemia of self” (McMurray 1963, p. 163) – such an inability to function within the social totality as a discrete, self-reckoning subject – ultimately enables the reader of *The Bostonians* to engage critically with the events of the novel in a way that Verena herself does not. As a consequence of Verena’s capacity to elide herself, the arbitrary, absolutist nature of Olive’s and Ransom’s worldviews is foregrounded and the self-evidence, or innocence, of their positions is demystified.

However, the absence of any “enlightened self-interest” in Verena suggests more than this. As a “parrot” for other people’s conceptions of the world, she epitomises a plurality of viewpoints which, in its capacity at once to mimic a particular ideological viewpoint and yet demystify it, ultimately locates these discordant viewpoints relationally or relativistically, rather than absolutely, with respect to each other. Their claims to truth are thus unmasked. Indeed, the drama and suspense of *The Bostonians* turns upon the prevarications of Verena as she not only lets Olive take her away from her parents that she might be indoctrinated in the Chancellor household, but also continually wavers as to whether she should side with Olive’s or Ransom’s “worldview” as her involvement with each of them deepens. As David Howard remarks: “Verena is a great creation, she makes *The Bostonians* plural in its greatness, gives the novel a compensating generosity along with its sardonic and satirical verve” (Howard 1972, p. 72).

James’s novel climaxes in the Boston Music Hall, on the evening in which Verena is due to give a speech that, under Olive’s tutelage, has been in preparation for months. In a way, it represents Verena’s “coming out” after all this time spent in preparation, a moment

when she will take a first triumphant step in forwarding the cause of women's rights. Yet Ransom, also attending the meeting, manages to seize Verena and carry her off with him as she is about to go on stage, having convinced her that she will be happiest as his wife rather than as a suffragette. James writes:

Ransom, palpitating with his victory, felt now a little sorry for her, and was relieved to know that, even when exasperated, a Boston audience is not ungenerous. "Ah, now I am glad!" said Verena, when they reached the street. But though she was glad, he presently discovered that, beneath her hood, she was in tears. It is to be feared that with the union, so far from brilliant, into which she was about to enter, these were not the last she was destined to shed.

(James 1990, pp. 434-5)

The point in James's narrative surely seems to be that Verena – a personality whose actions embody the standpoint of others at the expense of herself – epitomises the very tensions and conflicting positions embodied in these different ideologies. Finally seeming to have been swayed by Ransom's exhortations, James tells us that Verena will nevertheless experience unhappiness in the union. As a character whose personality would seem to epitomise a pluralising, demystifying conception of reality, one person's doctrines will not sit easily with her. Howard observes:

She is both representative of the age and uniquely separable from it, and we are continually watching her in the novel being taken both ways. The comedy of these attempts is that they keep reopening satirically the settled question of the American scene. It gives the scene, the 'age', a perpetual second chance.

(Howard 1972, p. 76)

In demystifying and reimagining America, Verena's fate thus goes further than merely interrogating the assumed absolute truth-claims of either Olive's or Ransom's respective radical and conservative positions. The project of nineteenth-century liberalism, as both "objective" and "emancipating", is also interrogated, as is its claim to be premised on a cognitively neutral conception of knowledge. If, then, like Trilling, we are to interpret *The Bostonians* as a work in which the narrative approach anticipates the proto-modernism of James's later novels, such a "proto-modernist" approach should surely be interpreted as

reflecting this demystificatory treatment in the novel of the various ideological positions. After all, James's proto-modernism is surely grounded in an understanding of narrative viewpoint which eschews both the mid-nineteenth-century expressivist model of the omniscient narrator and the general nineteenth-century liberal tradition. It would seem useful, accordingly, to investigate how *The Bostonians* is situated in relation to this liberal tradition; how, in short, it critiques the democratic project as exemplifying a political ideology whose roots lie in the Enlightenment, but whose effects are still felt in America today. A discussion of *The Bostonians* with regard to the nineteenth-century liberal tradition in America can be employed not only to produce a demystifying reading of that tradition, but also to position the author-function in James's novel in such a way that it too is also demystified. Indeed, it is surely possible to argue that if James eschews the unassailable narrative viewpoint for either Olive or Ransom, this is also true of any other narrative viewpoint founded upon the conceptual notion of absolute political and philosophical foundations.

### **The American Liberal Tradition in Relation to *The Bostonians*.**

The question as to the position that *The Bostonians* – indeed the general James corpus – occupies in relation to the nineteenth-century tradition of liberal modernity has important repercussions with regard to the question of the author-function in James's novel. As a work of late realism, written and published in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, *The Bostonians* first appeared at a time when the ethos of nineteenth-century liberal modernity – itself a product of the social, cultural, philosophical, and technological transformations ushered in by the era of the Enlightenment and the political and industrial revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – was entering a period in which it was increasingly questioned as an ideology able to realise a modern, democratic, liberal

utopia. James's concern in *The Bostonians* with the reformist politics prevalent in Boston during this period thus provided him with a theme bound up with the question of the efficacy of modernity as a utopian project.

The setting for *The Bostonians* is mostly that of the city of Boston in the 1880s, during the period of the Reconstruction after the end of the American Civil War. James's satire in the novel is directed at the many reformist movements – such as that of feminism and abolitionism – which were prominent in the city, indeed throughout much of New England, at this time. These movements, whose origins preceded the Civil War, were crucial in fostering the reputation of the city as a place of ferment for reformist ideas. As many critics have rightfully pointed out, Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1852 novel, *The Blithedale Romance*, also set in Boston and New England, served as a model for James when he wrote *The Bostonians* thirty years later. The critic Marius Bewley, in his book, *The Complex Fate: Hawthorne, Henry James and Some Other American Writers*, addresses the question of the influence of *The Blithedale Romance* upon *The Bostonians*, going so far as to argue that Hawthorne's novel was not only the principal influence for *The Bostonians*, but that it was Hawthorne's work in general that grounded James's values as a writer in much of his following fiction (Bewley 1967, p. 8).

However, the influence of a European tradition of literature upon James, such as that of Ivan Turgenev and George Eliot, is also widely known, and has been stressed by other critics. For example, Peter Buitenhuis, in *The Grasping Imagination: The American Writings of Henry James*, although acknowledging that *The Blithedale Romance* influenced James when he conceived and wrote *The Bostonians*, argues that it was merely the general Boston setting and reformist themes that influenced James, and that it was

another novel, *L'Evangeliste*, by the French writer Alphonse Daudet, which primarily suggested to James the idea of *The Bostonians*. Indeed, as will be argued below, it was a predominantly European, not American, tradition which James ultimately drew on in effecting his critique of liberal modernity, a critique which – in engaging in a demystification of the absolute precepts of modernity – was both to ally James with a European tradition of literature and philosophy and signal a conscious differentiation by James from his American liberal democratic inheritance. Certainly, any common ground shared with Hawthorne by James begins with a similar differentiation by Hawthorne from the forces of liberal modernity prevalent in America during the nineteenth century. However, the different ways in which each of these writers oriented their responses reflects, once again, James's alliance with a tradition of European rather than American literature. These points of difference, which will be touched upon below, can also be seen as reflecting a questioning of the expressivist model of the author as an ideologically innocent, formalist function, thus preparing the ground for the emergence of a new model of the author-function in *The Bostonians* as an engaged and ideologically implicated (as opposed to innocent and differentiated) function.

In attempting to map a line of influence from Nathaniel Hawthorne to Henry James, the American critic Marius Bewley argues in his book, *The Complex Fate*, that Hawthorne “literally gave James a tradition” (Bewley 1967, p. 8). He discusses how James had known the works of Hawthorne since he was a small child, and his essay “A Small Boy and Others” recounts the effect of Hawthorne's early novels, such as *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) and *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), upon James's imagination. Later novels such as *The Blithedale Romance* (1852) and *The Marble Faun* (1860) were more obviously influential on James's fictions, especially *The Bostonians* and *The Wings of the*



*Dove* (1902). In the case of *The Bostonians*, Bewley argues that Hawthorne made the novel's New England setting artistically accessible (Bewley 1967, p. 8):

[I]t was, finally, this sense of rootedness, or more accurately, of fine and enduring relation [to Hawthorne], that safeguarded him from becoming a kind of Edwardian Maugham. Later, when his novels became a dialectic of nations, the Moderator, instead of a displaced cosmopolitan, was a novelist whose values were centred and whose aims were clearly focused.

(Bewley 1967, pp. 8-9)

In arguing for the importance of this native literary influence upon James's fiction, Bewley attempts to downplay the well-known influences of nineteenth-century European writers such as Maupassant and Turgenev upon the author, even going so far as to say that "[t]o focus James's art against a background of continental writers is not to focus it at all" (Bewley 1967, p. 6). Although Bewley is surely correct to use Hawthorne as a basis for delineating an American influence on James, it can be argued that he is misguided to assert that the European influence has been overestimated. As will be discussed below, the importance of European writers such as Maupassant and the English novelist George Eliot in supplying an innovative tradition of novelistic realism is as important – if not more important – than any influence of Hawthorne's. Indeed, the importance of a European inheritance in the creation of *The Bostonians* has been addressed by other critics, such as Buitenhuis; consequently, the primacy of *Blithedale* (as stressed by Bewley) as an influence on James's novel must be readdressed. The new European realist tradition in many ways set James apart from that Romantic American heritage, and James's approach to realism differentiates him from his American forebears. As Bewley himself observes, James's writing diverged from, as much as it demonstrated, Hawthorne's influence, and this divergence is a product of the ways both writers sought to respond to the nineteenth-century project of realism and the concomitant era of liberal modernity.

According to Bewley, Hawthorne's *Blithedale Romance* provided James with a physical and thematic American background for *The Bostonians* some thirty years later. However, as Bewley also argues, James did not so much emulate Hawthorne's novel as use it as premise for his own concerns (Bewley 1967, p. 12). James concurred with many critical assessments of *The Blithedale Romance* as an essentially flawed work, not least because Hawthorne had failed to situate his novel, written in a Romantic or Gothic mode, within a convincing present-day setting. James remarks in his 1879 essay on the author that, instead of employing it as the basis for a narrative of literary realism, Hawthorne uses his novel's New England milieu "as a perch for starting an imaginative flight" (Bewley 1967, pp. 12-13). James's main point of contention, in fact, is that Hawthorne fails to use the materials of his narrative as the basis for social satire, and satire is of course his central narrative approach in *The Bostonians*.

As Buitenhuis argues, it is James's use of satire which provides a number of important clues linking *The Bostonians* with *L'Evangeliste*. Alluding to an essay James wrote on Daudet's novel in 1883, Buitenhuis notes that the style and tone of *The Bostonians* owed much to the naturalistic style in which Daudet's novel was written:

It is in the style and tone of *The Bostonians* ... that James owes most to Daudet. As he noted in the essay, Daudet achieved the feat of getting 'outside of his ingredients and judging them.' ... His detached, often scornful, attitude affected his style, which was sharp and epigrammatic. Following Daudet, James in *The Bostonians* ... adopted the socially conscious role of the naturalistic writer. ... In this novel, James abandoned the device of the point-of-view character that he had been experimenting with for so long. He found the model for this technique in ... Daudet's fundamentally unsympathetic attitude towards his northern Protestant characters. Like Daudet he judged and commented on his characters freely.

(Buitenhuis 1970, p. 145)

Buitenhuis notes that other American critics, including Bewley, have acknowledged the role of *L'Evangeliste* as an influence on *The Bostonians*. However, whereas these critics have deliberately downplayed Daudet's influence, arguing instead that *The Blithedale*

*Romance* is the primary influence, Buitenhuis argues that the importance of *L'Evangeliste* as an influence is self-evident (Buitenhuis 1970, p. 142). Indeed, in 1883, when James first outlined the plot for *The Bostonians* in one of his notebooks, Buitenhuis emphasises that James himself described *L'Evangeliste* as having given him the idea for his novel (Buitenhuis 1970, p. 142). Daudet's novel recounts the story of a Danish Protestant named Madame Autheman, a religious fanatic who (much like the character of Olive Chancellor) takes charge of the life of a young *naif-cum-ingenue* named Eline Ebsen and convinces her to leave her mother and break off her engagement to a French widower in order to devote herself to religion. For Buitenhuis, the similarities between the Autheman-Ebsen relation in Daudet's novel and the Chancellor-Tarrant relationship in *The Bostonians* are clear evidence of the importance of *L'Evangeliste* as an influence upon James's novel.

James himself felt that, as psychological types, neither Madame Autheman nor Eline Ebsen completely convinced as characters. James regarded the character of M. Autheman as a psychological blank, lacking the necessary character motivation which would persuasively account for the nature of her obsession with Eline (Buitenhuis 1970, p. 143). Likewise, the character of Eline also failed to convince James. Buitenhuis argues that, in creating his characters and detailing the circumstances of their involvement with one another, James felt that Daudet failed to get inside his characters and delineate their inner psychological motivations. James believed that ultimately Daudet looked at his characters solely from the outside (Buitenhuis 1970, pp. 143-4). In conceiving and writing *The Bostonians*, James therefore borrowed Daudet's plot model involving an evangelist hell-bent on winning the allegiance of a social innocent to her cause but, in his conception of the characters of Olive and Verena, set out to instil in them a psychological depth and

motivation which he believed was lacking in Daudet's novel (Buitenhuis 1970, pp. 144-5). In conceiving the title *The Bostonians* for his novel, two other possible titles – *The Reformers*, and *The Precursors* – were rejected by James lest the origins of *L'Evangeliste* as the model for *The Bostonians* was too obvious (Buitenhuis p. 144). The role of *The Blithedale Romance* as a source for James's novel thus rests mainly in the provision of both the New England setting and the reformist movements that were prominent in Boston during this period. Even here, the origins of the reformist theme in *The Bostonians* can largely be understood as reflecting James's need to develop a suitable plot motivation; a motivation which would provide James with an evangelist/*naif-cum-ingenue* relation specific to a post-Reconstruction American setting. In writing *The Bostonians*, James consequently deployed a naturalistic writing technique and a method of explicit narrative commentary to overcome what he saw as Daudet's failings.

In outlining some of the specific ways in which he understands *Blithedale* as influencing *The Bostonians*, Bewley argues that certain elements of Hawthorne's novel – Boston, women's rights, mesmerism, a "neurotic" friendship between two women – provided James with a set of "counters ready for re-shifting in *The Bostonians*" (Bewley 1967, p. 23). *Blithedale* is set in New England, in the Transcendentalist community of Blithedale (a fictional version of the actual Transcendentalist community of Brook Farm, also in New England, where Hawthorne lived throughout most of 1841). James was able to draw upon Blithedale's utopian, reformist elements for his own novel, including the nineteenth-century women's movement, which served as the basis for the speechifying suffragette, Zenobia, who functions as a template for Verena Tarrant in *Bostonians*. In addition, the domination Zenobia exercises over the character Priscilla, who arrives at the

Transcendentalist community part way through the novel, also provides a prototype for the relationship between Olive and Verena:

When James came to create Verena Tarrant he gave her the role of Priscilla, but he conferred – with a far finer sense of the situation than Hawthorne had displayed – the charm, beauty and eloquence of Zenobia on her.

(Bewley 1967, p. 27)

Finally, as Bewley goes on to argue, Selah Tarrant and Basil Ransom may be seen as partly derived from Hawthorne's characters (Westervelt and Hollingsworth). However, as Buitenhuis again argues, many of the principal characters in *The Bostonians* can be understood as derived, not from *Blithedale*, but from other characters in some of the stories that James wrote prior to commencing work on his novel:

Basil Ransom is evolved from a long series of conservatives, generally European in origin. Some of these are M. Lejaune of 'The Point of View,' Count Vogelstein in 'Pandora,' and Sir Rufus Chasemore in 'The Modern Warning.' Ransom's physical characteristics can be traced to a childhood acquaintance of Henry James when his family lived in Washington Square. Next door to them lived for a while a Southern family. A son, Eugene Norcom was described in 'A Small Boy and Others' as 'the slim, the sallow, the straight-haired dark-eyed Eugene.' These are also the physical characteristics of Basil Ransom. Mrs. Luna had her origins in the merry, rococo widow in 'Guest's Confession,' and Olive Chancellor is prefigured by Lizzie Crow in 'The Story of a Year' and Gertrude Wentworth of *The Europeans*.

(Buitenhuis 1970, p. 142)

In his endeavour to uncover the specific nature of the artistic influence of Hawthorne upon James, Bewley not only seeks to locate James within an American tradition of literature, but also attempts to qualify the widely-held view of many commentators that it was almost exclusively a European tradition to which James turned as an example for his own craft.<sup>2</sup> The American woman was a subject that James was to tackle time and time again throughout his career. The Jamesian heroine, such as Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady* and Milly Theale in

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<sup>2</sup> Bewley provides another brief study in *The Complex Fate* to link James with Hawthorne: the influence of Hawthorne's last novel, *The Marble Faun* (1860), upon a novel of James' later period – *The Wings of the Dove* (1902). Bewley's comparison between these two novels shows how the character of Hilda in *The Marble Faun* became for James a prototype for that of the American expatriate Milly Theale, the central character of *The Wings of the Dove*.

*The Wings of the Dove*, was consistently employed by James as a means to draw out points of contrast between culture and society in America and in Europe; points of contrast, in effect, between that of the “new” and “free” continent of the United States and the “old” traditional culture of Europe. In many of James’s fictions this clash also came to exemplify the clash of the “innocent” and the “corrupt”, of which the fate of the Jamesian heroine (such as Milly) became a dramatic and thematic exemplar. As Bewley notes in his discussion of *The Wings of the Dove*, James presents the American woman, or heroine, as embodying an ideal of subjectivity which, in her supposed independence from European constraint and tradition, epitomises a disposition which is “freer” than that of the European woman. Compounding this observation, Bewley quotes at length in *The Complex Fate* from James’s essay, “The American Scene”, where James talks thus of his conception of the American heroine:

What it came to, evidently, was that she had been given an air in which a hundred of the ‘European’ complications and dangers didn’t exist, and in which also she had had to take upon herself a certain training for freedom.

(James, in Bewley 1967, p. 32)

Both Hawthorne and James employ their heroines to delineate a critique of the era of modernity in the nineteenth century, especially as a project which conceives of itself as a universalising abstraction or idea. Although Hawthorne is part of a tradition in American writing that includes Transcendentalists such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman, the ways in which Hawthorne responded to the rise of modernity in the years leading up to and including the American Civil War set him apart from his contemporaries. James propounded a project of realism which critiqued the American mode of Romantic Transcendentalism, and developed a model of fictional realism which, like the European Romantics, sought to break free from the Enlightenment and nineteenth-century liberal model of modernity, but which

interrogated this modern model in a different way. An outline of some of the principles of the Transcendentalist movement, and Hawthorne's position in relation to it, and an outline of the way both Hawthorne and the Transcendentalists differentiated themselves from the strict rationalist model of modernity, will thus establish some of the principles of a tradition which James in turn was to critique. However, unlike Hawthorne and the Transcendentalists, James sought not only to interrogate the rationalist model of modernity, but also to critique the project by denaturalising its perceived foundationalism. This set him apart from the Romantics and the Transcendentalists and allied him with a particular model of nineteenth-century English and European realism pioneered by writers such as George Eliot and Ivan Turgenev.

The Transcendentalist movement flourished in America in the three decades leading up to the American Civil War. Essentially, it signified the first emergence of a genuine American literary tradition, a tradition measurably distinct from that of America's European forebears. Broadly, Transcendentalism drew on a number of influences. In his book about the movement, *Transcendentalism in America*, Donald N. Koster enumerates its main influences: the European tradition of Neoplatonism in the nineteenth century; religious Puritanism; nineteenth-century Romanticism; and the newly-discovered tradition of Oriental thought (Koster 1975, pp. 5-12). Transcendentalism attracted the support of key American figures such as Emerson, Thoreau and Walt Whitman.

Though ultimately opposing the movement, Hawthorne's involvement with the Transcendentalists was by no means insignificant. He was present at the first meeting of the Transcendental Club, and in the years that followed attended it on an irregular basis (Koster 1975, p. 14). In addition to this, he joined the utopian community of

Transcendentalists at Brook Farm in April 1841 (Ziff 1981, p. 114). Although Hawthorne denied, in the preface to *The Blithedale Romance*, that the portrait of Blithedale was an attack on Brook Farm, his disenchantment with that community was clear. Nevertheless, like the Transcendentalists, Hawthorne was opposed to the direction democratic society in America had taken since the War of Independence. He saw the character of American democracy as increasingly privileging ideas over feelings, a “law of the head” that was abstracting the idea of society and culture in America. Mass society and materialism were sacrificing lived experience upon the altar of illimitable change, all under the optimistic banner of social and ideological progress. Hawthorne was a conservative democrat at heart who championed spontaneous, instinctual action as a barometer of individual and social well-being. As Ziff writes: “[h]e used the mob as the standard of emotional health in his fictions. ... He embraced it because its very undifferentiation meant truth to human feeling rather than adherence to mere ideas” (Ziff 1981, p. 115).

Consequently, although Hawthorne applauded the response of the Transcendentalists to the general direction democracy was taking in America, he could not support the emphasis placed by figures such as Emerson upon the value of an abstract idea over that of the social body politic, for this abstracted human experience too much in his opinion. In addition he viewed the Transcendentalist belief in the capacity of the human individual to mystically intuit the truth of God and nature as evidencing nothing less than rampant egotism, not to mention his added conviction that it severed the human subject from reality (Koster 1975, p. 82). Thus Hawthorne came to oppose Transcendentalism for much the same reasons that he opposed the direction of democratic modernity in America. A “law of the heart” had been defeated by a “law of the head”, a situation which resulted not only in Hawthorne’s disillusionment with America, but also finally



silenced him as an artist. For Hawthorne, the industrial and material acquisitiveness of the Northern states triumphing over the blood ties of the conservative South after the Civil War signified the triumph of democratic modernity as an abstract idea, thus allowing nothing other than the birth of “a literature of essayistic abstraction” (Ziff 1981, p. 123). Essentially, Hawthorne regarded both industrial modernity and the Romanticism of the Transcendentalists, in abstracting the feelings of the individual subject, as effectively demystifying and thus destroying the ideals and principles of democratic modernity in America – with the effect that the subject was alienated from the non-abstracted reality of their own feelings. In the case, however, of James’s response to these abstracting tendencies in industrial and democratic America, this demystifying abstraction of both the individual subject and the democratic process in his home country served as a starting point for a different mode of critique. Indeed, as will be argued below, it was James’s more positive response to this question of industrial modernity and modern democracy as a demystifying phenomenon which further set him apart from Hawthorne, a response which further underlines the central influence of the European literary tradition upon his writing.

Like Hawthorne, James was critical of the Transcendentalist movement. In a review in 1887 of a memoir of Emerson by James Elliot Cabot, James, discussing Emerson’s status as a kind of founder of Transcendentalism, describes the movement as a “remarkable outburst of Romanticism on Puritan ground” (James 1970, p. 25) which could not survive during the period of the Reconstruction. For his part, James was more favourably disposed towards the figure of Emerson himself rather than the movement of reform Emerson helped spawn. As a consequence, James lauds the position Emerson took in opposing active, interventionist social reform and the distinctions Emerson repeatedly

made between himself and Transcendentalism (James 1970, p. 25). Indeed, James regarded Transcendentalism as a failure as a movement of reform:

Nothing is more perceptible to-day than that their criticism produced no fruit – that it was little else than a very decent and innocent recreation – a kind of Puritan carnival. The New England world was for much the most part very busy, but Dial and Fruitlands and Brook Farm were the amusement of the leisure class.

(James 1970, pp. 26-7)

James, too, was critical of the utopian elements of the Transcendentalist movement, of its view that human nature was essentially good, and that active social reform could bring about a perfect human society. In *The Bostonians*, the feminist, Miss Birdseye, is presented by James as a sort of epitome of Boston's Transcendentalist period; her death in the novel is nothing less than an elegy for the passing of this age of innocence. As James famously wrote of Miss Birdseye in his novel: "She was heroic, she was sublime, the whole moral history of Boston was reflected in her displaced spectacles" (James 1990, p. 30).

Certainly, this image of the *displaced* spectacles seems significant. Taking into account James's attitude towards the Transcendentalist movement, it appears to speak volumes about what he regarded as the essential innocence of the movement, or perhaps even the displacement of the movement by the Reconstruction in the 1870s. James saluted the brilliance of Emerson's "plea for the spiritual life" (James 1970, p. 6), but also criticised his "ripe unconsciousness of evil" (James 1970, p. 7). It is this claim which cuts to the heart of James's criticism of Emerson and of utopian Transcendentalism. James notes that one reason Transcendentalism was able to flourish in Boston during the 1830s and 1840s was because Boston society was far more contained, far more homogenised, than during the period after the Civil War. Such a situation thus allowed for a far simpler view of human society. For James, the kind of human society that came to prominence during

the Reconstruction seemed to confirm his own more sceptical view of Boston society, a society which was politically corrupt, and which he saw as reflecting an essential moral failure in American society. James's sceptical moral standpoint thus not only stemmed from his view of the essential naivety of the Transcendental movement, but also the succeeding era of liberal modernity in Boston and America as a whole. The consequences of the Northern triumph in the Civil War foreshadowed the linking of the basic precepts of democracy as enshrined at the end of the War of Independence with the rampant industrial acquisitiveness of the Northerners during the 1870s. It is James's sceptical moral position which accordingly motivates his critique of nineteenth-century modernity in America as well as that of Transcendentalism.<sup>3</sup>

James was an influential part of the new American lineage that succeeded Hawthorne and the Transcendentalists. However, it would be wrong simply to assume that, in mapping out a literature for this new era, James somehow exemplified the new era of "essayistic abstraction" that Hawthorne feared. Like the Transcendentalists, Hawthorne was emphatically opposed to the course democracy had taken during his lifetime. He was part of a Romantic tradition in American literature that was to champion a formalist or extra-contextual model of human nature perceived to transcend the mutable conditions of opinion and social convention. However, James wrote within a tradition of realism which

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<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to note that the rise of Transcendentalism in the 1830s and 40s marks a movement in American history when the popular narrative of national democracy and liberalism – of the United States as a crucible of democracy – became problematised. In writing a satire of Boston society that not only reflected this new scepticism, but problematised, also, the era of reform in Boston during the periods of Transcendentalism and the Reconstruction, James thus critiqued the narrative of democracy from a standpoint which embraces ideals of neither era. In looking ahead, and extending this question to the critique of American liberalism and democracy in *The Great Gatsby*, it is possible to draw some parallels. As Transcendentalism first struck a popular chord throughout the period of the Great Panic – a period when liberal democracy in America entered a time of crisis – so too the popularity of Fitzgerald as a novelist reflected a later crisis of the national consciousness; namely, the transformation of American society after World War One and during the "Jazz Age" of the 1920s. In a way, Fitzgerald's fiction of the 1920s, and his focus on the arrival of a new class of the wealthy, the collapse of traditional values and the explosion of mass market capitalism anticipated the Wall Street Crash in 1929. As James satirised Transcendentalism in

began in Europe and England, whilst the Romantics were still defining the literary tradition in America. James actually began to write in America when the literary renaissance of Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne and Melville had been brought to a close by the American Civil War, and instead of remaining in the country, he sought to escape what he saw as the provincial limitations of his native continent. Thus, rather than looking to new or established American writers such as William Dean Howells, Mark Twain or Walt Whitman as examples for his craft, he looked to representatives of the realist movement in France, such as Flaubert, Maupassant, the Goncourt brothers, Zola, and, in England, George Eliot (Bradbury 1993, pp. 10-11). As will be argued below, James both drew upon and contributed his own innovations to this realist tradition by explicitly seeking to problematise the absolute truth-claims of liberal modernity, an approach which clearly set him apart from the valorising on Hawthorne's part of an ideologically innocent conception of human subjectivity.

Living in Europe and seeking out a cosmopolitan literary tradition, James delineated a complex response to the American tradition of Romanticism, modernity and democracy. The new movement of European realism was part of this response, since it too critiqued a preceding tradition of modernity and democracy which had commenced with the European Enlightenment. The European and English traditions – particularly with the example of George Eliot – provided James with a model of realism which enabled him to not only interrogate ideas of democracy and modernity, but also to reassess and redefine the tradition of modernity as a rationalist, objectivist cultural model. James's model of the American novel can thus be seen as problematising the ethos of modernity from which American Enlightenment and Romantic thought emerged.

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his labelling it as a "Puritan Carnival", so too Fitzgerald's fiction (including that of *The Great Gatsby*) sought to dissect the Jazz Age as a period which underlined many of the illusions of American democracy.

While Hawthorne responded to the modern scene by adopting the form of the Romance, James responded by foregrounding the modern scene's denaturalising, or desacralising, tendencies. James, in a sense, sought to elucidate a position which recognised that, in working from a standpoint which sought to demystify reality, modernity – as a model of representation and reality – could itself no longer be understood as being founded upon rational, absolute precepts. Both these writers responded to the tenor of their age, to the capacity of the modern, democratic process to denaturalise the objectivist truth-claims of its rational precepts. Such a response followed from the fact that modernity, as a demystificatory project of knowledge – as a model of understanding which sought to use a “rationalist”, “demystificatory” model of critique – also undermined the assumed innocence of its own precepts. The romance form, for Hawthorne, was a means to step outside the rationalist frame of the modern project, much as the Romantics did in England and the Transcendentalists also did in America. James, however, sought to problematise the rationalist precepts of modernity by exploring the ways in which the modern ethos had opened up Western society to a process of continual change. To take the example of *The Bostonians*, it can be argued that the collision between the perceived “rationality” of Ransom's conservatism and Olive's feminism is used by James to denaturalise any “rational”, “unassailable” claims to understanding of both these two positions. James explored the notion that liberalism and industrialism, in opening up modern Western society to a process of rapid and continual change, were at the same time robbing the “rational” and “objectivist” underpinnings of modernity of their supposed foundationalism. As a project of transformation and demystification, modernity was transforming and demystifying itself. Novelists such as Eliot provided James with a model of fictional realism which at once reflected this phenomenon and enabled him to

investigate it. Like Hawthorne and the Transcendentalists, then, James's realism was responding to the massive cultural changes brought about by liberal modernity in the nineteenth century, but in a profoundly different way.

Many critics have discussed James's development of a narrative technique which exhibited an increasingly idealist focus on individual character consciousness as an interpretive basis of reality, a focus which was to culminate with the three novels of James's "major phase" – *The Wings of the Dove*, *The Ambassadors*, and *The Golden Bowl*. In these novels James's focus on individual consciousness – or the individual sensibility as the interpretive basis of reality – was refined and extended to such a point that they foreshadowed the technique of "stream of consciousness" that was later to be explored and developed by writers such as Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. Peter Buitenhuis notes that the various short stories – "The Point of View", "Pandora", and "The Impressions of a Cousin" – that immediately preceded the writing of *The Bostonians* were characterised by "thorough-going point-of-view and reflector techniques" (Buitenhuis 1970, p. 121) that were to become characteristic of James's methodological approach in later novels. Buitenhuis writes that these three stories "[a]ll exploit the problem of how particular points of view colour experience", reflecting as they did "James's understanding of the ways in which experience is conditioned, and his consequent awareness that there is no ultimate and objective truth in judgement about any country or situation" (Buitenhuis 1970, p. 121).

As Richard A. Hocks argues, James's innovations in character point-of-view broadly parallel the similarly idealist concerns of the philosophical tradition of the nineteenth century (Hocks 1974, p. 6). Indeed, James's fictional method reflects many of the

concerns of idealist philosophy as a critical tradition starting out as it did from an interrogation of the rationalism of René Descartes and the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, for example, by idealist philosophers such as G.W.F. Hegel, Auguste Comte, William James, and F.H. Bradley. It is possible to argue then that James's fiction occupies a position in nineteenth-century letters that was broadly concerned to interrogate the tradition of modern philosophy pioneered by philosophers such as Descartes and Kant. Indeed, James's fiction stands as a prominent example of a "critical" tradition of modernity. As Dorothea Krook argues:

There remains the question of the sources of James's view of reality and its essential logic. ... It will be evident that it has affinities with the so-called idealist philosophies of the nineteenth century; and it is even possible that James was aware of the connexion.

(Krook 1962, p. 410)

However, as she goes on to conclude:

I have thought it safer, however, to proceed on the hypothesis that he did not take it from anywhere, or anybody, in particular: neither from Hegel, nor F.H. Bradley, nor from his brother William's Pragmatism, nor (least of all) from his father's Swedenborgian system. I have supposed he took it from the ambient air of nineteenth-century speculation, whose main current was the preoccupation with the phenomenon of self-consciousness. To this air he had been exposed from his earliest years; and the animating intellectual atmosphere of his remarkable home.

(Krook 1962, pp. 410-11)

Suffice to say that James's increasing focus in his fiction on the problem of consciousness was part of this idealist tradition, a tradition which, by the emergence of modernism at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, had undermined the modern focus on idealism as the means by which an objective, foundational model of reality and human understanding was made possible. Concerns such as this are reflected in James's engagement with other nineteenth-century novelists such as Eliot.

James was a fervent admirer of Eliot and her work. He aligned her with European writers such as Turgenev and Tolstoy, describing her as a pioneer of the novel as an “organic form” (Bradbury 1993, p. 16). James emphasised the move Eliot had made away from “the schematic plots, sentimental moral conventions, religious sentiments, and melodramatic devices” that were generally characteristic of the novel of Victorian England (Bradbury 1993, p. 16). With novels such as *Middlemarch* (1872), she sought to be true to life and experience and to use the development of character or a moral idea to create the form of a novel (Bradbury 1993, p. 16). Novels by James, such as *The Portrait of A Lady* (1881), emulated Eliot’s example and used the progress of the central character, Isabel Archer, as the basis for the novel’s narrative shape. As with Eliot’s ironic presentation of the character Dorothea Brooke as a heroic figure set on bringing about reform and social progress, James’s interrogation of the nineteenth century as an era which championed the modern ideals of progress and individual emancipation begins with his similarly ironic presentation of Isabel Archer’s Romantic response to life. Like Dorothea, Isabel’s guiding ideal – her desire to choose the life she would like to live – is confounded by the corrupt European milieu into which she ultimately marries. Like Eliot, then, James uses the fate of his central character to question the efficacy of modernity as an unproblematic model of progress and emancipation.

Parallels can be drawn between *Middlemarch* and *Portrait* in that both address the problem of the sovereign subject of nineteenth-century democratic modernity, problematising the capacity of the individual to serve as the basis for individual and social progress. This problem also motivates James’s almost dystopic portrait of American democracy in *The Bostonians*. As U.C. Knoepfelmacher argues in *Religious Humanism and the Victorian Novel*, Eliot uses the character of Dorothea Brooke in



*Middlemarch* to revise modern assumptions formulated during the Enlightenment and by nineteenth-century Positivist theory, in which a heroic model of individual subjectivity centres on an ostensibly free-willing, autonomously constituted subject. In a chapter entitled “The Metaphysics of *Middlemarch*”, Knoepfelmacher argues that Eliot uses the thwarting of Dorothea’s heroic attitude to her life by an “irony of events” to problematise traditional narratives of liberal, or democratic, modernity (Knoepfelmacher 1965, p. 110). The failure of Dorothea’s endeavours to effect immediate change in her milieu – to be of moral and social value in a democratic society whose idealistic doctrine of social progress was founded upon the utopian narratives of Enlightenment and Positivist modernity – is employed by Eliot to ironise nineteenth-century modernity’s utopian platform of progress and social reform. Knoepfelmacher shows how the structuring of Dorothea’s destiny and that of other central characters in *Middlemarch* within the balancing and checking interplay of the novel’s narratives ironises – or situates in relative rather than given terms – the various ideological positions of the characters’ viewpoints. Summarising Eliot’s role as the architect of this narrative interplay, Knoepfelmacher writes:

Balance is all in *Middlemarch*. George Eliot the rationalist corrects George Eliot the enthusiast; Dorothea the enthusiast corrects Lydgate the rationalist. Although this balance is occasionally broken, the author qualifies her “gushiness” through a steady sense of humour; she softens her satiric denunciations by an all-inclusive sympathy.

(Knoepfelmacher 1965, pp. 114-15)

As Marianna Torgovnick remarks, Eliot’s approach to character and character agency in *Middlemarch* problematises the optimistic view of Positivists such as Auguste Comte, Ludwig Feuerbach, John Stuart Mill and Eliot’s partner, George Henry Lewes, who saw their philosophies as “fulfilling in the nineteenth century the same unifying, purpose-giving functions religion had served for earlier periods” (Torgovnick 1981, pp. 34-5).

Thus, as Eliot undermines the ideological innocence of the characters' viewpoints in *Middlemarch*, so also Verena's capacity to dislodge the absolutist claims of Olive's and Ransom's positions effects a similar kind of critique.

James's conception of the character of Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady* broadly mirrors that of Dorothea in *Middlemarch*. Like Dorothea, Isabel is a woman who is ostensibly independent enough to discover an ideal destiny for herself. James appears intent on "us[ing] female consciousness as a discovering means for exploring moral and social experience" (Bradbury 1993, p. 18). The plot of James's novel concerns Isabel's failure to discover an ideal destiny, to achieve happiness in adulthood. Like Dorothea, her entrapment within a sterile marriage – to the expatriate American dilettante, Gilbert Osmond – effectively sees her Romantic outlook undermined by an interplay of social narratives that thwart her avowed wish to be mistress of her own destiny. Like Eliot, James problematises a narrative of modernity founded on a modern model of a self-constituting, free-willing subject, a model which installs the subject as the starting point for an illimitable doctrine of individual agency.

However, James's contribution to this critique of the modern project surely lies not only in his demystification of the project, but also in his ability to foreground some of its absolutist implications. Verena Tarrant demystifies both Olive's and Ransom's stances when, in eliding her discrete self, she foregrounds the absolutism of their subject-positions. This not only problematises the project of Enlightenment and Positivist modernity, but exposes as fallacious its project of unconditional individual freedom. Human action, whether it be Olive's or Ransom's – or Verena's failure to escape manipulation by one or other of them – is presented by James as operating relative to the

contexts of a collective social matrix. Verena may be silenced by Ransom, but she illustrates the way that human ideology, and human action, is mediated and defined by social context. Indeed, concerns of human ideology and human action carry no meaning outside the interrelational situation of a collective context, and the autonomous, free-willing subject of Enlightenment modernity is thus nothing more than a theoretical construct. The pathos of Verena's predicament in *The Bostonians* accordingly reflects the way events in the novel position her, Olive, and Ransom in relation to the social matrix. James uses Verena's capacity to pluralise the narrative of *The Bostonians* to avoid ideological closure in the novel, and thus also disarms the project of traditional modernity of its absolutist premises. To repeat Howard's observation: Verena's capacity to foreground the fascistic elements present in her social contexts "keep[s] reopening satirically the settled question of the American scene" (Howard 1972, p. 76).

The function of satire in *The Bostonians* raises a final point. James criticised Hawthorne's seeming inability to employ satire in *The Blithedale Romance*, a criticism which also highlights another way in which the two novels differ from one another. However, his own satirical set-pieces and authorial interjections also foreground the various ideological positions embodied by the various characters in the narrative without unequivocally siding with any one of them. In eschewing closure, James – whether consciously or not – ultimately deprives the narrative viewpoint of any interpretive standpoint that would contradict his demystifying response to modernity. The ending of the novel – the narrative interjection in *The Bostonians* which observes that Verena's union with Ransom was not to be an unconditionally happy one – makes it clear to the reader that there is no emphatic closure to the narrative. Narrative viewpoint in *The Bostonians* is thus positioned within the narrative relationally rather than extra-

discursively, eschewing any “extra-contextual” position that places narrative viewpoint outside and above the ideological contexts which together embody the plural positions of the novel’s narrative. This relational position thus stands apart from a mode of viewpoint that would be complicit with a foundational definition of modernity. James thus strips traditional, illimitable models of modernity and metaphysical models of realism of their absolute truth-claims. In doing so he also opens the door to new variations upon modernity and realism – such as that of literary modernism – which, in moving away from realism, further problematise the relationship between the author-function and modernity. This manoeuvre foreshadows the proto-modernist character of the novels of James’s later period, such as *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), *The Ambassadors* (1903), and *The Golden Bowl* (1904).

### ***The Bostonians: A Contextual Model of the Author-Function.***

Situated as a relational, or contextual, function rather than a trans-relational function, narrative viewpoint in James’s novel, as will be argued in the next section of this chapter, effectively transcends any situatedness as an absolute position of meaning-production. Defined according to terms that are relational, narrative viewpoint is implicated as a partial and contextual, instead of absolute and autonomous, position of meaning in *The Bostonians*. Narrative viewpoint in James’s novel is thus implicated as a partial function within a matrix comprised of the variegated cultural standpoints within a social totality. As a consequence of this, James’s own position, as an author, with respect to the generally disocculting critique in his fiction of the nineteenth-century traditions of liberal modernity and idealist modern philosophy, also eschews any extra-contextual claims to autonomy and objectivity. In embracing a European, as opposed to an American, artistic and philosophical inheritance which renders problematic the formalist claims to

objectivity of both the Enlightenment and Positivist modern philosophy, the contextual situatedness of narrative viewpoint in *The Bostonians* thus problematises the expressivist model of the author-function.

The relation of James, as a writer, to this modern liberal inheritance is also contextualised. Liberal and philosophical modernity, argued here as important influences in the shaping of James as a novelist, ultimately situate him as a partial and relational function, with the effect that James – writing within a late-realist tradition – serves to dislodge the expressivist model of the author as an essentialist, ideologically-innocent locus of understanding. Applied in a more general sense, the claims of the expressivist model of the author to cognitive and representational precedence – claims perceived to transcend the partial and mutable concerns of society and culture – are placed under question. The author-function in *The Bostonians* thus operates as an internalised, contextually-engaged position of critique, breaking free of the limitations inherent in an expressivist model of the author and of meaning production which ultimately displace the author as a cultural function. In considering below the significance of concerns of personal biography in relation to some of the personal characteristics of James – not simply as an individual, but as an artist – the next section of this chapter will seek to show how this context-specific examination of James as the author of *The Bostonians* makes possible a more productive model of the author-function. Implicit in this discussion is the unconscious disarming in James's novel of an expressivist or theological treatment of the author.

In examining the way that the author-function in *The Bostonians* interrogates the modern conception of the author, it is useful to examine James's relation to the women's

movement at the time of the nineteenth century and the opening years of the twentieth. His opposition to the movement is well known and has been widely documented. In a letter James wrote to a suffragette correspondent on 6 April 1909, in response to her request that he autograph some numbers of the *English Review*, he wrote: "I confess that I am not eager for the *avenement* of a multitudinous and overwhelming female electorate - & don't see how any man in his senses can be" (Horne 2000, p. 478). In an article on Henry James and George Sand, Sarah B. Daugherty makes the observation that, along with the English author George Eliot, Sand was the only woman novelist whom James regarded as a genius. However, James's enthusiasm for Sand, although expansive, was ultimately tempered by his thoughts on her sexuality, as Daugherty illustrates using James's review of one of Sand's romances: "Madame Sand's imagination ... is indefatigable, inexhaustible; but it is restless, nervous, and capricious; it is, in short, the imagination of a woman" (Daugherty 1989, p. 42). Lynn Wardley also takes up the issue of James's sexism, drawing on his text, *The Speech and Manners of American Women*, to outline his horror at the emergence of the women's movement in America after the Civil War (Wardley 1989, pp. 639-65). She recounts how James opposed feminists' attempts to break free from the traditional domain of domestic life and the perceived tyranny of their biological role as progenitors of children and become participants in public life.

Quoting *Speech and Manners*, Wardley notes how James

indicts the "innumerable sisterhood," the women's movement, for "bristling" with its "proclamation of indifference" to the very institutions that regulate cultural and biological reproduction: proper manners, proper speech, and matrimony. Although the voice of the American woman "pleads in a thousand places the cause of culture", it abandons her most precious conquest, domestic life, wherein civilization originates and from which it outwardly unfolds.

(Wardley 1989, p. 643)

However, Wardley also recognises that James accepted the entry of women into the public domain of the modern democracy as inevitable. Alluding to another essay in *Speech and Manners*, she writes:

insofar as James remarks with horror on the ubiquity of mannerless American girls, what frightens him finally in *Speech and Manners* is less that they are suddenly seen and heard in the public domain than that they have entered it untutored and unchaperoned. Acknowledging that the presence of women in American urban life is a *fait accompli*, James does not urge a retreat into domestic scenes of cultural training. Instead, such scenes must be staged in the public domain and such women must serve as culture's "missionaries". For in woman's nature is the possibility of her becoming the "guardian of the sacred flame of inherited civilization" by so thoroughly internalizing proper speech, manners, customs, and authority that the problem of the body's vulnerability to alien incursions, or, inversely, to its own "slackness," is peculiarly solved.

(Wardley 1989, p. 644)

Wardley argues that, along with Alexis de Tocqueville and Ralph Waldo Emerson, James believed the success of the American democratic experiment "rest[ed] in the superiority of the American women", and even that James measures the progress of liberal democracy on the position of women (Wardley 1989, p. 642).

In accepting the success of the women's movement as a *fait accompli*, James aligns the emergence of feminism and "the decline of the sentiment of sex" with the denaturalising reading of modernity and democracy that he effects in *The Bostonians*. In presenting women in liberal Western democracy as moving beyond the limitation of serving a primarily domestic function, James is effectively recognising that this traditional view of the role of women has also been denaturalised by the transformative capacities of modernity. In attempting to rationalise James's conservative views towards the women's movement with the position it can be argued he takes in *The Bostonians*, where he appears to side with neither the radical suffragette nor the conservative Southerner, his demystifying, desacrelising presentation of America as a modern democracy must be taken into account.

As Wardley also argues, James's general position on the women's movement may appear to agree with Ransom, but he does not embrace his rigidity, or the ruthless, partisan way that Ransom propounds his views and places the interests of the male sex above those of female (Wardley 1989, p. 647). In underlining Verena's capacity in the novel to eschew ideological closure, James's narrative viewpoint foregrounds the provisional – the ideologically contingent – nature of cultural and social structures in modern democracy. Recognising Verena's partial, as opposed to objectively-situated, cultural position (indeed the partial-situatedness of all the characters' positions) within the republic, James's novel dismantles the modern view that the position of the individual in society proceeds from an autonomous, objective standpoint which transcends questions of context.

The problems faced by Verena reflect a number of personal anxieties James himself faced, both as an individual and an artist, anxieties which involved the kind of position that the artist occupies in a liberal society. James's narratological approach in *The Bostonians* and various autobiographical and artistic precepts that the novel mirrors, serve to dislodge the expressivist view of the author as omniscient, as an artist who presides over the considerations of theme, plot and character from some autonomous, formalist position extraneous to the text. By foregrounding the capacity of liberal modernity to demystify both the modern project and modern subjectivity, James also demystifies the expressivist, "commonsensical" view of the role played by the modern author.



Merla Wolk addresses the contradiction between James's opposition to the rise of the women's movement and his position in *The Bostonians*, by arguing that his presentation of the post-Civil War Boston feminist movement is not in fact the primary concern in his novel (Wolk 1989, p. 50). Alluding to James's short story, "The Figure in the Carpet", Wolk sets out to show that plot and characterisation in *The Bostonians* are employed by James as a variation upon a wider thematic concern common to a number of his novels – *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Princess Casamassima*, *What Maisie Knew* and *The Golden Bowl* among them. Wolk writes:

Central to *The Bostonians* is a version of the "figure in the carpet" of many James novels, a pattern of concerns that reveals the conflicts of a sensitive and vulnerable character unschooled in the ways of the world. Older or more experienced characters, who are at once outwardly alluring, implicitly threatening, and ultimately betraying, commit the greatest of Jamesian sins when they violate the personal freedom of the naif.

(Wolk 1989, p. 50)

The battle between the radical Northerner, Olive, and the conservative Southerner, Ransom, to win the allegiances of Verena is, Wolk argues, one example of this archetypal Jamesian theme. Olive's and Ransom's attempts to control Verena utterly echoes the behaviour of other Jamesian characters such as Morris Townshend, in *Washington Square*, who woos the unsuspecting Catherine Sloper so that he may possess her fortune, and Madame Merle and the unscrupulous fortune hunter, Gilbert Osmond, in *The Portrait of a Lady*, who trick Isabel Archer into a sterile marriage. This "figure in the carpet" plot dynamic in *The Bostonians* is presented in a number of ways. The battle between Olive and Ransom for control of Verena is foreshadowed by the exploitative relationship between the young woman and her parents. It is Verena's father, Selah Tarrant, who uses his daughter as the "medium" for his performances as a mesmerist in Boston, employing Verena's talent as an orator to assist him in earning his living. As

Wolk notes, Verena is at this point characterised by a child-like dependence on her father, asserting that she cannot perform at his exhibitions unless he “starts her up” (James, in Wolk 1989, pp. 50-1). The danger of such a position for Verena is demonstrated when she first comes to Olive’s attention at a meeting of Boston feminists. Enamoured by Verena’s oratorical gifts, Olive convinces Verena’s parents to let the young woman live with her and become a spokeswoman for the feminist movement. Indeed, Olive not only convinces Verena’s parents to let her come and live with her, but she also buys them off: “As is often true in James’s novels, childlike passivity and trust seem to invite parental treachery; here, the Tarrants sell their daughter for social and monetary gain” (Wolk 1989, pp. 50-51).

Discussing this aspect of the plot, Wolk takes up the issue of homosexuality, latent or otherwise, in the Verena/Olive relationship. As mentioned above, many critics have characterised Verena’s and Olive’s relationship as lesbian, but for Wolk this assertion has no useful significance in James’s novel (Wolk 1989, p. 51). Wolk makes the point that their involvement with one another is not actively homosexual, and notions of latent homosexuality “can be attributed to any intimate, same sex relationship” (Wolk 1989, p. 51). However, for Wolk, the relationship certainly illustrates the perversity that many commentators have seen in Olive’s association with Verena:

Suggested in the strange, intense relationship between Olive and Verena is a corrupted mother/daughter dyad. Olive acts as the incorporating mother who perversely governs her child’s life and language. She gives Verena a home, organizes her life, writes her speeches, monitors her choice of friends, and even considers whether and whom she should marry. Underscoring Olive’s attempt to take over Verena’s life, James employs images of merger and envelopment throughout ... in gestures that mimic the symbiotic relationship of mother and child.

(Wolk 1989, p. 51)

In outlining the role played by Ransom as Verena's surrogate father,<sup>4</sup> Wolk notes that much early criticism interpreted him as a figure of salvation. Wolk draws upon the above mentioned example of Lionel Trilling, which sees Ransom as a hero come to rescue Verena from the clutches of a woman whose attentions towards her are abnormal. Wolk observes that, until the rise of the feminist movement in the 1960s brought about a change in collective attitudes concerning the rightful position of women in society, many critics took Trilling's lead, and emphasised Ransom's humour and grace, its contrast with Olive's rudeness and almost pathological intensity, and the ruthlessly partisan ideas that fuel Olive's designs on Verena (Wolk 1989, p. 51). However, subsequent critics, many of them feminists, have addressed this situation differently.<sup>5</sup> They have argued that Ransom's designs on Verena are as ruthless as Olive's, since his interests toward her are driven by mercenary, selfish motives. As Wolk argues, the sadism of Ransom's designs are symptomatic of an attitude which disregards Verena's own desires and feelings.

According to Wolk, James structures his narrative, and the characters of Olive and Ransom, so that the reader must compare them. The female/male, Northerner/Southerner, puritan/ bohemian, charmless/charming, rigid/relaxed, humourless/humorous, honest/prevaricating binaries which locate the two characters in relation to one another do not serve to indicate a preference by James for either Olive or Ransom, but rather sets up the

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<sup>4</sup> Wolk's assertion that the Verena, Olive, Ransom dynamic reflects a surrogate daughter, mother, father relationship of course reflects the psychoanalytic position where every "me" has to be bracketed by "Daddy" and "Mummy". I do not subscribe to this argument, and thus treat Wolk's discussion of the Verena, Olive, Ransom dynamic in the broadest, most matter-of-fact sense. It is not necessary to regard a psychoanalytic interpretation of the Verena, Olive, Ransom relationship as underpinning the plot in *The Bostonians* in order to agree with Wolk's argument that the Verena, Olive, Ransom relation stands as another example of James's general "figure in the carpet" theme.

<sup>5</sup> Wolk draws attention to the examples of Nina Auerbach and Judith Fetterley, who have sought to redress the incorrectness of earlier interpretations concerning Ransom's role in *The Bostonians*. However, while she notes that they have sought to redress this imbalance, Wolk also notes that they have tried to make the text fit their wishes either by seeing Olive as the heroine of the novel (Auerbach), or by presenting Olive as a tragic figure whose defeat by Ransom demonstrates the futility of her fight against abhorrent male power (Fetterley).

comparative terms of conflict between the two of them (Wolk 1989, p. 54). The battle between Olive and Ransom to control Verena can be seen as a way to silence the young woman rather than emancipate her. Indeed, as Wolk goes on to argue, their attempts to exploit her not only replay James's broader "figure in the carpet" pattern involving the relations between the idealistic *naif* and the corrupt interlocutors who ultimately betray her, but also James's parallel concerns regarding the dangers faced by the artist in a corrupt social environment. Verena's gift as a public speaker is a gift both Olive and Ransom lack, and one reason they seek to use her as a surrogate to express their ideological positions (Wolk 1989, p. 52). Wolk argues that the conflict which ensues from Olive's and Ransom's attempts to control Verena arises from oppositions that impact in a most personal way upon James himself, reflecting issues that ultimately exceed, or even elide, the Northerner/Southerner, radical/conservative binaries that set Olive and Ransom against one another and in large part structure the novel. Wolk argues:

What James refers to as "the figure in the carpet" bears a marked resemblance to what psychoanalysts call an "identity theme," an individual pattern of relatedness and perception. The conceptual resemblance between these patterns – one that weaves throughout a writer's work and the other throughout a life – takes us beyond the text, inviting speculation about the psychic significance this figure has for James. This speculation is particularly inviting in a novel like *The Bostonians*, informed by emotions that seem at times larger than the subject requires: heightened anger and exaggerated fears appear throughout. In fact *The Bostonians* is arguably James's most angry novel, an anger expressed in the bitter satire of the American scene.

(Wolk 1989, p. 55)

It can be seen, then, that James's focus in his novel upon the women's movement in Boston in the 1880s reflects a number of crucial personal concerns which the satirical, public tenor of the novel is unable to conceal. Wolk attempts to account for all the personal precedents that might explain the heightened anger in the novel, arguing that the figure in the carpet pattern underpinning the plot in *The Bostonians* illustrates Verena's personal relevance for James as an artist. Wolk argues that, as a public orator, and as a figure other characters in the novel seek to control, Verena's predicament is symptomatic

of the marginal position occupied by most women in the late nineteenth century, and of the difficulties inherent in their endeavours to attain a position of equality and power in the public arena (Wolk 1989, p. 56). The skill and subtlety with which James delineates Verena's character attests to his awareness of this predicament. Many critics discussing the character of Verena have argued that, because of her passivity, and her seeming shallowness in comparison to figures such as Olive and Ransom, she is not fully realised as a fictional character. However, as Wolk argues, "[t]he weakness many critics have found in James's characterisation of her is in fact a weakness in her character" (Wolk 1989, p. 56). This weakness, reflected in Verena's desire to realise her talents yet at the same time to accord passively with the wishes of either Olive or Ransom, highlights the predicament faced by women in this period seeking to transcend their marginalisation in society.

For Wolk, James has a very personal investment in the Verena/Olive/Ransom dynamic, for in her eventual entrapment by this dynamic, Verena exemplifies many of James's own anxieties as an artist. Wolk argues:

To offer an interpretation of James's personal investment in the ... dynamic that shapes his novel, I ask you first to note that Verena's art, unlike the art of her creator, is practiced publicly in full view of an audience. The fantasy in *The Bostonians* rests on the premise that nothing is more powerful or more desirable than the artist's voice. It then suggests that if the artist as public speaker gets up and exposes her talents before spectators, she so overwhelms them with her display that some of its members, seeing what power she has, will want it for themselves. And finally, it connects that covetous desire with those most intimately attached to the artist, a connection that condemns at once the parent figures and the condition of intimacy itself. We can link this dynamic to James's own concerns if we recognise that Verena's art is a version of the art form James himself found so attractive during the period in which he was writing *The Bostonians* – a public exhibition of his talents in writing for the theater.

(Wolk 1989, p. 55)

As Wolk notes, James's failure as a playwright has been well documented. In many important ways James identified with the character of Verena, and his failure to establish

himself as a successful playwright can be seen as a reason behind this identification. Moreover, the ways in which he identified with Verena, with her passivity, with her precociousness as an artist/*naif*, reflect predicaments faced by James in his own life. Critics have noted that Verena's passivity in *The Bostonians*, and the dangers she faces in attempting to realise her artistic talents in the public domain, reflect a near-lifelong ambivalence on James's part towards an active participation in life. As John Halperin argues, this realisation came about for James as early as 1861, when he declined to volunteer for active service in the American Civil War. This was the year in which James experienced his mysterious "obscure hurt" (James 1983, p. 415), much discussed by critics, and it is Halperin who counters the traditionally-held views that James experienced his hurt while pulling and pushing a fire engine in a local fire, thus injuring his back, or by impaling himself on a fence, by arguing that James's hurt was emotional rather than physical (Halperin 1996, pp. 22-9).

For Halperin, James's hurt was brought about by a recognition that he was not emotionally or morally disposed towards an unambiguous commitment to an active, unquestioning participation in life; his role in life would have to be a passive one.

James's hurt, he contends, was brought about by his conviction that an active public life was something that he would have to, in a conventional sense at least, renounce:

[A] crisis of identity beset Henry James in 1861, a crisis that brought with it new knowledge of, or at the very least new questions about, himself. The call for troops and the stirring of the young men of his age around him to action made him look into his own heart and mind. What he found there, or failed to find, wounded him deeply.

(Halperin 1996, p. 25)

Halperin finds evidence for the psychic, rather than physical, nature of James's obscure hurt in his autobiographical work, *Notes of a Son and Brother*, arguing that events early in the Civil War, such as the firing upon Fort Sumpter and President Lincoln's call for

volunteers, triggered the epiphany which made James recognise his own inability to participate in conventional male activities (Halperin 1996, p. 26). In short, he saw himself as unable to fulfil some of the traditional obligations of his sex, hence his retreat into another life as a writer of fiction and an observer of, rather than participant in, society. Halperin also cites James's movement around America and Europe as articulating an "ambivalent perception of his own place in the world and his relation to others" (Halperin 1996, p. 25). His decision, made by the time he was in his forties, not to marry, and indeed to lead a celibate life (Edel 1963, pp. 17-18), also add to this picture of James's understanding of his sense of apartness and difference from people who could understand and embrace the world in more conventional, more unequivocal ways.

Andrew Scheiber also examines Verena's role as an artist, arguing that although both Olive and Ransom are figures of satire for James, largely because of the way they manipulate Verena, Olive nevertheless plays a more positive role in James's novel than Ransom does. Although Olive, like Ransom, seeks to control Verena, she does regard Verena's artistic talents as something which can be fostered and developed. This contrasts markedly with Ransom, who desires only to silence Verena. For Scheiber, it is Verena's capacity as an artist to discover a position in society which enables her to assert herself as a discrete individual rather than "a site of free play for others' desired meanings" which motivates the Verena/Olive/Ransom triad in the novel (Scheiber 1992, p. 245). Although Olive seeks to manipulate Verena in the same general fashion that Ransom does, she nevertheless awakens Verena to possibilities inherent in her talent as an artist. Scheiber draws attention to Verena's speech at the Burrages, noting Ransom's observations that Verena has developed and refined her talents to the extent that they dazzle and mystify him, exceeding his capacity to wield control over her (Scheiber 1992,

p. 245). Scheiber argues that although Olive also seeks to manipulate Verena, this negative trait is partly mitigated by the fact that it is Olive who has allowed Verena a glimpse of herself as a person speaking “not just for Olive, but for her own desired self as well” (Scheiber 1992, p. 246):

[T]he “reformist” impulse that grips Olive has, finally, more in common with the artistic imperatives endorsed by James than does Ransom’s opposing view. Whereas Ransom demands that Verena return to the ground-zero of her “feminine” nature, Olive encourages her to attempt flight on the gossamer wings of her speaking “gift.” In addition, Olive’s view is transitive: unlike Ransom, she desires for Verena, and for all women, a glory no less than that which she desires for herself; and though one can perhaps fault her generosity of vision for failing to include men, it is difficult to argue with the results in Verena’s case. Though Olive begins by using Olive as an instrument for projecting her own vision, this particular “usage” alerts Verena to the wonder of her own power – a power that allows her, after all the significations impressed on her by others, to transform herself from figure into artist and, however briefly, to become the author of her Self.

(Scheiber 1992, p. 248)

Swayed by Ransom at the end of the novel not to deliver her speech to the audience at the Boston Music Hall, Verena’s potential as an artist is thwarted. As a number of critics have noted, Verena’s decision to marry Ransom, on the surface at least, echoes the most conventional of endings in the nineteenth-century Victorian novel, where her surrender to Ransom reflects a triumph of the conventional social order over the radical suffragette movement. Scheiber’s argument foregrounds the deliberate twist in James’s replication of this conventional ending, in observing that Verena’s union with Ransom would be marked by her unhappiness:

[A]lthough the ending of the novel may appear superficially to affirm the “natural” order implicit in the [nineteenth-century] culture’s division of the sexes, at a deeper level it frustrates the equally “natural” human thirst for alterity, for the imaginative and performative acts by which the self and the world are enlarged and improved.

(Scheiber 1992, p. 248)

In the conclusion of *The Bostonians*, James is thus not only using Verena’s fate to question the privileged position of the “natural” order, but also to foreground the ideological oppositions and precepts which underpin and ultimately subvert the



hegemonic position a “natural order” occupies. In addition, James is also foregrounding the ideological position occupied by the artist in society. By viewing Verena as a kind of surrogate figure for James, one can see how the contentiousness of her fate in *The Bostonians* reproduces anxieties James himself felt as an artist. However much he may have consciously sought to avoid the issue, James’s vision of the ideological preconditions and ruptures which draw out the problematic, partial and relational, rather than autonomous, character of Verena’s position as an artist in the novel ultimately foregrounds the denaturalised status of the artist in a nineteenth-century liberal democracy. As a surrogate artist figure for James, then, Verena also foregrounds the ideological (as opposed to natural, or ideologically innocent) cultural makeup of his position as a writer engaged in a dissection of the modern democracy. The anxieties which James felt as an artist, expressed through the character of Verena and her own fate as an artist, thus reproduce the contexts and concerns of his own position as an author in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Implicit in his presentation of the character of Verena is a recognition of the partial and contextual – not “expressivist” or “omniscient” – position occupied by the artist/author in a liberal society. Despite James’s attempts to retreat from the denaturalising, pluralising effects of modern democracy by shoring up an artist/author standpoint which sought to occupy a hermetic position separate from these material processes, *The Bostonians* demonstrates the discursive, contextual position occupied by the author, not least because the denaturalising processes of the modern period have foregrounded the ideological assumptions which underpin the expressivist convention of the “autonomous”, “omniscient” author. *The Bostonians* unconsciously foregrounds the elided contexts which install James’s narrative viewpoint. A close reading of the operation of this viewpoint and James’s critique of the supposed “innocence” and “absoluteness” of the tradition of nineteenth-century realism exposes

the ambivalence of the novel's expressivist author model. In demystifying nineteenth-century modernity and the concomitant tradition of realism, James in effect contests the assumed commonsensicality of the author's status. Consequently, although *The Wings of the Dove*, *The Ambassadors*, and *The Golden Bowl* foreshadow the emergence of literary modernism proper, James's denaturalised vision of modernity, the modern subject, and the modern author, also foreshadow modernism's *explicit* (as opposed to unconscious) dislodging of the supposedly autonomous, ahistorically-situated expressivist author/narrator.

### **James's Break with the Expressivist Author.**

Noting the importance of Daudet's *L'Evangeliste* as a model for *The Bostonians*, Buitenhuis argues that, in moving away from the narrative approach of much of his earlier fiction, James "adopted the socially conscious role of the naturalist writer" (Buitenhuis 1970, p. 145). By abandoning, temporarily, a narrative approach whereby the drama in a novel is mediated via the necessarily partial and subjective viewpoints of his characters,<sup>6</sup> and instead mediating the events of the novel via an external, intervening narrator, Buitenhuis argues that James, like Daudet, sought to create a narrative where the novel's narrator was able to judge and comment freely on his characters (Buitenhuis 1970, p. 145). For Buitenhuis, this naturalistic approach is deployed by James to explicitly condemn the overall direction post-Civil War American society had taken. His critique of the perceived "feminisation" of American society by the rise of the women's movement is thus seen to be bound up with this:

The range of characters in the novel sufficiently represents James's ruling ideas about the Bostonians. All of them except Ransom, an outsider, and Verena, an innocent, represent some

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<sup>6</sup> In his introduction to the Oxford Classics edition of James' early novel *Roderick Hudson*, Tony Tanner describes James' rejection in much of his fiction of an overt, intervening authorial voice in favour of a narrative mediated via character viewpoint with the insightful phrase "drama of consciousness" (James 1980, p. xxii)

distortion of personality that relates in some way to a dislocation of the sexual role. All James's sense of the misproportions, provincialisms and corruptions in American life were poured into his devastating observations about these creations.

(Buitenhuis 1970, p. 152)

As Buitenhuis argues, James's condemnation of this American milieu is motivated by a position "which satirizes manners and morals from the firm conviction of what they ought to be. Implicitly, he is judging Boston by cosmopolitan standards of culture and traditional codes of morality" (Buitenhuis 1970, p. 152). To a degree at least, Buitenhuis thus sees James – as a traditionalist – siding with Ransom's conservative politics. Although the narrator in *The Bostonians* observes that the union between Verena and Ransom is perhaps fated to be unhappy, in Buitenhuis' view this unhappiness is a possible symptom of the fact that "Verena sacrifices a life of fame and comfort for poverty and adversity" (Buitenhuis 1970, p. 156). Broadening McMurray's discussion of *The Bostonians* (presented above), he argues that "she only exchanges one set of absolutes for another in choosing Basil instead of Olive" (Buitenhuis 1970, p. 156). As Buitenhuis emphasises, Verena must discover how to live "in the *actual* and *potential* freedom of her *own* will and the challenge of her union with Basil" (Buitenhuis 1970, p. 156, my italics). In underlining Verena's predicament, and emphasising how Verena – as a *naïf*, and as a person whose emotional temperament cannot easily be reconciled with rigid, partisan outlooks – Buitenhuis argues that Verena must learn to live within the necessarily demarcated character of whatever social milieu in which she ultimately finds herself living. Although he therefore sees James as essentially siding with Ransom's position, Buitenhuis also underlines the dangers inherent in situations like that of Verena's marriage when they are asserted as absolutes.

In his discussion of *the Bostonians*, Buitenhuis places considerable emphasis upon the fact that the explicit, intervening narrative viewpoint in James's novel sets it apart from much of the James *oeuvre* (Buitenhuis 1970, p. 141). However, if one understands James's narrative viewpoint in this novel as, first, refusing to side with either Olive's or Ransom's social politics and, second, underlining the way that Verena's prevarications throughout the narrative demystify the perceived absolute truth-claims of their respective positions, it can be seen that *The Bostonians* is still constructed around a demystifying critique of social reality. As novels such as *Roderick Hudson* (1876) and *The Portrait of a Lady* mediate understanding through the subjective viewpoints of their central characters, so too does the technique of an external narrative viewpoint in *The Bostonians*. In foregrounding the partial nature of each of the various character's viewpoints, narrative viewpoint in this novel is deployed to distance the narrator from the entrenched positions of most of the characters. This is demonstrated early in the novel when the narrator, recounting an outburst by Ransom against the women's movement, remarks: "I am but the reporter of his angry *formulae*" (James 1990, p. 45). In distancing himself from Ransom's position, the narrator in *The Bostonians* underlines the deliberate way in which he refuses to side with any partisan character or position.

In spite of its naturalistic, rather than strictly realist, approach to narratological methodology in *The Bostonians*, James's demystifying narrative approach is broadly consistent with the general method and development throughout his *oeuvre*. Consequently, the development throughout this *oeuvre* of a sophisticated technique of realism – from that of an innovative model of psychological realism (initially derived from Turgenev) in early novels such as *Roderick Hudson* and *The Portrait of a Lady*, to the naturalism during his middle period of *The Bostonians*, *The Princess Casamassima*,

and *The Tragic Muse* (1889), to the proto-modernism of the three major novels of his later period – is not only significant because of the standard of its artistic achievement. James's accomplishments here are also important because they occupy a crucial cultural turning point between the nineteenth-century school of realism and the emergence of modernism in the early part of the twentieth century. The relation of James's *oeuvre* to the shift throughout this period from realism to modernism impacts in a number of ways upon the character and operation of the author-function in his fiction.

This turning point between realism and modernism, negotiated in the development of James's fiction, is a reflection of his unceasing experimentation with the novel and short story form. Beginning as a practitioner of the nineteenth-century realist form, James's central contribution to this movement lay in his conscious endeavour to ground the narratives of his fiction within the perceptions and points of view of his characters, to shape his novels as dramas of character consciousness, as dramas of "being and seeing" (Krook 1962, p. ix). In mediating his narratives via the consciousnesses of his characters James, on many occasions, conceals the voice of the author as an overt presence. In early works of fiction, such as *Washington Square* (1880), an authorial point of view is an overt presence in the narrative, a point of view which explicitly subjects its characters to irony. However, in other early novels, such as *Roderick Hudson* and *The Portrait of a Lady*, meaning is mediated through the necessarily partial point of view of the characters. Certainly, in *Roderick Hudson* there is an overt narrative presence; however, it is not that of the author, but rather that of Roderick's patron Rowland Mallet. The foregrounding of an explicitly partial point of view thus takes the place of an external, authorial point of view, with the effect that James deliberately avoids aligning character motivation with events according to an explicitly author-centred locus of meaning. Likewise, in *The*

*Portrait of a Lady*, events are structured around the psychology, aspirations, and fortunes of the novel's central character, Isabel Archer. As James writes in the preface to the New York Edition of the novel:

Well, I recall perfectly how little, in my now quite established connexion, the maximum of ease appealed to me, and how I seemed to get rid of it by an honest transposition of the weights in the two scales. 'Place the centre of the subject in the young woman's [that is, Isabel's] own consciousness,' I said to myself, 'and you get as interesting and as beautiful a difficulty as you could wish. Stick to *that* – for the centre; put the heaviest weight into *that* scale, which will be so largely the scale of her relation to herself. Make her only interested enough, at the same time, in the things that are not herself, and this relation needn't fear to be too limited. Place meanwhile in the other scale the lighter weight (which is usually the one that tips the balance of interest): press least hard, in short, on the consciousness of your heroine's satellites, especially the male; make it an interest contributive only to the greater.

(James 2003, p. 50)

In the three novels of his later period – *The Wings of the Dove*, *The Ambassadors*, and *The Golden Bowl* – the author has not only disappeared as an overt function, but the action of the novels is mediated exclusively via the internal perceptions of the characters' consciousnesses. James's approach here clearly foreshadows the "stream of consciousness" narrative method developed in many works of modernism later in the century. James, as an author, has withdrawn from these three novels in exactly the manner espoused by Stephen Dedalus in Joyce's modernist novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a young Man*: "The artist, like the God of creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails" (Joyce 1993, p. 187). In his last fictions, James explicitly foreshadows this kind of modernist author, refined out of his novels to such a degree that meaning, relative to the narrative at least, is mediated solely through the consciousnesses of its various central characters.

With this absence of the author as an overt function in these fictions, the author – in a strictly formalist sense at least – is simply not available as a theological locus of meaning. The reader can no longer treat the author-function as an extra-contextual position they are able to access unproblematically. With meaning in these three novels only available as a contextual, narratological function mediated by the various characters, any attempt by the reader to discern an extra-contextual position of author intent is rendered impossible. Meaning in the novel can only be inferred via the texts, not via some antecedent, extra-textual position of perceived author intention. With the retreat of the author as an overt function in these novels, the valency of the expressivist model of the author is thus discredited. The author, in short, possesses no formalist ability to operate in relation to the text. As a result, meaning in these novels is explicitly situated as a function of the text rather than the author – not *vice versa*. Taken as a whole, James's *oeuvre* – beginning with the early novels of character such as *Roderick Hudson* and *The Portrait of a Lady*, and carrying through to his three major proto-modernist novels – can broadly be characterised as progressively moving away from the nineteenth-century novel form which treats the author as an unproblematic expressivist presence in a work of fiction. James's removal of the author as an overt presence in his work stands as a moment in literary history whereby a break with the expressivist model of the author is explicitly effected.

In characterising James's corpus as foregrounding a break with the expressivist author convention, the position of his fiction as a turning point between realism and modernism can thus be understood as the basis of a critique of the expressivist convention. With the explicit disappearance of the author as a formalist function in the narrative, the narratological innovations in James's fiction can be seen to mark a moment when

meaning production in a literary artefact is foregrounded as a context-specific function of the narrative. As a position of meaning, the author can only be understood as a function that is produced by the narrative – not extra to it. Whether one considers the intervening point of view of the “external” narrative viewpoint in *The Bostonians*, the point of view of the narrator as a participating character, as in *Roderick Hudson*, or the absence altogether of the author as an overt function, as in *The Golden Bowl*, it is the deployment of point of view in James’s fictions as context-dependent (not expressivist and extra-contextual) which makes narrative possible. Narrative point of view is thus a reflection of the discursive situatedness of the narrative, not an expressivist function of the author. *The Bostonians* can be presented as a case in point.

If we treat the author-function in James’s novel as (after Foucault) a specific function of discourse, the operation of the narrative viewpoint as a function which demystifies absolute meaning positions must itself be understood as a position of meaning production produced by discourse. The deployment by James of an external narrative viewpoint which distances itself from either Olive’s or Ransom’s ideological standpoints and the deployment of Verena’s shifting, pluralising point of view as a means to demystify the objective, cognitively-neutral truth-claims of nineteenth-century liberalism, must be understood as a function of specific operations of discourse rather than an expressivist invention of an autonomous, sovereign author. One such operation of discourse – an operation which makes possible the demystifying narrative point of view in *The Bostonians* – is the field of cultural discourse which situates the author-function (not only with regard to *The Bostonians* but throughout James’s work in general) as demarking the historical turning point in nineteenth-century Western culture between literary realism



and literary modernism. Indeed, this discursive turning point can be understood as being built into any reading of *The Bostonians*.

This can be demonstrated if we once again take up the question of the importance of biographical influences and the operation of both the author and the narrative viewpoint in *The Bostonians*. Returning to the question of the importance of the character of Verena as both artist and social *naif*, a *naif* who is a kind of surrogate figure for James's own anxieties as an artist in the late-nineteenth-century, it is possible to argue that questions of biography, rather than *jettisoning* the author as a discursive function, in fact *install* the author as a discursive function. James's investigation of the essentially partial, relational situation of Verena's place in society serves to foreground the essentially partial and relational status of his own cultural position in liberal society, with the effect that the various biographical concerns which underpin this identification (that is, his anxieties concerning the role of the artist in nineteenth-century society and his reluctance – like Verena – to unequivocally embrace any single ideological position) must be seen as partially and relationally situated as well.

Because James, as the author of *The Bostonians*, is denaturalised by the James/Verena identification as an expressivism and is installed instead as a context-specific function, it necessarily follows that the biographical precepts implicated in this relation are also disarmed as an extra-contextual, expressivist basis of meaning. These biographical influences, specific to *The Bostonians* at least, possess *no* extra-contextual valency. They possess no valency as ideologically innocent, expressivist bases of either meaning or representation. The discursive manner in which questions of biography thus operate in *The Bostonians* is therefore implicated in the demystifying function of both external and

character-mediated viewpoints, and also with the way in which James deploys point of view to disarm the claims to objectivity of the nineteenth-century tradition of liberalism. As a writer both living within and critiquing this tradition of liberalism, and deploying methods of both realism, naturalism, and proto-modernism to interrogate this tradition, James's discursive relation with this tradition necessarily dislodges him as an author who has independently originated this critique. As a consequence, he can no longer, either, be understood as some unchanging, extra-contextual sovereign agent able to preside as a kind of theism outside the contexts of this tradition. Installed discursively, the author-function in *The Bostonians* is instead implicated *within* this tradition, operating as a complicit yet differentiated contextualism able to critique the tradition – not because the author is a sovereign function, but because the tradition is itself a pluralised and conflictual one.

As a context-*specific* function, then, the author-function in *The Bostonians* disarms the innocence of a nineteenth-century tradition of literature which has not merely installed but hegemonised the expressivist model of the author. Writing within a tradition that was creating innovations within the genre of literary realism, yet also preparing the ground for his experiments with the new genre of proto-modernism, the partial, contingent, relationally-situated makeup of the author-function in *The Bostonians* can thus be seen as a product of the various social and cultural discourses which mark this shift. Because the author-function in *The Bostonians* is a product of these discourses, the discursive makeup of the various biographical influences which operate in the novel reflect the contingent, context-specific manner in which the author-function is situated, thus preparing the ground, also, for the modified functionality of the author in James's works of proto-modernism. As an unconscious or implicit contextualism in *The Bostonians*, the author-

function thus anticipates the foregrounding of the author as an *explicit* contextual function come the emergence in the new century of the aesthetic of literary modernism.

### 3.

## Modernism, the End of Modernity, and the Problem of Narrative

### Viewpoint.

### *The Great Gatsby*

(1925)

- life is much more successfully looked at from a single window, after all.

(F. Scott Fitzgerald, 1998, p. 7)

In Chapter Two, I argued that James, in deploying the narrative of *The Bostonians* to effect a demystificatory reading of nineteenth-century liberalism and modernity, also unconsciously contextualised the author-function in this novel, with the effect that the formalist expressivist convention of the author-function in *The Bostonians* is denaturalised. In this chapter, I deploy a close reading of F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* to foreground a further transformation of the author-function; this transformation is effectively a *conscious*, or explicit, contextual situating of the author-function. This chapter begins by broadly locating Fitzgerald's novel, as a work of literary modernism, in the context of modernism's supersession of nineteenth-century modernity in the early decades of the twentieth century. *The Great Gatsby* is situated as a work which, as a meditation upon the career and eventual death of Jay Gatsby, writes an elegy for the ethos of modernity. This chapter provides an interrogation of conventional readings of the novel and the specific way in which they situate and respond to this ethos; it also investigates the specific way that the novel's narrator, Nick Carraway, can be seen to position the elegy he has written for Gatsby and modernity itself. In mourning the passing of Jay Gatsby, and in setting the man up as a mythical exemplar of this superseded modern ethos, is Carraway in fact simply projecting his own individual biases

upon the man? In addition to this, does Carraway employ the figure of Gatsby to universalise – to render as an absolute – the specific elegy in his narrative?

A distinction is drawn between the different schools of modernism – conservative and progressive – discussed in this chapter. Through a discussion of Michael Bell’s model of “modernist mythopoeia”, I question the efficacy of the conservative branch of modernism as a workable diagnostic of the period, endeavouring as I do to align *The Great Gatsby* with the progressive branch of modernism. In drawing this parallel, I underline the partial nature of Carraway’s narrative viewpoint in the novel. Carraway’s viewpoint, grounded in the social and psychological contexts from which he fields his position, thus distances *Gatsby* from the kind of absolute, universalising stance that a conservative modernist such as T.S. Eliot seeks to install. Accordingly, Carraway’s modernist viewpoint, ironised by the contexts of his ineluctible psychological and social acculturatedness, can be differentiated from the kind of diagnostic of Western society that Eliot assumes, for example, in his poem *The Waste Land*, as he seeks to universalise his contemporaneity as a wasted landscape of social and ethical meaninglessness. By emphasising this historicity and eschewing readings of *The Great Gatsby* which interpret Carraway’s viewpoint as elegaic like Eliot’s, I want to argue that Fitzgerald effectively deploys Carraway’s viewpoint to contextualise the project of modernism, and thus to disarm it as a universalism. The effect of this, I conclude, is to situate the author-function in *The Great Gatsby* as a consciously foregrounded contextual position.

It follows, then, that in explicitly contextualising the author-function in *Gatsby* in this manner, one is able to conceive of it in discursive rather than expressivist terms. Installed as a discursive function, Fitzgerald’s status as “author-as-consumer-brand” and as a

popular spokesman for 1920s America is differentiated in this chapter from the conventions of the expressivist model. Treating the author-function “F. Scott Fitzgerald” in discursive terms, it is possible to understand this authorial viewpoint as a figure produced by the mores of the age – the new cult of capitalist wealth, the new position of youth as the arbiter of morals, the whole 1920s *zeitgeist* – rather than as a sovereign, self-identical entity who has independently produced them. As a “consumer brand” – an “Author-as-Star” – Fitzgerald achieved popular fame as the author of a particular kind of fiction which far exceeded the actual size of his readership. Fitzgerald’s prestige as an author, denaturalised in an expressivist sense, is nevertheless not diminished. It is a symptom, rather, of the way the discourses of the new culture of twentieth-century consumer capitalism produced him as a popular cultural spokesman.

### ***The Great Gatsby and the End of the Modern Ethos.***

In his pioneering essay, “F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Poet of Borrowed Time”, Arthur Mizener lauds Fitzgerald as an exemplar of “the developed romantic attitude” (Mizener 1952, p. 286). In his discussion of *The Great Gatsby*, Mizener is very clear as to what he means by this phrase. He emphasises Fitzgerald’s ability in his novels (particularly in *Gatsby*) to delineate his materials and his insights in a dramatic way; to show rather than merely tell. Mizener writes:

He had, moreover, with all its weakness and strength and in a time when the undivided understanding was very rare, an almost exclusively creative kind of intelligence, the kind that understands things not abstractly, but only concretely, in terms of people and situations and events.

(Mizener 1952, p. 286)

In defining what he means by Fitzgerald’s “romantic attitude”, Mizener praises the author’s “minute awareness of the qualities of times and places” and, most crucially, “Fitzgerald’s acute consciousness of the irrevocable passage of everything into the past”

(Mizener 1952, p. 287). Building upon this point, Mizener focuses briefly upon some of the qualities of Fitzgerald's mature works: their "almost historical objectivity, produced by his acute sense of the pastness of the past"; their "Proustian minuteness of recollection of feelings and attitudes which made up experience as it was lived"; and finally, their ability to "cast over both the historically apprehended event and the personal recollection embedded in it, a glow of pathos, the pathos of the irretrievableness of a part of oneself" (Mizener 1952, p. 287).

Fitzgerald uses the character of Jay Gatsby himself, most especially the fate Gatsby meets in the novel, to delineate some of the qualities of this romantic attitude.<sup>1</sup> The development of the plot throughout the novel turns upon Gatsby's initially meeting and falling in love with the wealthy, privileged socialite, Daisy Fay, whom he first met in Louisville in 1917 whilst in service with the United States Army. Gatsby is separated from her when he is posted to fight in Europe. Daisy, unable to understand Gatsby's inability to immediately return to America after the war when he is temporarily sent to Oxford University for a period of post-war study, weakens in her resolve to remain loyal to him in his absence and meets and marries another wealthy socialite, Tom Buchanan:

She wanted her life shaped now, immediately – and the decision must be made by some force – of love, of money, of unquestionable practicality – that was close at hand. That force took shape in the middle of the spring with the arrival of Tom Buchanan. There was a wholesome bulkiness about his person and his position, and Daisy was flattered. Doubtless there was a certain struggle and a certain relief. The letter reached Gatsby while he was still at Oxford.

(Fitzgerald 1998, p. 120)

The extraordinary way in which Gatsby tries to win Daisy back, to turn back time as it were, cuts to the heart of his romantic attitude and foreshadows the tragic

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<sup>1</sup> The use of the term, "romantic", here should be distinguished from the use of the term as defined by the Romantic movement of the nineteenth century. In the context of Fitzgerald's novel, "romantic" is a more general term, to be distinguished from the specific philosophical precepts of the Romantic Movement,

sequence of events that ultimately destroy him. Nick Carraway recounts these events, relating the important retrospective fragments concerning Gatsby's early years with the American entrepreneur Cody and the American Army, whilst simultaneously disclosing the disastrous consequences of Gatsby's determination to recapture his elusive dream. Carraway initially meets Gatsby when he rents a cheap dwelling next door to Gatsby's mansion. However, he doesn't learn much about his neighbour until he visits Tom and Daisy Buchanan and meets the golf tournament champion Jordan Baker at their house. It is Jordan who first tells Carraway that he lives in the same suburb as Gatsby.

This imbrication of Carraway's involvement with Gatsby via the more obvious connection with Tom, Daisy, and Jordan plays a crucial part in delineating the profoundly tragic and romantic elegy that Carraway sets out to construct. At the heart of Carraway's presentation of Gatsby's romantic ethos is his recognition that Gatsby is seeking to validate an ideal of existence which positions the human individual independently of social and historical context. This is the principle at the heart of Gatsby's ethos. Gatsby seeks to be an autonomous subject who stands free of all social context. In short, he is attempting to valorise himself as a self-constituting, free-willing modern subject. Carraway encapsulates Gatsby's flawed romanticism, his desire to confound both time and history and win Daisy back again, by presenting him as somehow independent and self-constituting in spite of the contingent, contextually-situated reality of the social milieu he moves through. But he also persistently inscribes Gatsby within that *socius*, continually revealing to the reader the ways in which Gatsby is as much a prisoner of time and history as any of his contemporaries. Carraway thus

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instead more generally referring to the capacity of the individual (in this case, Gatsby ) to romanticise experience by privileging himself as an autonomous centre of social discourse.



ultimately lends Gatsby's romanticism a pathos, even a dignity, that it would otherwise signally have lacked. Without the capacity of the *socius* to lend pathos to his dream by locating it in relation to a specific context, Gatsby's flawed dream – and the eventual consequences of his bid to realise it in the world – might have made him little more than a caricature, for the character's humanity is to be found in the position he occupies in relation to a world which is ultimately antagonistic to that dream.

Carraway's narrative approach ties in neatly with Mizener's reading of *The Great Gatsby* as elucidating a particularly Proustian romantic attitude. Mizener claims that Carraway's insights into Gatsby's fate in effect write an elegy for the passing of modernity in America. Further, this elegy works as a "Proustian recollection of feelings and attitudes which make up experience as it was lived" (Mizener 1952, p. 287). In recounting the circumstances of an ambitious, handsome young man of unsuccessful working-class origins, who reinvents himself as a romantic sophisticate – thus bringing about his own death – Carraway manages to encapsulate an ethic that (in some ways at least) bears comparison to Proust's writing. As in *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, Carraway's first-person narrative transmits its insights through a narrative which is mediated via the impressionistic, perspectival position of an individual consciousness. Carraway therefore not only becomes Gatsby's acquaintance and sometime confidant, but also – from one viewpoint, at least – a sort of compassionate biographer who is able to bring together all he believes he knows and understands about the man in a bid to pass commentary upon a society that has played its part in bringing about his downfall.

Carraway is emphatically sympathetic towards Gatsby, and his viewpoint ultimately dignifies the man and in a way resurrects him amidst a milieu that eventually becomes a

catalyst for his murder. Gatsby's romanticism is a particular ethos that Gatsby himself ultimately fails to realise, and in relation to which a contemporaneous New York society and the wider republic of the USA fails also. Gatsby's ruin, and Carraway's retreat back to his family's roots in the provincial Mid-West encapsulates, for Carraway at least, the condition of a nation that to all intents and purposes has destroyed its own soul. His disillusion with the "sophisticated" Eastern society from which he has fled is symptomatic, he believes, of the role this society has played in bringing about Gatsby's death. His endeavour to portray the man as an idealistic, self-constituting romantic subject locates Gatsby's tragedy within the wider context of the emergence, and perhaps failure, of the dominant precepts of individual free will, emancipation, and progress that underpin the project of liberal democracy in America.

In spite of the fact that the origins of the Western democratic project most obviously lay in the United Kingdom and Europe, it was America that provided a crucial proving ground for the project. As Arthur Ekirch writes: "The origins of the democratic tradition belong to the history of the Old World, but the first extensive practical application of the theory was worked out in the New" (Ekirch 1963, p. 7). English settlement and colonisation in North America began in the early part of the seventeenth-century, as exemplified by the foundation of permanent settlements in Jamestown, Virginia and the Puritan settlement in Plymouth, New England (Chitwood 1961, pp. 53-4 & pp. 92-3). The further establishment of colonies in Maryland, and in the Carolinas after 1660, further cemented the English hold upon the continent (Chitwood 1961, p. 183).

As early as 13 July 1619, "the first legislative assembly in America was convened at Jamestown" (Chitwood 1961, p. 64); this body effectively gave the colonists there a

voice in deciding their own laws. In Plymouth, the Mayflower Compact was signed aboard the vessel of the same name shortly after it was decided that settlement would definitely take place in New England. The compact not only swore allegiance to the English King, James I, but also more importantly acknowledged the need to establish a governing body politic which would keep order in the colony and allow its citizens a degree of representation (Chitwood 1961, pp. 98-9). Almost from the very beginning, then, principles of government modelled largely upon the example of the English Parliament and the English social order of the period, crucially underpinned by laws allowing at least a limited degree of political enfranchisement, were laid down in the “New World”.

The arguments propounded in England by the radical left-wing “Levellers” both before and after the 1688 revolution proposed the formulation of a constitution that would not only abolish the English monarchy altogether, but would provide universal manhood suffrage “and the protection of the individual in his civil liberties and right of descent” (Ekirch 1963, pp. 8-9). The English philosopher John Locke further adapted Leveller principles when he formulated his theory of “natural-rights”; Locke’s theory not only argued that every individual was born with a number of assumed sovereign rights, but also that “personal independence presupposes private property, securely protected under the rule of law” (Gray 1986, p. 13). As Ekirch comments, such a theory constitutes “the ultimate resort of the individual against an organised tyranny” (Ekirch 1963, p. 9). Locke’s theories were converted into political practice in England as well as throughout the English colonies of North America. Indeed, as early as 1669, in partnership with Lord Shaftsbury, Locke supervised a project in North Carolina which sought “to recruit

settlers and to engage in agriculture, initially drawing surplus planters from Barbados”.<sup>2</sup> Locke’s involvement with the project was underscored by his arguments for popular sovereignty and property ownership.

Throughout the early part of the eighteenth century, the “Thirteen Colonies” that had expanded from the original settlements in New England, Virginia, Maryland, and Carolina effectively laid the foundations for the emergence of modern democracy proper later in the century, beginning with the declaration of war by these colonies against their English masters in 1776 (Ekirch 1963, p. 31). Upon the conclusion of the American War of Independence (1776-83), America not only set about asserting its new status as a sovereign nation, but also, along with England and parts of Western Europe, commenced the somewhat problematic process of eventually transforming the government into an organ of democratic reform. Throughout the course of the nineteenth century, America emerged as a cornerstone of classical liberalism, founded upon an ideal of the sovereign, free-willing individual whose material well-being and acquisitive capacities were compounded one hundred-fold by the explosion of industrialisation and modern technology. The American cult of the self-made individual, epitomised for example by the Transcendentalist theories of Emerson and Thoreau, and taking form throughout the years of settlement and eventual expansion along the western frontier after independence, became an ideal residing at the heart of the American democratic identity.

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<sup>2</sup> James Tully, “The *Two Treatises* and Aboriginal Rights” in *Locke’s Philosophy: Content and Context*, Rogers, ed. 1994, p. 171. Tully points out in this essay that John Locke in fact developed his principles of natural-rights theory and rights to private property to argue that European settlers could appropriate property without the consent of the indigenous population. Tully writes: “The natural rights of the governments of England, France and Holland to punish or put to death ‘an Indian’ who violates natural law is put forward as the proof and illustration of this violent doctrine” (p.172.). Such observations fit in neatly with the problematisation by political theorists and academics of the ‘classic’ liberal project of individual sovereignty and free will that has occupied so much discussion throughout the twentieth century.

In writing his elegy for Gatsby and this vision of America, Carraway is at once tapping into and attempting to critique this cult of the individual. For Carraway, Gatsby's romantic attempt to assert himself as a self-fashioned exemplar of the democratic ethic encapsulates the perhaps delusory ideals proper to the liberal theorisation of the sovereign subject. A key point here is that Gatsby's romanticism, rather than being realised within the domain of the American republic, is the source of his eventual undoing. Locating Gatsby's tragedy within a then contemporary story of America, Carraway's narrative thus deploys the example of Gatsby's tragedy to problematise and question the valency of liberal theorisations of the individual. As Gatsby's career is ultimately defined not only by himself, but also by the material contingencies of the society he moves through, so by implication the self-inscribing sovereignty of the liberal individual *per se* is problematised as well.

Carraway's account can thus be understood as an elegy for both Gatsby and the wider question of America as a successful paradigm for the modern project of liberal democracy. However, as will be argued below, this elegy does not necessarily comment definitively, or finally, upon the American republic, and can be seen as reflecting the elisions and contingencies of his own subjective viewpoint rather than those of Gatsby or any abstract idea of "America". Indeed, since the late 1950s – when Fitzgerald's novel was rediscovered by critics and spectacularly rescued from obscurity – a plethora of academics discussing *The Great Gatsby* have either lauded or questioned the degree to which traditional readings of Fitzgerald's novel in fact represent Fitzgerald's actual narrative intentions. Accordingly, taking into account the alternate readings offered up by various critics of *The Great Gatsby*, some of the ways in which it has been interpreted as an example of American literary modernism may also be called into question. Such

concerns turn upon the problem of authorship in Fitzgerald's novel. The role played by Carraway as a mediator of narrative and meaning in the novel serves to delineate a model of authorship which, like *The Bostonians*, also problematises the expressivist authorial convention first privileged by the Romantics, and installs the author-function in Fitzgerald's novel as a partial and context-specific, rather than autonomous and formalist, position of meaning.

### **Traditional Interpretations of Narrative Viewpoint in *The Great Gatsby*.**

The mediation of Gatsby's story via the participating viewpoint of his friend, Nick Carraway, constitutes the central narrative strategy in Fitzgerald's novel. This not only provides *The Great Gatsby* with a narrative form which enables Fitzgerald to critique the milieu both Gatsby and Carraway inhabit, but is also a narratological method typical of much twentieth-century modernism. Discussion of Carraway's viewpoint and the narrative and interpretive role it plays in Fitzgerald's novel often focuses upon the way in which the narrative approach employed in *The Great Gatsby* positions Fitzgerald's work as a particular model of literary modernism.

Thomas A. Hanzo describes *The Great Gatsby* as a particular example of American modernism, while the discussion fielded by John F. Callahan argues otherwise. In restoring the narrative viewpoint in the novel in relation to the contingent, ideologically-grounded materiality of historical process, Callahan provides a penetrating critique of the model of modernism with which traditional interpretations of *Gatsby* link Fitzgerald's novel. Discussion of Carraway's role as narrator in *The Great Gatsby* usually hinges upon his perceived interpretative function in the novel: whether his viewpoint should be read as inscribing a modernist eulogy for Gatsby's tragedy, or whether it should be seen

as ironising Carraway. Hanzo, along with many other critics, takes the view that Carraway's interpretative function in the narrative not only provides the reader with a viewpoint which encapsulates Gatsby's "romantic readiness" (Fitzgerald 1998, p. 6), but also situates it within a contemporary avant-garde fashion for deliberate interpretive contingency (Hanzo 1968, p. 64).

Addressing the problem of narrative viewpoint in Fitzgerald's novel, Hanzo argues that "our knowledge of the narrator will establish the limits of our knowledge of the whole action" (Hanzo 1968, p. 64). His claim neatly parallels Carraway's own assertion that "life is much more successfully looked at from a single window, after all" (Fitzgerald 1998, p. 7). Importantly, Carraway's assertion supports Hanzo's claim that Carraway is not presenting his narrative from some autonomous position which transcends questions of social context and ideology, but is instead narrating Gatsby's tragedy from an interpretive position that in many ways stands complicit with the mores of the society depicted in the narrative, and which is thus founded upon a premise of epistemological contingency. Carraway's viewpoint in *The Great Gatsby* – his scathing indictment of the fashionable New York leisure classes and his eventual sympathy for Gatsby – is firmly grounded in his experiences on Long Island and New York, rather than from any supposedly detached, "Olympian" perspective appropriate to a nineteenth-century realist novel. Hanzo argues:

Fitzgerald's intention cannot be clarified, nor the significance of his achievement grasped, without our sharing with Nick the trial of his self and the activity of his conscience in that society of which Gatsby is only the most notable part.

(Hanzo 1968, p. 61)

For Hanzo, a number of themes together constitute the materials of Carraway's "trial of his self". First, there is the question of Carraway's background, an "innocent" from the American "Middle-West" come to New York to earn his living as a bond salesman. As Hanzo argues again:

The moral distance between the two localities may be measured in more profound ways if we take Nick Carraway as our example and his sensibility and intelligence as the recognisable determinants which inform the story with its meaning.

(Hanzo 1968, p. 62)

For Hanzo, then, meaning in the novel stems from Carraway's involvement with and reaction to, as opposed to some sort of exclusive detachment from, the society that he details in the narrative. This is not only exemplified by Carraway's involvement with Tom and Daisy Buchanan, and of course Gatsby, but by the romantic relationship he commences with Jordan Baker. Indeed, Gatsby's murder not only results in Carraway's disillusioned return to the provincial Mid-West, but also eventually prompts his scornful condemnation of the society exemplified by Tom and Daisy. In addition, Carraway acknowledges what Hanzo describes as "a new-found vision of his own guilt" (Hanzo 1968, p. 65). As a consequence of the tragedy that befalls Gatsby, Carraway is not only disillusioned by the corruption of a society that has played its part in bringing about Gatsby's death, but also, as a consequence of his involvement with Tom and Daisy and his relationship with Jordan, has to acknowledge that, although he is sympathetic towards Gatsby, he has himself been complicit with that corruption.

As will be argued below, it is this contingent and complicit, rather than Olympian and detached, narrative position that Carraway occupies in Fitzgerald's novel, and which centrally defines *The Great Gatsby* as a pioneering work of American modernism. The novel's narrative strategies draw a divide between the confident omniscient narrative viewpoint in a realist nineteenth-century novel and a twentieth-century novel that



deliberately eschews it. This narrative strategy serves to underline the important contrast between Carraway's contingent narrative position in the novel and Gatsby's extraordinary romantic attitude. This attitude is epitomised by Gatsby's obsession with Daisy and his conviction that, five years after they had first met and been separated from one another, he can win her back from her husband Tom. Gatsby sustains himself with the deception that he can automatically submit the indifferent passage of time, circumstance and history to the romantic, even sovereign, promptings that motivate his deception.

Reiterating a point made above, plot and theme development in *The Great Gatsby* turns upon the eventual, perhaps inevitable, thwarting of Gatsby's dream, the thwarting of his romantic attitude. Gatsby's death, and the dismantling of his romantic ethos, is paralleled in Carraway's narrative with a more general kind of idealism. At the heart of this idealism is a lauding of a specifically romantic outlook, an outlook founded upon a model of the individual subject which is defined according to terms of the individual as both sovereign and possessed of free will. In his account of the destruction of Gatsby's dream by a society that is ultimately indifferent to it, Carraway thus interprets Gatsby's fate as signifying the death in twentieth-century American society of the liberal ideal of modernity and the sovereign, self-determining subject. Generally, Carraway invokes this theme by implication and analogy, rather than by direct demonstration. For example, despite his renting a house next door to Gatsby's mansion, Carraway first learns about the man indirectly. He first happens upon the figure and reputation of Gatsby via the social milieu in which he moves, a milieu which thus defines the man in materialist, intersubjective terms, rather than acknowledging any actual romantic autonomy.

In delineating the circumstances of his involvement, firstly with the Buchanans and Jordan Baker and then with Jay Gatsby, and recounting the consequences which follow when these separate domains at last converge, Carraway demonstrates how Gatsby's dream is dependent upon the intersubjective makeup of the society he inhabits. Rather than a self-constituting transcendent position, Gatsby's romantic ethos is represented as complicit with this society. Having learnt that Carraway is a friend and relative of the Buchanans, Gatsby arranges, with Jordan Baker's assistance, a reunion between himself and Daisy at Carraway's house. This event not only serves as a premise for Gatsby's eventual meeting with Tom Buchanan as well, but also directly triggers the train of circumstances that results in Gatsby's murder. In effect, Gatsby's romantic attitude is thwarted by the moral bankruptcy inherent within the New York moneyed classes he has attempted to manipulate; it is a society, furthermore, that both Daisy and Tom Buchanan in many ways personify. Rather than being validated, Gatsby's dream is thus subsumed within the exteriorising materiality of an America that stands as a kind of antithesis to it.

Gatsby's tragedy functions as an effective springboard for Carraway's narrative.

Gatsby's fate can be seen as personifying the fate of the project of modernity during an epoch when the precepts of liberalism, as made possible by a model of a sovereign, autonomous subject, were no longer universally taken at face value. For Carraway, then, Gatsby's fate as an individual and as a propagandist for a particular romantic attitude exemplifies a key modernist turn. In writing an epitaph for both Gatsby and his romanticism, Carraway seeks to embrace a wider ethos of modernity founded upon the idea of the autonomous, free-willing subject that he believes America has lost in the new century. Recalling the moment in which he stands on the beach fronting Gatsby's

property after Gatsby has been murdered, and he stares out across the Sound to East Egg,

Carraway writes:

Most of the big shore places were closed now and there were hardly any lights except the shadowy, moving glow of a ferry-boat across the Sound. And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes – a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby's house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory, enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder.

(Fitzgerald 1998, p. 143)

In employing Gatsby's fate as a metaphor for a wider dilemma which Carraway believes encapsulates the America around him, an archetypal mode of the modernist viewpoint is invoked. To employ a well-known modernist term, Carraway is delineating a "Great Divide" (Huysen 1986; Bradbury & MacFarlane 1991, p. 21) between the past and his own present. Invoking the historical moment in the seventeenth-century in which sailors of the Dutch East India company first sailed up the Hudson River and laid claim to the region that was ultimately to become New York (Chitwood 1961, pp. 159-60), Carraway seeks to elucidate a attitude – an "aesthetic contemplation" – that he sees epitomised in Gatsby's and the Dutch sailors' "commensurate ... capacity for wonder" (Fitzgerald 1998, p. 147). It is this particular ideal that he believes American and Western culture no longer possesses.

Carraway is invoking in Gatsby's dream a particular ethic that runs counter to what he regards as the forces of contemporary historical circumstance. In *The Idea of the Modern*,

Irving Howe writes:

Since the beginnings of the bourgeois era, a central problem for reflective men has been the relation of the individual to the collectivity. In modern fiction, this problem often appears as a clash between a figure of consciousness who embodies the potential of the human and a society moving in an impersonal rhythm that is hostile or, what is perhaps worse, indifferent to their potential.

Gatsby's fate – and the fate of the Dutch sailors' capacity for wonder – reflects precisely this modernist dilemma. As Howe continues, “The modern hero moves from the heroic deed to the heroism of consciousness, a heroism often available in defeat” (Howe 1967, p. 36). Carraway's rescue of Gatsby's romantic attitude proceeds from the conviction that the sovereign autonomy epitomised by the early bourgeois subject – heroism exemplified by deed – has been removed from the domain of concrete endeavour and relegated to a displaced domain of consciousness. Carraway's crucial role in the narrative is to recuperate Gatsby's attitude, to recuperate “[a] sense of the real that has been lost in conventional realism” (Howe 1967, p. 29). Again, this is a well-known strategy in much literary modernism. Ernest Hemingway's novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, is a case in point. In this novel, the endeavours of the sexually impotent protagonist Jacob Barnes to live in Paris according to a self-conscious code of social and moral dignity is challenged by the “decadence” of the expatriate fellow Americans and English people with whom he mixes. In a social milieu where traditional religious beliefs and social mores have become meaningless, the only perceived ideal he is able to discover in this post-war European environment lies in the traditional rite of bullfighting in Pamplona, Spain. Even here, however, the status of the bullfighting as a traditional festival is, in Barnes's eyes at least, also being undermined by an increasingly “banal” contemporaneity. When Barnes finally realises that he will never be able to possess the wealthy English aristocrat Brett Ashley, his own determination to maintain a code of dignity – what some commentators have described as “grace under pressure” – is seemingly the only ideal, the only value, with which he is left. Barnes's fate in *The Sun Also Rises* thus generally parallels Carraway's narration of Gatsby's fall.

Discussing Carraway's role as a complicit, contingently-situated narrator of the events in the novel, Hanzo remarks: "The tone of his narrative is never offensively positive ...[W]hat may appear to be a peculiar form of pride is actually a serious kind of candour" (Hanzo 1968, p. 63). As Hanzo argues, Carraway's position exemplifies "the limits of our knowledge of the whole action" (Hanzo 1968, p. 64). Carraway is thus unequivocally posited as a reliable psychological barometer of the events that comprise the novel. Again, true to an archetypically modernist approach, Carraway employs his contingent subject position to write an elegy for a lost, transcendent mode of definition – a universality.

Yet this interpretation of the events of *The Great Gatsby* from the epistemological perspective of Carraway's viewpoint inevitably raises questions. Should Carraway's viewpoint, instead of being understood as an authoritative point of view, in fact be understood as an ironic viewpoint? This is the position taken by John F. Callahan in his book about Fitzgerald's fiction, *The Illusions of a Nation: Myth and History in the Novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald*. Critics such as Callahan, who do not accept more widely held views regarding the specific nature of Fitzgerald's narrative intent, raise further questions, not only regarding the kind of modernist artefact Fitzgerald's novel might be, but also regarding the specific kind of elegy this particular mode of literary modernism writes for modernity.

### **Callahan's Reinterpretation of Narrative Viewpoint in *The Great Gatsby*.**

Callahan's argument with critics such as Hanzo hinges upon a critique of Carraway's position, which problematises his status as a definitive arbiter of the novel's narrative.

Taken broadly, Callahan's critique of Carraway's narrative position stems from his conviction that, rather than elucidating a vision of America that is an unproblematic projection of Carraway's capacity for candour, his viewpoint in fact mirrors the particular personal, social, and historical contexts from which the narrator writes. For Callahan, the universalising narrative standpoint that Carraway attempts to posit is symptomatic of the contexts, biases, and elisions from which he speaks, rather than any standpoint which transcends and totalises its milieu. Callahan argues that Carraway's elegy for Jay Gatsby, and his deliberate alignment of Gatsby's failed bid to win back Daisy with an all-encompassing modern ethos that he believes the USA has lost, does not transcend questions of context.

Callahan opens his chapter on *The Great Gatsby* with a discussion of Nick Carraway as narrator and the importance of this framing device with regard to what he argues is Fitzgerald's *actual* narrative approach. For Callahan, authorial intent must be differentiated from the specific viewpoint of Carraway's narrative position in much the same way that Conrad establishes an authorial distance from Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, and Eliot does from Prufrock in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock".

Callahan writes:

Novelists like Fitzgerald and Conrad who would become moral historians must recognise the necessity for distance between a novel's outermost frame and the narrower perspective of the narrator. I say necessity because without such a wide-angle lens, a novel may fall prey to its narrator's vision of man and history as universally decided once and for all.

(Callahan 1972, p. 29)

Callahan argues that we grant Fitzgerald, as we do other modernist writers, "the artist's 'cold eye,' that impersonality or negative capability which separates him from the vision, if not always the consciousness, of the narrator" (Callahan 1972, p. 30). For Callahan, the conscious position Carraway takes in his narrative elides the personal and social

biases which in fact shape his response to Gatsby, New York, and the wealthy leisured classes he encounters. By unconsciously assuming that his position stands somehow outside of any context, he abstracts both himself and Gatsby from genuinely critical engagement with this *socius* and the historical period within which he speaks.

Accordingly, Callahan seeks to uncover the generalisations and distortions inherent in Carraway's universalising stance by contextualising his narrative position, by ironising his viewpoint and thus treating him, like Conrad's Marlow, as an unreliable narrator. In ironising Carraway's narrative stance we contextualise his position, and thus "implicate him in the historical process" (Callahan 1972, p. 39). According to Callahan, the most important contexts which Carraway employs in order to invoke a universal picture of the historical process in twentieth-century America are his Mid-West, middle-class background, "the role of his ancestors in American history", and the way in which the values asserted by Carraway as a consequence of his background shape his responses to the experiences recounted in his narrative (Callahan 1972, p. 31). Compounding these initial considerations is the way in which "Carraway's personality and its contextual value system" (Callahan 1972, p. 35) shape his relationships with the people he becomes involved with in New York.

Discussing the question of Carraway's "ambivalent commitment to that middle-class, middle-western world of his adolescence and his ancestors" (Callahan 1972, p. 34), and the role this cultural heritage plays in engendering Carraway's eventual empathy towards Gatsby, Callahan points out that Carraway is prone to indulging in romantic fantasies about his lineage, in much the same way that he romanticises the figure of Gatsby (Callahan 1972, p. 34). Carraway talks nostalgically of his family's "descent from the Scottish Dukes of Buccleugh, a *legend* with aristocratic pretensions, despite the *fact* of

these Dukes as usurpers and plunderers” (Callahan 1972, p. 34). Callahan argues that the Carraway clan romanticise their heritage in other ways, pointing out that they originally earned their middle-class legitimacy in America when Carraway’s grandfather’s brother first founded the clan prosperity by sending a substitute to the Civil War and starting the family’s wholesale hardware business. Carraway romanticises such conduct, suspect as it actually is. Thus his description of the United States’, and his own, participation in World War One as a “counter raid” (Fitzgerald 1998, p. 6) “harks back to the Dukes of Bacclough and, in its adolescent, history-as-adventure tone, sets the stage for Nick’s journey East” (Callahan 1972, p. 35). Callahan, commenting upon Carraway’s pilgrimage, argues:

it is not as if he strikes out on his own, a pioneer. The family council before his departure indicates the degree of home-town control over his intention to come East permanently. Thus, the provincial comes to the city not from any simple gesture of rebellion, but as an ambassador of family traditions and values.

(Callahan 1972, p. 35)

The way in which Carraway romanticises the suspect heritage of his family line mirrors the way he romanticises the figure of Gatsby. Given that he is acutely conscious of the corrupt ways in which Gatsby has amassed his fortune (as exemplified by Gatsby’s involvement with Meyer Wolfsheim), he nevertheless reifies Gatsby and his dream in much the same way that he reifies his family and its place in “America”. In a bid to define the man as standing somehow independent from the historical processes they are both complicit in, Carraway thus “defines” Gatsby according to the precepts of his own specific cultural heritage and, in his idealising of the man, effectively renders Gatsby “pure and distinct from the world” (Callahan 1972, p. 34). As Callahan observes, this is a stance “one feels Gatsby himself would not dare take” (Callahan 1972, p. 34). Callahan talks of Carraway’s sensibility as one “that reserves not judgements but feelings”



(Callahan 1972, p. 39); he is a figure in which “manners masquerade as morality”

(Callahan 1972, p. 38).

Carraway’s compliance with the dictates of social form are also evidenced, for example, by some of his initial dealings with Gatsby. Carraway agrees to let Gatsby arrange a supposedly chance reunion with Daisy at his own house; by way of compensation Gatsby offers Carraway a bond dealing opportunity, but Carraway immediately turns down the man’s offer because it is not good social form:

Technically, one can say that such testimony witnesses Nick’s honesty, but essentially he is more committed to the good form of middle-class manners and to his own self-making than he is to moral conduct. To accept a handout is both bad form and bad manners. One thinks Nick requires the illusion, at least, that his abilities are involved and needed, that he would be earning the money.

(Callahan 1972, p. 38)

Gatsby’s death marks the pivotal moment when Carraway’s disillusionment with wealthy New York society is cemented. Gatsby’s tragedy is the fulcrum upon which Carraway’s disillusion with the New York set turns, signalling the moment when he shifts from being an outsider at once attracted and repelled by this society to his arrival as an insider of sorts. With Gatsby’s death, Carraway no longer regards his provincial, middle-class values and his cultural heritage as an index of his aspiration, of his pilgrimage East, but as a haven to which he can escape from the horrors and deprivations of the East Coast. His disillusionment with New York prepares the reader for Carraway’s “withdrawal into himself and abdication of historical engagement” (Callahan 1972, p. 40). His provincial mores, no longer employed as a barometer for the mores of the New York society he has moved amongst, or as the means by which he romanticises his journey East as an aspirational pilgrimage, become instead the means by which he expresses his desire “to be the only one who knows and broods about truth” (Callahan

1972, p. 44). Carraway in effect attempts to remove both himself and Gatsby from the historical processes endemic in the narrative, processes which are only reinstated when, as Callahan argues, a contextualising frame is placed around Gatsby's viewpoint, placing a distance between himself and Fitzgerald and the reader.

In orienting Carraway's viewpoint as a reflection of some of the various personal, social, and historical contexts that situate him as a narrator of the events in *The Great Gatsby*, Callahan's interpretation of the function of narrative viewpoint in Fitzgerald's novel has a number of important implications. Because Carraway's viewpoint in the narrative is a reflection of specific questions of context, and not a viewpoint position which narrates events from some idealist or formalist position extra to these contexts, Carraway, as a narrator, cannot be understood as some kind of self-constituting, univocal sovereign identity who mediates the events of the narrative from an extra-contextual position. Carraway is not a coherent autonomous identity preceding a text which we as readers unproblematically access, but a locus – or “nexus” – for the multiple, variegated languages and discourses of the culture within which he, as an individual, resides. In *The Politics of Reflexivity*, Robert Siegle makes the same point with regard to the narrator in William Makepeace Thackeray's novel *Vanity Fair*:

We are accustomed to ordering the language of narrative voice into the contours of an individual identity that we project behind it; we assume there is a person talking to us, as if on a printing telephone held before our eyes instead of the standard receiver. In fact, however, the lesson of *Vanity Fair* is that there is not one “human” voice behind a narrative, but *the* one human voice of culture. With its varied history of texts, its repertoire of many patternings, devices, stances, and other unspoken contracts between authors and readers about reality, that culture *is* the narrative voice. It is thus far less univocal (and hence less consistent, “reliable,” and “coherent”) than we may be accustomed to thinking.

(Siegle 1986, p. 17)

Such an argument reflects many of the insights of semiotics, especially the argument that the human subject is a nexus-point, or locus, of cultural viewpoints, which reflects the various encoded conventions or “texts” of human society. One need only think of Barthes’s famous essay, “Myth Today”, in his book *Mythologies* which examines a photograph of a Negro member of the French Foreign Legion in order to argue that the image in the photograph (a Negro soldier saluting the French flag) is coded by the various semiotic conventions which valorise the social hegemony of French imperialism (Barthes 1987, p. 116), and which thus situate the soldier as a reflection or locus of a set of cultural positions produced by society. Once Carraway’s viewpoint is contextualised, and thus dislodged as a perceived univocal, extra-contextual identity, his endeavour to use *Gatsby* to exemplify a particular kind of elegy with regard to America is disarmed as a universalising epitaph and restored once more to the partial, multivocal conditions of culture. Instead of universalising *Gatsby* and America, Carraway’s viewpoint can also be understood as a site for the variegated “voices” of culture which encode him. Instead of freeing his narrative from the contingent conditions of historical process, Carraway accordingly *implicates* his narrative within history. In his introduction to *The Great Gatsby*, Tony Tanner addresses the position taken by critics such as Callahan, who ironise Carraway’s viewpoint by grounding it in the material contexts of his position.

Tanner writes:

Is the whole work the self-consoling hankey-pankey of a miserable failure of a bachelor, who invents a ‘gorgeous’ figure to compensate for the ‘dismal’ Middle West to which he has retreated – Nick’s fakery of *Gatsby*’s fakery? ... There is more to *Gatsby* than the shivered glass of his custom-made identity after his shattering encounter with Tom’s ‘rock’ at its most obdurate, something that in the end he inadequately articulates and imperfectly incarnates. ... We may call it, with Nick, ‘an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness’ ... That this hope takes the form of a romantic dream or impossible obsession, which is at once doomed or unrealizable, does not necessarily invalidate the need or the desire that nourished it.

(Fitzgerald 1990, p. xlviii).

One may respond to Tanner's position by arguing that Callahan's argument does not differ significantly from his. Rather, it is possible to suggest that Callahan's ironising of Carraway's narrative – his foregrounding of the familial and personal contexts that underlie Carraway's response to Gatsby – serves to underline further the pathos of both Gatsby's and Carraway's predicaments in relation to their American milieu. This is because their respective outlooks, epitomised by the elegy Carraway seeks to write for America, possess no foundational or determinate grounding. Gatsby's reinvention of himself as a "genteel romantic hero" – an epitome of 1920s American glamour – can be seen as a product of some general semiotic precepts that install and mediate Carraway's viewpoint in *The Great Gatsby*. As Carraway is a kind of nexus-point for certain multiple, variegated precepts of culture, so too is the fantastic identity Gatsby conceives in order to reinvent himself. Carraway's observation of the relationship between the figure of Jay Gatsby and James Gatz – "[t]he truth was that Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his platonic conception of himself" (Fitzgerald 1998, p. 78) – can thus be seen as a reflection of specific and variegated discursive conventions of twentieth-century American wealthy society. Accordingly, Gatsby does not so much epitomise a superseded "romantic readiness" – a loss of the modern ethos *per se* – as embody the various contingent cultural conventions which precede and make possible this ethos. The elegy Carraway thus writes for both Gatsby and this ethos does not so much reflect a *literal* loss of this ethos, but rather of the discourses which have grounded and projected it. The pathos of Fitzgerald's novel can thus be seen to exemplify a loss of this modern narrative as a *discursive precept*, rather than its loss in any extra-discursive, foundational sense; it is also a loss that it is no longer unproblematically seen as a self-identical expression of the modern conception of the autonomous or "god-like" individual subject.

This contextual orienting of Carraway's narrative viewpoint in *The Great Gatsby* also has important repercussions when the role of the author-function in this novel is considered. Once narrative viewpoint in Fitzgerald's novel is understood as a simultaneous point of convergence and dispersal for various contextual cultural "texts" and "codes" rather than a sovereign, single identity, so by implication is the author-function. It is thus possible to understand Carraway's contextually-situated viewpoint as a kind of template for the ontological makeup of the author-function "F. Scott Fitzgerald" in the novel. As a consciously foregrounded narrative viewpoint in *Gatsby*, Carraway operates as a general model whose contextual modes of narrative function foreground the similar function of the author as a mouthpiece of the pluralised narratives of culture rather than that of an autonomous, self-constituting identity which invents and produces these narratives. As will be argued below, such an interpretation of the character of F. Scott Fitzgerald as the author of *The Great Gatsby* is crucially bound up with the status of Fitzgerald's novel as an example of a particular model of modernist literature, and has important implications when considering the specific way in which the makeup of the author-function in *Gatsby* can both be differentiated from and critique the expressivist convention of the author. As with the question of the author-function in *The Bostonians*, such concerns can also be linked with Foucauldian conceptions of discourse.

### ***The Great Gatsby* and the Problem of Modernism.**

Callahan's interpretation of the narratological role played by Nick Carraway's first-person viewpoint differs markedly from conventional readings of the novel, exemplified by critics such as Hanzo. Callahan makes it clear that Carraway, writing his eulogy for

Gatsby from the standpoint of his own personal and historical contexts, critiques the tacit assumption that Carraway universalises the figure of Gatsby as an exemplar of a lost American romantic-cum-modern heritage. Gatsby can no longer be seen as an autonomous, hermetic exemplar of this liberal sensibility. Rather than working from the pretext of some universalising viewpoint which presents the historical process as “universally decided once and for all”, Carraway’s position is always situated in relation to these historical processes. The consequences of this position are far-reaching, for by contextualising the position that Carraway has traditionally been assumed to take in Fitzgerald’s novel, Callahan forces one to reconsider the specific way that this novel positions itself as a work of modernism.

By situating Carraway in *The Great Gatsby* in a narrative position which organises and mediates events in the novel, and which thus employs the figure of Gatsby to write an elegy for modernity, Fitzgerald effects a classic modernist manoeuvre. Carraway is not only deployed to draw a line between what he perceives as an ethically meaningful past and a meaningless present devoid of such ethical values, but is using this divide to posit this past (that is, the era of settlement in America and its development as a liberal democracy) as an ethical and epistemological bedrock able to provide an absolute foundation for both American society and the individual. Such a manoeuvre serves to ally Carraway with the ideals and ethos of Western liberal modernity. Theories of modern philosophy and modern science, serving as a theoretical ground for modernity, and reflecting the privilege accorded to an autonomous, self-constituting model of subjectivity first propounded by Descartes in the seventeenth century, sought to deploy this model of subjectivity as an absolute ground for epistemological and ethical understanding.

By drawing a divide between the eras of Enlightenment and liberal modernity, and that of his twentieth-century present-day milieu, and by using Gatsby's fate to write an elegy for modernity, Carraway seeks to define twentieth-century America as a place where all such absolute foundations have been lost. In employing Gatsby to universalise this divide – to render it eternal and absolute – Carraway seeks to abstract himself and his outlook from the partial, contingent forces of history. Carraway's gesture, taken at face value, reflects conventional readings of the narratological role he is perceived to play in *The Great Gatsby*. However, if (to use Callahan's argument) Carraway's position is contextualised, and not accepted at face value, his endeavour to universalise his narrative cannot be taken as given either. As will be argued below, the disarming by Callahan of Carraway's universalising outlook forces one to consider precisely how narrative viewpoint can be understood as operating in *Gatsby*. A contextualising reading of Carraway's narrative viewpoint ultimately allies Fitzgerald's novel with what might be termed a "progressive", as opposed to "conservative" brand of modernism, as (at the risk perhaps of oversimplification) respectively practiced by Joyce and Eliot, and as an approach to narrative which explicitly repudiates any bid to universalise understanding.

That the proto-modernist writer Joseph Conrad, and exponents of high modernism such as T.S. Eliot and James Joyce, played a crucial role in the conception and execution of *The Great Gatsby* seems beyond doubt. Fitzgerald himself acknowledged a debt to Conrad in the 1934 edition of his novel (Brucoli & Bryer 1971, p. 156), and there is little question that the use of Carraway as a first-person narrator in *Gatsby* stands as a deliberate and skillfully-worked parallel to Conrad's use of the character-cum-narrator, Marlow, in works such as *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim*. It is well known that

Fitzgerald was able to recite *The Waste Land* by heart, a fact that in itself seems to illustrate the influence of this poem upon *Gatsby*. Many commentators have noted that the Valley of Ashes, in Chapter II of Fitzgerald's novel, "a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens, where ashes take the form of houses and chimneys and rising smoke" (Fitzgerald 1998, p. 26), is an intertextual reference to the wasted landscapes that pervade Eliot's poem. There are other allusions to *The Waste Land*. Ruth Prigozy notes that Daisy's cry, "What'll we do with ourselves this afternoon? ... and the day after that, and the next thirty years?" (Fitzgerald 1998, p. 94) is a reworking of the lines "What shall we do tomorrow?/ What shall we ever do?" (ll 133-4) from Part II, "A Game of Chess" (Fitzgerald 1998, pp. xxi-ii). *Gatsby's* contrast between a banal contemporaneity and a humanly and ethically meaningful past, epitomised by references to the perceived grandeur of the Palace of Versailles in comparison to the irrelevance of the contemporary gossip magazine *Town Tattle* in Chapter IV, provides another parallel to Eliot's poem (Fitzgerald 1998, p. xxii). In his biography of Fitzgerald, Matthew J. Bruccoli also suggests that the faded, bespectacled eyes of the Doctor T.J. Eckleburg billboard in the Valley of Ashes is Fitzgerald's own version of the blind seer Tiresias of *The Waste Land* (Bruccoli 1981, p. 209).

The different positions of commentators with regard to the perceived role and function of Carraway's viewpoint in *The Great Gatsby* taps into a key problem addressed in both the early modernist literature of the final decades of the nineteenth century, and the high modernism of the twentieth. This problem centres upon disarming the modern human individual – the individual of Western humanism and liberalism – as an authoritative ground of understanding. In Western literature, this new strain of scepticism was reflected in a questioning by many writers of the authority of the omniscient narrative



viewpoint (as typified by archetypal Victorian novelists such as Charles Dickens and George Eliot). Pioneers of early modernism investigated issues of narrative viewpoint in their fiction. They sought to address particular problems encountered by methods of narrative representation when the perceived authority of the omniscient model of narrative viewpoint as a ground for understanding had come under investigation.

Michael H. Levenson's *A Genealogy of Modernism* addresses this issue in an examination of the emergence and rise to prominence of the modernist movement in England in the early twentieth century. Using Joseph Conrad's novella, *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* as a specific example with which to trace some of the developments within the movement up until the publication of *The Waste Land* in 1922, Levenson is concerned centrally with the question of narrative viewpoint in modernist literature.

Levenson begins his discussion by alluding to Conrad's famous remark in the preface to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* in which Conrad declares his intent "to make you hear, to make you feel – it is, before all, to make you *see*" (Conrad 1963, p. 5). Conrad posits the viewpoint of the individual human consciousness as the means by which this is made possible: "the source of meaning and artistic 'justice'; against the evanescent flux of the phenomenal world, it provides permanence, pattern and significance" (Levenson 1984, p. 2). Levenson, like Conrad, defines "viewpoint" and "consciousness" carefully, distinguishing them from the way they might be understood prior to the emergence of modernism. Consciousness, as it is employed for example in *"Narcissus"* is mediated by the highly self-conscious deployment of an intermittent first person narration which works in conjunction with the third person narration. Levenson notes that it is only in Conrad's use of the first-person that he allows for "direct psychological speculation" (Levenson 1984, p. 3). Prior to such moments, "Conrad clings fastidiously to externals"

(Levenson 1984, p. 5): “there are no explicit statements of attitude or emotion until the appearance of the first-person ‘we’; instead, simple actions ... are embellished with similes designed to *evoke* the intended psychological quality” (Levenson 1984, p. 5).

As Levenson argues, Conrad’s predecessors saw no problems in distinguishing between first- and third-person viewpoints in this way – they allowed themselves “unrestrained access to a character’s consciousness” (Levenson 1984, p. 5). However, Conrad’s use of a first-person viewpoint as the exclusive means of “direct psychological speculation” and his eschewing of such speculation at the moments in which he employs the third person are, for Levenson, an indication that the conventions of the Victorian novel, central among which is the employment of a viewpoint which unproblematically embraces an omniscient (as opposed to perspectivist approach) were breaking down (Levenson 1984, p. 5).

Consciousness, for Conrad, is the sole arbiter of what can be known, and consciousness is of course grounded in the non-omniscient positionality of the individual subject. The key point here is that a perspectival fictional narrator, not an all-seeing omniscient narrator such as that employed in *Middlemarch*, is posited as the ground of meaning.

Levenson argues that, in a work such as George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*, the narrator is able to range freely and unproblematically throughout the text (Levenson 1984, p. 8) as

an assimilating, amalgamating force who makes transparent the opacities between individuals, who lets moral evaluation mingle freely with description, who sees hidden thoughts quite as clearly as natural landscapes, who hears distinctly the faintest whispers of introspection.

(Levenson 1984, p. 8)

Conrad’s narrative approach in “*Narcissus*” is indicative of a reassessment of the omniscient Victorian author in relation to an era that can no longer accord the same kind of valency to such a convention. The omniscient author has broken down as a “self-

evident” narrative method. For Levenson, Conrad’s approach to viewpoint and narrative is symptomatic of a loss of confidence in the Victorian narrator’s “god-like” claims to omniscience; Conrad explores a viewpoint “no longer confident that it knows all” (Levenson 1984, p. 8).

With this investment of meaning within a non-omniscient (or bracketed) consciousness, comes an inevitable reassessment of the capacity of such consciousness to function as a mediator of truth-claims. Conrad’s fictions highlight the dilemma that arises when a perspectivist, not omniscient, point of view is posited as a ground of cognitive and ethical values. If point of view in “*Narcissus*” and *Heart of Darkness*, for example, makes no claim to omniscience – to a “God-like” point of view – can such a point of view make the same claims to cognitive and ethical authority as the authorially-validated perspective in a more traditional Victorian novel? As Levenson argues, the responses to the problem of authority by nineteenth-century intellectuals such as Matthew Arnold, John Stuart Mill, and Walter Pater express this dilemma neatly. At a time when the political ethos of liberalism was ascendant, and when new scientific discoveries (Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution being the most obvious example) were undermining the traditional authority of the Christian Church, these intellectuals addressed the same questions as Conrad by interrogating the primacy that empirical science and nineteenth-century liberalism had accorded to the human individual as a ground for meaning and understanding. Arnold, for example, sought to position the liberal, secular individual as source of the Bible’s and Christianity’s authority (Levenson 1984, pp. 10-11). In seeking to uphold the traditional authority of the church in Western society, Arnold, rather than rejecting the new hegemony of science and its attack upon religion, attempted to use science as a new foundation positing the truth-claims of religion. He aimed to ground “religion on a sound

empirical basis” by situating the psychological perceptions of the individual human consciousness as a basis for this empirical position (Levenson 1984, pp. 10-11). Arnold sought to employ the secular individual as a means to describe a “natural” religion, to reject the authority of miracles and instead rely on the capacity of the individual to serve as the empirical basis for a “natural truth” (Levenson 1984, p. 11):

a formerly extra-individual category (the God of creation) has been located on grounds of individual consciousness. Any transcendent character has been abandoned; religious force is now to be derived from human psychology.

(Levenson 1984, p. 12)

As Levenson goes on to argue, this bid to posit the human individual as a ground of cognitive authority – an approach instituted during the Renaissance and by René Descartes during the seventeenth century – is also apparent in the theories of utilitarianism developed by John Stuart Mill, who argued that an altruistic morality – which sought the overall good of society – could be derived from the general happiness of its individual members (Levenson 1984, p. 13). Science and the liberal conception of the free-willing individual, although displacing traditional justifications of value, can nevertheless be employed to sustain the authority of such value. Like Arnold and Mill, Walter Pater also acknowledges the primacy accorded to the individual and individual psychology in the new scientific and liberal intellectual climate, supporting science’s empirical claim to authority and the capacity of the individual subject to function as a locus for understanding. However, unlike Arnold and Stuart Mill, Levenson continues, Pater employs this primacy accorded to the individual subject “to oversee the withdrawal of subjectivity from the realm of fact” (Levenson 1984, p. 16). Pater argues that “To redefine traditional values as phases of the self [is] to weaken traditional sanctions” (Levenson 1984, p. 17). Focus upon the primacy of the self, upon individual psychology,

as a ground for a cognitive and ethical methodology ultimately undermines such grounds. This subjectivist argument for truth-claims, rather than serving as a locus of authority, has the effect of severing such truth-claims from the extra-textual premises (for example, the more traditionalist idea of religion that preceded Arnold's) which initially asserted them. Subjectivity, then, becomes "a double-edged sword" (Levenson 1984, p. 18). If traditional religious and objective ideas are seen as mere extensions of individual subjectivity, "[t]hen it is but a small step towards the discarding of such categories altogether" (Levenson 1984, p. 18).

Levenson argues that if narrative in both "*Narcissus*" and *Heart of Darkness* is motivated by the primacy accorded to individual psychology, these works simultaneously grapple with the antithetical relation of individual psychology to the certainties afforded by more traditional models of human understanding and individual and social ethics. As Levenson points out, there is a constant tension in Conrad's work between calls for authority, tradition and restraint, and the "assertion of the individual as the only criterion of judgement" (Levenson 1984, p. 34). This tension is less explicit in later works such as *Heart of Darkness*, where Marlow's perspectivist viewpoint largely mediates meaning in the novel, yet it already foregrounds a specific *agon* – a struggle between ideological value and narrative form – that characterises the formative years of literary modernism. Levenson traces the course of a debate that was to rage in England between modernist artists and intellectuals – leading figures of which included T.E. Hulme, Ezra Pound, Ford Madox Ford, Wyndham Lewis, and T.S. Eliot – all of whom sought to address this problem of the modernist *agon*. This problem turned upon the dilemma of whether the situating of knowledge in the domain of individual consciousness resulted in either "a precise rendering of facts [or] an unrepentant subjectivising" (Levenson 1984, p. 36).

Their responses were evidence of a conscious endeavour to situate modernist art and thought upon a more coherent, less problematic doctrinal foundation which would overcome the conflict between that of authority and tradition and the subjectivist grounding of the individual. The use of the mythical method by Eliot and Joyce in *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses* stand as two key responses to this disjunction of fact and subjectivity.

In considering the influence of Conrad, Eliot, and Joyce upon the writing of *The Great Gatsby*, a number of clear distinctions must be drawn between the different models of modernism practiced by various modernists. Many critics have outlined clear points of difference between Eliot and Joyce, for example, differences which – at the risk of simplification – are part and parcel of their broadly conservative and progressivist approaches to modernism. Eliot's conservative and Joyce's progressive approaches to modernism reflect the different ways in which each artist responded to an aesthetic which recognised that both the various disciplines of knowledge and the cultural values that pervaded Western culture during the final decades of the nineteenth century could no longer be understood as an authoritative, absolute, and incontestable basis of understanding. For Eliot, the loss of Christianity's ethical hegemony presaged the loss of any kind of meaningful values *per se*, and the perceived surrender of the ethical life of Western society to anarchy. Such a diagnosis of the transformation of ethics throughout Western culture is a motivating principle which shapes *The Waste Land*. On the other hand, Joyce articulates a more progressive response to the supersession in Western culture of this hegemonic model of ethics. For Joyce, the supersession of this absolute model by a partial, contingently-grounded paradigm of ethics (and, hand in hand with this, a partial, contingently-grounded model of all knowledge- and truth-claims) is to be lauded as a

perceived reflection of the actual epistemological makeup of both understanding and ethics. *Ulysses* thus represents the loss of an absolute model of ethics and understanding as a productive phenomenon of late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century Western culture because it restores the human subject to the partial, contingently-grounded actuality of human culture. In a discussion of what he terms as the “mythopoeic” nature of literary modernism, Michael Bell positions Eliot and Joyce in relation to this concept of mythopoeia model, respectively aligning it and contrasting it with Joyce’s specific progressivist position and that of Eliot’s conservative position, a discussion which (as will be argued below) bears upon the status, also, of *The Great Gatsby* as a work of modernism. In describing the literature of modernism, especially that of high modernism<sup>3</sup>, as mythopoeic in character, Bell draws upon the two divergent readings that “myth” suggests: “both a supremely significant foundational story and a falsehood” (Bell 1997, p. 1). Bell employs the term “modernist mythopoeia” to describe an attitude that has emerged after the decline of the cultural and moral authority of religion in Western society, and also to show how modernism emerged out of the problematisation of science and scientific theory as a field of privileged truth-claims. Deploying the term devised by

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<sup>3</sup> The term “high modernism” refers to a school of modernism which first came to prominence in England, Europe and America in the 1920s, exemplified by the work of the American writers T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound and, in England and Europe, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and Wyndham Lewis. Artistically, this branch of modernism drew on the insights of pioneering proto-modernists such as Joseph Conrad and Henry James. High modernists such as Joyce and Eliot not only proceeded from their example but, most importantly, formulated new approaches to narrative and representation, such as the “mythical” model of narrative, pioneered by Eliot and Joyce, and the technique of “interior monologue” or “stream of consciousness” pioneered by Joyce and Woolf.

In Europe, writers such as Robert Musil, Hermann Broch, and Franz Kafka also reacted against the realist model of representation prominent during the nineteenth century, and in works such as *The Man Without Qualities*, *The Sleepwalkers*, and *The Trial* developed a Continental brand of high modernism. The Anglo-American and Continental schools of high modernism practiced a variety of artistic methods which questioned both the valency and efficacy of more “commonsensical”, “mimetic” models of fiction, and shared a significant degree of common ground with one another in that most of the modernists sought to problematise and break away from the Western tradition of liberal modernity, which they saw as ultimately degrading Western civilisation. For Eliot and Pound, Western modernity had “botched” Western civilisation. On the other hand, modernists such as Joyce and Woolf responded to this diagnosis in more productive ways, using techniques of mythical narrative and stream of consciousness to herald a new relativistic model of understanding which sought to break free from more absolutist models of epistemology.

the philosopher Martin Heidegger, Bell argues that we live in an age of the “world picture” (Bell 1997, p. 1).

Bell touches upon Heidegger briefly, using the term “world picture” to invoke the sense that Western culture, specifically the culture of modernism in the first decades of the twentieth century, lives out its cultural codes and systems of belief in full consciousness of the fact that these codes of belief are no longer incontrovertible modes of knowledge. The term “world picture” reflects the new, self-consciously relativist character of human understanding in the twentieth century, a model of understanding which stems from the discrediting of the authority of both religion and science, the two belief systems which warred for epistemological supremacy in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

Alluding to Heidegger, Bell stresses that the age of modernism was overtly conscious of the fact that its systems of belief were contingently rather than transcendently grounded. In emphasising its relativist status, understanding in the age of the world picture, or the world view, was undoing the metaphysically and positivistically privileged ideas characteristic of the European Enlightenment in the eighteenth century and positivist science in the nineteenth. Bell writes:

The general recognition Heidegger defines came crucially into consciousness in the teens and twenties of the century when the consciousness of living a world view as a world view was instantiated in a number of literary and philosophical works.

(Bell 1997, p. 9)

The idea of an outlook which is consciously lived as a world view encapsulates the way in which, Bell argues, the double meaning of the word myth is employed with respect to literary modernism:

[The] word ‘myth’ superimposes two meanings to reflect a cardinal recognition implicit in the modern literary use of myth. Stated as a proposition, this is simply the fact that fully conscious



citizens of the twentieth century are aware that their deepest commitments and beliefs are part of a world view, whether individual or collective, which cannot be transcendently grounded or privileged over other possible world views.

(Bell 1997, p. 1)

In employing the double meaning of this concept of myth, modernist mythopoeia exemplifies “[t]he double consciousness of living a world view as a world view” (Bell 1997, p. 1). A position of understanding, be it religious, philosophical, or scientific, is adhered to as a mode of belief, but also located relativistically rather than absolutely in relation to other modes of belief. It is lived with conviction, yet also consciously inhabited as only one of many possible world views (Bell 1997, p. 1).

However, in discussing Eliot’s relation to modernist mythopoeia, Bell himself points out that to state that mythopoeia is central to modernism is not to claim that all modernist artists reflect the relativist ideas inherent in the model (Bell 1997, p. 120). Bell links Eliot with another expatriate American modernist, Ezra Pound, to argue that their conservative politics – particularly Eliot’s Anglicanism after 1927 and Pound’s fascism – was symptomatic of a consciously articulated disagreement with the idea that all models of human understanding are relativistic in their makeup rather than objectively grounded. Bell draws on Nietzsche’s ideas concerning language theory, for example, that “truth is a mobile army of metaphors” (Bell 1997, p. 121) rather than a neutral, transparent index of a given reality. Eliot (like Pound) was aware of Nietzsche’s position which, along with Wittgenstein’s language-theory, came to prominence in the early decades of the twentieth century; but the two American modernists took issue with these theories. As Bell argues again, Nietzsche “had no yearning for transcendent or objective truth, but Eliot and Pound *did* want something like this, and could not, therefore, adopt the mythopoeic posture” (Bell 1997, pp. 121-2).

An examination of the function of Nick Carraway's perspectivist viewpoint as a privileged mediator of the narrative in *The Great Gatsby* shows a clear relation between Fitzgerald's novel and this double-sided – conservative and progressive – model of modernism. The debate between critics such as Hanzo and Callahan as to the specific way Carraway's viewpoint mediates the narrative in *Gatsby* is implicated in the question whether Fitzgerald's novel should be understood as a conservative or progressive work of modernism. On the one hand, if Carraway's narrative (as Hanzo argues) is to be taken at face value and understood as an authoritative basis for interpretation, the elegy he writes for the modern/liberal ethos effectively locates *The Great Gatsby* as a conservative work of modernism. If, on the other hand (as Callahan argues), Carraway's narrative viewpoint is to be ironised, Carraway's bid to write an elegy which universalises his outlook, and which diagnoses his contemporaneity as a domain in which (in the manner of T.S. Eliot and *The Waste Land*) all meaningful values have been lost, is disarmed and his viewpoint becomes contingent and historically-specific. In eschewing a position which seeks to universalise meaning and which instead restores Carraway's viewpoint to historical process, Carraway's viewpoint can be understood as an example of the progressive mythopoeic position. Carraway's position is situated as only one possible world view.

Academics such as Robert Sklar have discussed the possible role played by James Joyce's *Ulysses* in shaping *Gatsby*. In his book on Fitzgerald, Sklar argues that *Ulysses*, alongside Conrad's and Eliot's writing, showed Fitzgerald how he might modernise his approach to writing fiction. Sklar points out that, before he even settled down to write *Gatsby*, Fitzgerald had already decided that his third novel would not be a work of

realism (Sklar 1967, p. 149). As he saw it, the novel of realism, rising to prominence during the nineteenth century and reflecting much of the optimism and acquisitiveness of that era of industrial expansion and democratic reform, “was too optimistic about the future and was too sure it knew all the answers” (Sklar 1967, p. 149). Sklar alludes to a letter Fitzgerald wrote to Edmund Wilson before he started *Gatsby*, which shows that Fitzgerald was searching for a narrative form which would indicate a direction for his next novel. As he argues, Wilson was to provide Fitzgerald with this new form when, in May of 1922, he brought *Ulysses* to Fitzgerald’s attention.

Throughout 1922, Wilson, in his role as commentator on the arts and literature, had exhibited a continued interest in Fitzgerald (Sklar 1967, p. 156). At the time he praised Fitzgerald in a sketch he wrote for *Bookman*, but also described him as a writer who had “the desire for beauty without an aesthetic ideal” (Sklar 1967, p. 147). Wilson also reviewed *Ulysses* for the *New Republic*, a review which Fitzgerald read and declared was the only criticism of *Ulysses* that he was able to make any real sense of (Sklar 1967, pp. 154-5). In the review Wilson found much to criticise in *Ulysses*. He felt, for example, that Joyce’s adherence to the structure of *The Odyssey* was too literal; that the structure and symbolism of his novel had caused Joyce to overextend himself (Sklar 1967, p. 155). However, Wilson praised Joyce’s capacity to make the bourgeois or lower-middle-class characters such as Leopold Bloom command the reader’s sympathy and respect. Wilson argued that Joyce’s unwavering focus upon the minutiae of everyday existence in Dublin – “his capacity to tell the truth about human ignobilities” – had the paradoxical effect of ennobling the characters (Sklar 1967, pp. 155-6).

It was Fitzgerald's recognition of Joyce's attitude to the lives of his fictional characters which, Sklar argues, was not only to play its part in shaping *Gatsby*, but which was also to mature Fitzgerald's art. Joyce showed Fitzgerald that it was possible to focus upon characters who did not have a moneyed background, and to instil these characters with a dignity. Perhaps the catalyst which brought this about was, for Fitzgerald, intensely personal. Wilson, in drawing *Ulysses* to Fitzgerald's attention, made plain a connection between Fitzgerald and Joyce: namely, that both writers were lapsed Catholics (Sklar 1967, p. 156). *Ulysses*, in short, helped Fitzgerald reassess his own lower-middle-class background and to see it as a possible source for his own writing. For the first time, Fitzgerald used his own familial roots as a basis for the creation of the genteel romantic hero which was a trademark in his fiction. In two stories he wrote before he started *Gatsby* – “Winter Dreams” and “Absolution” – he devised two characters without privileged, moneyed backgrounds. Sklar writes of the second story:

“Absolution” is amongst Fitzgerald's best; its significance for *The Great Gatsby* lies in its skilful fusion of Fitzgerald's old theme of the genteel romantic hero with his new capacity to write with feeling and penetration about lower-class lives and aspirations.

(Sklar 1967, p. 159)

The central character in “Absolution”, Rudolph Miller, is in fact a prototype for the character of Gatsby<sup>4</sup>. Miller is driven by a desire to transcend his lower-class background and become his romantic “other self”, Blatchford Sarnemington (Sklar 1967, p. 159). Seen from this perspective, then, Joyce showed Fitzgerald ways to advance his fiction and take his place amongst the practitioners of the new modernism, “to close the gap between Fitzgerald and modern movements in the arts” (Sklar 1967, p. 156).

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<sup>4</sup> In his discussion of “Absolution”, Sklar notes that this short story was originally conceived as part of *Gatsby*. The character, Rudolph Miller, was originally the adolescent James Gatz. In later drafts of *The Great Gatsby*, however, Fitzgerald removed this account of Gatz's adolescence because he saw it as extraneous to the novel, and refashioned it as a short story. Nevertheless, the fact that Rudolph Miller was, like Gatz, of a lower-middle-class background further emphasises some of the ways that the influence of Joyce helped to mature Fitzgerald as a writer.

However, in discussing, as Sklar does, the influence of other more famous modernists on Fitzgerald, a number of problems arise. Although both Eliot and Joyce are modernists, they occupy different artistic positions as modernists. This difference is underlined by their respective approaches in *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses*, in the divergent ways in which the two writers employ what Eliot – in his essay “*Ulysses, Order and Myth*” – calls the “mythical method” (Eliot 1987, p. 177). For Eliot, the mythical method provides the means for him to elucidate a conservative ideological position while, for Joyce, the mythical method is a mouthpiece for his more progressive politics<sup>5</sup>. If one is to attempt to argue for the significance of both *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses* as influences on *The Great Gatsby*, the problem of the position of *Gatsby* in relation to these different politics must be addressed.

For Sklar, the influence of Eliot and Joyce upon Fitzgerald when he wrote *The Great Gatsby* turns upon the fact that their invention and deployment of a mythical method in *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses* supplied Fitzgerald with the aesthetic for *Gatsby* (which Wilson argues was previously lacking in his fiction). In declaring that his next novel would not be a work of realism, Fitzgerald was tapping into an anxiety that in many ways defined his times, an anxiety that stemmed from a widespread belief in both America and Europe that the project of democracy, liberalism, individual emancipation,

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<sup>5</sup> Critics who have discussed the function of the mythical method in *Ulysses* have of course not always seen Joyce’s novel as evidencing such a progressive politics. Early studies which discussed Joyce’s fiction, such as the pioneering introduction to Joyce by Harry Levin, have interpreted the use of Homer’s myth alongside an exhaustive, naturalistic depiction of Dublin in 1904 as an elaborate ironic device which, as with Eliot and *The Waste Land*, is used to present a present-day milieu as an environment devoid of any meaningful values. Critics such as Levin, then, see Joyce’s mythical method as broadly paralleling the conservatism of Eliot’s position. However, much of the succeeding criticism on Joyce has moved away from this position. For example, as Anthony Cronin argues, that Joyce “did exploit his [mythical] framework for ironic purposes is undoubtably true, but a certain elephantine coarseness of irony would be implied if the whole thing were simply a huge joke at the expense of Dublin, the twentieth century and Leopold Bloom” (Cronin 1989, p. 61).

and “rational” social progress – precepts central to the very ethos of modernity – was a project beset by crisis. Responding to historian James Harvey Robinson’s *The Mind in the Making*, which Fitzgerald’s publisher Maxwell Perkins had urged him to read some time before he began work on *Gatsby*, Fitzgerald expressed the opinion that Robinson’s diagnosis of the project of modernity, motivated by a pervading faith in the modern valorisation of the ideals of science and reason, ultimately described a project which had lost its way (Sklar 1967, pp. 148-9). As Fitzgerald wrote in a letter to Perkins, Robinson’s book “states the entire case for modernity’s lingering hope of social progress” (Sklar 1967, p. 148). However, as with the discrediting of the optimistic view of the modern project – expressed by commentators such as H.G. Wells and George Bernard Shaw in the 1890s – Robinson’s book merely underlined for Fitzgerald his own belief that, by the 1920s, the project had foundered (Sklar 1967, p. 149). Central to this position was Fitzgerald’s conviction that, in spite of his socialist ideas, popular rule could not come to grips with the increasing complexity of scientific knowledge and the increasingly complex makeup of contemporary culture. As Sklar argues, “Robinson believed that advances in scientific knowledge could be put to good use in improving society, but he also implied ... that only scientific experts knew enough to make the decisions” (Sklar 1967, p. 149). In his letter to Perkins, Fitzgerald was to compound his sceptical opinion of modernity’s future with the view that, rather than bringing about freedom in America, democracy had produced tyranny: “The strong are too strong for us and the weak too weak” (Sklar 1967, p. 149).

Eliot and Joyce provided Fitzgerald with a method and an aesthetic which would enable him to develop a narrative form that transcended what he saw as the essential obsolescence of the realist model, and which would enable him to articulate a response to

this perceived crisis of modernity. Both Eliot and Joyce used a method of retrospective mythical allusion to contrast a period in Western culture in which the mores of society were installed as ethically meaningful absolutes with a present-day milieu where such “absolutes” no longer carried any epistemological and ethical authority. Fitzgerald, in turn, used the character of Gatsby as an elegy for the passing of the ethos of modernity and as an exemplar of an “absolute” myth-principle that in Gatsby’s milieu had been lost. Fitzgerald thus employed something resembling Eliot’s and Joyce’s mythical method to extrapolate a method of his own, the aim being to diagnose this crisis of modernity and the values it impressed on America.

The relationship of *The Great Gatsby* to *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses* raises again the question of how Carraway’s viewpoint positions Fitzgerald’s novel as a modernist artefact. It is possible to argue that traditional interpretations of Carraway’s viewpoint, such as Hanzo’s, ally *Gatsby* with the conservative camp of modernism, whilst Callahan’s interpretation of Carraway’s narrative function has the effect of allying *Gatsby* with more progressive thinkers. Embracing the universalising elegy Carraway writes for the epoch of modernity from a given narrative viewpoint – as a position to be taken at face value – provides a more traditional interpretation of the function of narrative viewpoint in *Gatsby*; this in turn allies Fitzgerald’s novel with what, in a broad sense at least, can be understood as Eliot’s conservative modernist position in which the past possesses an absolute epistemological grounding. However, Callahan’s more recent discussion – in placing a contextual frame around Carraway’s viewpoint – allies *Gatsby* with (again, at the risk of oversimplification) more progressive modernists, such as Joyce, who embrace the relativist implications of this specific modernist strategy. A careful distinction must thus be drawn between Eliot and Joyce if one is to assess the

specific ways these two writers influenced Fitzgerald. The problem of modernism as both a conservative and progressive movement is thus important to understanding the particular way that Callahan's interpretation of narrative viewpoint in this novel locates *The Great Gatsby* as a modernist artefact.

Sklar sees the influence of Joyce upon *Gatsby* as simply iterating traditional interpretations of Carraway's viewpoint. However, Callahan's interpretation of the function of Carraway's viewpoint suggests that narrative viewpoint in *The Great Gatsby* not only problematises a conservative modernist position, but also shows how Carraway's viewpoint broadly parallels a progressivist modernist position. By emphasising the differences in Eliot's and Joyce's stances as modernists, and aligning *Gatsby* with Joyce, the inadequacy of the position critics such as Sklar adopt in broadly aligning Fitzgerald with both Eliot and Joyce can be brought into focus. Indeed, in aligning *Gatsby* with Joyce's progressive modernist position rather than Eliot's conservative position, one must also reappraise the specific character of the elegy Carraway writes for the epoch of modernity. If we regard Carraway's narrative viewpoint as a viewpoint which, rather than standing as an objective voice outside its own historical specificity, must be situated within an interpretive frame which renders it partial, it is no longer possible to interpret Fitzgerald's novel as writing the sort of elegy for modernity which attempts to draw a line between an ethically meaningful past and a meaningless present day. Because Carraway's elegy for both *Gatsby* and the epoch of modernity is grounded upon the contingent precepts of his specific point of view, so also his view of modernity as grounded upon an absolute set of ethical and epistemological foundations is a contingent one. Consequently, the assumption that modernity ever possessed such absolute foundations is also questioned. Rather than writing a conservative elegy for



some mythic America that is no more, then, Carraway's point of view forces the reader to ask the question whether *any* foundational model of understanding ever existed in the first place.

Eliot's yearning for a transcendent or objective truth, and the juxtaposition of this yearning against a twentieth-century social milieu which may be at odds with this position, is a central theme in *The Waste Land*. Peter Nicholls touches upon this theme in *Modernisms: A Literary Guide*, undertaking a brief discussion of Eliot's mythical method in this poem. He seeks to show how Eliot's method positions *The Waste Land* in relation to the poet's specific critique of the contemporary cultural ethos in the early decades of the twentieth century. Eliot's approach to his mythical method is made overt, not only in *The Waste Land*, but also in his 1923 essay, "Ulysses, Order, and Myth", in which he discusses Joyce's own use of mythic allusion. The often cited passage in the essay outlines Eliot's own mythical method and hints at the way that Eliot's and Joyce's methods diverge. Eliot writes:

In using myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. They will not be imitators, any more than the scientist who uses the discoveries of an Einstein in pursuing his own, independent, further, investigations. It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.

(Eliot 1987, p. 177)

For Eliot, the allusions throughout *The Waste Land* to a panoply of religious and literary sources is used to foreground what he sees as an essential contrast between an ethically and religiously meaningful antiquity and a present-day milieu in which any significant ethical, religious and personal meaning are lost. The use of myths, characters, and stories from antiquity and past history – whether the figure of Tiresias from Greek myth, the

Fisher King from the Grail legends, or the prophet Ezekiel from the Bible – at once valorise a past which Eliot sees as possessing personal and religious significance and a coherent social order to provide a shape, an allusive parallel, within the context of a present which he perceives as having lost this significance. As Nicholls argues, it is these mythical and literary parallels which enable twentieth-century citizens – within the context of Eliot’s poem at least – to apprehend the banality of their own milieu, to apprehend the supposed anarchy and futility within “a modernity increasingly degraded by the imitative forms of mass politics and consumer culture” (Nicholls 1995, p. 255). Traditional readings of the function of Carraway’s viewpoint align *Gatsby* with this particular point of view.

Nicholls makes the telling observation that the proliferating array of allusions which underpin *The Waste Land* might be expected to result in a multivocalising parade of competing, relatively grounded positions “compelling us to contemplate Western decadence in the context of other cultures” (Nicholls 1995, p. 256). However, what the poem instead invokes is the voice of an absent author, or absent authority, that the contemporary milieu has lost (Nicholls 1995, p. 256). After his conversion to the Church of England, Eliot would infuse his poetry with an absolutist Christian orthodoxy, an orthodoxy which functioned as the very voice of authority that was so signally lacking in *The Waste Land*. As Nicholls writes of Eliot’s poem, the use of mythic and literary allusion is employed by Eliot as a “cultural echo”, an echo which serves to “reveal a vacancy within the modern event to which it is ironically applied” (Nicholls 1995, p. 257). Nicholls refers to the passage in *The Waste Land* from “The Fire Sermon” where the narrator Tiresias witnesses the coupling of the typist and her lover in her flat:

Their encounter has been neither passionate nor pleasant, merely one routine moment in a life which [is unable to] rise above the mechanical. ... The woman herself is made to seem thoroughly inconsequential, and the reference to Goldsmith’s lines (‘when lovely woman stoops

to folly') hammers the point home by equating eighteenth-century melancholy (which 'soothes the heart instead of corroding it') with the contemporary world's more blatant reduction of passion to mechanism. Such moments of compound irony show how the 'timelessness' of the poem [i.e. *The Waste Land*] is complicit with an absoluteness of moral perspective. ... Eliot's own version of the 'mythic method' thus tends to produce a high degree of local specificity at the level of tone and idiom, while securing a parallel abstractness in its referents.

(Nicholls 257)

In a way that stands in significant parallel to *The Waste Land*, *Gatsby*, too, can be seen as an absent author – or authority – in Fitzgerald's novel. *Gatsby*, from Carraway's point of view, stands for a set of values and a romanticism which Carraway sees as no longer applicable in contemporary America. Returning from New York to the Middle West after *Gatsby*'s death, Carraway, at the beginning of his narrative, writes of his desiring "the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever" (Fitzgerald 1998, p. 5). *Gatsby* is employed by Carraway as an exemplar of such a desire for an absolute, transcendental bedrock or ethic able to redeem a country where all such absolute values are presented by Carraway as superseded. *Gatsby* is employed by Carraway as a voice of authority – a "cultural echo" – of which the absent voice of authority in *The Waste Land* is a kind of precursor. However, according to a reading such as Callahan's, the difference between *The Waste Land* and *Gatsby* is that *Gatsby*'s status as a voice of authority is disarmed as an absolute by the various contexts that render Carraway's narrative viewpoint partial.

In a sense, it is possible to see *Gatsby* as a voice for an absent ethos of modernity. His fate in the novel is a kind of allegory for the supersession of the modern, self-identical subject, the subject perceived as an absolute, extra-contextual ground for understanding. However, *Gatsby* does not lose all presence in Carraway's narrative. In a sense, he is merely denaturalised as an extra-contextuality or formalism. As a contextual function, he instead possesses a relative and partial functionality the valency of which is defined and

mediated according to his presence as a central motivation and point of focus driving Carraway's narrative. Gatsby may not possess any effectivity as an autonomous, sovereign function which stands outside and extra to Carraway's narrative. But as a character whose life and significance in *Gatsby* is *mediated* by Carraway, he possesses, instead, a relative and contextual effectivity. Gatsby stands as a subject whose status as a relative function is dependent upon Carraway as a narrator, thus emphasising his relational, as opposed to autonomous and sovereign, status in the novel. Gatsby's fate, unconsciously situated by Carraway's narration as a relative and context-specific function, can consequently be understood as a further allegory for the passing of the modern model of the subject as an autonomous and transcendent basis of meaning in twentieth-century American culture. As will be argued below, this disarming of Gatsby and the modern subject as an absolute basis of understanding can be understood further as another allegory for the disarming of the expressivist model of the author as autonomous and its realigning as a relative, partial, and contextual function.

Eliot's use of the mythical method to hint at an absolute order also reflects an absolutist moral perspective on his part, a perspective which stands in marked contrast with Joyce's employment of the mythical method. Joyce employs a mythical sub-text (in the case of *Ulysses*, of course, *The Odyssey*) as an allusive parallel narrative to the contemporary sequence of events in Dublin over the course of a day. The crucial difference between Eliot and Joyce is that Joyce does not position his myth narrative so that it stands in absolutist counterpoint to an "anarchic" present day devoid of moral and epistemological value. Certainly, the myth narrative in *Ulysses* is positioned in abstract, hegemonic terms not available as a guiding principle in 1904 Dublin, but neither is it employed by Joyce as an allusive principle which seeks to pass off the present day as a "waste land" devoid

of any meaningful ethical values. Eliot's assertion in "*Ulysses, Order, and Myth*" that the allusive myth narrative in Joyce's novel provides an ordering principle in a contemporary milieu devoid of order more accurately describes the use of myth and allusion in *The Waste Land* rather than *Ulysses*. In employing Homer's epic as an ordering principle in his novel, Joyce is using *The Odyssey*, and its very status as a myth-story, to align *Ulysses* with a model of modernism and modernist mythopoeia in the way that Bell has discerned as a formative principle in much modernist literature. Rather than mirroring Eliot's ideas concerning twentieth-century modernity, anarchy, and a mythical antiquity whose absolute values have been lost, Homer's myth story is instead used by Joyce as the basis for a model which seeks to *affirm* the relativism of knowledge and ethical values in the present. The myth story in *Ulysses* is used as the basis for a contingent, discursively-located model of understanding – a world view rather than an absolute view.

Nicholls does not overtly distinguish between Eliot's and Joyce's employment of the mythical method in relation to a model of modernist mythopoeia in the same way as that broached by Bell. The difference he draws is between the theory of authorial "impersonality" and the deferral of the contemporary scene to a meaningful, if now superseded, historical order located in antiquity, and a focus on "the contents of consciousness and the self's labile existence in time" (Nicholls 1995, p. 254) as practiced by writers such as Joyce. Like Bell, then, Nicholls foregrounds an intrinsic aesthetic difference separating Eliot from Joyce, a difference which stems from their respective conservative and progressive politics, thus preparing the ground for Bell's model of mythopoeia.

Bell argues that Joyce uses the story of *The Odyssey* as a shaping and patterning sub-text in *Ulysses*, at once installing it in his novel as a grounding, foundational story (Bell's first definition of myth) and also foregrounding its status as a fiction (Bell's second definition of myth). Thus, in the same instant that Joyce installs *The Odyssey* as an ordering and shaping narrative in his novel, he also frames or brackets it, placing *The Odyssey* within a discursive context which questions its prior claims to any foundational authority. According to Bell, Joyce thus structures his model of mythopoeia in *Ulysses* around a narrative which interrogates both the Cartesian and realist models of subjectivism. These models seek, respectively, to posit human knowledge and understanding by privileging the human subject as an autonomous, extra-discursive locus of meaning or, as is the case with the project of nineteenth-century realism, privileging scientific understanding as a definitive model of knowledge. Bell examines these two traditions of knowledge, arguing that, rather than simply dissolving the models of realism that they are founded upon, Joyce's interrogation of Cartesian subjectivism and nineteenth-century realism creates the basis for a new, enhanced model of realism (Bell 1997, p. 73).

As Bell makes clear in his subsequent discussion of mythopoeia, relativism, and subjectivism, the problem of defining modernist mythopoeia as an approach to understanding which locates its truth-claims relativistically rather than objectively turns upon the question of whether such an approach is a subjective projection of understanding which carries no cognitive weight (Bell 1997, p. 67). As Bell remarks, this problem reflects the way the Cartesian model of understanding posits its truth-claims. It privileges the idea of an extra-discursive, autonomously positioned human subject as a foundational basis for the differentiation of objectivist and relativist truth-claims, the

implication here being that the mythopoeic theorisation is an inadequate narrative method because it does not ground understanding in such a model of the subject.

However, as Bell goes on to argue, modernist mythopoeia dismantles the givenness of the Cartesian model of knowledge by questioning the inherent objectivist vs relativist dualism on which it is founded (Bell 1997, p. 67).

Bell takes up the example of “Proteus”, the third episode in *Ulysses*, to underline his point. The episode relates the walk Stephen Dedalus takes along Sandymount Strand, the entirety of the episode being presented through the modernist technique of stream of consciousness, which modulates the narrative through the inner process of Stephen’s thoughts:

Ineluctable modality of the visible: at least that if no more, signatures through my eyes. Signatures of all things I am here to read, seaspawn and seawrack, the nearing tide, that rusty boot. Snotgreen, bluesilver, rust: coloured signs. Limits of the diaphane. But he adds: in bodies. Then he was aware of them bodies before of them coloured. How? By knocking his scone against them, sure. Bald he was and a millionaire, maestro di color che sanno. Limit of the diaphane in. Why in? Diaphane, adiaphane. Shut your eyes and see.

Stephen closed his eyes to hear his boots crush crackling wrack and shells. You are walking through it howsomever. I am, a stride at a time. A very short space of time through very short times of space. Five, six: the *Nacheinander*. Exactly: and that is the ineluctable modality of the audible. Open your eyes. No. Jesus! If I fell over a cliff that beetles o’er this base, fell through the *Nebeneinander* ineluctably!

(Joyce in Bell 1997, p. 70)

As Bell points out, the construction of this passage might imply a view of reality which is exclusively subjectivist, conveyed through the perspectival standpoint of an individual consciousness, and appears to eschew any pretence to objective truth-claims. But as Bell goes on to argue, Joyce’s presentation of meaning via a single consciousness actually dissolves the dualistic separation between subject-consciousness and the exterior object-world methodology characteristic of the Cartesian idea of subjectivity. Discussing the passage from Joyce, Bell writes:

The immediate impact suggests an enclosure of consciousness. Yet the subject of Stephen's meditation, and his closing his eyes to reflect on 'the ineluctable modality of the visible' enforces the inescapable existence of the external world within the modality of his consciousness and perception. ... Instead of a world sustained by a possibly solipsistic consciousness, one can see consciousness as the problematic phenomenon sustained within and by a world.

(Bell 1997, pp. 70-1)

The Cartesian spectator-model of subjectivity as an extra-discursive basis for perceiving the world is thus dismantled, since the subject's capacity for perception is dependent upon, rather than distinguished from, exterior reality. As Bell also argues, "The technique of *Ulysses* is not so much subjective as a way of dissolving subjectivity" (Bell 1997, p. 71). Indeed, he further dissects the above passage from *Ulysses* to argue that it summarises a history of modern Western thought:

The 'ineluctable modality of the visible' soon divides into the more objectified categories of time and space, the *Nacheinander* and the *Nebeneinander*. Whether or not Joyce had any specific reference in mind here ... the use of the German words points to a broadly Kantian rather than Cartesian provenance. Kant's categories, including time and space, through which he saw all experience as constituted, were at once mental or logical categories and the structuring principles of the phenomenal world. World and the mind are functions of each other. Kant's philosophy was foundational to modern thought by overcoming an earlier, Cartesian dualism as well as, by the mid-eighteenth century, Hume's scepticism and Bishop Berkeley's idealism; about which Stephen ruminates later in the episode. It is typical that Stephen's overt thought should be of Aristotle, Jakob Boehme and Berkeley, and that the narrative technique should echo Descartes's systemic doubt, while the deeper implication is Kantian and ultimately post-Kantian. Joyce compresses an essential history of thought here just as he compresses a history of literature in his modern recycling of Homer.

(Bell 1997, pp. 70-1)

The specific manner in which Stephen's meditation on "the ineluctable modality of the visible" compresses a history of thought, contrasting the respective standpoints of Descartes and Berkeley, and Kant, in a juxtaposition which reflects the interdependence of Steven's stream of consciousness and the world around him, points to the relativistic fashion in which each philosophical position stands in relation to the others. It is this relativism, founded upon the interdependence of individual subject-consciousness and the object world, which explodes the limits, the supposed givenness, of the Cartesian



theorisation of epistemology. The Cartesian attempt to found reality on an autonomous construction of subject-perception (“I think therefore I am”) is exploded in *Ulysses* as a construction rather than an absolute foundation. Understanding in *Ulysses* thus rests upon the relativistic juxtaposition of various philosophical, or world, constructions; upon the projection and relative positioning of one model of understanding against another. In the specific case of *The Great Gatsby*, it is possible that a contextual situating of Carraway’s narrative viewpoint, such that it is seen as a reflection of the individual, cultural, and social precepts discussed above, serves to install the narrative as something more than a solipsistic position of understanding precisely because Carraway’s position in the narrative is shorn of his own assumptions of cognitive objectivity. A contextual situating of Carraway’s viewpoint serves to show, also, how the modern model of the subject, theorised by Descartes, is a solipsism rather than an absolute. Taken at face value, Carraway’s viewpoint could thus be seen as solipsistic as well, a “transcendent”, “extra-contextual” basis of meaning eliding the very contexts which in fact ground him as a subject carrying the necessary cognitive authority.

Bell also positions Joyce’s novel in relation to the project of nineteenth-century realism, as a novel which re-presents realism under the auspices of a new metaphysic rather than exploding that project. As Bell observes, realism in the nineteenth-century novel “commonly privileged science as the paradigmatic form of truth-statement” (Bell 1997, p. 72). Bell draws attention to the influence of Flaubert’s “impersonal” style of narration upon the Joycean oeuvre. Commenting upon the critique of the nineteenth-century scientific paradigm, Bell observes that its comic, parodic treatment in “Proteus”, positioning scientific understanding as a world construction rather than a given, underpins the new relativist position of science in the twentieth century (Bell 1997, p.

72). As he argues, the scientific paradigm is prized, in the context of Joyce's novel, more "for its emotional impersonality rather than for its claims to objective knowledge", an approach which "suggest[s] the limits of those claims" (Bell 1997, p. 72). In summary, he concludes:

Modernism was a moment, like that of Cervantes and Shakespeare, when fundamental changes in world view, what Thomas Kuhn called paradigm shifts, were occurring. Modernism was a peculiar synthesis which preserved the realist world on the basis of a new metaphysic ...

(Bell 1997, pp. 73-4)

The technique of positing a knowledge-claim within a context which positions it as a world construction, or projection, alongside other world projections, underlies Joyce's approach to modernist mythopoeia, an approach which is emphatically different from Eliot's conservative stance. Crucially, these two divergent positions bear upon specific questions concerning modernism, modernist mythopoeia, and *The Great Gatsby*, turning as they do, once again, upon the problem of narrative viewpoint in Fitzgerald's novel.

As suggested above, it is possible to argue that Mizener's and Hanzo's interpretations of Gatsby's fate in the novel (that is, the destruction of his romantic ethos), parallels the kind of elegy Eliot writes for Western culture in *The Waste Land*. The death of Gatsby's romantic dream in Fitzgerald's novel, valorised by Carraway as the death of "the orgasmic future that year by year recedes before us" (Fitzgerald 1998, p. 144), is the death for Western man of "something commensurate to his capacity for wonder" (Fitzgerald 1998, p. 143). As Eliot writes an elegy for religious belief in Western culture, so Fitzgerald writes an elegy for the loss of a similarly religious impulse, complicit with what Carraway asserts is a supersession and commodification of the modern impulse that motivated Western settlement in America in the first place. The symbolism employed in Carraway's description of the billboard featuring the faded, bespectacled eyes of Dr. T.J.

Eckleburg in the Valley of Ashes – the eyes “dimmed a little by many pointless days” – directly invokes a Christian God that has absented twentieth-century America; just as God and religious belief have deserted Eliot’s waste land.

Bell argues that a discrepancy can be discerned in Eliot’s conscious employment of myth (for example, the Grail myth) as an exemplification of meaningful religious and ethical values juxtaposed against a present day devoid of such values, and the unconscious personal values which the myth narrative attempts to elide. For Bell, this discrepancy can be traced to certain characteristics involving Eliot’s own personality and emotional disposition (at least at the time he wrote *The Waste Land*) for which the myth narrative stands as a kind of unconscious alibi. Bell argues that Eliot uses the mythic allusions in *The Waste Land* as “an impersonal and culturally prestigious vehicle through which to project unexamined or unresolved emotions” (Bell 1997, p. 124). In the specific case of the Grail myth, Eliot used it to validate what Bell describes as an essential emotional lack in Eliot’s personal makeup, a basic antipathy, even disgust, towards his contemporaneity, a disgust that was only reconciled through his orthodox Christian beliefs. As Bell writes: “Here is a textbook case for Nietzsche’s analysis of Christianity as a negative life symptom” (Bell 1997, p. 124).

In recent years, scholarship on Eliot and his poetry, particularly *The Waste Land*, has dislodged the myth that the poet worked from some impersonal, trans-contextual basis – a position which he propounds in his essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent” – as he sought to realise a viewpoint which supposedly transcends any biographical and personal precepts which might diminish the impact of his poetry and compromise himself as a poet seeking to break free from the preceding Romantic tradition. As Lyndall Gordon

points out in her recent biography of Eliot, Eliot himself admitted that his theory of impersonality was a bluff (Gordon 1998, p. 4). Accordingly, the chapter she devotes to the conception and writing of *The Waste Land* uncovers the sometimes disturbingly biographical nature of the material that went into the formation of the poem. For instance, she argues that there is a clear “confessional element” (Gordon 1998, p. 147) in *The Waste Land* which stands alongside the more public satirical stance in the poem, a confessional element which – although more overt in all the fragments he wrote between 1914 and 1921, and which, taken together, made up the original manuscript of the poem – was significantly muted when Ezra Pound made his drastic excisions to the manuscript (Gordon 1998, p. 147). Further, reading the uncut version of the manuscript, she argues that *The Waste Land* was originally conceived as “spiritual autobiography”, a tradition of poetry and written expression that was practiced widely in New England (Eliot’s place of birth) by various Transcendentalists (Gordon 1998, p. 149). As will be argued below, Bell’s and Gordon’s positions here with regard to Eliot and *The Waste Land* can be understood as having a direct impact on the function of Carrway’s narrative viewpoint in *Gatsby*.

Gordon demonstrates that it is possible to delve into “the morass of the manuscript ... into the chronology of the accretions” that Eliot amassed in the years after 1914, and “perceive the shaping pattern of the private life” (Gordon 1998, p. 147). Doing precisely this, she argues that early fragments of Eliot’s spiritual autobiography – his “soul history and sermon” – reveal his own express desire to achieve sainthood, presenting as he does in some of these early fragments a would-be saint he names after Narcissus, Bishop of Jerusalem (Gordon 1998, p. 153). However, this saint figure was to disappear from the

final version of *The Waste Land*. Nevertheless, fragments such as this reveal the nature of the allegiance owed to the American tradition of religion and poetry:

It is not possible to understand Eliot's dreams ... outside the context of a native tradition. It is true that Eliot's bonds were not with the America of his own day, but he shared with earlier Americans a barely acknowledged bond: with those who opposed spiritual deadness through revivals like the Great Awakening and Transcendentalism, and with those New England saints who were subject at all times to incursions from the unknown.

(Gordon 1998, p. 152)

Eliot's conscious endeavour in *The Waste Land* to write a poem which would locate its mythic allusions in such a way as to transcend the relativist character of both personal and social context is undermined by the very contexts his mythical method seeks to elide. As Bell remarks, for Eliot, "religious faith ... was essentially incompatible with mythopoeic relativity" (Bell 1997, p. 124). Nevertheless, Eliot's conscious use of the mythical method to undermine the constructivism of modernist mythopoeia as construed by someone like Joyce cannot overcome the contexts that are openly acknowledged by modernist mythopoeia. Eliot's attempt to use both mythical allusion and accepted social norms to stand in as alibis for the acutely personal precepts that motivate *The Waste Land* thus serves to demonstrate the relativistic position Eliot in fact unconsciously shares with Joyce.

Bell's and Gordon's foregrounding of the personal, indeed biographical, premises that underlie *The Waste Land*, and which Eliot unsuccessfully sought to elide, parallel the way in which Callahan positions Carraway as a narrator in *Gatsby*. As Eliot's poem is an unconscious mouthpiece for the personal, relativistically positioned values Eliot brings to *The Waste Land*, so also Carraway's first-person viewpoint is an unconscious projection of the personal values he brings to his narrative in Fitzgerald's novel. For

Callahan, Carraway's bracketed viewpoint – his contingent status as an ambassador of his own personal and social values (values which assume an extra-discursive truth status) distances *Gatsby* from the conscious philosophical position of *The Waste Land*.

According to Callahan's reading, Carraway is a kind of consciously rendered version of the Eliot of 1922. In embracing the self-conscious constructivism of Joyce's mythopoeic approach in *Ulysses*, Carraway's viewpoint, rendered partial by its unconscious personal contexts, presents itself as a progressivist critique of Eliot's conservative modernism, thus resolving the apparent contradiction evinced in Robert Sklar's argument when he seeks to trace the way both *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses* influenced *Gatsby*. Addressing this contradiction, however, it is interesting to point out that the personal way in which Fitzgerald absorbed the influence of both Eliot and (especially) Joyce in a manner that reflected common biographical factors in their backgrounds, can be seen as a kind of working template for the way in which he used Carraway in his novel. As Fitzgerald absorbed modernist culture in a way that influenced his own approaches to the subject matter of his writing and some of his autobiographical contexts, so too Carraway's modernist outlook is positioned by his own background and values.

The implications of this reading of *Gatsby* and the position the novel takes with regard to modernism are significant. If we can accept that Carraway's viewpoint is ironically – or at least contingently – located in the novel, the question as to how *The Great Gatsby* positions itself as an elegy for modernity must be reconsidered. Since Callahan has shown that meaning in *Gatsby*, grounded in Carraway's viewpoint, can no longer be conceived as occupying a universalising position that transcends context, the elegy for modernity that Carraway elucidates can no longer be seen as transcending personal and social context either. Carraway may believe he is writing an elegy for modernity from an

ahistorical viewpoint that transcends contexts – whether they be personal, social or historical – but he is in fact foregrounding the very contexts which pre-empt any attempted theorisation of a context-free position.

A contextual reading of the function of Carraway's narrative viewpoint in *Gatsby* suggests that interpretations which posit the end of modernity in this way are misguided. Rather, the end of the era of modernity signals the cessation of an ideological position which posits human understanding in supposedly formalist or context-transcendent terms. Callahan's context-dependent reading of Carraway's interpretative position in *Gatsby*, which subverts the assumed extra-discursivity of his viewpoint, effectively returns the projects of both modernity and literary modernism to the contexts which foreground their historicity. It is possible to argue, then, that the ironic deployment by Fitzgerald of Carraway's narrative viewpoint serves to position it in the novel in such a manner that it stands as a *conscious*, or explicit, contextual interpretive position. This position locates Fitzgerald's novel as a work of modernism which at once "talks back to" and yet "moves on" from the unconscious, or implicit, contextual position of the narrative voice of a work of late realism such as James's *The Bostonians*. As a narrative artefact, *The Great Gatsby* thus takes a further step in the progressive denaturalising and interrogation by the four novels in this thesis of the project of modernity and the modern, trans-contextual model of the author. By installing *Gatsby* in relation to the contexts which serve to enable it to exist at all as a narrative artefact, one is able to foreground the essentially partial and contingent (as opposed to neutral or given) character of Fitzgerald's novel as a modernist artefact. Fitzgerald's novel differs from *The Bostonians*, however, in that the contextual model of the author-function in *Gatsby* is a

deliberate, consciously elucidated position, a conscious, explicitly theorised denaturalisation of the expressivist author convention.

### ***The Great Gatsby* and the Author-Function.**

If narrative viewpoint in *The Great Gatsby* explicitly denaturalises the expressivist convention of the author, it follows that one can no longer think of the author-function “F. Scott Fitzgerald” in expressivist terms. An expressivist treatment of the author-function in Fitzgerald’s novel might seek to situate Fitzgerald as a theological point of reference for the novel, as an autonomous, formalist locus of meaning production. *The Great Gatsby* would be seen, then, as the expression of an author conceived as a formalist autonomy who – as the progenitor of the novel – has independently brought the novel into being. If, however, the author-function is disarmed as an expressivism and, as argued above, installed instead as a contextual function, the author-function must be conceived in terms which reflect this question of context. As with the example of *The Bostonians*, the author-function can therefore be treated as an expression of discourse. One can thus employ the example of Fitzgerald to consider some specifically twentieth-century developments of the author-function (in the Foucauldian sense), in that Fitzgerald received a level of personal fame as an author which extended well beyond the actual readers of his works. Fitzgerald was one of the first “Authors-as-Stars”, in the sense that his name became a consumer “brand” in post-war American capitalist society, earning him a kind of fame which was very different from that enjoyed by James.

With the publication in 1920 of his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, Fitzgerald tapped into the mood of America which, with the end of World War One, was undergoing a profound social transformation. The onset of the 1920s saw the rise of the youth of the



nation as the new arbiter of morals in America (Brucoli 1981, p. 134). Thus with the examination and romanticisation in *This Side of Paradise* of college life in an American Ivy League university (Princeton), Fitzgerald immediately struck a chord with the reading nation:

The Princeton material generated some of the popularity of *This Side of Paradise*, which was regarded as the first realistic American college novel. Moreover, it was about Princeton at a time when Princeton was a glamorous and exclusive place. ... As a Princeton novel, *This Side of Paradise* appealed to young readers who wanted inside information about American Oxbridges, and it was read as a handbook for collegiate conduct.

(Brucoli 1981, p. 127)

However, Fitzgerald's novel came to stand for much more than this. In its celebration and romanticising of privileged youth, exemplified by the novel's genteel romantic hero Amory Blaine, *Paradise* instantly encapsulated the new mood of cultural licence and liberation that was America during the 1920s. With the explosion of share prices on the American stock market and the rise of a new mood of national confidence, Fitzgerald and his new wife Zelda became swept up in the general excitement:

The Fitzgeralds' first months in New York were heady. Any couple might have been spoiled by the same exciting circumstances. The twenty-three-year-old author and the nineteen-year-old Alabama girl were celebrities – young, handsome, rich (so it seemed), with no one to exercise authority over them. They were interviewed; they rode on the roofs of taxis; they jumped into fountains; there was always a party to go to. ... The Fitzgeralds found themselves cast as the models for the new worship of youth. At first it may have rather bewildered them, but they soon accepted their roles as pioneers.

(Brucoli 1981, p. 135)

It was Fitzgerald of course who coined the term "Jazz Age" to describe the Twenties. Immediately becoming a catch-phrase for this period of American history, it demonstrates the enormous degree to which Fitzgerald became a popular spokesman for the period. As Brucoli points out, *This Side of Paradise* was reprinted repeatedly throughout the first year of its publication, and by the end of 1921 had sales totalling 49,075. The novel also experienced further exposure when abridged editions were published in the *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, the *Atlanta Georgian*, and the *New York*

*Daily News* (Brucoli 1981, p. 136). Nevertheless, the novel did not make Fitzgerald rich. In 1920 Fitzgerald made \$6,200 from the novel, not a small amount, but considerably less than other American novels which sold more widely in the same year. Most of his money came from stories he wrote during that year, and Hollywood movie studios took out options on some of these stories (Brucoli 1981, p. 136).

Fitzgerald's fame rested chiefly in his almost serendipitous capacity to write a novel which first articulated the Twenties *Zeitgeist*. Coupled with his and Zelda's status as celebrities, and his pioneering (in the shape of the character Blaine) of the trademark model of the genteel romantic hero, Fitzgerald was to take on the demeanour of an almost mythic persona. In short, Fitzgerald became famous for pioneering a particular writing – and a particular style of romantic hero – which Twenties culture would embrace as its own. Writing in this age about a new generation of youth which was “dedicated more than the last to the fear of poverty and the worship of success; grown up to find all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in men shaken” (Fitzgerald 1948, p. 269), Fitzgerald himself came to epitomise the great divide that the new aesthetic of artistic modernism drew between the nineteenth century and the twentieth. One of the reasons for the success of *Paradise* rested upon the fact that it articulated the ethos of this modernist divide in an accessible realist form. Later, when he came to write *Gatsby*, and used the examples of Conrad, Joyce, and Eliot to develop his own variation on the *modernist* narrative form, Fitzgerald was to discover that further popular success in the medium of the novel eluded him. Indeed, until the resurrection of *The Great Gatsby* by critics in the years after Fitzgerald's death, *This Side of Paradise* was to prove his most popular novel.

Fitzgerald's reputation as an archetypal writer in the Twenties is thus to be found in his status as a spokesman for the age's new mores. However, this was owing to the capacity of the Capitalist economy, as a basis for specific discursive practices, to produce him as such a spokesman, rather than any sovereign capacity on Fitzgerald's part to invent the age. If his life had taken a different course, the discourses defining the period would still have been pervasive. Fitzgerald did not invent the 1920s. The remarkable way that the fortunes of his life seemed to mirror the fortunes of both the Twenties, the Wall Street Crash, and the Depression of the 1930s, thus serves to underline how – as both an individual subject and writer of literary fiction – he evinced no sovereign, autonomous agency able to surmount and transcend the excesses and strictures of the period. The economic fortunes, and social and cultural mores of this period *produced* Fitzgerald as a subject, not *vice versa*. In writing about the Twenties, and producing characters and stories which tapped into the ethos of this period, both Fitzgerald and his fiction stand as very literal – even uncanny – exemplars of a particular representation of human subjectivity and this subject's art as products of discourse. As an author popularised as a “brand name” valorising the mores of the period, and which deployed Fitzgerald's character-type of the genteel romantic hero as a kind of advertisement for the period, Fitzgerald the man and Fitzgerald the writer can be understood as productions of the various discourses of the period – for example the newly-emergent discourses which defined 1920s youth culture – as well as a brand name advertising the mores valorised by the proliferating discourses of mass-market capitalism.

Defined as a product of discourse, as a product of the various discursive regularities which have installed Fitzgerald as a locus of meaning production in, for example, *The Great Gatsby*, his authorial persona effectively participates in an explicit dismantling of

the expressivist model of the author-function. Situated as an effect of discourse, the author-function possesses no valency as either a sovereign agency who has instituted the novel's modes of meaning and representation, nor an extra-contextual formalism which the reader of *Gatsby* unproblematically accesses. Fitzgerald's status as a function of discourse rather than an expressivism is paralleled by the similar function of Carraway as the first-person narrator in *Gatsby*. As an ambassador of a particular ensemble of social values, and as a narrator who unconsciously uses both these values and his own psychological biases to construct his portrait of Gatsby, Carraway's viewpoint can also be understood as a function of discourse.

Crucially, this disarming of the perceived innocence of the expressivist author model does not diminish the prestige of the author. With the contextualising by Fitzgerald of Carraway's universalising point of view in *Gatsby*, the viewpoint/narrative relation in the novel is reversed. Because Carraway's viewpoint is a function of certain discursive precepts, Carraway is produced as a subject by these discourses. As a consequence, Carraway's partial, contingent viewpoint is installed by Fitzgerald in such a manner that it eschews any claims to omniscience. It therefore stands as a narratological exemplar of a modernist narrator who problematises the semantic relation between the author of a literary artefact and the narrator of that artefact. As with the example of Carraway, the narrator possesses no position of omniscience, and as a consequence of this disarms the author as a perceived sovereign function able to mediate a narrative according to the assumptions of the omniscient model. Installed as a product rather than an initiator of discourse, the narrator, Carraway, foregrounds the author also as a function of discourse.

Installed as a contextual and partial function, the new prestige of the narrator in *Gatsby* thus rests upon the rejection of the author as an expressivism. As a result of this manoeuvre, Fitzgerald's novel can be seen to articulate the modernist divide between nineteenth-century liberal modernity and the succeeding era of modernism in the early part of the twentieth century according to Foucauldian conceptions of discourse. In its differentiation from nineteenth-century modernity and a convention of meaning and narrative centred upon a privileging of the modern subject, the narrative viewpoint practiced in *Gatsby* disarms the expressivist convention of the author. Narrative viewpoint in *Gatsby* as an expression of the author conceived as a theologism is dislodged and, in re-engaging narration as a partial and complicit function discursively installed as a symptom of partial, historically-specific conditions of discourse, makes it impossible for the reader to treat Carraway's narrative viewpoint as the theological mouthpiece of an expressivist author. Narrative viewpoint demystifies – or desacralises – meaning in *The Great Gatsby*, and it is as a result of this that a new post-expressivist model of the author-narrator relationship is made possible.

## 4.

### Denaturalising a Modernist Poetics.

## V.

(1963)

He would dream perhaps once a week that it had all been a dream, and that now he'd awakened to discover the pursuit of V. was merely a scholarly quest after all, an adventure of the mind, in the tradition of *The Golden Bough* or *The White Goddess*.

(Thomas Pynchon, 1995, p. 61)

*The Great Gatsby* situates modernism in partial and provisional (as opposed to universal) terms, but in effecting this also demystifies the preceding era of nineteenth-century modernity as an absolute narrative. In this chapter, an examination of narrative viewpoint in *V.* – mediated by the viewpoints of the characters of Benny Profane, Herbert Stencil, and Sydney Stencil, as well as the “omniscient” point of view of the novel’s narrator – is deployed as the starting point for a critique of modernism.

This critique proceeds from the position that *V.*, as a work of *late* modernism, occupies with regard to modernism proper. This position is explored in this chapter via a distinction Brian McHale draws between the “epistemological” dominant of modernism and the “ontological” dominant of postmodernism. Pynchon’s novel occupies a transitory position which straddles both these dominants. In embracing both, its position as an artefact which anticipates the emergence of postmodernism is not foregrounded until the epilogue, when both Benny Profane’s and Herbert Stencil’s epistemologically grounded viewpoints are overridden by “a postmodern version of the fantastic” (McHale 1987, p. 22) which denaturalises the modernist procedures employed previously. Throughout *V.*, there are a number of stylised reworkings of various modernist narrative approaches, all

of which, taken together, situate the various histories of the novel's mysterious avatar, the Lady V., that the character of Herbert Stencil endeavours to assemble. Narrative viewpoint installs the V.-plot as a relativist modernist poetics rather than according to any absolute or universal literary model, serving to disarm universalising models of representation, such as the character viewpoints of Profane and Herbert Stencil, and the repeated attempts by Stencil to deploy the V.-histories as a basis for an objectivist model of historiography. Thus it is possible to argue that the non-objectivist, non-universal model of culture, history, and historical representation posited by the V.-histories serves to ally the modernist poetics deployed in Pynchon's novel with the progressive, or relativist, model of narrative exemplified by what was identified in the previous chapter as "progressive modernism".

However, as a work of late modernism, *V.* is ultimately differentiated from even this progressivist model. Unlike the example of *Ulysses*, the V.-histories, which operate as a kind of narratological equivalent to the myth-story of *The Odyssey* in Joyce's novel, do not initially proceed from a relativist position which renders provisional the universalist motivations of the myth story, but instead proceed from the standpoint of a narrative which is relativist from the very outset. *V.* thus denaturalises the modernist genre, understood by commentators such as Brian McHale as operating according to an "epistemological" or "world-disclosing" poetics, by defining this poetics according to relativist rather than universalist terms. Modernism's world-disclosing poetics is thus from the very beginning undermined. As a consequence of this critique – a critique which effectively turns the epistemological/relativist interrelation into a kind of "myth-shaped hole" – the operability of the author as an expressivist, world-disclosing function is also denaturalised. As an expressivist convention, the author-function in *V.* ceases to work as

an implicitly accepted meaning-conveying function. This ontology of viewpoint, specific to *V.*, prepares the ground for a model of authorial point of view whereby the operation of the author-function can be seen to distinguish Pynchon, as such an author, from the convention of “artistic heroism” central to definitions of the expressivist model.

As a demonstration of the discursive makeup of the author-function, it is possible to treat a perceived “author intention” in Pynchon’s novel as a perceived “expressivist” function, despite the availability of only a few officially-known details of Pynchon’s life. As a consequence of this, an expressivist treatment of the author continues to operate by default – traditional author-centred readings of the novel are seemingly made possible in spite of the lack of extensive biographical information – thus explicitly aligning the expressive author model specific to *V.* as a function of discourse rather than as a sovereign author agency. This model of authorial viewpoint thus prepares the ground for an ontological model of the author whereby the operation of the author-function can be seen to distinguish Pynchon, as a writer, from the convention of “authorial heroism” central to the expressivist convention.

### **Benny Profane and Herbert Stencil: The Problem of Viewpoint.**

In a self-conscious manoeuvre that can be seen as characteristic of modernism, every section comprising the central narrative in *V.* (the instances of omniscient authorial commentary excepted) is mediated, not through any representation by Pynchon himself, but via the various viewpoints of its characters, particularly the novel’s two main protagonists, Benny Profane and Herbert Stencil. This is a crucial strategy, positioning *V.* as a work of late modernism via its critique of modernist literary techniques. It is largely through Profane and Stencil that we apprehend the *V.*-plot in the first place, although the



interjections and qualifications of Pynchon's narrative viewpoint necessarily qualify any attempt to posit either Profane or Stencil Jnr's viewpoints as epistemological givens. Profane and Stencil, moreover, attempt to mediate the milieux they inhabit according to very different exegetical premises: Profane by an almost wilful, even pathological, refusal to inscribe even an illusion of agency, meaning, or narrative coherence to the *socius* within which he functions, and Stencil by his repeated, hyperbolic attempts to do precisely the opposite.

Profane and Stencil represent two different poles of interpretation, with consequences that ultimately seem to undermine their respective viewpoints, rather than unproblematically engage with the milieux through which they move. Nevertheless, as will be argued below, Profane's and Stencil Jnr's respective narrative approaches, coupled with the narrative function of the epilogue in *V.*, not only locate Pynchon's novel as a work of late modernism but also, in once more critiquing the expressivist convention of the author-function and delineating a further stage in the historical trajectory argued in this thesis, effect a specific critique of modernism as a literary genre.

Profane employs a viewpoint that is almost wilfully pathological, a viewpoint that seems itself undermined even as Profane attempts to install it. In a bid to impose his particular mindset on his surroundings – to render his surroundings comprehensible according to his particular rationale – he embraces contingency, meaninglessness, and random chance. This perspective ensures that his description of himself as a *schlemihl* (“a victim, dispossessed and alienated” Slade 1974, p. 91) remains, from his viewpoint at least, unchallenged. A number of episodes in *V.* illustrate this. For example, in chapter eight of the novel, Profane consults the classified section in the *New York Times* in a bid to find a

new job. Sitting in a New York park in the middle of the day, he duly chooses one of the Employment Agencies advertised in the paper by seeing which listing coincides with the crosswise fold down the newspaper that an erection in his trousers has made (Pynchon 1995, p. 215). And earlier in the novel, also killing time between jobs, Profane elects to spend a day “shuttling on the subway back and forth underneath 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, from Times Square to Grand Central and vice versa” (Pynchon 1995, p. 37). He is described in this instance as a human yo-yo. Indeed, Profane often seems to resemble an object blindly rehearsing various impersonal laws of motion rather than a discrete human subject. Throughout the novel he repeatedly derides or avoids his humanity, not because he possesses none, but because meaningful engagement in his milieu might force him to acknowledge it. In a sense, Profane is an absurdist, like a character in a modernist play by Samuel Beckett.

In assuming his absurdist stance and labelling himself a *schlemihl*, Profane seems to elide his humanity as a means of solipsistic self-protection. Throughout the novel, Profane repeatedly uses his self-description as a *schlemihl* as something to shelter behind; it is an excuse which negates the possibility of his recognising himself as something other than the persona he asserts himself to be. Profane thus parodies the traditional picaresque hero, a tactic which hints at how Pynchon’s novel is situated in relation to a variety of allusive contexts. David Seed argues that the character of Profane can convincingly be read as a parody of a rather different picaresque hero, that of Sal Paradise, in Jack Kerouac’s novel *On the Road*. Seed writes:

Profane is an absurd figure because he is so much at the mercy of chance. ... This clearly reveals the difference between Profane and a Beat Protagonist like Sal Paradise who sets off for the West in the confident hope that he will find happiness in a particular place or with a particular friend (Dean Moriarty). The road thus becomes a metaphor of possibility although the hope becomes more and more difficult to sustain as Sal crosses and recrosses the continent. The only sense in which Profane goes on the road (Kerouac’s title is referred to in chapter one) is to work on a repair gang. Since Profane has no goal he has no direction and hence yo-yos on the New

York shuttle and later on the Staten Island Ferry. Pynchon is careful to point out that his dress is exactly the same at the end of the novel as at the beginning, thereby suggesting that he has not changed at all. Profane represents an attenuated and lethargic Beat mobility reduced absurdly to moving in order to fill the monotony of life. Thus it is quite appropriate for him to run as it were off the page into darkness at the end of the novel.

(Seed 1988, pp. 73-4)

Profane opens Pynchon's novel by seeming to materialise on a street in Norfolk, Virginia. The street becomes a motif throughout the novel which not only functions as a metaphor for Profane's absurdist outlook, but which also stands in counterpoint to Stencil's bid to posit the V.-plot as an all-embracing historical totality.

As Benny Profane in a sense constructs reality via a specific exegetical approach, so too does his counterpart, Herbert Stencil. Stencil is the main explicator, or mediator, of the V.-plot. As a key "voice" in the novel, he is in a problematic way the *raison d'être* of the V.-plot in the novel, a plot which he on repeated occasions seeks to rationalise as a century-old, worldwide conspiracy. Essentially, the V.-plot which Stencil attempts to assemble in the novel is structured around the progress of a mysterious avatar – the Lady V. – who is present at various moments of historical catastrophe in various European colonies during the latter years of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth.<sup>1</sup> This historical epoch with which the Lady V. is (perhaps) implicated centres upon the period when European imperialism had reached its apogee and was now faced with the prospect of surrendering its hegemony to various colonies' indigenous populations. Throughout her "progress" through this historical period, the Lady V. undergoes a series of metamorphoses, becoming increasingly inanimate with each "new" persona. Metamorphosing from the young English *ingenue* Victoria Wren at the scene of the Fashoda crisis, she reappears as Vera Meroving in the episode entitled "Mondaugen's

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<sup>1</sup> Two such instances of catastrophe addressed in *V.* are the 1898 Fashoda crisis in Egypt and the Herero rebellion in German-occupied South-West Africa in 1922.

Story” – set in South-West Africa – her left eye now replaced by a mechanical eye which also contains a watch. By the final V.-history, “Confessions of Fausto Maijstraal”, set during the siege of Malta during World War Two, the Lady V.’s body has been replaced entirely by inanimate objects, and she is disassembled by Maltese children during an air raid.

According to the logic of the V.-plot, the increasing inanimateness of the Lady V. is a metaphor for the “progress” of Western civilisation. The V.-plot stands as a kind of diagnostic of the Western imperial enterprise. In short, Western society has entered a period of decadence and decline. Through the ruthless scramble for wealth via the acquisition of new territories, and the oppression of the territories’ indigenous populations, the imperial enterprise is presented as a “swan song” for Western culture. Western civilisation has embraced a death-seeking impulse, and the increasing inanimateness of the Lady V. is a metaphor for this. Pynchon also employs the figure of the Lady V. to allude to the Virgin Mary of Christianity, and to the great Goddess in Richard Graves’s *The White Goddess*. The increasing inanimateness of the Lady V. throughout her peregrinations mark her out as a figure whose eventual death in the novel signifies a loss of the values epitomised by such “archetypal” figures in Western culture. The Lady V. can also be linked with the metaphor of the dynamo in the American historian Henry Adams’ *The Education*, the metaphor of the Lady V./dynamo functioning as a kind of working embodiment for Adams’ model of the more complex makeup of contemporary Western society compared with the medieval society when conceived as a unified, Christian cultural monad.

The dynamo generators Adams witnessed at the Paris exposition of 1900 (and which he discusses in the chapter “The Dynamo and the Virgin” in the *Education*) provide a metaphor for the energy driving Western culture which had become, in the twentieth century, a polyvalent “multiverse”, superseding a simpler, “unified” Christian culture, symbolised by Adams’ concept of the “Virgin”. Joseph Slade writes of the V.-plot:

Whether V. be the eternal feminine of Goethe or the great Goddess of Graves, symptom or cause of the chaos of the twentieth century, blighter or ghastly redeemer of the waste land, Western civilization ... is caught in a dying fall. Randomly dispersed natural energies, creeping inanimateness, rampant colonialism and racism, expiring romanticism, perverted sexuality, degenerate politics and holocaustic wars have turned the western world into a waste land. Somehow, Herbert Stencil feels, V. explains what has been happening, how “the avalanche of unknown forces” started, and he traces her spoor across three continents, a small figure on an enormous global landscape chasing what may be a will-o’-the-wisp.

(Slade 1974, p. 53)

The V.-plot possibly manifests itself in the present day as a kind of symptom of degeneracy, whereby humanity has sublimated all desire into a fetishistic love of inanimate objects. Benny Profane appears to encounter such symptoms during his wanderings around America, and in his meetings with figures such as the MG-obsessed Rachel Owlglass. If taken as a symptom of contemporary Western culture in *V.*, this worship of inanimate objects sits in broad parallel to the modernist convention of twentieth-century culture as devoid of all meaningful values. One need only think of the way in which Nick Carraway uses the figure of Gatsby to write an elegy for an American culture he perceives as having lost all meaningful values to understand this parallel between the V.-plot and this particular concern in modernist literature generally.

Stencil’s attempt to posit the V.-plot as a historical totality turns upon his capacity to prove its existence. It is no accident that when Stencil makes his first appearance in the novel, an intervening authorial interjection by “Pynchon” somewhat ironically describes Stencil thus: “Born in 1901, the year Queen Victoria died, Stencil was in time to be the

century's child" (Pynchon 1995, p. 52). This moment of intervening commentary hints at the almost pathological way Stencil situates himself in the narrative as nothing less than the voice of this century-wide V.-plot. Stencil seeks to understand the historical and social character of contemporary America (1955-56) as exhibiting the symptoms of the V.-plot. For Stencil, the plot both positions and defines twentieth-century history and locates America as a nation whose society exhibits the pathologising consequences of this history. America, in short, has become a nation whose citizens have apparently fetishised desire. Through their worship of the inanimate, in an era when the Adamsian energies have replaced the unity of medieval Christendom with a decadent, meaningless social multiverse, America has become (as Joseph Slade suggests) a contemporary waste land devoid of meaningful values. However, as will be argued below, and as the "omniscient" narrative interjections in the novel repeatedly make clear, Stencil's self-definition as the century's child, and the V.-plot as a century-old historical totality, is something that the novel ultimately satirises.

In referring to Pynchon's "omniscient" narrative viewpoint in *V.*, it is necessary to draw a distinction between the omniscient convention of the author as practiced by the movement of nineteenth century literary realism and the omniscient author of Pynchon's time. The nineteenth century model of the omniscient author reflects many of the functional precepts of the expressivist author model of the same period. In contrast to this, the omniscient viewpoint convention of the twentieth century, as practiced by Pynchon in *V.*, does not operate from the assumption that the omniscient viewpoint is a formalist function. Instead, the author is an explicitly contextual function that does not transcend the material contexts of the literary artefact and, as a result of this, does not operate from a standpoint of perceived ideological innocence. The omniscient author convention is no

longer defined according to terms which seek to install – or sacralise – the author as a “Creator-God” who has brought into being a literary artefact from some formalist standpoint assumed to transcend the partial and mutable conditions of society and culture. In a way, the unconscious contextual position of James’s omniscient narrative viewpoint anticipates Pynchon, for it signals a moment in nineteenth-century literary history when the presumed “self-evidence” of the expressivist-cum-omniscient author convention is questioned. Thus the omniscient narrative viewpoint in *V.* serves to render partial any position of meaning, recognising as it does the ideologically-complicit function of the author. Consequently, narrative viewpoint in Pynchon’s novel does not situate the author “Thomas Pynchon” as some formalist Creator-God. Rather, narrative viewpoint is precisely that – a viewpoint; it is an “alter-ego” whose production of narrative and meaning throughout the text in question discredits any idea that a coherent, monological position of “author intention” can be apprehended in all its naked, extra-contextual self-evidence.

The origins of Stencil’s quest for the V.-plot and its avatar, the Lady V., lie in the diaries that Stencil receives from his father, the English foreign affairs diplomat, Sidney Stencil. Stencil Jnr receives these diaries on achieving his majority in 1922, some three years after Stencil Snr has died in mysterious circumstances during the June uprisings in Malta. The actual year in which Stencil comes into possession of the diaries is significant, for as John Dugdale points out, this year “is the *Annus Mirabilis* of Modernism” (Dugdale 1990, p. 77). Stencil Jnr replays and parodies some of the specific narrative strategies embraced by high modernism – of *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses*, for example – for, although he attempts to position the V.-plot according to objectivist, realist ideas of narrative and narrative representation, his attempts to do so are problematised and ironised by the

contingent, perspectival nature of his viewpoint. Stencil is, at least in part, somewhat bemusedly aware of this. When we first encounter him we immediately learn that he always refers to himself in the third person. Like Profane, he decentres himself, but in this case in an attempt to position himself in relation to a specific pattern (that is, Lady V. and the V.-histories he assembles), instead of eliding (as Profane does) any sort of pattern altogether. In a sense, Stencil too pathologises himself as an interpreting subject. A flashback to 1946, where Stencil Jnr is in Mallorca talking with Margravine di Chiave, hints at Stencil's ironic viewpoint regarding his quest for the Lady V.:

MARG: Then you must leave?

STEN: Stencil must be in Lucerne before the week is out.

MARG: I dislike preliminary activity.

STEN: It isn't espionage.

(Stencil laughs, watching the twilight.)

MARG: You are so close.

STEN: To whom? Margravine, not even to himself. This place, this island: all his life he's done nothing but hop from island to island. Is that a reason? Does there have to be a reason? Shall he tell you, he works for no Whitehall, none conceivable unless, ha, ha, the network of white halls in his own brain: these featureless corridors he keeps swept clean and correct for occasional visiting agents. Envoys from the zones of the human crucified, the fabled districts of human love. But in whose employ? Not his own: it would be lunacy, the lunacy of any self-appointed prophet....

(Pynchon 1995, p. 53)

Every remark he makes regarding his quest for the Lady V. is an exercise in self-irony. His reference to Whitehall alludes to his father's career as an English diplomat, a career which, when he arrived in Malta in 1919, compelled him to make his single enigmatic reference to the Lady V. in one of his diaries. Stencil Jnr's own admission that, rather than working for Whitehall like his father, he works for, "ha, ha, the network of white halls in his own brain", exemplifies one aspect of his predicament. His brain is the one place in which he can, at times, believe that the Lady V. actually exists. The evidence he accrues via the massive V.-histories he stumbles upon, and the perhaps pathologised, decadent present-day milieu he inhabits, remain palpably, frustratingly ambiguous. Yet the V.-plot



cannot simply be dismissed as Stencil's solipsism, if only because his quest for the V.-plot also haunts him in a way that he can neither discount nor verify as ultimately existing outside his own perspective. Hence his concluding point in the dialogue above: "But in whose employ? Not his own: it would be lunacy, the lunacy of any self-appointed prophet". There is an inescapable sense, therefore, that Stencil Jnr, rather than simply searching for the V.-plot, is also driven by it. His reference to himself exclusively in the third person can be seen as symptomatic of the way his quest for the Lady V. has decentred him. Stencil's quest for the Lady V., in short, frustrates all of his attempts to situate the career of the Lady V. in a way that reflects his objectivist approach to the writing of history. The Lady V. may well exist, but she cannot be posited as the basis of a universalising historical totality.

Significantly, Stencil's particular hermeneutic strategy with regard to the V.-plot can be located within a wider allusive context, a context which enables a critique to be effected with regard to Stencil. In chapter three of the novel, "In which Stencil, a quick-change artist, does eight impersonations", Pynchon presents us with an external narrative aside which reveals another important detail:

Herbert Stencil, like small children at a certain age and Henry Adams in the *Education*, as well as assorted aristocrats since time out of mind, always referred to himself in the third person. This helped 'Stencil' appear as only one among a repertoire of identities. 'Forcible dislocation of personality' was what he called the general technique, which is not exactly the same as 'seeing the other person's point of view'; for it involved, say, wearing clothes that Stencil wouldn't be caught dead in, eating foods that would have made Stencil gag, living in unfamiliar digs, frequenting bars and cafes of a non-Stencilian character; all this for weeks on end; and why? To keep Stencil in his place: that is, in the third person.

(Pynchon 1995, p. 62)

The significant reference here is to Henry Adams: historian, novelist, and man of letters. It is necessary to pursue the allusion to Adams somewhat carefully here insofar as it sheds light on Pynchon's representation of authorship. The crucial point is that Stencil Jnr's

decentred viewpoint has a significant precursor in Adams' employment of a decentred narrative viewpoint in his most famous work, *The Education of Henry Adams*. In the cases of both Stencil Jnr and Adams, their decentred viewpoints reflect the fact that neither Stencil nor Adams is able to situate himself as a privileged origin and centre of understanding. Adams (1838-1918) hailed from a distinguished ancestry who made a name for itself in American public life. His great-grandfather, John Quincy Adams, was in fact the sixth President of the United States (Adams 1931, p. v). By the time Henry Adams reached adulthood, however, the family's status as a prominent force in both national politics and international diplomacy was, as Henry Adams saw it at least, on the wane. This was so much the case that Adams' apparent unsuitability to the altered priorities of the American political environment after the end of the Civil War in the 1870s was cause, he felt, for an acknowledgement of personal failure (Adams 1931, p. vii).

This was perhaps both premature and unnecessarily self-deprecating. Adams took up a Professorship in History at Harvard in 1871, became editor of the *North American Review*, wrote a definitive biography on the American Statesman Edward Gallatin, two novels – *Democracy* and *Esther* – and a nine-volume history of the administrations of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison (Adams 1931, p. vii). However, Adams is best remembered as the author of two other works of history: *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres*, (privately published by Adams himself in 1904); and his more famous *The Education of Henry Adams*, privately printed for friends in an edition of one hundred copies in 1907, then publically printed after Adams' death in 1918. The book very quickly became a national bestseller (Adams 1931, p. v).

Both *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres* and the *Education* were distinguished in the early twentieth century because of the historical theories Adams employed in each book. In *Mont-Saint-Michel*, as the title hints, Adams attempts to show that the eleventh to the twelfth centuries marked a time in which “man had attained to the highest level of unity” (Adams 1931, p. viii). He accordingly uses the culture, beliefs, and history associated with the cathedrals Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres as a springboard for this discussion. Thus, he writes of Mont-Saint-Michel:

Church and State, Soul and Body, God and Man, are all one at Mont-Saint-Michel, and the business of all is to fight, each in his own way, or stand guard for each other. Neither Church nor State is intellectual, or learned, or even strict in dogma. Here we do not feel the trinity at all; the Virgin but little; Christ hardly more; we feel only the Archangel and the unity of God. We have little logic here, and simple faith, but we have energy.

(Adams 1986, p. 13)

“Energy” is in fact a key Adamsian term, taken up more overtly in the *Education*, and also by Pynchon. While *Mont-Saint-Michel* is concerned to delineate a theory of historical unity, the *Education* delineates precisely the opposite. The book concerns Adams’ “historical” education, his endeavour to comprehend the forces of history throughout his own lifetime, when it seemed to him that new energies had rendered defunct the ostensible “unity” of the epoch of Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres, replacing it with an era characterised by multiplicity.

Adams’ book concerns his intellectual maturation during a period where medieval notions of cultural and social hegemony were no longer applicable, where “[a]s an unfortunate result [of the loss of this medieval unity] the twentieth century finds few recent guides to avoid, or to follow” (Adams 1931, p. ix). At one level, this is an autobiography through which Adams attempts to explain his “self-teaching” (Adams 1931, p. ix) in an epoch in which unitary conceptions of the self were at least problematic – in many ways even

obsolete. The *Education* is thus a sort of epitaph for what might be termed “classical modern” conceptions of rationality and of the Ego. Adams’ “education” stands in marked contrast to that of liberal Romantic thinkers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose own autobiography, *Confessions*, sought to locate the author’s self as a centre of expression and cognitive understanding. As a liberal thinker whose thought was central to the era of modernity in the eighteenth century in which he lived, Rousseau was able to privilege the individual subject as a foundational grounding for understanding that seemed impossible for Adams in his own time. Individual consciousness – the Cartesian ego – had lost its position as a privileged, centred basis of understanding.

It is not necessarily surprising then that, in his autobiography, Henry Adams refers to himself in an ironising, decentring third person (as does Herbert Stencil much later in *V.*). It is almost inevitable that Adams’ viewpoint in the *Education* is decentred because Adams is attempting to situate this viewpoint within a historical period he understands as multiplicitous:

Under the shadow of Boston State House, turning its back on the house of John Hancock, the little passage called Hancock Avenue runs, or ran, from Beacon Street, skirting the State Grounds, to Mount Vernon Street, on the summit of Beacon Hill; and there, in the third house below Mount Vernon Place, on February 16, 1838, a child was born, and christened later by his uncle, the minister of the First Church after the tenets of Boston Unitarianism, as Henry Brooks Adams.

(Adams 1931, p. 3)

The opening of the first chapter in his autobiography introduces Adams’ theme of decentredness. Adams himself is decentred by a cultural milieu which, although privileged, left him feeling unequipped to face the transformations of the next century. The institutions and icons of provincial Boston society are inscribed in the very circumstances of his birth, and as such they are “speaking” him from the moment he takes his first breaths. This is a basic premise driving Adams’ autobiography; born in a

privileged, traditional Unitarian society whose cultural makeup harked back to the eighteenth century, Adams felt that he was ultimately acculturated according to precepts which had no applicability to the altered cultural conditions in America during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Every allusion in the above passage is thus both deliberate and ironic. Adams declares his position by observing that he was not simply born beneath the (new) State House, but that he was born in its shadow.<sup>2</sup> The State House “turning its back” on the House of John Hancock symbolises Adams’ conviction that the course taken by liberal democracy in nineteenth-century America had effectively debased the ideals of the American War of Independence. Adams’ allusion to his uncle and the First Church completes the equation, since Massachusetts, and in particular Boston, was one of the first regions in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America in which Unitarianism was successfully established. More to the point, the umbrage Adams later took against his Unitarian upbringing sprang from his appalled realisation that both the establishment Unitarian clergy, and much of its brethren, happily believed that their confident religious convictions held the key to ethical and philosophical understanding, that their simplistic cosmology had somehow “solved the universe” (Adams 1931, p. 34). Capping his scepticism was Adams’ inability to convince himself that any sort of deity, let alone a Christian one, actually existed in the first place (Adams 1931, p. 34).

The essential point of Adams’ irony, of course, is that he not only turns it upon the society in which he grew up, but also turns it upon himself. This critique is not simply a reaction against a provincial outlook, but the assumption of propriety motivating this position.

Adams' contemporaries behaved as though their perspective quite unproblematically elucidated American society and its place in the world. In a way, Adams' Boston heritage in the *Education* rehearses the world view he expounded upon in *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres*, with the qualification that this was now the nineteenth century and the medieval had become the modern. The point of Adams' irony is that he had been fashioned by a particular environment that had rendered him effectively excess to its purposes. A pervasive nostalgia seems to colour Adams' position, so much so that he can perhaps be seen as comically self-aggrandising, writing a sort of pre-emptive, high modernist elegy for some lost, prelapsarian world-view. His nostalgia, his elagaic positioning of himself within a superseded cultural and social ethos, can also be seen as resulting from his conviction that the American ethos, as an exercise in modern democracy, was bunk.

Referring to himself throughout the *Education* in the third rather than first person, and thus decentring himself in the narrative, Adams situates himself as a person born out of his time. As George Hochfield argues, Adams derived from a Puritan and eighteenth-century America for which the nineteenth century, in the wake of the Civil War, no longer had any use (Hochfield 1962, p. 118). Adams' sense of failure thus stemmed in part from this upbringing, which included a notion of modern democracy and social progress which believed that the democratic process, guided by God and the advances of science, would bring about a perfect society. Because moral law derived from God's law, and human nature worked for good, humankind needed only a correct education to create a perfect society (Adams 1931, p. 33). As Adams himself argued, such a world view, regarded from the standpoint of his years as a boy in the 1850s, meant that, thanks to the nature of his

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<sup>2</sup> The New State House was in fact built in 1895, some decades after Adams' birth; but it nevertheless epitomised the historian's sense of a democratic idea ultimately debased by political developments in the wake of the revolution and, notably, the course of national democracy after the American Civil War.

social inheritance, he stood nearer to the year 1 than the year 1900 (Hochfield 1962, p. 119).

In the *Education*, Adams employs his decentred viewpoint to argue the futility inherent in any attempt to elicit a coherent – or unified – historical picture of his times. As the cathedrals of Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres provided a premise from which he could expound a thesis of history as defined by a principle of unity, so he uses his viewpoint in the *Education* as a sort of prism through which he can refract “the various lights of the contemporary ‘multiverse’” (Hochfield 1962, p. 115). Adams’ central thesis proceeds from the understanding that the unity of Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres is no longer historically applicable, and humankind now lives in an era where the complexity of contemporary existence defies any coherent attempt at systemisation. As Hochfield writes, Adams’ *Education* details his persistent attempts to discover a world view that is systematic, coherent, and able to order existence. Every one of these attempts proved futile:

At every stage of his quest, Adams finds that events and actions and systems of thought fail, upon analysis, to substantiate the meanings to which they lay claim, or that their suppressed meanings are, in fact, illusory. The modern world is not only incoherent but intolerable. ... The pattern of failure is thus a deliberate device by which Henry Adams frustrates “Henry Adams’” quest for meaning.

(Hochfield 1962, p. 121)

Crucial points of comparison can be drawn between this strategy, the pattern of failure that Adams employs in the *Education*, and the strategies Stencil Jnr employs in *V.* in a bid to assemble the *V.*-histories. In drawing a parallel between Henry Adams and Stencil, it is possible to argue that “Pynchon” (or at least the narrative position his author-function foregrounds in the novel) delineates a position whereby Adams’ strategies in the

*Education* can be used to critique Stencil's own attempts to piece together the V.-histories.

As Ronald W. Cooley argues, Adams' position of critique proceeds from his conviction that the attempts by historians to use historical narratives to explain and order human existence is a reductive enterprise, since it uses its materials to distort and simplify human existence in a bid to arrive at a definitive explanation or pattern. Cooley quotes from "The Dynamo and the Virgin (1900)"; at the Great Exposition of 1900 Adams found himself questioning the accepted conventions of historiography:

Historians undertake to arrange sequences – called stories or histories – assuming in silence a relation of cause and effect. ... [Adams] had even published a dozen volumes of American history for no other purpose than to satisfy himself whether, by the severest process of stating, with the least possible comment, such facts as seemed sure, in such order as seemed rigorously consequent, he could fix for a familiar moment a necessary sequence of human movement.

(Adams, in Cooley 1993, p. 316)

As Cooley argues (and as will be discussed below), Adams' assertion of the futility of historical pattern-making stands in marked contrast to Stencil Jnr's attempt to use the materials of the V.-histories to install a coherent historical totality.

### **The V.-Histories and the Problem of Historical Understanding.**

It is possible to use the way in which Profane's and Stencil's interpretive methodologies are satirised in *V.* as the starting point for a wider critique which not only positions Pynchon's novel as a late modernist artefact, but which also foregrounds some of the ways that *V.* addresses the problem of the author-function. The V.-histories not only interrogate the epistemological claims of modernism – specifically the "high modernism" of writers like Eliot and Joyce – but also function as the means by which this critique is able to problematise some of the hegemonic claims of Western culture more generally.



The problematisation by the V.-histories of the assumption of cultural hegemony that went hand in hand with Western imperialism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, coupled with the way that the author-function in *V.* eschews any similar claim to interpretive and narrative hegemony, sets up some of the basic terms of the argument.

The V.-histories are both an assemblage of narratives which interrogate the claims to epistemological hegemony of Anglo-American high modernism, and a set of narratives which interrogates the question of political hegemony throughout the period of Western imperialism. The narratological makeup of the V.-histories serves to foreground some of the questions raised by the different interpretive methodologies employed by Profane and Stencil Jnr. Profane, moving through New York in 1956, proceeds from the assumption that contemporary reality is completely meaningless – that it is devoid of any kind of sense-making narrative – and Stencil, in assembling his V.-histories, works from the premise that reality is able to yield up a single, all-embracing epistemological totality. Their respective encounters with the V.-plot have the effect of qualifying both their interpretive positions. This prepares the ground for a critique of Western hegemony, extending through high modernism, nineteenth- and twentieth-century imperialism, and the modern, expressionist convention of the author-function.

As Cooley argues, the V.-plot, taken at face value – that is, from an interpretive position which does not seek to problematise it as a given, objectively verifiable historical totality – critiques the era of English and European capitalist imperialism and colonisation at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The V.-histories assembled by Stencil Jnr are varied in their settings, but trace the journey of the Lady V. as a narrative focused

around the subject of Western imperialism and colonisation. In deploying the V.-histories in this way, Pynchon presents a theory, or series of interlocking theories, of empire and of history (Cooley 1993, p. 309) which draw upon the psychoanalytic criticism of culture by Norman O. Brown and Denis de Rougemont. De Rougemont argues, for example, that war, nationalism, imperialism, class struggle, and totalitarianism are driven by a “narcissistic and death-seeking erotic impulse” (Cooley 1993, p. 309), an impulse which is replicated throughout the V.-histories in the form of imperialism as a perceived psychiatric disorder. This death-seeking impulse, or disorder, “the conquest of the animate by the inanimate, proceeds, in *V.*, along fairly clear lines, from object-love, to fetishism and sadism, and finally to self-destruction” (Cooley 1993, p. 309). Consequently, the V.-histories track a process whereby the “disease” of imperialism and empire evidences the conquest of the animate by the inanimate. The imperialist enterprise is first depicted as pathologising humanity, sacrificing human relationships and lives (Cooley 1993, pp. 309-10), and progressing towards a phase where the V.-history/disease is characterised by “sadism and fetishism, the transformation of humans into objects” (Cooley 1993, p. 310), and culminating in a final phase when life surrenders wholly to the inanimate and is thus brought to an end (Cooley 1993, p. 311).

Examples of this process are presented in the V.-histories. The imperial adventure is satirised as a pathological enterprise in V.-histories such as “She hangs on the western wall” and “Mondaugen’s story”. In “She hangs on the western wall” Captain Hugh Godolphin, an English adventurer who attempted to trek to the North Pole during the middle of winter, describes his adventure, and the bid to use it to glorify the British empire, as madness (Cooley 1993, pp. 309-10). In “Mondaugen’s story” the recollection of the Herero genocide carried out by the German General Lothar von Trotha, in which

German colonisers were ordered to exterminate the native Herero population in South-West Africa, is likened to the Nazi extermination of the Jews in World War Two (Cooley 1993, p. 310). All the V.-histories are shadowed by the mysterious figure of the Lady V., whose disturbing repertoire of metamorphoses gradually render her body entirely inanimate. The V.-plot thus appears driven by a death impulse.

For Cooley, the Lady V.'s progression from animate to inanimate parallels Hannah Arendt's theories of imperialism as well as the psychoanalytic criticism of Brown and de Rougement. Drawing a parallel between V.'s metamorphoses into Vera Meroving in "Mondaugen's story" and Arendt's book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Cooley links the name "Meroving" with Arendt's discussion of the myth of the Frankish (Germanic) descent of the French aristocracy. Quoting from Arendt, Cooley notes that the name, Meroving, is linked with the origins of French racism, most especially a version of the myth propounded by members of the French aristocracy which stated that French aristocrats were surviving sons of the Merovingian dynasty – the "sons of kings" (Cooley 1993, p. 310-11). As a consequence of this descent, French aristocracy could claim to be an elite, a superior race. Cooley argues that the Lady V. embodies precisely these aristocratic ideas (Cooley 1993, p. 311).

Cooley also asserts that Arendt seems to anticipate the theories of Brown and de Rougement in arguing that modern race doctrines in Europe, linked with imperialism and totalitarianism, "outline very clearly the forms of organisation through which humanity could carry the endless process of capital and power accumulation through to its logical end in self destruction" (Arendt, in Cooley 1993, p. 311). The metamorphoses of the Lady

V. can be posited as an example of Arendt's theories, and her death in Malta in 1943 as a final consequence of this death-embracing impulse:

For Pynchon, as for Arendt, self-destruction, union with the inanimate, is the "logical end" of the process, the final stage of the disease. On the individual level this stage is symbolised by V.'s "progression towards inanimateness" ... her incorporation of inanimate objects into her body, and her eventual death by disassembly. ... On the societal level the only equivalent for this can be apocalypse, and it is precisely "those grand conspiracies or foretastes of Armageddon" ... that draw together all the book's historical settings, from Alexandria during the Fashoda crisis of 1898 to Malta during the Suez crisis of 1956.

(Cooley 1993, p. 311)

Brown, de Rougement, and Arendt effectively disarm any claims to propriety the imperial project may assume as a project supposedly grounded upon cognitively "neutral" and "objectivist" ethical and epistemological precepts. As Cooley goes on to argue: the imperial enterprise is a project concerned to "construct and consolidate an imperialist ideology" (Cooley 1993, p. 307). Consequently, any historiographic approach which might seek to privilege the imperial enterprise as an objectivist totality effectively elides its ideological, Eurocentric makeup. Objectivising representations of the imperial narrative are thus foregrounded by Brown and de Rougement – and especially by Arendt – as representations which, while seeking to encode the imperial narrative as a given, in fact propagandise and naturalise its drive to assert hegemony. Henry Adams' work can also be linked with these ideas. His diagnosis of twentieth-century Western culture as a one whose multiple narratives and energies have rendered any monocentric model of cultural and epistemological representation as both distorting and reductive exemplifies the argument that a centric, objectivist interpretation of the imperial enterprise is also distorting and reductive.

Whether this narrative of imperialism, totalitarianism, and increasing inanimateness culminating in death/apocalypse in *V.* be accepted as a given historical narrative, or whether such claims to objective, authoritative truth-status should be seen as more

problematic, is central to the narrative approach in Pynchon's novel. Moreover, this question concerning how the V.-plot functions in *V.* is linked with the ways it is *mediated* as a mode of representation. The V.-plot is not represented to the reader in any direct, self-evident fashion; it is represented via the mediating viewpoints of Profane and Stencil Jnr. The V.-histories themselves come into Stencil's possession in the form of dossiers, diaries, and second-hand accounts which Stencil distorts and refashions (that is, which he "Stencilises") in his determined attempts to construct a coherent historical narrative. The V.-plot, in a sense, has no apprehendable existence outside the extant narratives which, taken together, bring it into being. In addition, the V.-plot subverts the interpretive methodologies employed by Profane and Stencil in their bid to rationalise both themselves and the V.-plot in relation to the world.

As a self-declared *schlemihl*, Profane defines his personal existence as devoid of any meaning, yet repeatedly encounters situations evidencing the existence of the V.-plot which undermine that nihilistic outlook. Profane's involvement with Rachel Owlglass is a case in point. As with most of his social involvements in the novel, Profane first encounters Rachel by chance, when she almost runs him down in her MG (Pynchon 1995, p. 23). Profane is happy to accept that their ensuing friendship, initiated by chance, continues largely by chance rather than anything that evidences conscious commitment (Pynchon 1995, pp. 26-7). Nevertheless, having (despite his best intentions) fallen in love with Rachel, he unexpectedly bears witness to an incident which hints at the possible existence of the V.-plot on the last night he sees her:

Profane wandered up by Rachel's cabin again. He heard splashing and gurgling from the courtyard in back and walked around to investigate. There she was washing her car. In the middle of the night yet. Moreover, she was talking to it.

"You beautiful stud," he heard her say, "I love to touch you. . . . Do you know what I feel when we're out on the road? Alone? Just us?" She was running the sponge caressingly over its front bumper. "Your funny responses, darling, that I know so well. The way your brakes pull a little to the left, the way you start to shudder around 5000 rpm when you're excited. And you

burn oil when you're mad at me, don't you? I know." There was none of your madness in her voice; it might have been a school-girl's game, though still, he admitted, quaint. "We'll always be together," running a chamois over the hood, "and you needn't worry about that black Buick we passed on the road today. Ugh: fat, greasy Mafia car. I expected to see a body come flying out the back door, didn't you? Besides, you're so angular and proper – English and tweedy – and oh, so Ivy that I couldn't ever leave you, dear."

(Pynchon 1995, pp. 28-9)

This is not the first time Profane encounters hints of the V.-plot, of fetishistic behaviour towards inanimate objects. There are also the examples of Da Conho and his obsession with a .30 calibre machine gun (Pynchon 1995, pp. 22-3), Pig Bodine with his Harley Davidson (Pynchon 1995, pp. 22-3), and a previous night when Rachel declares that the inanimate rocks of the quarry are all the world is (Pynchon 1995, p. 26). This narrative, dependent on or framed by the V.-plot, subverts Profane's nihilistic conception of reality and the world as entirely founded upon contingency and accident, upon meaningless absurdism. The same is true of Stencil Jnr and his assembling of the five V.-histories. Occupying a position precisely opposite to Profane, Stencil's quest to find the V.-histories proceeds from his assumption that meaning in the world can be ordered and comprehended according to a single, objective, all-embracing viewpoint. Consequently, in gathering the V.-histories together, he attempts to order them in so that they serve as the basis for his "objective", self-evident historical narrative. Stencil Jnr thus attempts to use the V.-histories as *proof* of the existence of the V.-plot, as proof of the novel's representation of the Western imperialist enterprise as a psychological disorder. Thus Stencil seeks to posit the V.-plot as a narrative which evidences Brown's, de Rougement's, and Arendt's hypotheses of fetishism and a narcissistic death impulse and their resultant surrender of human life-forces to inanimateness and apocalypse.

However, Stencil is of course unable to unequivocally prove the existence of the V.-plot. He is unable to objectify it. In his almost pathological endeavour to use it to construct an objective historical narrative, he has to de-centre himself as a discrete subject, to position himself in the third person as “he who looks for V.” (Pynchon 1995, p. 226). Stencil ultimately demonstrates the absurdism inherent in asserting a wholly opposite world view to Profane’s by seeking to prove that reality can be ordered according to wholly objective, centric terms. As the V.-plot subverts Profane’s absurdist outlook, so too it subverts Stencil Jnr’s objectivist outlook. Stencil’s dilemma is emphasised not only by his inability to prove or disprove the existence of the V.-plot, but also by the repeated authorial interjections in *V.* which satirise his attempts to use the V.-histories to install an objective historical narrative and remind us of the way he distorts, fills out, and reinvents the histories he uncovers.

Although the opposite polarities of Profane’s and Stencil’s world-making methodologies are satirised in *V.*, their respective encounters with the V.-plot also illustrate how any world-constructing hypothesis is mediated by the ineluctable modalities of time, temporality, and narrative. The perception of a narrative, in short, is a condition of human existence within their temporality. Narrative can be problematised and questioned, but, because it is a process that intrinsically mediates human comprehension and action in the world, it can never be elided. Human comprehension is perpetually imbricated within the temporal, world-making propensities of narrative. Profane’s and Stencil’s nihilistic and totalising positions are satirised by the V.-plot, but only in the sense that their positions are reoriented in relation to another, alternative narrative methodology. Profane’s attempt to reject any sort of world/sense-making modality is undermined by his problematic glimpses of the V.-plot in the present day, with the effect that he *must* reckon with a

world/sense-making narrative. On the other hand, Stencil Jnr's objectivist, totalising world-making model is repositioned according to terms which subvert its monological assumptions of self-evidence and universality.

This ultimately provides the reader with a rationale that explains the way the V.-plot operates by interrogating questions of interpretation and narrative functionality. In satirising Profane's and Stencil's interpretive methodologies, the question of narrative and narrative understanding is readdressed rather than thrown out altogether. This alternative narrative model more critically engages with the problems inherent in constructing models of historical and social process. In doing this, *V.* is also positioned as a political artefact which critiques Western imperialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the pervasive models of culture and hegemony which have driven this enterprise. Pynchon's novel denaturalises the historical narratives which have cemented Western society as a dominant hegemony, and foregrounds the ideological and political realities that an "objective", "universalist" representation of the imperialist enterprise has elided. At the heart of this critique lies a reappraisal of the conception, function, and politics of narrative as a mode which (as will be argued later in this chapter) both mediates and lays down the possibilities and limits of any act of interpretation.

### **V. as a Work of Late Modernism.**

Problems of understanding, interpretation, and narrative are implicitly linked in Pynchon's novel with a specific critique of modernism. Pynchon's novel can be broadly situated as a work of late modernism, reflecting as this does the way the V.-histories allude to and comment upon some of the preoccupations, both technical and thematic, characteristic of the modernist canon. Brian McHale argues that Stencil Jnr's quest for the



Lady V. “takes the form of an epistemological quest, a detective story like those of Conrad, James, or Faulkner, but blown up to gargantuan proportions” (McHale 1987, p. 21). McHale goes on to argue that some of the V.-histories are stylised imitations of characteristic modernist strategies:

In one chapter, for instance (Ch. 3), he defracts his espionage melodrama through the extremely limited perspectives of no fewer than seven supranumary characters, climaxing with the limit-case of perspectivism, the so-called “camera eye” (a favourite of typologists of point-of-view, but rare almost to the point of nonexistence in actual practice). The point is driven home more forcibly when one realizes that Pynchon had originally narrated this same spy-thriller, then called “Under the Rose” (1961), from a unitary, omniscient point of view, only later recasting it, using this perversely overelaborate perspectivist technique, for inclusion in *V*. In another chapter (Ch. 9) we get a tale of imperialist savagery from the heart of African darkness, employing a Conradian unreliable narration at two removes; in yet another (Ch. 11), a Proustian first-person memoir displaying the vagaries and instability of selfhood, studded with self-conscious allusions to Eliot’s high-modernist poetry.

(McHale 1987, pp. 21-2)

Because the V.-histories are structured around the allusive redeployment of narrative techniques pioneered by modernist fiction, McHale describes *V*. as a work of “stylised” modernism (McHale 1987, p. 21), as opposed to an overt parody of modernism and modernist forms. For McHale, this “stylisation” still works within the broad formal conventions laid down by modernism. In presenting stylisations of various modernist narrative techniques, such as camera eye perspectivism and Proustian representations of time and consciousness, the V.-histories thus self-consciously engage with the conventions of a modernist poetics. However, although the V.-histories are allusively located as stylisations of modernism, they do not simply mimic or uncritically reproduce the general forms of the genre. As a work of *late* modernism, published in 1963, *V*. both looks back to the period between the two world wars when modernist art occupied a dominant position in Western culture, and, in announcing the supersession of this hegemony, anticipates the emergence throughout the 1960s of postmodernist art and culture. As a work of late modernism, *V*. can be positioned upon the cusp of cultural transformation. Modernist techniques, and a modernist poetics, are deployed throughout

*V.* not only to effect a critique of the forms, but also to contextualise – or bracket – a formal modernist poetics that might otherwise be uncritically taken as a given. Such an approach in *V.* can be seen to denaturalise the conventions of modernism in the same general way that the imperialist enterprise is denaturalised.

In describing Pynchon’s novel as a work of stylised modernism, McHale acknowledges *V.* as a critique of a modernist poetics. He locates *V.* relative to a specific modernist/postmodernist divide, specifically positioning modernism as operating according to an “epistemological” dominant and postmodernism according to an “ontological” dominant (McHale 1987, pp. 9-10). For McHale, a modernist text is broadly defined by an epistemological dominant because it is concerned with interrogating questions of knowledge – or knowing. He writes:

[M]odernist fiction deploys strategies which engage and foreground questions such as ... “How can I interpret this world of which I am a part? And what am I in it?” Other typical modernist questions might be added: What is there to be known? Who knows it?; How do they know it, and with what degree of certainty?; How is knowledge transmitted from one knower to another, and with what degree of reliability?; How does the object of knowledge change as it passes from knower to knower?; What are the limits of the knowable?

(McHale 1987, p. 9)

Postmodern fiction, on the other hand, is positioned by an ontological dominant:

[P]ostmodern fiction deploys strategies which engage and foreground questions [that are] post-cognitive: “Which world is this? What is to be done with it? Which of my selves is to do it?” ... [T]ypical postmodern questions bear either on the ontology of the literary text itself or on the ontology of the world which it projects, for instance: What is a world?; What kinds of world are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?; What happens when different kinds of world are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?; What is the mode of existence of a text, and what is the mode of existence of the world (of worlds) it projects?; How is a projected world structured?

(McHale 1987, p. 10)

McHale claims that the ontological dominant characteristic of a postmodern literary artefact does not need to be unequivocally defined against modernism’s epistemological dominant. Rather, an ontological dominant results when a modernist literary artefact’s

questions of knowledge and of knowing are pushed towards epistemological uncertainty; pushed so far that they “tip over” to embrace ontological questions (McHale 1987, p. 11). Questions of knowledge in a modernist text are perspectively situated – even rendered indeterminate. Knowledge is thus mediated from the standpoint of conditions that admit, often, of epistemological doubt and uncertainty; this factor accordingly emphasises the primacy of the epistemological dominant in modernist fiction (McHale 1987, p. 9).

As outlined above, McHale argues that Stencil Jnr’s quest for the Lady V. takes the form of a “gargantuan” epistemological quest (McHale 1987, p. 21). The various stylisations of modernist techniques with which Stencil’s quest is structured serves to foreground the modernist perspectivism inherent in his position, a position which is further underlined by the fact that Stencil is unable to prove whether or not the V.-plot exists. Whether Stencil is fabricating the V.-plot or whether it actually exists beyond him remains unresolved even from his own perspective. However, as McHale goes on to argue, the modernist poetics presented in *V.* develop a haemorrhage:

The fantastic alternative reality which Stencil constructs in the course of his quest – a reality incorporating the “lost world” of Vheissu, a clockwork woman fabricated from prosthetic devices, and other gothic or science fiction improbabilities – is all kept safely within the frame of Stencil’s unreliable information and ill-founded or outright fictional speculations. Until the end, that is, when we readers – but *not* Stencil himself – are confronted with apparently reliable, authoritative information tending to confirm the existence of this alternate reality. It is at this point that Pynchon’s text threatens to break through into a postmodern version of the fantastic.

(McHale 1987, p. 22)

The fantastic alternative reality of the V.-plot, and which the epilogue at the end of *V.* (recounting the journey Stencil Snr makes to Malta in 1919) seems to affirm as more than a fantasy, not only appears to prove the existence of the V.-plot but, expressing this fact ontologically rather than epistemologically, presents a world whose fantastical makeup works beyond the precepts laid down by an empirical, objectivist representation of reality. McHale borrows Annie Dillard’s phrase, “unlicensed metaphysics in a tea cup” (McHale

1987, p. 25), to posit a model of postmodernism which grounds understanding within the free-play of unconstrained self-referentiality, as opposed to a metaphysical model of understanding within an empirically verifiable domain of experience. However, the apparent verification of the V.-plot by the epilogue not only anticipates the ontological poetics delineated by McHale's definition of the postmodern, but can also be employed to position Pynchon's novel as a *critique* of a modernist poetics. The verification of the existence of the V.-plot in the epilogue exceeds Stencil Jnr's perspective and foregrounds questions which arise when a non-omniscient, perspectivist point of view is employed as an authoritative ground of available meaning.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Eliot employs the mythical method in *The Waste Land* not only as a means of ordering his narrative, but also to juxtapose what he perceives as a religiously and ethically meaningful antiquity against a present-day milieu where this meaning has been vanquished. Joyce, on the other hand, positions this perceived loss of a meaningful antiquity relative to a "meaningless" present-day environment to at once bracket and denaturalise this "meaningful" antiquity, so as to valorise the relativist world picture that is effected by this bracketing manoeuvre. Eliot thus uses the problem raised by the modernist *agon* to position *The Waste Land* as a sort of elegy for the loss of a conjunction of fact and subjectivity. Individual subjectivity, divorced from an objective world of unequivocally disclosed facts, has become a perceptual prison that neither narrator is able to transcend. Profane's and Stencil's solipsistic individual subjectivity functions as the basis of their understanding of the world, and the world thus becomes a subjective representation of this consciousness rather than an extra-individual objective realm.

In *V.*, Pynchon attempts to overcome the problem of subjectivity, solipsism, and relativism that is symptomatic of the subject/object disjunction instituted by the problem of the *agon*, by showing that a solipsistic position is contextually, not extra-contextually, grounded – grounded in the modernist absurdism of Profane’s viewpoint and the objectivist model of narrative posited by Stencil Jnr – and therefore possesses no valency as an absolute or given. A solipsistic viewpoint does not stand outside the function of narrative. Pynchon recognises the loss in this period of the truth-claims of the extra-subjectively disclosed fact, but, unlike Eliot, does not see this phenomenon as resulting in a solipsistic negation of all meaning *per se*. Eliot’s position reflects his deep interest in the theories of the English philosopher F.H. Bradley. Unlike other nineteenth-century philosophers such as William James, Bradley does not accept that the individual can be posited as an empirical foundation for an objective exterior reality. In this respect his position at least generally parallels that of Pater. Consequently, the position occupied by the individual subject is contingent, unable to serve as the unproblematic ground for the object world. Taking up Levenson once again:

For Bradley, as for James, the world of common-sense reality – the realm of subject and object, concept and category – is only a construction. ... For James this poses no great difficulties; reason is derivative but effective. But Bradley, much like Bergson, sees ordinary rational thought not only as derivative but as a contradictory and unstable derivation. The concepts which we employ to apprehend the world are “a makeshift, a device, a mere practical compromise, most necessary, but in the end most indefensible.”

(Levenson 1984, pp. 177-8)

Bradley defines as the absolute grounding for subjectivity and reality “Feeling”, or “Immediate experience”, a state of experience “prior to any division into self, or self and the world” (Levenson 1984, p. 177). However, because this grounding precedes the identification of self from other, from the external world, it is prior to subjective experience and thus cannot be empirically validated (Bradley 1897, p. 92). Unlike earlier poetry, which posits this contingent position, Eliot’s *The Waste Land* propounds a more

empirical position. He no longer seeks to define meaning according to the primacy of an individual consciousness, but to re-theorise understanding according to a new model of *multiple* points of view. This “theory of points of view” (Levenson 1984, p. 185) recognises the problem of individual subjectivism while avoiding the problem of solipsism that occurs when the idea of the Absolute is relinquished:

It furnished a principle of authority, the system of points of view, without violating empiricist constraints of verifiability. The theory, in short, can be recognized as a legitimate third term, neither egoist nor objectivist.

(Levenson 1984, p. 185)

Understanding in *The Waste Land* proceeds from the merging of one viewpoint into another, from the bracketing and refraction of one position into the wider position occasioned by this merging into the next viewpoint. Eliot’s theory of multiple points of view is thus one solution to the problem of solipsism that arises when primacy is accorded to an individual consciousness. Coupled with Eliot’s attempt to position the subject in relation to a perceived heritage – and a perceived tradition (as of course outlined in “Tradition and the Individual Talent”) – this represents a conservative response to the relativist implications of the subject/object, subject/fact disjunction.

Joyce’s delineation of a mythical method in *Ulysses* constitutes a more progressive response. His method of modernist mythopoeia can still be seen to work according to a process of systemisation, with the consequence that the problems of relativism arising from the concept of the modernist *agon* are resolved. The *agon*, systemised in this manner, thus preserves the world-disclosing dominant which McHale argues underpins modernism. As will be argued in the next section of this chapter, the alignment of *V.* with Joyce’s progressive response to the problem of the *agon*, as opposed to Eliot’s

conservative response, serves to orient the specific manner in which Pynchon's novel of late modernism critiques the modernist genre.

### **V. as a Critique of a High Modernist Poetics.**

The moment in the epilogue of *V.* when the epistemological limitations of Stencil Jnr's viewpoint are transcended and the existence of the *V.*-plot is seemingly proved can be seen as the methodological catalyst which both locates Pynchon's novel as a work of late modernism and delineates some of the general characteristics of its critique of modernism. It is important to emphasise, however, that, in its critique of a modernist poetics, Pynchon's novel does not validate Stencil Jnr's attempt to use the *V.*-histories to posit a totalising model of history and historical understanding. Rather, the strategy employed in *V.* to prove the existence of the *V.*-plot by transcending, or exceeding, Stencil's viewpoint serves to decentre it. Stencil's bid to use the *V.*-plot to totalise historical process is further qualified by the narratological makeup of the *V.*-plot, which itself undermines any possibility that it is a historical totality. Pynchon's novel engages with the alternative approaches of Eliot's and Joyce's "mythical method" by questioning assumptions of cultural coherence and hegemony that are implicit in any claim to a totalising historical and epistemological position. In problematising the *V.*-plot as a totality, Pynchon's novel denaturalises, or at least brackets, modernism's guiding epistemological dominant.

In his essay, "In the Rathouse of History with Thomas Pynchon: Rereading *V.*", Robert Holton argues that the novel's *V.*-histories comprise a critique of Western historiography, documenting what he describes as "the breakdown of white imperialist hegemony" (Holton 1988, p. 324) and interrogating models of historiography which assume a capacity to represent reality objectively. Holton argues that the *V.*-histories explore "the

aporias of epistemology at a series of specific and critical junctures in modern Western history” (Holton 1988, p. 324) in order to represent and perform this breakdown. This process is paralleled by installing in the V.-histories a series of historical narratives that undermine any claims to historical and epistemological objectivity (Holton 1988, pp. 324ff).

Holton examines the way in which each of the V.-histories treat historical narratives. He takes the example of the first V.-history, where the central episode in the chapter (a colonial spy intrigue set during the 1898 Fashoda crisis in Egypt, mediated via eight otherwise unconnected character perspectives) functions as a demonstration of “a non-homogenous interpretation of reality” (Holton 1988, p. 332). The various viewpoints that comprise the first V.-history – those of P. Aieul, an Arab waiter; Yusef, an Arab kitchen worker; Maxwell Rowley-Bugge, a disgraced expatriate English paedophile; Waldetar, a Portuguese Jew working on the railroads in Egypt; Gebrail, an Arab phaeton driver; Girgis, an acrobat and juggler working with a team of Syrians; and Hanne, a barmaid in a German-style beer hall – all offer separate perspectives which, taken together, relate the machinations of a group of spies participating in the intrigue. Because this intrigue is recounted from eight viewpoints rather than just one, any attempt to present a single, centred account of the episode is rendered impossible. This “non-homogenous” episode, conveyed from the perspectives of eight people whose viewpoints do not reflect the hegemonic perspective of their British colonisers, thus demystifies the idea that a historical narrative can be objectively and authoritatively recounted. Each of the eight viewpoints stands in emphatic contrast to the viewpoints of their colonial masters. Even the Englishman Rowley-Bugge, as a paedophile, is an alien in this British colony. As



Holton, quoting S. Rimmon-Kenan, notes, each of the eight historical focalisers in the episode

offer very different perspectives on the events they observe. In more conventional narratives, writes Rimmon-Kenan, the 'norms' of the text in accordance with which the events and characters are evaluated 'are presented through a single dominant perspective, that of the narrator-focalizer'. Pynchon's use of multiple focalizers undermines any single sense of norms as interpretive guides.

(Holton 1988, p. 332)

This non-centric model of history stands in broad comparison with the need to question narrative conventions which seek to install the author as an absolute function and as an illimitable position of semantic origin in a text.

With the exception of chapter fourteen – “V. in love” – all of the V.-histories problematise the convention of an “objectivist” historical narrative. As Holton argues, “She hangs on the western wall”, uses a shifting focaliser to subvert such centrism; “Mondaugen’s story”, as McHale has observed also (McHale 1987, p. 22), is an example of a Conradian unreliable narration presented at two removes (first Mondaugen’s and then Stencil’s viewpoint); and “Confessions of Fausto Maijstraal” is an adaptation of someone-else’s story (Holton 1988, p. 333). In each of these chapters objective historical representation is not only questioned, but also undermined. Holton consequently compares the different ways that Sydney and Herbert Stencil attempt to comprehend and define the historical process. Discussing Stencil Snr’s career as a British foreign diplomat, Holton notes Sydney’s allusion to “Situations” of crisis for the British embassies in the colonies. Such “Situations” arose when embassy personnel found themselves unable to make sense of a colonial crisis they found themselves confronted with, no matter what angle they attempted to view it from. Stencil Snr recalls the strategy the embassy staff developed for such crises. This was “a form of epistemological teamwork” (Holton 1988, p. 330) to try

and make sense of the relevant crisis, whereby more than one mind would apply itself to the situation. However, Stencil discovered that, since the application of more than one viewpoint “tended to form a sum total or complex more mongrel than homogenous”, the crisis would appear to an observer “much like a diagram in four dimensions to an eye conditioned to seeing its world in only three” (Holton 1988, p. 330). Furthermore, Stencil Snr’s view of history as an uncategorisable, heterogenous “Situation” stands in emphatic contrast to his son’s attempts to employ the V.-histories to totalise and hypostasise the historical process.

Along with Cooley, Holton stresses, however, that V.’s questioning of a totalising historical approach to historiography does not mean that any attempt to narrate the historical process should be rejected outright. To reject out of hand all historical narrative whatsoever would mean that Stencil Jnr’s monological approach to historical representation would be superseded by the model of narrative, meaning, and understanding propounded by Benny Profane. As Holton goes on to argue:

Surely there is a middle ground between Profane, who claims to understand and to learn nothing, and Stencil, who seeks to comprehend the totality of experience. ... The point here is neither to hypostasize facts nor to relativize them out of existence. As [Edward] Said contends, ‘Facts do not speak for themselves but require a socially acceptable narrative to absorb, sustain and circulate them.’

(Holton 1988, p. 337)

Holton’s point is that, as Said argues, narrative mediates fact; fact is not evident in itself. Narrative, in a general sense at least, is ineluctable. The “objectivity” of a “factual” position is thus dependent upon a particular narrative; it is not evident in itself. Such a position stands in clear parallel to a general questioning within the fields of poststructuralism and postmodernism of objectivist models of representation and historiography. Foucault’s interrogation in *The Order of Things* of the conventions of representation in the painting “Las Meninas” by the seventeenth-century Spanish artist

Diego Velasquez is a case in point. Foucault shows how the conventions of representation are mediated by the invisible subject that Velasquez, as the artist in the picture, is painting. Both the subject of the painting and the gaze of the spectator sit outside the parameters of the visual field demarcated by the painting, and serves to render explicit the way in which a particular field of representation is a finite and partial (as opposed to universal and innocent) function. The painting “Las Meninas” is mediated by a field of representation whose codes and perspective, located in a position outside the painting, cannot be taken as self-evident. In a sense, then, the perspective of the position that mediates representation in Velasquez’s painting is absent.

In fact, the picture Velasquez is painting is a portrait of King Philip IV and his wife, Mariana (Foucault 1992, p. 9), but the painting is a portrait of Velasquez and the various courtiers who are present *while* Velasquez is painting Philip IV and Mariana – not just a depiction of the king and his wife. Thus the position from which Philip IV, Mariana, and we the spectators view the scene is detached from the visual field represented in the painting and therefore demystified as an innocent function. The field of representation is not a “natural” and therefore “self-evident” extension of the painting. Where the question of historiography is concerned, Foucault’s demystification of “omniscient” and “universal” models of representation is paralleled by the twentieth-century questioning by philosophers such as Michel de Certeau of objectivist models of historiography. De Certeau questions the objectivist model of the historian as a kind of Omniscient-cum-God able to deploy methods of historical representation that yield up a past and definitively claim the veracity of that representation:

It is through a sort of fiction, however, that the historian is accorded this place. In fact, the historians are not agents of the operation for which they are technicians. They do not make history, they can only engage in the making of histories: the partitive usage indicates the role they play in a position that does not belong to them, but without which a new kind of historiographic analysis would not have been possible. (Certeau 1988, p. 8)

As with *V.*, then, representation by the historian does not vanish as a result of their redefinition according to relativist terms. The terms and conditions of representation simply alter.

A conscious historical position – the “facts” of history as mediated by a culturally-specific narrative – can be discerned in *V.*, a position which is bound up with the critique it offers of objectivist representations of narrative. Each of the *V.*-histories addressed by Holton, in documenting the breakdown of Western hegemony in the colonies, use the experience of the colonised nations to satirise the Western imperial enterprise and to address the rights of persecuted colonised populations. Holton notes that the *V.*-histories, though broadly presented in *V.* as fabrications, are all based upon actual historical instances invoking atrocities carried out by imperial powers. He gives as some of his examples the Malta uprising of 1919 and the Battle of Omdurman in Egypt. Holton’s point is that Pynchon represents a version of colonial history elided by the imperial powers in order to foreground the centrism inherent in their colonising viewpoint and the Eurocentric narratives they construct from it. However, although Pynchon’s novel subverts the presumed objectivism of these Eurocentric narratives, and has redress to the elided narratives of the oppressed colonial nations, Holton argues that *V.* does not simply replace a centric imperialist viewpoint by presenting the historical position of the colonies in centric terms instead. Quoting Thomas Schaub, Holton writes:

Pynchon is no dogmatist: any final interpretation – of history or of his story – remains thwarted. As Schaub argues, ‘he is adamantly opposed ... to the creation of any stable, fixed history’. Pynchon’s project is not primarily a reconstruction of history from the point of view of its victims, although elements of this are present in the narrative. Instead he works to decentre the possibility of an established authoritative objective account of historical events.

(Holton 1988, p. 340)

Pynchon's use of stylised modernist narrative and thematic techniques to present the V.-histories is proof enough of this. Thus, "Although the rooms in Pynchon's rathouse exhibit a radical and consistent rereading of European imperialism" (Holton 1988, p. 340), the provisional, as opposed to objective, manner in which they are mediated in Pynchon's novel lends them a partial rather than definitive historical status. Accordingly, Pynchon's V.-histories not only illustrate the way that fact depends upon narrative if it is to be apprehended but also stands as an example of Jean-Francois Lyotard's notion of the "historical sublime", the incapacity of historical narrative to apprehend the "irreducible confusion and ultimately unrepresentable nature of the historical field" (Holton 1988, p. 325). Historiographic narrative, then, is not ineluctable in the sense that it can objectively represent the historical sublime, but that narrative, however provisional in relation to fact, remains the sole means of representation.

Holton's model of historical representation as historical relativism suggests a way to position *V.* as an example of late modernism which critiques high modernism. The decentring of Stencil Jnr's viewpoint with regard to the makeup of the V.-plot as a historical totality undermines any attempt by the reader to align the V.-plot with an objectivist model of historiography. Consequently, to recall Cooley, any bid to position the V.-plot as a narrative which rationalises the plot as a death-seeking totalitarian narrative of empire and colonisation is denaturalised as a reification, even an outright falsification, of a more plural, relativistic narrative. This narrative of conquest, empire, fetishism, and decline into inanimateness – taking place during the latter period of Western colonial hegemony – parallels the elegy for culture that Eliot presents in *The*

*Waste Land*. As Eliot employs the materials of his poem to write a sort of reifying elegy for Western culture, so too (according, at least, to Stencil Jnr) does the V.-plot.

A critique of the V.-plot that focuses on it as a relativist model of historiography does not write an epitaph for a principle of transcendence and cultural homogeneity now lost by Western society. It is possible, then, to argue that the decentred model of culture, history, and historical representation posited by the V.-plot allies Pynchon's epistemological poetics with the relativist, or mythopoeic, model of narrative employed by Joyce in *Ulysses*. However, there are also crucial differences. The V.-plot itself, although a functioning as a "mythical" meta-narrative like the story of *The Odyssey* in *Ulysses*, is not positioned as a given, nor as an epistemologically *grounded* narratological locus, situated prior to any qualifying interpreting manoeuvre which brackets it as a relativist world-view. The ambiguous manner in which Stencil's V.-histories locate the V.-plot position it as relativistic right from the very outset. So, too, the V.-histories' epistemological status, their function as a world-disclosing narrative, is also from the very outset presented in relativist terms. Whereas Joyce brackets a myth-narrative (that is, *The Odyssey*) in order to dislodge and relativise it while maintaining its position as a cultural and historical given, the epilogue in *V.* brackets a narrative (the V.-plot) which is *already* positioned relativistically. The extra-contextual, world-*disclosing* epistemological dominant of a modernist poetics is thus denaturalised, as is the supposed "world-disclosedness" of a general modernist mythopoeic poetics. *V.*, in short, brackets and denaturalises the epistemological dominant that McHale argues positions modernist narrative, thus effecting the epistemological "haemorrhage" which McHale also argues positions *V.* as a late modernist artefact.

Michael Bell describes *V.*, and other examples of Pynchon's fiction, as inhabiting an epistemological world of myth where the world-disclosedness of modernist mythopoeia no longer applies:

Much as Salman Rushdie speaks of a character who has lost his religious faith as having a 'god-shaped hole' inside him, Pynchon presents the historical world as a myth-shaped whole surrounding us all. Yet it is also now, of course, a black hole consisting not of a mere emptiness of meaning, but of a terrifying and unanswerable complex of questions into which all interpretation is sucked.

(Bell 1997, p. 200)

The *V.*-plot, as an example of a relativist historical narrative, seems almost to dissolve the assumption of world-disclosedness that underpins any theory of epistemology. As a consequence of this, the haemorrhaging of the epistemological dominant in *V.* redefines the systematising epistemological approaches which ground modernist conventions of world representation, albeit relativist rather than given, which positions high modernism, making a kind of epistemological "hole" – a "myth-shaped hole" or "black hole" – within which the relativistic generation of narrative rejects systemic representational modes through its denaturalising of the epistemological modernist model. Consequently, the relativistic model of narrative and narrative groundedness is repositioned as a myth-shaped absence.

### **The Operation of the Author-Function in *V.***

The implications of this denaturalising of the modernist epistemological dominant with regard to the nature and operation of the author-function in *V.* are significant. As a consequence of the disjunction of fact and subjectivity, compounded by the denaturalising of any mode of epistemology as a systematic means of world-disclosedness, it can be argued that the expressivist model of the author-function as a locus, an origin-point, of world-disclosedness is denaturalised also. Rather than objectively disclosing the

world, the author-function disappears as a self-evident entity and becomes merely a rhetorical position (or series of positions) that limits and fixes the narrative. Certainly, there is an emphatic narrative voice in *V.*, an “omniscient” narrative viewpoint which intercedes and passes comment in the novel, in much the same manner as the omniscient author-function positions itself in an eighteenth-century novel. For instance, we encounter in *V.* an emphatic author position which repeatedly and openly satirises Stencil Jnr’s attempts to position the *V.*-plot as a historical totality. However, true to the conception of *V.* as a work of late, or stylised, modernism, we find that it is ultimately the stylised modernist techniques which ensure that, in functioning within a perspectivist epistemological frame, understanding in the novel is still mediated by the modernist logic of the narrative.

As the *V.*-plot occupies a myth-shaped hole, so too do the operations of the author-function. The omniscient author/narrator in *V.* mediates narrative from a relativist standpoint which does not assume any extra-discursive position outside the novel. Any idea of the author as a coherent entity motivating the text from an unproblematic, “god-like” position exterior to the text is undermined by the relativist epistemological logic motivating the text. The author-function in *V.* is a sort of textual figure – a de-naturalised reworking or re-presentation of the extra-discursive author of modernity. Such a positionality of the author-function in Pynchon’s novel seems eerily compounded by the absence of Thomas Pynchon as a public figure, his “invisibility” as a living, flesh-and-blood writer. Installed contextually, like the narrative viewpoint in *The Bostonians* and *Gatsby*, the author-function no longer possesses any *givenness*. This denaturalised author-function in Pynchon’s novel parallels the denaturalising in *V.* of the modernist epistemological dominant, and anticipates the emergence of the ontological dominant that



McHale argues defines postmodernism, since the narratives it mediates, stripped of any idea of world-disclosedness, looks toward a “world-making” rather than “world-disclosing” function.

In spite of Pynchon’s absence as a publically known writer, his novels and short stories have spawned a massive critical industry. Biographical details concerning Pynchon are sketchy, and have barely altered since the 1970s. In *Thomas Pynchon*, the first book to be published on the author, Joseph Slade pieces together these fragments of biography, yet at the same time sounds a cautionary note. He points out that Pynchon’s initial enrolment as an engineering student at Cornell University at least partially accounts for the prominence of scientific theory (for example, the Second Law of Thermodynamics) as a theme in his fiction, and that his two years as a conscript in the U.S. Navy would probably have supplied him with both the geographical settings and military background for *V*. However, the use of details of Pynchon’s personal background as an exegetical tool, as the basis for interpretation of his fiction, is necessarily problematic (Slade 1974, pp. 13-14). Because Pynchon is so insubstantial as a public figure, attempts to use the few known facts about his background to explain his fiction (something many critics writing on Pynchon have done) is fraught with difficulties. The unusual example here of Pynchon as an anonymous twentieth-century author who, at least within the confines of the academy, is at the same time as famous as any other living literary figure, demonstrates that Pynchon is an important case in point where Foucault’s model of discourse and the construction of the author is concerned. By using the few sketchy facts of his life as a basis for an author-centred interpretation of his corpus, Pynchon’s invisibility as a public figure demonstrates how “author intention” can be understood *solely* through contemporaneous historical discourses (for example, some of the discourses of science) without the reader or the critic

being in possession of much exact information on the author's life. Edward Mendelson broadly supports this position, arguing that critics who deploy Pynchon's fiction to situate him as a writer who valorises the customary precepts of the expressivist author convention in fact *distort* the way Pynchon operates as an author:

Pynchon's anonymity – like his books – calls into question the familiar modes of modern writing and the styles of modern authorship. Just as his books take little interest in the interior psychological labyrinths and the narrow domestic landscapes which are the fields of his century's fiction, so his minimal personal presence in the literary world, the vacancy he offers to the eye of the camera and the interviewer, deliberately rejects all the varieties of artistic heroism which the romantic and modernist traditions have created. Pynchon's books try to be seriously *there*; while he himself is somewhere else entirely.

(Mendelson 1978, p. 1)

As Mendelson argues, this model of artistic heroism, the aggrandisement of the artist as a privileged domain of self-consciousness reflected a shift in the central orientation of human existence relative to Western art and culture, as practitioners of fiction moved away from constructing stories concerning the “stable generalities of the human race” and focused instead on the “particularity of individual nations and individual minds”

(Mendelson 1978, pp. 1-2):

The romantic era hardly invented self-consciousness, but until then it had been a *problem* only for the exceptional – only for the rare Oedipus or Hamlet whose self-conscious isolation could be watched with pity and fear by audiences who were secure in the knowledge that they would never share it. But the psychological conditions that one era thinks exceptional and horrifying are those that a later era will accept unquestionably as a universal norm. In the romantic age, as in the later age of the psychoanalytic interpretation of human motive and detached scientific interpretation of the social and physical world, self-consciousness has become a universal problem rather than an exceptional one ...

(Mendelson 1978, p. 2)

For Mendelson, Pynchon's reaction as a writer against this tradition of self-consciousness is symptomatic of an exhaustion of many of the era's assumptions (Mendelson 1978, p. 2). In short, this tradition of self-consciousness is no longer equal to the task of coming to grips with the changing conditions of a culture that has gone beyond Romanticism and

modernism, and which is now confronted with the altered cultural conditions of postmodernism. This cultural shift is reflected in Pynchon's fiction by both a return to the use of fictional techniques explicitly rejected by the modernist tradition and, Mendelson argues, a reassessment by Pynchon of the character and function of the literary artist (Mendelson 1978, pp. 3-4). With the writing of *V.*, Pynchon revived many of the literary techniques of the early novels of the eighteenth century – the “loose baggy monsters” disparaged by James in his preface to the New York Edition of *The Tragic Muse*. Pynchon uses the techniques of “omniscient narrators, direct addresses to the audience, characters capable of heightened speech (in the form of a song), authorial judgements on character and situation [and] verse epigraphs” (Mendelson 1978, pp. 2-3); these are the fictional techniques that are the bane of modernism. For Pynchon, the tradition of self-consciousness has begun to exhaust itself, and there are now other tasks for writing to undertake (Mendelson 1978, pp. 2-3).

In adopting a literary approach that differentiates him from this tradition of self-consciousness, Pynchon also rejects the concomitant tradition of artistic heroism; that is, the artist – in the tradition of the expressivist author – is not only valorised as a privileged consciousness, but also effectively *displaces* the concrete world by privileging him or herself in this way:

Pynchon always refuses to take himself seriously – a refusal that, to readers accustomed to claims of high seriousness, seems an offence. But it is an offence only in terms of a decorum that gives the greatest honor to the artistic creations of the centripetal self. Pynchon insists instead that the issues he writes about and the problems his literary manner brings to light are more important than anything he, as a writer, can ever say about them.

(Mendelson 1978, pp. 3-4)

In rejecting this centripetal model of the author in his fiction, Pynchon is in effect rejecting the *expressivist* model of the author. His recovery of some of the narrative

devices of eighteenth-century fiction is a reflection of this. Parading these devices in his fiction, Pynchon underscores their function as devices of literary artifice, taking issue with a more “realistic” approach to fiction and representation which instead orients the fictional form as a strictly mimetic mode. By parading these devices as artifices, Pynchon forestalls any bid by the reader to naturalise – or sacralise – both the fictional mode and its author as an ideologically innocent mode of representation. Pynchon’s fictions, in short, disarm the author-function “Thomas Pynchon” as an expressivism. Rather than foregrounding any conception of himself as a theologically-installed expressivism in his fictions, Pynchon is instead foregrounded as a relative, context-specific term. The author-function “Thomas Pynchon” is only available to the reader as a textually-located position of artifice.

In a further appraisal of the role of Pynchon as an author of his fiction, Mendelson also comments upon the massive critical industry that has developed as a response to Pynchon’s prominence as a writer on the contemporary scene, especially as a response to his most famous novel *Gravity’s Rainbow*. The reputation of this novel is such that

Pynchon

himself has changed his literary status from *author* to *institution*. ... [W]hen an author becomes a monument in his own lifetime, the history of his work becomes entangled with the history of his readers and his culture. *Gravity’s Rainbow* is in part *about* the kinds of institutions which have sprung up in response to its existence. Just as the book traces the proliferation of self-sustaining bureaucracies out of the transience of charismatic heroes and charismatic moments ... so the book itself has already generated institutions that seem entirely innocent of any sense that the book they honor criticizes precisely the kind of honor they offer. ... The Modern Language Association has received petitions urging the maintenance of a continuing seminar on Pynchon; Pynchon Reading and Study Groups meet regularly in New York and elsewhere; indexers, bibliographers, allusion- and lexicon-compilers are all hard at work on their beauracracially defined tasks. Collective enterprises have built themselves up around Pynchon’s work – and this book [i.e. Mendelson’s] is one of them.

(Mendelson 1978, pp. 8-9)

A key point at issue here is that this monumentalisation of Pynchon, his establishment within contemporary academic culture as an institution, has in a profound way been effected in his absence. As an institution, Pynchon is an effect of discourse, a further illustration of the point that an author-centred operation of discourse is possible without the author having to be present in any biographical or expressivist sense. As an author, Pynchon is in a way a consequence of his books, not *vice versa*. As an effective absence in relation to the operations of discourse which valorise the author as an expressivism, the example of the institutionalisation of Pynchon as a front-rank writer is proof in itself of the discursive precepts which in fact install the expressivist convention. The discourses of the author are able to operate almost without the subject of the author, thus explicitly disarming the perceived innocence of the expressivist model.

## 5.

### Enunciating the Text.

#### *Democracy*

(1984)

Call me the author.

(Joan Didion, 1987, p. 12)

In Chapter Four, I argued that *V.* interrogated questions of narrative and narrative viewpoint to denaturalise both literary modernism as a “world-disclosing” poetics still applicable as an aesthetic in relation to the altered conditions of Western culture, and to undermine the expressivist model of the author-function as a trans-contextual position of world-disclosedness. This chapter will employ Joan Didion’s novel *Democracy* to discuss the enunciative model of the author-function which is further differentiated from the modern expressivist model. This differentiation is foreshadowed by the progressive contextualisation of the author-function via the historical trajectory traced in this thesis, and makes possible a properly transformative postmodern poetics.

The argument in this chapter will begin with an analysis of the manner in which narrative viewpoint in *Democracy* is installed, arguing that narrative viewpoint here is deliberately situated as an *intertextual* function. Parallels are drawn between Didion’s novel and the narrative approach in the novels of the nineteenth-century writer Anthony Trollope, and the work of Henry Adams. Didion’s narrative viewpoint is seen to deliberately eschew the perceived “objectivity” and “extra-textuality” of the expressivist author model. Positioned as a partial, provisional interpretive position, narrative viewpoint in Didion’s novel is

situated in an explicitly postmodern sense. By establishing parallels between *Democracy* and postmodern and poststructuralist philosophers such as Jean-Francois Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault, the qualified, provisional character of narrative viewpoint in *Democracy* is thus employed to render problematic the “modern”, “formalist” model of understanding that modernity prioritises.

The status of *Democracy* as a work of postmodernism is then aligned with the question of the enunciative function, as addressed by Emile Benveniste, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Linda Hutcheon. This discussion begins with Derrida’s critique of the Western tradition of metaphysics as an objective basis for a model of knowledge. Linked with the question of the enunciation (as first instituted by Benveniste), this critique is used as the starting point for a discussion of the author-function in relation to the full enunciative function – the interpretive interrelation of the author, text, and reader in the production of meaning – to argue that the tradition of modernity, in seeking to install a metaphysical model of meaning, in fact represses this enunciative function. This discussion of the enunciation seeks to foreground the way in which the author-function in *Democracy* – a convention which foregrounds the act of the enunciation – ultimately makes possible a genuine critique of modernity. Part of this critique includes a discussion of the way in which the question of authorship in Didion’s novel – as an enunciative critique of modernity and liberal humanism – is legitimated in an intertextual rather than expressivist sense, preparing the ground for an exploration of the relation of the author and modernity as a parallel to Foucault’s philosophical position on liberal modernity and the earlier epoch of the European Enlightenment. The chapter concludes with a summary discussion of all four novels which seeks to situate Didion’s novel as a kind of “culminating position” in the historical trajectory argued in this thesis. In foregrounding a

model of the author-function which breaks free of the expressivist model, this trajectory makes possible a workable, because properly engaged, basis of critique of the American national narrative which helped effect the hegemonisation of the expressivist model of the author-function in the first place. Situated as a reflexive rather than formalist function, the enunciative interpretive function foregrounded in *Democracy* makes possible a genuinely transformative interpretive poetics.

### **The Problematic of Viewpoint in *Democracy*.**

First published in 1984, the decade which saw postmodernism move outside the confines of the academy and become a catch-word within mainstream culture, *Democracy* exhibits much of the postmodern artform's self-consciousness. For example, Didion eschews a more conventional narrative approach in this novel for a narrative viewpoint which operates as a metafictional commentary in the novel. In short, narrative viewpoint in *Democracy* overtly reflects upon the role that it plays in both situating itself and operating as the novel's interpretive "voice". Crucially, Didion inserts herself as a character (albeit a minor character) in the novel; she is a character who is not only personally acquainted with the other (fictional) characters in *Democracy*, but has also set herself the task of writing about them. By inserting herself into the narrative as a "factual" author-cum-narrator, Didion's narrative viewpoint is akin to that of a somewhat ironic investigative journalist as she records at length the difficulties and prevarications she experienced in attempting to settle upon a subject for her novel and then successfully "track" it as she attempts to fashion a narrative. Discussing Didion's narrative approach, Mark Royden Winchell writes:

Although this device may appear to make Didion's tale a postmodernist tale about novel writing, it also places her in the decidedly premodernist company of George Eliot and William



Makepeace Thackeray – both of whom inserted themselves as minor characters in their own fiction.

(Winchell 1989, p. 133)

Winchell's alignment of Didion's narrative method in *Democracy* with this nineteenth-century realist tradition is evident in Didion's own narrative approach. *Democracy* effects a marriage between nineteenth-century realism and the twentieth-century aesthetic of postmodernism within which *Democracy* operates, with the result that narrative viewpoint in her novel operates as a metafictional interpretive function. For example, early on, Didion makes a direct allusion to the nineteenth-century novelist, Anthony Trollope:

Call me the author.

*Let the reader be introduced to Joan Didion, upon whose character and doings much will depend of whatever interest these pages may have, as she sits at her writing table in her own house on Welbeck Street.*

So might Trollope begin this novel.

(Didion 1987, p. 12)

Didion's marriage of the modern and the postmodern hinges to some extent upon this allusion to Trollope. The author "Joan Didion" is a continued presence in *Democracy* as Didion introduces herself as both narrator and minor character, who deploys her position to delineate her metafictional authorial perspective. The approach employed here by Didion serves to critique the role (whether modern or postmodern) that the author can play in constructing a novel. Indeed, the marriage Didion effects between realism and postmodernism is a reflection of the way in which she situates herself as a minor character in the narrative and then aligns this approach with that of Trollope. Ruth apRobert's analysis of Trollope's own narrative approach provides an important pointer with regard to the way in which Didion shapes her narrative, as well as suggesting how Didion's critique of the projects of modernity and postmodernity moves beyond the restrictive metaphysical dichotomy.

ApRoberts takes to task a view widely held by other commentators who have criticised Trollope for what they disparage as his “Divided Mind” (apRoberts 1971 p. 35). This refers to Trollope’s apparent inability to inscribe a unified authorial viewpoint in his novels; rather, his viewpoint is always coupled with narratives they regard as nothing more than random colloquies and rambles. ApRoberts describes as “insouciant” commentary on Trollope which understands his insistent, obtruding, and repeatedly contradictory authorial voice as nothing more than a naïve writer who “has no control over his material” (apRoberts 1971, p. 35). ApRoberts argues instead that Trollope’s narrative viewpoint evidences a particular and deliberate “shaping principle” (apRoberts 1971, p. 34), which she defines as “Situation Ethics” (apRoberts 1971, p. 54).<sup>1</sup> She discusses the dramatic form of Trollope’s novel, *The Warden* (the first work in his *Chronicles of Barsetshire*), as an illustration of this shaping principle. For apRoberts, *The Warden*, first published in 1885, represents what she describes as “the start of his oeuvre” (apRoberts 1971, p. 34), and is constructed around a dramatic form that consequently became characteristic of Trollope’s work.

The plot of the *The Warden* revolves around the fortunes of the Reverend Septimus Harding, a clergyman residing in the fictional West English town of Barchester, who is also warden of an almshouse for aged men in the town. Much of Harding’s income comes from a sinecure which stipulated that income from a house, estates, and an almshouse should be provided for both aged wool-carders and a warden (such as Harding) assigned as a supervisor of the almshouse. In the centuries since, the profits from the estates have increased markedly, with the result that the warden’s income has also increased.

Trollope’s novel thus focuses upon an attack on Harding’s sinecure, since during the mid-

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<sup>1</sup> ApRoberts borrows the term “situation ethics” from the theologian Joseph Fletcher, who coined it to formulate a new “pragmatic”, “non-systemic” approach to Christian theology.

Victorian period in which the novel is set, positions such as that held by Harding had been deemed by many social reformers as little more than an abuse of church privilege.

Trollope crafts a dramatic situation from this plot premise which consistently avoids arguing on behalf of either the church establishment or the reformers. His concern, rather, is to “insist on incongruities” (apRoberts 1971, p. 36); the ethical truth of the intrigue is not to be found in either of the two conflicting parties, but in the “sharp juxtaposition of the different perspectives” (apRoberts 1971, p. 36). As apRoberts argues, there may be no doubt at all that the Church sinecure held by Harding has become an abuse of privilege, but this fails to allay the fact that Harding is essentially a good man, devoted to good works, and who indeed ultimately resigns his sinecure when he is attacked by reformers. In addition, Trollope complicates the fortunes of John Bold, one of the reformers opposed to the sinecure, but whose fortunes – including his love for one of Harding’s daughters – in the end compel him to drop his cause, thus complicating his opposition to the clergyman. Accordingly, he loses face in the eyes of the other less principled reformists opposing the sinecure.

As far as the commentators criticising Trollope’s narrative approach are concerned, his seeming inability to come down on either side in the novel is evidence of his compromised, divided mind. But apRoberts argues it is wrong to define Trollope’s novel as some kind of simple, if flawed *Tendezroman*, or novel of social purpose. She writes:

Trollope is not trying to expose an abuse, nor is he trying to demonstrate the beauties of the *status quo*. His art lies in his carefulness to do neither, to avoid the *partis pris*. For it is his delight to regard the juxtaposition of the two *partis*. He has a Divided Mind, and it is no *plight*, but rather a distinct artistic advantage. *The Warden* involves both sides in a beautifully ironic demonstration of incongruities.

(apRoberts 1971, pp. 35-6)

ApRobert's term "Situation Ethics" understands the inevitable moral ambivalences, ambiguities, and paradoxes that ultimately complicate any ethical position:

The potency of the work is simply not in its story. It is, rather, within this situation that Trollope has taken, and in the way he exploits it. What he does, is to insist on the incongruities, by sharp juxtaposition of different perspectives.

(apRoberts 1971, p. 36)

Trollope's approach to narrative viewpoint throughout his *oeuvre* avoids and critiques univocal rhetorical closure, and bears comparison with the subtlety of James's narrative approach in *The Bostonians*. It also provides some valuable parallels with Didion's approach to narrative viewpoint in *Democracy*. Though it would perhaps be overstressing the point to say that Trollope has provided a narrative model which Didion has been able to work from consciously, her allusion to Trollope, and to a novelistic tradition which precedes the postmodern, suggests a deliberate intertextual reference. As Winchell points out, Trollope is by no means the only author that Didion refers to in her novel. Describing her strategy of allusion in *Democracy* as "compulsive" (Winchell 1989, p. 131), he notes that in Part One, Chapter Eleven alone, Didion makes allusions "both direct and oblique" to George Orwell, Ernest Hemingway, Henry Adams, Norman Mailer, A.E. Houseman, T.S. Eliot, and Delmore Schwartz (Winchell 1989, p. 131). Her reference to Henry Adams also seems particularly relevant, not only because he also is the author of a novel titled *Democracy* (first published in 1880), which satirises the American political arena too, but also because further parallels can be drawn between Didion and Adams' autobiography, *The Education of Henry Adams*, discussed in the previous chapter.

In his review of Didion's novel in the *New York Review of Books*, Edward R. Thomas remarks that Didion "was another American pessimist" (Thomas 1984, p. 24). He writes:

With due allowance for the distances between Quincy<sup>2</sup> and Sacramento, Henry Adams and Joan Didion may have something in common. In both of them, irony and subtlety confront a chaotic new reality that shatters the orderings of simpler, older ways. Both face such a world with an essentially aristocratic weapon, the power to dispose language and thought, at least, against those empowered to dispose just about everything else.

(Thomas 1984, p. 24)

Winchell, also drawing a parallel between Didion and *The Education*, remarks:

Perhaps an even more suggestive linkage exists between Didion's novel and *The Education of Henry Adams*, particularly the most famous chapter of the book – “The Dynamo and the Virgin.” The thesis of this chapter is that over a period of 600 years Western civilization has moved from thirteenth-century unity to nineteenth-century multiplicity, from the age of the Virgin to that of the Dynamo. While this development no doubt represents progress to many, those of a traditionalist sensibility (e.g. Didion, Adams, T.S. Eliot) realize that there is a dark side to progress, that another name for multiplicity is fragmentation.

(Winchell 1989, p. 132)

The narrative approaches of both the *Education* and *Democracy* tap into this question of the emergence of modern society after the middle ages and the replacement of a perceived epoch of unity by a “chaotic new reality”. Indeed, Adams' autobiography and Didion's novel at once install yet critique the respective eras of modernity and postmodernity that they write within. As discussed in the previous chapter, Adams' autobiography, written in the third person, eschews an autonomous, centred first-person viewpoint for one whereby the narrating voice becomes that of “Adams” or “he” instead of “I”. Adams' decision to write his autobiography in the third person acknowledges the fact that he was writing from the perspective of a civilisation that, in undergoing a transformation from the simplicities of a monist Christian world-view, has pluralised and multivocalised reality, thus decentring the subject.

Didion's approach to narrative viewpoint in *Democracy*, suggested in the allusion to Trollope, parallels the way Adams treats narrative viewpoint in the *Education*. Like Adams, Didion installs the narrative viewpoint in her novel in a way that avoids treating

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<sup>2</sup> The American President, John Quincy Adams, grandfather of Henry Adams.

the viewpoint of the author as though it is some kind of omniscient, God's-eye position. Although she herself appears in *Democracy* as a first-person narrator, Didion is at pains to qualify such an approach. Like Henry Adams, Didion locates her narrative viewpoint in such a way that it speaks from within a historicised, *contextual* standpoint rather than a standpoint which attempts to effect the "objective", "context-transcendent" position of a secularised Christian god.

Didion's capacity to recount the story presented in *Democracy* is thus limited by and dependent upon the contexts, elisions, and bifurcations that are part and parcel of the narrative. She is bounded by the very limitations and qualifications inherent in the decentred, perspectival nature of her position. These qualifications reflect the fact that, although Didion is concerned in *Democracy* to investigate and recount the story of the character, Inez Christian, Inez's marriage to the American Democrat politician Harry Victor, and her parallel affair with the more ambiguous, shadowy figure of Jack Lovett, it is a story that the author "Joan Didion" did not arrive at immediately. In recounting how she ultimately came to write the story that she did, Didion also discloses some of the stories that she abandoned before she came to write the account she settled upon. These stories focussed upon Inez Christian's childhood in Hawaii, stories that preceded her meeting and eventual marriage to Harry Victor (Didion 1987, pp. 14-15). As Winchell argues, in presenting a narrative which culminates with the American evacuation from Vietnam in 1975, and Inez's abandonment of her unhappy marriage, "the Hemingway iceberg technique [is] working overtime" (Winchell 1989, p. 131). As Didion herself makes clear, *Democracy* is a novel of "fitful glimpses" comprised of events that are not arrived at without conjecture and equivocation. In Chapter Two, playing upon some of

these equivocations and emphasising some of the difficulties she experienced at a writerly level, she claims:

I began thinking about Inez Victor and Jack Lovett at a point in my life when I lacked certainty, lacked even that minimum level of ego which all writers recognize as essential to the writing of novels, lacked conviction, lacked patience with the past and interest in memory; lacked faith even in my own technique. ... So I have no leper who comes to the door every morning at seven ... no unequivocal lone figure on the crest of the immutable hill.

(Didion 1987, pp. 13-14)

Indeed, expounding upon the ambivalences of her narrative, Didion also alludes to a textbook assignment about herself:

A poignant (to me) assignment I came across recently in a textbook for students of composition: *'Didion begins with a rather ironic reference to her immediate reason to write this piece. Try using this ploy as the opening of an essay; you may want to copy the ironic-but-earnest tone of Didion ...*

(Didion 1987, p. 13)

The description of Didion's "ironic-but-earnest" narrative viewpoint encapsulates her approach very neatly. In presenting her tale about Inez Christian, Didion makes it clear that this is not the only, or even the most important, story she could have told, but one among a number of others that might have been recounted. At one point early in her novel, as she prepares to narrow her narrative focus and present Inez's story, she qualifies her account with the remark: "Last look through more than one door" (Didion 1987, p. 12). She also concludes her novel – and her story about Inez – with the further remark: "Anything could happen" (Didion 1987, p. 173). Thus, in "tracking" Inez Christian's story, she in effect ironises the tale which she has (earnestly) recounted. Her non-omniscient first-person viewpoint thus qualifies the narrative with a distancing, ironic perspective. As a novel which satirises the American democratic process in the post-industrial, postmodern epoch, Didion's decentred perspective replays many of the same equivocations inherent in the decentred narrative viewpoint of Adams' *Education*.

Throughout *Democracy*, Didion refuses to delineate an author-position that transcends irony and context.

Didion's narrative approach thus stands in general parallel with the non-omniscient, non-objectivist narrative approach in *The Bostonians* and *The Great Gatsby*. However, Didion's use of narrative viewpoint can also be distinguished from that of *The Bostonians* and *Gatsby* in the sense that her approach is a metafictional one. In delineating a narrative viewpoint which overtly reflects upon the writing process, Didion's approach exploits a characteristic postmodern narrative convention (deployed by other post-war writers such as John Fowles and Italo Calvino), whereby the narrator explicitly discusses and comments upon the nature of the fictional process. In deploying narrative viewpoint in this manner, Didion's self-conscious rejection of any "objective" style of narrative commentary is a response specific to her postmodernist approach.

The common ground that Didion's *Democracy* shares with the viewpoint represented in the *Education* illustrates the way in which this approach shares a degree of common ground with apRoberts' discussion of Trollope and Situation Ethics. By refusing to install herself "objectively" and "ahistorically", but instead situating her narrative within a discursive literary and rhetorical tradition (in her allusions to Trollope and Adams), Didion reiterates the critique of modernity and the nineteenth-century realist tradition effected by Trollope's approach to narrative viewpoint. Like Trollope, Didion's narrative approach serves to counter the idea that it is possible to delineate a subject position from a context-transcending, Olympian standpoint. This position effectively questions the Enlightenment position that the subject, in constituting itself as a locus of meaning production, can discover an objective, ahistorical point of view.



## ***Democracy and the Question of Postmodernism.***

The functionality of the narrative viewpoint “Joan Didion”, in *Democracy* signifies a further “working through” – a self-conscious metafictional critique – of the process of critiquing “the project of modernity” that has been evinced by the novels in the three preceding chapters in this thesis. Indeed, the very historicity of the narrative approach in *Democracy* stands in marked opposition to the metaphysical Enlightenment position, eschewing any manoeuvre which seeks to articulate a foundationalist model of knowledge. Didion’s novel can be seen as a culmination-point – albeit a provisional one – of a process whereby the supposed “ahistoricity” and “cognitive objectivity” of the Enlightenment project has been progressively unmasked – but with the effect that the Enlightenment, as a supposed project of demystification, is ultimately demystified itself. Didion’s narrative viewpoint has the effect of rendering self-conscious and explicit the same position of irony implicit in author and character viewpoints presented in *Gatsby* and *V*. As the first-person narrator in *Gatsby*, constructed upon the elisions and confluences of Carraway’s modernist perspective, serves to render explicit the very provisionality and situatedness of his position, and the third-person viewpoints of Profane and Stencil in *V*. replay and parody this modernist perspective, so too the narrative viewpoint in *Democracy* incorporates the irony inherent in a perspectivist standpoint within the narrator’s very outlook. In short, Joan Didion’s narrative viewpoint acknowledges the very perspectivism that Carraway is blind to, and which Profane and Stencil attempt to transcend.

To define *Democracy* as a work of postmodernism is thus, first, to understand the counter-metaphysical stance of its narrative viewpoint and, second, to locate the self-consciousness of the irony inherent in such a viewpoint within a postmodern tradition. In

his work *Postmodern Fiction*, Brian McHale talks about the postmodern discrediting of the foundationalist project of Enlightenment as evincing a “*loss of a world that could be accepted, ‘willy-nilly’ as a given of experience*” (McHale 1987, p. 26). He defines postmodernism in fiction as exemplifying “the *otherness* of the fictional world, its separation from the real world of experience” (McHale 1987, p. 27). Distinguishing the project of postmodernity from that of modernism, he discusses the postmodern as signalling a shift from an epistemological position which seeks to ground knowledge and understanding within the perspectivism of a “grounding, mediating consciousness” (McHale 1987, p. 23) to an ontological reflexivity which acknowledges the capacity of a work of fiction to project a world which need have no grounding in the metaphysical foundationalism which is so crucial to definitions of the epistemological project.

Postmodernism, McHale argues, heralds a shift from a world-disclosing idea of metaphysics to the unconstrained self-referentiality exemplified by Annie Dillard’s phrase, “unlicensed metaphysics in a teacup” (McHale 1987, p. 25). Postmodernism, defined in this way, epitomises the discrediting of the Enlightenment as a successful foundationalist project. In denaturalising the foundationalist position of the Enlightenment (something which the Enlightenment has itself surely helped bring about),<sup>3</sup> postmodernism defines itself as a philosophical position which, in critiquing the Enlightenment, epitomises “the

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<sup>3</sup> The problematic status of Enlightenment philosophy, relative at least to much philosophical thought that has succeeded it, is epitomised, for example, by its somewhat problematical theorisation of individual subjectivity. Frank B. Farrell, for example, has argued that the “theological” model of subjectivity first instituted during the Enlightenment by René Descartes, seeks to ground itself as an absolute of understanding. By borrowing some of the “divine” attributes of the God of medieval Christendom, the Enlightenment subject – the “finite human thinker” (Farrell 1994, p. 2) – “takes over some of God’s functions as a subject” (Farrell 1994, p. 2). The Enlightenment subject thus takes on “the necessity, the intrinsic natures, the autonomy, the constructive power, the role as an always present conservator of determinacy, that earlier one had located in God” (Farrell 1994, p. 3). The denaturalisation of the Cartesian subject in succeeding centuries thus reflects a disenchantment of its perceived divine attributes, with the effect that the subject loses its perceived intrinsic value, a process which itself stems from the attempt instituted by thinkers such as Descartes to install philosophy as a demystificatory project. In a sense, then, the demystification of the Enlightenment and the modern subject by post-Enlightenment philosophy reflects

self-destruction of an exclusively or predominantly formalist rationalism” (Rosen 1987, p. 5). The Enlightenment rhetoric of a rational model of knowledge which would unmask irrational beliefs and prejudices also has the effect of unmasking the foundationalism of the Enlightenment; so much so that the world, rather than being defined by foundationalist model of understanding is “regarded as a metaphysical fantasy” (Rosen 1987, p. 11).

Much postmodern theory, in offering up a critique of modernity and the Enlightenment, has generally argued that that the project of modernity has sought to legitimate itself through an appeal to a monolithic, metadiscursive cognitive position. Broadly, this means that the foundationalism of modernity and the Enlightenment rests upon a theorisation of subjectivity which posits an autonomous, context-transcendent subject. This in turn functions as the basis for a rationalist Enlightenment utopia, and ultimately seeks to install meaning and the subject in relation to a model of understanding which subsumes difference and heterogeneity within an embracing rational consensus. Defining the project of modernity in *The Postmodern Condition*, Jean-Francois Lyotard writes:

I will use the term *modern* to designate any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse ... making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth. For example, the rule of consensus between the sender and addressee of a statement with truth-value is deemed acceptable if it is cast in terms of possible unanimity between rational minds: this is the Enlightenment narrative, in which the hero of knowledge works towards a good ethico-political end – universal peace.

(Lyotard 1993, pp. xxiii-iv)

For Lyotard, the project of postmodernity is characterised by an “incredulity towards metanarratives” (Lyotard 1993, p. xxiv), whereby the Enlightenment ideal of philosophical consensus is replaced by a project of heterogeneity and radical dissensus. In place of the modern theorisation of the grand or metanarrative as a means of cognitive

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a process that itself began with a recognition of the nominal, rather than determinate, character of the supposedly “divine” Cartesian subject.

legitimation, Lyotard uses the term “paralogy”<sup>4</sup> to elucidate his project of dissensus, arguing, for example, that in the field of postmodern research science (succeeding that of Newtonian science) “a scientist is before anything else a person who ‘tells stories’” (Lyotard 1993, p. 60).

Briefly, postmodernism replaces the foundationalism of Newtonian science with a formulation of science founded on the theory of the paradigm. Instead of regarding the discoveries of science as elucidating foundational truths about reality, scientific truths are models of knowledge which are consensually rather than metaphysically grounded. Furthermore, the relation of the various models of reality within and between the various sciences are “incommensurable” with one another, reflecting as they do the hypothetical rather than “given” makeup of the various projects which validate themselves according to pragmatic notions of “performativity”. Again, Lyotard writes:

Consensus is a horizon that is never reached. Research that takes place under the aegis of a paradigm tends to stabilize; it is like the exploitation of a technological, economic or artistic ‘idea.’ It cannot be discounted. But what is striking is that someone always comes along to disturb the order of ‘reason.’

(Lyotard 1993, p. 61)

Parallels can be drawn between Lyotard and the character of the author-function in *Democracy*. For example, in eschewing an “Olympian” or context-transcendent narrative viewpoint, Didion’s novel also eschews any appeal to a consensual, metadiscursive position. Rather than situating the author-function in *Democracy* such that it privileges itself as an autonomous position which seeks to subsume the heteronomy of variant character viewpoints within a single, metanarratological viewpoint, Didion situates

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<sup>4</sup> In his foreword to *The Postmodern Condition*, Jameson, defining the term “paralogy” writes: “This view not surprisingly will then determine Lyotard’s ultimate vision of science and knowledge today as a search, not for consensus, but very precisely for ‘instabilities,’ as a practice of *paralogism*, in which the point is not to reach agreement but to undermine from within the very framework in which the previous ‘normal science’ had been conducted” (Lyotard xix).

narrative viewpoint differentially. Viewpoint in *Democracy* functions in a context-dependent fashion, thus foregrounding its provisional, narratologically-grounded position in the novel. As Lyotard eschews a rational, consensual model of knowledge, so too does narrative viewpoint in *Democracy*. The comparison that can be drawn between Didion's narrative approach and the juxtapositional "shaping principle" which motivates Trollope's approach is illustrative of this. In *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard seeks to undermine the modern assumption that understanding can be founded upon an absolute, rationally grounded point of view; thus he disarms precepts crucial to the makeup of the modern epoch. A questioning of the validity of a consensus-based model of knowledge is thus central to Lyotard's project, and is paralleled in *Democracy* which, in eschewing any objective point of view, also questions the efficacy of the modern project. As a postmodern metafiction, Didion's novel thus questions the objective truth-claims characteristic of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century modernity.

From a postmodern position, it is no longer possible to define the Western scientific project as exemplifying a model of understanding which will realise the consensual, rationalist, utopian rhetoric of the Enlightenment and modernity. Applying a performative model of postmodern science to postmodernity in general, Lyotard talks of a heterology of "language games" and an "agonistics of language" (Lyotard 1993, pp.66 & 16) as configuring social relations. This notion of heterology also undermines the modern position which seeks to ground knowledge upon rational models of understanding and consensus. Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, remarking upon Lyotard's formulation of the postmodern, write:

Knowledge is produced, in Lyotard's view, by dissent, by putting into question existing paradigms, by inventing new ones, rather than assenting to universal truth or agreeing to a consensus.

(Best & Kellner 1991, p. 166)

Lyotard's postmodern philosophical position, a position whereby no philosophical, scientific or ethical argument is able to position itself as a systemic or foundational standpoint within the wider dissensus of other standpoints, is broadly paralleled by the theories of two other postmodern philosophers – Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. Like Lyotard, Foucault sought to question the idea that a rational model of understanding can provide a theoretical model for a foundational philosophy that at once emancipates the subject and liberates it from unreason; thus it provides the basis for a “continuist” and “progressive” model of understanding which is universalist in its conception, and serves as the basis for a progressive model of knowledge which moves increasingly closer to an absolute, universal truth. Foucault began to develop a “counter history” of ideas during the 1960s and 70s, at a time when the traditional field of the history of ideas had entered a period of crisis. Thinkers in Western society recognised that a “progressivist” and “continuist” model of knowledge no longer seemed able to account for the way that innovations in both the natural and human sciences were brought about. Further, it no longer seemed possible to see such discoveries as reflecting a revolution in thinking brought about through the agency of the creative subject, a “genius” such as Newton or Einstein.

Foucault thus pioneered a new approach, a “counter history” of ideas which sought to escape from progressivist and continuist historical narratives grounded in the agency of a rational creative subject. Foucault pioneered a model of “discourse theory” which attempted to locate the various schools of thought as autonomous objects of knowledge in their own right, independent of the agency of a rational thinker. In works such as *Madness and Civilisation*, *The Birth of the Clinic*, and *The Order of Things*, Foucault sought to show how specific discursive and epistemic formations produced the objects of

knowledge, rather than *vice versa*. Foucault argues, for example, that the various discursive formations produced and constituted bodies of knowledge. These bodies of knowledge, furthermore, reflect differences, relative clusters, and discontinuities of thought, rather than a continuist model of an ultimate, increasingly definitive truth. Foucault also argues that it is discursive formations of knowledge which produce the human subject (a process Foucault refers to with the term, “subjection”) which enable subjects to consider themselves as such, thus eschewing any concept of the subject as a producer of ideas. Foucault uses this counter history to problematise the foundational, subject-centred model of modernity by displacing the subject as a premise and ground for such understanding. In his essay “What is Enlightenment?” he seeks to disarm the project of modernity as an absolute model of understanding, instead arguing that modernity should be realigned as an “attitude”, a reflection of the provisional discursive regularities particular to the period, rather than any given. Indeed, Foucault seeks to disarm any position which sets out to ground the modern model of understanding as a rational, progressive narrative able to realise a rational human utopia (Foucault 1991, p. 46). Rather than treating the human subject as the agent of a rational narrative of Enlightenment able to liberate humanity from unreason, Foucault argues that “[w]e must proceed with the analysis of ourselves as beings who are historically determined, to a certain extent, by the Enlightenment” (Foucault 1991, p. 43).

Foucault’s interrogation of the concept of the rational model of the human subject has repercussions when considering the perceived efficacy of the modern concept of the autonomous, creative subject, valorised in science by figures such as Newton and Einstein. This dismantling of the self-evidence of the creative subject, or “genius”, also has repercussions whereby – with the rise of postmodernism – the validity of the concept

of the creative subject has come under question. This questioning of the modern subject is mirrored in the operation of the author-function in *Democracy*, where the metafictional situating of narrative point of view in Didion's novel dismantles the author as a locus of meaning which presides as a god-like "omniscience" over the production of the literary artefact. Point of view in Didion's novel, explicitly implicated in the material contexts of the narrative, thus possesses no functionality – illusory or otherwise – as an expressivism. The intertextual parallel Didion draws between both her own narrative viewpoint and that of Trollope's, for example, underlines the context-specific (because intertextual), as opposed to formalist and autonomous, ontology of her viewpoint, thus distinguishing Didion's author-function from that of the creative, or expressivist, model of the author.

Like Lyotard and Foucault, Derrida delineates a postmodern position – pioneered in works such as *Of Grammatology* – to effect a critique of the project of Enlightenment modernity. Derrida founds his critique upon an unmasking of the Enlightenment as well as the entire project of Western metaphysics from its beginnings with Plato. Briefly, he critiques what he terms the Western "metaphysics of presence", the privileging of the philosophical tradition of speech over that of writing – of speech as presence (Derrida 1998, p. 12) – in order to ground utterance within a privileged, absolutist epistemology of meaning. Jane Flax describes Derrida's theorisation of the Western metaphysics of presence as an attempt by philosophy

to master the world once and for all by enclosing it within an illusory but absolute system they believe represents or corresponds to a unitary Being beyond history, particularity and change. ... Just as the Real is the ground of truth, so too philosophy as the privileged representative of the Real and interrogator of truth claims must play a 'foundational' role in all 'positive knowledge.'

(Flax 1992, p. 34)

Again, a comparison can be made here with the operation of the author-function in *Democracy*. As Derrida seeks to undermine metaphysical models of knowledge which



seek to systemise understanding according to an extra-contextual Being “beyond history”, so also Didion deliberately avoids situating narrative viewpoint in her novel in such a way that it assumes an extra-contextual narrative functionality. The metafictional situating of her narrative viewpoint “Joan Didion” as a discursive and contextual, rather than extra-textual, position demonstrates this. Like Derrida, narrative viewpoint in *Democracy* does not seek to master the materials of human reality by shaping them according to some absolute position of understanding. In situating narrative point of view in *Democracy* such that it is no longer perceived as operating in a space extra to the text, Didion’s novel stands in explicit parallel to the counter-metaphysical position propounded by theorists such as Lyotard, Foucault, and Derrida. As with the operation of narrative viewpoint in *V.*, narrative viewpoint in *Democracy* disarms and denaturalises the expressivist author convention, a convention which regards the author as functioning from within a formalist position anterior to the discourses of the text. However, unlike *V.*, narrative viewpoint in Didion’s novel is not only concerned to denaturalise the expressivist author. By operating as a position situated by and *implicated in* the text, narrative viewpoint in *Democracy* is ultimately situated in relation to the full enunciative function. That is, it takes into account the implication of both the author, as an *inferred* rather than unequivocally determined position, and the reader in the production of meaning in a text. As a postmodern metafiction, Didion’s novel thus stands as a specific model of fiction which renders overt the active, as opposed to mimetic and passive, role played by the reader with regard to meaning production in a text. Indeed, as a generic convention specific to twentieth-century literature, this enunciative role played by the reader-as-producer serves to question the assumption that the meaning of a literary artefact “is always sought in the man or woman who produced it ... through the more or less transparent allegory of the

fiction, the voice of the single person, the *author* ‘confiding’ in us” (Barthes 1977, p. 143).

Derrida’s argument that poststructuralist criticism deconstructs the metaphysical conception of Western philosophy has important implications when a poststructuralist theorisation of the author-function is addressed. Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault have broached this question in their respective essays, “The Death of the Author” and “What is an Author?” (as discussed in Chapter One of this thesis). These are key responses to the problematic of the author-function, especially that of the modern, or humanist, model of the expressivist author. Other key works by Barthes, such as *S/Z*, and his short essay, “From Work to Text”, also broach the question of the author-function. As the Marxist poststructuralist Terry Eagleton argues, *S/Z* stands as an actual “moment of break” (Eagleton 1989, p. 137) between structuralist theory and the emergence proper of poststructuralism. In this break, thinkers such as Barthes and Derrida challenge the earlier structuralist idea that the relation between the signified and the signifier – argued, for example, in Saussurean linguistics – is a stable and closed one; that the terms of difference in a sign system position a word relative to its concept within a stable, delimited system of signs.

As a work of postmodernism, *Democracy*, strictly speaking, occupies a separate domain from the field of poststructuralism. Nevertheless, in common with Derrida and poststructuralism generally, the author-function in *Democracy* eschews any delimited conception of meaning. Didion’s insistence that she locate narrative viewpoint in the novel such that it reflects rather than seeks to transcend the multiple and divergent contexts of the novel – coupled with her acknowledgement that her narrative is but one of

a number of possible narratives that could have been written – reflects a similar acknowledgement of the deferral, displacement, and play of meaning in language.

Didion’s remark, “Anything can happen”, reflects a position which effectively parts company with a conception of language and meaning as determinate and delimited.

Derrida’s deconstruction of the idea of the metaphysics of presence clearly parallels the interrogation of the commonsense idea of the author-function by prominent poststructuralists. As argued in Chapter One of this thesis, Barthes and Foucault question the humanist conception of the author as a “Creator-God” which the reader deploys to “definitively” elucidate the meaning of a text. Barthes argues in “The Death of the Author” that a text is a medium which, instead of reflecting the position and “intent” of the author as an anterior position of semantic origin, the author enters into his or her own death (Barthes 1977, p. 143). Foucault argues that the author-function is a function of specific discursive practices which constitute the convention of the author rather than *vice versa* (Foucault 1988, p. 197). Both arguments effect a manoeuvre similar to Derrida’s critique of metaphysics. As Derrida employs his examination of Western metaphysics to question the assumption that one can ground understanding upon an absolute, trans-discursive concept of meaning – of meaning as presence – so Barthes and Foucault question the idea that the author can be privileged as an autonomous presence in relation to meaning. Both Barthes’s denaturalisation of the author as an ideological construct whose sovereignty over meaning in a text is in fact illusory (Williamson 1989, p. 31), and Foucault’s theorisation of the author as an effect of specific discursive practices, serve to discredit the author as a metaphysical position. The author is no longer a “self-present” or “self-identical” position which serves as an extra-textual ground of meaning and is instead theorised as a position whose supposed “commonsensicality” and “givenness” is illusory.

The author-function thus loses its power as a perceived locus of world-disclosedness and becomes instead an ideological figure whose “self-evidence” is questioned. As argued above, the author-function in *Democracy* – mediated by a contingently situated narrative viewpoint – also eschews any such metaphysical “presence”. Because narrative viewpoint in this novel is situated in a relational and contextual sense, it is the multiple contexts which mediate the narrative which make narrative point of view in Didion’s novel possible in the first place.

The alignment of the author-function in *Democracy* with postmodernism foregrounds the way that the author-function in Didion’s novel questions the absolute truth-claims of modernity. In a general sense at least, this contextual model of the author-function in Didion’s novel shares a significant degree of common ground with the contextually-situated models of the author-function as argued in the chapters on *The Bostonians*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *V.* in this thesis. These three novels deliberately critique the modernist project through their implementation of alternatives to the expressivist model of the author-function. The problematising in *The Bostonians* of the project of modernity as founded upon absolute truth-claims is carried through in both *Gatsby* and *V.*, where their respective modernist and late-modernist modes of literary production effect an explicit break with modernity. In critiquing modernity through a rejection of the formalist author model, and once more aligning the author-function in relation to questions of context, the author-function in each of these novels is embedded within modernist discourse as a materially engaged, or *internalised*, challenge. The alliance in *Democracy* of the operation of narrative viewpoint with this questioning of the absolute precepts of modernity, both openly theorises and renders explicit the capacity of a “post-expressivist” author-function to effect this challenge. In the case of Didion’s novel, one of the ways in which this

challenge is instituted lies in the way in which the convention of author-centred meaning production can be understood in terms of “the enunciation” – the interrelation of the author, the text, and the reader in this process of meaning production.

### **The Author-Function and the Act of Enunciation.**

The denaturalisation of the author as a position of world-disclosedness is one way that fiction, viewed from a more general standpoint, can be questioned as a mode of reproduction or mimesis. Linda Hutcheon argues that postmodern fiction, first rising to prominence during the 1960s, is overtly concerned with questioning the idea that fiction is a mimetic form mirroring reality (Hutcheon 1988, p. 40). She argues that fiction neither mirrors nor reproduces reality, that such means of aesthetic production are in fact impossible (Hutcheon 1988, p. 40). Rather, fiction should be understood “as another of the discourses by which we construct our versions of reality, and both the construction and the need for it are what are foregrounded in the post-modernist novel” (Hutcheon 1988, p. 40). Postmodern fiction can broadly be defined as a form which, in questioning the mimetic model of representation, also questions the related idea that reality can be represented as a self-evident given. Hutcheon argues that postmodernism deliberately contests the givenness of narratives which seek to reproduce reality by self-consciously denaturalising these narratives, yet at the same time underlines the specific historical and discursive efficacy these narratives possess as forms of meaning. For Hutcheon, postmodern fiction at once invokes and contests modes of representation, emphasising the discursive as opposed to given character of perceived representational modes, while at the same time questioning their status as common-sensical claims to truth (Hutcheon 1988, p. 40). Hutcheon’s and McHale’s definitions of postmodern fiction as that which denaturalises “given” modes of representation thus also acknowledge the historical power

of these models. As Hutcheon argues, postmodern fiction does not so much deny the representational model of fiction as invoke it in such a way as to contest its givenness (Hutcheon 1988, p. 40).

Hutcheon's concept of the entire "enunciative" or discursive situation of fiction – "the contexts in which fiction is being produced by both writer and reader" (Hutcheon 1988, p. 40) – provides a useful approach with which to argue the character and operation of the author-function with respect to Barthes, Foucault, and also *Democracy*. This concept of the enunciation was first formulated by Emile Benveniste, who employed it to overturn the humanist assumption that language is the invention, expression, and instrument of the subject, that language refers to or expresses "some already given, pre-linguistic meaning or intention" (Williamson 1989, p. 32). Benveniste argues that the definition of language as an instrument – a vehicle of exchange – invented by human beings so that communication between them is made possible is a naïve fiction (Benveniste 1971, pp. 223-4). Such a condition is impossible to return to, because a situation where humanity is separated from language never existed; we can't see humanity inventing language:

We shall never get back to man reduced to himself and exercising his wits to conceive of the existence of another. It is a speaking man whom we find in the world, a man speaking to another man, and language provides the very definition of man.

(Benveniste 1971, p. 224)

Certainly, people's everyday use of language suggests that language – the reciprocal give and take of speaking – is an instrument, a separate entity, that we exchange in order to communicate with one another, "an instrument or vehicular function which we are quick to hypostasize as an 'object'" (Benveniste 1971, p. 224). However, as Benveniste argues, rather than understanding language as an invention, an artifice, constructed by

subjectivity, subjectivity is the construction of language. It is language alone, not the subject, which establishes the concept of ego, for it is the reality of *language*, not subjectivity, that is the reality of subjectivity:

“Ego” is he who *says* “ego.” That is where we see the foundation of “subjectivity,” which is determined by the linguistic status of “person.” ... Consciousness of self is only possible if it is experienced by contrast. I use *I* only when I am speaking to someone who will be a *you* in my address. It is this condition of dialogue that is constitutive of *person*, for it implies that reciprocally *I* becomes *you* in the address of the one who in his turn designates himself as *I*.

(Benveniste 1971, pp. 224-5)

In a general sense, narrative viewpoint in *Democracy* is made possible because it is a construction of the novel, rather an entity which stands extra to it. As an operation specific to the unfolding of the novel, Didion’s narrative viewpoint can be understood as a linguistic rather than exclusively extra-linguistic function. Narrative viewpoint operates as a mode of meaning production in *Democracy* because the materials of the novel’s narrative enable it to do so. Throughout the novel, the narrative viewpoint “Joan Didion” is deployed by the author such that its capacity to produce a mediating agent who both recounts and mediates the novel’s events reflects the the novel’s viewpoint as imbricated *within* the narrative. Didion’s endeavour to understand the motivations of Inez Victor as the central character in *Democracy* is made solely possible by this imbrication, by Didion’s deployment in her novel of a non-omniscient viewpoint whose capacity to render coherent the materials of the narrative is wholly dependent on this relationality. Without such a relation, narrative viewpoint – Didion’s viewpoint – simply cannot exist.

To return to Benveniste, consciousness of self is only possible via the contrast, via the mutual reciprocity, of the linguistic terms *I* and *you* as employed in an address. Instead of regarding “I” and “you” or the subject and society as antinomies, subject positions such as the individual *I* only become possible if conceived as mutually dependent on each other.

Furthermore, the basis of this relation is linguistic. As Benveniste argues, personal pronouns such as *I* and *you* are never missing from language: “A language without the expression of person cannot be imagined” (Benveniste 1971, p. 225). Unlike other designations in language, personal pronouns do not refer to a concept or individual:

*I* refers to the act of individual discourse in which it is pronounced, and by this it designates the speaker. It is a term that cannot be identified except in ... an instance of discourse and that has only a momentary reference. The reality to which it refers is the reality of discourse. It is in the instance of discourse in which *I* designates the speaker that the speaker proclaims himself as the “subject.” And so it is literally true that the basis of subjectivity is the exercise of language.

(Benveniste 1971, p. 226)

This is the basis of Benveniste’s definition of the enunciation. Language, not some idealist model of subjectivity, makes subjectivity possible. A statement by the subject is not uttered from the position of some pre-linguistic, extra-discursive space. Rather, it is the discursive situatedness of language – the discursively-situated utterance – which makes a statement possible. The humanist assumption that subjectivity and meaning precede language is thus overturned.

Benveniste’s concept of the enunciation suggests a way in which one may interrogate the expressivist model of the author. Theorists such as Hutcheon directly employ the concept of the enunciation to formulate such a model, building as she does upon discussions of the author-function in “The Death of the Author” and “What is an Author?”, and Foucault’s theorisation of discourse. Indeed, Hutcheon’s discussion of the author-function in relation to the enunciation, and the applicability of the enunciation to the question of discourse, prepares the ground for such a break. The question of the relation of the author-function and the enunciation is directly discussed in “The Death of the Author”, while Foucault’s denaturalising of the expressivist conception of the author-function, and the importance of this argument with regard to the question of the enunciation is broached in his work, *The*



*Archaeology of Knowledge*. Barthes's and Foucault's models of the author-function provide a model of the author as a mode of critique which – as will be argued in the concluding section of this chapter – succeeds in offering a general critique of modernity which proponents of the expressivist author model in the nineteenth century first sought and failed to do.

The parallel Barthes draws between his own concept of the author-function and Benveniste's concept of the enunciation directly reflects the assertion by Benveniste that subjectivity is a construction of language. Since *language*, (not some pre-linguistic concept of the subject) constructs subjectivity, it follows that it is writing (not some pre-linguistic concept of the author) that constructs the author in a text. Linking this model of the author with the enunciation, Barthes argues:

[L]inguistics has recently provided the destruction of the author with a valuable analytical tool by showing that the whole of the enunciation is an empty process, functioning perfectly without there being any need for it to be filled with the person of the interlocutors. Linguistically, the author is never more than the instance writing, just as *I* [that is, the subject of the enunciation] is nothing other than the instance saying *I*: language knows a 'subject', not a person, and this subject, empty outside of the very enunciation which defines it, suffices to make language 'hold together', suffices, that is to say, to exhaust it.

(Barthes 1977, p. 145)

The author, in other words, contextually positioned by the process of writing in the same way that the subject of the enunciation is positioned by language, needs no anterior, extra-textual field of reference in order to function. The author is a textual rather than extra-textual function. It is the act of enunciation, the context-specific process of making a statement, that creates the position of the author in a text. This contextual parallel between the function of the author in a text and that of the enunciation can also be applied to Foucault's discussion of the author-function. It is possible to argue that such a parallel, linked with Foucault's position, serves as one way to foreground how a contextual definition of the author, *implicated with a contextual definition of the reader*, at once

makes meaning possible in a text and questions the Romantic position that the author in a text is an empirical, pre-linguistic, origin-point of meaning.

Hutcheon uses Benveniste's term "enunciation" as a label for this author-reader interrelation, an interrelation which can not only be understood as a position which Barthes and Foucault have foregrounded through their re-theorising of the concept of the author, but which can also be seen as a culmination point – a kind of "capping off" – of Barthes's and Foucault's denaturalisation of the expressivist author-model. In arguing for a contextual author-reader relation, both Barthes and Foucault attend to the role this text-specific model of the author-function plays in producing meaning. The following discussion of the role of the enunciation with respect to *Democracy* will highlight some of the ways that this model of interpretation critiques both the expressivist model of the author-function and the relation of the enunciation to modernity.

### **The Enunciation, *Democracy*, and Modernity.**

Through her intertextual echo of Trollope, and her accompanying observation that a fragment of a poem by Stevens is vaguely suggestive of a possible beginning for *Democracy* (Didion 1987, p. 12), Didion emphasises the complicitous, as opposed to autonomous, relation and function of narrative viewpoint of a text, and also radicalises the function of the enunciation in relation to the narrator and the novel's author. In a discussion of the operation of the enunciation in relation to the expressivist convention of the author, and the model of nineteenth-century realism which came to prominence in Western culture at the time the expressivist authorial model was being incorporated as a cultural norm, Catherine Belsey notes that this expressivist model of the author orients the enunciative function in a very specific way:

[T]he conventional tenses of classic realism [in a broad sense, the convention of nineteenth-century realism] tend to align the position of the reader with that of an omniscient narrator who is looking back on a series of past events. Thus, while each episode seems to be happening 'now' as we read, and the reader is given clear indications of what is already past in relation to this 'now', nonetheless each apparently present episode is contained in a single, intelligible and all-embracing vision of what from the point of view of the subject of the enunciation is past and completed.

(Belsey 1989, p. 78)

The classic realist novel installs the author and the reader in relation to the enunciation by orienting the discourses of the subject of the *enonce* (the subject – for example, a fictional character – inscribed in the text) and the subject of the enunciation (that is, the subject – for example, the author – who narrates) so that they arrive at a point of semantic convergence at the conclusion of the narrative and achieve a position of univocal closure (Belsey 1989, p. 79). The effect of this is to orient the narrative so that it appears not only to mirror the rhetorical position of the author who has written the narrative, but also to situate the author as a kind of presiding autonomy who has independently brought the narrative into being. A work of classic realism mirrors the “transcending”, “all-embracing” vision of its author, a vision that assumes the appearance (at least) of non-contradictory, univocal coherence; the author appears to be a non-contradictory expressivism because the narrative, brought to a universalising position of closure, appears to install its author as a universal, non-contradictory locus of meaning (Belsey 1989, pp. 79-80).

Writing at a time when classic realism had risen to prominence, Trollope’s self-conscious flagging of his narrative viewpoint in select examples of his fiction can be seen to problematise the security of the classic realist relation of the text and the expressivist author. By flagging the position of the author in relation to a text, thus disrupting the text’s illusion of mimetic representation, Trollope is also disrupting the illusion of the author as an expressivism. Instead, the author is reoriented as a position of self-reflecting

artifice. By paralleling her approach with that of Trollope, Didion reproduces this manoeuvre, thus dislodging her narrative viewpoint as a projection of the author “Joan Didion” as an expressivism, and positioning it instead within a more recent tradition of literary production such as that of postmodern metafiction. Both Trollope and Didion thus recast the way in which the author-reader relation is oriented by the enunciation. The enunciation effects a relation whereby the reader no longer perceives the author as a theological locus of meaning operating from an autonomous position extra to the text. The author thus eschews any claims to autonomy and universality, assuming instead a contingent, partial position mediated by the multiple and variant semantic contexts which both inform and position the text.

In the case of *Democracy*, this is demonstrated by Didion’s deliberate foregrounding of the author-reader relation. Moments of overt metacritical commentary (for example, “Call me the author”) imply a critical participation in the narrative by the reader. At another moment in the novel Didion directly addresses the reader with the appellation “you” (Didion 1987, p. 119), a manoeuvre which not only acknowledges the ineluctable participation of the reader in the overall process of meaning production, but which overtly implicates the reader in the narrator’s self-conscious, problematising commentary concerning the “tracking” of the novel’s narrative. In the narrator’s reflections on the difficulties encountered in establishing a beginning for her novel, in her happening upon the central character’s motivation (Inez’s affair with Lovett), and further reflections concerning the contract between the writer and the reader and the question of narrative suspense and a suitably placed narrative climax (that is, the moment, flagged by the narrator, when Inez leaves Victor), the novel demonstrates that the author-reader relation is a *critical* one. The author-reader relation in *Democracy* thus encourages the reader to

question the assumption, central to theological conceptions of the author, that the author can be deployed as an autonomous and universal locus of meaning.

As a consequence, the enunciation in *Democracy* can be understood as a function of the very questions of ideology and context that the expressivist author and the classic realist model of the enunciation are assumed to transcend. The enunciation, in short, is a function of meaning production mediated by discourse. Hutcheon writes:

Both postmodern art and theory work ... to reveal the complicity of discourse and power by re-emphasising the enunciation: the *act* of saying is an inherently political act, at least when it is not seen as only a formal entity. ... Art, theory, criticism are not really separable from the institutions (publishing houses, galleries, libraries, universities, and so on) which disseminate them and which make possible the very existence of a field of discourse and its specific discursive formations ...

(Hutcheon 1988, p. 185)

Hutcheon's insistence that the enunciation should not be seen in formal terms which stand outside questions of ideology and context directly reflects Foucault's position concerning the enunciation, the author, and questions of discourse. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault reiterates Barthes's argument that the enunciation is an empty function capable of being filled by almost any individual on formulating a statement (Foucault 1994, p. 93). Indeed, in the act of enunciation, the author is not installed as an unchanging, timeless formalism, but occupies a set of differing positions motivated via the assumption of the roles of different subject (or speaking) positions (Foucault 1994, pp. 93-4). The relation of the author to the enunciation thus cancels out any commonsense conception of the author as an expressivism. In negotiating the enunciative relation between an authorial "I" and a reading "you", any conception of the author as an expressivism disappears.

For Hutcheon, the denaturalisation of the author-function as an autonomous, extra-discursive locus of meaning, and its reconfiguration according to conditions that are context-specific, stands as an example of the general questioning of the truth-claims of modernity by postmodernism (Hutcheon 1988, p. 75). Where the problem of the author-function is concerned, this questioning is evidenced by the emergence in literature and theory of the postmodern model of the enunciation; the disarming of the expressivist model of the author and author-centred interpretation occurs through a practice which not only acknowledges the role played by the author in the production of meaning in a text, but also those of the text and the reader (Hutcheon 75). Hutcheon alludes to Timothy Reiss's discussion of the act of the enunciation as a mode of discourse, which he argues is replacing the expressivist author model. As Hutcheon notes, Reiss draws upon "certain key Foucauldian notions", such as discourse theory, to outline his position:

Reiss has argued, in *The Discourse of Modernism*, that at any given time or in any given place, one discursive model or theory prevails and thus "provides the conceptual tools that make the majority of human practices meaningful." However, this dominant theoretical model at the same time represses or suppresses an equally potent discursive practice, a practice which gradually works to subvert the theory by revealing its inherent contradictions. At that point, certain forms of practice itself begin to become tools of analysis. Since the seventeenth century the prevailing theoretical model has been one variously labelled as "positivist," "capitalist," "experimentalist," "historicist," or simply "modern."

(Hutcheon 1988, p. 74)

The commonsense, or expressivist, conception of the author-function is one example of this modern discourse. Barthes's and Foucault's critiques of the hegemonic position of the expressivist author seek to reveal the contradictions it has suppressed. Barthes's effacing of the author-function in the name of an infinite play of positions within a text, or Foucault's denaturalising of the modern idea of the author as an illimitability – as an inversion of its historically real function – foreground some of its contradictions and undermine its cultural valency, allowing a once suppressed discursive practice to take its place. For both Hutcheon and Reiss, this suppressed discursive practice is that of the

complete act of the enunciation (Hutcheon 1988, p. 74). Like Foucault, Hutcheon's questioning of the givenness of the expressivist author-function begins with a recognition that the discourse of modernity, rather than functioning according to a model of infinite expansion, is in actual fact "underpinned by a drive towards totalization and finite and closed knowledge" (Hutcheon 1988, p. 75). This recognition of the ideological as opposed to natural relation which installs modernity as a figure of illimitability thus disarms modernity as a given and repositions it as a function of discourse. Located thus, both the discourse of modernity and conventions which install the author in a text as a perceived extra-textual locus of meaning instead foreground the contradictions that modernity has elided.

For Hutcheon, the supersession of the expressivist model of the author by an interpretive model foregrounding the enunciation suggests that it is possible to break free of the expressivist paradigm of meaning and construct instead a model of interpretation which locates the problematic of the author-function in relation to wider questions of postmodernism. In eschewing the formalist or ahistorical approach that underpins modernity, meaning, and the modern author-function, the enunciation – operating according to a context-dependent model of meaning – strips a meaning-position of any "absolute", "extra-discursive" truth-value, with the effect that any truth-claims are rendered epistemologically contingent rather than true in any universal or given sense. For both Hutcheon and Reiss, the foregrounding of the full act of enunciation – in science and philosophy, as well as art and critical theory – displaces the paradigm of the expressivist author with a discursive practice which frees understanding from modernity's positivist precepts (Hutcheon 1988, p. 74).

Hutcheon argues that to no longer believe in the author as a person (in relation to the text they have written, at least) may be a way “to restore the wholeness of the act of enunciation” (Hutcheon 1988, p. 81). Instead of situating the text as something written by an author – the meaning of which the reader must passively interpret – Hutcheon proposes that we dismantle the modern author-reader model and replace it with a model that treats both the author *and* the reader in contextual terms. Drawing on terminology formulated by Walter Benjamin in “The Author as Producer”, she argues that we can replace the traditional terms “author” and “reader” (and the conventions that these terms connote) with the terms “producer” and “receiver”; these terms, she argues, foreground a relationship that is not only contextual, but also collaborative:

No longer to believe in the “author” as a person may be another way to restore the wholeness of the act of enunciation. The producer would be known as a position (like that of the receiver) to be filled within the text. To speak (as I have been) of producers and receivers of texts, then, would be to speak less of the individual subject than of what [Terry] Eagleton calls “subject positions” that are not extra-textual, but are instead essential constitutive factors of the text. ... [T]he producer of the text (at least from the reader’s point of view) is never, strictly speaking, a real or even *implied* one, but is rather one *inferred* by the reader from her/his positioning as enunciative entity.

(Hutcheon 1988, p. 81)

The enunciative relation between the author, the text, and the reader in *Democracy* reflects many of the precepts of the producer-receiver model. Because it is implicated in a relation of the author/producer which foregrounds the author as a textually rather than formally grounded function in Didion’s novel, the reader/receiver is actively implicated in a model of meaning production which distances the author-reader relation from the theological model of praxis that valorises the expressivist function. Situating, for example, narrative viewpoint as an intertextual rather than free-standing function in *Democracy*, Didion effectively de-essentialises the author’s narrative viewpoint.



It is possible to argue that Didion's self-conscious deployment of a contextual narrative viewpoint exemplifies the kind of positionality that acknowledges the complete act of enunciation. In addition, by foregrounding meaning in *Democracy* in relation to the act of enunciation, Didion's novel can be seen to effect a general critique of the concept of modernity; this critique, moreover, interrogates the concept of modernity at more than an abstracted, formalist level. It is closely bound up with the general discussion of the problematic of the author-function that has been the central focus of this thesis. Once again, Winchell's discussion of *Democracy* provides a useful position from which to field this discussion.

Winchell argues that Didion's approach to point of view is the single most controversial feature of this novel (Winchell 1989, p. 132). He contrasts the function of point of view in *Democracy* with viewpoint approaches in some other examples of her fiction and journalism, which range from "the selectively limited omniscience of *Run River*, to the *director-auteur* stance of *Play It as It Lays* to the Conradian narration of *A Book of Common Prayer*" (Winchell 1989, pp. 132-3). He argues that the use of the autobiographical first-person point of view in *Democracy*, coupled with Didion's ironic, self-conscious detailing of the difficulties and repeated false starts she experienced in writing the novel, not only denaturalises the convention of the author as an extra-discursive "Creator-God" who eschews questions such as context and contextual situatedness, but is also suggestive of parallels between *Democracy* and the "new journalism". He writes:

By telling us about the false starts and treating her characters as if they were as real as the figures in her journalism, Didion may be trying to collapse the distinction between fiction and nonfiction narrative. If the new journalism brings the techniques of fiction to the writing of fact, this novel brings the illusion of fact to the writing of fiction.

(Winchell 1989, p. 133)

Winchell's phrase, "the illusion of fact", is interesting. His argument implies that it is possible that Didion is positioning her "autobiographical" author-viewpoint, "Joan Didion", in a sense that disarms the factuality of the novel's narrative viewpoint. By locating this author-viewpoint *in relation* to the fictional characters and the fictional plot that comprise *Democracy*, yet using an autobiographical viewpoint as if the story it delineates is wholly factual, Didion is denaturalising the givenness of this factuality. As a consequence, Didion's extra-discursive status as a flesh and blood subject who has created the narrative position, "Joan Didion" is denaturalised, also, at least with respect to the text itself.

Any recourse the reader has to Joan Didion is negotiated via the contextual situatedness of her textually-grounded position in the novel. Because of this, the authorial viewpoint "Joan Didion" is *implicated with*, rather than rendered distinct from, the position of the reader as the collaborating producer of meaning in *Democracy*. "Joan Didion" exists *relatively* – not as a differentiated formalism – in relation to the reader. The author-function in *Democracy* is implicated with the meaning-producing operations of the reader, and the overall act of enunciation is reflexively foregrounded as a self-conscious, contextual allegory of meaning production. The author-function in Didion's novel is predicated upon the act of enunciation, not upon any context-transcendent idea of the author. As a consequence of this, Didion's context-dependent author-function can be seen as a kind of "internalised challenge" (Hutcheon 1988, p. 75) to the modern convention of the author, since it functions *within* and *relative* to questions of context, rather than from some autonomous, extra-contextual space external to them. The theological model of the author, criticised by theorists such as Barthes and Foucault, is at once denaturalised yet repositioned in such a manner that it subverts the idea of givenness or commonsensicality

that underpins the modern conception of the author. It is in this sense that the author-function in *Democracy* can be seen as evidencing a properly transformative poetics. The fact that the author-function in Didion's novel is, as Winchell argues, predicated upon a collapse of the distinction between fact and fiction hints at the way in which Didion's novel can be seen to effect this. Didion is in effect employing the contexts which locate this author-position not only to disarm the author-function as an extra-textual position, but also to suggest that it is contextual, discursive locatedness – not a position of extra-discursiveness – which locates the author as a meaning-producing function.

Didion's approach to narrative viewpoint in *Democracy*, then, can be seen as another stage in the progressive critique of the metaphysical foundationalism of modernity outlined in *Bostonians*, *Gatsby*, and *V.*, locating itself within a post-war, postmodern tradition which can be broadly interpreted as interrogating the absolute precepts of the modern project. It is the groundedness of the author-function in *Democracy* within the discursive, context-locatedness of the act of enunciation which makes such a critique possible. Because the author-function in Didion's novel eschews the formalist, extra-contextual model of the author-function first privileged during the Romantic period, and reified and naturalised as a specialised position of meaning throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century, it can be seen to critically engage with the specific social, political, and historical contexts that the expressivist model of the author-function sought to transcend. Didion's metafictional situating of the narrative viewpoint in *Democracy* – such that the narrative viewpoint functions as a means of reflection upon the writing process – is presented throughout the novel as a fluid, provisional, contextually-delineated negotiation with the various materials she has drawn on in writing the novel. As a flesh-and-blood writer reflecting upon the narrator "Joan Didion" in *Democracy*, Didion

denaturalises her author-self as an extra-contextual, given externality accessible through the reading of the novel, and positions herself as a contextual, narratologically located function.

It is this position that the reader has access to; a position which, in eschewing the convention of the omniscient/expressivist author model, delineates the conditions of reading and understanding. The reader, as an enunciatively-situated collaborator, thus accesses the textual narrative viewpoint in *Democracy* rather than Joan Didion as an anterior position external to her novel. Meaning in *Democracy* is discursively situated by an enunciative author/reader interrelation, by the capacity of the reader to elucidate the various contexts – historical, social, political, intertextual – that the narrative position “Joan Didion” negotiates in the unfolding of the novel’s narrative. Writing a satire on the American scene in the post-war period, and yet foregrounding her narrative viewpoint in such a way that she is an actual character in the novel, her position is mediated by the various contexts she navigates.

Because the author-function in *Democracy* is contextually rather than extra-contextually situated, the semantic operation of the author-function is dependent upon such questions of context. The intervening commentary employed by Didion throughout her novel as she reflects upon the process involved in developing her narrative serves to foreground this. For example, early in the novel, Didion employs her narrative viewpoint to reflect upon the problems encountered in starting *Democracy*:

I have no unequivocal way of beginning it, although I do have certain things in mind. I have for example these lines from a poem by Wallace Stevens:

The palm at the end of the mind,  
Beyond the last thought, rises  
In the bronze distance,  
A gold-feathered bird

Sings in the palm, without human meaning,  
Without human feeling, a foreign song.

Consider that:

I have: 'Colors, moisture, heat, enough blue in the air.' Inez Victor's fullest explanation of why she stayed in Kuala Lumpur. Consider that too. I have those pink dawns of which Jack Lovett spoke. I have the dream, recurrent, in which my entire field of vision fills with rainbow, in which I open a door onto a growth of tropical green (I believe this to be a banana grove, the big glossy fronds heavy with rain, but since no bananas are seen in the palms symbolists may relax) and watch the spectrum separate into pure color. Consider any of these things long enough and you will see that they tend to deny the relevance not only of personality but of narrative, which makes them less than ideal images with which to begin a novel, but we go with what we have.

(Didion 1987, pp. 12-13)

Didion's enumeration of the various fragments at hand which suggest to her a kind of starting point – if a problematic one – for *Democracy* serves to emphasise the contextual, *relational* character of the novel's narrative viewpoint as she attempts to develop a coherent train of narrative. By underlining her relation with various fragments and sources – poetic, imagistic, and, with regard to Inez Victor, "biographical" – as starting points for her narrative, Didion's metafictional narrative commentary foregrounds the complicitous nature of the relation between the author and the sources employed by them. Didion's commentary underlines the way in which the author's position, with regard to the narrative she is writing, is not that of some omniscient author/god creating an artefact out of thin air, but a relational, contextually-situated negotiation with the materials of the world – linguistic, social, political, historical – out of which the capacity of the author to fashion a narrative is in the final event made possible. Using a metafictional narrative viewpoint to reflect upon the processes of invention and creation, Didion in effect shows how the capacity of a writer to reflect critically upon the writing process is part and parcel of their contextual position in relation to the narrative itself.

Didion's inability in the early stages of *Democracy* to discover a workable way to begin her novel – to discover her “leper” at the door, her “unequivocal lone figure on the crest of the immutable hill” (Didion 1987, p. 14) – is illustrative of this. The moment, some forty pages later in the novel, when Didion at last happens upon an incident which suggests a needed narrative shape for her novel – when Jack Lovett, in the operations room at Honolulu Airport, sees Inez step off an incoming 747 onto the tarmac with her husband, and Didion understands that she and Lovett are both in love with one another – is thus flagged by Didion as her motivation for the novel, as the “leper who comes to the door” / “unequivocal lone figure on the crest of the immutable hill” (Didion 1987, p. 56).

However, Didion does not couch this moment in terms that are given or absolute. As she writes, the encounter between Inez and Lovett is significant because it lends a narrative shape, a motivation, for the *specific* narrative she is attempting to write:

As the passenger service representative speaks to the man listed on the manifest as DILLON, R.W., clearly a consultation about cars, baggage, facilitating arrangements, when the senator arrives, the woman stands slightly apart, still smiling dutifully. She has stepped beyond the protection of the umbrella and the rain runs down her face and hair. Absently she fingers the flowers of the lei, lifts them to her face, presses the petals against her cheek and crushes them. She will still be wearing the short, knitted skirt and crushed lei when she sees, two hours later, through a glass window on the third-floor intensive care unit at Queens Medical Center, the unconscious body of her sister Janet.

This scene is *my* leper at the door, *my* Tropical Belt Coal Company, *my* lone figure on the crest of the immutable hill.

Inez Victor at 5:47 AM on the morning of March 26, 1975, crushing her lei in the rain on the runway.

Jack Lovett watching her.

‘Get her out of the goddam rain,’ Jack Lovett said to no one in particular.

(Didion 1987, p. 56, my italics)

In discovering a narrative logic, a scene that will lend an embracing thematic shape to her novel, Didion's meta-commentary emphasises the fact that, in using the clandestine affair between Inez and Lovett as a plot motivation which lets her focus and direct her satire on the post-war American economic empire and the Vietnam War, she is employing a narrative logic that is delimited by the self-conscious, non-omniscient stance of her

narrative viewpoint. This is *Didion's* immutable hill, not everybody's. This deliberately delimited viewpoint, in emphasising its provisionality, brackets her standpoint such that Didion, eschewing the omniscient author model, is able to situate her viewpoint reflexively rather than absolutely. Her technique of meta-commentary foregrounds the various contexts from which she proceeds, contexts which reflect the provisional manner in which her viewpoint is ultimately grounded. Didion's employment of a reflexive, meta-critical narrative viewpoint serves to reveal the contextual conditions of the novel's meaning, not by naturalising these conditions, but by foregrounding them as conventions whose capacity to construct a narrative stand specific to the various contexts (both worldly and textual) which make this novel possible.

Didion's intuition of the long-standing romantic attachment between Inez and Lovett is flagged as the moment which supplies her with a basic plot motivation; it is also deployed by the narrator in a number of ways which reflect Didion's metafictional approach. Her use of a narrative point of view to reflect explicitly upon the writing process is hardly without precedent; one need only recall the self-conscious reflections of narrators such as that of John Fowles in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* to understand that Didion is tapping into a postwar tradition that has been pervasive throughout contemporary Western culture. In placing such emphasis upon a self-reflecting narrator, and explicitly using the ruminations of the narrator to manipulate the way the reader responds to her novel, one can argue that Didion (in line with this general metafictional tradition) encourages the reader to consider afresh the specific role a narrator plays in fiction. In the case of *Democracy*, the relation between the narrator and the reader – the operation of the function of the enunciation in the process of meaning production – can thus be seen to

undermine the position of ideological innocence occupied by the convention of the expressivist author.

The shaping and structuring of the plot of *Democracy* reflects this non-expressivist narrative viewpoint, as is demonstrated by the moment Didion witnesses the encounter between Inez and Lovett and stumbles upon their covert romantic attachment (Didion 1987, p. 56). This moment stands as a key example of the relations between the narrator and the novel's characters and plot motivation. Importantly, the point of view of the narrator is both enabled yet limited by the nature of the involvement – professional, personal, or otherwise – with the novel's other characters, and the various milieux in which she both lives and works as a journalist. The capacity of Didion both to assemble and shape her story bears more resemblance to that of an investigative journalist hunting out sources for a possible story, than that of an author-cum-omniscience presiding over a narrative which is an expression of her “omnipotent” creative powers. Disarmed as a formalism able to transcend the material contexts of the novel's settings, Didion's narrative point of view is instead delimited by these contexts.

Another important example in *Democracy* occurs when Didion's narrator alludes to a night three years previously, when Inez's husband Harry Victor failed in his running as a Democrat Presidential nominee:

There were people who all knew someone who knew someone who knew that on the night in 1972 when Harry Victor conceded the California primary before the polls closed Inez Victor flew back to New York on the press plane and sang 'It's All Over Now, Baby Blue' with an ABC cameraman and the photographer from *Rolling Stone*.

(Didion 1987, p. 35)

Encountering this story through the hearsay of persons who know other persons who witnessed Inez aboard the press flight, Didion has presented the story as one mediated by



other people who have witnessed it and then passed the story on, rather than as a story she apprehend as a kind of “brute fact” from an omniscient, expressivist standpoint. The dramatic importance of this story for Didion’s narrator, providing an early hint of Inez’s unhappiness in her marriage, is compounded by another scene much later in the novel when Didion recounts the evening in Honolulu where Inez finally walks out on her husband with Lovett (Didion 1987, p. 121); Didion’s narrator is only privy to this scene when Inez tells her about it in person (Didion 1987, p. 101).

At another point in the novel, when she prepares the reader for the climactic moment in which Inez finally walks out on Victor, Didion’s narrator emphasises the non-expressivist, enunciative function of her narrative viewpoint by framing the moment and commenting explicitly on her narrative approach:

I know the conventions and how to observe them, how to fill in the canvas I have already stretched; how to tell you what he said and she said and know above all, since the heart of the narrative is a certain calculated ellipsis, a tacit contract between writer and reader to surprise and be surprised, how not to tell you what you do not yet want to know.

(Didion 1987, pp. 118-19)

Foreshadowing the moment as it takes place in the novel, the narrator writes:

I could still do Inez Victor’s four remaining days in Honolulu step by step, could proceed from the living room of the house on Manoa Road into the dining room and tell you exactly what happened the first night in Honolulu when Inez and Billy Dillon and Dick Zeigler and Dwight and Ruthie Christian finally sat down to dinner.

I could give you Jack Lovett walking unannounced into the dining room, through the French doors that opened onto the swimming pool.

I could give you Inez looking up and seeing him there.

(Didion 1987, pp. 117-18)

The complicit, ineluctable nature of the role played by the narrator in mediating the events in *Democracy* is thus foregrounded here. As both a participating character and observer in the novel, and as a narrator notating and arranging the novel’s events, Didion’s narrator is flagging the irreducible relatedness of the inchoate materials and

events of the novel with herself. As with the relatedness of a historian and the events of history discussed in Chapter Four in this thesis, Didion's narrator foregrounds the ineluctable relation of narrative viewpoint and concrete events. The narrator describes both *Democracy* and questions of narrative and narrative strategy through recourse to a series of metaphors; the novel is an already-stretched canvas, upon which she is ready to paint. The moment in the narrative when Inez walks out on Victor is described by the narrator not only as the "heart" of the narrative, but also as "a calculated ellipsis", a strategic placing of the moment by the narrator such that it will serve most effectively as a moment of climax and be understood as another defining instance of plot and character motivation: "a tacit contract between writer and reader" (Didion 1987, p. 119). Through explicit recourse to such metaphors and an open acknowledgment of certain implicitly accepted narrative conventions, such as that of character motivation, Didion highlights a relation between the narrator, the text, and the reader that is intrinsic to both the presentation and reception of a fiction's narrative.

Although the relation between Didion's narrator and the events of *Democracy* is an ineluctable one, the position of the narrator as the narrative agent detailing these events cannot be understood as absolute. As argued above, the narrator in *Democracy* is repeatedly concerned to reject any positing of her narrative point of view as definitive or universal. Strategies employed by the narrator, such as the detailing of the problematic process involved in settling upon a suitable narrative, coupled with an intertextual placing of her narrative viewpoint (for example, alongside that of Trollope and Adams) – with the effect that it is seen to occupy a contextual rather than formalist standpoint – forestall any bid by the reader to treat narrative viewpoint in *Democracy* as an absolute arbiter of its own reality. Strategies such as this also disarm the narrator as an *empirical* arbiter of its

reality. Narrative viewpoint, mediated by the contexts – intertextual, social, and historical – which not only shape, but also in the first instance *make possible* the operation of the narrator as a diegetic rather than mimetic function, effectively force the reader to mediate the events of the novel *via* these contexts. The reader, accessing the “reality” of the novel through the discursive precepts of the mediating narrator, cannot therefore assume that the narrator accesses the events of the novel in all their naked, empirical literalness. The foregrounding of narrative point of view as a contextual function – for example, Didion’s orienting her narrative viewpoint in Chapter 2 of *Democracy* as an intertextual echo and parallel with that of Trollope – serves to dislodge narrative viewpoint in the novel as an empirical function and aligns it instead as a material function of the enunciation.

It is a maxim of intertextual theory and the question of authorship in relation at least to the question of the author and the text, that the author-function, as a position of meaning production, cannot be legitimated as a formalist or autonomous function of meaning production (that is, as an expressivism), but is in fact legitimated as a semantic product of a specifically intertextual meaning relation. This relation has been explored by Harold Bloom in *The Anxiety of Influence* where, using some canonical English Romantic Poets, he sets out to “de-idealize our accepted accounts of how one poet helps to form another” (Bloom 1973, p. 5). Bloom questions the idea that a literary artist is a god-like progenitor of a literary work, a secular artist-cum-deity who independently and autonomously brings a literary artefact into being. For Bloom, the artist occupies a necessarily dependent relationship with his or her artistic predecessors, a heritage-cum-inheritance which the artist must attempt to transcend in order to win a position as an “original” artist. Bloom likens this relation of influence to Freud’s “family romance” (Bloom 1973, p. 8), specifically, the relation between the father and his son, an Oedipus figure attempting to

usurp the hegemony of the father. Deploying Freudian terminology, Bloom calls the artist/father the “precursor”, while the artist/son – “the young citizen of poetry” – he designates as “ephebe” (Bloom 1973, p. 10). The individuality and creativity of the artist is thus necessarily defined by this relation of artistic inheritance rather than any perception of the artist as the autonomous agent of artistic creation. The artistic individuality and strength of the artist is accordingly dependent on a capacity to triumph as an artist over this inheritance. Discussing such an inheritance with regard to the Romantic poet John Keats and his influence during the later Victorian period, Bloom writes:

[T]he Victorian disciples of Keats most notably include Tennyson, Arnold, Hopkins, and Rossetti. That Tennyson triumphed in his long, hidden contest with Keats, no one can assert absolutely, but his clear superiority over Arnold, Hopkins, and Rossetti is due to his relative victory or at least holding of his own in contrast to their partial defeats.

(Bloom 1973, p. 12)

Bloom couples this model of artistic creation and influence with the argument that a poet does not triumph over the weight of the artistic inheritance of the precursor(s) by writing a work that allows of an original reading relative to their work, but by “misreading” his or her precursors (Bloom 1973, p. 12). Thus Bloom adds to his argument that a poet (or any artist) should not be regarded as a secular god/genius who has independently brought a work of art into being.

In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar apply a specifically feminist slant to the position expounded by Bloom, developing it in relation to the emergence of the woman novelist in England in the nineteenth century. They write:

Bloom’s model of literary history is intensely (even exclusively) male, and necessarily patriarchal. For this reason it has seemed, and no doubt will continue to seem, offensively sexist to some feminist critics. Not only, after all, does Bloom describe literary history as the crucial warfare of fathers and sons ... he metaphorically defines the poetic process as a sexual encounter between a male poet and his female muse. Where, then, does the female poet fit in? Does she want to annihilate a “forefather” or a “foremother”? What if she can find no models, no

precursors? Does she have a muse, and what is its sex? Such questions are inevitable in any female consideration of Bloomian poetics. And yet, from a feminist perspective, their inevitability may be just the point; it may, that is, call our attention not to what is wrong about Bloom's conceptualisation of the dynamics of Western literary history, but to what is right (or at least suggestive) about his theory.

(Gilbert & Gubar 1984, p. 47)

As Gilbert and Gubar go on to argue, "Western literary history is overwhelmingly male – or, more accurately, patriarchal – and Bloom analyzes and explains this fact" (Gilbert & Gubar 1984, p. 47). Bloom defines a process of interaction in literary history – and in the "family romance" – that has been ignored by other theorists because they simply took such a process as an automatic assumption or given, and therefore not in any need of analysis:

Like Freud, too, Bloom has insisted on bringing to consciousness assumptions readers and writers do not ordinarily examine. In doing so, he has clarified the implications of the psychosexual and sociosexual con-texts by which every literary text is surrounded and thus the meanings of the "guests" and "ghosts" which inhabit texts themselves.

(Gilbert & Gubar 1984, p. 47)

Consequently, it is postulated by Gilbert and Gubar that, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, women writers were confronted with the problem of developing a distinctively female tradition of writing in relation to a tradition dominated by men and patriarchal models of femininity. As Gilbert and Gubar argue, women writers were faced with the predicament of "taking up the pen" when a woman writer possessed "no story of her own" (Gilbert & Gubar 1984, p. 22). The woman writer was thus not so much confronted with the predicament of an "anxiety of influence" as an "anxiety of authorship" (Gilbert & Gubar 1984, p. 48).

For Gilbert and Gubar, male and female writers working in our own day occupy different literary traditions, even though these traditions, in the main, have grown out of a male-dominated literary culture. While the male writer is faced with the problem of exhaustion

and belatedness, of having to write within a male-centric tradition which goes back to the Renaissance, the woman writer today, “the daughter of too few mothers ... feels that she is helping to create a viable tradition which is at last definitively emerging” (Gilbert & Gubar 1984, p. 50). Although the question as to whether Didion can be considered a *feminist* writer in relation to this tradition (her intertextual allusions to the late nineteenth-century tradition of Trollope and Adams after all aligns her with a specifically male tradition of writing) is perhaps something of a moot point, her deliberate flagging of narrative viewpoint in *Democracy* as an intertextual rather than expressivist function is a signally important narratological manoeuvre. Essentially, Didion legitimates narrative viewpoint in her novel through her method of intertextual allusion, thus distancing herself as a writer from the expressivist authorial model. Indeed, Didion positions her narrative viewpoint by problematising the efficacy of the expressivist convention, emphasising instead the intertextual groundedness of narrative viewpoint in *Democracy* as a viable basis of meaning production. Consequently, as will be argued below, Didion not only deploys an intertextual model of the author and narrative viewpoint to question the givenness of the expressivist author convention, but also deploys an intertextual author model to undermine the absolute truth-claims of liberal modernity and liberal humanism. By locating an intertextual model of the author in a contextual sense – as one of the contextual modes which ground the function of the enunciation – Didion thus uses the concept of intertextuality and authorship to foreground narrative viewpoint in *Democracy* as a postmodern critique of the modern hegemony.

This intertextual author relation is grounded by Didion in the second chapter of the novel, when she parallels her metafictional narrative viewpoint with that of Trollope and thus installs her own narrative viewpoint in an explicitly intertextual sense. This allusion to

Trollope, coupled with other allusions (to name but several in the novel) to Stevens and Adams, forestalls any bid by the reader to treat the relation of Didion's narrative viewpoint to Didion the author as theological, foregrounding instead some of the intertextual relations that at once precede Didion as the author and locate the narrative viewpoint "Joan Didion" as a position whose operations both bear upon and are mediated by these relations. It is possible to argue that, instead of understanding the novel's narrative viewpoint as an expression of "Joan Didion" as a self-identical autonomy, the reader is encouraged to treat Didion's narrative viewpoint as a relational, discursively complicit function – as "Didion/Trollope/Stevens/Adams" and so on. The narrative viewpoint "Joan Didion" is a function not simply of itself, but also of its semantic and ideological operation as a function both imbricated within and made possible by all the discursive positions that install it.

As argued above, the narratological importance of both Trollope and Adams as precursors for the function of Didion's partial, non-omniscient narrative viewpoint in *Democracy* turns upon the specific way in which the operation of narrative viewpoint in, for example, *The Warden* and *The Education of Henry Adams* critiques the claims of both the narrative of modernity and liberal humanism to epistemological givenness. Trollope deploys narrative viewpoint in *The Warden* to avoid the *partis pris*, to question the liberal humanist belief that the human subject can be treated as a foundationalist centre of meaning in society. Adams, in turn, decentres narrative viewpoint in the *Education* to argue that the multiple, fragmented realities of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Western society have eclipsed the position of self-evidence once assumed by the modern and liberal humanist subject. When it comes to Didion, the operation of narrative viewpoint in *Democracy* (not only as a metafictional reflection on the problems of narration, but as the

mediator of events in the novel) taps into this theme of partial, non-essentialist authorial praxis to serve as the basis for a critique of Western modernity and liberal humanism. The meditations upon Inez's progress in Didion's novel stand both as a parallel with and historically-specific differentiation from the intertextual precursors that locate *Democracy* as a cultural artefact. Central to Didion's approach is a deployment of the character of Inez as a figure who disarms the pervasive narrative of liberal humanism as a given – as a kind of ontological “archetype” – installing it instead as an ideologically- and culturally-specific model of human culture.

In an explicit parallel to Foucault's rejection of the idea that the author should be regarded as an autonomous “founding consciousness” in a text (Foucault 1994, p. 54), narrative viewpoint in *Democracy*, charting Inez's progress (and mediating a course which is at once located and made possible by the intertextual relations that it foregrounds) is also differentiated, via Didion's metafictional reflections, from the expressivist convention of the author-function. As a function of various intertextual relations, narrative viewpoint is understood by the reader as both implicated with and a discursive function of these relations. Didion's explicit foregrounding of the novel's narrative viewpoint relative to intertextual precursors such as Stevens, Trollope, and Adams, immediately undermines the “commonsensicality” of the expressivist author-narrator relation and foregrounds Didion's narrative in relation to these precursors. The narrative viewpoint “Joan Didion” is thus installed as a construction, as opposed to a formalistically-situated mediator, of these various discursive precepts. The expressivist author-mediates-narrator-mediates-culture relation is consequently inverted.



Implicit in this inversion is a similar relation between the narrator and the character of Inez. Because the narrator in *Democracy* is located in the novel as a function discursively implicated within its intertexts, its relation with Inez must also be seen as a discursive one. The narrator in the novel does not apprehend Inez as an extra-contextual brute fact – as an ideologically innocent, nakedly apprehended material entity. Rather, the narrator’s relation with Inez is mediated by the various discourses that construct Inez as a subject, and which enable the narrator to participate in this construction.<sup>5</sup> As narrative viewpoint in *Democracy* must be understood according to intertextual rather than expressivist terms – as (for example) “Didion/Trollope/Adams” – so it follows that the narrator’s relation with Inez must be understood through the various cultural intertexts that install her as a character and which also render her comprehensible to Didion. Consequently, the relation between Didion and Inez should not be treated according to terms which posit both figures as extra-contextual autonomies, but as subjects imbricated in a discursive relation – a relation perhaps described by the appellation “Didion/Inez”.

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<sup>5</sup> In his article, “Intertextual Representation: On Mimesis as Interpretive Discourse”, Michael Riffaterre, discussing the concept of intertextuality, writes: “If we try to arrive at the simplest and most universally valid definition of the representation of reality in literature, we may dispense with grammatical features such as verisimilitude or with genres such as realism, since these are not universal categories. Their applicability depends on historical circumstances or authorial intent. ... Readers feel, and critics pronounce, that the text’s significance depends on this objective exteriority, even though this significance may entail destroying the commonplace acceptance of the object; indeed, negating something still presupposes that something. Secondly, the reader’s response to the mimesis consists in a rationalization tending to verify and complete the mimesis and to expand on it in sensory terms. ... There are, however, literary representations almost devoid of descriptive content, or so vague and so skimpy that their object cannot be analyzed or rationalized in sensory terms. Criticism is hard put to explain why readers feel compelled to evaluate them. And yet these texts not only lend themselves to interpretation but they are especially apt to trigger and control the reader’s hermeneutic behaviour. In short, the represented object eschews referentiality yet refuses to vanish altogether, becoming instead the verbal vehicle of an interpretive activity that ends up by making the object subservient to the subject. ... Critics fail to explain this paradox because they stick to referentiality as the only law governing representation and assume that the reference on which the mimesis is based is from words to things, from the verbal to the nonverbal domain. I propose that reference in such cases is from words to words, or rather from texts to texts, and that intertextuality is the agent both of the mimesis and of the hermeneutic constructions on that mimesis” (Riffaterre 1984, pp. 141-2). Riffaterre’s remarks thus underline the fact that every text has its meaning, not in some self-identical relation to itself, but in relation to other texts. As Barthes writes: “[T]he text is held in language, only exists in a moment of discourse. ... *Text is experienced only in an activity of production*” (Barthes 1977, p. 157).

In describing her narrative as a calculated ellipsis, as a narrative which orients and places the events concerning Inez's life such that they are seen to foreground a specific dramatic shape, Didion's narrator brings this "Didion/Inez" relation into focus. Events of the novel, turning upon the narrator's intuition about Inez's and Lovett's attachment, are situated by the narrator in such a way that the moment of crisis in her life – the murders by Paul Christian, and the suggestion by Victor's aide Billy Dillon that the murders can be contained as an accident, thus minimising damage to Victor's political career (Didion 1987, p. 88) – serve as the basis for a specific narratological shape. Accordingly, Inez's defection with Lovett, and the years which preceded the defection, are couched by the narrator in very particular terms. Surveying Inez's years as wife to Victor, the narrator writes:

I have never been sure what Inez thought about how her days were passed during those years she spent in Washington and New York. The idea of 'expressing' herself seems not to have occurred to her. She held the occasional job but pursued no particular work. Even the details of running a household did not engage her unduly. Her houses were professionally kept and, for all the framed snapshots and studied clutter, entirely impersonal, expressive not of some individual style but only of the conventions then current among the people she saw.

(Didion 1987, p. 39)

This observation touches upon a central concern in *Democracy*: Inez's realisation of herself, after she forsakes both the Christians and Victor, as an individual able to fulfil her own selfhood – as an individual who eventually "expresses" herself according to the liberal humanist precepts which perceive the human individual as an autonomous, self-determining subject. The entire narrative of *Democracy*, its organisation by the narrator around Inez's personal progress, can be couched according to this theme. As a daughter in a prominent establishment family, and then the wife of a Democrat senator, Inez is implicated in a milieu whereby its characters, their society, and the various social institutions directly reflect and touch upon some of the pervading ideals which define America as both a democratic republic and an imperial power, as a nation founded upon

the liberal humanist precepts of free will for the individual within a democratic body politic. The title of Didion's novel can thus be treated as an explicit entry point for its specific concerns.

Inez's peregrinations as a daughter in the Christian family and as Victor's wife serve as the basis for an examination of the idea of America as a twentieth-century democracy; her progress serves as a touchstone which enables the novel's narrator to deploy a critique of the nation as a crucible for the ideals of individual liberty and democracy. At its simplest, the narrator in Didion's novel tracks the progress of an individual who enters her adult life as an American citizen divested of free will, and who has to reject America, or at least her current place in it, in order to fulfil herself as a subject possessed of the self-determination that has been refused her. Such a pattern – the basis of the ellipsis with which Didion's narrator structures *Democracy* – would seem to affirm and validate the liberal humanist precepts which define Inez's milieu, and which underpin the popular idea of America as a democratic nation.

In a general sense, this is precisely what Inez does. In forsaking the Christians and Victor, and journeying with Lovett to rescue her daughter during the last stages of the war in Vietnam, and finally re-establishing herself in Kuala Lumpur to assist with the influx of refugees, Inez is both freeing herself from a milieu which up until this time has oppressed her. In helping with the refugee effort, she follows through with a years-old ambition which her marriage to Victor has prevented her from realising. In a broad sense at least, Inez is able to validate herself as a free-willing subject. However, Inez's progress ultimately renders problematic the ideal of the American empire as a crucible of individual rights and free will. The milieux which Inez has navigated throughout her life

– the Hawaiian Islands, America, Hong Kong, and Kuala Lumpur – are no mere backdrop for her; she is both implicated in these various milieux and ultimately situated by them as a liberal humanist subject. Inez’s capacity to realise herself as a free-willing subject in relation to the American body politic is driven by her capacity to undermine the perception of America as a crucible of liberal humanism through an implicit questioning of liberal humanism as a self-evident basis of understanding; a mode of praxis which transcends concerns of ideology and which thus stands as a “natural”, “commonsensical” basis of human understanding. Importantly, Inez’s progress throughout the novel is grounded upon a contradiction within the milieu of which she is a subject: while liberal humanist precepts turn upon an ideal of universal human rights and free will, Inez, as the wife of a Democrat senator, is denied such rights.

In a parallel assessment of the question of liberal humanism and the rights of women, Belsey argues: women “participate both in the liberal humanist discourse of freedom, self-determination and rationality and at the same time in the specifically feminine discourse offered by society of submission, relative inadequacy and irrational intuition” (Belsey 1989, p. 65). As a site, then, of contradiction in the American body politic in *Democracy*, Inez undermines liberal humanism as an unproblematical enterprise, as a social narrative which serves as a self-evident, commonsensical basis for individual liberty and rational progress. As Inez is a site of contradiction, so too is liberal humanism. Any agency Inez possesses in the novel rests upon her capacity to foreground the partial, contingent – as opposed to ideologically innocent – underpinnings of America as a democratic nation, with the effect that the “commonsensical” position of America as one such milieu comes under question. Inez’s progress in *Democracy* thus orients the novel’s liberal humanist thematic as a historical specificity, as a narrative *specific* to the

individual, social, and historical contexts which situate Inez and the milieu she inhabits. Didion's novel stands as a specific intertextual *parallel* with the critiques of liberal humanism (and along with this the ideal of the rational, free-willing subject) as undertaken by both Trollope and Adams. In contrast, though, Didion's critique is *specifically* a postmodern metafiction written in the latter part of the twentieth century.

As a novel whose narrative viewpoint explicitly meditates upon the writing process, *Democracy* thus deploys an author-narrator relation which grounds authorial viewpoint in relation to a narrative point of view which, as argued above, is in turn situated in relation to discourses which locate Inez in the narrative; thus Inez is installed as a discursively-mediated rather than nakedly apprehended subject. In addition to this, narrative in Didion's novel reflects a narrator-reader relation which is also a discursive – because contextually-mediated – relation; thus the reader is implicated as a collaborative producer of meaning in the novel's narrative. Consequently, the author-function in *Democracy* operates as a *relative* rather than autonomous term. Engaging in a tracking of Inez's progress as a character who is seen to participate in a simultaneous flagging yet discursive denaturalising of the “archetypal” American liberal humanist narrative of individual self-determination and free will, the enunciative author-reader relation in Didion's novel installs a politic of liberal humanism, or more broadly liberal modernity, as a defining precept of American culture, yet at the same time disarms it as a cultural given.

Parallels can be drawn here between *Democracy* and Foucault's position with regard to liberal humanism. Commentators such as Jana Sawicki have noted a change towards both the Enlightenment and humanism in the final period of Foucault's writings. In works

such as *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault implicitly opposed the Enlightenment and humanism as social systems which totalise understanding and systems of representation and social organisation. However, quoting from an interview with Foucault in *Technologies of the Self* (1998), Sawicki notes that Foucault does not oppose humanism outright, but in the specific sense that it generally presents its ethos of individual self-determination and liberty in terms that are universal:

In effect, Foucault finds humanism unreliable because as a theme in history it has meant so many different things, has been enlisted in so many different causes. But this is not its only problem. It also 'presents a certain form of ethics as a universal model for any kind of freedom'. In particular, he objected to forms of humanism that begin with an a priori theory of the subject and proceed to define the universal and necessary conditions for the possibility of ethical action and thought. ... What Foucault objects to is the tendency to supply innate structures of autonomous subjectivity – the tendency to reify and render necessary contingent structures of being.

(Sawicki 1998, p. 103)

Redefining his position towards the Enlightenment and humanism, Foucault acknowledges that any social system must impose limits and constraints, and that the value of a social system, in this era of liberal humanism, thus rests upon the degree to which it allows individuals “the liberty to transform the system” (Foucault, in Sawicki 1998, p. 101). Any value a system of humanism possesses as a system enabling liberty for the individual must therefore proceed from a dislodging of this system as universalising, and as a system which proceeds from *a priori* epistemological principles, and its deployment instead as a model of cultural production founded upon the recognition that freedom is a practice, not an *a priori* given (Sawicki 1998, p. 102). As Foucault argues, “liberty is what must be exercised” (Foucault, in Sawicki 1998, p.102).

The value of the author-function as a productive diagnostic in *Democracy* proceeds from just such a position. Located as a relative and contextual rather than autonomous function, and deploying a narrative point of view which valorises Inez’s progress as a liberal humanist subject, narrative viewpoint in Didion’s novel (installed according to

context-specific terms) ultimately situates this narrative of self-determination according to terms which de-universalise this liberal humanist archetype. Working in relation to the hegemonic position enjoyed by liberal humanism – not only in America but in Western culture generally – as a position of internalised (as opposed to externalised) challenge, the author-function in Didion’s novel effects a critique of American and Western modernity which, in acknowledging the current position of the author-function in our culture as an adjunct of modernity, is nevertheless able to effect a discursive reconfiguration of the author-function which interrogates the perceived givenness of this modern hegemony. Paralleling the position Foucault himself was to take towards modernity, the way in which this discursive model of the author critiques this modern hegemony emphasises “the importance of expanding our sense of possibility in the present rather than imagining alternative social orders” (Sawicki 1998, p. 102). As an interrogation, then, of the ethos of modernity, the metafictional operation of the author-function in Didion’s novel – situated as an adjunct of modernity, yet also as a function of discourse – suggests that we might well require the emergence of an alternative social order if it is itself to undergo a further transformation, or even disappear altogether. Situated, at this juncture, at an endpoint of a trajectory (Romantic, to realist, to modernist, to postmodernist), a trajectory which has itself emerged more as a response to, rather than unequivocal differentiation from, modernity, Didion’s enunciative author-function thus offers a productive response to the universalising tendencies of the modern hegemony.

### ***The Bostonians to Democracy: The Post-Expressivist Turn.***

The efficacy of the model of the author-function, outlined in this thesis, as a productive diagnostic proceeds from two central premises. Firstly, the author-function serves as a basis of meaning production which transcends the limitations of the expressivist model of

the author. Conceived according to the terms of the author-discourse relation delineated by Foucault in his essay “What is an Author?”, the author model outlined in *The Bostonians*, *The Great Gatsby*, *V.*, and *Democracy* has been situated such that the author-function is dislodged as an expressivism. Secondly, located as a contextual (as opposed to formalist) function in each of the four novels, the author-function is effectively dislodged as a reified, naturalised adjunct of modernity – as an adjunct of “our era of industrial and bourgeois society, of individualism and private property” (Foucault 1988, p. 209) – and located instead as a contextually-situated function able to critically engage, and thus denaturalise, the perceived givenness of this modern hegemony. It is as a consequence of this denaturalisation of the expressivist model of the author-function (not only by Foucault, but also by Barthes’s disarming of the givenness of the expressivist author in the name of a condition of textual, not author-centred, meaning production) that a failed critique of modernity attempted in the name of the expressivist model is, under the aegis of poststructuralism, now made possible. No longer installed within Western (in the case of this thesis, specifically American) culture as an abstracted specialism, the author-function is instead situated as an explicit means of material, ideological engagement.

As argued in Chapter One of this thesis, Foucault’s interrogation in “What is an Author?” of the supposed “self-evident”, “commonsensical” precepts that underpin the convention of the expressivist author in Western culture accordingly proceeds from a position which questions the modern, liberal humanist perception of the author as an autonomous, illimitable producer of a text’s meaning. As Foucault argues, rather than regarding the author as a transcendent producer of an illimitable, indefinite proliferation of meaning, the author “is the ideological figure by which we mark the manner in which we fear the



proliferation of meaning” (Foucault 1988, p. 209). Denaturalising the expressivist model of the author in this manner, Foucault stresses, however, that he is not necessarily calling “for a culture in which fiction would not be limited by the figure of the author” (Foucault 1988, p. 209). Although he imagines a time when the author may alter in form and complexity, and may even disappear,

[i]t would be pure romanticism ... to imagine a culture in which the fictive would operate in an absolutely free state, in which fiction would be put at the disposal of everyone and would develop without passing through something like a necessary or constraining figure.

(Foucault 1988, p. 209)

Foregrounding the expressivist author as one such constraining figure, Foucault’s critique of this model of the author reflects an implicit concern that the author-function *hypostasizes* meaning. As a “principle of thrift” (Foucault 1988, p. 209), and as a naturalised, reified adjunct of modern Western hegemony, the expressivist model of the author in effect valorises its perceived functionality as an expressivism *because* it is naturalised as a totalising absolute in our culture. As a perceived function of illimitability, a function founded upon the operation of the expressivist author as a limiting semantic function in our culture, the expressivist model of the author thus operates as a figure of meaning production as a result of a totalising manoeuvre which ultimately elides its contingent function in Western culture. However, in foregrounding the expressivist author as an ideological rather than innocent figure – in foregrounding its actual function as a figure which limits meaning – Foucault effectively denaturalises it as a function of self-evidence or givenness. Denaturalising the author in this way, Foucault foregrounds it as a partial and provisional function, thus disarming it as a totalising locus of meaning. Such a manoeuvre makes possible an alternative effectivity of the author, an effectivity which – in explicitly grounding the author as a constraining figure – opens the way to a

theorisation and deployment of the author which transcends the limitations of the expressivist model.

Foucault's author-discourse relation stands as one such effectivity. Situating the author as a product of discourse, as a function of specific discursive operations, Foucault acknowledges the position of pre-eminence accorded the expressivist author in our culture, while at the same time making visible the contingent, provisional relations of discourse which install it thus. Because Foucault orients the expressivist author as a function of discourse, and because such discursive situatedness disarms the author as an illimitability, the resultant operation of the author in a text (now understood to limit meaning) avoids the totalising tendencies of the expressivist model.

The semantic operation of the author-function in *The Bostonians*, *The Great Gatsby*, *V.*, and *Democracy* can be presented as a case in point. In *The Bostonians*, the function of James's authorial viewpoint as an unconscious, or implicit, contextualism stands as one such constraining figure. James's authorial viewpoint – a reflection of certain biographical yet at the same time discursive precepts, and the consequent foregrounding of the partial and contextual position occupied by the artist/author in his culture – deploys meaning according to terms which reflect his partial and contextual (as opposed to formalist) position within this culture. Accordingly, his position in Western culture as marking a discursive transition point between the aesthetics of realism and modernism is also a provisional one. The shift from realism to modernism demarcated by James is discursively grounded, and thus modelled upon no self-evident, absolute truth-claims.

The same is true of the operation of the author-function in *Gatsby*, *V.*, and *Democracy*. In *The Great Gatsby*, the situatedness of the author-function as a conscious or explicit contextualism, coupled with Fitzgerald's position as a "spokesman" produced by the mores of the 1920s, serves as the premise for the delineation and diagnosis of the then contemporaneous realist/modernist divide which, thanks to the deployment by Fitzgerald of Carraway's partially-situated viewpoint reflecting specific individual, social, and historical contexts, again operates according to a non-absolute model of truth-claims. In *V.* and *Democracy*, the relativisation of Pynchon's viewpoint as a "myth-shaped hole" and the alignment of Didion's authorial point of view in relation to a wider, discursively-grounded enunciative operation again serves to orient their respective author viewpoints according to contingent rather than absolute terms, with the consequence that the author-function in both novels denaturalises (and in the case of *Democracy*, metafictionally problematises) the expressivist convention of the author conceived as "artistic hero".

Taken as instances in the general trajectory traced in this thesis from *The Bostonians* to *Democracy* – from an implicit contextual model of the author to an enunciative model of the author – authorial viewpoint in each of the novels can be treated as discursively-modelled "loci" in a general historical narrative which denaturalises the expressivist convention of the author and the liberal humanist, or modern, hegemony that has privileged it. This critique of both the expressivist author and modernity is a corollary of the operation of narrative viewpoint in each of the novels, proceeding as it does from the deployment of narrative viewpoint by the novel's respective authors such that any self-evident or ideologically-innocent position of meaning – that might naturalise meaning representation in each of the novels – is refused. A critique such as this is a corollary, also, of the successive aesthetic conventions that define each of the novels: the aesthetic

of late realism of *The Bostonians*, the modernism of *The Great Gatsby*, the late modernism of *V.*, and finally the postmodern aesthetic of *Democracy*. Each of these aesthetic conventions have been explicitly engaged as the basis of a questioning and undermining (beginning in the latter years of the nineteenth century) of the perceived self-evidence of the liberal humanist, modern cultural tradition in Western society. One need only recall the demystifying critique of liberal modernity effected by James in *The Bostonians* – a critique which is itself but one example of a wider, more general critique of modernity in Western literature during this period – to understand the role played by the tradition of late-realist fiction as an instigator of an interrogative tradition that has persisted and evolved to this day. The elegy for modernity that drives Carraway’s narrative in *Gatsby*, the relativising treatments of Western culture in *V.*, and the reflexive treatment of the continued hegemony of liberal humanism (in the mainstream of Western culture, at least) in *Democracy*, thus stand as specifically modernist, late-modernist, and postmodernist exemplars of this critiquing trajectory.

To take each of the four novels in turn, and to examine briefly the question as to the way in which the author-function in each novel serves as a basis for a critique of modernity which eschews any “natural” or innocent position of meaning production, each novel’s critique of the modern hegemony proceeds from the specific way in which the author-narrative viewpoint relation outlined in this thesis refuses any absolute, partisan position. James’s explicit deployment in *The Bostonians* of a narrative viewpoint which, in tracing Verena’s progress, sides with neither Olive’s nor Ransom’s ideological standpoint, functions as the precursor of a demystifying treatment of liberal modernity. Grounded in James’s discursive, contextually-situated function as an artist-novelist, this narrative viewpoint assumes no alternative position of perceived ideological innocence to orient its

critique. James's bi-partisan stance towards Olive and Ransom reflects the contingent, provisional situatedness of the novel's narrative viewpoint, thus differentiating James as an author from any position in *The Bostonians* as an "innocent", "absolute" arbiter of the late nineteenth-century liberal milieu that is both the social and philosophical concern of the novel.

This demystifying, non-partisan diagnosis of the American republic is broadly replicated in the other three novels analysed in this thesis. Fitzgerald's authorial viewpoint in *The Great Gatsby*, mediated via a contextualising reading of Carraway's first-person narrative, functions as the means of a similar demystification of the liberal-modern hegemony; once again, it eschews an absolute point of view. Although Carraway deploys his narrative to write a universalising elegy, not only for Gatsby but also for the ethos of modernity which Gatsby epitomises, the ironic demystification of Carraway's viewpoint by the personal, social, and historical biases which help define his subjectivity serves (as with James in *The Bostonians*) to rob his point of view of any universalising truth-claims. Carraway's elegy for modernity is thus a partial one, an elegy defined by none of modern absolutes which he presents Gatsby as valorising. Ironised in this fashion, Carraway's first-person viewpoint thus serves as the basis for a non-totalising diagnosis of American culture in the wake of the problematising of the national liberal ethos initiated by earlier works of fiction such as *The Bostonians*.

Although America is not a central concern in *V.* as it is in James's and Fitzgerald's novels, the examination in *V.* of the enigma that is the novel's avatar Lady V., and the examination of the V.-histories, again eschews any totalising diagnosis of the cultural milieu. Through the novel's ironic representations of both Profane's absurdist philosophy

– his rejection of any meaning-producing stance – and Stencil’s contrasting endeavour to deploy the V.-plot to affirm an objectivist model of reality, Pynchon negotiates an epistemological middle ground which, rejecting any notion of world representation according to the terms of a “carey” (Profane’s near-hebrephenic absurdism), or alternatively a model of representation as epitomised by that of a “cabal” (Stencil’s near-schizophrenic construction of the V.-plot as an all-pervasive conspiracy), argues for a vision of twentieth-century America and the apogee of European colonial empire which undermines its Eurocentric claims to cultural representation. Likewise, in *Democracy*, Didion couples a metafictional narrative viewpoint and a tracking of the progress of Inez Victor to delineate a non-objectivist examination of the American liberal humanist ethos, problematising any “innocent” representations of the novel’s liberal milieu. Didion thus uses Inez’s progress to “de-objectify” America.

The demystification of America via the post-expressivist effectivity of the author-function in these four novels – a manoeuvre made possible by the denaturalising of the wider ethos (central to definitions of Western culture) of liberal modernity – impacts directly upon mainstream conceptions of America and its liberalist hegemony. The trajectory traced in this thesis, grounded upon a discursive model of the author-function which disarms the ideological innocence of the expressivist author-function, also disarms the perceived self-evidence of the American narrative of nationhood; that is, the liberal encapsulation of the American republic as a body politic founded upon the ethos – central to liberal modernity – of liberal democracy as an agent of rational progress. In denaturalising this modern ethos, the post-expressivist author-centred trajectory presented in this thesis effectively deploys the author in order to question the givenness of this narrative of nationhood. The discursive model of the author-function argued in this thesis – oriented as the ground of a

trajectory which moves increasingly away from the modern, rationalist precepts which have defined America throughout its history as a Western nation – in fact delineate a model of the author-function which (in contradistinction to the expressivist model) makes possible an *engaged* critique of the national narrative.

As a discursively, *materially* situated function, the model of the author-function presented from *The Bostonians* to *Democracy* – a functionality of the author no longer reified as an abstracted specialism – once more engages as a critique of the American body politic. As distinct “loci” contextually situated in relation to a trajectory which denaturalises the givenness of the liberal modern hegemony in America – a trajectory which reorients this ethos as an ideologically partial and provisional cultural narrative – this discursive model of the author-function is at once differentiated from the cultural narrative of modernity, and consequently no longer neutralised as an abstracted adjunct of this narrative. As a discursive (as opposed to formalist) function, the model of the author-function presented in this thesis orients the roughly hundred-year period straddled by *The Bostonians* and *Democracy* as a narrative which, in demystifying the modern hegemony, effects a critical *re-engagement* of the author in relation to this hegemony. As a discursive “internalised challenge” to modernity, the author-function examined in relation to *The Bostonians*, *The Great Gatsby*, *V.*, and *Democracy* makes possible a more productive model of the author-as-diagnostic; it offers a challenge to the innocent truth-claims of the national narrative. To speak of a post-expressivist model of the author – not of the author as a reified specialism – as a discursive event materially implicated in the American *socius* is, as Hutcheon argues, “to foreground the way we talk and write within certain social, historical, and institutional (and thus political and economic) frameworks” (Hutcheon 1988, p. 184). As she goes on to argue (following Foucault), such a recognition

foregrounds the role of discourse in the production of meaning in society, a fact which underlines the relation of authority and knowledge as adjuncts, not of an idealist subject or formalist conception of the author, but of power conceived as an institutionalised, material process (Hutcheon 1988, pp. 184-5). Such a recognition emphasises the role that a discursive conception of the author-function plays as a *material event* in our culture, thus restoring it as a basis of material engagement. The denaturalising of the American narrative of nationhood, implied as a consequence of the argument presented in this thesis, restores the author-function as a workable basis of cultural critique; it at last renders productive the differentiation of the author from the national narrative. As a critique of the national narrative, the trajectory traced from *The Bostonians*, to *The Great Gatsby*, to *V.*, to *Democracy* underlines the effectiveness of a discursively-situated model of the author-function as a critique of the American narrative of nationhood, a critique paradoxically made possible by a critical *restoration* of the author to the material narratives of the nation.



## Conclusion.

The problematic of the narrative viewpoint in *Democracy* marks a kind of culmination point for the argument of this thesis. Broadly, the movement from a late realist critique of the Enlightenment and the nineteenth-century project of modernity in *The Bostonians*, from modernism to late modernism in *The Great Gatsby* and *V.*, marks a shift away from the foundationalist philosophies privileged during the Enlightenment. This serves to question the efficacy of the Enlightenment and the project of modernity, interrogating as it does the modern assumption that a rational, trans-historical theorisation of human subjectivity can be employed as the basis for a scientifically grounded, cognitively neutral social project whose utopian precepts will liberate human society from the irrationalities of prejudice, superstition, and conflict.

The historical trajectory argued in this thesis foregrounds a reflexive model of the author-function which critically engages and interrogates the national narrative of liberal modernity, individual emancipation, and progress; these novels denaturalise the perceived epistemological absolutes which have sought to install the hegemonic narrative which valorises the American republic as an unproblematic exemplar of the project of liberalism and modernity. Because the grounding of the national narrative upon an absolute model of understanding is effectively placed under question, the idea that the USA stands as a kind of crucible – or unproblematic exemplar – of Enlightenment rationalism and liberal modernity is also questioned. The post-expressivist model of the author-function argued for in this thesis – a mode which rejects the epistemological formalism of the expressivist author-function and installs instead an engaged, contextual model – can thus be seen as one way in which literature can be reintegrated – *critically*, not passively and mimetically – within the American body politic. This post-expressivist model of the author can thus be deployed as the basis of a

literary aesthetic which can engage with the national narrative as a denaturalising critique, dismantling the national narrative as a perceived given.

As a satire of the project of nineteenth-century liberalism in America, James's novel *The Bostonians* effectively discredits the idea that the human subject can be successfully categorised according to the terms of this modern model. Indeed, James's novel, in questioning the valency of the narrative of modernity, instead asserts that the objective, trans-historical model of the subject which grounds the project of modernity is not only a fiction, but that prejudice and superstition in fact provide a workable basis for understanding. James dissects social mores in order to demonstrate how the very historicity, material contingency, and social groundedness of human subjectivity are in many ways constitutive of the subject. The capacity of Verena Tarrant to foreground Ransom's and Olive's ideological positions as ideologies demonstrates this.

*The Great Gatsby* and *V.* mark a further interrogation of the project of Enlightenment and liberal modernity, problematising the definition of literary modernism as a project which seeks to echo, from a different standpoint, the totalising and universalising tendencies of modernity. Both *Gatsby* and *V.* institute an explicit, narratologically foregrounded, "working through" of a historicised, context-dependent narrative viewpoint that James's unconsciously privileges in *The Bostonians*. The first-person narrator of *The Great Gatsby* (Nick Carraway) and the late modernist perspectivist viewpoint "stylisations" epitomised by Benny Profane and Herbert Stencil in *V.* are explicitly elucidated exemplars of the context-dependent narrative foregrounded in *The Bostonians*. Thus these three novels provide case studies which question a universalising model of narrative, narrative viewpoint, and human understanding. Taken together as stages in a temporal trajectory, *The Bostonians*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *V.*

delineate a supersession, not only of Enlightenment and liberal modernity, but also of any systemic project of philosophy which seeks to ground human understanding upon cognitively neutral, ahistorical foundations. As Carraway's viewpoint in *Gatsby* can be interpreted as a perspectively situated elegy for modernity, so too Carraway's viewpoint of idealist, self-inscribing sufficiency becomes a source of parody in *V*. Accordingly, Carraway's attempt to elicit a universalising foundation with regard to his viewpoint is replayed by Profane and Stencil in *V*. as a cognitive ambivalence, as a solipsistic self-removal from the material contents of the world.

The chapter on *Democracy* argued that the author-function in Didion's novel is reflexively grounded. *Democracy* foregrounds the conditions (social, political, historical, intertextual) which not only position it, but also make it possible as a function in the first place. Linking this question of the author-function and reflexivity to all four novels discussed in this thesis, it is possible to argue that narrative viewpoint in *The Bostonians*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *V*. is also positioned reflexively. As has been argued in previous chapters, narrative viewpoint in each of these novels is grounded contextually. Each of them eschews the expressivist, formalist model first privileged during the Romantic period. The narrative viewpoint in *The Bostonians* serves to foreground – albeit unconsciously – the ideological assumptions that in fact underpin the expressivist convention of the omniscient author. The narrator Nick Carraway is ultimately situated by the personal and social contexts which position him as an individual in *The Great Gatsby*, contexts which in the final event define and delimit his viewpoint. The narrative viewpoints of Benny Profane and Herbert Stencil in *V*. are also contextualised, and thus delimited, by the erasure in Pynchon's novel of the expressivist, “world-disclosing” convention of the author. The key point at issue here is that, by *reflexively* positioning the author in these novels, the late realist mode of narrative in *The Bostonians*,

and the modernist, late modernist, and postmodernist modes of narrative respectively installed in *The Great Gatsby*, *V.*, and *Democracy* are ultimately grounded reflexively as well. As specific models of world representation, the literary model of each novel, be it late realist to postmodernist, is grounded in relation to the worldly and intertextual contexts that locate them. As a “progressive” historical trajectory, the mutation of the novel form from late realist to modernist, late modernist and then postmodernist, is an *ideologically specific*, rather than ideologically innocent, trajectory. It is implicated with – it does not stand anterior to, or naturalise – the material contexts that have helped produce it and which have brought about its respective transformations.

It is possible to argue that the historical trajectory foregrounded by these four novels is implicated, also, in a model of cultural and philosophical “progress” and transformation that differentiates itself from the American national narrative, as does the expressivist model of the author. However, the specific way in which it differentiates itself from the narrative differs from that of the expressivist author model. In the case of the expressivist model, the author-function was ultimately displaced by industrial capitalism after the Romantic period and commodified, or neutralised, as just another specialised mode of production. The reflexive, post-expressivist author model foregrounded in *The Bostonians*, *The Great Gatsby*, *V.*, and *Democracy* installs a narrative which contextually engages the author as a workable mode of critique. The historical trajectory traced by the four novels elicits a reflexive, not expressivist, model of the author-function, and it is this reflexivity which positions the trajectory as a narrative which is able once more to critically engage with the national narrative rather than be reified as a specialism by it. Situating the author in a non-formalist, contextual sense serves to restore the author-function as an engaged mode of critique, whereas the expressivist model of the author situates the author-function as an autonomous

function which stands anterior, or extra-contextually, to modes of discourse (for example, the discourses that comprise the national narrative).

As argued in previous chapters, this engaged, contextual model of the author-function is founded upon a provisional, not absolute, model of understanding. Such a model is able to engage critically and interrogate the national narrative because it is no longer reified as an extra-discursive autonomy located *outside* the narrative. As a consequence, the restoration of the author-function (as a contextual reflexivity) is able to denaturalise the national narrative as a given narrative of modernity and is realigned as an ideologically grounded model of meaning. It is therefore possible to argue that the author-function in all four novels operates as an implicated, or internalised – because contextually engaged – challenge to both the expressivist author model and the national narrative. The operation in *Democracy* of the *enunciative* author relation as such an internalised challenge thus renders conscious and explicit the break with the expressivist author model that was unconsciously instituted in *The Bostonians*.

As a workable diagnostic, the post-expressivist function of the author not only seeks a cessation of representations of modernity as a basis of absolute, given truth-claims, but recognises, also, the cessation of the author as a self-evident or “theological” function. Indeed, this post-expressivist model of the author-function is a *relative* and provisional term, a fact which is illustrated by the successive mutations that the positionality and ontological character of the author-function has undergone in each of the novels discussed in this thesis. Installed as an unconscious contextual function in *The Bostonians*, the author-function by the time of *Democracy* almost a century later, has been installed as an explicitly contextual, enunciative function.

This cessation, or “death”, of the author as an absolute can be understood as symptomatic of another, earlier death announced by the German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche: nothing less than the death of both man (not to mention woman) and the entity once understood to have brought them into being – namely, God. The expressivist model of the author-function, in a sense, sought to install the author as a secular example of the Christian deity; the death of God stands in clear parallel to the discrediting of the givenness of the expressivist author. In freeing the author, then, as a secularised yet deifying function, the alternative author diagnostic argued for in this thesis posits a functionality of the author which eschews the totalising and objectifying tendencies of modernity, as inaugurated by the Cartesian model of consciousness. Indeed, along with Jean-Francois Lyotard’s definition of postmodernity as an ethos which eschews the Cartesian model of subjectivity and understanding, the model of the author-function presented in this thesis breaks free from these objectifying tendencies, with the effect that the author is liberated as a function of a generalising narrative of modernity and opened up to the new freedoms and pluralised knowledges of postmodernity.

The foregrounding of narrative viewpoint in *The Bostonians* as a contextually-situated function which demystifies the absolute truth-claims of liberal modernity installs narrative viewpoint in James’s novel as a discursive (as opposed to extra-discursive) locus of meaning production. The relevance of specific biographical and artistic precepts which define James’s narrative viewpoint, and which are mirrored in both the psychological makeup and progress of the character Verena in *The Bostonians*, reflect the discursive functionality of James’s narrative viewpoint. Accordingly, as a contextually-defined locus of meaning production, the author-function in this novel is implicitly disarmed as an expressivism, operating instead as a discursive function of the text rather than the author. In the case of James’s general *oeuvre*,

*The Bostonians* stands as an example in an overall body of fiction which marks a transition point throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century between realism and modernism.

Likewise, the deployment by Fitzgerald in *The Great Gatsby* of a contextual narrative viewpoint to effect a de-universalising reading of modernity and modernism proceeds from an *explicit* contextual grounding of Carraway's narrative viewpoint, with the consequence that the author-function "F. Scott Fitzgerald" reflects Fitzgerald's discursive function in American culture of the 1920s as an "author-cum-consumer brand" possessed of a popular reputation far wider than the actual size of his readership. In the case of *V.*, the denaturalising of the absolutist precepts which motivate Profane's and Stencil's points of view is coupled with a narratological orientation of the *V.*-plot such that an absolute, centric model of representation is also denaturalised. Consequently, the *V.*-plot serves as the basis for a model of the author-function that disarms the novel's modernist aesthetic as a function of "world-disclosedness". Installed according to a relativist model of representation, the author-function in *V.* relativises the expressivist convention of the author as a "myth-shaped" absence. As a consequence of this, Thomas Pynchon, famous for his "invisibility" as a public figure, functions as a kind of "artist hero" who discursively valorises the expressivist convention of the author by default. Finally, the author-function in *Democracy* is dislodged as an expressivism and deployed in Didion's novel as an enunciative and intertextual function. Foregrounded in this manner, Didion's narrative viewpoint, metafictionally tracking the progress of the character of Inez Victor, employs Inez's peregrinations to disarm the absolute and formalist truth-claims of the American ethos of liberal humanism to effect an intertextual critique of modernity. Such a manoeuvre reflects the explicit grounding of the author-function in this novel as a discursive product of the enunciative author-reader relation rather than the author as an expressivism. The alignment of the author-function in *The Bostonians*, *The Great Gatsby*, *V.*, and

*Democracy* thus not only dislodges the author as an expressivism, but locates the author-function as a material event implicated within social, political, cultural, and historical discourses. It is these discourses – not some conception of the author as a reified specialism – which allow the author a voice, thus providing him or her with a material effectivity which expressivist conceptions of the author have denied them.



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