



University
of Glasgow

Hunter, Adrian C. (1999) "*Complete with missing parts*": modernist short fiction as interrogative text. PhD thesis.

<http://theses.gla.ac.uk/3204/>

Copyright and moral rights for this thesis are retained by the author

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge

This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the Author

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the Author

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given

***‘Complete with Missing Parts’:
Modernist Short Fiction
As Interrogative Text***

by

Adrian C. Hunter

***Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of English Literature
University of Glasgow***

April 1999

Abstract

This thesis examines modernist short fiction in English from the 1890s to the 1980s, with particular reference to works by James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, Samuel Beckett and Donald Barthelme. The term 'interrogative' is evolved in the course of the study to describe the relationship of the reader and of interpretative discourse to the form. It is argued that the modernist story is marked by indeterminacy and a resistance to teleological structuration as a result of its narrative strategies of ellipsis, reticence and interdiction. Unlike those existing theories which emphasize 'unity' or 'ambiguity' in the short story, the interrogative approach takes as its starting point a post-Saussurean definition of language as differential and plurisignificant and uses this to demonstrate the form's constitutional resistance to determinate critical exegesis.

Contents

Acknowledgements.....	4
<i>Introduction: Stopping Short</i>	5
<i>'A Certain Science of Control': England and the 1890s</i>	23
<i>Joyce Between the Blinds</i>	64
<i>Abdicated Unities: Hemingway</i>	107
<i>Total Objects, Missing Parts: Beckett</i>	145
<i>Destitute Myths of Depth: Postmodernism and Donald Barthelme</i>	179
References.....	215
Other Works Consulted.....	225

Acknowledgements

I should like to express my warmest thanks to my supervisor, Dr John Coyle, for all his support and encouragement over the last three years. I am grateful to him for the confidence he has shown in me, for the unfailing thoughtfulness of his readings, and for his many words of criticism kindly spoken. I must also thank him for looking on the bright side after the laptop computer containing the final draft of this thesis found itself travelling alone on a Glasgow bus one morning in April.

My family has demonstrated an unwavering belief in my abilities, even as it has cost them money, and for this I owe them all a great deal. Without the love and support of my parents and their sensitivity to the seasonal hardships of post-graduate life I could not have carried through this work at all. I am also deeply grateful to my grandfather for his wise counsel and for encouraging me to pursue an academic career in the first place.

My pre-eminent debt, however, is to my wife Allison who, more than anyone else, has borne the burden of my ambition over the last three years. Without question she has granted me her patience, her confidence, and her love when I have needed them most, and perhaps deserved them least. I should like to dedicate this work to her.

Introduction: Stopping Short

Robert Coover's 'Klee Dead' is a story with a disappointing ending. The narrator admits as much. 'I'm sorry,' he says. 'What can I say? Even I had expected more. You are right to be angry' (1971, 111). He can give us no plausible explanation for the poor eponymous clerk's death by jumping from a high place. Even the putative suicide note turns out to be of uncertain legibility and authorship, and it is written in the third person to boot. In fact, uncertainty surrounds the significance of all the main events of the story, yet the narrator is unwilling (unable, he would say) to exercise authority and answer the questions his narrative is prompting us to ask:

Your questions, friend, are foolish, disease of the western mind. On the other hand, if you wish to assume a cause-and-effect relationship—that he is dead *because* he jumped from a high place—well, you are free to do so, I confess it has occurred to me more than once and has colored my whole narration. (*ibid*, 106)

He knows what we are looking for as readers, what we expect, what laws govern our logic and our percipience. But if we want to determine consequence and motivation in Klee's story, we will have to do so unilaterally, speculatively, without collusion or validation from the text.

Coover's 'narratorial interdictiveness' is, of course, a familiar strategy within postmodernist metafiction. However, we might also consider that this resistance to sense-making form and interpretative certainty belongs equally to the genre in which Coover is working—short fiction. Cutting across the text's postmodernist identity is its attachment to the modernist short form. Read against this alternative glossary, 'Klee Dead's' explicit interdictions and withholdings merely voice techniques and devices that have governed experimental short fiction throughout this century. For the reader schooled in that form, Coover's narratorial recalcitrance is a familiar posture, particularly in

the way in which it both elevates the reader's role—prompting his co-productive speculations—and yet occludes that material which would allow him to make a determinate reading.

In this thesis I will be concerned with the trajectory within short fiction to which Coover's text can be shown to have some critical attachment. I have already used the conveniently vague terms 'modernist' and 'experimental' above, but I want to propose in the course of this introduction that 'interrogative' not only better encapsulates the formal procedures of this variety of short fiction but also entails a post-Saussurean acknowledgement of language as differential and plurisignificant.

It may seem strange to insist on this latter point so late in the day. However, within short fiction theory there has been scant willingness to engage with the consequences of poststructuralist thought. The major textbooks on the genre show either strong structuralist leanings (e.g. Lohafer 1983; Lohafer and Clarey 1989; Gerlach 1985; May 1994) or deliberately confine their critical approach to the consideration of 'unity' (Hanson 1985) or 'ambiguity' (Head 1992). It should not be thought, however, that the impetus for my study is simply a desire to move on from structuralism to poststructuralism, as though that were the inevitable 'next step'. Rather, it is that the existing approaches strike me as inadequate when tested against the stories themselves. By dint of their narrative strategies, interrogative short fictions generate plurality and indeterminacy. In readings which strive after 'structure', 'unity', 'ambiguity', there is a tendency to suppress such effects by eliding the disruption caused by the form's interstices, reticences and interdictions. Many critics see it as their task to supply by inference or speculation that which the texts themselves withhold. It is as though the short form requires always an explicatory gloss to make meaning from its restricted articulations. The tendency is to treat the form, in Beckett's suggestive formulation, as a 'partial object' requiring fulfilment by

the reader, rather than as a '[t]otal object, complete with missing parts' (1965, 101). My theory of interrogative short fiction, as I will develop it below, endeavours to expose the shortcomings of existing approaches largely by revealing how the texts in question elude the determinations they would seek to make. It is a theory which sets out to validate the plural constitution of the form, to account for its silences, to treat its shortness as a positive quality rather than as an interpretative hindrance.

To begin with, the easiest way to elucidate this term 'interrogative' is by contrast with existing theories and terminologies. The species of short fiction I am looking at has been variously labelled 'modern', 'modernist', 'impressionist', 'Chekhovian', 'plotless', 'lyric', 'elliptical', 'open', 'epiphanic', 'dialogic'. Where these definitions agree is in relation to the status of plot and action, which is generally markedly de-emphasised or displaced in such stories. Typically these fictions will be elliptical, both in the sense that they may delete elements in their diegeses, and that they will often occlude any omniscient or authoritative narratorial perspective.

Eileen Baldeshwiler, in her definition of the form, contrasts its 'lyric' nature, which 'concentrates on internal changes, moods, and feelings', with the 'epical' type of story which is 'marked by external action developed "syllogistically" through characters fabricated mainly to forward plot' (1994, 231). Whereas the 'epical' form will 'culminat[e] in a decisive ending', 'lyric' stories, by comparison, will tend to conclude evocatively or figuratively (*ibid*). Baldeshwiler's trajectory of the 'lyric' story includes Turgenev, Chekhov, Mansfield, Woolf and Eudora Welty, all of whose works convey complex shifts in mood and meaning through highly inferential, unemphatic surface structures of plot and action.

Of interest to me in Baldeshwiler's taxonomy is that despite hinting that 'lyric' stories may possess a quality of indecisiveness, particularly because of

their tendency to be open-ended, she is ultimately able to overcome these poetic or figurative hindrances and locate with certainty each story's 'emerging emotion'—that unifying condition to which 'all other narrative elements must be subordinated' (*ibid*, 239). It is as though the uncertainties generated by the elliptical or markedly figurative narrative strategies are temporary only and can be normalized by the thoughtful reader. On that basis, the distinction between the highly resolute plot-motivated form with its climactic act of (dis)closure and the impressionistic 'lyric' form would appear to be a difference of manner rather than of kind. Whereas the former leads towards a revelatory end-point in its action—a 'reasoned resolution' (*ibid*, 234)—the latter contains an equivalent teleological impulse at the level of character motivation or feeling—that 'emerging emotion' or 'closing cadence' (*ibid*) to which everything in the narrative tends. Despite their differences, both forms, according to Baldeshwiler, nevertheless resolve: one in soft-focus, the other in a harsh light.

Baldeshwiler's essay highlights two common and related strands in criticism of modernist or 'lyric' short fiction: one is the elevation in importance of the reader's co-productive role: he is called upon to discern and articulate the deep-laid patterns of meaning that the text does not make explicit. The other is the determination that the text be determinable, that whatever the interstices or opacities in its language or structure an explicatory locus exists on some level which we as readers can attain.

Suzanne Ferguson in a more recent essay also discusses the augmentation of the reader's sphere of influence, and, like Baldeshwiler, is interested in how the text's occlusiveness and reticence can be compensated for by the perspicacious reader. Ferguson argues that when we read 'elliptical' stories—that is, stories that omit material which we require to process them satisfactorily—we nevertheless readily construct 'hypothetical plots' that allow us to 'explain' the interstitial text:

The sense of a double plot in all such stories is strong; we recognize a story that has not been fully told lying behind the one that *is* told. Reading the stories, we become detectives, piecing together the main elements of the hypothetical plots in order to rationalize the actual plots (1994, 223)

As an example of this process Ferguson offers an analysis of Joyce's 'Clay'. I deal with this story at length in chapter 2, but for now I would simply point out some shortcomings in Ferguson's 'hypothetical' approach to the text. She states that 'the parts of the hypothetical plot that are omitted are represented metonymically by the episodes Joyce has written' (*ibid*, 222). In other words, if we scrutinize what 'parts' Joyce gives us it will be possible to reconstruct the remainder of the 'whole'. What this theory does not allow for is the possibility that those parts which have been written will be so gap-ridden, complex and indeterminate that the reconstruction of some putative 'complete' story will simply not be possible.

Constructing the hypothetical plot of 'Clay' is, according to Ferguson, the means by which we can answer a question like 'Who is Maria?' (*ibid*). The narrative itself does not supply sufficient information to answer this question, so we infer a hypothetical story beginning with the time when Maria 'had a "home"' in which she was 'relatively happy' and how this contrasts with her 'desolation' now the family has placed her at the laundry (*ibid*). But even this seemingly innocuous construction proves very difficult to sustain against Joyce's textual practice. The technique of free indirect discourse through which Maria is presented precludes the possibility of making a determinate summary of her character and the extent of her awareness of herself and her status in relation to her workmates and the family. For instance, when we read in the story that 'Everyone was so fond of Maria', it is possible that this expresses a generally held opinion of Maria, expressed by her workmates perhaps, in which case we must decide (and, of course, we can't) whether it conveys, say, tolerance, sarcasm or sympathetic indulgence. It is equally possible, however, that this line conveys, through indirect thought, Maria's appropriation of something that has

been said to her (her discourse is riddled with things other people have said). Again, we cannot know in what sense it may have originally been meant, and so we cannot judge the validity of Maria's appropriation of it. The free indirect discourse also allows for the possibility that Maria is projecting a sense of herself here as charmingly inoffensive, an image she seems to cultivate elsewhere in the story, for instance when she is looking at herself in the mirror. If that is so, then a reading of Maria emerges in which she is entirely conscious of her own status and the impressions she gives, and far from the pitiable benighted figure Ferguson describes. Alternatively, we might read this line as a narratorial judgement of Maria. If so, then we would again have to consider whether it is meant ironically or pitifully or literally. Indeed, the statement 'Everyone was so fond of Maria' could be all of these things at once, and more. In truth, we cannot be sure from whom it emanates or what the quality of its sentiment is.

On the matter of omissions in the story, Ferguson's argument that these can be filled in with reference to the 'hypothetical' explanatory plot is equally suspect when applied to actual omissions or withholdings in the text. For example, the story ends with the incomplete 'text' of Maria's song. The song she sings comes from Balfe's opera *The Bohemian Girl* and the verse that she omits concerns the wooing of a suitor. This omission leads us back to the man on the Drumcondra tram whose appearance she elaborated (he would seem to be a corpulent drunk) and whose advances (if that is what they were) she favoured with the demure nods and looks she gives to the family. Perhaps this is the reason for her awkward blushing. Joe takes her omission of this verse as an understandable error, but it might equally suggest a well-developed awareness on Maria's part of the impression she conveys and the effect her manner can have. Our uncertainties over the reason for the omission multiply when we consider the verse she does sing, which in Balfe's opera is performed by an

abducted princess who despite being brought up by gypsies is still haunted by dreams of her former nobility. Throughout 'Clay' there is the suggestion that Maria considers herself superior to the other women in the laundry, to Protestants, and even to the cake shop girl. Once again, we have to consider Maria's intense self-consciousness and protested delicacy as knowing, manipulative gestures. Given the manner of presentation, however, there is no way to negotiate securely between these readings.

Ferguson concludes her analysis by suggesting that Maria is finally 'consoled by the appreciation of her wishful song' (1994, 222), supposedly for her humiliation in the blindfold game. For a start, however, the narrative makes no mention of how Maria reacts to the children's trick or how she feels about the reception of the song; and this is crucial, because were consolation signalled then this would privilege the reading of Maria's character that Ferguson is putting forward. As it is, Joyce's narrator remains scrupulously impercipient of Maria's reaction, as he does, indeed, of the family's response. Joe, we are told, is moved, but by what? By pity for Maria? By the sentiment of the song? By the melody or the singing? The narrative puts on its own blindfold at the end, suppressing analysis of Joe's reaction so that we cannot look to his experience of Maria to confirm any one reading of her.

Ferguson's desire to raise an explicatory hypothetical reading of 'Clay' represents a failure, I would suggest, to validate the text's cultivated indeterminacy. However, her approach is in many ways typical of the criticism of the short form. The 'hypothetical plots' theory formulates the tendency to seek out cohesive and determinate readings of texts in spite of their occlusions, reticences or interdictions. It is as though the text represents a puzzle missing a piece and it is the reader's job to supply that piece. The role of the reader is indeed elevated in such criticism, but in such a way as to suggest that his role can only be to fill gaps and provide explanations of all that the text has neglected

to say. In other words, there seems to be a reluctance to credit indeterminacy, to acknowledge the plural constitution of the form.

For many critics, 'unity' is the watchword, the job description, when reading elliptical short fiction. Rohrberger and Burns, in their reading of 'Clay', argue that at the end 'the elements of the story fall together in the reader's mind to form a coherent whole...For full satisfaction the reader must make an effort to see the story as a unified whole' (1982, 10). Clare Hanson, similarly, sees the Joycean epiphany as 'a structural equivalent for conventional resolution of plot' (1985, 7), which apparently means that the kind of unified closure achieved in plot-motivated stories is also evident in modernist fictions with the readily recuperable difference that whereas the former deals in resolutions of external action, the latter is concerned with providing "objective correlatives" for abstract states of mind or feeling' (*ibid*). Again, there is a reluctance to admit that the narrative strategies employed in the form may preclude interpretative norms such as 'unity' and 'resolution'.

All of these critics treat elliptical short fictions as though their interstices and interdiction were there to be overcome rather than indulged. Beckett's distinction between the 'partial object' and the '[t]otal object, complete with missing parts' sums up the situation perfectly: our critics here, and the many like them whose readings I will address in the course of subsequent chapters, would appear to view the modernist short story as a 'partial object' requiring explicatory fulfilment by the reader. This is not to say that they are unconscious of the special effects of the form. Clare Hanson, in particular, is alert to the techniques of 'deletion' and free indirect discourse. However, she does not allow her acknowledgement of the disunifying effects of these devices to disrupt the thematic integrity she perceives in the stories. So, she claims that deletions function in Joyce's texts 'to enhance our sense of the "unknowability" of human character and experience' (1985, 59), while the eschewal of omniscient narration

means that Joyce must direct matters ‘in more covert ways...through juxtapositions of characters, events, images and thought patterns’ (*ibid*, 63). The reader’s elevated role in relation to these stories is a matter of perspicacity, of his needing to look harder to perceive the texts’ redoubtable coherence and unity.

It is curious that the greater demands elliptical texts unquestionably make on their readers should not entail any corresponding anxiety among these critics over the act of interpretation. Quite the reverse would seem to have been the experience of Roland Barthes for whom any intensification of the plurality of a text meant the retreat from what he termed (in ‘The Death of the Author’) ‘theological’ interpretation (1977, 147). For Barthes, those texts which were ‘less parsimonious’ with their plurality (1990, 6), which made the reader a ‘producer’ rather than a ‘consumer’ of meaning (*ibid*, 4), were by definition less susceptible to determinate readings; what they demanded was not a increased effort towards *decipherment*, but a lust to *disentangle*, endlessly, excitedly, provisionally (1977, 147).

My theory of interrogative short fiction takes as its starting point Barthes’s injunction that ‘To interpret a text is not to give it a (more or less justified, more or less free) meaning, but on the contrary to appreciate what *plural* constitutes it’ (1990, 5). The value of Barthes’s approach in relation to the short form is first of all that it does not seek to explain away or recuperate ellipses, interstices, withholdings, reticences, interdictions, but instead recognizes how these phenomena affect the economy of meaning in a text. In other words, the Barthesian reader’s relation to the text is *interrogative* rather than declarative. The kind of short fiction I will be concerned with throughout this thesis is intensely plural as a result of its narrative strategies; what Barthes’s approach offers is a way of validating that plurality as the aesthetic—the operative principle—of the form. This validation does not involve the reader in any repressive imposition of meaning, but rather defines the form in terms of its

active resistance to determinate discourses of all kinds—including the reader's. The term 'interrogative' encapsulates both sides of the textual transaction: on the one hand, the plurality that arises from certain narrative strategies, and on the other, the reader's implication in that plurality. In existing theories of the form—modernist, elliptical, lyric, impressionist—the emphasis has been very much supply-side, concentrating on how writers achieve their complex effects while allowing the interpretative discourse to remain relatively undisturbed. The interrogative theory attempts to show how these short fictions undermine the security of that discourse.

Efforts have been made in this direction before, most notably by Dominic Head whose book *The Modernist Short Story* (1992) takes issue with the dominant 'unity aesthetic' in short story criticism. Head argues that the form is in fact marked by a 'cultivated disunity' (1992, 20) in its narrative techniques, and in his chapter on Joyce especially he challenges the idea of the epiphany as a point of structural resolution. The limitation of Head's study, for me, lies in his resistance to any suggestion that the form might be productive of indeterminacy or undecidability. Instead, he argues, 'specific kinds of ambiguity are examined in specific ways' (*ibid*, 14), a claim which restricts his analysis to a kind of supply-side hermeneutics. I shall deal in detail with the shortcomings of this ambiguity theory in chapter 2, but for now I would simply take issue with Head's opposition to a principle of indeterminacy. In his introduction he bases his argument against indeterminacy readings on a somewhat unrepresentative example, namely Frank Kermode's reading (in *The Genesis of Secrecy*) of Kafka's 'Before the Law'. Kermode's point, according to Head, is that 'the man in the parable, denied access to the Law, is comparable to the reader of any parable' faced with the ultimate insufficiency of all interpretative glosses (*ibid*, 15). Head's counterpoint is that Kafka's parable is quite determinately and decidably about something, namely the "uninterpretable" nature of 'Before the

Law” (*ibid*). He suggests that the parable is ‘in certain ways, a representative modernist short fiction’ (*ibid*) but does not specify in what ‘ways’ it is so. And herein lies the problem: Kafka’s text is, as Head states, a *parable*. It may be ‘representative’ of modernist short fiction but that is very different from saying that it *is* a modernist short fiction. I would agree that Kafka’s text can be read as a parable about indeterminacy, but that is not the same as saying that it is indeterminate. Head’s justification for denying the principle of indeterminacy is based, I would suggest, on a false analogy.

Nevertheless, Head’s book is both innovative and important and has prompted many of the theoretical questions I will seek to address in the course of this thesis. As mentioned above, his work on the epiphany is particularly significant as it offers a fundamental revision of what is for many the defining characteristic of the twentieth-century short story. Head’s dialogic approach recasts the epiphany as a site of dissonance and ambiguity rather than of impressionistic or figurative resolution. Although he disdains the ‘idea of the story as an end-oriented totality’ (1992, 14), his emphasis on the epiphany nevertheless responds to the widespread interest among short story critics in the moment of closure. Indeed, for many it is the nature of the termination that defines the form, as Susan Lohafer describes: ‘Looking for a foothold, a vantage point from which the short story might make a unique and serious claim on theory, critics seized upon its one clear distinction from the novel: its shorter span, its foregrounded “end”’ (Lohafer and Clarey 1989, 110).

In all the theories mentioned above—‘lyric’, ‘impressionist’, ‘elliptical’, ‘modernist’, ‘open’—some complication at the moment of closure, some diffusion of impact, is of defining importance; it is at this point that the form most obviously differs from the plot-motivated variety with its conspicuous act of disclosure and resolution. John Gerlach has used this interest in endings as a theoretical basis for his extensive survey of the American short story. Gerlach

comments on how, after Poe's essay 'The Philosophy of Composition' and his reviews of Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales*, stories 'began to fall into patterns based on how they were structured in relation to the ending' (1985, 3). Gerlach sees the shift to more 'open' or irresolute endings as part of modernism's recognition that 'causality and narrative restricted fiction by falsifying its view of life' (*ibid*), clearly echoing Virginia Woolf's appeal in 'Modern Fiction' for a more 'real' realism and an abandonment of the well-made novel's artificial and meretricious structures.

The weakness in Gerlach's study, however, is that his readings fail to recognize the extent of the modernist story's attack on the falsifications of narrative and causality. He notes how at the point of closure writers 'strove to give the *impression* of lack of resolution' (*ibid*; my emphasis). This is different from saying that there is anything actually irresolute about their stories; like Head and his theory of ambiguity, Gerlach seems to want to impose his own quota on the extent of texts' indeterminacy. So, for example, in his reading of Hemingway's 'Cat in the Rain', he notes the uncertainty created by the fact that the cat delivered to the couple's room at the end of the story is not necessarily the cat the young woman saw out in the rain. But he concludes that in the end this does not matter very much as the real point of the story is the young woman's restlessness in her relationships with the men in the story. 'The actual cat is not going to be what she expected,' Gerlach writes, 'no cat would bring her the satisfaction she wants' (*ibid*, 113). How does he know this? His reading is *necessarily* speculative here. Rather than pursue the consequences for the text of the interdictive refusal to clarify which cat she has been given or indeed where the thematic centre of the story (if there is one) lies, Gerlach grants the story a determinate meaning it simply does not warrant.

The restrictiveness of Gerlach's approach arises from his conviction that there is an 'underlying narrative grid that...each reader applies to any story and

that every writer depends on the reader knowing' (*ibid*, 6). As with Ferguson's theory of the 'hypothetical plot', the claim is that there exists always a cogent, complete story which the reader can access and which will allow him to process the elliptical text's artful diversions. Again, the interrogative short fiction is being approached as though it were a partial object awaiting fulfilment by the reader in possession of an explicatory 'narrative grid'.

Austin Wright is another critic who has explored the issue of closure. He applies the term 'recalcitrance' to describe the short form's tendency to leave things to inference, particularly in its ending. This recalcitrance is not unique to the short story, however, but is an element in all texts which generate suspense in order to delay or defer resolution. In a reworking of Barthes's hermeneutic code Wright describes how if resolution is too easily reached then the text seems 'banal'; on the other hand, 'if the process is stalled and our quest for form is too stubbornly frustrated, we find the work chaotic' (1989, 117). The choice of this word 'chaotic' here is notable as it suggests an unwillingness to accept that a text might perpetrate impedances against the transmission of meaning which the reader cannot overcome. Sure enough, when Wright applies his notion of recalcitrance to modernist short fiction he is keen to point out that it presents only a temporary hindrance to the reader's interpretative activity. 'The open-ended story,' he writes, '...is recalcitrant in its rejection of conventional beginnings and ends, resolved by subtler notions of form' (*ibid*, 119). Resolution may be less conspicuous, but it is still resolution. Enigmatic endings present the reader with a challenge 'that can only be resolved by reflection after the reading' (*ibid*, 121); they exhibit what Wright calls 'final recalcitrance—meaning that it is instituted by the end of the story, not that it cannot be resolved' (*ibid*).

In his reading of the Joycean epiphany, Wright contends that we must look for 'a unifying principle subtle enough to bring the details into a single

compass' (*ibid*). The principle he proposes is that of the 'discovery plot, in which the protagonist's discovery is implicit, embodied in images with emotional and moral significance' (*ibid*). But could we honestly say that 'Clay''s conclusion brings about this kind of discovery either for Maria or the reader? She is literally blindfolded, and we are left lamely scrutinizing Joe's obliquity, the narrating perspective having assumed an impercipient of its own behind the free indirect discourse. I would be interested to know what has been 'discovered' at the end of 'Clay', and by whom.

Wright's theory of recalcitrance has much in common with Susan Lohafer's account of the process of reading short fiction. Lohafer argues that at the level of the sentence we experience 'an impetus toward closure, blocked by various kinds of interference which are in one way and another removed, surmounted, absorbed' (1983, 42). Again, the assumption is that we will always proceed towards a *telos*, a point of order and disclosure in the text. Underlying both theories is an attitude to language that assumes that we as readers may pass unimpeded from the signifier to the signified. Wright admits that language presents the first level of recalcitrance in a text, but goes on to explain that it exists in order 'to be understood, interpreted' (1989, 118). He entertains no possibility that we may be irresolvably detained at the level of the signifier, unable to pass through to the realm of determinate meaning.

When we read interrogative short fictions, however, we repeatedly experience this kind of hermeneutic detention at the level of the signifier through the occlusion of a guiding narratorial metalanguage. In Joyce's 'The Sisters', for instance, the feral, unmediated trio of signifiers, *paralysis*, *gnomon*, *simony*, are not determined semantically by the text. They float free of any fixed referent and leave us 'play-producing meaning' (MacCabe 1979, 35) with no way of anchoring or securing their significance. Similarly, in Hemingway's 'Hills Like White Elephants' strategic omissions in the narrative discourse undermine

entirely our ability to impose a determinate meaning on even the most innocuous pieces of dialogue. My theory of interrogative short fiction takes as its starting point this reality of language, its differential and plurisignificant nature. What it seeks to acknowledge is the way in which the narrative strategies of the form—reticence, ellipsis, interdiction—indulge this plurality and instability by removing or withholding the orientational material that would make determinate reading possible.

Returning to the issue of closure, the interrogative theory makes it possible to extend our understanding of the short story's resistance to resolute endings. Rather than considering 'open-endedness' as simply a last-ditch deviation from some putative conclusive norm, we can read it as another manifestation of the form's climate of indeterminacy. Just as the strategies of ellipsis and interdiction resist the teleological structure in the relationship of signifier to signified, so at the narrative level there is a refusal to posit a *telos* as the text's controlling explicatory and unificatory force. In other words, we can read the interrogative short story as anti-teleological in the widest sense.

The importance of teleological structuration in Western discourse has been a persistent concern of J. Hillis Miller. In 'Ariadne's Thread', Miller describes how the point of revelation in the linear narrative is one of the fundamental principles of intelligibility:

The end of the story is the retrospective revelation of the law of the whole. That law is an underlying "truth" which ties all together in an inevitable sequence revealing a hitherto hidden figure in the carpet. The image of the line tends always to imply the norm of a single continuous unified structure determined by one external organizing principle. This principle holds the whole line together, gives it its law, controls its progressive extension, curving or straight, with some *arché*, *telos*, or ground. Origin, goal, or base: all three come together in the gathering movement of the *logos* (1976, 70).

The *telos* is the rationale of the text, the reason for its being written; in Barthes's words 'it is what is *at the end* of expectation' (1990, 76). Clearly, any disruption or permanent deferral of the *telos* would involve a violation of the Aristotelian

principle of unity. Throughout modernist and postmodernist literature, of course, there has been a persistent effort to perform precisely this violation. William Spanos has written of this ‘impulse of the contemporary Western writer to refuse to fulfil causal expectations’ (1987, 19) in terms which can readily be applied to the kind of short fiction I am concerned with. He describes this impulse as a resistance to the model of the detective fiction in which clues lead through a series of causal relations to a resolute and all-encompassing *telos* of revelation. In this world, the ‘eye’ follows the ‘leads’ which ‘lead’ to the text’s solution. What the detective novel represents for Spanos is the idea of a

well-made positivistic universe...grounded in the equally comforting certainty that the scientist/psychoanalyst/social scientist (and reader) can solve the immediate problem of deviation by the inductive method, a calculative interpretative process involving the inference of relationships between discontinuous “facts” that point or lead straight to an explanation of the “mystery” (*ibid*, 18)

In the various readings of the short story I have been examining in the course of this introduction a similar set of presumptions would appear to be in operation. There is an assumption that the inductive or inferential method of reading will uncover not a further perplexity of meaning—not a “mystery”—but a full disclosure. I have been arguing that in fact the interrogative short story refutes this readerly intuition and that we require a critical approach to it that is equipped to recognize the value of this refutation.

When we *stop short*—in every sense—of the *telos*, when we refuse the summons to intelligibility at the point of closure, we challenge what one critic has called ‘the traditional literature of knowledge’ which conventionally depends on the ‘pivot of the teleological principle...to say what it is about’ (Watson 1991, 24). I would argue that interrogative short fiction challenges the teleological principle through its techniques of ‘shortness’—ellipsis, reticence, interdiction. The resistance to closure in the form is not simply a formal innovation (or deviation) at the end-point of the text; it occurs, rather, at every level as a

resistance to teleological structure and determinate meaning. My interrogative theory allows us to escape the narrow formalism of closural studies by integrating the way in which short fictions end with the resistance to closure evident in their discourse. Moreover, it affords the form a new prominence within modernism and postmodernism by revealing its participation in the radical innovations of narrative outlined by Hillis Miller and William Spanos.

The desire to place short fiction more precisely within these contexts has to a great extent conditioned my choice of writers in the following chapters. Obviously, any genre-based study will need to be selective if it is to undertake sufficiently detailed analyses in a reasonable space. However, the writers I have decided to focus on—Joyce, Hemingway, Beckett, Barthelme—are the four I would have chosen whatever liberties I had been given in terms of wordage. What connects these writers is, to put it simply, their willingness to *stop short* and to explore what happens when one removes or withholds fundamental orientational material in narrative. They all, in various ways, answer to Elizabeth Bowen's desire for a conception of 'shortness' as a 'positive' quality (if positively disruptive), rather than as mere 'non-extension' (1950, 39).

Dubliners makes its own case for inclusion; no study of twentieth-century short fiction can reckon without it. My emphasis falls first of all on the ways in which Joyce's stories evade determinate readings, and how even as sensitive an analytical tool as 'ambiguity' is insufficient in accounting for their radical plurality. I go on to suggest, through a consideration of the use of intertexts in the stories, that in fact all determinate or authoritative discourses are undermined in *Dubliners*, including that of the reader.

This apparent hostility to particular modes of reading is even more explicitly evident in Hemingway's short fiction. In my reading of *In Our Time* I attempt to show how critical abductions from existing story forms act to resist the reader approaching the text in pursuit of its supposed novelistic continuities.

The much-rehearsed theory of ‘omission’ in Hemingway’s stories is then reconsidered in relation to Jonathan Culler’s notion of literary presupposition in an attempt to reveal how radical interrogativeness is generated by the occlusion of unifying teleological structures in the text.

In many ways, Beckett’s short fiction represents the theoretical centre of my study. I suggest that the parodic and critical reading of modernist short fiction which he undertakes in *More Pricks Than Kicks* offers an exemplification of the formal definition I have established in my chapters on Joyce and Hemingway. Thereafter, I examine the post-Trilogy short fictions, in particular two of the ‘residua’—‘Imagination Dead Imagine’ and ‘Ping’—and discuss what it was uniquely that the interrogative short form offered to Beckett in his attempts to ‘go on’, to ‘fail better’, after the Trilogy.

My concluding chapter concerns American writers in the 1960s and 1970s, especially Donald Barthelme, and their appropriation of the interrogative story for the concerns of postmodernism. I suggest that examining the work of these writers from a genre-based perspective allows for some significant revision of the argument that postmodernist fiction represents a decisive breakthrough against the aesthetics of high modernism.

My first duty, however, is to establish more clearly my definition of interrogative short fiction. This I want to do in the form of a case study by examining the story’s emergence in England in the 1890s. Not only does this afford the opportunity to recover the work of some neglected writers of that decade but it offers some explanation for why the interrogative form has been, in English at least, a phenomenon of twentieth-century fiction.

**‘A Certain Science of Control’:
England and the 1890s**

‘A Certain Science of Control’: England and the 1890s

In Italo Calvino’s short story, ‘The adventure of a reader’, the central character enjoys a frisson of narrative satisfaction familiar to any reader of fiction:

The novel Amedeo was reading had reached the point where the darkest secrets of characters and plot are revealed, and you move in a familiar world, and you achieve a kind of parity, an ease between author and reader: you proceed together, and you would like to go on forever. (Calvino 1985, 77)

Amedeo has arrived at the point of full disclosure characteristic of the classic realist novel. Revelation is his reward. The designs of intrigue and enigma will soon be behind him. He has entered the end-game of the novel where the textual world comes to rights, and his only remaining anxiety is to read to the very last word.

For the reader of Calvino’s story, however, no such climax of consonance and identification is on offer. The last words of this text present instead a tantalizing crux, a metafictional suspensiveness in which Amedeo must decide whether to follow the woman sunbather into the sea or read those last gratifying pages:

Dusk was falling. Below, the rocks opened out, sloping, into a little harbour. Now she had gone down there and was halfway into the water. “Come down; we’ll have a last swim...” Amedeo, biting his lip, was counting how many pages were left till the end. (Calvino 1985, 81)

Amedeo wishes to read the final pages because he knows what they contain—a promise realized, a desire fulfilled. To follow the woman would be to instate another plot, to pursue another desideratum—sexual this time rather than textual. In his hands he holds the perfection of the pattern of desire; to follow the woman would be to defer, once again, that longed-for resolution.

What interests me is that this structure of desire-consummation which governs the story Amedeo is reading also governs the story we are reading, but with the crucial difference that it is possible for Amedeo to read on to the end and complete his satisfaction. We are offered no such possibility of fulfilment as readers of his narrative. We may be intrigued by the ellipsis in that ‘last swim...’, made expectant by the ‘intermediary’ properties of the scene (‘dusk’; ‘halfway’), yet we cannot read on through any final pages to where the ‘darkest secrets of characters and plot are revealed’, to where we might enjoy our sense of ‘parity’ with the author. The metafictional ‘open’ ending to the story interdicts these desires; the text refuses to supply the information it has itself created the appetite for. Where Amedeo’s novel draws up conclusions, our story abbreviates; where his narrative gathers, ours seems to disperse. The ending to ‘The adventure of a reader’ does not permit the reader to attribute function and significance retrospectively to all the details of the narrative; it does not realize our expectations of closure. To adapt that most famous of fictive metaphors, the scratches on the pierglass fail to arrange themselves around an ordering sun, and remain scattered in many directions.

The structural parallel in Calvino’s story between sexual and readerly desire is significant here. Denis de Rougemont, in *Love in the Western World* (published in French in 1940), uncovered the importance of the connection in European literature through his study of the Tristan and Iseult myth, suggesting that the Western novel’s persistent fascination with transgressive, adulterous sexual relations had its origin in the Tristan story where the vitality of passion between the lovers is sustained by virtue of the impediments placed in the way of its consummation.

Roland Barthes translates de Rougemont’s thesis into narratological terms in his discussion of the hermeneutic code. For Barthes, the code, like Tristan’s sword, is necessary for the sustenance of readerly desire, and his

description of it in his study of Balzac's 'Sarrasine' is fittingly sensuous:

[J]ust as rhyme (notably) structures the poem according to the expectation and desire for recurrence, so the hermeneutic terms structure the enigma according to the expectation and desire for its solution. The dynamics of the text (since it implies a truth to be deciphered) is thus paradoxical...[T]he problem is to *maintain* the enigma in the initial void of its answer; whereas the sentences quicken the story's "unfolding" and cannot help but move the story along, the hermeneutic code performs an opposite action: it must set up *delays*, (obstacles, stoppages, deviations) in the flow of the discourse; its structure is essentially reactive, since it opposes the ineluctable advance of language with an organized set of stoppages: between question and answer there is a whole dilatory area whose emblem might be named "reticence", the rhetorical figure which interrupts the sentence, suspends it, turns it aside (1990, 75)

This 'dilatory area' which acts to defer resolution, fulfilment, closure—and so sustain desire, appetite, enigma—is manifest in a network of textual devices:

the *snare* (a kind of deliberate evasion of the truth), the *equivocation* (a mixture of truth and snare which frequently, while focusing on the enigma, helps to thicken it), the *partial answer* (which only exacerbates the expectation of the truth), the *suspended answer* (an aphasic stoppage of the disclosure), and *jamming* (acknowledgement of insolubility) (*ibid*, 75-6)

Such are the techniques of postponement and withholding by which the pleasure of the text is cultivated. Crucially, however, there is in Balzac's world, and from what we can gather in the world of Amedeo's novel too, an ultimately satisfactory resolution of these enigmas, a point of (dis)closure where equivocations are reconciled, parts made whole, and reticences 'voiced': 'truth, these narratives tell us, is what is *at the end of expectation*' (*ibid*, 76).

In Calvino's story, by contrast, the hermeneutic indeterminacies are sustained, prevarication and insolubility foregrounded, at the expected point of closure. The *snare*, the *equivocation*, the *suspended answer*, all feature in Calvino's text not as the means to an end but as the end itself. The *reticence* that characterizes the text's strategies of deferment is carried over into its conclusion; what are usually techniques of interim suspensefulness become in this story permanent interdictions of readerly desire.

My interest here is not only in the juxtaposition of plot structures in

Calvino's story—one tending towards decisive closure, the other remaining interrogative and open—but that these two types should be exemplified in different genres: what cuts against the model of continuity and closure in Amedeo's novel is the *interrogativeness* of the short story 'The adventure of a reader'. The nature of this relationship between short fiction and the novel will be returned to throughout this thesis, but for now it is sufficient to observe how in Calvino's text the story form undermines by dint of its interstitial and interdictive narrative strategies the continuities which govern the novelistic model. When we come to consider the emergence of interrogative short fiction in England at the end of the nineteenth century we find that the critical interaction between the two forms is a vital element in the development of an independent aesthetic of the short story. Indeed, it would seem that the key to the form's identity rested on its ability to distance itself critically from the novel and from novelistic practice.

I have chosen to focus this first chapter on a consideration of the situation in England because there the interrogative story form develops later than elsewhere in Europe and in America. This tardiness on the part of Victorian writers makes for a study in resistance in which the constitution of the form and its relationship with the dominant novel can be seen to be important critical issues of the day. It also means that there is a large body of conventionally structured (non-interrogative) short fiction against which to define our subject. In addition, the development of the new story form is intimately connected with the marked social and cultural changes affecting late-Victorian England, and this allows us to place short fiction within the context of an emergent modernism.

Among critics of the short story there is wide agreement that the form did not achieve recognition in England until long after its distinction in America

and elsewhere in Europe.¹ Underlying this consensus is the belief that the English imagination had a particular affinity with the novel which it could not establish with the short form. V.S. Pritchett, for example, suggests that English writers were ‘slow starters in the art of the short story’ because of the ‘national taste for the ruminative and disquisitionary; we preferred to graze on the large acreage of the novel and even tales by Dickens or Thackeray or Mrs Gaskell strike us as being unused chapters of longer works’ (1980, 164). Pritchett here echoes Henry James who observed in ‘Guy de Maupassant’ that the English preferred their fiction ‘rather by the volume than by the page’ (1905, 264). Not only was the novel’s extensiveness and sweep congenial to Victorian tastes but shorter prose works were considered subordinate, uncertain fragments of a meaningful whole, not generated by—or generating—any independent aesthetic. For H.E. Bates, similarly, the dominance of the Victorian novel, with its Latinate artificiality and seeming obligation to pedagogy and edification—its ‘weight of words’ and ‘weight of moral teaching’ (1945, 37)—was responsible for the failure of English writers to create a short fiction that was formally distinct. The short story, he suggests, is a delicate, non-committed form requiring ‘tender and skilful hands’ (*ibid*, 41); from the Victorian novelist it emerged bereft of its defining subtlety, overblown with novelistic tropes, ‘like a baby fed on a diet of two-inch steaks and porter’ (*ibid*, 41). It is Bates’s contention that no English writer applied to the short story ‘a technique different from that of the novel’ (*ibid*, 23), an argument rehearsed by Elizabeth Bowen who suggests that Hardy and the Victorians wrote stories as condensed novels: their short fictions contain, she says in her introduction to *The Faber Book of Modern Short Stories* (1936), ‘no urgent aesthetic necessity...Their shortness is not positive; it is non-extension’ (1950, 39).

¹ For a summary of this opinion see Baldwin 1993. See also Flora 1985, and the essays by Baldeshwiler, Harris and Marler in May 1994.

Like Frank O'Connor, Bowen contends that the failure of Victorian writers to respond to the possibilities of the short story in the way Turgenev, for instance, did, was the result of their lack of understanding of the 'positive' qualities of shortness. Although many English writers wrote short fiction, they still conceived of it in terms of novelistic practice. In his apologetic preface to the 'Charles Dickens' edition of the *Christmas Stories* (1852) Dickens suggested that the challenge of the form lay in how one could translate techniques of the novel in it:

The narrow space within which it was necessary to confine these Christmas Stories...rendered their construction a matter of some difficulty, and almost necessitated what is peculiar in their machinery. I could not attempt great elaboration of detail, in the working out of character within such limits. (Dickens 1971, xxix)

These comments reveal Dickens' frustration with the curtailment involved in writing short and the difficulty he had in conceiving of an aesthetic of the short story that was distinct from novelistic practice. He is certainly aware that condensation 'necessitates' a different approach, but he is unable to consider this other than in terms of a 'confinement' and 'limitation' of his full expressive capacity. It is as though he has been asked to make a doll's house from the plans to a mansion. That the form does not allow him to individuate character through 'great elaboration of detail' is a privation for Dickens rather than a stimulus to a new conception of characterization.

Dickens's comments contrast tellingly with Henry James's praise of Maupassant's gifts for characterization and description in his short fiction: 'These are never prolonged nor analytic', says James, 'have nothing of enumeration, of the quality of the observer, who counts the items to be sure he has made up the sum.. His eye selects unerringly...' (1905, 251). It is essential in the short story to characterize through a highly concentrated metonymy: the Dickensian catalogue, as Bates calls it, is not permitted; to describe the shape of the hands is enough.

More recent and rigorous theorizing of this issue has been undertaken by Wendell Harris. Harris argues that it was the Victorian novelist's habit of constructing his fiction around the twin axes of historical sequence and social survey, what Harris terms the 'longitudinal tracing of sequence and the latitudinal or comprehensive survey of interrelationships' (1994, 183), that inhibited his ability to write short stories. The customary placement of characters within an 'organic, all-encompassing' (*ibid*) narrative structure prevented Victorian writers from appreciating the formal distinctiveness of short fiction: they simply applied to it the rules of novel writing, and to no great effect. 'Unfortunately,' writes Harris, 'the closer the tale approached the novel, the further it was forced to move from the essentially ahistorical, sonnet-like, and highly focused vision, which is characteristic of the true short story' (*ibid*, 187).

It is interesting that Harris should describe the 'true' short story as sequestered, 'ahistorical', in contradistinction to the continuous and conclusively 'historicized' Victorian novel. As with Bates' description of the short form as essentially non-committed, the implication would seem to be that if it is to distinguish itself as something other than a miniaturized novel the story must resist novelistic strategies of continuity and identification. Developing this idea in Barthesian terms, I would suggest that what Robert Louis Stevenson termed, in a letter of 5/6 September 1891 to Sidney Colvin, the 'full close' of classic realist novelistic practice (Stevenson 1997, 464)—i.e. the limiting of interpretative uncertainty, the resolution of contradiction and 'dissolution of enigma through the reestablishment of order' (Belsey 1987, 70)—was the controlling model for the Victorian story, and that the modern form is resistant, directly or indirectly, to such closure: its aesthetic, by contrast, seeks for an 'open' or interrogative, rather than 'closed' or declarative effect. To demonstrate this difference, and to reaffirm the point about the tardiness of English writers in recognizing the possibilities of the short form, I want to undertake a comparative

reading of a story by Hardy with one written some thirty-five years earlier by Turgenev.

Hardy's 'The Three Strangers' (1883) is a story structured around a series of enigmas, progressing towards an ending that resolves those enigmas by instating closure at every level in the text. The plot is typical in its shape: order is disrupted by the arrival of the eponymous, *enigmatic* strangers; confusion then ensues until their identities are confirmed, which confirmation occasions the reinstatement of intelligible order in the text. Revelation of the 'truth' about the strangers is the *raison d'être* of the story; in Barthes's terms, it is 'what is *at the end* of [the] expectation' generated by the narrative (1990, 76).

The first stranger arouses mild suspicion among the guests on account of his rough attire and his request for some tobacco despite his obvious lack of a pipe and a tobacco tin. The second stranger, dressed in cinder-grey, foregrounds his enigmatic status by composing riddles as to his identity. Just as it is discovered that he is a hangman there to carry out an execution at the neighbouring jail, the third stranger comes to the door. 'Can you tell me the way to—?' is all he says before fleeing, apparently at the sight of the hangman (1967, 16). News breaks that a prisoner has escaped from the jail and it is deduced that the third stranger must be the escapee. The guests give chase and the third stranger is caught. However, he proves not to be the escapee, but the escapee's brother who had come to visit the condemned man on the night before his execution. The condemned man is now identified as the first stranger, who has by this time fled the cottage.

At the level of plot, the story is clearly organized towards closure—that point of *disclosure* which functions to dissolve the enigma surrounding the identity and purpose of each of the strangers. The disruption of their presence is healed by a settling reinstatement of intelligibility both for the characters in the story, who now have answers to their questions—'But what is the man's calling,

and where is he of..?’ (*ibid*, 13)—and for the reader in whom anxiety was generated by the ‘reticence’ of the text in supplying the solution (which the text, of course, always ‘knows’) to its enigma. Consequently we are able to attribute function retrospectively to every narrative detail: we now know why the first stranger had no tobacco, pipe or tin; we know why he was so poorly dressed; we can even supply the destination sought by the third stranger, ‘Can you tell me the way to the—?’: he was looking for the prison.

Yet Hardy engineers unity in his text more intensively still in an effort, I would suggest, to recuperate the actual short story *form* for the conventions of novelistic practice. Here is the first paragraph:

Among the few features of agricultural England which retain an appearance but little modified by the lapse of centuries, may be reckoned the long, grassy and furzy downs, coombs, or ewe-leases, as they are called according to their kind, that fill a large area of certain counties in the south and south-west. If any mark of human occupation is met with hereon, it usually takes the form of the solitary cottage of some shepherd. (1967, 1)

This passage would seem to bear out Wendell Harris’s theory that Victorian story writers were in thrall to novelistic conventions: the narrative is given its longitudinal and latitudinal coordinates here, its place within a particular rural history and topography, in an effort to attain the compass of the novel. Notably, the passage occurs in a discourse belonging to the subject of the *énonciation*, the subject who narrates the tale, imparting information that transcends the comprehension of the subjects of the *énoncé*². This is significant in terms of the text’s movement towards closure. That privileged discourse recurs at the end of the story, completing a narrative frame:

The grass has long been green on the graves of Shepherd Fennel and his frugal wife; the guests who made up the christening party have mainly followed their entertainers to the tomb; the baby in whose honour they all had met is a matron in sere and yellow leaf. But the arrival of the three strangers at the shepherd’s that

² Todorov, in ‘Language and Literature’, uses the terms *énoncé* and *énonciation* to distinguish between ‘two equally linguistic realities, that of the characters and that of the narrator-listener duality’ respectively (1970, 132)

night, and the details connected therewith, is a story as well known as ever in the country about Higher Crowstairs. (1967, 25)

The events in this story are here placed within a conclusive historical narrative. Just as the enigma in the story was resolved for the subjects of the *énoncé*, so in the frame the discourse of the subject of the *énonciation* seeks to resolve any indeterminacy, tie up any conceivable loose ends, that the brevity of presentation might have created. It is as though the short form presents a danger in that its very shortness tends toward enigma, momentariness, open-endedness (the ‘ahistorical’ sequestration Harris identified above), as though the threat to order in the lives of the characters is mirrored by the threat of an un-closed or ultimately inconclusive narrative and so must be recuperated for the classic realist novelistic enterprise whereby closure is ensured, historical continuity established and interpretative uncertainty closed down.

It is clear that for Hardy the short story was essentially a plot-driven form. Characterization is scant in his stories; the few details given are index-linked to the end-point of the text. There is no superfluous gesture, no non-functional or indeterminate unit of meaning—everything tends towards and is recuperated by the ‘truth’ that is at the end of expectation. Reading ‘The Three Strangers’ one is reminded of Beckett’s comments on Balzac:

To read Balzac is to receive the impression of a chloroformed world. He is absolute master of his material, he can do what he likes with it, he can foresee and calculate its least vicissitude. He can write the end of his book before he has finished the first paragraph, because he has turned all his creatures into clockwork cabbages and can rely on their staying put wherever needed or going at whatever speed in whatever direction he chooses (1993, 119-20)

Like Balzac’s, Hardy’s world is rigorously teleological in structure. The details of character and action are entirely subordinated to their plot functionality. The difficulties Dickens describes above of achieving effective characterization in the short story are writ large in Hardy: unable to grant them a cumulative reality, he reduces his characters to ‘clockwork cabbages’ serving a pre-determined plot

trajectory. Closure, coherence and unity govern his aesthetic of the short form. Hence the reinforcement of the deterministic plot by the historical and topographical contextualization of the adventure of the strangers in a narrative frame.

Hardy's determination to place the action of his story within a long-range continuum of events, people, places—in effect, to make 'discourse' into 'history' (Benveniste 1971, 206)—suggests that he considered the short story a potentially atomistic and discontinuous form. Henry James recognized its potentially disruptive and inconclusive properties, too. However, for James it was possible to understand the consequences of writing short in a far more positive and productive way, as he makes clear in his preface to 'The Lesson of the Master'.

In his preface, James envisages a short form in which it will possible 'to do the complicated thing with a strong brevity and lucidity—to arrive on behalf of the multiplicity, at a certain science of control' (1934, 231). Crucially, James's brevity of form does not entail any reduction in complexity or multiplicity. In fact, he is proposing a disparity of extent between utterance and meaning: though material statement in the short form is necessarily curtailed, for James there should be no corresponding reduction in complexity or implication; when we read we should be conscious of amplitudes, not economies. Whereas the novelist's art may be centripetal—arranging scratches on a pierglass around an ordering sun—James's formulation implies an aesthetic of the short story which we might characterize as 'centrifugal', significance amplifying outward from an inevitably reduced centre.

For Hardy and Dickens, writing short stories meant condensing the principles of novel writing. Shortness was for them no positive feature; they were unwilling to conceive of short fiction as a form in which dissident meanings might arise, surplus to—in excess of—their acts of signification. In

other words, they did not see the form as implicative or, to use my own defining term, interrogative in method. Hence the strict unity and closure evident in their stories.

For an example of the kind of story that does exploit the suggestive potential of writing short we can look abroad to a writer whom James championed, and whose work was, surprisingly, known to English readers of *Household Words*, Ivan Turgenev. Frank O'Connor once described Turgenev's *Sketches from a Hunter's Album* (1852) as 'the greatest book of short stories ever written', a work largely responsible for 'the creation of a new art form' (1963, 46). I would argue, rather, that Turgenev is the first writer to recognize that the short form, by virtue of its shortness, could be governed by a poetics of indeterminacy, that it might function without the clockwork paraphernalia of plot and resist the militancies of unity and closure. Turgenev understood that the formal curtailment of the short story might generate an implicative 'openness' in semantic terms—that 'multiplicity' might be achieved on behalf of 'brevity', as James puts it. In other words, he treated shortness as a positive quality.

'Raspberry Water' offers a representative example of the way in which Turgenev's narratives de-emphasise plot and actively resist formal closure. In contrast to the Hardy, Turgenev's story refuses the kind of revelatory vantage point at which function becomes attributable to every narrative unit and meaning is stabilized. This is evident even in a summary of the story: the narrator, out hunting on a hot August day, comes upon two old men, Stepushka and Foggy, fishing the river Ista beside a spring known as 'Raspberry Water'. The narrator embarks upon the first of many mini-narratives by telling of Stepushka's connection with a gardener in the village of Shumikhino called Mitrofan. He then relates some of the life of Foggy—a freed serf formerly in bondage to the Count Pyotr Ilyich. The story of the Count's profligate lifestyle is picked up by Foggy himself in a series of disordered, inconclusive recollections, until the

arrival at the river of Vlas, a serf whose son has recently died and who is struggling with debt. The others return to fishing while Vlas, on the opposite bank, gives way to his grief.

Even in summary form the story's plot structure clearly contrasts with that of the Hardy. Most obviously, it is not a plot structured on the basis of disruptive enigma, progressing towards resolution and the reinstatement of a recognizable order. Moreover, there is a marked inconclusiveness about each of the contained narratives in the story. For instance, in the relatively lengthy retailing of Stepushka's life we find ourselves questioning the function of the various details, and indeed of the narrative itself, in relation to the text as a whole. But Stepushka's narrative does not build to a conclusion which signals its significance and meaning. In fact, it peters out in physical description:

He had a small face, yellowish little eyes, hair down to his eyebrows, a sharp little nose, enormous transparent ears, like a bat's, and a beard shaved literally two weeks ago, never any longer or shorter. ([1852] 1990, 45)

There is no confirmation of the significance of what we have been told about Stepushka even at the end of the story; function does not become attributable in this way. (In fact, Stepushka is asleep by the end.) In other words, the information we are presented with about Stepushka is intended as self-sufficient. The narrative interdicts our desire that this material be recuperated by the wider text, that it function in meaningful relation to the dominant diegesis of the story. Stepushka's life remains defiantly 'surplus'.

Yet the account of Stepushka is not dissident from an otherwise unified narrative. All of the mini-diegeses in the story work in the same way: each narrated life suffers from the same inconclusiveness, each fades in an air of lost connections. The Count's story, for instance, conveyed in fragmentary recollection by Foggy, ends with his death in an unspecified hotel room 'before anything had been decided' (*ibid*, 46). Just as there is no resolution for the Count before his moment of dissolution, so Foggy's recollections themselves

suffer a lack of meaningful closure:

‘Well, there’d be guests, you see, at a thing like that.
Entertainin’ to see, but you got to observe decorum...Oh it’s got
away, dammit!’ he added suddenly, jerking up his fishing rod.
(*ibid*, 47)

It is not only the fish that gets away here but the meaning and significance of the story Foggy is telling.

The same is true of the ending of the wider narrative, based around the grief and penury of Vlas following his son’s death. Once again, there is ellipsis and interdiction at the very point where explanation and meaning are sought:

‘...That’s real bad, brother Vlas,’ Foggy announced, pausing
between the words.
‘What’s real bad about it? It’s not. . .’ But Vlas’s voice broke
at that point. ‘Oh, it’s bloody hot,’ he went on, wiping his face
with his sleeve. (*ibid*, 50)

The potentially conclusive and significant utterance by Vlas—the expression of his understanding of his own condition—dissipates in wordlessness, a failure not just to fix significance but to signify at all. Rather than offer any unifying statement of the various threads of the story, the text opens out here in terms of interpretative possibility. We cannot, in contradistinction to Hardy’s story, supply Vlas’s omitted phrase from the vantage point of closure: no such privilege has been granted. Vlas’s statement intensifies rather than dispells uncertainty. This lack of decisive utterance is sustained into the ending of the story with a long exchange between the characters rendered in direct speech and offering no narratorial mediation. Once again it is left to the reader to attribute significance to these utterances; the narratorial voice does not attempt to enforce a meaning:

‘Who’s your master?’ I asked.
‘Count—, Valerian Petrovich.’
‘Pyotr Ilyich’s son?’
‘Pyotr Ilyich’s son,’ said Foggy. ‘Pyotr Ilyich, the late Count,
gave ‘im Vlas’s village while he was still alive.’
‘Is he well?’
‘He’s well, thank God,’ Vlas answered. ‘Gone all red, fat-
faced, he has.’

‘You see, sir,’ Foggy continued, turning to me, ‘it’d be all right like if it were outside Moscow, but it’s right here he’s on quit-rent.’

‘How much?’

‘Ninety-five roubles,’ mumbled Vlas.

‘Well, you can see for yourself, can’t you - just a little bit o’ land and all the rest’s the master’s woodland.’

‘And that’s been sold, they say,’ remarked the peasant.

‘Well, you can see for yourself...Give us a worm, Steve...Hey, Steve, what’s up? Gone to sleep, ‘ave you?’

Stepushka shook himself. The peasant sat down beside us. We fell silent again. On the opposite bank a voice struck up a song, but it was protracted and sad...My poor Vlas gave way to his grief...Half an hour later we all went our separate ways. (*ibid*, 50-1; Turgenev’s ellipses)

Frank O’Connor has noted of another Turgenev story how it is “‘thrown away” in a theatrical sense, how all the human agony emerges from that maze of irrelevance’ (1963, 50). The sense of ‘irrelevance’ arises because we are not being directed towards a single ascendant meaning in the text. The narrator is *reticent* at the point of closure about the significance of what is being said and felt; the narrative techniques of deferment and withholding are sustained right to the boundary of the text. The narrator’s final comment seems to apply as much to the form of the story as to the actions of the characters: ‘Half an hour later we all went our separate ways’. There has been no convergence of ‘ways’ at a site of fixed meaning. The lack of arbitration between the speaking voices gives the story a structure which we might visualize as centrifugal. As Bakhtin says, ‘Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear’ (1981, 272). Unlike Hardy, Turgenev does not find that brevity of form requires a commensurate curtailment of meaning through the imposition of a univalent plot resolution. In fact, the equation is the reverse for Turgenev: the very shortness of the form involves him in a suggestive and implicatory method of characterization and a marked deemphasis of plot closure. Once again, Henry James’s observations are informative here. James notes in his essay ‘Ivan Turgenieff’ (1884) that

the germ of a story...was never an affair of plot...it was the representation of certain persons...The thing consists of motions of a group of selected creatures, which are not the result of a

preconceived action, but a consequence of the qualities of the actions (James 1905, 314-5)

James's choice of the word 'motions' (no definite article) suggests precisely that quality of action without definable consequence, 'purposiveness' without purpose, that characterizes Turgenev's short fiction. For Hardy, shortness involves the imposition of an absolute teleological structure in the action; for Turgenev, it is achieved through the suppression of precisely those causal relationships which facilitate teleology.

It should not be thought that I am claiming for Turgenev radical modernist indeterminacy of the sort described in my introduction. Rather, I am seeking to illustrate the structural and semantic differences between his conception of the short story and that of Hardy and Dickens. Whereas for the English writers the form entailed a miniaturization of novelistic effects of unity and closure, for Turgenev shortness was inherently disunifying and tended towards interrogativeness and 'openness'. For Dickens, writing short meant simply suppressing his inclination towards 'great elaboration of detail', leaving out what could be considered 'surplus' to the requirements of a satisfactory resolution of action. *Turgenev, on the other hand, occludes precisely the orientational material which would permit such closure.* Perversely, as a result of this withholding, the narrated history of the somnambulant Stepushka at the start of 'Raspberry Water' emerges as 'surplus' to the dominant diegesis of the story.

What we dealing with here are in effect two different notions of shortness: one which involves merely the shrinkage of a preconfigured unity, and the other which exploits its own interstices, reticences and occlusions. In Frank O'Connor's terms, the difference is between a brevity motivated by 'convenience' and one motivated by 'its own necessities' (1963, 28). It is to the latter that English writers eventually turn in the 1890s, and from which the modernist interrogative form begins to emerge.

Coming back to Barthes for a moment, it is clear how interrogative short fiction bears out in a double sense his claim that '[t]he more plural the text, the less it is written before I read it' (1990, 10). By *written*, of course, we understand Barthes's own sense of the *scriptible* or infinitely plural text, an ideal which cannot be committed textually—'the novelistic without the novel, poetry without the poem' (*ibid*, 5)—but which exists at the opposite end on the plurality continuum to the *lisible*, readerly or 'classic' text, the text 'devoted to the law of the Signified' (*ibid*, 10). Barthes places texts on his continuum according to the extent or 'proportion' of their plurality. Although we are dealing always with 'incompletely plural texts', it is possible to distinguish strategies of narrative which generate a 'more or less parsimonious' plurality (*ibid*, 6). The interrogative short story would clearly number among those 'less parsimonious' texts because of its foregrounded ellipses, reticences and interdictions, in other words because it is both less *written* in Barthes's special sense and because literally less is written. The interrogative short story achieves its 'writerly' or plural status by writing less; its shortness is what generates its plurality. Hardy, by contrast, wrote less when he wrote stories, but he did not *write* less (i.e. determine less) in Barthes's sense of the word.

In common with Barthes's 'writerly' texts, interrogative short fictions in an obvious way augment the role of the reader who is called upon to supply, to produce meaning from, that which the texts themselves withhold or suppress. The reader becomes, in Barthes's words, 'no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text' (*ibid*, 4). Umberto Eco, in his study of the 'open' work, investigates at some length this co-productive capacity of the reader in relation to texts which are markedly reticent and even materially incomplete. Within poststructuralist critical discourse, of course, the differences between Eco's approach and Barthes's are more important than any common ground. Whereas Barthes is arguing from a post-Saussurean perspective that all texts are plural or

indeterminate as a result of their being constructed in language, Eco still invokes the stable subject of reception theory, the reader who fashions textual meaning according to his own 'existential credentials' (1989, 3); all texts are in this sense 'open' because they are susceptible to readers' 'countless different interpretations' (*ibid*, 4).

While mindful of this fundamental discrimination, I would nevertheless argue for the continuing significance of *The Open Work* for the study of short fiction. To a far greater degree than Barthes, Eco gives his theory historical coordinates. In particular he identifies the late 19th century as the moment when writers, composers and artists began consciously to adopt strategies of indeterminacy and 'openness' in their work. Barthes, despite his synchronic (rather than diachronic) predisposition—i.e. his interest in the total system of language that makes signification possible at any one moment—actually suggests something similar in his contention that texts can, by dint of their devices, be more or less parsimonious with their plurality. Eco goes further in placing this phenomenon within a developmental metanarrative of Western art.

He begins with a consideration of the 'incomplete' musical scores of 20th century *avant-garde* composers. These scores, Eco writes,

offer themselves not as finite works which prescribe specific repetition along given structural co-ordinates but as 'open' works, which are brought to their conclusion by the performer at the same time as he experiences them on an aesthetic plane.
(1989, 3)

The performer (or reader) is invited to supply the missing parts in the score (or text). In other words, he or she is involved in the 'writing' of the work—an act coincident with his or her reception of it. Eco immediately concedes that all works make co-productive demands on their audience, but argues that these works are open 'in a far more tangible sense' (*ibid*, 4) because they are materially 'incomplete'.

It is in the late 19th century, Eco claims, that we first see explicit

attempts by writers to ‘prevent a single sense from imposing itself at the very outset of the receptive process’ (*ibid*, 8). He cites Verlaine’s *Art Poétique* and Mallarmé’s celebration of the pleasures of ‘guessing’ as the first statements of a programmatic and self-conscious ‘openness’, of an effort to produce works that will indulge the free play of interpretative possibility, that will seek out the ‘free response of the addressee’ to their ‘halo of indefiniteness...pregnant with infinite suggestive possibilities’ (*ibid*, 9). For major modernists—Eco cites Kafka, Joyce and Brecht —‘openness’ and indeterminacy become central operative principles.

The development Barthes offers over Eco is in the location of this indeterminacy and plurality in language itself. For Eco, ‘openness’ in his special definition is a supply-side effect, something generated by the author. The other kind of ‘openness’ he identifies as inherent in all texts arises because of the uncertainty of the expressive-receptive transaction between the subjectivities of the writer and the reader. In other words, indeterminacy is not for Eco as it is for Barthes a product of the inherently plural constitution of language. My theory of interrogative short fiction depends on Barthes’s corrective here. Although I am entirely in agreement with Eco that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there arises a self-conscious interest in textual ‘openness’ on the part of writers, I would suggest that very ‘openness’ arises in the first place because of the potentially indeterminate nature of language, and that the strategies of ellipsis and interdiction writers employ serve to exploit and intensify this plurality.

Despite these theoretical circumspections, Eco’s historical placement of the ‘open’ text at the end of the nineteenth-century marks its particular relevance to a study of short fiction, for it was in the 1890s that English writers first began to explore effects of indeterminacy in the form. At the same time the critical debate about the aesthetic of the short story and how it might be distinguished from the novel and from novelistic practice started in earnest and engaged the attentions of, among others, Henry James, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Brander

Matthews, whose views crystallized into the pioneering theoretical work on the form, *The Philosophy of the Short-Story* (1901). Although Eco does not single short fiction out in his study, I would argue that that is the form in which we see best exemplified the emergence of the poetics of indeterminacy with which he is concerned. I would like, therefore, to discuss the circumstances in which the short story achieves modernity in England in the 1890s and undertake some readings from the period with a view to elucidating further how the form's emergent aesthetic fits with this theory of indeterminacy.

There are by necessity several strands to my analysis here. In the first place, it is important to consider the revolution in publishing in the second half of the nineteenth century and how this helped bring about favourable conditions for the growth of short fiction. Henry James' desire, expressed in a letter to Robert Louis Stevenson (31 July 1888), to produce 'a multitude of pictures of my time, projecting my small circular frame upon as many different spots as possible' (Smith, J. 1948, 173) reflects, perhaps, not so much a *fin-de-siècle* 'Paterian disinclination to take a cosmic or even expansive or longitudinal view of the world' (Harris 1994, 188) as it does the then current publishing vogue for shortness of form. According to Peter Keating in *The Haunted Study*, the development of the short story in the last years of the 19th century—its wide practice and emergent theory—had a great deal to do with commercial necessities following the considerable expansion in the 1880s of the already vast Victorian periodical market. That growth had been made possible by improved technologies in printing (such as machine-made paper and half-tone illustrations), the repeal of mid-Victorian free-trade duties on paper and, more importantly, by advertising revenue, changes in copyright law, and the increasing professionalisation of authorship. Keating doubts whether short fiction would have developed much at all in this period 'if the market had not been so desperate to fill periodicals columns with fiction' (1989, 40).

Book publishers themselves became involved in the periodicals market, using it as a low-capital testing ground for previously unpublished authors, and some, such as George Smith and Macmillan, began their own journals as a means of securing new writers for their lists (Brake 1993, 89). The ‘quickenning rhythm’ (*ibid*, 88) of periodical publishing—monthlies, weeklies, dailies, evening dailies—meant a vast increase in demand for fiction which could be quickly written and quickly read. Cheap magazines and miscellanies such as *Tit-Bits* (to which Joyce, Woolf and Conrad all submitted work) and *Answers* began carrying fiction and short sketches, while W.T. Stead’s *Review of Reviews* provided condensed version of new novels. By 1891 it was desirable for magazines such as *Strand* and *Black and White* no longer to carry serialized novels at all but instead to publish ‘a complete short story by an eminent writer’ in each edition (Baldwin 1993, 32).

Keating suggests that this change in reading habits in favour of the short story ‘suited the commonly-expressed editorial belief that periodical readers were becoming incapable of sustaining interest in the written word for any length of time’ (1989, 41). The greatly enhanced profile and marketability of short fiction, along with the emergence of cheap one-volume ‘well-made’ novels, left circulating libraries with surplus stocks of expensive three-decker editions and so contributed to the eventual demise of that format in 1894. But even if the story and single-volume novel did attract less-committed readers, many authors were happy to see a decline in the influence of the lending libraries whose powers of selectivity amounted to censorship:

Not only did the lending library exercise immense control over the price, size and distribution of novels by mid-century, but, acting on behalf of what Thackeray referred to as ‘my squeamish public’, even dictated to a considerable degree the actual subject matter of fiction. (Bell 1993, 128)

Edmund Gosse in essays such as ‘The Influence of Democracy on Literature’ (1891), and Hardy in ‘The Profitable Reading of Fiction’ (1888) and

'Candour in English Fiction' (1890), scorned the injunctions of the moralists who took it upon themselves to protect the sensibilities of their subscribers by endorsing only those titles they felt were suitable. But the influence of the likes of W.H. Smith and Charles Mudie only reflected a more 'general climate of censorship and control' (Bell 1993, 128) in Victorian England. Fear of offence to public sensibility is evident as late as 1888 in Henry James's review of Maupassant where James worries that Maupassant's short fictions will prove 'embarrassing and mystifying for the moralist' (1905, 254) and that it is the Frenchman's 'licentiousness' that will be most noticed by the English reader (*ibid*, 265). This is the climate in which Hardy struggled, most notably over the publication of *Tess*, but even in respect of as slight work as 'The Distracted Preacher' (1879) which he was obliged to conclude with the trite propriety of a marriage between Lizzy and the minister, an ending which he, in a note attached to the story in May 1912, described as 'almost *de rigueur* in an English magazine at the time of writing' (1967, 120). Of course, when we examine the ending Hardy wanted for the story—namely Lizzy and the smuggler Jim marrying and emigrating to Wisconsin—it is obvious that it would have made no *formal* difference to the text. The marriage ending occurs only as a coda to the already concluded action of the plot. The revised ending would simply have presented the characters with an alternative but formally equivalent destiny. The published version makes no difference to the kind of highly plotted tale moving towards conclusive and explicatory closure that Hardy sought to write.

Nevertheless, critics of the short story have since the beginning argued that the climate of Victorian censoriousness impinged in particular upon the development of that form. According to H.E. Bates, it was not until the 1890s that conditions prevailed 'under which the short story could begin to thrive...free from the poking of moral umbrellas' (1945, 44). Frank O'Connor, similarly, argues that the English failure to embrace the modern form was the result of that

culture's resistance to the 'marginal', the 'outlawed', the 'submerged population group' in which the short story deals (1963, 18-19).

One can readily see how the non-committed or non-determinate interrogative story might be considered morally evasive, relativistic, or, to use James's word, deliberately 'mystifying'. By the very nature of its abbreviation and 'openness' it expresses a scepticism about the possibility of decisive or conclusive utterance, in contradistinction to the Victorian novel's all-encompassing historicism and survey. The emergence of the form in the last decades of the nineteenth century would appear to be consistent with the retreat of Utilitarian and Evangelical prejudices about imaginative writing, and with the countering of Victorian high seriousness by the 'art for art's sake' movement—shifts in cultural values which made the 1890s a decade especially propitious to development of the short story.

That the story became in many ways the nonpareil form in the late nineteenth century for the expression of this sense of cultural and ethical reformation is clear from remarks that G.K. Chesterton made in 1906:

Our modern attraction to short stories is not an accident of form; it is the sign of a real sense of fleetingness and fragility; it means that existence is only an impression, and, perhaps, only an illusion...The moderns, in a word, describe life in short stories because they are possessed with the sentiment that life itself is an uncommonly short story, and perhaps not a true one. (1919, 69)

That sense of *fin de siècle* 'fleetingness and fragility' contrasts for Chesterton with the mid-Victorian period of progress and 'hope' (*ibid*, 12) and, of course, of the three-decker novel. His imagery recalls Pater's conclusion to *The Renaissance*: 'the cohesive force seems suspended like a trick of magic; each object is loosed into a group of impressions...unstable, flickering, inconsistent...the whole scope of observation is dwarfed to the narrow chamber of the individual mind' ([1868] 1980, 187). Not only is experience fissiparous, formed of tenuous, infinitely divisible impressions, but we are each confined to our own perceptive centre. What is lacking in this condition, as Chesterton

laments, is the continuity of vision, the faith in public knowledge, the assurance of certain certainties, that permits the novelist's art. For Chesterton, the destruction of these values is directly expressed in literary form: under the new condition we retreat into smallness: 'many a man calls himself contentedly "a minor poet"' who in the past would 'have been inspired to be a major prophet' (1919, 16).

The idea that the short story's brevity and confinement suits it to such modern scepticism and relativism as Chesterton identifies recurs in contemporary criticism of the form. Nadine Gordimer, for instance, has called the short story 'the art of the only thing one can be sure of—the present moment'; an art in which a 'discrete moment of truth is aimed at—not *the* moment of truth' (1968, 459). She goes on to describe the form as 'fragmented and restless' and suggests that for this reason it may be seen as uniquely suited to the articulation of the 'modern consciousness—which seems best expressed as flashes of fearful insight alternating with near-hypnotic states of indifference' (*ibid*, 460). More recently, Clare Hanson has argued that the modern short story emerges from the late 19th century movement 'towards subjective impressionism in literature and the visual arts and a hedonistic emphasis on the value of the passing moment' (1985, 13). Her emphasis here on the fleeting and fragile contingencies of experience is elaborated by Wendell Harris who suggests that it was in response to Pater's vision that writers of the 1880s and 1890s turned 'with relief to the isolable, the detachable' (1994, 189). Harris claims that the emergence of the modern short story in the last decade of the 19th century is bound up with a Paterian 'new vision' of reality 'perceived as a congeries of fragments' (*ibid*, 190).

All of these elements—innovations in publishing and circulation, the demise of the three-decker novel, changes in reading tastes and in public morality, developments in the aesthetics of perception—form the circumstantial

matrix from which the short stories of the 1890s emerge and to which they contribute. What remains to be done is to relate these contexts to the theory and practice of interrogative short fiction as I have defined it.

Both Hanson and Harris offer some diagnosis of the cultural changes taking place in late Victorian society, and both suggest that these changes impinge particularly upon the development of short fiction. However, they are both surprisingly timid about the claims they are prepared to make for the formal innovativeness of the fiction that is produced in the 1890s. Both observe the new interest in significant moments of personal experience and the corresponding de-emphasis of plot, but they thereafter maintain that the short fiction emerging from this upheaval is in effect as 'stable' and highly ordered as the more conventionally plotted form. For Hanson, the new species of story simply infiltrates a moment of 'heightened awareness' as 'structural equivalent for conventional resolution of plot' (1985, 7); while under Harris's New Critical examination the new, 'true short story' emerges as 'crisp, taut, lean, focused, unified' (1994, 187)—a decidedly *un*-disruptive product when you consider the apparent disorder of its inception. By their readings both these critics reduce the significance of the changes in the 1890s to a series of limited, classifiable modifications in form. It is as though they are unwilling to contemplate the full significance of the claims they themselves are making for the period and are content instead to recuperate the formal developments of the 1890s for a highly unified and un-disruptive aesthetic.³

One must be careful, on the other hand, not to overstate the radical credentials of these new stories. Their importance lies in the way in which they attempt to sustain their strategies of ellipsis, interdiction and reticence even at points where disclosure is expected. In other words, they see shortness not

³ I am prefigured in this complaint against the 'unity aesthetic' of Hanson et al by Head 1992, 18-21

merely as the condensation of some pre-figured unity, but as positively disruptive. The value of my theory of interrogative short fiction is that rather than attempt to impose any one reading on the stories it recognizes how their compositional techniques conspire in their plurality. This recognition, I would suggest, is the key to understanding the subsequent developments of the modernist interrogative form.

One important and recurring motif in many of the stories of the 1890s is that of the city and the experience of metropolitan living. Of course, the metropolis figures strongly throughout modernist writing, both as a thematic concern and a formal directive; in many ways it becomes ‘the physical embodiment of a decisive modern consciousness’ (Williams 1973, 239). The city is at once the wasteland, the domain of Eliot’s anonymous, numberless mass flowing over London bridge; yet it is also the place where, despite the proximity of so many others, a sense of one’s own subjectivity is most excited, where the individual consciousness attains to poetry:

I am moved by fancies that are curled
Around these images, and cling
The notion of some infinitely gentle
Infinitely suffering thing

This dual response—an abhorrence of, and yet a willing and fascinated indulgence in, the mass and the metropolis—is evident too in many of the innovative short stories of the 1890s. Indeed, it seems that for many writers the short form in that decade emerges as ideally expressive of the excitements and exigencies of modern city life.

The most influential testament to the metropolis for 1890s writers (and indeed for the modernists) was that of Baudelaire. For his poet, his painter of modern life, Baudelaire had devised a ‘sovereign’ subjectivity that allowed him to be *in* but not *of* the city crowd. As he wrote in ‘The Painter of Modern Life’ in 1863:

The crowd is his domain...His passion and his profession is to

merge with the crowd...in the throng, in the ebb and flow, the bustle, the fleeting and the infinite...The observer is a prince enjoying his incognito wherever he goes (1972, 399-400)

The poet is exceptional but unnoticed, the writer of other lives who is himself unwritten. As Keith Tester puts it, the poet 'is the centre of an order of things of his own making even though, to others, he appears to be just one constituent part of the metropolitan flux' (1994, 4).

Baudelaire's influence is felt strongly in many of the story writers of the 1890s. Often, however, it occurs as a forced and self-indulgent poeticism. Writers like Hubert Crackenthorpe and Richard Le Gallienne, both of whom were associated with *The Yellow Book*, attempted to translate the sensitized perambulations of the *flâneur* to their stories of 1890s London. London, however, was a far more crowded and threatening space than Baudelaire's Paris with its arcades and boulevards, and hardly suited for 'botanizing on the asphalt' (Benjamin 1983, 36). *Flânerie*, as Tester points out, is really only possible if you are not in danger of being knocked down. The problem for Le Gallienne and other Francophile writers was that their sense of horror at mass metropolitan existence readily overwhelmed their efforts to poeticize city life. In stories like 'A Poet in the City' and 'A Seventh-Story Heaven', Le Gallienne's poet-figure cherishes the flower of his sensibility amid the anonymous civilian crush of faces 'no more like individual men and women than individual puffs in a mighty wind, or the notes in a great scheme of music' (1896, 104). He must testify to his love under dingy office blocks though 'harsh voices grate the air where Beauty sang' (*ibid*, 19). Whereas for Baudelaire 'multitude and solitude' were 'equal and interchangeable terms' (1991, 44), for Le Gallienne the multitude is a uniformly hostile and consuming presence against which the writerly subjectivity must be protected. Thus the refuge sought in an elevated bookish nostalgia—the poet's 'yellow-leaved garland...an *immortelle*'—and in stylized romance—'Love and Beauty would smoke their cigarettes together' (1896, 107; 17). The fascination of the metropolitan crowd for Baudelaire's poet, his enchantment with its

horrors, is replaced in Le Gallienne by a sense of the threat posed by submersion in the mass, by banality and by the dehumanization of labour. Hence the retreat, the deliberate distancing, the reserve and antipathy his poet exhibits.⁴ 1890s London, it turns out, is a place for the acuity of a Sherlock Holmes, not for the limping autism of a Francophile rhapsodist.

Despite these failings, Le Gallienne's stories do at least contemplate the plight of the writerly subject in the agglomeration of the modern metropolis. And it is interesting that he should choose a form which by virtue of its brevity can make no pretensions to plenitude or culmination. More accomplished writers of his era, such as Arthur Morrison and George Gissing, also found short fiction ideally suited for writing about city life. Unlike Le Gallienne, however, they were able to express their sense of the fleeting contingencies of metropolitan existence in formal terms.

The desire for a form that would be intrinsically expressive of urban experience was first stated by Baudelaire in the dedicatory letter to Arsène Houssaye which prefaced the *Prose Poems* of 1862: 'This obsessive ideal,' he wrote, 'springs above all from frequent contact with enormous cities, from the junction of their innumerable connections' (1991, 30). Significantly, the form Baudelaire conceives of 'has neither head nor tail, since everything, on the contrary, is both head and tail, alternatively and reciprocally' (*ibid*). Gissing and Morrison in the 1890s also found a form ideally expressive of city life, a form which, like Baudelaire's, resisted or de-emphasised literary conventions of plot and structure. That form was the interrogative short fiction.

Many of Gissing's stories, such as 'The Firebrand', 'The Poet's Portmanteau', 'A Son of the Soil' are concerned with the effects on the individual of urban experience, a theme he often explores through the encounter

⁴ Reserve and antipathy are, according to German sociologist Georg Simmel in his 1903 essay 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', mental attributes without which metropolitan life 'could not be carried on at all' (1971, 331)

of a countrified sensibility with the complex realities of city life. In other stories he is interested in the plight of the literary intelligence in the metropolis. 'Comrade in Arms', for instance, opens with a young writer, Wilfred Langley, sitting in a London restaurant after lunch:

In this quiet half-hour, whilst smoking a cigarette and enjoying his modest claret, he caught the flitting suggestion of many a story, sketch, gossipy paper. A woman's laugh, a man's surly visage, couples oddly assorted, scraps of dialogue heard amid the confused noises—everywhere the elements of drama, to be fused and minted in his brain. ([1898] 1977, 1)

Wilfred here, like Baudelaire's poet, is at the 'centre of an order of things' in the metropolitan flux. He is the educated observer, the writerly intellect who will gather the disparate urban materials into an orderly dramatic whole. The fragments of dialogue, the smells and noises and strange matings, can be brought to a point of significance and unity in the act of writing: the multiple and uncertain 'suggestions' of the scene can be made into definite expressions of meaning.

Clearly, there is a metafictional implication here that a similarly unifying gesture will be performed by the host text, that an 'order of things' will be made to prevail there too. However, when Wilfred and his lover Bertha meet again at the end of the story after a long parting, there is an interdiction of that expectation that the story itself has generated:

[T]hey came face to face on the pavement of the roaring Strand. Their umbrellas had collided, and as they shook hands the hurrying pedestrians bumped them this way and that.
'All right again?' asked Bertha merrily.
'Quite,' was the stalwart reply. 'Come somewhere and talk.'
'Can't. Appointment in ten minutes.'
'Move on, please!' shouted a policeman.
'Mustn't stop the way.' (*ibid*, 19)

Agency lies with the city now. The pressing motion of the Strand is irresistible: its momentum brings the two accidentally together, and it acts, through the regulations of clock and law, to keep them finally apart. The city Wilfred thought he could meld into significant forms now dissipates his efforts to unite

with Bertha. More importantly, however, the suggestion of a failure of artistic intent is picked up in the form of the narrative itself: at the point in the story where maximum potential energy has been gathered towards a conclusion it breaks off and we are not granted the expected closure. The lovers are left in their delicate poses of beginning, and we are left with a list of unanswered questions which the text has enticed us to ask. It is as though the very momentary, snatched intimacies of city life the story describes—bereft of narrative and conclusive meaning as they are—are expressed in the form itself.

Obviously, one must be careful not to overstate the extent of Gissing's achievement here. As was the case with the Turgenev example, I am not claiming that he generates any radical indeterminacy. What is significant is that he should seek, however simply, to interdict the kind of unifying conclusiveness his story appears to have been preparing us for. In the context of the Victorian story this is a notable development.

Like Gissing, Arthur Morrison began to exploit effects of 'openness' and interdiction in his metropolitan *Tales of Mean Streets* (1896). Often the sense of inconclusiveness is generated by focusing on an interior state, sometimes in free indirect discourse, at the climax of an otherwise active and externalized narrative: 'Was she coming? Night after night, and night after night. But to-morrow...' (1896, 252). Elsewhere there appears to be a selective withholding of information, a resistance to the lure of a totalized or unified narrative. 'In Business', for instance, ends when Ted Munsey, an unemployed moulder, deciding that his family will be financially better off without him, signs over all his property to his wife and leaves under cover of darkness. The story's central enigma—what can Ted do to save his family from ruin?—is thus resolved, but the matter of where he goes, what happens to him, and, more importantly, what happens to his family—precisely the kind of frame of information Hardy would supply—is not entertained. Ted's mysterious (to his

family) departure is reflected formally by the narrative which ends with a scene of contemplative interdiction: 'Upstairs the girls began to move about. Mrs Munsey sat with her frightened face on the table' (*ibid*, 170). Reticence, enigma, withholding: these effects of interim suspensefulness are sustained to the limit of the text.

Morrison found such interrogative narrative techniques particularly effective for conveying a sense of the fleeting and ephemeral proximities, the accidents of convergence, of city life. 'To Bow Bridge', for example, tells of a well-dressed woman (we are not given her name) who, with her two small children, boards a late-night tram mobbed with boisterous drinkers headed for Bow and last orders. Opposite sits a prostitute who is brought into contact with the woman when one of the children falls and she helps her up. The well-dressed woman tries to overlook the proffered kindness (Simmel's 'reserve') but is powerless to resist the prostitute's subsequent intervention as they disembark from the tram:

The harlot, lingering, lifted the child again—lifted her rather high and set her on the path with the others. Then she walked away toward the Bombay Grab. A man in a blue serge suit was footing it down the turning between the public-house and the bridge with drunken swiftness and an intermittent stagger; and, tightening her shawl, she went in chase.

The quiet mechanic stood and stretched himself, and took a corner seat near the door; and the tram-car, quiet and vacant, bumped on westward. (1896, 93)

In these final paragraphs, the sense of fleetingness in relations, of a proximity which is physical only, of the arbitrariness and transitoriness of social character, is ideally conveyed in a form which itself is transitory, open-ended, inconclusive. There is no more to say about the quiet mechanic with which the story ends because no more is known: he is a member of O'Connor's 'submerged population group'. It is appropriate that he should occupy the final scene of the story—a symbol of 'human unknowableness' (Bowen 1962, 94) at the very point where we as readers might expect meaning and significance to be declared.

Morrison's text de-emphasizes, hides, narrative here because the narratives of the lives it evokes are de-emphasized, hidden; its inconclusive and interrogative form is appropriate because such is the nature of relations between the characters in this city. The metropolitan dweller, as Georg Simmel points out, has knowledge, understanding of, and intimacy with only a fraction of the many people he encounters daily. To register each contact, to grant it emotional space, would be to fall into 'an unthinkable mental condition' (1971, 331), hence the self-preserving disinterest, the blessed unknowableness, into which the urbanite retreats. Morrison's short fiction in its detachment and reticence performs precisely this reality.

Both Morrison and Gissing acknowledge the potential discrepancy of extent between what is stated in their fiction and what is meant; in other words, they are beginning to exploit, in however obvious a way, shortness as a positive (positively disruptive) quality. Their stories are not written on a principle of miniaturization of a fully-formed and meaningful whole; rather their 'missing parts' are productive of a desirable interrogativeness. This is true also of writers like Ella D'Arcy and George Egerton who find that the disruptive reticence of the form makes it possible to convey a sense of the complexities of psychology and the workings of the mind. Unlike Morrison and Gissing they are not concerned with the multiplicity and ephemerality of relations in the modern city; rather they are interested in depicting the inner lives of small groups and the intimacies of their relations.

At first sight, it may appear counter-intuitive to suggest that interrogative short fiction could be amenable to the investigation of mental states. From what we have seen of Turgenev, Morrison and Gissing, the point would seem to be that the form does not pursue these kinds of depths but instead maintains an oblique and 'scrupulous meanness', as Joyce put it. However, D'Arcy and Egerton found that the de-emphasis of plot in the form brought

about an intensification of interest in mood and character psychology. Once again, it is the discovery of that discrepancy of extent between utterance and meaning—multiplicity on behalf of brevity—that is at the heart of the matter.

Ella D'Arcy was associated with *The Yellow Book* throughout its years of publication, and many of the stories collected in her *Monochromes* (1895) were initially published there. 'Irremediable', which I want to examine at some length, appeared in the first issue of *The Yellow Book* in April 1894. The story concerns a young bank clerk, Willoughby, who while on holiday in the country meets an imploring, passionate girl, Esther Stables, whom he marries and takes back to London. Three months into the marriage and Esther has sunk into depravity and petulance. The story ends with Willoughby's realization that he hates his wife, regrets bitterly their marriage, but that he harbours an obsessive 'passion' for her. Such is the 'irremediable' plight under which he must now live.

The preceding summary is accurate in terms of the plot and structure of the narrative. However, the real interest of this story lies in its complexity of characterization. *Once we begin to account for that, and for the manner of its presentation, it becomes far harder to get the story straight.* Take for instance the following reflections on Willoughby's attempts to educate Esther:

It is so natural to think you may make what you will of the woman who loves you. But Esther had no wish to improve. She evinced all the self-satisfaction of an illiterate mind...He gave up the attempt, and, with humiliation at his previous fatuity, perceived that it was folly to expect that a few weeks of companionship could alter or pull up the impressions of years, or rather of generations ([1895] 1977, 118)

At first sight, this passage would seem to confirm the summary account of Esther's negligence and blameworthiness in the troubled marriage. In fact, many complicating and contradictory elements in Willoughby's character converge here and threaten that simple conclusion. We are told earlier that Willoughby's initial attraction to Esther was based on her being so refreshingly unlike his

previous lover, Nora Beresford. Whereas Nora was ‘cultured’, a model of ‘feminine refinement’, Esther is a ‘working daughter of the people’. The failure of his relationship with Nora had ‘indissolubly associated in his mind ideas of feminine refinement with those of feminine treachery’, hence his pleasure in meeting a girl like Esther with whom he might ‘dispense with the formalities’ (*ibid*, 88-9).

What unites both women, however, is that they turn out to be other than as Willoughby had imagined. Throughout the story we see Willoughby constructing romanticized and fictionalized scenarios for himself, distorting and resisting reality. We are told that he ‘had always been given to much daydreaming, and it was in the silence of his rooms of an evening that he turned his phantasmal adventures into stories for the magazines’ (*ibid*, 117). The Nora Beresford of his imagination ‘had nothing whatever in common with the Nora of reality’; Willoughby, we are told, idolized her ‘with the wholeheartedness of the true fanatic’ (*ibid*, 115-6).

The statement in the passage, then, that it is natural to think you may make of the woman who loves you what you will, refers not simply to Willoughby’s attempted education of Esther. It also carries connotations of his deep-seated need to fictionalize, to make the women in his life other than as they are. Similarly complex is the conclusion Willoughby reaches in the passage that it was ‘folly to expect that a few weeks of his companionship could alter or pull up the impressions of years, or rather of generations’. The rendering of this through free indirect discourse is significant. Willoughby’s suffixed opinion that Esther’s stupidity is not just a matter of the failures in her education and upbringing but is in fact a symptom of heredity further dismantles the political idealism he is earlier credited with. We are told that he had ‘dabbled in Socialism’ but on being jilted by Nora had come to the conclusion that women should be subject to the same privations of labour as men:

Always in reference to the woman who, fifteen months before, had treated him ill, he had said to himself that even the breaking of stones in the road should be considered a more feminine employment than the breaking of hearts. (*ibid*, 91)

His initial attraction to Esther was partly based in his socialist idealism—she as ‘working daughter of the people’—and the empathy he felt with her as a fellow worker. However, it is clear that his socialism is no match for his fear of humiliation by women, on whom, in the above passage, he wishes the toils of fruitless labour as punishment for their infidelity. Thus he uses his ‘socialism’ as a justification for his interest in Esther, then disavows it when that interest wanes.

Our story about a young, hopeful, idealistic man marrying a woman who turns out to be a deplorable sloven has been considerably disrupted. The various climaxes of ‘realization’ for Willoughby—the little epiphanic moments he creates for himself—are for the reader sites of convergence for complex and contradictory elements in Willoughby’s character. The sense of certainty in summarizing this story is evaporated by the sense of interpretative openness that the focus on psychology has brought. It is not just that D’Arcy has de-emphasised action in the plot but that the interrogative quality of the character presentation, the way in which we are left to do the detective work in understanding Willoughby’s motivations, problematizes our conclusions about this story.

The complexity and interpretative uncertainty of D’Arcy’s story arises because of her refusal to arbitrate between the various possible readings of Willoughby’s character. His essential ‘unknowableness’ is the product of her abstemiousness. It is not just that she writes ‘short’ but that what she omits is the very orientational material required to fix meaning in the text. ‘Abridge, brother, abridge!’ wrote Chekhov (1924, 72), but the art is in knowing *what* to abridge. Like D’Arcy, he was fascinated by the ways in which short fiction

could convey a sense of the inscrutable nature of human motivation. Although his fiction did not become widely available to the English reader until Constance Garnett's series of translations (1916-22), Chekhov's example is worth considering here because his stories are, like D'Arcy's, based on narratorial reticence and suggestion, a tactic which leaves it to the reader to state the meanings (risking always reductiveness) that he withholds. Typically, Chekhov will reveal character through a focus on external detail, the deployment of symbol, a neglect of authoritative narratorial comment, an intrigue in perspective or point of view. Thus a story like 'Misfortune' (1886), ostensibly about a woman's struggle to decide between her husband and her lover, quickly becomes a puzzling study of self-representation and possibly even delusion. Central to the complexity of Chekhov's effects is the 'objective' nature of his narrative presentation—the technique which eschews the intercession of authoritative comment of the sort that would 'fix' significance. By seeking to manifest, to 'show forth', rather than to attribute meaning and close down interpretative possibility, his texts remain interrogative. In such a system symbols will clearly tend to attract a multivalent significance, as we are not directed towards any one privileged reading of them. In 'Misfortune' several of the central symbols are reiterated in various contexts and with explicitly different associations. A railway line, for instance, at one point seems to represent a means of escape, later comes to represent the limiting threshold of the characters' lives, then seems to stand for a sense of inevitable and unalterable doom. Similarly, a fir tree gathers possibilities: from its status as a calligraphic sentry on the horizon it moves to being a symbol of passion in the mind of one of the characters. And the same uncertainty attends the presentation of character. In 'Misfortune', as in D'Arcy's story, the central character undergoes several 'resolutions', several little epiphanies of heightened awareness, yet these are always the site of contradictory strands in the character. The objective presentation never allows

these to be graded or made explicit: it is down to us to distinguish between delusion and actual self-knowledge, between truth and falsity.

Instability and plurality are conspicuous in the stories of the final—and arguably most accomplished—1890s writer I want to look at here. In her collections *Keynotes* (1893) and *Discords* (1894) George Egerton (pseudonym of Mary Chavelita Dunne) developed a technique of radical ellipsis that allowed her to omit from her stories information that would usually be considered central. It was this sense of what Egerton *didn't* do in her fiction that troubled early reviewers: '*Discords* has been called a volume of stories; it is a misnomer, for the book contains merely varying episodes in lives of men and women, with no plot, no beginning nor ending.'⁵ The echoes of Baudelaire's ideal form are obvious, but more significant still is the sense that plot has been abandoned and narrative confined to a series of discontinuous episodes. The idea in Pater and Chesterton of experience and knowledge becoming narrowed and confined to the fragmentary and impressionistic would appear to have found its ideal literary form.

Frequently in her stories Egerton will omit important background information: 'A Psychological Moment', for instance, concerns a woman who is being blackmailed, yet we are never told why she is subject to this. In 'A Cross Line' the central character is pregnant, yet that fact is never explicitly stated: we eventually infer the crucial matter through oblique comments made to another woman about children. At a more local level, Egerton radically excises basic orientational material, often to startling effect:

'Do not I understand you a little?'
'You do not misunderstand me.'
'That is something.'
'It is much!'
'Is it? (searching her face). It is not one grain of sand in the

⁵ These comments by the *Boston Traveller* were quoted in promotional material for the book promulgated by the publishers, Roberts Brothers. They are reproduced on the endleaves of D'Arcy [1895]1977.

desert that stretches between you and me, and you are as impenetrable as a sphinx at the end of it. This (passionately) is my moment, and what have you given me?' ([1893] 1983, 25)

It is not made explicit here whom the woman is talking to: we may infer that it is the fisherman met at the beginning of the story from what she says of him and from the mention of his grey-clad appearance. Nor is any of the background to this conversation filled in: we have no knowledge of the previous dealings that have brought them to this point in their relationship. The text is simply presented to us as self-sufficient. The sphinx-like impenetrability described is enacted in the presentation, too. The omission in the passage of reporting clauses (a technique Hemingway takes to its extreme) creates a vivid plurality. Is the 'searching her face' an action of his or a reflection (i.e. 'how searching her face is')? Does he actually say 'passionately' in his final statement or does it report the manner of his saying? The distance between narrative voice and character thought and speech has collapsed through Egerton's abstemiousness, her excision once again of basic orientational material.

The effect of this kind of elliptical writing is to break down any sense of causality in the narrative. Compare for a moment the plot structure of the Hardy with any story by Egerton for a sense of how radical the short story has become. One is put in mind of Virginia Woolf's famous statement on the need to suppress facile cause and effect in modern narrative. Egerton's short stories prefigure much modernist innovation in form and reflect the impressionist sense of reality as a 'congeries of fragments' apprehended by the individual mind.

Clare Hanson groups D'Arcy, George Egerton and Frances E. Huntley together as specialists in the 'psychological sketch', a variety of short fiction which typically deals with an apparently trivial incident made significant by 'what it reveals of a character's inner mood or state of mind' (1985, 15). Often some deep change of feeling is the subject of these fictions, 'but this will be conveyed obliquely, through symbol and repeated imagery, and will not be

directly stated' (*ibid*). I would concur with Hanson's identification of the oblique manner of presentation in these stories and their use of symbol and interior monologue. However, I see a contradiction in her attempt to claim that this 'impressionist' or 'plotless' fiction, with its oblique and suggestive manner of presentation, is expressive of a world in which 'there are no absolutes', while at the same time wanting to depict these stories as ultimately decisive and unified (*ibid*, 7). The value of my interrogative theory is that it alerts us to the fact that these techniques of interdiction, ellipsis and reticence in fact produce an instability in meaning and an uncertainty about authorial intent. In other words, it does not seek to recuperate the texts for some notion of unity of purpose or effect; rather it validates their plural constitution.

In all the interrogative stories examined here shortness figures as a positive—if positively disruptive—quality. The Hardy story by contrast was merely truncated: its abbreviation was an external control. The value of the interrogative approach will become clearer in relation to modernist writers who put shortness to ever more radical uses. But for now I would return to Henry James's preface to 'The Lesson of the Master' (discussed above) from which my title for this chapter comes. I hope now that the implications of James's description of the new short fiction he was witnessing are clearer: the aim is for 'brevity', but in a form that sustains 'multiplicity'. Shortness is to be allied with possibility and amplification, not economy and confinement. The 'science of control' is a science of implication, rather than of limitation. The significance of such a science in the emergence of modernist writing I have already hinted at and will elaborate in subsequent chapters. The development of short fiction from the reductive artifice of Hardy and Dickens to the intense psychological realism of George Egerton I have outlined here is perhaps best summed up by Elizabeth Bowen in her introduction to *Ann Lee's*, with which I concur and conclude:

Up against human unknowableness, I made that my subject - how many times? The stories are questions posed—some end with a shrug, others with an impatient or dismissing sigh... Yet I cannot consider those trick endings; more, it seemed to me that from true predicament there *is* no way out (1962, 94)

Joyce Between the Blinds

Joyce Between the Blinds

The biologist Richard Dawkins once attended a lecture on the fig—not a botanical enquiry but a literary one examining the fruit’s textual and symbolic history, its life as a metaphor, ‘changing perceptions of the fig, the fig as emblem of pudenda and the fig leaf as modest concealer of them’ (1997, 1). He heard about the fig in Genesis and D.H. Lawrence, social constructions of the fig, ‘fig’ as a term of insult, how to ‘read’ the fig, and, indeed, ‘the fig as text.’ After a time, Dawkins found himself provoked to literal-mindedness, and not just by the lecturer’s elegant, equivocating idiom. Rather, his discomfort was with a way of seeing that overlooked so much. For in his search for symbol and significance the lecturer was missing the most informative story of all—that of the fig itself, the very matter of its existence, in which, suggests Dawkins, lurks the ‘genuine paradox’ and the ‘real poetry’ (*ibid*).

Like the fig, Joyce’s *Dubliners* has been ill served by a particular kind of literary inquiry. While poststructuralists have celebrated the materiality of the signifier in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, testifying to the marvel of the fig itself, critics of *Dubliners* have continued to focus on the symbolic values attaching to the stories and how collectively these express the central theme of ‘Irish paralysis’.¹ Comments on the language of the text have been largely restricted to an observation of its modest ambiguities. In part, of course, this critical deprivation is the means by which the radical credentials of the later, greater works are established, and a developmental metanarrative of Joyce’s career put in place. However, reading *Dubliners* against my theory of interrogative short

¹ The interest in ‘paralysis’ emanates principally from Joyce letters to C.P. Curran, early July 1904, and Grant Richards, 5 May 1906, where he talks of Dublin as a ‘centre of paralysis’ (Ellmann 1975, 22; 83). ‘Irish paralysis’ also crops up in *Stephen Hero*, where it is symbolized by a row of ‘brown brick houses’ (Joyce 1950, 188), and in *Dubliners*, where Eveline, in her story, lives on such a row, as does the narrator of ‘Araby’. ‘Paralysis’ readings are ubiquitous. For a recent extended treatment of the theme see Heller 1995.

fiction reveals the radical grammar of the text, how it cultivates indeterminacy and plurality by its interstitial and interdictive narrative techniques and by the use of free indirect discourse. In addition, I want to advance an argument that throughout the stories Joyce in fact offers a validation of his own practice in what he says about other texts and about language.²

Though an irregular witness to his own work, Joyce's readings of other writers are never less than advisory. In a letter to his brother Stanislaus, dated 3 December 1906, he offers a slighting summary of Hardy's 'On the Western Circuit' (from *Life's Little Ironies*, 1894) which he concludes by asking: 'Is this as near as T.H. can get to life, I wonder? O my poor fledglings, poor Corley, poor Ignatius Gallaher...What is wrong with these English writers is that they always keep beating about the bush' (Ellmann 1975, 137).

Richard Ellmann reads these comments as indicative of Joyce's 'moral nature': the criticism Joyce is making of Hardy, according to Ellmann, is that he lacked 'the courage to break through'—a 'moral fault' which in turn 'breed[s] a literary one' (*ibid*, xiv). Ellmann's speculations here perhaps miss the point: Joyce's judgement might as well be taken, in conjunction with the sardonic plot summary he offers, as pertaining specifically to Hardy's *formal* shortcomings. Joyce was, after all, engrossed in the theory and practice of the short story throughout the first decade of the century, as his correspondence with Stanislaus and Grant Richards reveals.³ Looking again at his retailing of the Hardy, it is clearly a sense of the story's structural and representational failings that provides the substance for his derision:

²In the 1998 volume *ReJoycing*, Sonia Basic makes a similar proposal that we should begin to examine *Dubliners* as a text of many 'uncertainties and indeterminacies' and forego the temptation to 'rush to conclusions about facts' (1998, 13). I discuss Basic's reading of 'A Painful Case' later in this chapter.

³ See, for instance, the letters on *Dubliners* to Stanislaus c.24 September 1905 (Ellmann 1975, 75-8) and, in particular, to Richards 5 May 1906, where he defends his style of 'scrupulous meanness' (*ibid*, 83), and 31 May 1906 on why in the short story the slightest omission or effacement 'may be fatal' (*ibid*, 86).

One story is about a lawyer of the circuit who seduces a servant, then receives letters from her so beautifully written that he decides to marry her. The letters are written by the servant's mistress who is in love with the lawyer. After the marriage (servant is accompanied to London by mistress) husband says fondly, 'Now, dear J.K.-S-&c., will you write a little to my dear sister, A.B X. etc and send her a piece of the wedding-cake. One of those nice little letters you know so well how to write, love.' Exit of servant wife. She goes and sits at a table somewhere and, I suppose, writes something like this 'Dear Mrs X—I enclose a piece of wedding cake.' Enter husband—lawyer, genial. Genially he says 'Well love, how have you written' and then the whole discovery is found out. Servant-wife blows her nose in the letter and lawyer confronts the mistress. She confesses. Then they talk a page or so of copybook talk (as distinguished from servant's ditto). She weeps but he is stern. (*ibid*, 137)

Notably, criticism here is made through a parody of form. The details of the wedding cake and the nose blowing are, of course, imported, but make the point that the plot elements, like the character names and types ('Mrs X', 'lawyer, genial'), are interchangeable and dispensable. The plotty artificiality and tricksiness of Hardy's story entail no necessity in the formation of character or meaning. Joyce's impatience with the laziness of Hardy's practice is evident in the cursory, variable summaries he is able to offer of the cuspidal scenes ('She confesses'; 'writes something like this'), in the easy binary of the characterization ('She weeps but he is stern') and in the mannered redundant piece of dialogue that rounds off sleepily this very textual affair.

In part Joyce is arguing here for a more 'real' realism in much the same way as Virginia Woolf, in 'Modern Fiction' and 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown', would later for the novel. And it is the same revisionary anxiety that motivated his infamous criticism of George Moore's *The Untilled Field*. As he wrote to Stanislaus 19 Nov 1904 about Moore's 'The Wild Goose', 'A Lady who has been living for three years on the line between Bray and Dublin is told by her husband that there is a meeting in Dublin at which he must be present. She looks up the table to see the hours of the trains. This on DW and WR where the trains go regularly: this after three years. Isn't it rather stupid of Moore' (Ellmann

1975, 44).⁴ But we can equally read his comments on Hardy as arising from his contemplations on the short story. Joyce is arguing for an aesthetic of the form that is radically different from Hardy's and, by implication, from the genre of traditional plot-based story writing with which Hardy's text consorts. Indeed, he would seem to be rehearsing here precisely the critical distinction outlined in the preceding chapter. His summary of how in the Hardy 'the whole discovery is found out' is, as we have seen, the climactic moment of disclosure in that sort of story, and it is the moment when Joyce's patience runs out.

All of which raises the question of what Joyce proposed to do with the short form himself now that, as Ellmann puts it, the idiom of twentieth-century fiction was so clearly established in his mind (1983, 233). Joyce claimed indifference to the stories of Gissing and Morrison (and downright hostility to Moore's impressionistic, local-colourist sketches), but his own practice in *Dubliners* suggests that he was alert to their methods. Like the 1890s writers Joyce was interested in what effects could be produced by 'scrupulous meanness', that is, by interdictive and interstitial narration and the de-emphasis of plot structure. However, he was prepared to make the reader's entry into the interpretative process far more problematic than were these earlier story writers. With Joyce, it is not simply a case of the reader supplying missing information or being left to speculate about consequences alluded to but not stated in the text. Rather, as Colin MacCabe suggests, Joyce's practice occasions a radical 'refusal of agreement between text and reader' (1979, 30).

To demonstrate how this 'refusal of agreement' comes about I want to look in detail, first of all, at one of the more blatantly interdictive and elliptical stories, 'The Boarding House', which has been described by Fritz Senn as a text of 'multiple misdirection and general discomfiture' (1988, 129). It proceeds,

⁴Joyce's scrupulousness in these matters is surely the inspiration behind Hugh Kenner's extra-textual reading of Frank as disingenuous in 'Eveline': Kenner suggests that Frank could not have been intending to elope to Buenos Ayres as direct sailings are not to be had to there from Dublin's North Wall (1972, 34-9).

Senn argues, by leaving the reader out of the main events of the narrative: 'we are detained by moments in between; the actions are off-stage...the overall narrative agency and all three main characters are in harmonious collusion in withholding the facts from us' (*ibid*, 121). Senn's analysis accurately describes the restricted viewing position given to the reader in the text, most clearly demonstrated by the various 'interviews' which are said to take place between the characters but which are never directly related to us. We find ourselves always on the margins of understanding, never sure what exactly has transpired off-stage, as it were. The 'open complicity' which is said to be lacking between Polly and her mother is missing too in the relationship between the reader and the text. Take, for instance, Mrs Mooney's initial intervention over her suspicions about Polly and Doran:

When the table was cleared...[Mrs Mooney] began to reconstruct the interview which she had had the night before with Polly. Things were as she had suspected: she had been frank in her questions and Polly had been frank in her answers ([1914] 1988, 69)⁵

What were the questions asked and what were the responses given? What was the nature of Polly's frankness? Was she upset or relieved at being discovered? The reader must conjecture. Just as Mrs Mooney is said to deal with her moral problems 'as a cleaver deals with meat' (*Dub*, 68), so the narrator is clinical in his excision of information here.

Now, clearly this withholding is the means by which suspense and intrigue are usually generated in narrative. However, Joyce sustains this reticence throughout the text, even when he is describing scenes in which matters are being resolved between the characters. This technique of instating questions and enigmas while ostensibly providing answers is most clearly demonstrated as the story moves to the climactic interview between Mrs Mooney and Doran. We are not made privy to what transpires at that meeting; instead we join Polly in Doran's room for a final scene which, while resolving matters

⁵Hereafter abbreviated as *Dub*

on one level, generates deeper puzzles on others. It is not simply that the content and conduct of the interview between Mrs Mooney and Doran are left to conjecture, that the decisive action happens, as Senn puts it, 'off-stage', but that the narrative deliberately shifts focus on to a false centre:

Polly sat for a little time on the edge of the bed, crying. Then she dried her eyes and went over to the looking-glass. She dipped the end of the towel in the water-jug and refreshed her eyes with the cool water. She looked at herself in profile and readjusted a hairpin above her ear. Then she went back to the bed again and sat at the foot. She regarded the pillows for a long time and the sight of them awakened in her mind secret amiable memories. She rested the nape of her neck against the cool iron bedrail and fell into a reverie. There was no longer any perturbation visible on her face (*Dub*, 74).

The description of Polly in Doran's room directs attention to the hitherto suppressed layer in the narrative which concerns Polly's motivations in the affair. But instead of elaborating this or offering any explanation through the medium of interior thought—a privilege we have enjoyed in relation to the thoughts of Mrs Mooney and Doran—the narrative withdraws here into a declarative, paratactic third-person mode. When thoughts come, the passive constructions give the impression that they act upon her, not the other way round. Polly is only active when she is physically doing something. A notion of interiority is played with here, but the focus remains resolutely on the surface, the performative. By the end of the scene Polly will have achieved the desired state of passive expectancy whereby she does not know what it is she is gazing at or waiting for. The important point to note here is that an intrigue in the narrational perspective has occurred: we now view Polly without any interpretative commitment from the narrator. Her 'amiable memories' and 'intricate' 'hopes and visions' remain 'secret' because the narrative, which has up to this point given access to character motivations, now pointedly refuses any such intimacy. This refusal can only strike us as interdictive because the text has hitherto been prompting questions and instating enigmas concerning Polly's

motivation, for instance through the song she sings, 'I'm a naughty girl'⁶, and her saying that she would 'put an end to herself', a comment clearly made for effect given her blitheness once Doran has gone downstairs. In contradistinction to the motivations of Doran and Mrs Mooney, Polly's are not being revealed. At the crucial point, the narrative has become reticent.

We can now see the disruptive purpose of the text's earlier withholdings. It was vital, in order to establish at the centre of the story the enigma of Polly's mind, that we be given no access to her thoughts or explanations of her own conduct. Accordingly, we are left with this curious discrepancy at the end of the story: Polly emerges in our suspicions as the prime mover in the affair, yet she is the character about whom we know least, whose motivations are kept from us. Where earlier we were given the partial recollections of Mrs Mooney or Doran (the occasion of the lovers' first congress is related through his recollections, not Polly's), we now have a consciously 'thoughtless' third-person narration, emulating stylistically the wilful passivity Polly herself adopts. The 'open complicity' absent earlier on between Polly and her mother is, of course, established now that she has made her confession. However, the reader is not admitted to the circle of their familiarity. Thus, when we reach the close of the story, the sense of an ending is attenuated by the feeling that the text mocks us and our expectations of narrative closure and resolution:

. At last she heard her mother calling. She started to her feet
and ran to the banisters.
- Polly! Polly!
- Yes, mamma?
- Come down, dear. Mr Doran wants to speak to you.
Then she remembered what she had been waiting for. (*Dub*,
75)

That last line is reminiscent of the Calvino story quoted in chapter 1 above where the reader is left counting how many pages are left till the end. Like Polly, we too have been 'waiting'. The narrative may resolve for us on one level—it

⁶ As Zack Bowen illustrates, the song from which she sings describes a situation very close to that narrated in the story, prefiguring, among other things, 'impish Polly's contentment on Doran's bed' (1975, 17)

would *appear* that Doran is about to propose, though the text does not, of course, deign to confirm this and entirely 'cleaves away' the conclusive scene—but it has cultivated enigma in more important ways. Joyce grants us access to the thoughts of Doran and Mrs Mooney, and organizes a conclusion that will reflect their respective fears and desires, because, perversely, these are not his central concerns. The real centre of this story is Polly, what she does, wants and thinks, but Joyce relegates all of that to the margins of the text in terms of articulation. Once again, we are witnessing a discrepancy of extent between utterance and significance. That which matters most is least spoken of. Again, in Barthesian terms, Joyce *writes* less by leaving less written. We are more struck by what we lack at the conclusion to this story than what we have been given, more concerned with questions than with answers.

'The Boarding House' is important not only because of its interstices and withholdings but because of the way in which Joyce intensifies the uncertainty created by these techniques through an intrigue in the narrational mode—in this case by modulating between free indirect discourse and an observational third-person perspective at crucial moments in the text. Throughout the *Dubliners* stories we find him cultivating flexibility in the narrative mode in order to disrupt the reading process and resist closure. Colin MacCabe's assertion (above) that Joyce creates a refusal of agreement between reader and text in his stories refers specifically to this manipulation of voice, in particular to the way in which free indirect discourse is used to generate discord between the two agents in the signifying process (1979, 30). MacCabe shares an interest here with several important commentators on Joyce's stories. Hugh Kenner, in his *Joyce's Voices*, cites the opening line of 'The Dead'—'Lily, the caretaker's daughter, was literally run off her feet'—as an example of the 'Uncle Charles Principle', Kenner's variation on free indirect discourse. Kenner designates the Principle thus: 'the narrative idiom need not be the narrator's' and goes on to illustrate how the narratorial discourse 'detect[s] the gravitational field of the nearest

person (1978, 18; 16).

Kenner's interest in *Dubliners* is limited, however, and he cites from 'The Dead' only as part of a wider developmental thesis about Joyce's stylistic innovativeness. Clare Hanson has more recently attempted to expand on the kind of observational formalism Kenner favours by arguing that the use of free indirect discourse in modernist short fiction is expressive of an essentially 'relativist philosophy' underlying the form. Unfortunately, she does not get further than Kenner in her account of how the technique itself operates and her analysis of its local effects is limited to claiming that it creates a certain 'epistemological confusion' (1985, 58) in the stories. Moreover, she does not, as Dominic Head points out, consider the ways in which free indirect discourse may compromise or complicate the simple unity of the epiphany (Head 1992, 18-20), which she takes to be 'a structural equivalent for conventional resolution of plot' (Hanson 1985, 7).

Head himself is author of by far the most ambitious and important analysis of the effects of free indirect discourse in the short story to date. His concern is with how the technique challenges the central 'unity' and 'epiphany' tenets of short story criticism.⁷ According to Head, many of Joyce's epiphanies are falsified. Rather than revealing a momentary, essential truth about a character, he suggests, they convey a decided 'lack of illumination' (1992, 50) and even a disruptive contradictoriness: 'The determining factor is the consciousness that is taken to be experiencing the revelatory moment, and this is considerably complicated by the destabilizing narrative technique of free indirect discourse' (*ibid*). Head argues that Joyce's use of free indirect discourse creates radically dialogic narratives. In his reading of 'Eveline', for instance, he suggests that we should understand as self-conscious, romanticizing melodrama the epiphany of Eveline as 'helpless animal, captive in Dublin' (*ibid*, 70). The

⁷ Head is not the first to question these canonic principles. See Zack Bowen's important essay on the compromised revelations in Joyce's epiphanies (Bowen 1981).

passage of free indirect discourse conveying her decision not to go with Frank is presented, Head argues, in ‘the exaggerated language of romantic fiction’ (*ibid.*): ‘All the seas of the world tumbled about her heart. He was drawing her into them: he would drown her. She gripped with both hands at the iron railing’ (*Dub*, 42). Her epiphanic moment here can be read as ‘a strategy of self-preservation, a wilful act of self-delusion’ (Head 1992, 71) in which Eveline protects herself from a dreadful acknowledgement of the unreality of her elopement.⁸

Such an analysis as Head offers here moves us on from the established readings which focus on Eveline as victim of an oppressive social and familial code of behaviour.⁹ Despite the importance of this breakthrough, however, Head’s thesis is flawed by an unwillingness to realize in his readings the full consequences of the theory he devises. While rightly arguing for a designation of the Joycean epiphany as ‘a nexus of a *variety* of forces rather than a *single* effect’ (*ibid.*, 49), he insists that no ‘principle of undecidability is operative; rather, specific kinds of ambiguity are examined in specific ways’ (*ibid.*, 14-15). For Head, ‘ambiguity does not connote...a principle of *undecidability*’ (*ibid.*, 71). Several difficulties emerge from this distinction, not least Head’s failure to define precisely how he understands the term ‘ambiguity’ in this context. As I outlined in my introductory chapter, ‘undecidability’ is exemplified for Head in Frank Kermode’s *The Genesis of Secrecy*, with its argument about the final inscrutability of all narrative. Contesting Kermode’s reading of Kafka’s ‘Before the Law’ Head says that the story is ‘ambiguous’ rather than ‘inscrutable’; but this quality of ambiguity he is content to define simply as the fruit of Kafka’s ‘deliberate cultivation’ (*ibid.*, 15). Head’s argument pivots on the suggestion that ‘ambiguity’ is something writers consciously generate, while ‘inscrutability’ is a

⁸ Head’s analysis of ‘Eveline’ can usefully be read as a reply to, and development of, those by Kenner 1972, 34-9, and Chatman 1978, 204-7

⁹ See for instance the essay by Clive Hart (1969, 48-52), and, more recently, Harold Bloom’s introduction to his own volume of studies (1988, 1-30)

critically unhelpful observation about the instability of signification. Clearly this is insufficient, and it leads Head into some reductive readings which seem to run counter to his initial assertions about the multivalence of Joyce's practice.

An example of this is his analysis of 'Clay'. Head distinguishes between those stories whose epiphanies he calls 'external' or 'empiricist' and those he calls 'internal' or 'relativist.' 'Clay' belongs (along with 'Counterparts' and 'Two Gallants') to the first category because its 'moment of revelation is perceived to be beyond the consciousness of the central character' (*ibid*, 54). ('Eveline' would be an instance of the 'relativist' epiphany by virtue of its focus on a 'phase of the mind' (*ibid*)). The external epiphany in 'Clay' arises because of the impercipientia of Maria (she is blindfolded when she gets the clay in the children's game) and because, Head asserts, the symbolic value attaching to the clay (i.e. death) is a 'calculated detail' and 'the product of a literary consciousness' (*ibid*, 56). Head is content to conclude that Maria is 'oblivious to the cruelty [of the children's joke] and continues happily to enjoy the party' (*ibid*, 55). In other words, Maria misses the point of the story, but the reader gets it. She is metaphorically as well as actually 'blind' at the moment of revelation of meaning in the text; significance is grasped by the reader in consultation with the 'immanent authorial presence' (*ibid*, 56).

There are important shortcomings in Head's reading here that bear out the general limitations of his approach. His insistence that modernist practitioners of the short story sought to generate 'specific types of ambiguity' in their texts has led him to conclude of 'Clay' that it is expressive of a 'lurking traditionalism' in Joyce (*ibid*, 54) because it does *not* display a cultivated ambiguity: its epiphany contains none of the invalidating details which characterize the 'relativist' form (*ibid*, 56). In fact, 'Clay' is a radically unstable narrative. Head's supply-side 'ambiguity' theory has blinded him to the real 'openness' of Joyce's story. As Margot Norris states in her brilliant analysis of the story, Joyce sets up the reader as the compliant narratee of 19th century

fiction, 'the putative listener who believes that Maria's life is simple, but good and admirable' (1988, 148), but goes on to distress that construct by cultivating indeterminacy at crucial junctures in the text. Take, for example, the following passage from near the beginning of the story:

Maria was a very, very small person indeed but she had a very long nose and a very long chin. She talked a little through her nose, always soothingly: *Yes, my dear*, and *No, my dear*. She was always sent for when the women quarrelled over their tubs and always succeeded in making peace. One day the matron had said to her:

—Maria, you are a veritable peace-maker!

And the sub-matron and two of the Board ladies had heard the compliment. And Ginger Mooney was always saying what she wouldn't do to the dummy who had charge of the irons if it wasn't for Maria. Everyone was so fond of Maria. (*Dub*, 110)

Deciding the origin and status of particular judgements and observations in this passage is highly problematic. The technique of free indirect discourse creates doubt about how we are to understand the various utterances (MacCabe's 'lack of agreement' between reader and text). The repeated intensifiers in the first paragraph, particularly where they are attached to diminutives ('very, very small'), echo Maria's underlexicalized mind-style with its clichés and tag-phrases ('very big barmbracks', 'very nice people' etc.). Accordingly, we may read these statements as expressive of Maria's (perhaps self-deceptive) sense of herself as delightfully inoffensive, charmingly slight and beloved. This would tally with her later feelings on viewing herself in the mirror in her 'little bedroom': 'she looked with quaint affection at the diminutive body which she had so often adorned. In spite of its years she found it a nice tidy little body' (*Dub*, 113). However, there are other possibilities in the interpretation of the quoted passage. The description of Maria may be an appropriation of a general opinion about her: it may be the expression of a communal voice—the voice of the other women who work with, indulge and tolerate her. As Norris suggests, 'the narrative voice...describes Maria as she would like to catch someone speaking about her to someone else' (1988, 146). Certainly, it seems to be a more objective point of view which takes over the remainder of that first

paragraph, describing Maria's 'soothing voice' and relating it in free *direct* speech. This uncertainty in deciding the origins of the various utterances crucially affects how we take the comment at the end of the passage: 'Everyone was so fond of Maria'. The polysyndeton throughout the last paragraph would again seem to suggest that we are in the grammatically hobbled voice of Maria. However, that final sentence, partly through the objectifying effect of using her name, floats free from certain attribution to Maria. Once again, we question if it is Maria's opinion of herself—how she believes others think of her—or if it relates a generally voiced opinion about her, emanating from the workers or the board ladies. Alternatively, it might be read as narratorial judgement for or against Maria, or for or against the others. Indeed, it could be all of these things at once, and more. The point is that we have no measure for judging whether this statement is ironic or said out of sympathy, irritation or tolerance; nor can we be certain from whom it emanates and to what end it is being stated. In the absence of a guiding meta-language the extent of the 'fondness' or otherwise in which Maria is held is an impossible ledger to draw.

We have, then, a complex of possible readings of this apparently simple old woman caused by a strategy in the narrative which denies ascendancy to any one analysis. Far from understanding Maria as a poor old woman moved by forces beyond her, there exists the possibility that she is entirely conscious of her own status and the impressions she gives. The narrative fluctuates between possible accounts of Maria as pitifully twee and intensely self-aware; between a picture of her as duped in ignorance by life, working with ex-prostitutes for a pittance, and one of her as author of a superior strategy of self-preservation based on a version of herself as cultured, superior and of independent means. We have to mediate between these various interpretations of Maria—and the many in between—for ourselves.

At the point of closure this absence of an advisory perspective is intensified by being manifest within the details of the story. The trick the

children play on Maria in the divination game is conveyed 'blindly', the narrative refusing to make explicit what is happening:

They led her up to the table amid laughing and joking and she put her hand out in the air as she was told to do. She moved her hand about here and there in the air and descended on one of the saucers. She felt a soft wet substance with her fingers and was surprised that nobody spoke or took off her bandage. There was a pause for a few seconds; and then a great deal of scuffling and whispering. Somebody said something about the garden, and at last Mrs Donnelly said something very cross to one of the next-door girls and told her to throw it out at once: that was no play. Maria understood that it was wrong that time and so she had to do it over again: and this time she got the prayer-book (*Dub*, 117)

The account of this event is conspicuously gap-ridden and interstitial. As Norris points out, the critic who fails to interrogate 'the reason for the gaps or [question] the function they serve risks being manipulated into narrative collusion' (1988, 154). Norris goes on to relate the gaps in the narration here to the protagonist's psychology, suggesting that they represent 'metaphorically, the blind spot that marks the site of Maria's psychic wound, her imaginary lacks and fears' (*ibid*, 156). I would suggest that the gaps serve to heighten the formally indeterminate nature of the text, in keeping with the strategy observed above in the discourse. At the very point in the story where the questions about Maria and the extent of her self-knowledge could be answered (by representing her reaction to the revelation of her true status as aged, close to death, and the dupe of children) the narration goes, as it were, under cover, withdrawing, as with Polly in 'The Boarding House', into a studied impercipient. It is not simply that we are confined behind Maria's blindfold: interiority would still be possible despite this. Rather, Maria is depicted quite simply as having no awareness of the significance of touching the clay. The point of epiphany, in other words, does nothing to settle the extraordinary conundrum in our feelings towards Maria: is she utterly, pitifully ignorant or is she in control of the meanings of all she sees, allowing others to carry off the awkward realization of the moment for her? We cannot decide because at the very moment when we would expect a revelation of Maria's self-awareness, the narrative makes absolute the impercipient it

describes.

The story concludes by exemplifying the reader's predicament in relation to this indeterminacy in the family's reaction to the incomplete 'text' of Maria's song. The song Maria sings comes from Balfe's opera *The Bohemian Girl* and, like Polly's song in 'The Boarding House', its context and content correspond to details in her story.¹⁰ But where the resemblance was simply informative in Polly's case, Maria's song interrogates meaning in the text of which it is part and re-configures the process that the reader of 'Clay' is himself experiencing. The verse that Maria omits to sing goes:

I dreamt that suitors sought my hand,
That knights on bended knee,
And with vows no maiden heart could withstand,
They pledged their faith to me.

And I dreamt that one of that noble band,
Came forth my heart to claim,
But I also dreamt, which charmed me most
That you loved me all the same (Gifford 1982, 80-1)

Joe, we are told, is 'very much moved' after Maria's rendition. But it is not clear if it is Maria's mistake that moves him (to affectionate pity, perhaps), the sentiment of the song, the fact that it is she who sings it, or indeed the quality of her singing. Whichever, no one tries to show Maria her error, and no one considers it other than a 'mistake'. Thus the function and significance of the song is not decoded for the reader, and this is important in several ways. Most obviously, the verse Maria sings relates to her own impoverished social position by summoning a fantasy of wealth and class recognition. But in Balfe's opera the song is sung by Arlene, a princess abducted by gypsies in her infancy who, as an adult, is haunted by dreams of her former nobility. Taken this way the song would seem to confirm the suggestion that Maria harbours a vision of

¹⁰ Cf. 'Eveline': Frank takes Eveline to see *The Bohemian Girl*, one of the correspondences between the two stories which has led critics to read Maria as a mature Eveline. See, for instance, Brandabur 1971, 67-73

herself as superior in some indefinable class sense to the other women in the laundry, and even to the girl in the cake shop, confirming in turn the possibility of Maria as author of a defensive strategy of self-denial. The omitted verse creates more uncertainty still. Joe perhaps reads Maria's missing the verse about the wooing of a suitor as a more or less conscious error on the part of this poor, blameless spinster. But other hints lead us to another interpretation of the mistake: we are told, as Mrs Donnelly plays the prelude to the song, that Maria, 'blushing very much, began to sing in a tiny quavering voice' (*Dub*, 118). The last time we saw Maria so demure was with the gentleman on the Drumcondra tram, a scene that again functions as a site of conflict and paradox in the account of Maria. We are told that 'none of the young men seemed to notice her' on the tram, but then 'an elderly gentleman made room for her' (*Dub*, 114). It is she who elaborates his appearance, thinking of him as 'colonel-looking'. In fact he is a fat, red-faced drunk. Maria favours him with 'demure nods and hems' (*ibid*), and when she leaves the tram we read that 'while she was going up along the terrace, bending her tiny head under the rain, she thought how easy it was to know a gentleman even when he has a drop taken' (*ibid*). That 'tiny head' echoes Maria's other observations of her own endearing littleness, adding to the sense in the story of a very precise (and effective) self-consciousness at work.

The important point in this analysis of Maria is that the text does not mediate between the conflicting versions that its techniques elicit. At the conclusion of the story, we are presented not with arbitration but with another unstable (and interstitial) text. We want to read the song as a key to decoding the 'openness' generated by the free indirect discourse, but instead we get a text full of holes that only serves to redouble the sense of indeterminacy. That 'no one' shows Maria her mistake implies, of course, that *everyone* notices it, including the reader. We all of us fall through the gaps in the text(s). Joe becomes our metafictional representative at the end, offering a 'reading' of what he has heard but more concerned by what he cannot find. As Patrick Parrinder

puts it, 'Joyce's story is very like a bottle for which someone has hidden the corkscrew' (1984, 53).

As was noted above, Dominic Head distinguishes between those stories whose epiphanies he considers 'empiricist', like 'Clay', and those he terms 'relativist'. My analysis of 'Clay' has, I think, exposed the arbitrariness of the distinction. This is not, however, to say that Head's theory of the 'relativist' epiphany, as a term for describing the disrupted and disruptive nature of many of Joyce's 'significant moments', is invalid. Rather, the weakness in Head's argument lies in his limiting his readings of individual stories by an insistence on 'ambiguity' in contradistinction to what he terms 'unreadability'. In the case of his 'relativist' texts this can lead him into the reductive practice of attributing indeterminate utterances to particular characters or to the narrator. An example of this would be his analysis of the final paragraph of 'A Little Cloud':

Little Chandler felt his cheeks suffused with shame and he stood back out of the lamplight. He listened while the paroxysm of the child's sobbing grew less and less; and tears of remorse started to his eyes (*Dub*, 62)

Head considers the scene 'staged', with the language here belonging to Chandler's 'own "poetic" turn of phrase' (1992, 62). The description of the cheeks 'suffused with shame' is, Head argues, 'chosen for its alliteration, without regard for the weariness of its cadence which is inappropriate for a scene of highly charged emotion'. He concludes that 'the epiphany is thus a falsification, designed to suggest that a magnanimous spirit of remorse allows [Chandler] to display contrition for the hurt he has caused, despite the great burden of artistic restriction he has to bear' (*ibid*).

Head is right to suggest that Chandler's epiphany can be read as falsified, his tears as crocodile—or at least as tears of self-pity for the failure in his artistry and in his life. The problem is that in his effort to overturn the 'innocent' readings which see Chandler's emotion as genuine, Head ends up closing down the play of possibility that is inherent in Joyce's use of free indirect discourse. In

other words, he simply displaces one reading by another, instead of recognizing what Joyce's practice invites us to recognize, namely the *plural* constitution of the text. As Roland Barthes puts it, 'To interpret a text is not to give it a (more or less justified, more or less free) meaning, but on the contrary to recognize what *plural* constitutes it' (1990, 5). Simply to impose a reading of Chandler's epiphany as falsified rather than genuine is to sell short the plurality the narrative generates at this crucial point. For Head the phrase 'suffused with shame' betrays, by its alliteration, its origin in the poetaster Chandler with his 'attraction to the surface qualities of words' (Head 1992, 62). From this he argues that the 'shame' and 'remorse' are constructs of Chandler's, not real emotional responses befitting the scene. But Head has no grounds for attributing these words to Chandler. They could as easily have emanated from the voice which narrates parts of the story in straight third-person, without any trace of indirect thought. That voice, too, is attracted to the surface of words: 'His hands were white and small, his frame was fragile, his voice was quiet and his manners were refined' (*Dub*, 76) contains alliteration and assonance within its balanced affectation—traits evident, too, in the narrator's description of Gallaher with his lips 'shapeless and colourless' and his 'thin hair at the crown' (*Dub*, 81). Accordingly, we might well take the 'shame' and 'remorse' to be directorial comments from the narrator (a point reinforced by the presence of the objectifying 'Little Chandler' at the beginning of the paragraph) imposed in contest with the facile poeticism belonging to Chandler.

My point here is not to try to reinvigorate the case for Chandler undergoing a genuine revelation, but to insist that we recognize the matter as undecidable (unreadable, if you wish) and that it is Joyce's narrative strategy that has made it so. Rather than argue about who signifies 'remorse' at the end of the story, we should acknowledge that we cannot be sure and enjoy the full possibilities of the text's ultimate 'plural'. Rather than assert, as Head does, that Chandler's feeling of remorse here is not a 'plausible emotion' (1992, 62) we

should concentrate on allowing this valent signifier to play out its full potential in our minds. Perhaps Chandler's remorse *is* a construct, but it might also be a genuine revelation signalled by him or by the narrator—'a revelation of imprisonment' as one critic has called it (Beja 1983, 10). Equally the narrator may be stating it ironically, indicating that Chandler's tears come because, as the child's sobbing subsides, another 'poetic' moment has been felt but not realized.¹¹ Or perhaps, as Edmund Epstein suggests, Joyce was already aware of the various etymological siftings in 'remorse' (which include 'biting', remarkably) and that there is meaning to be gathered from these too (1983, 60). Once again, it is Joyce's narrative technique that has created these possibilities and it is the critic's job, as Barthes suggests, to acknowledge the full extent of this 'openness'.

The resistance evident in *Head* to any poststructuralist suggestion of 'unreadability' or 'indeterminacy' is a feature too of Phillip Herring's study, *Joyce's Uncertainty Principle* (1987). Herring employs the term 'uncertainty' explicitly to distance his thesis from 'indeterminate' deconstructionist approaches (1987, xii). The 'uncertainty principle' states that although Joyce produces 'ambiguous texts' he also provides 'the keys to interpreting them' (*ibid.*, 3). Herring adapts Joyce's use (in 'The Sisters') of the word 'gnomon', applying its dual sense to the text of *Dubliners* as a whole.¹² The Euclidean 'gnomon' is defined as a parallelogram that has had another small parallelogram removed from one of its corners, and Herring advances this as Joyce's structural

¹¹ Michael Patrick Gillespie elaborates on the narrative technique which 'leaves us to decide upon the amount of irony and of sympathy we wish to assign to the situation' in relation to 'The Boarding House' (Gillespie 1989, 32).

¹² He is by no means the first to harness the gnomonic concept. It has been variously identified with the 'impaired', atrophied characters who people *Dubliners*, used as an interpretative key to their recomposition, and applied to the text as a whole in order to explain its elliptical and interstitial structure and language. See for instance Friedrich (1957), Fabian (1968), Leigh, J. (1983) and Day (1988)

metaphor for the elliptical ‘uncertainty’ of his writing. ‘Gnomon’ also carries the sense, however, of ‘pointer’, or ‘indicator’ and this in turn provides Herring with the germ of his idea that the stories in *Dubliners* simultaneously ‘point’ to the way in which they are to be interpreted. As he puts it elsewhere, ‘Joyce intended to give aid and comfort to the enemy’; accordingly, he ‘provided guideposts to interpretation’ (1988, 40). In other words, Joyce generates only a certain amount of uncertainty in the reader about what things mean in his stories, and if that reader follows the clues he will eventually be apprised of the text’s theology.

Herring’s is clearly a strident thesis and difficult to defend. Obviously it runs the risk of becoming schematic in its readings, and this is something Herring falls foul of, applying the geometric ‘gnomon’ to everything from the lowered window shade in ‘Araby’ to the newspaper article relating Mrs Sinico’s death in ‘A Painful Case’. More importantly, Herring supplies the ‘theological’ meanings (in case we should ourselves miss them) for ‘gnomon’ along with ‘simony’ and ‘paralysis’, the celebrated triumvirate of feral signifiers from the first page of *Dubliners*. They represent, respectively, the uncertainty principle, the ‘Church’s role in Ireland’s oppression’ and the ‘complicity of the Irish in that oppression’ (1987, x). Herring unites the three interpretations under the flag of political subversion, suggesting that Joyce adopted his gnomonic approach in order to facilitate ‘embittered social commentary’ in a time of censorship:

Readers alerted to the implications of the three key words from the first...could feel more deeply the political impact they contain. In theory the author then need not fear censorship because libelous thoughts are in the reader’s mind, not in the text (*ibid*, 7-8)

In essence, Herring is arguing that the ‘openness’ of the Joycean short story is the result of the author’s need to indulge in political euphemism. This theory depends on fixing the meanings of Joyce’s three signifiers: if they signify other than what Herring says they signify—or indeed, if they represent, as Colin MacCabe suggests, a ‘surplus of meaning’ (1979, 34), or signify nothing certain

at all—then the whole argument is undone. Herring falls into this reductivism because, like Head, he is intent on resisting poststructuralist ‘indeterminacy’ readings. Herring wants to say that uncertainty is a feature of some texts, but not every text, and of some language, but not *all* language (1987, xii). This leaves him with the barbed matter of determining which words in which texts *are* certain, and which are not. He is, to give one example, content that there is no ‘uncertainty’ about the presentation of Maria in ‘Clay’: as she looks in the mirror ‘she seems totally lacking in self-awareness...in her innocence she cannot comprehend the image or its implications’ (*ibid*, 63-4). As with Head, this is to stifle analysis with inflexible theory, to miss entirely the effect of Joyce’s narrative tactics and succeed only in displacing one reading by another equally contestable one.¹³

The theoretical debate I have established here between ‘ambiguity’ and ‘indeterminacy’ readings was usefully rehearsed on the pages of *Poetics Today* some years ago by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan and J. Hillis Miller. Responding to Miller’s avowedly deconstructionist reading of Henry James’s ‘The Figure in the Carpet’, Rimmon-Kenan challenged the use of the term ‘undecidability’, which Miller argued was preferable to ‘ambiguity’. In reply Miller wrote that, whereas Rimmon-Kenan employed ‘ambiguity’ as ‘a specialized tool needed...to get hold of certain stories by James and others’, he sought an approach that demonstrated ‘the impossibility of mastery...by such an analytical tool’ (1980/1, 190). ‘Undecidability’ or ‘unreadability’ were preferred because they defined the ‘impossibility of deciding whether or not a given text is ‘decidable’ or ‘determinate’ in meaning, that is, ‘readable’ according to a common definition of readability’ (*ibid*).

¹³ To Head and Herring’s theses might be added Cordell Yee’s (1997) which challenges the poststructuralist approach (particularly Colin MacCabe’s) by resurrecting a principle of authorial intentionalism, claiming that the ‘historical Joyce sees language as a means to certainty, not doubt’ (1997, 29). Yee’s observations on MacCabe and ‘The Sisters’ are touched on later in this chapter.

What underlies this distinction is an important disagreement about the status and the function of textual interpretation. In Head's and Herring's readings 'ambiguity' is the necessarily refined critical instrument for determining meaning in Joyce's stories. Neither critic applies their observation that the texts are disruptive to their own reading practice; they still confidently impose limits on the 'openness' and polysemy of the stories, closing down the plurality of their articulations. This is because they both approach Joyce's texts from the point of view of their 'meaning' (however complex or disruptive) rather than from the point of view of their textuality. Their interest is not in the text as a 'galaxy of signifiers' but as a 'a structure of signifieds' (Barthes 1990, 5).

The argument I am developing in my readings is that, as with Dawkin's fig, justice can only be done to the full effect of the Joycean story if the critic seeks to 'disentangle' rather than 'decipher', as Barthes puts it, its multiplicity and materiality (1977, 147). Indeed, given what Joyce leaves out of or suppresses in his texts, decipherment will always involve the critic in a speculativeness that will itself be necessarily gap-ridden and suppressive of the stories' plurisignificance and undecidability, a fact borne out by the quite remarkable quantity of contradictory readings *Dubliners* has produced. Sonja Basic suggests that this critical confusion arises because determinate readings of the stories repeatedly encounter the 'stubborn resistance' (1998, 14) of Joyce's text and that we must accordingly find another way of making our assessments of it. The value of my theory of interrogative short fiction is that it does not seek to decipher 'a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign' as Derrida says in 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' (1978, 292), but instead attempts to credit the full significance (the plurisignificance) of Joyce's writing 'short'.

Of course, the complaint I am making here against symbolist and 'ambiguity' readings of *Dubliners* was levelled long ago at critics of *Ulysses*

and *Finnegans Wake* who, as Colin MacCabe said back in 1979, were failing to acknowledge the ways in which Joyce's texts 'refuse to reproduce the relation between reader and text on which literary criticism is based' (1979, 3). That conventional relation is manifest in the procedures of classic realist fiction where the narratorial meta-language is able to 'state all the truths in the object-language(s)' and place the reader 'in a position of dominance with regard to the stories and characters' (*ibid*, 14; 16). Thinking back on the complex experience of reading 'Clay' we can readily see the ways in which Joyce's stories refuse to conform to this convention. As Margot Norris says, the reader who believes in Maria's innocence and essential goodness is like the docile narratee constructed in 19th century fiction (1988, 148). Such a reader fails to become critic of his own reading practice in the way Joyce's story demands he does. Throughout *Dubliners* the reader's sense of dominating or mastering the story in front of him is troubled and challenged.

MacCabe argues for a focus on the textuality and materiality of Joyce's stories, for some recognition of their plural status. Taking 'The Sisters' for exemplary analysis, he concentrates on the 'surplus of meaning' generated by the story's 'excess' of signification. The famous three signs from the first paragraph—'paralysis', 'gnomon', 'simony'—are the salient examples of 'signifiers which are not determined in their meaning by the text' (1979, 34). In this gap between the act of signification and determining what is signified the reader circulates, 'play-producing meaning through his or her own activity' (*ibid*, 35). MacCabe has been criticized by Cordell Yee for granting the material of language primacy over meaning, which, Yee argues, must not be 'outlawed' or relegated in this way (1997, 19). But Yee, in service of his argument that Joyce's alleged 'intentions' can be used to establish his true meaning, misses MacCabe's point that these signifiers are not determined in their meaning *by the text*. Like Phillip Herring, Yee elides the fact that the text itself does not explain or fix the terms, and instead argues a case for his own interpretations of them,

closing down the play of meaning in an analysis which is necessarily exclusive and speculative.

Indeed, the confident attribution of meaning to the three signifiers in the studies by Herring and others is no real advance on the drab symbolist accounts offered by earlier critics, such as John William Corrington, who took the sisters to represent 'the Irish Church', the chalice 'the Irish people', and so on in service of a reductive symbolic schemata (Hart 1969, 21-22). A glance through recent criticism of 'The Sisters' reveals no abatement of this habit. 'Paralysis', to take just one example, has been variously interpreted as a euphemism for syphilis, a physical manifestation of the 'gnomon' (in the sense of a partial lacking) and so of the 'rhetoric of paralysis' (ellipsis etc.) characterizing the narrative style (Heller 1995, 14); as expressive of 'dissolution' or 'unbinding' (from *para-lyein*: to release, unbind) and linked to *paresis*, meaning 'to let fall' (Rabaté 1982, 53); and, most popularly, as a metaphor for the doomed and self-defeating life of Dublin (Parrinder 1984, 53). Fascinating as some of these readings may be, lighting on any one of them to the exclusion of others is, I would argue, a necessarily partial and unsound basis on which to form a generic theory of the Joycean short story.

'The Sisters' is an important text, however, not only because of its evident plurisignificance but because it contains within itself, I would suggest, an argument for the necessity of its indeterminacy, its reticences and withholdings, interstices and interdictions—in short, for the plurality of its discourse. My argument here arises from the observation that in this story, as in every story in *Dubliners*, there is some commentary on the nature of language and the status of texts. It is my contention that through this Joyce is expressing a scepticism about the possibility of final or decisive meaning, a scepticism that is, as I have been arguing, the central operative principle of his short story technique. In other words, I am claiming that in his metalingual and intertextual referencing Joyce is offering a validation for the interrogativeness of his own

texts. Once again, it is only by recognizing the *Dubliners* stories as interrogative short fictions that this perspective becomes available.

Like 'The Boarding House' and 'Clay', 'The Sisters' is an indulgent text, foregrounding its gaps and enigmas and unanswered questions and challenging the processes the reader undertakes and the expectations he brings to the site of narrative. The characteristically elliptical presentation, however, is subject to a further torsion, for the story is very much about knowledge and knowing and about the quest for understanding. Throughout the story the narrator mirrors the reader's interpretative activity, probing for meaning in the interstitial utterances of Old Cotter and the sisters themselves, utterances more notable for what they withhold than what they avow (Joyce's ellipses throughout):

—No, I wouldn't say he was exactly...but there was something queer...there was something uncanny about him. I'll tell you my opinion.... (*Dub*, 7)

*

—I have my own theory about it, he said. I think it was one of those...peculiar cases...But it's hard to say.... (*Dub*, 8)

*

—Wide-awake and laughing-like to himself ... So then, of course, when they saw that, that made them think that there was something gone wrong with him... (*Dub*, 17)

That last statement is the story's conclusion and comes amid a silence which has taken possession of the house as it has the priest. The 'something' that went wrong with Father Flynn looks back to Cotter's 'something uncanny' (literally 'unknown') at the beginning of the story. Similarly, the narrator feels that he 'has been freed from *something*' (*Dub*, 11; my emphasis) by the priest's death. What these 'somethings' are is not made clear to us. What is more, even if Cotter's 'something' could be identified, it would still be 'unknown'. As with the estranging 'surplus' signifiers—*paralysis*, *gnomon*, *simony*—we are left to conjecture as to meaning and significance from the contexts of reference and utterance. According to Jean-Michel Rabaté, the boy narrator supplies the reader 'with a figure mirroring his own interpretative process' (1982, 49), drawing the

obvious parallel between the boy's study of the words of Cotter and the sisters (and, in the opening paragraph, of the priest's window, his attempts to 'read' the steadiness of its illumination) and the reader's activity in relation to the signs of the text. This is to take no account, however, of the differences between the narrator's position in relation to the facts of the case and the reader's. The narrator may indeed be left to read the silences of the other speakers, but the reader is *doubly* distanced as he must read the narrator's silences about his own understandings too. The narrator in fact plays the same game of withholding from the reader as do the adults with him. What is the 'something' the narrator feels freed from? What is the nature of his 'interest' (*Dub*, 8) in the news of Father Flynn's death? Why his contempt for Old Cotter? Is it because the old man knows or suspects that the boy's relationship with the priest was 'unhealthy'? Why does he think the priest in his dream smiles? What relation, if any, does he perceive or intend between the three signifiers in the first paragraph? Why does his story peter out in the meaningless coffin-side chatter of the two sisters? What has he to hide? The narrator does not offer to explain or clarify any of these questions he himself prompts. Although he implies that he is, like the reader, involved in a process of learning and acquiring knowledge, the narrator in fact acts to suppress recognition of the meanings lodged in his own text.

Of course, readers of the jam doughnut school (can't see a doughnut but they must fill the hole) are maddened by these deletions and withholdings and seek to plug the gaps with their own extra-textual preserve. But rather than speculate on how the narrator's relationship with the priest was constituted pre-text, as it were, I think it can be argued that the story contains a justification of its silences in the consideration it gives to the status of text and discourse.

There are several texts and documents alluded to (in various ways) in 'The Sisters'. In addition, the story also has things to say about the activity of interpreting written forms. The narrator's recollections of time spent with Father

Flynn contain several references to texts and exegesis. In addition to teaching the boy Latin, telling him stories about Napoleon Bonaparte, explaining the ceremonies of the Mass to him and quizzing him on moral dilemmas, the priest tells of how

the fathers of the Church had written books as thick as the *Post Office Directory* and as closely printed as the law notices in the newspaper, elucidating all these intricate questions. Often when I thought of this I could make no answer or only a very foolish and halting one upon which he used to smile and nod his head twice or thrice. Sometimes he used to put me through the responses of the Mass which he had made me learn by heart...
(*Dub*, 11-12)

The priest's texts are authoritative, theological; their discourse is monologic, patriarchal, patristic. These are texts (at least for Father Flynn) to rote learn, like the responses to the Mass, their meaning transparent, unequivocal, transcendent; texts which seek to displace multiplicity of interpretation by unity of understanding, determining, for instance, what is sin and what is not, and whether 'such and such sins [are] mortal or venial or only imperfections' (*Dub*, 11). These texts pronounce; they are determinate.

However, many forces in the 'The Sisters' combine to undermine the special status of these intertexts, among them the trajectory of Father Flynn's life and death. His fall into delinquency and madness is charted against the doctrine of his religious code. He is found by his sister, 'his breviary fallen to the floor' (*Dub*, 16), and this idea of the facts of his life contradicting the textualized edicts of his faith is captured in the description, again given by his sister, of the crucial event in his demise: 'It was that chalice he broke.... That was the beginning of it. Of course, they say it was all right, that it contained nothing, I mean. But still....' (*Dub*, 17). The sisters intend this as an expression of absolute belief (i.e. that only the 'appearance' of wine was spilt, not Christ's blood and body), but the statement is disturbed by a suggestion that such rituals may ultimately be found to be meaningless—that the cup may be truly empty, after all. The point here is that the disruption of the religious certainty is manifest in linguistic slippage.

Equivocation bears out the way in which the ‘centrifugal’ forces of language push against the pietistic (and, indeed, readerly) attempts to control or consolidate meaning. As Joseph Valente states (adapting Bakhtin), the centrifugal forces ‘tend toward heterogeneity, contingency, and freedom’, threatening the effort for ‘conformity and control’ characteristic of the sacerdotal discourse (1988, 57). This threat to unity and certainty is finalized in Father Flynn’s deranged confessional: ‘After that he began to mope by himself, talking to no one and wandering about by himself...sitting up by himself in the dark in his confession-box, wide-awake and laughing-like softly to himself’ (*Dub*, 17). The priest’s retreat into meaninglessness occurs in a place where words have the special status as medium for the conferment of divine grace. In his personal dissolution we see the unity and order of religious office exposed to the secular contingencies of language.

In the narrator’s observations, too, we find a mischievous resistance to any discourse claiming to be conclusive or ultimate. For instance, his recollections (quoted above) of Father Flynn’s texts are juxtaposed with his own reading of the ‘theatrical advertisements’ in the shop windows and his attendant ‘sensation of freedom’ (*Dub*, 11). Similarly, the priest’s death notice in the window has replaced one normally stating ‘*Umbrellas Re-covered*’. Reading it, the narrator is ‘persuaded’ that Father Flynn is dead, though the notice presents itself as unequivocal (*Dub*, 10). Even at prayer the narrator notices the presence of other voices and acknowledges the pressure they exert on his own: ‘I pretended to pray but I could not gather my thoughts because the old woman’s mutterings distracted me’ (*Dub*, 13). The effect of these juxtapositions and interruptions and ironic downward conversions is to force each discourse—even the narrator’s—into dialogue or competition with others. The story ends with the narrator taking on the silence of the house and letting Eliza speak, her final ‘something’ and concluding ellipsis as good as any other.

In this light of this reading, we might then take the gaps and withholdings

in the narrator's account, his refusal to explain his meaning, to be part of the story's culture of scepticism about authoritative utterance. Just as the technique of free indirect discourse compromises an otherwise inviolable omniscient perspective, so the narrator's reticence here may be taken as expressing an awareness of the partial and incomplete nature of any point of view and of the ultimately relativistic nature of any attempt at absolute definition.

The relationship between the narrator and Father Flynn is 'The Sisters' is reminiscent of that which exists between Stephen and his ecclesiastical mentors in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. There too we see a cultivation of 'linguistic heterodoxy' (Epstein 1983, 58) threatening the fixtures of religious discourse. In his conversation with the priest early in part 4, immediately following his religious amendment, Stephen encounters a troublesome signifier, *les jupes*, which the priest uses in reference to Capuchin dress, but which suggests to Stephen '[t]he names of articles of dress worn by women' and an attendant 'delicate and sinful perfume' ([1916] 1988, 158). In his subsequent conversations with the dean, the same difficulties of containing association are evident:

—One difficulty, said Stephen, in esthetic discussion is to know whether words are being used according to the literary tradition or according to the tradition of the marketplace. I remember a sentence of Newman's in which he says of the Blessed Virgin that she was detained in the full company of the saints. The use of the word in the marketplace is quite different. *I hope I am not* detaining you.

—Not in the least, said the dean politely.

—No, no, said Stephen, smiling, I mean...

—Yes, yes: I see, said the dean quickly, I quite catch the point: *detain* (*ibid*, 192)

Stephen's juxtaposition of a literary discourse with that of the market-place, is similar to the narrator of 'The Sisters''s bringing Father Flynn's religious texts and dogma into contact with theatrical advertisements and shop notices. As one critic of *Portrait* has put it, by flaunting the materiality of discourse Stephen seeks to bring about 'relationship rather than control' in the text's community of

voices (Pearce 1988, 80). And as though to underscore the point that meaning is fugitive—that there is an instability in the relationship of signifier and signified—the dean here misunderstands (misreads) Stephen’s meaning, which, of course, itself emanates from another text—Newman’s. Indulging the creative instability of language becomes Stephen’s real salvation as it does Joyce’s career.

I would argue that the refusal in ‘The Sisters’ and in *A Portrait* to accept the monologic or authoritative declaration of meaning exemplifies the reader’s relation to these texts themselves. The reader should not seek to impose a limiting ‘certainty’, the texts seem to caution, where indeterminacy has been generated by the techniques of radical ellipsis and free indirect discourse. The gaps in meaning are not there to be filled, the argument follows, but to be embraced as essential to the economy of the texts. Throughout *Dubliners* we feel the pressure of other points of view, other voices, other representational methods whenever any one discourse seeks authority over meaning—and that includes our own interpretative discourse. The concerted effort throughout the text to resist the decisive or monological perspective applies equally to the role of the reader of interrogative short fiction. Certainty is not on offer; our interpretative gestures must be plaintive rather than declarative, pointing, like Old Nannie in ‘The Sisters’, ‘upwards interrogatively’ (*Dub*, 12).

In every story in *Dubliners* there is some reference to or use made of other texts or documents. In ‘The Boarding House’ and ‘Clay’, as we saw, popular song was used both to consolidate and interrogate our readings of the narratives in which they occur. In ‘An Encounter’ and ‘Araby’—along with ‘The Sisters’ the other stories of childhood¹⁴—the intertexts function both to question the idea of authoritative discourse and to reveal the devices which narratives (including those of the stories themselves) use to generate meaning.

¹⁴ See Joyce’s letter to Stanislaus, c.24 Sept 1905, for his division of the collection into stories of childhood, of adolescence, and of ‘mature life’ (Ellmann 1975, 78)

Simpler use of intertexts is made in 'Eveline' which, like 'Clay', makes reference to *The Bohemian Girl*, though the story also, arguably, parodies at its epiphany the idiom of cheap romantic fiction. 'After the Race' makes glancing reference to a song whose words are advisory (*Cadet Roussel*) while the use of *Silent, O Moyle* in 'Two Gallants' has generated much critical speculation on the symbolic and political meanings in that story.¹⁵ 'A Little Cloud', as noted above, is explicitly concerned with the activity of textual composition in the mind of Little Chandler, while Farrington's working day in 'Counterparts' involves the transcribing of texts (and the occasional contemplation of their linguistic structures). Books line the ordered shelves of Duffy in 'A Painful Case': his mind reverberates with ideas gleaned from them, while poor Mrs Sinico's death is related to him in a newspaper article. 'Ivy Day in the Committee Room' ends with the full text of an amateur poem; 'A Mother' includes references to texts important to the Irish Revivalists; 'Grace' worries over the interpretation of Luke 16: 1-9; and Gabriel Conroy in 'The Dead' is exercised by the appropriateness or otherwise of certain textual allusions. We might also add to this list of texts present in *Dubliners* Stanislaus Joyce's claims that his brother based many of the stories on his (Stanislaus's) diary entries and letters (1954, 526-7).

Patrick Parrinder has suggested that the insertion of all this documentary material creates an effect rather like a Cubist *collage* (1984, 45). Despite the questionable cross-cultural comparativism, Parrinder is right to point out how when placed in Joyce's textual environment ordinary referents, like signs and notices, 'lose their purely instrumental function and can be appreciated simply as items of language' (*ibid*). I would go further and say that what we are being directed to is the material nature of language, the fact that a word's meaning is not deposited within it trans-historically and immutably but arises from its differential relation to other words (and, of course, from the differences between the letters that make it up). Joyce directs our attention to this materiality and to

¹⁵ See Day 1988

the ways in which discourses, especially those invested with authority, generate by virtue of their extended sense-making structures an illusion of transparency, meaningfulness, truth.

The story which most clearly demonstrates the consequences of this awareness is 'An Encounter'. From the beginning of the story texts are placed in conference with one another. In Joe Dillon's comic-book collection we have an alternative library and literature to the officially prescribed classroom reading. Text is set against text when Leo Dillon is found reading a number of the *The Halfpenny Marvel* instead of Caesar's *Commentaries on the Gallic Wars*. The hierarchy of reading matter is confirmed in Father Butler's rebuke:

—What is this rubbish? he said. *The Apache Chief!* Is this what you read instead of studying your Roman History? Let me not find any more of this wretched stuff in this college. The man who wrote it, I suppose, was some wretched scribbler that writes these things for a drink. I'm surprised at boys like you, educated, reading such stuff...(Dub, 19)

The narrator feels a pang of guilt about his own secret reading on hearing this statement of authority. However, he is conscious of the 'sometimes literary' (Dub, 19) quality of the comics and it is this sensitivity that allows him to resist the pedagogical imposition. Tellingly, the 'plot' of the narrator's adventure begins the next day with an act of liberation from these official discourses when he hides his school books in the grass (Dub, 20). But the subsequent adventure does more than simply confront the bookish adolescent imagination with a reality more threatening and feral than any text. The narrator's encounter with the old josser revolves around textual allusion and some consideration of language. It is important to the narrator to distance himself from the prankish Mahony and establish his credentials with the old josser as a 'bookworm' conversant in the works of Sir Walter Scott and Lord Lytton (Dub, 25). Thus the narrator at once wishes for imaginative liberty from the officially endorsed canon, yet at the same time desires admittance to the charmed circle of its familiars. The strange last pages of the story focus on the mantra-like

monologue of the old jossler as he orbits his obsessions:

He gave me the impression that he was repeating something which he had learned by heart or that, magnetized by some words of his own speech, his mind was slowly circling round and round in the same orbit. At times he spoke as if he were simply alluding to some fact that everybody knew, and at times he lowered his voice and spoke mysteriously as if he were telling us something secret which he did not wish others to overhear. He repeated his phrases over and over again, varying them and surrounding them with his monotonous voice. I continued to gaze towards the foot of the slope, listening to him (*Dub*, 26)

As well as a passion for reading the narrator shares with the old jossler a desire to narrate and a sensitivity to the strategies for tale-telling. But although the narrator listens his gaze is elsewhere. Repeatedly he refers to the old jossler's speech as a 'monologue' and by the end of the story his resistance to it has hardened into 'agitation' and he seeks a 'stratagem' for escaping it (*Dub*, 28). As in his relationship to Father Butler and the officially sanctioned canon, the narrator desires the textual knowledge—and is fascinated with the language—of the old jossler. Yet there is also a need to resist their points of view, the attempts they make at domination of both text and language through the establishment of a canon and the 'monologue' of their opinions. Just as Stephen in *A Portrait* must raise his own literary voice in response to the great monologue of the Hellfire Sermon, so must the narrator of 'An Encounter' in his denial of the priest and the old jossler's efforts to prevail in language. It is not enough to attribute the narrator's wish in 'An Encounter' to escape simply to his distaste for the old jossler's lecherous conduct. The construction of the adventure around a shared textual world and yearning to narrate is indicative of his need to make his own story, in his own way.

The resistance shown in 'An Encounter' and throughout *Dubliners* to impositions of determinate meaning and textual prepossession is reflected in the reticent, elliptical and interdictive narrative techniques employed. These interrogative devices deny the reader's interpretative efforts any sovereignty over the text's meaning. It seems to me that a critical theory geared to the recognition

of the plurality generated by these devices not only responds positively to the demands Joyce is making of us as readers but offers us some explanation of why the *Dubliners* stories have generated such a wealth of contradictory interpretations. The advantage of the approach I am advocating here is that it allows us to embrace all of these legitimate readings without exclusion or privilege. Moreover, it offers a formal justification based in the text itself for why we should seek to ratify the plural constitution of these stories.

That demand for ratification is most clearly put in 'Ivy Day in the Committee Room', arguably the most self-consciously elliptical text in the collection. It is the story which most conspicuously disavows omniscient perspective and narratorial metalanguage. Indeed, the narrator is unable even to name characters as they appear in the story until one of the other characters addresses them by name. As Colin MacCabe has pointed out (1979, 30), only once is the flow of oblique and tangential dialogue interrupted by narratorial comment, and even then only to explain a silence:

Mr Crofton sat down on a box and looked fixedly at the other bottle on the hob. He was silent for two reasons: The first reason, sufficient in itself, was that he had nothing to say; the second reason was that he considered his companions beneath him (*Dub*, 146)

This subtle passage, far from explaining anything, contains, I would suggest, a self-referential joke. Crofton's magisterial 'silence' equates both with the role of the narrator in this story (i.e. his interrogative reticence) and with the traditional status of the narrator in general (the superiority of his discourse in relation to the characters). Crofton, if you will, adopts here the pose of the author in *A Portrait* who 'remains invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails'. Thus, the one conspicuous entrance of the narrator in 'Ivy Day' can be read as an exposure of the story's narratorial procedure—its 'silence' in spite of its immanence.

The consequences of this 'silence' for us as readers attempting to fix meaning in the story are manifest in the difficulties we have in ordering and

interpreting each character's utterances in relation to a dominant diegesis in the story. If we are to conclude that Crofton is a right-winger or Lyons a conservative liberal then we have to do so by inference. Fittingly, the central character on whose behalf they are all campaigning and debating, Tierney, remains off-stage, another immanent, 'invisible' presence whose failure to signify at all reflects the refusal of any finally authoritative or mediative perspective in the story. The difficulty we have in negotiating between the voices in this ungraded polyphony is intensified when the intertext appears at the end of the story in the form of Hynes's poem on Parnell. As with the characters' speeches themselves we have no indication as to how we should take the poem: literally? ironically? Our position in relation to it is reminiscent of how we felt about Joe's response to Maria's song in 'Clay'. And as with 'Clay' we are offered no assistance from the reactions of the characters: 'The applause continued for a little time...' we are told. 'When it ceased all the auditors drank from their bottles in silence' (*Dub*, 152). There is that silence again, played with this time by juxtaposition with the description of the men as 'auditors'. We too audit the conversations in this text, but the one voice that could verify our audit—that of the superintending narrator—does not give us anything to listen to. We cannot even read the extent of the characters' applause securely: how long exactly is a 'little time' and how does that length of time, whatever it is, gauge the men's feelings to what they have heard? The final sentence completes the relationship between the intertext and the reader's encounter with its host: 'Mr Crofton said that it was a very fine piece of writing' (*ibid*). This final statement, about writing, is unreadable. We cannot possibly know what Crofton (a conservative Orangeman, from what we can gather) means by what he says here. We feel even doubtful about what text these words refer to—Hynes's or Joyce's. The use of the intertext has served both to intensify and exemplify the reader's troubled relation to Joyce's interrogative short fiction.

'Ivy Day' is a story explicitly about a committee and the contrariness of

its voices, and so one might expect that the text's interrogativeness would take the form of refusing coalescence of these voices. As we have seen, however, those stories which focus on a single character are no more securely readable. An exception to this, it has been claimed, is 'A Painful Case', which even the committed poststructuralist Sonja Basic feels is a story with a stable and easily recuperable thematic structure:

['A Painful Case' is] a story where the theme—the rejection of life and love—is not only clearly outlined but also firmly related to character motivation. We are not surprised by the ending of the story: it seems to have been encoded in the protagonist .
(1998, 20)

It is odd to find Basic making this concession when her study has been about overturning symbolic and thematic readings of the *Dubliners* stories. One can certainly see where her conclusion that the story's central theme is the 'rejection of love and life' emanates from. Duffy's 'epiphany' would appear to involve his coming to realize the extent of Mrs Sinico's loneliness and his own culpability in her death. His final inarticulate apprehension of himself delivers the complex ironic realization that he is now as he said he wanted to be—alone—but that that solitude and sequestration will one day be absolute and not of his making, as it is now for Mrs Sinico.

To read Duffy's epiphany in this way (or in some other way that takes it as a genuine moment of self-awareness) involves, however, suppressing the role of free indirect discourse and the fact that Joyce has clearly compromised all certainty regarding Duffy's character and motivation. Once again, the intertexts that litter the story offer a starting point for my analysis.

Duffy, we know, is a voracious reader. His shelves are full of informative intertexts and he is very conscious of his own role in relation to what he reads and of the status of his own voice. In his copy of Hauptmann's *Michael Kramer*, we are told, 'a sentence was inscribed from time to time and, in an ironical moment, the headline of an advertisement for *Bile Beans* had been pasted on the first sheet' (*Dub*, 119-20). His relationship with Mrs Sinico

revolves, for him, around texts and knowledge. He loans her books and shares with her the theories he has gleaned from them. Significantly, however, he is unwilling to allow his own ideas expression in textual form:

She asked him why he did not write out his thoughts. For what, he asked her, with careful scorn. To compete with phrasemongers, incapable of thinking consecutively for sixty seconds? To submit himself to the criticisms of an obtuse middle class which entrusted its morality to policemen and its fine arts to impresarios? (*Dub*, 123)

Duffy does not wish his own writings to be brought into debasing contest with other voices. He does not want them contaminated by juxtaposition with adverts for bile beans, for example. His passion, like that of the old jossers and the priests in other stories, is for monologue, for the authority of his own utterances to remain unchallenged, basking above the morass of enquiring dialogue. And it is not only in the written form that Duffy desires the inviolability of his own voice. In his conversations with Mrs Sinico he is sometimes aware of himself ‘listening to the sound of his own voice’ (*Dub*, 124). Tellingly, the break comes with Mrs Sinico when she brings his words into conflict with her own: ‘Her interpretation of his words disillusioned him’ (*Dub*, 124). He drops her because she threatens the refinement of his dominant discourse by exerting the ‘centrifugal’ influence of her own ideas, thoughts and desires on his.

Of course, the irony that drains at Duffy’s linguistic puritanism begins with the central conviction he adopts to justify ending the relationship with her, namely that ‘friendship between man and woman is impossible because there must be sexual intercourse’ (*Dub*, 125). This idea is an appropriation from Nietzsche, whose volumes stand on Duffy’s shelves.¹⁶ Ironically, the ideas and tenets Duffy holds to and defends as his own are in fact borrowings by him. His precious monologue is in fact pieced together from the texts of others; it is already *dialogized*. Later he is forced to read of Mrs Sinico’s death in the ‘threadbare phrases’ (*Dub*, 128) of a newspaper columnist, despite his best

¹⁶ The Nietzsche passage is in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, I: xiv

efforts to read it *Secreto*, i.e. 'set apart'. His 'epiphany' is triggered by the 'inane' expression of this 'commonplace vulgar death' (*Dub*, 128).

Now, in order to read the epiphany as genuine we need to accept that Duffy achieves some degree of self-realization, that he does indeed feel that his 'moral nature [is] falling to pieces' (*Dub*, 130). In other words, we need to believe that the text foregoes the ironic undermining it has perpetrated throughout and summons finally a determinate appraisal of Duffy which the reader can take privileged possession of. Well, I do not think any such thing happens in this story; Joyce does not make that kind of concession. I would argue that one crucial sentence undermines all possibility of a determinate reading of Duffy's epiphany:

He had an odd autobiographical habit which led him to compose in his mind from time to time a short sentence about himself containing a subject in the third person and a predicate in the past tense (*Dub*, 120)

The whole of the epiphany scene is conveyed through free indirect discourse, much of it in the kind of short sentences described in this passage. Here is the final paragraph:

He turned back the way he had come, the rhythm of the engine pounding in his ears. He began to doubt the reality of what memory told him. He halted under a tree and allowed the rhythm to die away. He could not feel her near him in the darkness nor her voice touch his ear. He waited for some minutes listening. He could hear nothing: the night was perfectly silent. He listened again. He felt that he was alone (*Dub*, 131)

The possibility exists, tantalizingly, that Duffy's epiphany is one of his fictionalized constructions. Certainly, that would seem to be what Joyce is suggesting by the preponderance here of short sentences containing a third person pronoun and a predicate in the past tense. The effect of the free indirect discourse is to undermine certainty of attribution in the language. We do not know that these constructions originate in Duffy, nor do we know that they do not. By slipping into free indirect mode here, Joyce is deliberately challenging our interpretative certainties. If the various intertexts militated against Duffy's

efforts at discursive ascendancy, so Joyce's text here refuses the reader sovereignty over meaning. The semantic core of this story remains interrogative.

It is important to say something here about the concept of the epiphany in general and the use critics of *Dubliners* have made of it. As was mentioned earlier, the epiphany is often taken to represent a moment of revelation or inscape which stands, in the economy of the 'plotless' short fiction, in place of 'conventional' plot closure. As Clare Hanson puts it,

Each of the stories of Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914) is structured around an epiphany (literally, a showing-forth), and in many 'plotless' fictions a moment of heightened awareness acts as a focus, a structural equivalent for conventional resolution of plot (1985, 7)

Implicit in Hanson's analysis here is the idea that the epiphany represents the structural centre of the Joycean story. In her subsequent readings she suggests that the epiphany acts to unify the disparate materials of its text. Dominic Head, as noted above, has done important work in challenging this assumption through his notion of the 'internal' or 'relativist' epiphany which functions *against* the unity aesthetic. But he, like Hanson, fails to give the crucial context for the definition of the epiphany offered in the *Stephen Hero* manuscript, which is as follows:

He was passing through Eccles Street one evening, one misty evening, with all these thoughts dancing the dance of unrest in his brain when a trivial incident set him composing some ardent verses which he entitled a 'Vilanelle of the Temptress'. A young lady was standing on the steps of one of those brown brick houses which seem the very incarnation of Irish paralysis. A young gentleman was leaning on the rusty railings of the area. Stephen as he passed on his quest heard the following fragment of colloquy out of which he received an impression keen enough to afflict his sensitiveness very severely.

The Young Lady—(drawling discreetly)...O, Yes...I was...at the...cha...pel...

The Young Gentleman—(inaudibly)...I...(again inaudibly)...I...

The Young Lady—(softly)...O...but you're...ve...ry...wick...ed....

This triviality made him think of collecting many such moments together in a book of epiphanies. By an epiphany he meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself (1950, 188)

Both Hanson and Head develop their respective arguments from the definition given in that final paragraph. Doing so, however, they omit to consider that the illustrative epiphany offered is composed around a fragmentary colloquy. This is an important point to note because it suggests that at the heart of this theory is an awareness of the contingent nature of discourse, of the way in which, as Bakhtin says, every utterance enters ‘the dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgements and accents’ (1981, 276). Several of the ‘Epiphanies’ are constructed in this way around passages of unmediated dialogue:

High up in the old, dark-windowed house: firelight in the narrow room: dusk outside. An old woman bustles about, making tea; she tells of the changes, her odd ways, and what the priest and the doctor said.....I hear her words in the distance. I wander among the coals, among the ways of adventure.....Christ! What is in the doorway?.....A skull—a monkey; a creature drawn hither to the fire, to the voices: a silly creature.

—Is that Mary Ellen?—

—No, Eliza, it’s Jim—

—O.....O, goodnight, Jim—

—D’ye want anything, Eliza?—

—I thought it was Mary Ellen.....I thought you were Mary Ellen, Jim— (1991, 165)

These other voices are not subsumed in the discourse of the narrator: there is no ‘explanation’ of them as object-languages, no privileging of the reader’s relation to them by an interpretation of their relation to the world. The voice of the subject of the *énonciation* does not attempt to efface its own materiality or status as discourse in relation to the subjects of the *énoncé*; it does not attempt to place them or transcend their comprehension.

Obviously, the ‘Epiphanies’ are slight texts to construe a theory from. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge, I think, that in the theory of the epiphany there is an evident sensitivity to the dialogic nature of utterance. With respect to *Dubliners*, it is obvious that such an awareness accords with the use of free indirect discourse, the deployment of other texts and documentary perspectives in the stories, and the exposure of the instability of signification, all of which are ways of resisting the monologic point of view, of revealing the

contingency of meaning and its status as discourse. In terms of my theory of interrogative short fiction, then, the Joycean epiphany represents not a moment of unity or resolution or even of ambiguity; its function is interdictive. It is a site of conflict in the text which creates indeterminacy, where not only the dominant diegesis of the story but also the reader's desire to impose his sense-making structures are refuted.

*

To all I have said in this chapter about Joyce's interrogative short fiction I would add finally, for closure, the example of 'Araby'. There is much to say about its epiphany, in which the narrator's moment of self-awareness is precipitated by his contact with perspectives which conflict with his own. As readers we must negotiate, too, between our sense of what was actually felt and experienced by the narrator in his childhood and what we take to be emanations from the perspective he constructs in his maturity.

There is much to say, too, about intertexts—*The Devout Communicant*, signifying, perhaps, the restrictive education and upbringing against which the boy's passions are in such uproar; Walter Scott's *The Abbot* with its hero's transformation from inconsequential youth to chivalric guardian of the queen's secrets; the *The Memoirs of Vidocq*, memoirs of a criminal turned informer and detective—very much the career trajectory the narrator is pursuing against his former self in this story. All of these, as one would expect, make their uncertain demands on us as readers and vitally affect our understanding not only of this best-remembered episode of the narrator's youth, but of his act of remembering.

But why I particularly want to end with 'Araby' is because of its initial paragraph and what this reveals to us about Joyce's achievement in *Dubliners*:

North Richmond Street, being blind, was a quiet street except at the hour when the Christian Brothers' School set the boys free. An uninhabited house of two storeys stood at the blind end, detached from its neighbours in a square ground. The other houses of the street, conscious of decent lives within them, gazed

at one another with brown imperturbable faces (*Dub*, 29)

The street is blind in the sense that it is a dead end. That is, of course, a metaphorical use of 'blind', but there is a further metaphor implied in this context—'impercipience' (ironically, the literal meaning of the word, and suggested by the sensory 'quietness' of the street) in the sense of 'ignorance' or even 'moral' blindness. The 'dead-end' meaning establishes itself, but is then quickly compromised by the return of the 'seeing' metaphor in which the houses are described as 'gazing' at one another. Again, this carries a literal descriptive meaning of houses standing opposite each other, but it also suggests lives looking, perhaps censoriously or voyeuristically, in on one another. Later in the story, the narrator watches from behind a blind in one of these houses Mangan's sister, for the love of whom he is blind to his own better judgement. Finally, there is the narrator in his maturity, 'watching' his former self, percipient in memory, seeing seeing.

I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter the reluctance among critics to credit the revolution of the word in *Dubliners*. Reading through this paragraph from 'Araby', one becomes conscious of just what Joyce did achieve in his short fiction. Virginia Woolf's delighted realization, in 'Craftsmanship', that it is not in the nature of words to 'express one simple statement but a thousand possibilities' and her celebration that 'at last, happily, we are beginning to face the fact' (1942, 126-7), is something we should recognize and celebrate in *Dubliners*, not just in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. Joyce did not simply perform some formal innovation in short fiction, some modification of existing practice. Rather he understood how the plurality and instability of language could be exploited to radical effect by the interrogative short form, how multiplicity could be achieved on behalf of—not in spite of—brevity. If nothing else, I hope that the theory of interrogative short fiction I have brought to bear here directs attention to the fact that *Dubliners* is born of language.

**Abdicated Unities:
Hemingway**

Abdicated Unities: Hemingway

‘[W]hat does one do with a writer like Hemingway,’ John Updike has asked, ‘so impeccably modernist in his short stories and so grossly popular as a novelist and cultural personality?’ (1992, 695). Updike’s question is rhetorical, of course: he is showing what we do with Hemingway—we discriminate, select, classify. And so we must, for Hemingway’s status within modernism is not secure. Joyce and Stein loom large as the originators of techniques of which he is often considered a mere popularizer, a ‘practical writer’ as Frank O’Connor described him (1963, 164), drawing on the experimental ‘research’ of his more difficult and intellectual forebears. Indeed, John Barth is happy to omit Hemingway entirely from his history of literary modernism, granting not even, as Updike puts it, ‘a “Terra Incognita” to mark his spot on the map of twentieth-century letters’ (1992, 695).¹ If we are to argue for Hemingway as a significant modernist then we will, it seems, have to admit straight away to the partiality of our account.

In part the problem lies with the variable quality of Hemingway’s output, exacerbated by the habit he had later in his career of disavowing the very techniques and devices on which his radical modernist work was based. If one compares, for instance, the awkward, mitigating narrative fill-ins and flash-backs of ‘The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber’ (1936) with the beguiling, destabilizing interstices and perspectival shifts of ‘Cat in the Rain’ (1925) then one is forced to question even the assumption that Hemingway was ‘impeccably modernist’ within the corpus of his short fiction.

Some critics, well provided for by the many biographical studies of

¹Barth’s conspicuous non-mention occurs in ‘The Literature of Replenishment’, (1997, 193-206)

Hemingway, have worked to recuperate these evident inconsistencies within positivist developmental narratives of the author's career. Michael Boardman, for instance, argues that the variability of Hemingway's writing in the years following the publication of *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) was in part the result of his annoyance with readers who had failed to understand his earlier work. According to Boardman, Hemingway's response to criticism that his work represented a wilful and politically negligent 'avoidance of difficult social problems' (1992, 164) was to divide his readership into the 'worthies and the fools' (*ibid*, 147). The fools (largely, it would appear, subscribers to *Cosmopolitan* magazine) were unable to grasp the subtleties of his implicative method and so misconstrued his work as politically docile. The technical crudities of later stories such as 'Francis Macomber' (1936) are to be read, then, as expressions of Hemingway's anxious conviction that he would be misunderstood, that he could not trust his readers, and that he had to explain his meaning in spite of the cost artistically of such authorial intrusiveness.

Whether the technical shortcomings of 'Francis Macomber' are the product of authorial contempt, or compositional anxiety, or some other distant impulse, I am not concerned to pursue here. The imposition of the biographical metanarrative shifts attention unhelpfully away, I would suggest, from how Hemingway's modernism is configured textually. Of much more interest than any real life party against whom Hemingway may be said to have contrived is the notion of readership that his texts, especially the short fictions, construct for themselves. We saw in the preceding chapter how Joyce used the interrogative form to resist determinate constructions of meaning: he did not allow us to feel that in the climate of uncertainty pervading his stories we as readers were somehow in possession of a superior knowingness or point of view. Hemingway's stories, at their best, are similarly interdictive of our desires to impose interpretative unity. However, they differ from Joyce's texts in that their

interdictiveness takes the form of a structural irony in which closural certainties are established only to be subverted.

In the discussion which follows I will concentrate first of all on stories from *In Our Time*. My interest here will be in how a theory of interrogative short fiction can inform the controversy that has surrounded that text's generic classification, i.e. whether it is to be considered an anthology, a novel or a hybrid form. I will examine how the constituent stories subvert those readings that locate novelistic continuities of extent in *In Our Time*, and from this give some further consideration to the critical relationship between the novel and short story that I introduced in chapter 1. For the remainder of the chapter, I will consider a range of stories in which Hemingway exploits the interdictive and elliptical strategies of the form, and offer a re-reading of his much-quoted statement on 'omission' within my theory of interrogative short fiction.

Of sustaining interest to critics of *In Our Time* has been the difficulty of deciding on a generic grouping for the text. The stories that make up the volume are frequently anthologized as separate, self-sufficient works; yet at the same time it is obvious—especially with regard to the Nick Adams stories—that an awareness of their interdependence in the volume as a whole is crucial, even if each text is to be encountered distinctly. The interchapters, for a start, seem to offer some sort of unifying context, though precisely how they relate—if at all—to many of the stories is not clear. Simple contiguity generates other suggestive interrelations, especially so when we take account of the chronology that moves us from stories of boyhood, through adolescence, the experience of war and convalescence, to a certain reflective maturity. Add to this the recurring presence of Nick Adams and it is clear that *In Our Time* is more than an assembly of otherwise disunited texts.²

In his letters Hemingway showed irritation at the complacencies of

²On the general history of interrelated story collections and cycles see Luscher (1989) and Goldberg (1996)

editors and publishers who were insensitive to the importance of the arrangement of texts in the volume. In a letter to John Dos Passos, 22 April 1925, he complained of Liverright's desire to cut 'Indian Camp' and the interchapters, stressing the violation that would entail of the work as a whole: 'Jesus I feel all shot to hell about it. Of course they can't do it, because the stuff is so tight and hard and every thing hangs on every thing else and it would all just be shot up shit creek' (1981, 157). In his later correspondence with editor Maxwell Perkins concerning the preparation of *The First Forty-Nine Stories*, he again sought to defend the integrity of the text's organization: 'A book of stories,' he wrote, 'is just as much a unit as a novel. You get the overtones by the juxtaposition of the stories or by what you put in between them' (Brucoli 1996, 188).

Comments like these have led many critics to read *In Our Time* as an episodic *Bildungsroman* centring on the character of Nick Adams. Unfortunately, this has entailed suppressing the many contradictory and indeterminate elements generated by the constituent stories. Reading *In Our Time* as an episodic novel not only tends to reduce the disruptiveness of its structure but also invites interpretative abuses. The novelistic readings depend in particular on establishing thematic continuity through the wounded psychology of the Nick Adams character. As David J. Leigh puts it, 'the shifting relationships between the stories and interchapters...[are] a structural manifestation of the psychological coherence of the work' (1975, 2). The progression in that statement from 'shifting relationships' to 'coherence', from disruption to recuperation, exemplifies this approach. Leigh goes on to claim that the book's patterning is directly expressive of the 'existential neurosis' (*ibid*) from which Nick suffers. This centralizing of Nick's psychology is the main device by which Leigh and others make *In Our Time* cohere. Though only seven of the fourteen stories in the volume are explicitly about Nick, it is

liberally presumed that several others are about or 'by' him in all but name.³ Foremost among the novelistic critics is Philip Young, who compiled the volume *The Nick Adams Stories* (1972) in an effort to sort the incommodiously 'jumbled sequence' of Nick's adventures by restoring to them a 'coherence' which had hitherto been 'obscured' and 'fragmented' (Hemingway 1972, 5). In an essay originally intended as the introduction to the volume he argues that Nick Adams is readable as a continuous character whose developing psychology can be followed through five distinct stages from callow youth to contemplative maturity. For Young, Nick stands as 'the most important single character in all [Hemingway's] work' (1975, 31). In particular, he suggests that 'The End of Something' and 'The Three-Day Blow' 'are as closely related as chapters in a novel' (*ibid*, 40) and that the latter story completes and explains the former which is somewhat elliptical and evasive in meaning. In other words, the atomistic nature of the stories (if treated as stories) can be subsumed in a governing novelistic unity which situates them as 'chapters', as instalments in a developing series concerned with the 'unifying consciousness' (Moddelmog 1988) of Nick Adams. Young's desire is in effect to recuperate the short form for novelistic practice and for modes of reading which seek out patterns of character development and other structural coherences, to privilege novelistic serial continuities over the disparate, inconclusive properties of the short story.

Negotiating between these two approaches is a fraught matter. Hemingway himself was equivocal, apparently emphasizing both the continuity and discontinuity of *In Our Time*. In a letter to Maxwell Perkins concerning *The First Forty-Nine Stories* he insisted that the interchapters not be run together as a continuous narrative, in the way Perkins was proposing, that their effect

³Some critics even identify Nick Adams in stories in other collections. For instance, Phelan (1998) is confident that although the Nick in 'Now I Lay Me' is never given a surname, readers will 'automatically supply' that and the 'accompanying identity' (1998, 48).

depended upon 'the breaking apart that separate pages and the headings of chapters give' (Brucoli 1996, 262)⁴. Notwithstanding his excitement over the suggestive contiguities and patterns in the text, Hemingway was clearly determined that the stories from *In Our Time* retain their disruptive, discontinuous individuality. As he cautioned Ernest Walsh, '[i]f you mention it just call it short stories' (1981, 152).

Of course, it is possible to pursue some putative middle ground that accounts for the text as a hybrid. Examples of this approach can be found in Kruse (1967) and Slabey (1983). The problem with the hybrid theory, however, is not only that it tends to predetermine equilibrium between the two constitutive forms in the hybrid but that it implies that the purpose of their conjunction is to create a new unity from the existing dichotomy. The 'hybrid' theory merely reinstates coherence on different terms. It rules out the possibility that the conjunction might be disruptive of the preconceptions and expectations attaching to the two forms; it is insensitive to the reading that sees multiplicity of effect rather than unity of purpose in the text.

Each of these generic characterizations satisfies particular aspects of *In Our Time* but none is entirely sufficient. The reading of it as a simple anthology is clearly impoverished, but by the same token the novelistic approach suppresses the disruptiveness of the short story compositional method. The 'hybrid' argument is equally limiting (as such syntheses usually are) because of its attempt to resolve the complexity of formal relations in the text by invoking a principle of unity of purpose. Faced with this kind of critical uncertainty I am prompted to wonder if in fact the answer to the question is determinable at all, and whether we might not be able to embrace this uncertainty as something

⁴Nevertheless, E.R. Hagemann still seeks to do with the interchapters as Philip Young does with the Nick Adams stories by examining them 'as an artistic unit', arguing that they 'become an entity when rearranged chronologically' (1980, 255)

positively produced by the text. For it seems to me that the difficulty of *In Our Time* arises from the disruption of its narrative continuity by the interdictive and interstitial nature of the stories that comprise it. We are invited at various points in the text to enlarge upon the emotional and psychological development of Nick Adams, yet at the same time the naturally atomistic short story texts act to undermine this effort. In other words, I am suggesting that it is the aesthetic of the interrogative short fiction that causes the text to abdicate its novelistic unities.

The first four stories in *In Our Time*—‘Indian Camp’, ‘The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife’, ‘The End of Something’, ‘The Three-Day Blow’—are frequently treated as an episodic *Bildungsroman*. Readers seeking to understand *In Our Time* on novelistic terms take these stories as consecutive instalments tracing stages in Nick Adams’s psychological development from youth through to adolescence. Such an approach requires that we establish Nick as the centre about which each individual text coheres; his presence as a continuous character is the means by which unity is established.

The problem with this reading, however, is that it has the effect of eliding the dissident or non-successive elements generated by the short stories themselves. My contention is that the stories are in fact disruptive of the apparent invitation to read the text continuously. Consider the first two stories, ‘Indian Camp’, and ‘The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife’, which recount two separate scenarios in which Nick appears as a boy. The first tells of his accompanying his father, a doctor, to an Indian camp where a squaw is about to give birth. The labour is complicated and the doctor is required to improvise a caesarean section using, as he later boasts, ‘a jack-knife and sewing it up with nine-foot, tapered gut leaders’ ([1944] 1993, 88).⁵ After the birth it is discovered that the father of the new-born has slit his own throat. The discovery of the

⁵Hereafter abbreviated as *Stories*

suicide functions as a point of closure to the main action of the text, and it has something of what Hemingway called, in *Death in the Afternoon*, a ‘wow ending’ quality about it.⁶ The suicide is a startling turn, occasioning an abrupt revision of the father’s bravura and boasting. However, Hemingway refuses to allow this sensational turn of events to predominate. Rather, the story is prolonged in a contemplative dialogue between Nick and his father which, while seeming to analyse meanings in what has just happened, in fact is fashioned to restrict articulation and, through this, to complicate possible significances in the action:

‘Why did he kill himself, Daddy?’
‘I don’t know, Nick. He couldn’t stand things, I guess.’
‘Do many men kill themselves, Daddy?’
‘Not very many, Nick.’
‘Do many women?’
‘Hardly ever.’
‘Don’t they ever?’
‘Oh, yes. They do sometimes.’
‘Daddy?’
‘Yes.’
‘Where did uncle George go?’
‘He’ll turn up all right.’
‘Is dying hard, Daddy?’
‘No, I think it’s pretty easy, Nick. It all depends.’
They were seated in the boat, Nick in the stern, his father rowing. The sun was coming up over the hills. A bass jumped, making a circle in the water. Nick trailed his hand in the water. It felt warm in the sharp chill of the morning.
In the early morning on the lake sitting in the stern of the boat with his father rowing, he felt quite sure that he would never die.
(*Stories*, 88-9)

The dialogue clearly reveals aspects of the doctor’s character—his sense of a particularly male grief and vulnerability that is the price of fortitude and adventurism—but crucially it does not disclose anything of Nick’s understanding of what has happened. The reader sees the earlier posturing by the doctor (his joking about the make-shift caesarean, his description of the birth as a ‘little

⁶The description of the ‘wow’ ending comes in response to the Old Lady’s disappointment at the conclusion to a story the narrator has told her. ‘Ah, Madame,’ he explains, ‘it is years since I added the wow to the end of a story. Are you sure you are unhappy if the wow is omitted?’ ([1932] 1994, 160).

affair', his invitation to Nick to watch him stitch the wound, his claim not to hear the woman's screams 'because they are not important') now give way to regret and reflection and, even, an apology to Nick for having taken him to the camp in the first place. But any recognition or appraisal on Nick's part of the counterblast his father's self-appraisal has just suffered is conspicuously withheld. Nick asks questions that probe his father's earlier statements—about the suffering of men and, differently, of women—but it is not signalled whether he has acknowledged or even registered the exposure of his father in the way the reader has. The reader considers again Uncle George's tellingly ambivalent statement 'Oh, you're a great man, all right' (*Stories*, 88) but is not told how the central character, Nick, reads that statement and George's subsequent disappearance. The possible irony of George's words is neither certified nor refuted by Nick; instead the penultimate paragraph slips away in a description of the lake and the distractions of fish, details which may be functioning metaphorically but which are certainly evasive of the central questions the text itself is posing. The final paragraph then compounds the uncertainty by stating Nick's conviction that he will never die. How we read this statement depends on the extent to which we credit Nick with awareness of the corrosion of his father's image—about which the text is, of course, reticent. The construction of that final sentence seems to suggest that Nick's conviction that he will not die arises from the comforting, controlling presence of his father. But the text seems to be concerned with undermining the father's status, so is this statement perpetrating an irony against Nick? Or does his feeling that he will never die arise from his awareness of the weakness and fallibility of his father, from a realization that his father is not always right, will not always be alive, and cannot answer all his questions?

According to Thomas Strychacz, the doctor's answers to Nick's questions leave the boy feeling 'oddly content' (1996, 63), but how can

Strachacz know this? The point surely is that we are not privileged with access to Nick's thoughts. That closing statement is deliberately impercipient of Nick's perceptions. We do not know what he knows or understands of his father. The narrative creates a torsion between what we have seen of the doctor and what Nick is said to appreciate or acknowledge. As with Joyce's 'The Boarding House' and 'Clay', the text has withdrawn at the very point where collusion and explanation are sought

The characteristic procedures of the interrogative short story have an added dimension here because of the status of Nick as a quasi-novelistic character. The invitation to read *In Our Time* with Nick as its centre conflicts with the interrogative story aesthetic which typically resists such identifiable character continuities; the 'open' form of the story, with its concentrated uncertainties about Nick, works against the desire to read it as an instalment in a concerted character development. Nor is it simply, as is the case with the impressionist novel, that the various initially desynchronized 'scenes' will ultimately come together to form a total picture of Nick. Rather, the interstices in these stories will persist across the entire text.

As though to underline the refusal to centralize Nick as novelistic hero, the second story, 'The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife', confines him entirely to the periphery of the action. The story is intriguingly structured, with Nick appearing *after* the closural moment in the main action of the story. Once again there is a disjunction between the reader's sense of meaning in the text and what Nick is permitted to know. Our 'central' character remains on the ignorant margins of the text. The reader's understanding of the main action—the doctor's confrontation with Dick Boulton and his humiliating climb-down—delivers another 'lesson' about the father, but this time it is not simply that Nick's feelings go undisclosed but that he is excluded from the demonstration itself.

When Nick meets his father in the woods at the end of the story the scene

probes at possible metaphorical meanings lodged in the main action, but Nick, of course, has no notion of what has just occurred with his father and so cannot follow these suggestions. Thus we see the doctor's act of placing Nick's book in his pocket in relation to the medical journals that lie unopened in his bedroom and thought of which irritates him after the scene with Dick Boulton. The book furthermore alludes to his wife's telling treasury of texts: the Bible, *Science and Health, Quarterly*. The doctor's reaction to his humiliation was, of course, to reach for another kind of 'magazine': one full of shotgun shells. His ritualistic cleaning of his weapon hints at a latent violence, a suggestion furthered by the slamming of the screen door and his walking out into the cool of the woods to calm himself. The final scene reads:

He walked in the heat out the gate and along the path into the hemlock woods. It was cool in the woods even on such a hot day. He found Nick sitting with his back against a tree, reading.
'Your mother wants you to come and see her,' the doctor said.
'I want to go with you,' Nick said.
His father looked down at him.
'All right. Come on, then,' his father said. 'Give me the book, I'll put it in my pocket.'
'I know where there's black squirrels, Daddy,' Nick said.
'All right,' said his father. 'Let's go there.' (*Stories*, 96-7)

For the reader, following the shotgun scene, the 'hemlock woods' picks up on the suggestions of violence and suicide. Of course, in so elliptical a narrative these are suggestions only, but the important point is that we do not know if Nick comprehends their significance. Nick, our central character, has been excluded from the main action of the story. Thus he cannot know the emotional significance or indeed the irony in his approbation of his father ('I want to go with you'). Nor can he follow, as the reader does, the possible significance of his father's taking the book from him. The doctor—intellectual, reader—has encountered the will of male violence and found it beyond his control. His cleaning of the shotgun, his refusal of reading matter, can be seen then as an attempt to recover some sense of his own physicality. Nick's final comment about the squirrels is intriguing because it is unclear whether the interest is in

looking at them or hunting them. The reader can follow the trail of these possibilities in relation to the events of the story; Nick does not, or, rather, cannot. In other words, the reader is led into feeling that he knows more than Nick. But the all-important thing about which we know nothing is Nick himself. Our central character is benighted, a marginal figure in the text, but we are in the dark too about what he knows and feels and understands. Hemingway encourages us to believe that Nick is the central interest of the story: 'Nick's father' is how the doctor is referred to throughout. Yet not only is his centrality undermined by the interrogative story form that does not afford him familiarity with the events of his own narrative, we as readers are led towards an interdictive blank centre. What does Nick know and feel about his father's loss of face, his latent violence, his impotent rage? What does his approbation of his father signify? And is it approbation, or pity, or fear? That which matters most in this story—the centre to which we are led to believe everything tends—is not articulated.

Those critics who would argue for the continuity of *In Our Time* as a novel are required to suppress this troubling indeterminacy. Thus, Joseph M. Flora, in his reading of 'The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife', cannot reconcile his desire to read Nick as a developing consciousness with the story's glaring evasion of Nick and ends up trying to fill the gaps and secure the novelistic structure with his own extra-textual adhesive. 'Nick,' Flora suggests, 'probably witnesses the scene of his father's humiliation in the confrontation with Nick Boulton, though the narrator never mentions Nick's presence and Nick speaks no words' (1989, 18). This startling act of wishful thinking is the result of a failure to acknowledge the disruptive uncertainties created by the interrogative short form. With *In Our Time* we are not reading chapters in a novel but a series of autonomous texts; and it is this autonomy, this ability of the short story to generate contrary signals, cutting across the continuous novel form, which gives

the text its radical appeal.

The interdictiveness of 'The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife', its refusal to disclose that information which it itself creates the desire for, exemplifies the structure of *In Our Time* as a whole. Functioning against our desires to read for coherence and determinacy in the text are the indeterminate and interrogative constituent stories. As Beckett puts it in another connection, 'the units of continuity have abdicated their unity' (1983, 49). Had Hemingway inserted the generic designation 'novel' in what Derrida calls, in 'The Law of Genre', that 'most peculiar place' (1992, 232) below the title, then we would be justified in recuperating these uncertainties and inconsistencies for our continuity reading. But he did not, and the fact that he did not needs to be validated in our readings.

The two stories set in Nick's adolescence, 'The End of Something' and 'The Three-Day Blow', consisting of an account of Nick's break up with Marjorie followed by a partial recitation of that event through an analysis of possible reasons for it, are usually cited in support of a novelistic reading of *In Our Time*. Philip Young goes as far as to assert that the stories are 'as closely related as chapters in a novel' (1975, 40), suggesting that the first requires the second in order to reveal its full meaning. What controls Young's reading here is the assumption that the second story exists in order to elucidate and augment the first, that there is a continuity between them of the sort achieved by chapters in a novel. What 'The Three-Day Blow' seems to offer is an exploration of Nick's motivations in breaking with Marjorie, an expansion on the shifting, laconic vagueness of his explanations to her. According to the novelistic reading, 'The Three-Day Blow' arises principally from the insufficiency of Nick's account of himself in 'The End of Something'. The presumption is that as a novelistic hero Nick's motivations and psychology require amplification, not concealment in the diffusions and lacunae of a short story. The indirectness of 'The End of Something' on this matter is an irritant to the novelistic reading.

'The Three-Day Blow' seems at first sight to deliver a consolidatory elaboration of Nick's character when his friend Bill begins to supply in the process of their conversation possible justifications and explanations for Nick's actions. Nick, however, is notably non-committal in respect of any of Bill's suggestions:

'It was the only thing to do. If you hadn't, by now you'd be back home working trying to get enough money to get married.'

Nick said nothing.

'Once a man's married he's absolutely bitched,' Bill went on.

'He hasn't got anything more. Nothing. Not a damn thing.

He's done for. You've seen the guys that get married.'

Nick said nothing.

'You can tell them,' Bill said. 'They get this sort of married look. They're done for.'

'Sure,' said Nick.

'It was probably bad busting it off,' Bill said. 'But you always fall for someone else and then it's all right. Fall for them but don't let them ruin you.'

'Yes,' said Nick. (*Stories*, 115-6)

Once again, Nick's consciousness has been occluded. When the story does retail his thoughts on the matter it is only to restate the facts of the case: 'It was all gone. All he knew was that he had once had Marjorie and that he had lost her. She had gone and he had sent her away' (116). The reader coming to 'The Three-Day Blow', as Philip Young suggests we do, the better to understand 'The End of Something' will be disappointed: the interstices which impeded the novelistic centralization of Nick in 'The End of Something' are only multiplied here. Furthermore, the turn in Nick's resolution with which the story concludes amounts, I would suggest, to a refutation of the whole idea of these stories as significant episodes in the *Bildungsroman* of Nick. 'The Three-Day Blow' ends with the realization that 'Nothing was finished. Nothing was ever lost' (118). This both promises a continuation of the Marjorie affair (which, of course, will never be related to us) and a refutation of the controlling thematic of the two stories expressed in the title 'The End of Something'. Nothing has ended; there is no egress on offer here. Rather, we are presented at the end with a reinstatement, another beginning which, in this highly interstitial text, will not be

got beyond.

Some critics, such as Kruse (1967), Putnam (1984) and Comley and Scholes (1998), have sought to establish the unity of these two stories by reading the historical account of Hortons Bay given at the beginning of 'The End of Something' as 'a poetic metaphor against which the story of Nick and Marjorie resonates' (Putnam 1984, 74). The metaphorical reading arises, oddly, from the conviction that the Hortons Bay history is anomalous and excessive, a violation of the balanced unity and purposefulness of the short story. Underlying this conviction, of course, is an established ontology of the short form that argues, after Poe, that everything in it should tend towards a single effect. The Hortons Bay narrative is spurious according to this theory and a way must be found of recuperating it or the story will be deemed to be flawed. Hence the metaphorical reading, the normalizing of the Hortons Bay story as an 'analogue for the subsequent plot' involving Nick and Marjorie (Kruse 1967, 156).

It is strange considering Hemingway's modernity that anyone should read the Hortons Bay passage as though it were a piece of Hardy-esque historical contextualization, placing the immediate drama of the story within a latitudinal frame of reference. But that is precisely what Kruse, Putnam and others do. Challenged by the seeming disparity of the Hortons Bay account they contrive a method by which it can be made to 'belong'. I would suggest that rather than seek to resolve it as a metaphor, we can read the Hortons Bay account in such a way as to sustain its curiosity, to acknowledge as meaningful its mark of non-belonging. Here is the passage in its entirety:

In the old days Hortons Bay was a lumbering town. No one who lived in it was out of sound of the big saws in the mill by the lake. Then one year there were no more logs to make lumber. The lumber schooners came into the bay and were loaded with the cut of the mill that stood stacked in the yard. All the piles of lumber were carried away. The big mill building had all its machinery that was removable taken out and hoisted on board one of the schooners by the men who had worked in the mill. The schooner moved out of the bay toward the open lake carrying two great saws, the travelling carriage that hurled the

logs against the revolving, circular saws and all the rollers, wheels, belts and iron piled on a hull-deep load of lumber. Its open hold covered with canvas and lashed tight, the sails of the schooner filled and it moved out into the open lake, carrying with it everything that had made the mill a mill and Hortons Bay a town.

The one-story bunk houses, the eating-house, the company store, the mill offices, and the big mill itself stood deserted in the acres of sawdust that covered the swampy meadow by the shore of the bay.

Ten years later there was nothing of the mill left except the broken white limestone of its foundations showing through the swampy second growth as Nick and Marjorie rowed along the shore. (*Stories*, 101)

The history of Hortons Bay is here presented as a unilinear narrative, or what Gerald Prince in *A Grammar of Stories* terms a 'minimal story'. According to Prince the minimal story 'consists of three conjoined events' the first and third of which are 'stative' while the second is 'active' (1973, 31). The events are 'conjoined by conjunctive features in such a way that (a) the first event precedes the second in time and the second precedes the third, and (b) the second causes the third' (*ibid*). One example Prince offers is: 'John was rich, then he lost a lot of money, then, as a result, he was poor' (*ibid*, 24). Notice that the final event represents a reversal of the first. The Hortons Bay history accords with these minimal story criteria: the town was rich on lumbering revenue (stative), then there were no more logs to lumber (active), therefore the mill and its dependant businesses fell away (stative reversal). The minimal story type clearly leads towards decisive closure, and I would suggest that this is its function in relation to the episodes concerning Nick and Marjorie. Rather than presenting simply a background analogy to that story, as Kruse and Putnam would have it, the Hortons Bay account offers a model of narrative closure from which Hemingway has the Nick and Marjorie narrative aberrate. The description of everything being taken from Hortons Bay on the schooner is picked up with Marjorie's departure by boat at the conclusion to 'The End of Something'. That title and that allusion, however, are undermined by 'The Three-Day Blow' which re-establishes, as we have seen, the viability of the relationship. All that is resolute

and conclusive about the Hortons Bay history is refuted by the irresolution of the Nick and Marjorie story. The passage's non-belonging is in fact quite real: it represents a model which is never obeyed, a discursive form which is everywhere countered.

In a discussion of Prince's notion of the 'minimal story', Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan cites as a counter-example a prototypical modernist short story, Chekhov's 'Lady With Lapdog', offering the following paraphrase of it: 'Gurov meets Anna Sergeyevna in Yalta, then they have an affair, then he returns to his family in Moscow, she to her husband in a provincial town, then Gurov goes to seek her out, then they resume their affair in Moscow' (1983, 19). Chekhov's text, Rimmon-Kenan observes, suppresses the causal connections between events. Furthermore, the chain of events 'does not display any obvious inversion or closed cycle: the state of affairs at the end is different from the initial one, but they are not symmetrically related (the characters are not 'happy' as opposed to 'unhappy' or vice-versa)' (*ibid*). The same might be said of Nick and Marjorie's relationship in Hemingway's two stories. What Hemingway does that Chekhov does not, however, is provide the reader with the model 'symmetrical' narrative from which his texts subsequently diverge. Just as his stories court novelistic continuities only to disrupt them, so determinate narrative models are instated in order to be refuted by the host texts.

The determinate/indeterminate opposition arises because Hemingway is using interrogative short forms to counteract narrative models of resolution, closure and continuity. This is interesting in the first place because it demonstrates clearly how the interrogative story functions. But more significantly, it indicates a resistance to the kind of reading (and writing) that seeks to determine meaning in texts. What the novelistic readers do is seek to establish the continuities of *In Our Time* at the expense of the disunifying omissions and reversals in the constituent stories. In other words, they do not

recognize the disruptive plurality of the interrogative form. Precisely this kind of reader seems to me to be the target of Hemingway's text.

Applying this argument to the issue of genre, I mentioned earlier how Hemingway does not offer an explicit designation for *In Our Time* anywhere in the text. That is, he does not seek to pre-determine our reception of it. For many, this reticence is a challenge, like the gaps and silences in Joyce's stories, to produce a defining taxonomy. But perhaps the point about *In Our Time* is that it evades this effort. I do not just mean that it is an unclassifiable text in genre terms, rather that its resistance to determinate readings is partly what it is about. What the novelistic readings do is follow the text's genre marks: the insertion of the nomination 'Chapter' between episodes, for example, the consistent naming of a principal character, the apparent undertaking to follow through a chronology, all condition the reading of the text as novelistic in purpose and effect. As Jonathan Culler says, these genre marks are the means by which we relate a story 'to a series of other stories, identif[y] it with the conventions of a genre' (1981, 115): so 'Once upon a time', for example, establishes certain expectations that the text will 'have a point to it, a moral which will govern the organization of detail and incident' (*ibid*). The genre marks in Hemingway's text operate in the same way, arousing expectations of a novelistic entailment, but the interrogative components elude this teleological structure. As with the Joycean story's refusal to provide the information which it has itself created the desire for, so Hemingway's short fiction invites a mode of reading only to interdict that mode's contingencies and insufficiencies. The novelistic genre-marks and the closural narrative models seem to promise access to a kind of determinate discursive practice. However, the constituent stories confound this expectation. The enduring dispute over the generic classification of *In Our Time* arises from the conflicting and irreconcilable signals that the text sends out. As with Joyce, we need to recognize that this instability is the desired product of the

interrogative form in which Hemingway is working and not seek to explain it away. The cultivated indeterminacies of *Dubliners* and *In Our Time* are not to be superseded by some finally determinate reading of them. The reader is not placed in that position of superiority in relation to these texts. Indeed, in Hemingway's case it is precisely this readerly presumption that matters will be made determinable that is subject to interdiction. Once again the interrogative short form requires that we validate the plural constitution of the text.

That Hemingway himself valued this condition of undecidability is made clear in his essay, 'The Art of the Short Story'. Written in 1959, this piece was originally intended as a preface to a projected student's edition of his short stories. Discussing his story 'Fifty Grand' he tells of how he there introduces two women characters only to drop them again, seemingly without consequence or significance. He writes to his student readers caddishly:

This is unlike what you will hear from your instructors, that if a broad comes into a story in the first paragraph, she must reappear later to justify her original presence. This is untrue, gentlemen. You may dispense with her, just as in life. It is also untrue that if a gun hangs on the wall when you open up the story, it must be fired by page fourteen. The chances are, gentlemen, that if it hangs upon the wall, it will not even shoot...Yes, the unfireable gun may be a symbol. That is true. But with a good enough writer, the chances are some jerk just hung it there to look at. Gentlemen, you can't be sure. Maybe he is queer for guns, or maybe an interior decorator put it there. Or both (1990, 4).

Hemingway here argues against the normative aesthetic of the short form which states not only that 'everything must count' but that it must do so in accountable ways. He demands the freedoms of inconsequentiality, subjunctivism, interrogativeness. His reference to Chekhov's famous dictum is interesting because it involves freeing the details of narrative from any obligation to securely signify. He values as the best kind of story writing that which eludes the teleological structure of symbolism—i.e. the means by which each element is index-linked to a total meaning in the text. We saw the same desire for plurisignificance throughout Joyce's stories, despite the best efforts of his

readers and critics to impose interpretative confinements. Hemingway, furthermore, does not want there to be a choice of more or less determinate readings of his texts: as he says at the end of the passage, it is not a case of either/or but of 'both' interpretative possibilities being maintained at the same time—possibilities both inextricable *and* immiscible. Notably, Hemingway assumes that readerly acumen will run counter to such a radical programme, that certainties of symbol and significance will, inevitably and irrepressibly, be sought. As I have suggested in my readings above, it is against this construct of readerly inclination that the short story discontinuities in *In Our Time* are perpetrated.

At this juncture it is appropriate, I think, to consider how my reading of *In Our Time* might impinge upon that most durable of controversies surrounding the definition of the short story as a genre, namely its relationship to the novel. In chapter 1 I described how in nineteenth-century England the dominance of the novel largely explains the tardiness of writers in embracing the interrogative short story there until the 1890s. This notion of the novel as dominant is picked up by Mary Louise Pratt in a challenging essay, 'The Short Story: The Long and the Short of It'. Pratt argues that the novel is by necessity, rather than as a result of historical contingency, the preeminent prose form; the short story and the novel, she says, occupy a relation not of 'contrasting equivalents' but 'a hierarchical one with the novel on top and the short story dependent' (1994, 96). Pratt's 'conceptual' validation for this is that 'shortness cannot be an intrinsic property of anything, but occurs only relative to something else' (*ibid*). She goes on to say that historically the novel has prevailed because it is self-evidently 'the more powerful and prestigious of the two genres', with the short story the 'training or practice ground' for the apprentice novelist (*ibid*, 96-7). The attempts by theorists since Brander Matthews to establish what are the unique properties of the short form should now, Pratt contends, give way to a

recognition of the 'dependent (rather than interdependent) relation between short story and novel' (*ibid*, 98).

Lurking behind Pratt's thesis is a somewhat populist appeal to the fact that many writers begin their careers with a collection of short fictions before moving on to the reputation-making business of writing novels. This phenomenon is not, of course, unique to the twentieth-century: as we saw in chapter 1 the rise in popularity of the short story in Victorian England was in part fuelled by the demand from publishers for a low-investment testing ground for talent that might find its full expression in longer work.⁷ But it is certainly the case that throughout this century the 'pattern of working in the short story, building a reputation, and advancing to the novel' (Barth 1973, 123) has been a common one. Indeed, it is a struggle to name very many writers of note whose careers and reputations have rested solely on short fiction. In English the list would not run much beyond Katherine Mansfield, Frank O'Connor, Donald Barthelme, Raymond Carver, and Alice Munro.

More serious objections to Pratt's argument, however, concern her claim that the relationship between the two forms is one of 'dependence' rather than 'interdependence'. She states that '[t]he novel has through and through conditioned both the development of the short story and the critical treatment of the short story, but the reverse is not so' (1994, 96). There are two problems here, one theoretical, the other historical. In the first place, Pratt is putting forward a principle of non-contamination of the novel by the short story. She sees the novel as self-sufficient, a totality, with the short form dependent or supplementary to it. As Derrida has pointed, however, the notion of a totality based on this kind of expulsion, or 'supplementation', is illogical: the very presence of the supplement corrupts the idea that we are dealing with a self-

⁷A comparative study of the importance of periodical publishing in the establishment of the American short story in the 1850s can be found in Marler (1994).

sufficient totality at all.⁸ The principle of non-contamination is already compromised.

Arising from this theoretical demurral is the historical objection that short fiction was indeed conceived of by modernist writers as distinct in theory, practice and effect from the novel, and that in many cases the short story became the aesthetic model by which novelistic practice was revolutionized, rather than the other way around. Dominic Head points out, in his contestation of Pratt's essay, that both *Ulysses* and *Mrs Dalloway* began life as short stories (1992, 6), an observation that probably confirms Pratt's thesis if anything, as it suggests that the story version was preparatory merely to the novels. Of far more significance in the case of Woolf is the extent to which short fiction led her out of the 'exercise in the conventional style' of her early novels. She wrote to Ethyl Smyth of the story 'An Unwritten Novel':

[That] was the great discovery...That—again in one second—
showed me how I could embody all my deposit of experience in
a shape that fitted it—not that I have ever reached that end; but
anyhow I saw, branching out of the tunnel I made, when I
discovered that method of approach, Jacobs Room, Mrs
Dalloway etc—How I trembled with excitement; and then
Leonard came in, and I drank my milk, and concealed my
excitement, and wrote I suppose another page of that
interminable Night and Day (which some say is my best book)
(1975-80, IV: 231)

That Woolf conceived of her major experimental novels from the practice of writing radical short fictions is surely evidence at least of *interdependence* between the two forms. Her diary entry for 26 January 1920 (a few months before she began work on *Jacob's Room*) confirms the importance of her discoveries in the short story for the writing of her novels. She tells there of how she 'arrived at some idea of a new form for a new novel. Suppose one thing should open out of another—as in *An Unwritten Novel*—not only for 10 pages but for 200 or so...' (1978, II: 13). This new kind of novel will be marked by its

⁸See 'Plato's Pharmacy' (1981, 61-171) and '...That Dangerous Supplement...' (1992, 78-109)

interstices and structural occlusions: it will bear ‘no scaffolding; hardly a brick to be seen’:

Then I’ll find room for so much—a gaiety—an inconsequence—a light spirited stepping at my own sweet will. Whether I’m sufficiently mistress of things—that’s the doubt; but conceive ‘Mark on the Wall’, ‘Kew Gardens’ and unwritten novel taking hands and dancing in unity (*ibid*, 13-14)

The effectiveness of the inconsequential narrative sequence was revealed to Woolf through her experimentation with the short story, itself the result of what she described in *Moments of Being* as her ‘scenic’ manner of recollection.⁹ The ‘little separate incidents which one lived one by one’ that Mrs Ramsay considers in *To the Lighthouse* might well describe the episodic, ‘scenic’ structure of *Jacob’s Room*. That these episodes could remain as self-sufficient narratives in Woolf’s mind is borne out by the story ‘A Woman’s College From Outside’ which originally formed a chapter in *Jacob’s Room* but which subsequently was removed and allowed to stand as a story in its own right. That it could do so suggests a process of composition the reverse of the dependence relation Pratt argues for. If anything, the interrogative short fiction was the controlling generic model in Woolf’s manner of seeing, remembering and writing.

Pratt’s assertion that the short form has never altered the theory or practice of the novel is confounded not only by the inherent falsity of the non-contamination principle but by the practice of modernist writers. Indeed, one can see how important interrogative short fiction would be for modernism’s attack on teleological structuration, temporality and causality in narrative. In Hemingway’s case, short fiction was the form in which he explored effects of textual indeterminacy and epistemological doubt. As Updike indicates above, Hemingway’s radical formalism is to be found in his short texts rather than his novels, a point reaffirmed recently by Paul Smith who goes as far as to suggest

⁹‘I could collect a great many more floating incidents—scenes in Kensington Gardens...What then has remained interesting? Again those moments of being’ (1976, 77-8).

that the stories were responsible for ‘transforming...the way American writers tell stories’ (1998, 1). What I would argue is that this distinction between Hemingway’s novels and his stories is critically configured in *In Our Time*, where the novelistic continuities of identity and extent are challenged by the occlusions and indeterminacies of the interrogative short form. The notion of the short story as docile dependant is invalidated by this central modernist text.

It is important to acknowledge, I think, that there are stories in *In Our Time* in which Hemingway falls short of achieving the kind of fiction he praises so highly in the letter to the students quoted above. Notably, however, these are stories which divert most markedly from the Nick Adams character and so lack that critical interaction with novelistic continuities. Those less successful stories are constrained by precisely the sort of modest impressionism Hemingway is critical of and depend for their effects upon often simplistic ironies and inversions. ‘Mr and Mrs Elliot’, for instance, tropes on the idea of pre-nuptial purity—‘He wanted to keep himself pure so that he could bring to his wife the same purity of mind and body that he expected of her’ (*Stories*, 153)—only to have that purity translated into sterility within the marriage, with a young girlfriend functioning as surrogate child for the wife while the husband’s nights are spent fathering poems away from the marital bed. ‘A Very Short Story’ and ‘The Revolutionist’ avoid the ‘wow ending’ only by replacing it with a crudely self-conscious bathos. The former concludes: ‘A short time after he contracted gonorrhoea from a girl in a loop department store while riding in a taxicab through Lincoln Park’ (*Stories*, 136), while the revolutionist, proclaiming the eve of global insurrection, finds himself ignominiously jailed by, of all nationalities, the Swiss (*Stories*, 150). ‘Soldier’s Home’ plays on the convalescent suggestiveness of that title to work out its metaphor of confinement and impotence, expressed ultimately in the image of the soldier going to watch his young sister play indoor baseball! (*Stories*, 146). In these stories, Hemingway

fails to outwit the summary symbolic reading he himself is critical of in 'The Art of the Short Story'. He achieves none of the plurisignificance and indeterminacy in these stories of which he says the 'good enough' writer should be capable.

Where Hemingway does attain to his own ideal of the short story, it is by virtue of his omitting from the text any governing symbolism or thematic fixtures. In these texts there are no riddles or reversals that can be readily assimilated by the vigilant reader. As with Joyce, the reader is not set in pursuit of a buried key that he can then use to unlock the secret of the text's meaning. Rather the very orientational material that would allow us to ascribe determinate meaning is occluded. In this way the stories become interrogative rather than just 'open' or inconclusive.

A useful text to illustrate how Hemingway achieves interrogativeness is 'Out of Season'. As is well known, this story originally carried an ending in which the main character Peduzzi committed suicide. Hemingway's subsequent omission of that ending was a crucial stage in his engagement with the short story, as he explained in *A Moveable Feast*:

It was a very simple story called 'Out of Season' and I had omitted the real ending of it which was that the old man hanged himself. This was omitted on my new theory that you could omit anything if you knew what you omitted and the omitted part would strengthen the story and make people feel something more than they understood ([1964] 1994, 63-4)

If we apply that ending to the story as it stands then we can see how significant the omission is in confounding our efforts to ascribe a thematic or symbolic order to the text. Peduzzi's suicide would make details such as his elaborate greetings (which go unreciprocated), his reiteration of 'tomorrow', his joy at the thought that '[d]ays like this stretched out ahead' (*Stories*, 170), significant as ironies. The young man's hesitation about joining Peduzzi the next day would become a focus for the story's moralism, as would his giving Peduzzi four lire instead of five in response to what would be his last request. The young man's mysterious argument with his wife might then, by its very lack of foundation, be

construed as mildly shameful in the company of so blighted a life as Peduzzi's. The couple's promising youth ('young gentleman', 'girl' etc.) would contrast with his defeated maturity. His daughter's seeming disregard for her father as the three pass her house would hint at a motive for his action, and perhaps for his upset at the departure of the young wife. We can go on attributing significance to the details of the narrative this way if we include the original ending: it becomes a unifying force in the text. If we omit it, however, we find ourselves at a loss to secure any such meaning in the story. The omission sacrifices, as one critic has said, 'the logic of traditional narrative and rhetorical modes in order to present the incoherence and incompleteness of action' (Strychacz 1996, 60). As with the Nick Adams stories, the text presupposes that we will as readers seek out significance and determinacy. The story is constructed in such a way as to lay these trails, courting expectations of finality or resolution, only to divert from them.

Paul Smith has suggested that 'Out of Season' is structured in such a way as to centralize the conversation that takes place between the young couple in the hotel. He derives a weight-centred ABCBA symmetry from the text: Peduzzi and husband together (A), walk to the hotel (B), couple's conversation alone in hotel (C), walk to the river (B), Peduzzi and husband together (A) (1996, 43). This is interesting because that central scene—the conversation between the couple—is marked out as perversely enigmatic: 'I'm sorry I talked the way I did at lunch. We were both getting at the same thing from different angles' (*Stories*, 167). What thing? What angles? The scene is wilfully interstitial, creating a desire for information that the text refuses to supply. With significance displaced from the ending we may look for another ordering centre to the text, and if we light on the conversation between the couple, as we seem to be invited to do, what we find is simply another gap-site, a scene which remains interstitial in itself and indeterminate in relation to the rest of the text. Indeed, we may feel,

if we are intent on unifying the story, that the conversation scene contains a surplus of signification: it raises questions which the text will fail to resolve or even engage with. The unity reader will be left uneasy and speculating, feeling more than is understood. As Hemingway desired, the text will have resisted its reader.

'Big Two-Hearted River' is another story from which Hemingway withheld the original expository conclusion. Composed in the three months to August 1924, it took another three months of rewriting for 'Big Two-Hearted River' to realize its final published form (Smith, P. 1996, 42). The revisions involved removing a long concluding passage in which Nick Adams meditates on writing and on subjects which figure in other stories in *In Our Time*, such as marriage and bullfighting. The omission of this material also meant that it was no longer possible to establish Nick as the narrator of 'My Old Man'. Again, Hemingway seems to have been intent on disrupting emergent continuities in his text. Philip Young, however, recovers the omitted passage for his novelistic enterprise, *The Nick Adams Stories*, printing it as a separate piece entitled 'On Writing'. Whereas the published version of the story concludes with a descriptive account of catching and gutting trout which is abstemious in respect of interiority or psychological contextualization of Nick's actions, the omitted ending involves the surface action of the narrative in a retrospective of the other stories along with some contemplation of the art of writing. We are presented, in other words, with an ending to which the detailed deferrals of the preceding narrative can be seen as tending. The laboured detail, the apparent descriptive excess which characterizes the story and which has appeared to lack function in plot terms is now made meaningful: Nick has been learning to write, learning 'to write about country so it would be there like Cézanne had done it in painting' (Hemingway 1972, 239). The text has been an argument in support of a thesis which is now revealed.

In the published version of the story, this significance is withheld. As Scott Fitzgerald stated in a review in May 1926, the story is unusual because it has 'no tail, no sudden change of pace at the end to throw into relief what has gone before' (Meyers 1982, 72). Fitzgerald senses the way in which the story continues at its end to defer significance, to refuse to unify or 'throw into relief', all which has gone before. The omitted ending would have provided that significance, hence its attraction to Young and his project. Hemingway, conscious of refuting such reading practice, thought better of it.

Michael Boardman has suggested that the highly interstitial nature of 'Big Two-Hearted River' was the result of Hemingway's 'complete trust in his reader': the text is so 'open' that the author depends on his reader to close its circle, and that, for Boardman, is a relationship of trust (1992, 149). Implicit in this reading is the notion that the text is a puzzle missing a piece, and that when that piece is supplied (by the reader) the puzzle can be solved. Furthermore, it is assumed that Hemingway 'trusts' his reader to locate and identify the vital, occluded element. Such an assumption underlies the multitude of readings of Hemingway's stories which seek to break their symbolic and semantic codes, to order their dissonances and disunities and secure the significance of their parts. I am arguing that, on the contrary, Hemingway's short story practice is marked by a decided hostility to interpretative activities and of what they bring by way of expectation to the site of the text. Hence the impedances perpetrated against benignly novelistic readings of *In Our Time* and the stated resistance to the kind of story in which symbolism and meaning can readily be fixed.

'Hills Like White Elephants' (published in *Men Without Women*, 1927) demonstrates how 'positive' shortness for Hemingway involved removing from his text whatever material would be restrictive of its plurality. The most obvious way in which it does this is by refusing to make explicit the topic around which the couple are circling in their fraught dialogue. By inference it is generally

assumed that they are discussing the possibility of her having an abortion. Now, critics have long noted that Hemingway likes to insert textual blanks like this in his stories, blanks which, as Hubert Zapf puts it, 'have an appellative function, calling upon the reader's activity to supply the missing context' (1990, 96). Zapf goes on to describe how throughout Hemingway's short fiction we are called upon in this way to 'interpret implicit, ambiguous, or incomplete textual information' (ibid, 97). But if we do supply the 'abortion' theme, does that really solve anything for us in relation to this story?

My difficulty is with Zapf's critical vocabulary, this notion that the text is 'calling' us to 'supply' something that's 'missing', to reconstruct through interpretation an 'incomplete' entity. Suppose we do supply that absent fact and state that the couple are discussing an abortion. What would that explain? '[O]ne could go on forever inventing the situations that might lie behind the dialogue' Milan Kundera has said of 'Hills Like White Elephants' (1995, 125). Quite so. For example, who are the couple? Are they married? Is she his mistress? Assuming that an abortion is what they are discussing—and it is never explicitly confirmed by the text—is it his child? Is she resistant to his idea of an abortion or is it she who has decided on that course of action and is now tested by conscience or doubt? Does he want her to have the abortion for his own selfish reasons or is he being supportive of her in the belief that, as he says, it will be to her good? What is the extent of irony in any one utterance? In all the utterances and gestures made by the couple we lack any adverbial mediation, any sense of how—and consequently why—what is said gets said. How, for instance, do we read her words, 'I was having a fine time'? or his, 'It's really an awfully simple operation, Jig'? Is she being sarcastic or regretful, scathing or loving? Are his words manipulative or are they comforting in recognition of her fears? And are they even talking about the same thing in exchanges like this:

'You've got to realize,' he said, 'that I don't want you to do it if you don't want to? I'm perfectly willing to go through with it'

if it means anything to you?
'Doesn't it mean anything to you? We could get along.'
'Of course it does. But I don't want anybody but you. I don't
want any one else. And I know it's perfectly simple.'
'Yes, you know it's perfectly simple' (265)

His first 'it' appears to relate to the operation. But what of his second and third 'it's'? Is he saying he's willing to go through with the abortion or the pregnancy? And does the 'it' in 'if it means anything to you' refer to the putative foetus or to his willingness to 'go through with it', whatever that 'it' is? Her question then—'Doesn't it mean anything to you?'—might refer to the foetus, and her subsequent 'We could get along' to her considering the possibility of life with a child. Alternatively, she may be angered by his deferring all responsibility for the decision to her, in which case she would be probing angrily, as in 'Doesn't it mean *anything* to you?'. Her suggestion that they could get along might be said calmly, after some pause, and mean 'we could try not to argue'. His final speech indicates that he thinks she means the pregnancy not the abortion by her 'it'. But it's not clear that she means that, and so this might be typical of his misunderstanding her or lacking compassion for what she would have to endure in having an abortion. His statement that he wants only her, no one else, might strike her as selfish, in which case her final remark that *he* knows it's simple involves not only sarcasm but an appropriation by her of what she takes to be his sense of 'it' in 'it's perfectly simple'.

More generally, what do we know of his worries and fears? Are they of the pregnancy? the abortion? the relationship? It might be suggested that in her white elephants simile the woman is betraying her susceptibility to 'fantasies, emotions, and impressions' (Smiley 1990, 290), while the man's reaction to it betrays his insistence on 'facts and proofs' (*ibid*). However, as Kundera points out, her 'metaphor-find' can as easily be read as 'mannerism, precocity, affectation' while his coolness may be a necessary and helpful reserve (1995,126-7).

As with the contradictory interpretations of *Dubliners*, there are so many

possibilities in reading this story that we have to wonder if the act of reading itself is not the subject here. When the man says ‘It’s really an awfully simple operation’, that ‘it’ is exophoric, relating to something which exists outside of what is related to us. The dialogue we witness is a weightless, repetitive litany—‘I’m fine’, ‘I know’, ‘It’s all right’—because all meaningful explorations of the predicament have been undertaken hitherto, in the pre-textual past, as it were. We are merely given a recapitulation of sentiments, persuasions, explanations and devices that have already been devalued in the minds of the participants and which will not, accordingly, be elaborated for our interpretative benefit. We encounter this text after the fact. All that matters in the story, between the couple, we simply do not get to know.

Given the impossibility of any definitive penetration of this text, given our marginal status, our ignorance in relation to the story’s discursive situation, it seems to me that the idea that we are there to ‘complete’ or ‘supply’ missing parts, that the story shows a ‘trust’ in its reader who ‘shares certain beliefs and knowledge’ (Boardman 1992, 149), rather misses the point. The interpretative activity of the reader is being mocked by a text whose indulgent plurality puts its beyond the realm of determinate reading. Our assumption that we can scrutinize it for meaning is what this text resists: we are detained at the level of the signifier, unable to push through to an appraisal of the signified. Even the story’s single linguistic innovation, the one thing the couple say to one another that they have not already said and found wanting as a solution to their predicament—in other words, the one utterance whose referent exists within the text and not in some undisclosed extra-textual situation—does not remain constant. Early on the girl backs away from the image altogether: ‘They don’t really look like white elephants. I just meant the coloring of their skin through the trees’ (263). Or does she back away? That second sentence may mean that the hills look white the way elephant skin looks white when glimpsed through

the contrasting green of trees. If it doesn't mean this, then she has not backed away from her metaphor at all as she is still maintaining that the mountains have 'skin' that looks like the skin of elephants. This complexity is intensified further by her substituting the word 'mountains' for 'hills', which inflects the later use of 'mountains' in a scene apparently connoting fertility and growth, and by the couple's agreement that if she has the operation 'it will be nice again' if she says things are like white elephants (264). The rhetorical riddle of the hills/mountains is finally 'solved' only by having them disappear altogether from the story, behind a 'later, sadder kind of landscape' (Hollander 1985, 215). If there is a 'white elephant' in this story it is the simile 'hills like white elephants'.

Kundera's essay on this story is particularly relevant to my study of short fiction because of its opposition to what Kundera terms 'kitsch-making interpretation' (1995, 145), that is, the sort of criticism that throws a 'veil of commonplaces' (*ibid*, 146) over the complex singularity of the text. Of course, all self-respecting criticism tries to avoid summary reductiveness, but Kundera's finer point is that we should be able to recognize the elusive plurality—the indeterminate 'present' as he terms it—of texts. Kundera's own analysis of 'Hills Like White Elephants' does not, significantly, involve raising an interpretation of the story's meaning. In fact, he makes a point of working through a pre-existing interpretation of the story (by Hemingway's biographer Jeffrey Meyers) not to counterpoint it with his own reading but to demonstrate how it is eluded by the text itself. Kundera sees the reader's task in relation to this story as reportorial, computative.

I have been arguing throughout this thesis that interrogative short fiction demands a similar readiness on the part of the critic to validate plurality and indeterminacy as the desired and desirable products of the genre. We have to understand these texts as total objects, complete with missing parts, and not seek to limit their play by installing our own determinate critical discourse. This is

particularly important as regards Hemingway whose texts, as we have seen, are very much concerned with resisting interpretative interventions—so much so that they often explicitly present critical abductions from models of narrative continuity and closure. In ‘Hills Like White Elephants’ the non-mention of the abortion theme works in this way by luring the reader into supposing that cracking the riddle of the missing word will allow him to determine the text’s meaning. As Gerry Brenner describes, Hemingway lets his readers ‘stew’ over the missing term knowing that ‘once they discover it or its meaning, they will feel they have solved the story and can mosey on along to the next one’ (1990, 161). I would agree that Hemingway’s stories do much to divest us of this confidence, but I would want to add that this is because their techniques of ellipsis, interdiction and reticence exploit the plurisignificant and differential constitution of language; in other words, because they are interrogative.

Reading Hemingway within my theory of interrogativeness allows us to revise our understanding of one of the central precepts of his story technique which I quoted above—the theory that any aspect of a story could be left out so long you ‘knew what you omitted’. The ‘omission’ theory is interesting because it suggests that what is radically absent from Hemingway’s texts in their finished form is nevertheless conventionally present during the writing of them. ‘Out of Season’, as we saw, can be made benign by the restoration of its original ‘lopped off’ ending; ‘Big Two-Hearted River’, though differently, also offers up a developmental narrative if we consider it as tending towards the ‘On Writing’ conclusion. Of course, it is naive to envisage the stories and the processes of their composition in this way, but these examples of the ‘omission’ theory are interesting because in both cases what is omitted is the *telos*, that point of disclosure which retrospectively orders all the elements in the narrative, which establishes them as constituent of a meaning that has finally been revealed.

Teleological structuring of this sort occurs at all levels in discourse. It is

evident in the signifying process itself, in the move we make from signifier to signified. Symbolism similarly works by the retrospective attribution of meaning. So, for example, when we encounter a phrase like ‘hills like white elephants’ we immediately attempt to normalize it within the text’s discourse by locating its sense. Again, we move from the act of signification, the moment of the sign, to the imposition of significance. At narrative level we look for meaning to be secured by resolution of the text’s enigmas, by the revelation of the significance of the narrative details.

Now, if we confound that teleological structure, if we fail to reveal or make determinate our meaning, then we threaten the communicative process. Hence the difficulty of assimilating Joyce’s trio of signs, *gnomon*, *paralysis*, *simony*, within his story ‘The Sisters’, or the enduring riddle of the hills in Hemingway’s text. These stories interdict teleological structure: they impose a hermeneutic detention at the level of the signifier, resisting our desire to pass through the word to what the word means. Interrogative short fiction works by suppressing these explicatory connections, by refusing to supply a determinate end-point that orders the various elements in the narrative. The interest that Gerlach, Lohafer and others have shown in the point of closure in the modernist short story, and which I discussed in the introduction, arises, I think, from the form’s suppression of these teleological structures. Gerlach, of course, only witnesses the anti-closural gesture literally at the end of the narrative—for him the ‘open’ modernist form is defined by way in which writers ‘defused the impact of termination’ (1985, 74). My theory of interrogative short fiction sees that resistance to closure at every level in the text, the result of the various devices of reticence, ellipsis and interdiction intensifying the plurality and indeterminacy of language.

In ‘The Art of the Short Story’ Hemingway expressed what was essentially his scepticism about the kind of teleological structure I have been

describing. There he states that with the 'good enough' story writer the gun hanging on the wall, or any other narrative detail, will not make its symbolic meaning determinable (1990, 4). At the level of the sentence, too, he seeks to suppress the way in which causal relations build up towards determinate endpoints. Hence the fondness for parataxis, static repetition and polysyndeton, the refusal 'to allow of trivial connections' (Hollander 1985, 212), that gives rise to structures like these: 'When his father died he was only a kid and his manager buried him perpetually' (*Stories*, 393); 'It was very hot and the express from Barcelona would come in forty minutes' (262); 'We were all at the hospital every afternoon, and there were different ways of walking across the town through the dusk to the hospital' (256).

Hemingway's theory of 'omission' involves breaking the teleological connections in his narratives at every level. The material he omits is that which would allow us to secure symbolic and other meanings in his texts. In other words, the omissions are interdictive of the expectations the stories themselves generate. By removing the elements which produce teleological structures, he leaves us with words which do not securely signify, symbols whose *symbolism* is uncertain and narratives whose constituent parts refuse to cohere.

Jonathan Culler's notion of presupposition, which I mentioned earlier, can provide a useful explication of the epistemological consequences of the theory of omission. According to Culler, the logical presuppositions of a sentence are all those statements which must be true in order for the sentence itself to be true. So, *I was delighted to hear that Bob and his sister Mary sold their house* presupposes that Bob and Mary sold their house, that there is someone called Bob who has a sister called Mary, that they owned a house, that there exists a means of buying and selling, and so on. This lowly sentence is related by presupposition to a whole body of other sentences that must be true (or false) in order for it to be true (or false). In everyday communicative terms,

of course, we do not spell out the ‘story’, the catalogue of presupposition, that lies behind the statement we are making—we assume an inferential capacity on the part of our interlocutor and so are able to communicate using a variety of cohesive devices such as substitution, lexical reiteration and collocation.¹⁰ Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that there is this narrative structure underlying our most basic linguistic transactions.

Culler extends his definition of logical presupposition more informally to clarify its importance in literature. The presuppositions of a sentence, he states, ‘consist of all the assertions made by a sentence *except* the assertion made by its surface structure predicate’ (1981, 112). It follows from this that it would be possible to make an assertion in a text indirectly by asserting something else that presupposed it. We can adapt this to Hemingway’s short fiction in a particularly informative way by suggesting that the theory of ‘omission’ entails removing that ‘surface structure predicate’ from the final form of the text. To return to the example of John and Mary selling their house, if we list all the propositions presupposed by that sentence, and then excise the sentence itself, we are left with series of statements of random purpose: the main sentence is required as a predicatory focal point establishing these statements *as* presuppositions. So, in ‘Out of Season’, the main predicate of that story which was present in Hemingway’s mind as he wrote (‘you could omit anything if you knew what you omitted’) was the suicide of Peduzzi. Removing that leaves us with a series of statements which function as presuppositions of an undisclosed central premise. Similarly, with ‘Big Two-Hearted River’, the removal of the conclusion on writing robs the story of exposition.

As an informative contrast to these stories, the uncharacteristic ‘A Canary for One’ does contain its controlling predicate. In that story an American couple travelling on a train encounter an old woman who, in the course of

¹⁰Beckett’s *Watt*, of course, lands us in a limbo of provisionality by foregoing these cohesive economies and spelling out every presupposition.

conversation, makes various pronouncements on the virtues of American husbands as opposed to 'foreign' ones. The story's 'wow ending' is that the American couple are on their way to Paris 'to set up separate residences' (*Stories*, 326). That closural statement that causes the various details of the story to emerge as presuppositions within the economy of the narrative: for the story to 'work', for the ending to be effective as an ironic twist, these statements have to be in place; once the main predicate is revealed their significance is fixed.

When the man in 'Hills Like White Elephants' says "It's really an awfully simple operation, Jig...It's not really an operation at all" (*Stories*, 263) we find it so problematic deciding his meaning because his words have been dislocated from the narrative chain of presuppositions. Our expectation is that the text will at some point—usually the point of (dis)closure—restore to the husband's words what was presupposed in the writing of them, for instance by confirming that he is attempting to bully the young woman into the abortion. But the main predicate concerning the husband is missing, hence we cannot read his words here as evidence that he is bullying her: we cannot read them as a presuppositions of a given statement 'He is a bully'. Hemingway has placed all such conclusiveness outside of the text.

Returning to Frank O'Connor's comment that Hemingway was a 'practical writer', I am not sure that this is necessarily a disparaging or unhelpful epithet. It at least directs our attention to the fact that Hemingway's abstemiousness often involved simply lopping off material from his stories. What is remarkable about his best work, however, is the extent to which it is prepared to court misreading through its indigent signification. When we turn to Beckett we find precisely the same willingness to 'fail' to make meaning. What the theory of interrogative short fiction offers us is a way of validating that 'failure'.

**Total Objects, Missing Parts:
Beckett**

Total Objects, Missing Parts: Beckett

Throughout his career Beckett wrote short fiction, and from the publication of *L'Innomable* in 1952 until his death in 1989 it was his favoured prose form. Nevertheless, his principal critics have seemed reluctant to survey his work from the point of view of genre. This neglect is surprising because from his earliest published works Beckett was engaged in exploiting and revising the operative principles of the interrogative modernist short form, particularly as he inherited it from Joyce. Later, after the publication of the Trilogy, he turned again to short fiction in his efforts to find a way to 'go on', and over the next fifty years worked at the very limits of the genre.

The following discussion reflects the bipartite nature of Beckett's engagement with the short story. In the first part I will look at how in his early works, especially *More Pricks Than Kicks*, he undertook a parodic exploration of the tropes and conventions of the modernist form. The interest here will be in how his parodies and metafictional interventions provide a critical reading of the form's interrogativeness that supports the definition I have been developing in this thesis. The second part of the chapter considers Beckett's short fiction after the Trilogy, in particular the 'residua'. In these works, Beckett explores to the limits of intelligibility what can be achieved by the systematic occlusion of orientational material in narrative. I want to argue that in 'Imagination Dead Imagine' and 'Ping' we can discover not only how Beckett came to transfigure literary modernism but also how he found a way to 'go on' from the aporetic entrapment of the Trilogy. For these reasons, Beckett's work in the short form exemplifies the theoretical thrust of my thesis as a whole. In the course of this chapter I hope to communicate his importance both as an acutely critical reader of the modernist form, and also the most ambitious exponent of the art of

stopping short.

In the preceding chapter I discussed at some length the critical dialogue which Hemingway established between the novel and short story in *In Our Time*. It was suggested that Hemingway used the interrogative, interdictive modernist form to disrupt the impetus towards novelistic continuity in his text. To a great extent, of course, Hemingway's practice depended on a stable notion of what the novel was and how it functioned, and, as we saw, he was at pains to establish in his texts the kind of model narratives he was seeking to subvert. With Beckett, the novel was never a consistent phenomenon. Nevertheless, like Hemingway he did realize that interrogative short forms could be used in an interdictive counter-teleological fashion, creating dead-ends and doublings-back within and against a linear, causal narrative. Near the beginning of *Watt*, for instance, the eponymous character loses his hat on a railway station platform. It is returned to him by a newsagent of whom we are told the following:

Now at the end of the platform the newsagent came out of a door, wheeling his bicycle. He would carry it down the winding stone stairs and then ride home. There he would play a game of chess, between masters, out of Mr. Staunton's handbook. The next morning he would carry his bicycle up the stairs again. It was heavy, being a very good bicycle. It would have been simpler to leave it below, but he preferred to have it near him. This man's name was Evans. (1976, 24)

Elsewhere on the one page he occupies we are told the shape of Evans's mouth, the colour of his hair, how he dresses, how he walks, and so on. The narrator even enters some speculation (over some things but not others is he obliged to conjecture) about Evans's apparent disequanimity: 'He seemed a man of more than usual acerbity, and to suffer from unremitting mental, moral and perhaps even physical pain' (*ibid*, 23). None of which is remarkable in any way, except that Evans is never mentioned again in the novel. A discrepancy of extent therefore arises between the account given of him and the function of that account in relation to the dominant diegesis of the text. The delight of the passage lies in the way in which it appears to be stabilizing meaning, presenting

biographical data in support of a character about to play a significant role in the text. 'This man's name was Evans', the extract concludes, as though that matters, as though the preceding paragraph has somehow established the validity and significance of that declaration.

The Evans episode is one of many such seemingly inconsequential abductions, tangents, counter-teleological diversions in *Watt*. Characters and events come and go in this way without any effort by Beckett to resolve their discursive codes in relation to the host narrative; it is as though they are brought about, these episodes, only to prove their redundancy, their recalcitrance to the principle by which texts attain to what Frank Kermode calls 'sense-making' form (1967, 3). We are persistently waylaid by the text's surplus signification; we follow the trails it lays in the belief (a belief born of our experience of narrative tropes and conventions) that significance will be uncovered, that the thirty or so pages devoted to Arthur's story of his friend Ernest Louit, for instance, will resolve to function as metadiegesis, as a story within the story offering, as David Watson says, 'a certain crystallisation *en abyme* of the macrocosmic fiction' (1991, 19) in which it occurs.¹ The story of Louit, like the intervention of Evans, is full of enticements towards precisely this kind of reading: it begins as an anecdotal illustration during a conversation about a restorative drug called Bando. 'But I shall better illustrate what I mean,' says Arthur, 'if I tell you what happened to my old friend, Mr. Ernest Louit...' (1976, 169) and then embarks on his lengthy account of Louit's dealings with Thomas Nackybal, an idiot savant with an extraordinary capacity for square and cube roots. But Arthur loses heart in his recitation which at no point mentions Bando, the subject of which it is meant to be helpfully illustrative. The episode concludes thus:

¹In other words we expect these stories to function in much the same way as certain critics have asserted that Hemingway's stories in *In Our Time* function: as episodic instalments in the novel of Nick Adams.

In another place, he said, from another place, he might have told this story to its end, told the true identity of Mr. Nackybal (his real name was Tisler and he lived in a room on the canal), told his method of cube-rooting in his head (he merely knew by heart the cubes of one to nine, and even this was not indispensable, and that one gives one, and two eight, and three seven, and four four, and five five, and six six, and seven three, and eight two, and nine nine, and of course nought nought), and told the delinquencies of Louit, his fall and subsequent ascension, running Bando. (*ibid*, 198)

There, at last, is 'Bando', mischievously suspended at the end of a sentence that, purporting to summarize all that Arthur did not get round to in the main body of his story, itself becomes caught up in the failure of narrational selectivity. Bando was the starting point of Arthur's speech; nine thousand words later, his story at an end, he is ready to begin. Robert Cochran has written of Beckett's 'endings that reject ending in the consideration of other beginnings' (1991, 34). Here all is 'beginning': we are trapped in a discourse that refuses to 'close', to gratify the sense of an ending. The story, in David Watson's terms, refuses to crystallise, to 'advance the "plot" of the main diegesis' (1991, 19). It remains a fugitive from the ordering principles of narrative.

I dwell on the example of *Watt* for two reasons: firstly, because of its interdictive use of short narratives to refute continuity and stability in the wider text. As readers we look for a point of textual disclosure that will situate these episodes within the economy of meaning in the novel; but throughout *Watt* textual elements like these are kept discrete in terms of their significance from the dominant diegesis. There is a refusal, in other words, to allow these elements to establish—or, conversely, their meaning to be established by—a point of closure. Instead of resolution or gratification we encounter interdiction, preclusion. The story of Louit disrupts and competes with the effort to erect a completed order of sense for the text; it refuses to operate as a metadiegesis or

illustrative crystallisation of meanings established in the dominant diegesis.² Once again, a connection between brevity and plurality is adumbrated: the short interrogative narrative is being used to establish apertures within and against emergent meanings in the text. Later in his career, Beckett begins to explore the limits of this connection in the short form itself.

The second reason for my interest in the *Watt* passages is their parodic nature. What they parody is novelistic convention, in this case the technique of inserting an illustrative, referential ‘story-within-a-story’. Early in his career Beckett employed this kind of parody of fictional praxis *within* fiction in his short stories. In works such as ‘A Case in a Thousand’ and throughout the volume *More Pricks Than Kicks* he explicitly engaged with the Joycean short story, parodying its tropes and mannerisms and revealing the principles of its composition. Indeed, Beckett’s early stories offer some of his deepest readings of Joyce. In particular he uncovers through parodic imitation the complexities of narrational voice in the *Dubliners* stories. These early stories in many ways subject modernist short fiction to the kind of scrutiny I have been attempting throughout this thesis.

By John Pilling’s account, Beckett began writing short stories by default. Dismayed at the rejection (by Chatto) of his poems and of the novel *Dream of Fair to middling women* Beckett turned to the short story simply to ‘enable him to keep his hand in and...provide a modicum of revenue’ (Pilling 1997, 95). Pilling makes clear his own indifference to the short form, describing it as an impoverished ‘half-way house’ lacking in both the ‘freedom of movement’ of the novel and the ‘complexity’ through ‘brevity and density’ of the poem (*ibid*).

²Of course, it may be argued that the Louit story’s very inconclusiveness is consonant with the novel’s wider insistence on the provisionality and partiality of all knowledge. However, such a reading would still be based on an acknowledgement of the discrepancies between the various elements in the text and would have to found its claim of coherence on a notion of similarity in form or structure rather than in meaning—the level at which *incoherence* is rife.

Like many of the critics mentioned already in this thesis, Pilling writes with some resistance to the idea that the short story has credibility as a literary form, let alone that it may be conducive to innovation or experimentation. He claims that the form was an uncomfortable one for Beckett because it had hitherto proved ‘largely resistant to radical and experimental development’: ‘Deprived of any mentor from whom he could learn, even if it was only to subvert the achievement from within, Beckett was left without the stimulus to do very much more than the ‘lower’ form required of him’ (*ibid*).

Pilling’s justification for this claim involves him in some familiar critical gap-plugging: he takes the ‘absence of any recurrent, substantial or profoundly significant comments on his stories by Beckett’ (*ibid*) as proof of the author’s lack of interest in what he achieved in them. In other words, Pilling ‘reads’ Beckett’s reticence on this matter, interprets his silence as ‘indifference’. The suggestion that Beckett lacked any mentor, and that he therefore was unable to devise a way in which he might engage critically with the short form, arises, I would argue, from Pilling’s insensitivity towards the aesthetic of the modernist short story. Indeed, his assertion is contradicted by the simple fact that throughout *More Pricks Than Kicks* Beckett explicitly subverts and scrutinizes many principal effects and mannerisms of the Joycean story. I would argue that Pilling fails to see the importance of Beckett’s achievement in respect of short fiction because he is unclear about the particular characteristics of the form Beckett was engaging with.

‘A Case in a Thousand’ (1934) concerns a young physician, Dr. Nye, who finds himself having to treat his former nanny’s gravely ill son. The young boy dies during surgery but weeks later the mother is still to be seen every day lingering in the hospital grounds. The final scene of the story involves an encounter between the mother and her former ward, Dr. Nye, and is marked by a reticence typical of interrogative short fiction:

“There is something I’ve been wanting to ask you,” he said, looking at the water where it flowed out of the shadow of the bridge.

She replied, also looking down at the water:

“I wonder would that be the same thing I’ve been wanting to tell you ever since that time you stretched out on his bed.”

“Can’t you go on,” he said.

Thereupon she related a matter connected with his earliest years, so trivial and intimate that it need not be enlarged on here, but from the elucidation of which Dr. Nye, that sad man, expected great things.

“Thank you very much,” he said, “that was what I was wondering.” (1995, 24; my emphasis)³

The narratorial interdiction here—the deliberate withholding of information the text has itself created the desire for—is typical of the modernist short fiction we have been examining. But what is particularly interesting is the way in which Beckett frankly and conspicuously signals the occlusion in that penultimate paragraph. Interstices in Joyce and Hemingway are precisely that—gaps, spaces, silences which do not threaten the illusion of objectivity in the presentation. In Beckett’s story, however, the decision-making narratorial voice is explicit about its act of omission. There is no effort here to maintain the objective stance, to disguise the sleight of hand by which the text’s interrogativeness will be achieved.

Beckett’s exposure of the moment of interdiction in the story represents a critical engagement with what is perhaps the defining mannerism of interrogative short fiction. The characteristic narratorial withdrawal at the point of expected disclosure in the text is revealed at the same time as it is enacted. Beckett is unwilling to adopt uncritically the Joycean persona of the artist ‘refined out of existence’. Such alleged objectivity is shown to be, as John Updike says, a narratorial ‘pose’ like any other (1976, 450). Throughout his early stories Beckett draws attention in this way to the act of narration itself, particularly at the structural crux of the text, the moment of revelation or epiphany. This is especially the case in *More Pricks Than Kicks* (1934) where

³All references to this edition, *Complete Short Prose*, will be abbreviated *CSP* hereafter

he explores explicitly the limitations and possibilities of the modernist form as he inherited it from Joyce.

In 'A Wet Night' the broad parody of Joyce's 'The Dead' climaxes in this passage:

But the wind had dropped, as it so often does in Dublin when all the respectable men and women whom it delights to annoy have gone to bed, and the rain fell in a uniform and untroubled manner. It fell upon the bay, the littoral, the mountains and the plains, and notably upon the Central Bog it fell with a rather desolate uniformity (1970, 87)

The parody here functions on many levels. That second sentence, of course, fails to follow Joyce's famous original where it leads—from 'treeless hills' and the 'Bog of Allen', through images of Calvary, to the 'universe', all its living and its dead (*Dub*, 255-6). On the Central Bog does the rain most notably impinge in Beckett's universe; and, of course, it's only raining there, not snowing. Hugh Kenner has written of how in Joyce's original snow 'rhymes with the uniform inevitability of human stasis', of how it 'levels and unifies all phenomena' in Gabriel's sight (1996, 54). In Beckett's parody, this effect of uniformity, of the levelling of the gravestone, the mountains, Dublin, is toyed with: the rain's uniformity is grey and mundane and transfigures nothing. Beckett uses rain throughout the ruminative last parts of the story as his reiterative element in imitation of Joyce's technique of narrow semantic repetition ('falling softly', 'softly falling', 'falling faintly', 'faintly falling'). Beckett's reiteration, however, is deliberately misplaced: he tropes on a word that he has consciously de-poeticized: 'Now it began to rain upon the earth beneath and greatly incommoded Christmas traffic of every kind by continuing to do so without remission for a matter of thirty six hours' (1970, 86-7). Furthermore, he does not allow the parodic epiphany⁴ to conclude the story. Belacqua leaves his

⁴The word epiphany is in fact slyly inserted just before the scene in question: 'A divine creature, native of Leipzig, to whom Belacqua, round about the following Epiphany, had occasion to quote the rainfall for December...' (1970, 87)

girlfriend's house (having enjoyed the kind of passionate intimacy denied Gabriel Conroy) in the pitch dark small hours. The street lamps, which in Joyce's story provide the 'ghostly' twilight shrouding Gretta and also induce Gabriel's vision of Michael Furey (*Dub*, 247; 255) are extinguished.

In 'Love and Lethe' the cuspidal scene is again exposed, though in a somewhat different way:

Who shall judge of his conduct at this crux? Is it to be condemned as wholly despicable? Is it not possible that he was gallantly trying to spare the young woman embarrassment? Was it tact or concupiscence or the white feather or an accident or what? We state the facts. We do not presume to determine their significance.

'Digitus Dei' he said 'for once.'

That remark rather gives him away, does it not? (1970, 104)

Here the narrator makes explicit the questions which the narrative itself has prompted concerning the motivations of the central character. These are precisely the kind of questions modernist short fictions by their reticent and interdictive strategies cause us to ask. Here the narrative is asking them for us, foregrounding the device by which the answers to them are withheld. The question posed to the narratee—'That remark rather gives him away, does it not?'—makes explicit the relationship the reader typically has to the interrogative story type: in the absence of a superintending, directive narrating presence we are obliged to supply confirmation of the meaning of the various textual details. The narrator here may be conspicuous, but it is as an ignorant subject of the *énoncé*. Earlier the narrator was similarly benighted concerning the central question of the text: namely why Belacqua wishes to kill himself:

How he formed this resolution to destroy himself we are quite unable to discover. The simplest course, when the motives of any deed are found subliminal to the point of defying expression, is to call that deed *ex nihilo* and have done. Which we beg leave to follow in the present instance (*ibid*, 95).

More than comical disingenuousness, this disclaimer parodies precisely the kind of narratorial withholding that we find repeatedly in modernist short fiction. Of course, Beckett's story achieves the same interrogativeness as Joyce's, presents

the same interdictions, and so offers a critique of the modernist form that is also, paradoxically, an arch expression of it. For this reason we have to be careful not to suppose that Beckett is simply parodying the Joycean epiphany in these stories in the sense of revealing its blind spots or expediencies. As we saw in chapter 2, Joyce's epiphanies are complex and unstable sites where discourses are brought into unmediated conflict, where suppressions, denials and occlusions undermine any attempt to impose a monological interpretation. Beckett's 'epiphanic' scenes offer a critical exposure of the Joycean technique in its full complexity, making explicit its instabilities and narratological sleights of hand. All of these early stories, in fact, can be read as exegetical counterpoints to Joyce's. In the treachery of apprenticeship, Beckett voiced the Joycean story's scrupulously unarticulated knowingness. As the narrator says at one point of *Belacqua*, 'Notice the literary man' (1970, 101). Indeed we do.

Beckett's exposure of the inner workings of the Joycean epiphany functions in a similar way to Hemingway's interdictions of model story types in his stories. Like Hemingway, Beckett seeks to contain 'anticlimax within our expectations of climax' (Kenner 1996, 53). The difference, however, is that the 'norm' from which Beckett is diverting is the modernist form itself. Whereas Joyce replaced the unifying plot resolution with a complex polyphony, Beckett attempts a further revision but by means of parody rather than by any paradigmatic shift in narrative structuration.

Linda Hutcheon has described postmodernist parody as 'repetition with critical distance', an 'ironic signalling of difference at the very heart of similarity' which allows the writer to 'speak *to* a discourse from *within*...' (1988,

26; 35).⁵ In Beckett's early stories this ironic signalling is achieved by making explicit that which is normally implicit in modernist short fiction. Crucially, as Hutcheon implies, the parody acts not to diminish, or reveal the fallibility of, the former text. Rather, it infiltrates the discourse of its predecessor in order to conduct an ironic re-articulation of it. When we read the following passage in 'Draff', for example, we are struck not by the sense that it ridicules the kind of epiphanic moment experienced by, say, Chandler in 'A Little Cloud', but by the way in which Beckett gives playful voice to the agonized suppressions of the Joycean story:

Hairy, anxious though he was to join the Smeraldina while his face was at its best, before it relapsed into the workaday dumpling, steak and kidney pudding, had his work cut out to tear himself away. For he could not throw off the impression that he was letting slip a rare occasion to feel something really stupendous, something that nobody had ever felt before. But time pressed. The Smeraldina was pawing the ground, his own personal features were waning (or perhaps better, waxing). In the end he took his leave without kneeling, without a prayer, but his brain quite prostrate and suppliant before this first fact of its experience. That was at least something. He would have welcomed a long Largo, on the black keys for preference (1970, 195)

The irony directed at Hairy and his lusting after a certain melancholy depth of feeling, fingered on the black keys, is also targeted at the structural device of the epiphany and way in which it is conventionally read as a moment of 'inscape' or illumination. The irony is encapsulated in the play on 'waxing' and 'waning': Hairy's appearance is actually 'waning', but the scene demands a dilation of feeling, a 'waxing'—lyrical and lachrymose. We saw in the analyses in chapter 2 that Joyce's epiphanies are typically qualified by suggestions that they may be fabricated or delusionary. For instance, Little Chandler's epiphany may well be

⁵The same point has been made by Robert Alter who describes parody as a mode which 'fuses creation with critique' (1975, 25). Matei Calinescu has applied this observation in particular to avant-garde parodies of modernist convention: '...a successful parody should convey, together with its criticism of the original, a degree of resemblance, a degree of faithfulness to both the letter and the spirit of the original. Ideally, a parody should at the same time appear to be a parody and offer the possibility of being mistaken for the original itself' (1987, 141).

an aspiration toward feeling rather than a genuine occurrence of it. Beckett's parody works not by erecting a superior metadiscourse in relation to the Joycean device. A more accurate appraisal would emphasize the way in which Beckett's story gives voice to that which is implicit in Joyce's texts. In other words, it exposes the implicatory sleight of hand by which the Joycean story achieves interrogative complexity. If there is a target in the parody here it is the 'innocent' or monological reading of the discourse of interrogative short fiction which overlooks or denies that complexity.

Of course, the device of the epiphany is only one of the means by which the Joycean story complicates the emergence of any determinate thematic reading. The difficulty in determining a story like 'Clay' arises because Joyce omits or subdues so much orientational narrative material throughout the text. Maria's psychology and motivation, the meaning of her song, the story's title, Joe's final feelings all remain unresolved, incongruent. Beckett's critical engagement with the form involves the installation of a metafictional narratorial voice that exposes this occlusive technique. The famous last line of 'Dante and the Lobster' encapsulates his acknowledgement of the aesthetic of the modernist short story best of all: in response to Belacqua's self-assurance on seeing the lobster boiled alive that 'it's a quick death' comes the rebuttal, 'It is not' (1970, 21). For Robert Cochran these are the words of an 'impersonal voice out of the heavens, speaking in fiat and inquisition' (1991, 18). Cochran's phrase, 'fiat and inquisition', gathers nicely the impression of the voice as at once stentorian and at the same time critically probing: we can read those words as both a general proclamation and as a weighing of the evidence that, in this particular case, God help us all, death will not be quick.⁶ Instead of the characteristic withdrawal at the point of closure in the text we get the blatant intrusion of a voice signalling

⁶Further meanings reveal themselves when one takes into account Belacqua's literary antecedent, Dante's indolent friend encountered in ante-Purgatory (iv, 97-135): no quick death indeed, unless, of course, quick means 'live'.

over the heads of the characters. Clare Hanson reads the line as forcefully unifying:

The emergence at this point of a voice speaking against the authority of Belacqua is important. It is as though a 'voice' has been submerged throughout the fiction, but as it finally achieves utterance we realize that it is crystallizing, summarizing, what the text has been saying all along through its particular forms and articulations (1985, 144-5)

Hanson takes the final line to be a thematic decoding of the whole story, a full illumination of all that has dwelled in the half-light of implication: the line brings together Belacqua's present predicament and the various allusions throughout the story to the protracted sufferings in Dante's hell. The problem here, however, is that Hanson's emphasis is on how the declaration gratifies and unifies through the resolution of enigma at the level of the discourse of the *énoncé*. She does not, in other words, perceive any irony in it. Yet surely the closure achieved by the 'It is not' is so blatantly superimposed that if judged against the *vraisemblance* of the rest of the story it seems a clumsy contrivance. The intrusion of such a prepossessive narratorial point of view is not simply a device for instating closure; rather, I would argue, it encapsulates Beckett's parodic exposition of the kind of narratological *legerdemain* by which the modernist short story achieves interrogativeness. He blows the cover, as it were, under which the story operates, exposing the narrator's presence by making it explicit. As with 'A Case in a Thousand' and 'A Wet Night' he is unwilling to allow the naturalistic illusion of the inconspicuous or objective narrator to predominate: he is signalling an ironic awareness of how the interrogative story seeks to defer meaning by a suppression of the personality of the narrator and the instatement of an enigmatic openness in its various discursive codes.

Pilling suggests that Beckett's criticism of Maupassant, made during a lecture entitled 'Naturalists', that he contained 'no subjectiveness' comparable to the great European novelists is evidence of Beckett's lack of interest in

Maupassant and, by extension, the short story (1997, 94).⁷ But Beckett's complaint here might also be read positively, as a declaration of intent. The intrusive 'It is not' encapsulates the break Beckett is attempting throughout these early works with the aesthetic of the modernist short story as he inherited it. The line brings to bear on the story a 'subjective' narratorial voice which exposes, plays with, the conspicuous detachment and 'objectivity' which the short form seemingly depends upon for its interrogativeness. All the parodic passages examined above contain this narratorial self-consciousness, this voice that reads as it writes.

Overall, I think it is difficult to credit Pilling's argument that Beckett found the short story a recalcitrant form of which there was no significant exponent with whom he could engage. One can only assume that Pilling shares Hugh Kenner's guardedness about the literary value of the stories comprising *More Pricks than Kicks*: 'With carefully directed attention, we can perceive latent in it his later directions. Other claims should not be made' (1996, 49). I would argue that if read within the context of modernist short fiction Beckett's early stories reveal their significance as far more than adumbrations of later, greater works.

For Beckett, however, the kind of parodic re-visioning of a form I've been describing here was sufficient only as a beginning, not as the basis of his critical distancing from the literature of the past. The limit of the revisionary approach is that it is central to the discourse of modernism itself (as it is to all avant-gardes)—witness the manifestos prefacing Futurism, Cubism, Imagism, Expressionism, Dadaism, Vorticism, Constructivism, to name but some, as well as the various declarations of intent offered in critiques of existing and past literatures, such as Woolf's 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs Brown' and Eliot's 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'. In his early stories—indeed, in most of his fiction

⁷Pilling is quoting here from Rachel Burrows's lecture notes

prior to the Trilogy—we see Beckett adopting this same ‘logic of critical “overcoming”’ (Begam 1996, 150) in relation to modernism. What Beckett was interested in, as he described in relation to Bram van Velde (in the third of the dialogues with George Duthuit), was an art that would be self-sufficient, that would not take up with any discourse of the past, nor even, indeed, with any referential discourse outside of itself. As Bersani and Dutoit put it, he was promising ‘a work of art cut off from all cultural inheritance’ (1993, 19).

An early indication of the path Beckett would take in his short fiction can be found in the 1940s stories ‘The End’, ‘The Expelled’ and ‘The Calmative’. These texts continue with the critical re-reading of the poetics of the modernist short story begun in the early works, but they do so now by bringing into question not just the mannerisms of the established form but the validity of the narrating act itself. In addition they begin to challenge the stability of their own mimetic discourse. ‘The Expelled’, for instance, is constructed along the lines of an excursion narrative, a kind of stumbling picaresque in which the narrator, expelled from some undetermined abode, takes his way about a city, eventually bedding down for the night in a cabman’s stable. The crux of the narrative is reached as he ponders the potential energy in a box of matches:

I held the box of matches in my hand, a big box of safety matches. I got up during the night and struck one. Its brief flame enabled me to locate the cab. I was seized, then abandoned, by the desire to set fire to the stable (*CSP*, 59)

We are familiar with such moments of decisive intersection in the modernist short story—possible closures summoned then interdicted—and Beckett’s narrative appears to act in precisely the same way: instead of lighting the fire the narrator leaves the stable and walks towards the dawn light. However, Beckett is not content with this final self-expulsion into interrogativeness. He undermines the security even of that ending by a metafictional exposure of the arbitrariness of the act of narration. ‘I don’t know why I told this story,’ the narrator says. ‘I could just as well have told another. Perhaps some other time I’ll be able to tell

another. Living souls, you will see how alike they are' (*ibid*). Linda Hutcheon claims that narrative is the translation of 'knowing into telling' (1988, 121); Beckett here questions that intuition, suggesting that what is 'known' is intimately dependent upon what is 'told'.⁸

Attention to the status of narrative and to the act of narrating is similarly given in 'The Calmative' and 'The End'. Both stories use again the framework of an excursion narrative within which are situated other, fragmentary stories, and again both seek to undermine the validity of their own narration. In 'The Calmative' the father's story of Joe Breem or Breen which was once intimately known—'If he had skipped a single word I would have hit him' (*CSP*, 64)—is now less securely remembered: 'Joe Breem, or Breen, the son of a lighthouse-keeper, a strong, muscular lad of fifteen...who swam for miles in the night, a knife between his teeth, after a shark, I forget why, out of sheer heroism' (*ibid*) This inability to grasp the point of the action in the Joe Breem story—'I forget why'—similarly afflicts the narrator's reception of the tale told by the comedian: 'He was telling a funny story about a fiasco. Its point escaped me' (*CSP*, 63). The failure to establish the teleological principle governing these stories shifts attention toward the act of narrating itself and away from the search for meaning. Within the larger narrative, the narrator's excursions do not end, like these stories, in any 'arrival'; he simply continues, as 'The End' puts it, aware of the arbitrariness of his efforts to narrate, aware of the story he might have told, 'a story in the likeness of my life' (*CSP*, 99). It is not simply that the story ends in aperture rather than closure but that the preferred ending is itself undermined: as Robert Cochran puts it, the story 'sabotages itself and ridicules its own making'

⁸It is, incidentally, by no means inevitable that the story will deny itself the conflagration ending. In 'Draff' fire does take hold. There, however, the irony resides in the mocking excess of plot: 'Little remains to be told. On their return they found the house in flames, the home to which Belacqua had brought three brides a raging furnace. It transpired that during their absence something had snapped in the brain of the gardener, who had ravished the servant girl and then set the premises on fire.' (1970, 202).

(1991, 33).

This epistemological fatigue in these texts, told ‘without the courage to end or the strength to go on’ (*CSP*, 99), is accompanied by an ontological exasperation that challenges our coordination as readers.⁹ The narrator’s way of speaking in ‘The End’, for instance, ‘assimilating the vowels and omitting the consonants’ (*CSP*, 83), or the description, in ‘The Calmative’, of the cyclist ‘pedalling slowly in the middle of the street, reading a newspaper which he held with both hands spread open before his eyes’ (*CSP*, 71), are ‘inconsistencies’ which, like the puzzle of how Murphy is able to tie himself up, or the ringing of Erskine’s broken bell in *Watt*, threaten the realist economy of the stories. However, this consternation is, like the flirtatious ontological impasse that opens ‘Assumption’—‘He could have shouted and could not’ (*CSP*, 3)—short-lived, the predominately realist mode being quickly reasserted. With ‘The End’, ‘The Calmative’ and ‘The Expelled’ a limit of tolerance is reached with the conventions of realist narrative. Beckett himself described that limit in relation to Kafka, in an interview given in 1956:

You notice how Kafka’s form is classic, it goes on like a steamroller—almost serene. It *seems* to be threatened the whole time, but the consternation is in the form. In my work there is consternation behind the form, not in the form (Shenker 1979, 148).

In these stories, as in Kafka, the threat to form is apparent only—the ‘consternation’ is really just an implausibility within an otherwise competent discourse. The act of writing itself is secure, no matter what chaos and collapse are being retailed. The writing subject operates at a stable descriptive distance from its material. What Beckett did in *The Unnamable* was collapse that distance entirely to undertake a ‘repudiation of language *in* language’ (Bersani

⁹Brian McHale uses the terms ‘epistemological’ and ‘ontological’ to classify the differing preoccupations of modernist and postmodernist fiction, i.e. the former’s concern with ‘problems of *knowing*’, the latter’s with ‘problems of modes of *being*’ (1987, 10). In his later refinement of this theory, he prefers the terms ‘cognitive’ and ‘post-cognitive’ (1992, 32).

and Dutoit 1993, 51).

All of the texts so far examined function with what Beckett himself termed in the so-called 'German Letter' of 1937 a 'Nominalist irony'¹⁰. The Unnamable may leave his calling card here and there—'He could have shouted and could not' (*CSP*, 3)—but we are at some distance yet from the 'much desired wordless literature' (Cochran 1991, 93) of Beckett's deepest imagining. With *The Unnamable*, however, we find ourselves in the departure lounge of writing. 'Affirmations and negations invalidated as uttered, or sooner or later' (Beckett 1994, 293), the Unnamable states early on, a self-defeating, self-consuming proclamation. What is affirmed, this statement tells us, will not simply be negated but *invalidated*, in advance of any possible negation. If affirmation is invalidated as uttered then negation can have no reality, because there is nothing to negate: we cannot be forced back to where we began by dint of contradiction or repudiation for we have not even begun. The statement wishes to act as both an affirmation (of the invalidation of affirmation) and as a negation (affirmation invalidated) but collapses, unable to repel the semantic impedances it generates against itself. The 'sooner or later', despite its appearing to offer a redemptive temporality, falls apart too: if subjected to the first clause its affirmation is invalid, as is the negation (sooner *or* later) it seems to offer. There is no escape: the statement simultaneously *says* and *gainsays*.¹¹

Throughout *The Unnamable* we are detained like this at the level of the signifier, unable to access any stable, ratifiable world beyond. Joyce explored the possibilities of this kind of hermeneutic detention in the opening lines of the 'Sirens' episode in *Ulysses*. There, however, the impasse was apparent only as

¹⁰This letter, to Axel Kaun, is reprinted in *Disjecta*, 51-54. The translation cited here is by Robert Cochran and Christoph Irmscher (Cochran 1991, 92-3).

¹¹Alain Robbe-Grillet has written of how events in Beckett's texts 'are constantly in the process of contesting themselves, jeopardizing themselves, destroying themselves, so that the same sentence may contain an observation and its immediate negation' (1989, 33).

the puzzlingly disembodied utterances were contextualized and made meaningful in the largely mimetic discourse that followed: ‘Imperthnthn thnthnthn’, for instance, is resolved as the boots’ querulous imitation of Miss Douce’s ‘impertinent insolence’. Beckett offers no such normalization. Richard Begam has argued that accompanying Beckett’s admiration for Joyce and Proust was an understanding that, for all their innovativeness, they had succeeded only in ‘subjectivizing’ the realist tradition and that their work remained ‘predominantly mimetic’ (1996, 31). The challenge Beckett set himself, Begam goes on, was to find a way in which ‘to “overcome” a modernity that [was] itself based on a logic of critical overcoming’ (*ibid*, 150). In other words, the problem was to find a way of critiquing modernism from a position exterior rather than posterior to it, not in a discourse belonging to modernism already—the discourse of ‘critical overcoming’. The problem is akin to that identified by Derrida in relation to the discourse of ethnology. Derrida points out that while ethnologists seek to displace Western culture as the comparative norm or centre in their readings of other cultures, they are only able to do so in a discourse of displacement belonging to the very culture they wish to decentre—‘a discourse which borrows from a heritage the resources necessary for the deconstruction of that heritage itself’ (Derrida 1978, 282). The position required of Beckett in relation to modernism is ‘unnamable’ because it would be ‘namable’ only in the terms of the discourse he is seeking to elude. As the narrator of one of the *Texts for Nothing* puts it, ‘with what words shall I name my unnamable words?’ (*CSP*, 125). Faced with impossibility of escape (except into silence) and yet with the ‘obligation’ to express he is thrown back on language, a witness, as we saw in the passage from *The Unnamable* quoted above, to its deconstructive fallibility, the *différance* at the heart of signification. What we encounter in the text is not some recuperable rhetoric of failure, but rather a failure of rhetoric (Hill 1990, 122).

In the early short fictions we saw how Beckett installed an ironic re-reading of modernist practice in his discourse. Both Joyce and Hemingway perpetrated abductive ironies in much the same way against conventional story-types in their texts. With *The Unnamable* Beckett breaks from this discourse of critical ‘overcoming’ by trapping intelligibility in the negative space of aporia. Immediately, of course, the problem arises within the obligation to express of how to ‘go on’ from the unnamable, how to negotiate between the realization that ‘[t]here is no way to go on’ following the disintegration of ‘I’, ‘have’ and ‘being’ in that novel and the effort to find a way out of the ‘attitude of disintegration’ (Shenker 1979, 148)—between, as Beckett put it, the ‘nothing to express’ and the ‘obligation to express’ (1965, 103). Susan Brien²³ suggests that ‘going on’ became possible for Beckett principally through experimentation with ‘stylistic devices’ (Brienza 1987, 20-47), but given that the most obvious trait one notices surveying the post-Trilogy oeuvre is a propensity towards shortness in prose form, a genre-based study like the present one may be best placed to offer an analysis of why Beckett should have chosen to go on as he did.

One might be tempted to understand the marked inclination towards short and fragmentary forms following *The Unnamable* as just the continuation of a process of reduction leading ultimately to disintegration: having failed to say anything the next step is to fail in shorter measure, to ‘fail better’ as Beckett puts it at the beginning of *Worstward Ho*. The obvious limit of this argument is that it does not allow that the act of reducing textual content may have any greater effect than an intensified negativity. Yet, admittedly, it is difficult to read the *Texts for Nothing* as achieving anything more than that. Certainly Beckett himself felt that the *Texts* failed to escape the ‘attitude of disintegration’ established by *The Unnamable* (Shenker 1979, 148). Nevertheless, several critics have sought to identify ways in which the *Texts* might be read as a significant development in Beckett’s writing. James Knowlson and John Pilling,

for example, have described them as a 'genuine median point' between *The Unnamable* and later works (1979, 43). Their argument is that through the formal restraints incurred by brevity the *Texts* further punctuate and fragment narrative. In this way do they overcome the 'babble' of the unnamable who is, by contrast, 'unable to resist' narrative (*ibid*, 44). The result of this fragmentation, this greater 'reliance on gestures of cancellation' (*ibid*), is a work whose energy acts centrifugally rather than centripetally. Clare Hanson, similarly, identifies the various 'strategies of organisation', such as 'long-term repetition and accumulation' (1985, 145), which operate in the novel but which are ruled out of the *Texts*. She is keen to emphasize the way in which the *Texts* deny efforts to establish intratextual continuities; their significance lies in the way in which they shift the main unit of expression 'from the 'story' or overall structure to the sentence' (*ibid*).

H. Porter Abbott has taken further this idea of the structural contrasts between *The Unnamable* and the *Texts*. In his essay he takes a passage from each and after describing their shared 'referential uncertainty and drift' (1994, 106) proceeds to outline the ways in which they differ. In particular, Abbott is interested in how the excerpt from late in *The Unnamable* belongs to a wider narrative of 'progressive disembodiment' which in turn 'conforms to the oldest pattern of storytelling, the voyage or quest' (*ibid*). The passage he quotes 'culminates the steady, inexorable progress of the 'trilogy', a progress that contextualizes it and, to a certain extent, naturalizes it' (*ibid*). The extract from the *Texts*, on the other hand, appears within no normalizing 'storytelling' trajectory; the reader encounters its complexity raw, as it were, free from any contextualizing narrative structure.

All of these readings make the valuable point that, aporia notwithstanding, *The Unnamable* still collaborates with that 'linear orientation which the mind appears to crave in narrative' (Abbott 1994, 106). *The*

Unnamable is intelligible as the culmination of a progress begun in *Molloy*, where the realist economy is threatened by Molly's apparent identity with, yet difference from, Moran, developed further in *Malone Dies* with its displacement of Malone's world by that which he claimed to be the creator of, i.e. Macmann and his world, and culminating in the collapse of the distinction between narrator and narrated in *The Unnamable*, where Basil/Mahood, for instance, appears as a creation of the narrator and yet also as the principal narrator of the narrator's own life, his voice mingling and dominating that of the narrator before leaving him for good, or refusing to leave, 'I don't know' (1994, 311). The Trilogy still has a fugal continuity.

If we are to read the *Texts for Nothing* as an advance upon *The Unnamable* then we must focus, I would suggest, on the way in which they progressively refuse to participate in the act of narrating itself. Of course, what is immediately present in such a summary is a meta-narrative telling of the disintegration of narrative! Perhaps Beckett's awareness of this narrational bind contributed to his feeling that the *Texts* were a failure. Nevertheless, there is an obvious shift over the course of the work from the calmative intrusions of the Joe Breem story in Text 1, and the anecdotal memories of Mother Calvert and Mr Joly in Text 2 which, while not giving hope, recollect a time and place where hope was possible—'How one hoped above, on and off...' (CSP, 108)—to the later texts that fail to establish character or story at all, which struggle even with that abandonment: 'Give up, but it's all given up, it's nothing new, I'm nothing new' (CSP, 141). Text 10 probes at the limits of this dissolution: 'But there is not silence. No, there is utterance, somewhere someone is uttering. Inanities, agreed, but is that enough, is that enough to make sense?' (*ibid*). The question is one Beckett will seek to answer in subsequent short works: what is to be done in language, how does one 'go on', when confidence in its sense-making function is lost? As Text 10 puts it:

No, no souls, or bodies, or birth, or life, or death, you've got to go on without any of that junk, that's all dead with words, with excess of words, they can say nothing else, they say there is nothing else, that here it's that and nothing else, but they won't say it eternally, they'll find some other nonsense, no matter what, and I'll be able to go on, no, I'll be able to stop, or start, another guzzle of lies but piping hot, it will last my time, it will be my time and place, my voice and silence, a voice of silence, the voice of my silence (*CSP*, 142-3)

The representational breakdown indicated here is performed in the *Texts* as a whole as they strip away the props of narrative, examining how little can be said, how much can be omitted, short of silence. The problem with words is that they name things—bodies, birth, death—and the only way in which it is possible to describe 'nothing' is in words, i.e. through the act of naming that 'nothing'. The 'on'/'no' circularity encapsulates the speaker's anxiety, his desire for silence yet his realization that the silence will be so named, in language, and that there can therefore be no 'silence', no beyond-words. The aporetic 'voice of silence' with which the passage ends is an effort to force language beyond this point, into the condition of unnamability.

As this analysis indicates, the *Texts* become caught up largely in a reiteration of the difficulties of *The Unnamable*. Their importance, however, lies in the way in which they attempt to disavow the sort of continuities of extent that form in the novel. Where the unnamable proclaimed his inability to go on yet continued going on, the *Texts* attempt to silence that voice, or rather, they envisage the final collapse of that narrating voice, going on without even that. Indeed, the very *shortness* of the constituent texts seems to me significant in this regard. If, as Roch C. Smith (adapting Hillis Miller's 'Ariadne's Thread') contends, the 'narration of fiction, the weaving of a verbal tapestry, multiplies words and carries the narrator further away from the exit of his verbal labyrinth' (1986, 79) then the less said the better, the more important it is to remove as many of the excesses—the labyrinth-making excesses—of narrative as possible. Faced with the 'obligation to express' the 'only way out is through words' (*ibid*), but every word spoken weaves more of the web, propagates the labyrinth.

Hence the need to reduce, to curtail, to *stop short*.

Bersani and Dutoit, in *Arts of Impoverishment*, have used the term ‘indigence’ to describe the quality of Beckett’s post-Trilogy writing (1993, 17). They are careful to point out that they do not mean by this term ‘impoverished expression’ or self-erasure (*ibid*); rather, they are insisting that we recognize that Beckett’s use of the word ‘failure’ does not designate a thematic concern in his work. He is not referring to a representation of failure, but to a failure of representation:

[W]hen Beckett speaks of failure as the artist’s vocation, as “his world”, he is not referring to the artist’s subject matter; rather, he is speaking of a failure intrinsic to the very process of artistic production. In the terms of the *Three Dialogues*, to fail does not mean to represent successfully existential failures or existential meaninglessness; it means *to fail to represent* (either meaninglessness or meaning’) (*ibid*, 14).

Bersani and Dutoit go on to argue that it is in the 1960s that Beckett first begins to produce the ‘insignificant text...that performs its own powerful resistance to representation’ (*ibid*, 27). I take it from this that Bersani and Dutoit read the Trilogy, as I do above, as still dependent on, and expressive of, narrative. They suggest that in the late works Beckett attempts to ‘go on’ without even this, denying sense-making narrative connections even at the level of the word. ‘Language is sanctified as expression only by a certain disregard for the particularity or discreteness of words’, they suggest (*ibid*, 23). Narrative, that is, works by creating connections and unities between individual words. Beckett, in his work from the 1960s onward, seeks to resist this by an ‘unprecedented emphasis on language’ (*ibid*, 24) that detains us at the level of the signifier: ‘Deprived of narrative sequences, words sound only in and for themselves...Beckett’s ideal of failure would seem to depend on a contagious destruction of relations’ (*ibid*).

Throughout this thesis I have been arguing that interrogative short fiction functions by a similar destruction of relations, a denial of teleological structure

both at the level of the word and in the narrative as a whole. Beckett's comment about units of continuity 'abdicating' their unity (1983, 49) directs us to his own achievement in texts such as 'Imagination Dead Imagine' and 'Ping' (discussed below), but it also leads us back to the 'discreteness' of Joyce's *paralysis*, *gnomon*, *simony*, and to Hemingway's refusal to allow his counteractive short texts to be absorbed by a *telos* of novelistic closure. Interrogative short texts offer Beckett a way to 'go on' because they can occlude the 'units of continuity' that emerge in the novel. With the 'residua', Beckett takes to a new extent the indeterminacy that results from narrative strategies of shortness, from the suppression of teleological connections at all levels in the text and the interdiction of narrative structure. In effect, the 'residua' take to its limit the logic of interrogative short fiction as I have defined it.

From his earliest work, Beckett signalled an awareness of the conceivable effects of reduction, of *stopping short*, of semantic 'indigence'. In *Dream of Fair to middling women* (written 1932) we find the following disavowal of longitudinal and latitudinal plotting in the classic realist novel:

The effect or concert of effects, unimportant as it seems to us and dull as ditchwater as we happen to know, that elicited the Smeraldina-Rima, shall not, for those and other reasons that need not be gone into, be stated. Milieu, race, family, structure, temperament, past and present and consequent and antecedent back to the first combination and the papas and mamas and paramours and cisibei and the morals of Nanny and the nursery wallpapers and the third and fourth generation snuffles... That tires us. As though the gentle reader could be nothing but an insurance broker or a professional punter. The background pushed up as a guarantee...that tires us (1993, 12-13; Beckett's ellipses)

The impatience with the rituals of causality and *vraisemblance*¹² would appear to suit Beckett ideally for the interrogative short story; and, fittingly, for sixty years the only published parts of *Dream* were those incorporated in *More Pricks Than Kicks*. But the deeper point to grasp here is that this denial is made in

¹²*Watt*, of course, labours these very rituals, pushes the background up, but as a hindrance to, rather than a 'guarantee' of, understanding.

conjunction with the admission that all these elements of race, milieu, temperament and the rest are present as conjectures within the classic realist narrative economy. Simply not mentioning them does not discount or hinder speculation over motive, history or orientation for these are the very terms in which *vraisemblance* functions, the causal laws which stabilize its discourse. The passage seems to suggest that mere ellipsis was not in itself enough for what Beckett envisioned as possible and desirable in fiction. It was enough for the modernist story writers we have looked at to disrupt the continuities of narrative closure, but Beckett was engaged in finding a way to supersede modernist practice. As Kenner wrote in his 'Progress Report, 1962-5', 'To play one more game by the old rules would merely be competence' (Calder 1967, 61). Beckett himself made the ambition explicit in the 1929 story 'Assumption': 'To avoid the expansion of the commonplace is not enough; the highest art reduces *significance* in order to obtain that inexplicable bombshell perfection' (*CSP*, 4; my emphasis). In other words, it is not enough just to say less, not enough to leave unchallenged the mimetic principles of fiction. Rather 'significance'—the desired end product of classic realism—must be diminished by a principle of reduction, by *shortness*.

What was missing in these early works, of course, was the technique to match this ambition, hence our awareness in many of the early works of a gap between what they aspire to and what they actually achieve. Post-Trilogy, however, reduction became the principal means by which Beckett was able to 'go on' in prose. In 1971 Raymond Federman argued, prophetically, that short forms were all that was now left to Beckett: 'Beckett must invent more restraining and constraining rules for his fiction, for he can only continue if he eliminates further, if he reduces further, but no longer the novel as such. He is finished with the novel' (1971, 30). In the 'residua', especially 'Imagination Dead Imagine', 'Ping', and 'Lessness', the reductions and eliminations threaten

the referential function of the language. The teleological structure of representationalism is the first casualty in this aesthetic of reduction; words, as Federman puts it, are ‘designified’, language is reduced to ‘pure ratio’ (*ibid*, 28; 30).¹³ In the modernist short fictions we have looked at the connection between brevity and plurality was exploited but within a controlled mimeticist aesthetic. Joyce and Hemingway applied techniques of reduction—ellipsis, occlusion, the suppression of a corrective narrational point of view—in order to generate interrogativeness in their texts. Beckett’s abstemiousness destabilizes both language and its referents:

No trace anywhere of life, you say, pah, no difficulty there, imagination not dead yet, yes, dead, good, imagination dead *imagine*. Islands, waters, azure, verdure, one glimpse and vanished endlessly, omit. Till all white in the whiteness the rotunda. No way in, go in, measure (*CSP*, 182)

This passage (from the beginning of ‘Imagination Dead Imagine’) achieves its remarkable fluidity of meaning by suppressing deictic elements in its structure. Deictic elements in a statement orientate the various propositions spatially, temporally, and in relation to the speaker and his implied listener or reader. Normally texts work to stabilize the relationships between these various parts through the use of deixis. Here, however, we are uncertain about the coordinates of the scene being described, and about the interaction between the narrator and his supposed interlocutor. How are we to understand that first sentence? The opening phrase seems to imply that the narrator and his implied addressee are located in relation to some reality in which there is no trace of life. But this would depend on who speaks that first phrase. If it is the narrator, and the tag ‘you say’ refers to what follows rather than to what has just been said, then the deictic element in ‘no difficulty *there*’ directs the interlocutor’s reply to that first statement made by the narrator. Hence we might read the sentence along these lines:

NARRATOR: No trace anywhere of life

¹³The phrase ‘pure ratio’ is, in fact, Ihab Hassan’s (1967, 9)

OTHER: Pah, no difficulty there, imagination not dead yet
NARRATOR: Yes, dead, good, imagination dead imagine

In this case, the sentence appears to operate as an instruction from the narrator first of all to imagine no trace of life, then, when the other objects that that is easy and does not signify the limit of imagination, the narrator instructs him to imagine the death of imagination.

Alternatively, that first phrase can be read as the narrator's report of the interlocutor's speech act. In that case we attach the tag 'you say' to the opening statement. What follows can be read as a continuation of the reported speech act, or alternatively it can be taken as the narrator's reply to the assertion by the interlocutor that there is no trace of life anywhere. In the latter case, we might understand the narrator as saying that just because no trace of life can be seen it does not follow that there is nothing: imagination is not dead yet, and to imagine it dead is still to imagine. In other words, imagination, like consciousness for Henry James, is an illimitable force; even its own non-existence is imaginable.

Other equally valid readings might understand the narrator's reply as asserting that only when imagination is dead will it be possible to detect a trace of life. 'Islands, waters, azure, verdure...': all these 'baseless fabrics' of conventional imagining need to be eradicated if one is to catch truly a glimpse of life. Alternatively, the narrator may simply be imploring his interlocutor to imagine the death of imagination, and then proceeding, paradoxically, to envisage that. .

The impossibility of determining the meaning of this passage arises because guiding material has largely been removed. As we have seen throughout, this kind of occlusiveness causes individual sense units to become dirigible. What punctuation there is has the effect not of assisting interpretation but of further breaking down any chain of meaning in the language. A simple orientational phrase like 'you say' hovers uncertainly between its commas; instead of securing the speech acts that surround it, it operates as a kind of

revolving door by which one both exits and enters the various semantic fields in the passage. Rather than assisting in an essentially teleological, cumulative refinement of meaning, the repeated commas emphasize the way in which these individual units create apertures and loops in the narrative logic—words as ‘pure ratio’.

The principle of reduction, then, involves removing differential elements in the language, the markers that separate one possible meaning from another. I said in my introduction that this study would take as read the differential and plurisignificant constitution of language and look at how an omission of narrative guiding material might intensify that instability. Language as a whole, of course, functions on a principle of difference: signifiers signify meaning by virtue of their differential place within the total system of signification. Throughout the ‘residua’ Beckett increasingly undermines the dependence fiction has on a referential world which it seeks to convey accurately by linguistic discrimination. Dismissing that experiential world from his texts, he is free to explore the extremes of reduction, the limits of signification. The drastic economies of vocabulary and the consequent dependence on repetition throughout the ‘residua’ are the most obvious manifestations of this effort. In the quoted passage from ‘Imagination Dead Imagine’ the reduction of differential elements in the language leaves us a world bereft of differentiation: ‘all white in the whiteness...The light that makes all so white no visible source, all shines with the same white shine, ground, wall, vault, bodies, no shadow’ (*ibid*). The rotunda cannot be ‘seen’ in any naturalistic sense of the word. In fact, the point is that we are not supposed to ‘picture’ it, refer it to reality—it is imaginable only. As Brian Finney puts it, ‘the image is itself’ (1971, 68). Beckett is not after some ‘reduction of the commonplace’, some economy in the representation of reality, but a reduction in *significance* (signification). He is seeking a form in which there will be ‘no shadow’ of represented reality in the

language itself. As he envisaged in the so-called 'German letter' to Axel Kaun, 1937: '...must literature alone be forever left behind on worn out paths abandoned long ago by music and painting?...Is there any reason at all why that terrible arbitrary materiality of the word's surface can't be eroded, like for instance the great black pauses eaten in the tonal surface of Beethoven's seventh symphony, so that for whole pages we can see nothing but a path of sound threading dizzying abysses of silence...' (Cochran 1991, 92-3). The pseudo-scientific observationalism brought to bear on the rotunda and its inhabitants is a futile attempt to account for what is seen 'realistically', to 'reproduce' a reality. At the end of the quoted passage we shift into that discourse with the paradox, 'No way in, go in, measure'. The realization is that language will always seek out a referential reality, will always 'go in' and 'measure': such is the burden of un-silence. The paradox indicates, however, that here that 'reality' will be unnamable, impossible; it is, in the words of the unnamable, invalidated as uttered. There can be no question 'of ever finding again that white speck lost in whiteness' (*CSP*, 185).

It should be pointed out here that the effort to free language of representationalism is, of course, futile, and that that is the nature of Beckett's 'failure'. However, obliged to go on, and necessarily 'skewered on the ferocious dilemma of expression', the writer 'continues to wriggle. The void he speaks of is perhaps simply the obliteration of an unbearable presence, unbearable because neither to be wooed nor to be stormed' (1965, 110-11). In the 'residua' the attempt is to work despite that 'unbearable presence' of representationalism. Words will always 'refer', will always 'go in' and 'measure'. But within his texts Beckett is able to create a world where linguistic representationalism collapses in on itself, in aporia: 'no way in, go in...'

Beckett's principle of reduction takes to extremes the connection already established in this thesis between brevity and plurality. The more specific the

topographies of confinement in these late stories—the deeper the blight of enclosure and sensory defeatism—the more apertures emerge semantically in the texts. Just as James envisaged in the preface to ‘The Lesson of the Master’, the short form should be able to embrace multiplicity within its ‘science of control’; meaning should amplify outward from the necessarily curtailed centre. Like James, Beckett had a vision of what was possible within an aesthetic of reduction. His ‘total object, complete with missing parts’ resonates, like James’s statement, in relation to much that has been discussed in this thesis. Repeatedly, I have drawn attention to the ways in which modernist short fictions can be read as ‘total objects’, ‘complete’ in themselves despite their occlusions and interstices. Indeed I have argued that these ‘gaps’, in their various ways, constitute the aesthetic of the modernist form. Against this have been set the many readings that insist on the short story as an incomplete or partial expression of an undisclosed, greater whole. As regards Beckett, the total object/partial object discrimination takes on further significance in the ‘residua’ because there he attempts not only to proceed with an increasing number of missing parts but uses this to remove from the economy of his texts the shadow of representationalism in language itself.

As mentioned above, the post-Trilogy fictions are characterized by an increasing paucity of vocabulary. Related to this is a dependence on repetition.¹⁴ Usually, repetition creates semantic or sound patterning which reinforces cohesion and meaning in texts. In the ‘residua’, however, repetition is used to break up any linear movement or narrative, to impede the reading process and undermine the effort to construe a teleology in the text. Along with the other paraphernalia of reduction, in syntax, vocabulary and punctuation, repetition acts against sense-making form. Paradoxically, when we read ‘Ping’, for instance, we may be conscious of its extreme repetitiousness—David Lodge counts ninety

¹⁴For a deconstructionist reading of repetition in Beckett see Connor 1988.

occurrences of 'white' in the text (1986, 120)—as its only expansive gesture, when in fact it is acting constrictively in conjunction with the abstemious vocabulary.

Once again, however, we have to read Beckett's device of repetition as more than just one further 'reduction of the commonplace'. We saw how in 'Imagination Dead Imagine' there was an attempt to free language of the shadow of representationalism. Well, the technique of repetition assists in that effort. The connection is made clear by Barbara Trelhoff in her essay on the post-Trilogy fictions. 'As in non-verbal music,' Trelhoff writes, 'repetition and echoing can be said to suggest aesthetic, intra-textual representation: references and relations do not point to phenomena outside of the music or text itself' (1990, 95). In other words, the repeated units refer us back to themselves, to their earlier occurrences, rather than to any proposed reality:

All known all white bare white body fixed one yard legs joined
like sewn. Light heat white floor one square yard never seen.
White walls one yard by two white ceiling one square yard never
seen. Bare white body fixed only the eyes only just. Traces
blurs light grey almost white on white...Traces blurs signs no
meaning light grey almost white (*CSP*, 193; my ellipsis)

William Gass reads that opening 'All' as 'audacious' (1970, 13). It certainly is audacious if one understands it as a claim to self-sufficiency. As with 'Imagination Dead Imagine' there is an apparent effort to rid the discourse of its extra-textual representationalism. However, the effort is doomed to 'failure' because language 'can't help being quotations of language already heard' (Bersani and Dutoit 1993, 20). As Barthes points out, 'the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original' (1977, 146). Beckett cannot free his language of representationalism here; what he can do, however, is interdict the teleological structure of the signification. We will be given the 'traces blurs signs' but 'no meaning'; the words of the text will act not as units in some gathering continuity, but as monadic seizures impeding the progress of the reader towards sense. Closure is precluded. As David Lodge has pointed out,

we normally pursue repetitions as elements of cohesion within the ‘variegated texture’ (1986, 121) of discourse. Here, we are unable to use Beckett’s patterning in this way because variegation has been so drastically reduced. The text’s indigence involves the occlusion of the orientational material we require to determine significance. This refusal of teleological structure is manifest in the interdictive ending: ‘silence ping over’ (*CSP*, 196). The sign which breaks the ‘silence’ here is the text’s most consciously indeterminate unit; the ‘over’ only returns us to silence. Beckett offers us cessation, not closure. Never closure.

It is because Beckett *stops short* at every level in ‘Ping’—narrative, grammatical, lexical—that determination is impossible. But it is not only that the text achieves this plurality through its narratorial reticence, occlusiveness and closural interdiction that makes it relevant to my study of interrogative short fiction; it is also that Beckett should have found the form so amenable to his efforts to ‘go on’ from the Trilogy. I would suggest that the reason for this was that, given the ‘obligation to express’ yet the impossibility of escaping language in that expression, interrogative short texts allowed him to ‘fail better’—to fail without the paraphernalia of narrative or any of the emergent continuities of extent that mark the Trilogy, to fail, above all, at making meaning from what is said.

**Destitute Myths of Depth:
Postmodernism and Donald Barthelme**

Destitute Myths of Depth: Postmodernism and Donald Barthelme

Richard Ford has written of the 1960s and 70s in America as ‘a time of boisterous experimenting and questioning about what a short narrative might variously be’ (1998, xiv); a time when convictions about the short story—gleaned largely from Frank O’Connor’s *The Lonely Voice*—were ‘being uprooted and turned upside down’ (1992, viii). In particular, Ford cites the impact on American writers of recently translated work by Borges, Carlos Fuentes, García Márquez, aesthetic ideas emerging from Gruppo 63 in Italy and the *Nouveau Roman* in France, along with the decline in the academy of the New Criticism.

Of course, all of these influences and trends have been—and will continue to be—thoroughly documented in writing about postmodernism, American or otherwise. However, Ford’s account is somewhat at odds both with contemporary and retrospective critical discourse about the 1960s and early 1970s because of its generic emphasis on the short story and its suggestion that the theoretical and experimental upheavals of the time may have been especially or differently manifest in short fiction than in the novel. Almost without exception, critics writing about this period have observed no such critical distinction between the forms; the focus has, rather, been on the competing registers of experimental/conventional, representational/non-representational, modernist/postmodernist, within which the novel and short story are lumped together. This homogenization of the two forms has unfortunate consequences for the short fiction which, as we have seen, has a tendency to be subsumed in a critical discourse geared largely to the aesthetics of the longer form. Hence, one finds repeatedly assertions made about postmodernist or experimental *fiction*

which in fact pertain only to the *novel*; and this even when the illustrative text is a short story.

In this chapter, therefore, I want to propose readings of stories by Donald Barthelme and others that place them *as* stories within the trajectory of modernist short fiction as I have defined it. My first objective in doing so will be to enhance understanding of the texts themselves by freeing them from a novel-orientated postmodernist perspective. By extension, this will allow me to challenge established definitions of literary postmodernism which are based solely on consideration of the novel, while at the same time demonstrating why the short story has been, in the case of Barthelme, so amenable a form for the experimental imagination.

Much of what I am concerned with in this chapter can be elucidated to begin with in relation to the title story from Ronald Sukenick's 1969 collection *The Death of the Novel and Other Stories*. Despite appearances, Sukenick's story does not attempt some putative displacement of the novel by the short story, nor does it offer to narrate, in short measure, the 'demise' of the novel as a genre. The much larger object of Sukenick's attention is what his narrator describes as the 'absolutely problematic' quality of post-realist fiction in terms of its treatment of chronological time, characterization and plot (1969, 41). The main diegesis of the story concerns the narrator's relationships with his fifteen year-old girlfriend Teddy and his mistress Betty. However, this narrative is repeatedly displaced and interrupted by fragments of newspaper stories, counter-teleological digressions, metafictional ruminations and, ultimately, by an account of the narrator's efforts to write the story itself.

The particular anxiety for Sukenick's narrator lies in his pressing sense of the arbitrary selectiveness of the narrating act. He is continually plagued by the presence of all that his narrative is excluding, all that he is leaving out in order to make this particular incidence of meaning. Hence the fraught intrusions into his

narration of 'real' newspaper columns reporting atrocities in Vietnam. Despite their narrative quality, their appearance as structured *récits*, these columns convey, as the narrator's story itself does, their status as arbitrarily selective representations of a reality that is not encompassable; they serve only to remind the narrator of the 'overwhelming social dislocations' (*ibid*) that are entailed in any feeble *location* of meaning. The newspaper, like the story, is implicated by its very act of selectivity in the formation of the 'reality' it reports.

To escape this predicament, the narrator attempts to write without any 'hysterical impositions of meaning', to 'improvise' his art as he does his life (*ibid*, 42). To this end he adopts a 'principle of simultaneous multiplicity, or the knack of keeping several things on your mind at once', a strategy which he believes will better reflect the inundation of data, the multitude of possible narratives that surrounds him, 'the central fact of our mental life' (*ibid*, 53). This 'simultaneous multiplicity' is manifest not only in the newspaper intrusions but in the many counter-teleological abductions from the dominant diegesis. Several of these begin 'Once upon a time...' or 'One evening...', statements that are, as Jonathan Culler puts it, 'extremely rich in literary and pragmatic presuppositions...relat[ing] the story to a series of other stories' (1981, 115). However, these openings, rich in promise, are followed by a marked failure to deliver any significance: the mini-narratives peter out indeterminately or are displaced by yet other digressions, as in the 'John Johnson' anecdote which is not only abortive but which is parodic of the novelistic compositional gesture of the illustrative anecdote itself: 'John Johnson was a short, slight fellow, tall and portly, with a nondescript face' (1969, 57).

My interest in Sukenick's story emerges from the familiarity of the techniques he is using to undertake his exploration of the 'post-realist' problematic. In preceding chapters we witnessed the importance of indeterminacy and resistance to formal closure in the modernist short story.

With Hemingway in particular we saw the device that Sukenick deploys of signalling conventions and archetypes of story-telling ('Once upon a time...') only to have the main narrative divert from the kind of closure promised by such a beginning. Similarly, the indeterminate anecdotes that resist recuperation by the main diegesis, and which in fact threaten to overrun it, recall the deceptive way-laying Joyce undertakes repeatedly in his stories and which Beckett explores to the limits of its logic. My point is that Sukenick's story exploring the predicament of 'post-realism' adopts characteristic techniques of modernist short fiction to do so. Sukenick's concerns may be different from his modernist predecessors, but many of the formal strategies of his narrative are not.

This formal connection is made clear in the ending to the story, where the metafictional anxiety about ending—'Here begins the last hour that I allow myself to finish this performance' (*ibid*, 90)—gives way finally to an explicitly and self-consciously modernist short story epiphany. In this 'last hour', the digressions, anecdotes, newspaper intrusions multiply as do the writer's pseudo-Beckettian imprecations to himself to 'go on', 'keep going', 'faster'. Every channel of information is open—'Another call. And still another' (*ibid*, 100)—and inundating the narrator with possibilities for closure that will, of course, be predicated on the occlusion of all other possible closures: 'What else can happen? The house can burn down' (*ibid*).¹ Maddened with anxiety the narrator finally writes in the actual situation of writing: 'Enough. Saturday, January 20, 1968. Let's take a walk' he says and heads out into the thawing landscape:

The sun begins to dip behind the mountain, I call it a mountain...And here's the bend in the road. I start around it. In a minute I'll be out of sight. But before I disappear, I lift my red wool cap that I bought so the hunters won't blow my head off, a

¹The pressure of multiple possible endings is felt throughout postmodernist fiction: see, for example, B.S. Johnson's story 'Broad Thoughts from a Home' in his 1973 collection *Aren't You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs*, Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939), John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1964), and Barthelme's 'Views of My Father Weeping', discussed below.

gesture of goodbye, as if to say, in fact to say, I'm happy folks,
and I wish you luck. I disappear around the bend.
So long. End of story (*ibid*, 102)

Given the anxiety about the conditions of 'post-realist' fiction that the narrator has been worrying over throughout the text, this ending is entirely appropriate because it describes the writer abandoning the scene of writing while at the same time placing that abandonment as the arbitrary ending to the text. However, as a gesture of valediction it is decidedly familiar in structure and effect to the reader of the modernist short story. That self-consciousness ('I call it a mountain') arises because of the epiphanic nature of the scene: the narrator has risen from his desk and walked out into a pastoral landscape that is also, like Gabriel Conroy's, a scene of transition—the thaw is on. Despite this self-awareness the ending acts interrogatively, as epiphanic endings do: it does not function as a point of disclosure. The relevance of the landscape is uncertain—indeed, it opens new interpretative possibilities concerning the narrator's convictions that we have reached the 'post-realist' stage in fiction. This closing scene is the most steadily pictured in the story, and like so many of the endings we have examined in previous chapters it represents a site of conflict and amplification in the text despite its gesture of closure and completion. What interests me is why an ending so conscious of its prefiguration in the modernist short story should emerge as ideally expressive of the narrator's 'post realist' anxieties about the writing act.

Rather than read Sukenick's text as simply an arch example of the playful metafictional imagination, then, I am suggesting that we approach it through a consideration of the form in which it is written—an approach that is surely invited by the title of the volume to which it belongs, *The Death of the Novel and Other Stories*. In other words, I am arguing for a genre-based perspective on this text rather than one geared solely to the consideration of its status as a postmodernist fiction. Postmodernist critics have understood Sukenick's story in terms of the challenge it presents to the classic realist piety of

representationalism and the fictional paraphernalia—time, plot, character—which facilitates that. Underlying this is an assumption that the postmodernist critique of mimetic realism cuts across genre, that a perspective sensitive to generic discriminations is no longer valuable, or even valid. I want to argue that, on the contrary, such an approach would not only supplement our understanding of the texts in question but also impinge upon our view of postmodernist fiction, its critical history, provenance and procedures.

Of course, the reluctance of critics to recognize the particular properties of the short story is nothing new; in previous chapters I have cited many whose readings of short fiction are predominantly based on theories of the novel. Yet it is still remarkable to come across commentators of the stature of John Barth and William Gass who even as they note the preference among their contemporaries for short forms do not undertake any consideration of the reasons for this phenomenon or bring to bear any generic discrimination in their analyses. In an interview published in 1973, Barth commented on how many of his fellow Americans were at that time finding the novel ‘much less congenial a form artistically than shorter, different kinds of things’ (Gado 1973, 124). He cited Kafka, Borges (whose *Ficciones* appeared in English translation in 1967) and Beckett as the principal influences on writers like Donald Barthelme and Robert Coover. Yet nowhere does he explore possible reasons for this phenomenon. Barth’s comments echo those made by William Gass a few years earlier in his influential volume² of essays *Fiction and the Figures of Life* (1970):

A number of our finest writers—Barth, Coover, and Barthelme, for example—have begun to experiment with shorter forms, as Beckett and Borges before them, and in many ways each wishes to instruct us in the art of narration, the myth-making imagination (1970, 107)

Gass too recognizes some generic preference on the part of these writers, some

²On the importance of Gass’s book as the ‘manifesto’ of the ‘nontraditionalists’ in American letters see McCaffery 1982.

leaning towards short forms as particularly suited to the metafictional explorations they wish to undertake. However, he is concerned only with these stories' ability to lay bare elements of narrative structure: he is not interested in their formal properties except as they distil what he takes to be the fundamental patterns underlying all narrative. As regards Donald Barthelme, this confines Gass's interest to *Snow White* (1967). Although a deeply sensitive reader of the contemporary scene, Gass, like Barth, nevertheless fails to consider that it may be the short story's formal properties which account for its intimate involvement in so much of the experimental fiction of the time.

The indifference Barth and Gass show to the short story is reflected throughout critical texts of this period, and this neglect has consequences when we consider the theories of postmodernism that have emerged therefrom. For instance, reading through Raymond Federman's influential 1975 anthology of essays *Surfiction* one discovers that there is not a single reference to the short story as a distinct genre, let alone any debate about its formal properties, despite its ubiquity as a form among the writers represented and discussed in the book. Jerome Klinkowitz, in his essay 'Literary Disruptions; or What's Become of American Fiction?', for example, examines work by, among others, Sukenick, Barthelme, Kurt Vonnegut, and Jerzy Kosinski. In his analyses Klinkowitz makes a number of claims for these writers as representative of the 'new style' in American fiction. Writing of Kosinski's *Steps*, a novel composed of extremely short chapters, he highlights the text's radical truncation and compression and the way in which this results in conventional plotting being 'replaced by more inventive associations' (Federman 1975, 171). Rather than gratify readerly expectations of closure, we are told, 'Kosinski prefers instead to write the bare minimum, so that "the reader is forced to imagine what the novel merely suggests"' (*ibid*). Only a reader unconscious of the achievements of modernist short fiction would carry the conviction that Kosinski's approach here is

radically new. Yet even in his discussions of short stories, such as Barthelme's 'Robert Kennedy Saved from Drowning', Klinkowitz fails to relate the text in question to any notion of the significance or history of the very form in which it is written. He notes of Barthelme's story that its various narrative elements 'add up to nothing conclusive' and from this argues that accordingly 'a new way is needed to count their meaning' (*ibid*, 170). That 'new way' has been the challenge in modernist short fiction for some sixty or so years prior to Barthelme's story.

To a great extent Klinkowitz's claims about the radical newness of the fiction he is witnessing arise from his conviction that the American novel has remained largely conservative and stable in formal terms since the 1920s. Set against the 'persistent old-fashioned story tellers', with their 'leading characters, plots and morals to be pointed', their 'beginnings middles and ends' (*ibid*, 165), these new writers certainly are provocative and radical. But it is surely inadequate to argue for their 'newness' by contrasting their poetics of indeterminacy, generated through truncation, ellipsis, interdiction, resistance to formal closure, and so on, with the continuities of the 'conventional' realist novel. Some consideration of the achievements of the modernist short story would quickly alert Klinkowitz to the fact that the very innovative strategies he is celebrating in this new writing have already been extensively cultivated in short fiction. At best, some revision of the claims for radical newness would be required.

To illustrate my point here, consider Barthelme's story 'Views of My Father Weeping' (from *City Life*, 1970) and the responses of some leading critics to it. The story is narrated by a character whose father has been run over and killed by an 'aristocrat...riding down the street in his carriage' (1970, 3). After the funeral ceremony the father appears, sitting in the centre of his son's bed, weeping. Or so it seems, for here the ontological doubt (interrogativeness) sets

in. Is it his father after all? The resemblance is strong, but identity cannot be confirmed. Throughout the story the father will reappear in this way, variously weeping, in fragmented, possibly delusionary, possibly memorial, interpolations into the main narrative:

My father throws his ball of knitting up in the air. The orange wool hangs there.

*

My father regards the tray of pink cupcakes. Then he jams his thumb into each cupcake, into the top. Cupcake by cupcake. A thick smile spreads over the face of each cupcake. (*ibid*, 5)

The temporal, spatial, and semantic status of these interpolations in relation to the main diegesis is not determined. Is the father (dead, of course) doing these things, or are they memories? And if the latter, what is their significance to the narrator? Their significance either way, of course, is uncertain—it is suspended, deferred, like his father between states of life and death, like the ball of orange wool.

In the midst of this uncertainty, Barthelme activates a plot predicated simply on a quest for certainty. The narrator wishes to reconcile opposing statements by witnesses to the accident, one of whom claims it was the father's fault that he was run over, another that it was due to the recklessness of the aristocrat. In his quest to know for sure which account is correct the narrator tracks down the aristocrat's coachman, Lars Bang, who 'resolves' the doubt by telling how the father had tried to attack the horses and been trampled underfoot in his madness. The story concludes thus with Lars Bang's account:

"I wanted to go back and see what had become of the madman, your father, who had attacked us; but my master, vastly angry and shaken up, forbade it. I have never seen him in so fearful a temper as that day; if your father had survived, and my master got his hands on him, it would have gone ill with your father, that's a certainty. And so, you are now in possession of all the facts. I trust you are satisfied, and will drink another bottle of this quite fair claret you have brought us, and be on your way." Before I had time to frame a reply, the dark-haired girl spoke. "Bang is an absolute bloody liar," she said.

Etc. (*ibid*, 15-16)

Brian McHale has described this as a ‘non-ending’, the ‘Etc.’ as a ‘gesture towards endlessness’ (1987, 109). But I read it as a typically interdictive short story ending. As Lars Bang’s account begins, we question his reliability as a witness, not least because he is a ‘suspect’ in the narrator’s inquiry. However, it is clear from this ending that the story is not interested in establishing the relative reliability or otherwise of its characters. Rather, the function of the ending is the non-resolution of the quest plot. The ‘Etc.’ does not only signal that the quest for certainty carries on *ad infinitum*, it also refers to all that has been left out of this narrative; it reflects back, in other words, on the condition of indeterminacy in the story as well as projecting forward an endless series of *statements and counter-statements*. That ‘Etc.’ we could attach to the end of every modernist short story we have examined so far—it is the mark of the form. It is the ‘Etc.’, too, that critics have sought to supply in their readings, filling the semantic gaps left by the interdictions, ellipses, withholdings and oclusions that mark the positive shortness of the form.

All of the radical effects in this story can in fact be read in this way, as extending from modernist short story techniques. The ‘endlessness’ of the ending, as I have suggested, is an extension of the interdictive openness that characterizes the short form. Similarly, the deferral of meaning mentioned above is typical of the short story technique of withholding, refusing to arrest the significance (symbolic or otherwise) of certain details in the narrative for the purposes of enforcing the dominant diegesis. Connected to this is what McHale calls the ‘rhetoric of contrastive banality’ (1987, 76), referring to the way in which in postmodernist fictions the narrator or characters often remain ‘blasé in the face of miraculous violations of natural law’ (*ibid*). In this story, the narrator does not at any stage remark upon the impossibility of his father’s actually being in his room weeping after his death: that fact does not cause the narrator to discount him as an unlikely cohabitee. Furthermore, he is concerned to make

sure that the weeping figure is not the 'mailman, the man who delivers the groceries, an insurance salesman or tax collector' (1970, 4) as though their presence, sitting weeping on his bed, would be more readily explicable. Contrastive banality is not just an instrument of irony or oddness; it marks a refusal to arbitrate connections between elements in the narrative—again, a refusal to recuperate the details of the story for the dominant diegesis. It is, in other words, akin to reticence in the short story. As with Joyce's three 'surplus' signifiers—*paralysis*, *gnomon*, *simony*—we are left to establish meaning and significance from the contexts of reference and utterance: the narrating voice refuses to mediate any connections for us. Finally, there is the status of the dominant diegesis itself. The quest plot is, of course, a pretence at narrative closure. Particularly in Hemingway we saw this technique of signalling an affinity to a minimal story structure in order then to refute it. Barthelme's text simply makes explicit in its 'Etc.' this refutation.

Obviously, there are significant differences between Barthelme's textual world and that of Joyce and Hemingway; he is, after all, unquestionably *postmodernist*. Barthelme more conspicuously disrupts ontological coordinates in his fictions than do the earlier writers. Hence the estrangement of the world in which the story takes place. The dead/undead simultaneity aside, this is a place populated by telephones, insurance salesmen, grocery delivery boys, plastic jonquils and Ford pickups, yet it also a place where aristocrats ride around the city streets in carriages and employ liveried footmen. The rational coordinates of Barthelme's world are difficult to fix. My interest, however, is that the narrative techniques Barthelme uses to disrupt ontological certainties are those employed throughout the modernist short fictions we have been examining. Barthelme uses shortness as a positive quality in his stories; form is integral to the meanings he generates, or degenerates. He exploits the techniques of interrogative short fiction but in order to explore questions of being as well as

those of meaning.

Aside from offering us another perspective on Barthelme's textual practice, the kind of reading I am advocating here has consequences for how we place Barthelme, and other story writers, within an appraisal of postmodernism. Indeed, I would go as far as to say that that appraisal may have to be altered or qualified when we involve it with a genre-based analysis. Certainly, critics who have responded to 'Views of My Father Weeping' have been unwilling to account for it as in any way related to the history of the form in which it is written. Barbara Roe, for example, would prefer to seek out ambitious, and ultimately impressionistic, connections to the visual arts in order to explain the story's structure, claiming that it 'simulates collage's temporal and spatial ambiguity' (1992, 40). Larry McCaffery, similarly, even while he contemplates the way in which 'final answers' and 'teleological explanations' (1982, 110) are missing from the text, is unable or unwilling to relate this to story form or to any critical history of short fiction.

More importantly, McCaffery's wider thesis is that the work of Barthelme (along with that of Coover and Gass) represents a break with the aesthetics of modernism. He argues that it was principally from the *Nouveau Roman* that these writers inherited the scepticism about 'causal relationships, beginnings, middles, and ends...' (*ibid*, 13) evident in their narratives. However, McCaffery's perspective, like Klinkowitz's, is exclusive of generic considerations; he is making a claim about *fiction* that is in fact based solely on a theory of the *novel*. Accordingly, he can make pronouncements about radical postmodernist credentials based on comments like this, about Barthelme:

When his characters—or we ourselves—try to gain “deeper” insights or teleological explanations about what has happened, the search inevitably ends futilely with our efforts often being anticipated and directly mocked (*ibid*, 110)

Barthelme feels that he cannot offer his readers the easy assurances which lie at the centre of most realistic narratives...[His] work is characterized by his refusal to present

well-rounded characters, supply easy explanations, or make causal connections (*ibid*, 114-5)

All of McCaffery's observations here could be applied to the modernist interrogative short story as we have encountered it. Not only is he arguing from a position blind to achievements in the form in which Barthelme is working, but once we take that form into consideration, then the integrity of the modernist/postmodernist breakthrough metanarrative he is arguing for can itself be compromised.³

Although she does not undertake any extended consideration of Barthelme as regards postmodernism, Barbara Roe, like McCaffery, seems happy to conduct her book-length study of Barthelme's short fiction as though the history of the genre were a footnote to his achievement. 'In the conventional sense,' she writes, 'Barthelme did not write "short stories"' (1992, xiii). She does not define her use of 'conventional' here but it surely cannot include modernists writers because she describes Barthelme's radical art in terms of its refusal of 'such explicit parameters as plot' and its cultivation of 'indeterminacy' (*ibid*, xiii; xiv). Where she does identify some of his experimental techniques her account is nevertheless still limited by its lack of awareness of the ways in which these might relate to short fiction, as when she writes of how in his stories 'unobstructed routes are not permitted...the paths of plot must be blocked at every turn...or narratives stalled by anticlimax' (*ibid*, 4). As with McCaffery, Roe's observations here could as easily be applied to the interrogative, interdictive modernist short story.

Alan Wilde goes further still than McCaffery and Roe in propounding the theory of a postmodernist breakthrough. According to Wilde, modernism is

³The phrase 'breakthrough metanarrative' is Brian McHale's, who argues that all such metanarratives concerning the relationship of modernism and postmodernism must be divested of authority in order to allow more refined, singular readings of the texts involved (1992, 24).

characterized by a ‘disjunctive irony’ which ‘recognizes the disconnections’ of a fragmented, relativized world yet seeks to ‘control them’ through ‘an aesthetic closure that substitutes for the notion of paradise regained an image...of a paradise fashioned by man himself’—an aesthetic evident in, for instance, T.S.Eliot’s countenancing of the ‘mythical method’ in *Ulysses* (Wilde 1981, 10). Postmodernism, on the other hand, Wilde defines by its quality of ‘suspensive irony’ in which the effort to close or unify the ‘vision of multiplicity, randomness, contingency, and even absurdity’ is replaced by an acceptance of ‘quandary...a low-keyed engagement with a world of perplexities and uncertainties’ (*ibid*). Wilde observes how various postmodernist writers ‘welcome or at any rate subscribe ‘to an aesthetic of openness’ (*ibid*, 135) in contradistinction to modernists in whose ‘heterocosmic’ imaginations ‘fragmentation is overcome’ and ‘discontinuity transcended’ (*ibid*, 128).

Wilde cites as an ‘emblem’ of postmodern suspensiveness Max Apple’s ‘Free Agents’, a fantastic story in which a narrator finds himself party to a court tribunal set up to establish whether his bodily organs, which have downed tools and gone on strike, have the right to determine their own future. Like the best courtroom thrillers, Apple’s story hinges ultimately upon the decision of the jury. However, the jury, in this case chaired by Einstein’s brain, delivers a hung verdict, a decision (or rather a failure to decide) whose indeterminacy is joyously accepted:

“To tell me this,” I yell to the heavens, “I don’t need Einstein’s brain.” Clouds suck up the jury. Full of myself, on tiptoes I bounce on the grass ready for everything (1977, 51)

For Wilde, postmodernist ‘suspensiveness’ is ‘imaged in the hung jury’ (1981, 132). However, we might equally read the interrogative openness of this ending, its deliberate refusal to supply information the narrative is itself generating the desire for, as significant of modernist short fiction. In other words, we can relate its strategies to the form in which it is written as much as to some postmodernist

anxiety about the indeterminacy of truth. Read as a short story, Apple's text cuts across the modernist/postmodernist binary as Wilde wishes to define it.

In effect I am arguing here that a study of the 'postmodernist short story' needs to take into account both elements in that designation. When we do so, we realize that the postmodernist breakthrough metanarrative can be compromised and qualified in relation to the short fiction. My position here aligns me with critics such as Helmut Lethen, Matei Calinescu, Marjorie Perloff, William Spanos and Brian McHale, all of whom have been concerned with refining our understanding of the continuities between modernism and postmodernism. They each seek to qualify the definition of the latter through an extension of our understanding of the former—something that the dependency relation in the term *postmodernism* itself would seem to invite. Helmut Lethen, for example, re-reads postmodernism as 'uncovering a dimension which has been buried within Modernism for some time' (1986, 233), namely the avant-garde. Lethen argues that the (by definition) disruptive and discontinuous avant-garde has been occluded in accounts of modernism firstly in order to guarantee 'the coherence of the critical construct of Modernism', and secondly in order to 'warrant the claim of innovation which is inherent in Postmodernism' (*ibid*, 234). Lethen suggests that if one compares the features of Postmodernism to those of Dadaism, for example, 'one will be hard put to discern any basic differences' (*ibid*). He goes on to list polarities commonly called upon to distinguish the modernist from the postmodernist, such as Hierarchy/Anarchy, Presence/Absence, and, most significantly for me, Determinacy/Indeterminacy (*ibid*, 235). Lethen argues that this list of polarities in fact 'shows the battlefield on which Modernism itself operates' (*ibid*, 236). In other words, the critical discrimination modernist/postmodernist is in fact already inherent within modernism.

Now, throughout this thesis I have been arguing for a definition of the

modernist short story based on its cultivation of indeterminacy. In the light of Lethen's comments we might say that what Klinkowitz, Wilde, McCaffery and others define as postmodernist indeterminacy in the stories of Sukenick, Coover and Barthelme could equally be read as emerging from an opposition within modernism. Furthermore, Lethen's point that the notion of a consolidated modernist aesthetic depends on the expulsion of the oppositional and, by definition, discontinuous avant-garde, concurs with my repeated insistence that the critical history of the short story has been suppressed by an emphasis on the aesthetic of novel; hence the claims for postmodernism based solely on an understanding of the dominant prose form, ignorant of any countermanding evidence in the short fiction.

Lethen's sentiments are echoed by Matei Calinescu who suggests that postmodernism 'is mostly an extension and diversification of the pre-World War II avant-garde' (1987, 143). However, Calinescu refines the argument by observing the ways in which postmodernist writers have retreated from the relentless and 'ruthless devastation' of the avant-garde and opted instead for a 'logic of renovation' (*ibid*, 276). Like John Barth and Umberto Eco⁴, Calinescu believes that the logic of the avant-garde ends ultimately in sterility, impasse, the impossibility of saying Hence the efforts made by Barth and others to articulate an alternative and recuperative 'logic of renovation' (*ibid*, 277) in which the postmodernist poetics of indeterminacy came to be understood as the 'continuation' of a force which has always existed within modernism.

Calinescu derives his definition of this poetics of indeterminacy from Marjorie Perloff who argues that there exist within modernist poetics two distinct though often interwoven strands: the 'symbolist mode' that runs from

⁴See Barth's 'The Literature of Exhaustion' (1967) and 'The Literature of Replenishment' (1980), both in Barth 1997. See also the interview in Bellamy (1974, 1-18). For Eco's views on the sterility of the logic of the avant-garde see Eco 1985, 66-7.

Romanticism, through Baudelaire and Eliot, to Robert Lowell, and the anti-symbolist ‘mode of indeterminacy or “undecidability”, of literalness and free play’ that runs from Rimbaud’s *Illuminations*, through Stein, Pound and Williams, Cubism, Dadaism, early surrealism and which also includes ‘the great French/English verbal compositions of Beckett’ (1981, vii). Perloff elucidates this difference in a comparative reading of John Ashbery’s ‘anti-symbolist’ poem ‘These Lacustrine Cities’ and Eliot’s *The Waste Land*. Her conclusion is that, despite its opacities and disjunctions, its allusiveness and symbolic richness, one can nevertheless readily decode Eliot’s poem because in it ‘the relationship of the word to its referents, of signifier to signified, remains essentially intact’ (*ibid*, 17). The elements of Ashbery’s poem on the other hand remain disparate and indeterminate:

In Ashbery’s verbal landscape, fragmented images appear one by one—cities, sky, swans, tapering branches, violent sea, desert, mountain—without coalescing into a symbolic network...For there seems to be no world, no whole to which these parts may be said to belong. Totality is absent (*ibid*, 10)

There is a striking similarity between Perloff’s descriptive rhetoric here and that which I have found appropriate for my account of modernist short fiction. The centrifugal nature of Ashbery’s poem, its deliberate failure to bring about a coalescence of meaning in its detail, to subjugate the ‘presence’ of its parts to a symbolic totality—in short, its qualities of *indeterminacy*—all signal its kinship to the kind of texts I have been dealing with. Of course, Ashbery’s poem goes further than the stories I’ve been looking at (Beckett’s excepted) in attacking the referential assumptions we make about language; nevertheless, Perloff’s descriptions of the poem’s techniques could equally apply to modernist short fictions. For instance, take the way in which imminent plots are signalled in the text only to be abandoned at the point of closure:

[S]uch potential plots are rather like water sprouts, rising to the surface only to dissipate again. As readers, we are thus left in a state of expectancy: just at the point where revelation might occur, the curtain suddenly comes down (*ibid*, 11)

Though Perloff's interest (with the exception of Beckett) is in poetry, I think we can readily associate short fiction—as another relatively neglected history within modernism—with this poetics of indeterminacy. The value of this for my account of postmodernism, and the reason I have advanced towards it, is that it establishes a metanarrative that cuts across the modernist/postmodernist binary which I have found so reductive in relation to short fiction.

Returning to Larry McCaffery, we find a discussion of the impact of Alain Robbe-Grillet's *For a New Novel* on American fiction (and criticism) following its publication in English in 1965 in which McCaffery argues that the work provided a theoretical grounding for the breakthrough against the dominant psycho-social realism of Salinger, Mailer, Bellow, Updike, and William Styron. Unquestionably, *For a New Novel* was an important part of the effort to free fictional practice from the strictures of representationalism. For many writers and academics it became the principal means by which the fiction of Beckett, Nabokov and Borges could be appropriated for literary theory, though Donald Barthelme, it should be noted, was careful to distance himself early on from the theory and practice of the *Nouveau Roman*.⁵ It is possible, however, to read Robbe-Grillet's text in support of the theory I have been outlining, namely that the short fiction contravenes the modernist/postmodernist dichotomy based on the metanarrative of a postmodernist breakthrough..

Discussing his own film, *Last Year at Marienbad*, Robbe-Grillet complains about the nature of the questions audiences invariably ask, questions about the past lives of characters, about events preceding those in the film:

⁵ 'The new French novelists, Butor, Sarraute, Robbe-Grillet, Claude Simon, Phillipe Sollers, have...succeeded in making objects of their books without reaping any of the strategic benefits of the maneuver...Their work seems leaden, self-conscious in the wrong way. Painfully slow-paced, with no leaps of the imagination, concentrating on the minutiae of consciousness, these novels scrupulously, in deadly earnest, parse out what can safely be said.' (Barthelme 1964(a), 16). 'Made dreariness into a religion,' one of his imaginary critic says elsewhere (1985, 40).

Have this man and this woman really met before? Did they love each other last year at Marienbad? Does the young woman remember and is she only pretending not to recognize the handsome stranger? Or has she really forgotten everything that has happened between them? etc.
Matters must be put clearly: such questions have no meaning.
(1989, 152)

It is as though the audience requires some preterition, some larger chronology, in order to decode the 'present' action of the film. We have seen how the same questions are repeatedly asked of modernist short fiction; indeed, I have argued that Joyce, Hemingway and Beckett all utilize the persistence of this kind of readerly curiosity as an operative principle in their texts. Robbe-Grillet's impatience is with the audience's refusal to recognize the self-sufficiency of the present moment in which the action of the film occurs. In the same way, modernist short stories refuse the explanatory teleological justifications and continuities of the novel; they are predicated on the self-sufficiency of their present, as it were. The repeated efforts of critics of, for example, Hemingway's 'Cat in the Rain' or 'Hills like White Elephants' to reconstruct a past life for the text that will offer motivations and explanations for the characters' actions betrays the depth of this determination to unify and recuperate meaning.

Robbe-Grillet argues that in the new narrative time 'no longer completes anything...Moment denies continuity' (*ibid*, 155). This emphasis on the momentary at the expense of continuity may appear to entail a sense of frustration, even disappointment, for the reader. But Robbe-Grillet argues that in fact this kind of writing celebrates the 'creative assistance' of the reading act:

For, far from neglecting him, the author today proclaims his absolute need of the reader's cooperation, an active, conscious, *creative* assistance. What he asks of him is no longer to receive ready-made a world completed, full, closed upon itself, but on the contrary to participate in a creation (*ibid*, 156)

Robbe-Grillet's phrasing here recalls that of Robert Louis Stevenson who defined the short story as resistant to the 'full close' (1997, 464) of the novel. As I have argued throughout, the modernist short form excites the co-productive

capacity of the reader; it is, in Umberto Eco's phrase, a deeply 'lazy machine' (1995, 3). Once again, there would appear to be consonance between the aspirations of experimental fiction of this period and the formal properties of the interrogative short story.

I am not suggesting here that modernist short fiction is somehow the unacknowledged nonpareil form for postmodernist fiction; nor am I unconscious of the fact that Robbe-Grillet's criticisms are of conventional realist fiction as a mode of representation and apply equally to the short story as to the novel. What I am pointing to is the manner in which the short form as I've defined it seems answer in many ways to the demands Robbe-Grillet is making of fiction as a whole. Throughout *For a New Novel* we encounter prophesies and projections about the new fiction that appear to be descriptions of the procedures of modernist short stories. In 'On Several Obsolete Notions', for instance, Robbe-Grillet calls for an end to teleological plot structure governed by the 'impulse of each episode toward a conclusion' (1989, 32). The modernist short story, as we have seen, resists precisely this teleological impulse and so would appear to be ideally suited to the resistance effort Robbe-Grillet is calling for against the classic realist imposition of 'the image of a stable, coherent, continuous, unequivocal, entirely decipherable universe' (*ibid*). Similarly, in 'A Future for the Novel' Robbe-Grillet chooses the detective story as his model of the 'old' narrative mode in which everything 'is resolved in a banal bundle of causes and consequences, intentions and coincidences' (*ibid*, 22). The oppositional 'new' form, by contrast, will thwart the desire for such conclusiveness, returning us instead to the 'evidence' in search of meanings that the text refuses to secure: 'Though they may conceal a mystery, or betray it, these elements...have only one serious, obvious quality, which is to *be there*' (*ibid*, 23). Resisting our determination to reduce their meaning to 'a single determining element' (*ibid*, 19), these texts will revel in surfaces, enigmas, contradictory states, celebrating

the ‘destitution of the old myths of “depth”’ (*ibid*, 23). Again, one can easily see how the stories of Joyce, Hemingway, Beckett and others I have cited, function to this end, interdicting closure and returning the reader always to the enigmatic ‘presence’ of their parts.

In an interview with Donald Barthelme in 1978, Heide Ziegler pursued the matter of Barthelme’s preference for short forms in terms very similar to those Robbe-Grillet uses in *For a New Novel*. ‘Would it be possible to say that you prefer experience over meaning?’ Ziegler asked, citing as an example the way in which the balloon in Barthelme’s story ‘The Balloon’ figures as a ‘concrete particular’ with no determinate meaning or significance (Barthelme 1982, 50). In other words, is Barthelme a poet of the surface, the testifiable ‘present’, conscious of the destitution of the old myths of ‘depth’? Ziegler’s question is based on a speculation that the short story may be ideally suited to this activity because as a form it permits or even enforces a disavowal of large-scale recuperative structures of meaning. Barthelme side-steps the question on this occasion, commenting only on his distrust of ‘big canvasses’ (*ibid*, 51). But in a later interview he is more forthcoming about what he aims for in a story and about what the short form offers him that the novel does not:

A process of accretion. Barnacles growing on a wreck or a rock.
I’d rather have a wreck than a ship that sails. Things attach
themselves to wrecks. Strange fish find your wreck or rock to be
a good feeding ground; after a while you’ve got a situation with
possibilities. (Barthelme 1983a., 34)

The metaphor is interesting here because it seems to suggest that the unextended form can be richer in ‘possibilities’ than that which exhibits, full-rigged, its development and identity. This resistance to novelistic elaboration is echoed later on in the same interview when he talks about the importance of removing the narrative scaffold, the rigging, in a story: ‘It’s a question as to whether such things can be made to fly without the support of a controlling narrative’ (*ibid*, 41-2). By eschewing the investigative paraphernalia of plot and character

psychology in his stories, Barthelme is able to convey the indeterminate, multiple 'present' of his textual world. Short fiction as a form is ideally suited to the 'student of the surfaces' (*ibid*, 43), as Barthelme calls himself. Its interrogative openness and resistance to closure allows him to testify to the strange possibilities of those surfaces without any obligation or scope to explain them, to present situations free from any teleological development—the text as 'an *itself*' (Barthelme 1974, 52), in other words, rather than a reflection of a reality pre-structured with meaning.

Barthelme may be for many the exemplary postmodernist—indeed, his 'After Joyce' (1964) is a striking precedential account of McHale's ontological dominant—but his chosen grammar is that of the interrogative short story. Indeed, stories such as 'The Explanation' (*City Life*, 1970) and 'Concerning the Bodyguard' (*Great Days*, 1979) are purely interrogative, both being constructed around questions that are either answered obliquely or not answered at all. When we read Barthelme, then, I think we need to be conscious of both these contexts—postmodernism and the short form. I have already set out why I think such an approach is important in relation to postmodernism as a whole; now I want to demonstrate what it offers to our understanding of Barthelme's achievement by undertaking some further readings of his work.

Throughout his career, Barthelme has made plain his awareness of the generic history of short fiction and its 'eligibility for responding to radical innovation' (Davenport 1991, 70) by parodic playfulness with its conventions and devices. For example, 'The Dolt' (*Unspeaking Practices, Unnatural Acts*, 1969) concerns an aspiring writer, Edgar, who must compose a story in order to pass the National Writers' Examination. Edgar's problem is that he cannot think of a 'middle' for his story. He has a captivating opening and an 'ironic' conclusion (he recites these to his wife, Barbara) but he is unable to contrive a love intrigue between his two central characters. "Something has to happen

between them,” his wife tells him. ““Otherwise there’s no story”” (1969, 68). Of course, Barthelme’s story itself lacks any such suspenseful intrigue, a failure that is recognized in the text’s wholly arbitrary, outlandish and ironic ending:

At that moment the son manqué entered the room. The son manqué was eight feet tall and wore a serape woven out of two hundred transistor radios, all turned on and tuned to different stations. Just by looking at him you could hear Portland and Nogales, Mexico.

“No grass in the house?”

Barbara got the grass which was kept in one of those little yellow and red metal canisters made for sending film back to Eastman Kodak.

Edgar tried to think of a way to badmouth this immense son leaning over him like a large and blaring building. But he couldn’t think of anything. Thinking of anything was beyond him. I sympathize. I myself have these problems. Endings are elusive, middles are nowhere to be found, but worst of all is to begin, to begin, to begin (*ibid*, 69).

The reiteration of ‘begin’ is, of course, playfully situated at the *end* of the story here, but more than that, the problem with beginning at all, as hapless Edgar discovers, is the obligation to conclude meaningfully. to justify having begun in the first place. Edgar has an ‘ironic’ ending for his story, but it has no meaning because there is no situation—no middle—for it ironically to resolve: the gap in his text robs it of significance. Barthelme’s interdictive and ironic ending to his own text makes it as much a ‘failure’ in this respect as Edgar’s.

The mischievous exploration of closure in the short form is a feature, too, of ‘The Piano Player’ (*Come Back Dr. Caligari*, 1964). Here, the madly discontinuous domesticity of Mr and Mrs Brian Hess, comprising an unsmoked ham that talks, stale penicillin, paint chipping, *Parsifal*, IBM, Edmund Wilson, Coriolanus, a sleepy combustible giraffe, and, of course, a piano, concludes with Brian’s attempt to move said instrument into the grape arbour for his wife to play: ‘He took a good grip on its varnishedness. He began to trundle it across the room, and, after a slight hesitation, it struck him dead’ (Barthelme 1964b, p. 22). A ‘wow’ ending, yes, but yet another perverse inflection of Chekhov’s

dictum that if there's a gun hanging on the wall in a story it has to be fired (see Hemingway's 'The Art of the Short Story', p.126 above). Here the title proposes some cohesive duty for Barthelme's piano, so he has it 'go off' at the end. What he's mocking is the convention that a fiction's guns and pianos and giraffes must come to order, must be made to 'mean'. Throughout his story Barthelme plays in this way with our desire to attribute significance to textual detail through unruly juxtapositions which, because of the absence of any mediation between them, strike us as literally discontinuous—elements resistant to sequentiality and ratification in a *telos*. The killer piano is a parody of the 'wow' ending, but also of the wider ways in which narrative discourse achieves intelligibility.

'The Piano Player' is interesting because it reveals, parodically, how appropriate the elliptical short form is for the effects of indeterminacy Barthelme wishes to create. Unlike Joyce and Hemingway, he uses it to enforce an ontological interrogativeness: what is the nature of this world the characters occupy? What are its physical laws and coordinates, and who or what has agency in it? The short form is ideally productive of this sense of discontinuity: it is a form which by its very nature is anti-teleological, which tends, through its devices of interdiction and ellipsis, to suppress the causal relationships that establish integrity and intelligibility in narrative. Whereas modernist writers indulged the doubts it was able to raise about the status of knowledge and meaning, Barthelme is interested in how its interrogativeness can be exploited to undermine our sense of a coherent, describable world.

In 'The Wound' (*Amateurs*, 1977), he undertakes a parody of narrative causality that again involves some playfulness with conventions of closure in the short story. 'The Wound' concerns a famous torero who is confined to bed after being gored in the foot during a televised bullfight. He is waited upon by, among others, his mother and his mistress, along with groups of *imbéciles*, *idiotas* and *bobos*. While his mistress films the convalescence, a roast beef is

served and some Lysol is applied to the wound. A depressed Bishop enters to talk briefly of his experiences in psychoanalysis and drink a glass of Chivas Regal. He is followed by the Queen of the Gypsies who, having helped herself to some roast beef, decides to take possession of the torero's wound. She commands that he be lifted up and carried out of the house, but the doorway is suddenly blocked by a large black bull. The bull begins to ring, 'like a telephone' (1979, 17).

In summary form like this, speculative absurdity would appear to be the dominant interest of 'The Wound'. But in fact, the manner in which the narrative proceeds encourages a reading of the story that emphasizes its connections to, rather than its differences from, mimetic realism. Large sections of the text are structured in the following way (I have underlined to clarify the pattern):

The torero, ignoring the roast beef, takes the silver dish from his mother and sips from it, meanwhile maintaining intense eye contact with his mistress. The torero's mistress hands the camera to the torero's mother and reaches for the silver dish. "What is all this nonsense with the dish?" she asks the famous aficionado who is sitting by the bedside. The torero offers the aficionado a slice of beef, carved from the roast with a sword, of which there are perhaps a dozen on the bed. "These fellows with their swords, think they are so fine," says one of the imbéciles to another, quietly. The second imbécil says, "We would all think ourselves fine if we could. But we can't. Something prevents us."
(*ibid.*, p. 13)

At least one element in each sentence here provides the basis, the subject, for the next sentence. It is as though the story were written to no plan: where it will end up, how it will conclude, is being revised on a sentence by sentence basis. Like a sestina, the narrative provocations arise from the concatenated keywords—that is the flimsy basis of the causal relationships in the passage. Yet it is still a narrative, and I think Barthelme is exposing here, as Sukenick does in his story, the ultimately factitious and arbitrary nature of all narrational acts. The challenge is to see that the artifice of this story resides not solely in the fabulous

incongruity of its happenings but also in the mechanisms of causality and selectivity it lays bear—mechanisms on which all narratives rely. Their exposure in this way, and indeed the parodic treatment throughout Barthelme's fiction of conventions of plotting and narration, reveals how textual meaning is always a fabrication, how, as one critic puts it, reality 'does not speak for itself but is always signified' (Maltby 1991, 5) 'The Wound' simply does conspicuously what all realist fiction does more or less covertly.

The conclusion of the story, like that of 'The Piano Player', is a parodic 'wow' ending, making a pretence of closure. The final sentence reads, 'The bull begins to ring, like a telephone' (1979, 17). In modernist short fiction we have seen many endings which are interdictive of expectations that the narrative itself generates. Barthelme's ending is also highly interdictive but it achieves this not by diverting from but by aping a dramatic closural gesture. Furthermore, the clarifying simile, 'like a telephone', undermines our objections to the absurdity of the image of the ringing bull by involving it in a sense-making linguistic structure. It is no more or less valid than all the other entirely arbitrary selections that have been conspicuously made throughout the text and which are made in all narratives. To the objection that bulls can't make ringing noises in real life, comes the reply, Nor can imaginary telephones. In other words, let us recognize the constructed nature of all that we encounter in narrative and free ourselves from the (illusory) prison of descriptive realism.

The double focus I am employing in these readings—that is, on the texts as short stories *and* as postmodernist metafiction—is useful because it demonstrates how applicable the procedures of one are to the concerns of the other. The interrogative short story's resistance to teleological structuration, the way in which it returns us always to the enigmatic 'evidence' of its parts, makes it the ideal form in many ways for the destitution of that myth of 'depth', as Robbe-Grillet calls it, that effort of classic realist fiction to uncover in itself 'the

image of a stable, coherent, continuous, unequivocal, entirely decipherable universe' (1989, 32). 'Moment' does indeed deny 'continuity' in Barthelme's hands and our understanding of his postmodernism is enhanced once we acknowledge the role his chosen form has in creating it.

This destitution of the myth of depth is performed explicitly in 'The Glass Mountain' (*City Life*), a story that again is interdictive of an established story type but which uses this tactic to reveal the inadequacy of such narratives for the postmodern condition. The story, composed of one hundred consecutively numbered sentences, concerns the ascent of a glass mountain at the top of which, it is said, there is a castle within which dwells 'a beautiful enchanted symbol' (1970, 61). According to Lance Olsen, 'The Glass Mountain' reworks an ancient Norse tale called 'The Princess on the Glass Hill' (1991, 9), where, as that title suggests, it is a beautiful princess rather than a symbol that is the object of attainment. Barthelme's revision of the tale involves transplanting the glass mountain to the centre of New York City and having his narrator ascend, through the cat-calls of his neighbours and acquaintances, with the aid of a pair of plumber's mates—the sort of functional detail that establishes the comic incongruity between the heraldic nature of the quest and its location in a bustling, sceptical, materialistic metropolis.

On his way up the narrator relates the 'conventional means of attaining the castle', as described in *The Yellow Fairy Book*, which involves being seized by a giant eagle, circling the castle at a great height, then cutting the eagle's feet off and dropping on to a balcony that gives access to the beautiful princess (*ibid*, 63-4). This fairy tale represents, as one would expect, the narrative model from which the present story seeks to divert. And sure enough, as with many of the short fictions we have examined, that subversion occurs at the point of closure in the text:

97. I approached the symbol, with its layers of meaning, but
when I touched it, it changed into only a beautiful princess.

98. I threw the beautiful princess headfirst down the mountain to

my acquaintances.

99. Who could be relied upon to deal with her.

100. Nor are eagles plausible, not at all, not for a moment.

(*ibid*, 64-5)

The destitution of myth here takes the form of an ‘abuse’ rather than a ‘reuse’ of the classical situation and turns the story, one critic has said, into ‘a parable about the destruction of the transcendental signified which the princess symbolizes’ (Olsen 1991, 9-10). I would agree with this summary but again would emphasize the ways in which the text is exploiting the strategies and structures of interrogative short fiction to achieve its effect. The summoning of a classical story pattern and the interdiction of it at the point of closure is a defining technique of the modernist short story, but more important still is the way in which this formal gesture reflects the ‘destruction’ that Olsen is describing. The enchanting symbol, with its layers of possible meaning, changes into only a princess at the end; in other words, the symbol becomes simply a sign, a distinction that is spelled out earlier in the story:

71. “The conventional symbol (such as the nightingale, often associated with melancholy), even though it is recognized only through agreement, is not a sign (like the traffic light) because, again, it presumably arouses deep feelings and is regarded as possessing properties beyond what the eye alone sees” (*A Dictionary of Literary Terms*)

72. A number of nightingales with traffic lights tied to their legs flew past me (1970, 63)

The debunking of the literary symbol here is achieved by reaffirming the valency of the sign. In Robbe-Grillet’s terms we are returned to the plural ‘present’, the ‘surface’, of these textual details, as we are at the end of the story where the quest for the transcendental symbol turns up only a sign, a princess. The text is, as Olsen says, about the impotence of traditional symbolic narrative in dealing with the postmodern condition, but it achieves this by virtue of an interdictive short story structure which, like so many of the modernist texts we have examined, acts to repel our efforts to determine significance. The anti-teleological nature of the form affirms this refusal to pass from statement to

meaning, from sign to symbol. As with Beckett's 'residua', the move from language to expression, from units to continuities, is interdicted. In Barthelme's story the very destitution that is his subject is enacted in the interrogative form itself.

Thomas M. Leitch has made the valuable point that the anti-teleological nature of Barthelme's fiction is more than just a case of 'declining to provide an ending'; rather, it is a matter of his preferring 'forms that do not commit him even to the idea of an ending' (1982, 136). Hence the dialogue stories, such as 'The Explanation' (*City Life* 1970), 'The Reference' (*Amateurs*, 1977), 'Wrack' (*Overnight to Many Distant Cities*, 1983) and many of the pieces in *Great Days* (1979), in which two voices are presented without any narrative mediation or developmental structure. Other stories, Leitch point out, are based on self-cancelling premises, such as 'On Angels' (*City Life*) whose first sentence, 'The death of God left the angels in a strange position', Leitch says 'depriv[es] angels of any possible meaning, reduces...them to the status of pure phenomenon: a narrative presence which by its very nature can imply no teleology and indeed no significance' (1982, 136).

Although he does not recognize any connection between Barthelme's practice and that of his modernist precursors (indeed, he claims for Hemingway's short fiction a unifying 'telos...of revelation' (*ibid*, 135)), the value of Leitch's essay lies in the careful distinction it makes between fictions which are interdictive solely of expectations of closure, such as we find in Joyce and Hemingway, and texts like 'On Angels' which make 'no commitments to an end' at *any* level in their discourse (*ibid*, 137). Because of his lack of discrimination concerning the modernist short story, however, Leitch does not see Barthelme's anti-teleological strategies as characteristic of the form in which he is working; indeed, he considers Barthelme's work to be a decisive break with the ultimately unified modernist text. I would argue that rather than constituting

a radical discontinuance of the practices of modernist short fiction, Barthelme's work can be read as extending its elliptical, interrogative and interdictive narrative strategies to the ontological plane. As with the modernist writers, what I have been seeking is a definition of Barthelme's stories in which their shortness is recognized as, in Elizabeth Bowen's phrase, a 'positive quality'; a definition which clarifies the connection between the short form and the concerns of postmodernism.

In his essay 'Not-Knowing' (1985), Barthelme makes clear his preference for forms which do not 'commit' him, as Leitch puts it, to the kind of teleological structuration that fixes 'meaning' in acts of 'signification' and states his opposition to critics whose readings impose that kind of determinacy:

I would argue that in the competing methodologies of contemporary criticism, many of them quite rich in implications, a sort of tyranny of great expectations obtains, a rage for final explanations, a refusal to allow a work the mystery that is essential to it. I hope I am not myself engaging in mystification if I say simply that the mystery exists, not that the attempt should not be made to penetrate it. I see no immediate way out of the paradox—tear a mystery to tatters and you have tatters, not mystery—merely note it and pass on. (1985, 45-6)

Barthelme's rhetoric here resembles Barthes' (indeed Barthes is cited in the essay) when he asks that criticism be driven not by the quest for some 'theology' of the text but by a desire fully to recognize 'what *plural* constitutes it'. As we have seen, modernist short fiction's interrogative quality demands this kind of critical approach and I think it is not coincidental that Barthelme should have favoured the form in the way he did.

The condition of 'not-knowing' Barthelme insists on in this essay—both from the writer and the critic—is further exemplified in 'The Balloon' (*Unspeakable Practices, Unnatural Acts*, 1969). The story concerns the inflation by the narrator of a huge balloon over the city in which he lives and the efforts made by his fellow citizens to identify its meaning or purpose. Ultimately these efforts have to give way to a recognition of the balloon's elusiveness, the fact

that it confirms no one 'reading' of itself: 'It was suggested that what was admired about the balloon was finally this: that it was not limited, or defined' (1969, 21).

• Now, it is easy to see the balloon as a symbol of a kind of art which resists absolute interpretation, which can host any number of understandings. And indeed, that is how the story has usually been taken, as the expression of an aesthetic ideal: 'the art object which defies meaning, which cannot be said to be about anything' (Maltby 1991, 44).⁶ Barthelme himself seems to encourage this allegorical reading with his summaries of the critical reception of the balloon:

Because we had hidden the pumps, which fed helium to the interior, and because the surface was so vast that the authorities could not determine the point of entry—that is, the point at which the gas was injected—a degree of frustration was evidenced by those city officers into whose province such manifestations normally fell. The apparent purposelessness of the ballon was vexing (as was the fact that it was "there" at all). Had we painted, in great letters, "LABORATORY TESTS PROVE" or "18° MORE EFFECTIVE" on the sides of the balloon, this difficulty would have been circumvented (*ibid*, 17-18)

The 'concrete' particularity of the balloon (text or art object), its presence as 'an itself', cannot be tolerated by the critical intelligence which insists on locating a point of entry, an origin, a limit, an explanation of purpose that can contain the proteiform balloon (text or art object) within its own reifying discourse. So the allegorical reading goes.

What I find interesting here is that to read the story as being about not imposing allegorical meanings on art objects involves reading it allegorically, i.e., refusing to accept the balloon as 'an itself', seeing it as a symbol of something else. To understand this story as being about the ultimate intractability of art objects to determinate meaning involves us in the imposition of a determinate meaning on it. And I think this is Barthelme's point—he is

⁶ Maltby, it should be noted, is opposed to the ubiquity of the 'neo-formalist' approach he describes here and in his own reading places the story 'within a broader socio-political framework' (1991, 45)

directing our attention to the persistence of our efforts as readers to fix significance, even as we are congratulating ourselves on our recognition of the indeterminacy of the text before us! I think in many ways this exemplifies (here we go again) the difficulties we have encountered throughout this thesis in readings of modernist short fiction. The interdictive, interstitial nature of the form means that we are forced, as with Barthelme's balloon, to recognize its plural constitution and to reject as reductive the determinate reading. Modernist short fiction removes the very orientational material we require to reach finality in our interpretations—that is its defining characteristic. 'The Balloon' embodies the theoretical position necessary for an understanding of the 'positive shortness' of the form which it is itself an instance of. Like the balloon it describes, 'The Balloon' is proteiform, indefinite, dirigible.

'The Balloon' exemplifies Barthelme's recognition (set out in 'Not-Knowing') that the value of any object lies in the fact that it 'at once invites and resists interpretation' (1985, 46). It is significant, I think, that Barthelme's chosen form for the conveyance of his objects—interrogative short fiction—itsself invites 'objectification' rather than interpretation on the part of the literary critic. Certainly, such is the position required of us in relation to a story like 'The Indian Uprising' (*Unspeakable Practice, Unnatural Acts*), as McHale and Ron (1991) make clear in their protracted readings and re-readings of this text. Initially unwilling to 'follow the recipe for poststructuralist reading' (1991, 51) that would result in testifying to the text's undecidable meaning, these two critics at first attempted to exact a determinate interpretation of Barthelme's story. However, what they found was that their reading very quickly ran into 'more or less intractable difficulties' (*ibid*, 56).

The problems McHale and Ron encountered all arose from the contrary signals that Barthelme's text gives out. A salient example is the paradoxical colour designations in the story. Blue, for instance, is at first associated with the

invading Comanches in that the women sympathizing with them wear blue mufflers. Later, green becomes attached to those defending the city. However, when the narrator and his Comanche-sympathizing girlfriend Sylvia look at a map of the progress of the uprising he says to her, 'Your parts are green' (1969, 7). McHale and Ron are forced to conclude that the 'system of color-coding collapses into self-contradiction' (1991, 60).

The same process occurred for the critics on the other levels on which they sought to fix the story's sense. For instance, the cultural-historical pattern they established in which the defenders are associated with a 'high-modernist' allusive discourse and the Comanches with a deconstructive 'postmodernist' one (*ibid*, 55-6). However, this coherence is broken down when, for example, one of the captured Comanches cites Thomas Mann and speaks like the embodiment of 'Aschenbach's respectable professional-class forbears' (*ibid*, 61). Even within the various narrative levels McHale and Ron identify problems arise through the lack of any narratorial mediation. The technique of juxtaposition in the story's discourse left them uncertain 'whether successive sequences could be integrated in the same "situation", or even the same world, and if so, how' (*ibid*, 57).

McHale and Ron's grudging conclusion about 'The Indian Uprising' is that the text is ultimately indeterminate. In many ways their experience of reading it exemplifies the process of my thesis as a whole. I have attempted to subject critical interpretations to interrogative short fictions in order first of all to prove the insufficiency of these readings, and then to identify this insufficiency as the desired and desirable aesthetic of a form premised on the displacement of the 'determinate' by the 'interrogative'. It is not incidental that McHale and Ron feel that this story 'recoils' upon its readers (*ibid*, 63)—that, as we have seen, is a condition of the interrogative. I do not, furthermore, believe that this means we have succumbed to the 'poststructuralist recipe reading' (*ibid*) that these two critics are so keen to avoid. The generic framework of the short story allows us

to understand the text's indeterminacy as arising from certain narrative techniques of reticence, occlusion and interdiction—all of which are evident in Barthelme's story, particularly in its unmediated juxtapositions. Like Beckett, Barthelme returns us to words as monads, preventing their absorption into a continuous, teleological expressiveness. Blue is blue in 'The Indian Uprising', just as for Beckett white is white; the word is 'an itself'. Indeed, as Miss R. in Barthelme's story says, 'I hold to the hard, brown, nutlike word' (1969, 9). Rather than fear, as McHale and Ron do, that stating indeterminacy leaves us with an undifferentiated notion of textual practice, we can understand that it is the inevitable product of a form that seeks always to retard our progress from the word to what the word means.

As a last *word*, and marking my own susceptibility to closure, I should like to address a prophecy of Saul Bellow's, made in support of his own late engagement with short forms. Bellow has, of course, written stories throughout his career, but it is only recently that he has begun to argue that they may represent the nonpareil form of the future. The reason for this, Bellow suggests, is that the modern consciousness is 'perilously overloaded' (1993, viii), inundated with information and opinion. Every channel is open. Faced with this the writer must compete for attention, but he will have to recognize, says Bellow, that the contemporary mind is distracted, abused:

The reader will open his heart and mind to a writer who has understood this—has understood because in his person he has gone through it all, has experienced the same privations; who knows where the sore spots are...Such a writer will trouble no one with his own vanities, will make no unnecessary gestures, indulge himself in no mannerisms, waste no reader's time. He will write as short as he can (*ibid*, x).

For many, Bellow's words here will seem capitulatory, a suggestion that the writer must narrow his compass to suit an age in which there is little room to move. However, I would like to suggest that he might equally be voicing a

recognition of what it is possible to do in short narrative forms. For Bellow does not for a moment suggest that there is less to say or that we should aim to say less. Rather, he seems to me to be arguing for precisely the connection between brevity of utterance and multiplicity of meaning that I have been concerned to identify in this thesis. The interrogative short form's discrepancy of extent—its ability to generate amplitudes from economies—may be what Bellow is seeking. In which case he aligns himself with all those writers I have studied here for whom shortness was a positive quality.

References

- Abbott, H. Porter. 1994. 'Beginning Again: the post-narrative art of *Texts for Nothing and How it is*', in Pilling 1994, 106-123
- Alter, Robert. 1975. *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press
- Apple, Max. 1977. 'Free Agents'. *Iowa Review* 8, 42-51
- Aycock, Wendell M. 1982. *The Teller and the Tale: Aspects of the Short Story*. Lubbock: Texas Tech Press
- Bakhtin, M.M. 1981. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Edited by Michael Holquist. Translated by Carl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin and London: University of Texas Press.
- Baldeshwiler, Eileen. 1994. 'The Lyric Short Story: The Sketch of a History', in May 1994, 231-41. First published, *Studies in Short Fiction* 6 (1969): 443-53
- Baldwin, Dean. 1993. 'The Tardy Evolution of the British Short Story'. *Studies in Short Fiction* 30, 1, 23-33
- Barth, John. 1973. Interview with Frank Gado, in Gado 1973, 110-41
- , 1997. *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Nonfiction*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press. Original edition, New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1984
- Barthelme, Donald, 1964 (a). 'After Joyce'. *Location* 1, 2, 13-16
- , 1964 (b). *Come Back, Dr. Caligari*. Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown & Co.
- , 1967. *Snow White*. New York: Atheneum
- , 1969. *Unspeakable Practices, Unnatural Acts*. London: Jonathan Cape
- , 1970. *City Life*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux
- , 1972. *Sadness*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux
- , 1974. Interview with Jerome Klinkowitz, in Bellamy 1974, 45-54
- , 1977. *Amateurs*. London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul
- , 1979. *Great Days*. London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul
- , 1982. Interview with Heide Ziegler, in Ziegler and Bigsby 1982, 43-59
- , 1983 (a). Interview in Leclair and McCaffery 1983, 32-44
- , 1983 (b). *Overnight to Many Distant Cities*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons
- , 1985. 'Not-Knowing', in Wier and Hendrie 1985, 37-50
- Barthes, Roland. 1990. *S.Z.* Translated by Richard Miller. Oxford: Blackwell. Original edition, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974
- , 1977. *Image Music Text*. Edited and translated by Stephen Heath. London: Fontana
- Basic, Sonja. 1998. 'A Book of Many Uncertainties', in Bosinelli and Mosher 1998, 13-40
- Bates, H.E. 1945. *The Modern Short Story*. London: Thomas Nelson
- Baudelaire, Charles. 1972. *Selected Writings on Art and Artists*. Translated by P.E. Charvet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- , 1991. *The Prose Poems and La Fanfarlo*. Translated by Rosemary Lloyd. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Beckett, Samuel. 1965. *Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit*. London: John Calder
- , 1970. *More Pricks Than Kicks*. London: Calder and Boyars. Original edition, London: Chatto and Windus, 1934
- , 1976. *Watt*. London: John Calder. Original edition, London: Calder

- Jupiter, 1963
- , 1983. *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*. London: John Calder
- , 1993. *Dream of Fair to middling women*. London and Paris: Calder Publications
- , 1994. *Molloy; Malone Dies; The Unnamable*. London, Montreuil, New York: Calder Publications. Original edition, London: John Calder, 1959
- , 1995. *The Complete Short Prose: 1929-1989*. Edited by S.E. Gontarski. New York: Grove Press
- Begam, Richard. 1996. *Samuel Beckett and The End of Modernity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press
- Beja, Morris. 1983. 'One Good Look at Themselves: Epiphanies in *Dubliners*', in Peterson et al 1983, 1-14
- Bell, Bill. 1993. 'Fiction in the marketplace: towards a study of the Victorian serial', in Myers and Harris 1993, 125-44
- Bellamy, Joe David, ed. 1974. *The New Fiction: Interviews with Innovative American Writers*. Urbana, Chicago and London: University of Illinois Press
- Bellow, Saul. 1993. *Something to Remember Me By*. Harmondsworth: Penguin
- Belsey, Catherine. 1987. *Critical Practice*. London: Routledge. Original edition, London: Methuen, 1980.
- Benjamin, Walter. 1983. *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*. Translated by Harry Zohn. London: Verso. Original edition, London: NLB, 1973
- Benson, Jackson J., ed. 1975. *The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway: Critical Essays*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press
- , ed. 1990. *New Critical Approaches to the Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*. Durham and London: Duke University Press
- Benveniste, Emile. 1971. *Problems in General Linguistics*. Translated by Mary Elizabeth Meek. Miami: University of Miami Press.
- Bersani, Leo and Dutoit, Ulysse. 1993. *Arts of Impoverishment: Beckett, Rothko, Resnais*. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press
- Bloom, Harold, ed. 1985. *Ernest Hemingway: Modern Critical Views*. New York: Chelsea House
- , ed. 1988. *James Joyce's Dubliners: Modern Critical Interpretations*. New York: Chelsea House
- Boardman, Michael M. 1992. *Narrative Innovation and Incoherence: Ideology in Defoe, Goldsmith, Austen, Eliot and Hemingway*. Durham and London: Duke University Press
- Bonheim, Helmut. 1982. *The Narrative Modes: Techniques of the Short Story*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer
- Bosinelli Bollettieri, Rosa M. and Mosher, Harold F. Jr. eds. 1998. *Rejoycing: New Readings of Dubliners*. Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky
- Bowen, Elizabeth. 1950. *Collected Impressions*. London: Longmans
- , 1962. *After-Thought: Pieces About Writing*. London: Longmans
- Bowen, Zack. 1975. *Musical Allusions in the Works of James Joyce: Early Poetry Through Ulysses*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan
- , 1981. 'Joyce and the Epiphany Concept: A New Approach'. *Journal of Modern Literature* 9, 103-14
- Brake, Laurel. 1993. "'The Trepidation of the Spheres": the serial and the book in the 19th century', in Myers and Harris 1993, 83-101

- Brandabur, Edward. 1971. *A Scrupulous Meanness: A Study of Joyce's Early Work*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press
- Brenner, Gerry. 1990. 'From "Sepi Jingan" to "The Mother of a Queen": Hemingway's Three Epistemologic Formulas for Short Fiction', in Benson 1990, 156-71
- Brienza, Susan. 1987. *Samuel Beckett's New Worlds: Style in Metafiction*. Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press
- Brucoli, Matthew J., ed. 1996. *The Only Thing That Counts: The Ernest Hemingway Maxwell Perkins Correspondence 1925-47*. New York: Scribner
- Burnhams, Clinton S., Jr. 1975. 'The Complex Unity of In Our Time', in Benson 1975, 15-29
- Calder, John. 1967. *Beckett at Sixty. A Festschrift*. London: Calder and Boyars
- Calinescu, Matei. 1987. *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism Avant-Garde Decadence Kitsch Postmodernism*. Durham: Duke University Press
- Calvino, Italo. 1985. *Difficult Loves*. Translated by William Weaver. London: Picador. Original edition, London: Martin Secker and Warburg, 1983.
- Chatman, Seymour. 1978. *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press
- Chekhov, Anton. 1924. *Letters on the Short Story, The Drama, and Other Literary Topics*. Edited by Louis S. Friedland. London: Geoffrey Bles
- , 1964. *Lady With Lapdog and Other Stories*. Harmondsworth: Penguin
- Chesterton, G.K. 1919. *Charles Dickens*, London: Methuen. Original edition, London: Methuen, 1906.
- Cochran, Robert. 1991. *Samuel Beckett: A Study of the Short Fiction*. New York: Twayne
- Comley, Nancy R. and Scholes, Robert. 1998. 'Reading "Up in Michigan"', in Smith, P. 1998, 19-45
- Connor, Stephen. 1988. *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell
- Coover, Robert. 1971. *Pricksongs and Descants*. London: Cape. Original edition, New York: New American Library, 1969
- Culler, Jonathan. 1981. *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction*. London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul
- D'Arcy, Ella. [1895]1977. *Monochromes*. London and New York: Garland
- Davenport, Guy. 1991. 'Style as Protagonist in Donald Barthelme'. *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 11, 2, 69-74
- Dawkins, Richard. 1997. *Climbing Mount Improbable*. Harmondsworth: Penguin
- Day, Robert Adams. 1988. 'Joyce's Gnomons, Lenehan, and the Persistence of an Image', in Bloom 1988, 5-21
- de Rougement, Denis. 1983. *Love in the Western World*. Translated by Montgomery Belgion. Reprint with new postscript, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Original edition, N.p.: Pantheon Press, 1956.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1978. *Writing and Difference*. Translated by Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- , 1981. *Dissemination*. Translated by Barbara Johnson. London: Athlone.
- , 1992. *Acts of Literature*. Edited by Derek Attridge. New York and London: Routledge
- Dickens, Charles. 1971. *The Christmas Books, Vol. 1*. Edited by Michael Slater, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

- Donaldson, Scott, ed. 1996. *The Cambridge Companion to Hemingway*. Cambridge: CUP
- Eco, Umberto. 1985. *Reflections on The Name of the Rose*. Translated by William Weaver. London: Secker and Warburg
- , 1989. *The Open Work*. Translated by Anna Cancogni. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press
- , 1995. *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press
- Egerton, George. [1893; 1894] 1983. *Keynotes and Discords*. London: Virago
- Eliot, T.S. 1961. *Selected Poems*. London: Faber
- Ellmann, Richard, ed. 1975. *Selected Letters of James Joyce*. London: Faber
- , 1983. *James Joyce*. Reprint, revised and corrected. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Original edition: New York: Oxford University Press, 1959
- Epstein, Edmund L. 1983. 'James Joyce and Language', in Peterson et al 1983, 58-69
- Fabian, David R., 1968. 'Joyce's "The Sisters": Gnomon, Gnomonic, Gnome'. *Studies in Short Fiction*, 5, 187-9
- Federman, Raymond. 1971. 'The Impossibility of Saying the Same Old Thing the Same Old Way—Samuel Beckett's Fiction Since *Comment c'est*'. *L'Esprit Créateur* 11, 3, 21-43
- , ed. 1975. *Surfiction: Fiction Now...And Tomorrow*. Chicago: Swallow Press
- Ferguson, Suzanne C. 1994. 'Defining the Short Story: Impressionism and Form', in May 1994, 218-30. First published *Modern Fiction Studies* 28 (1982): 13-24
- Ficken, Carl, 1975. 'Point of View in the Nick Adams Stories', in Benson 1975, 93-112
- Finney, Brian. 1971. 'A Reading of Beckett's *Imagination Dead Imagine*'. *Twentieth Century Literature* 17, 65-71
- Fleishman, Avrom, 1980. 'Forms of the Woolfian Short Story', in Freedman 1980, 44-70
- Flora, Joseph M. 1989. *Ernest Hemingway: A Study of the Short Fiction*. Boston: Twayne
- , ed. 1985. *The English Short Story 1880-1945: A Critical History*. Boston: G.K. Hall
- Fokkema, Douwe and Bertens, Hans, eds. 1986. *Approaching Postmodernism*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co.
- Ford, Richard, ed. 1992. *The Granta Book of the American Short Story*. London: Granta Books
- , ed. 1998. *The Granta Book of the American Long Story*. London: Granta Books
- Fowler, Alastair. 1989. *A History of English Literature*. Oxford: Blackwell
- Fowler, Roger. 1986. *Linguistic Criticism*. Oxford: OUP
- Friedrich, Gerhard. 1957. 'The Gnomonic Clue to Joyce's *Dubliners*'. *Modern Language Notes*, 72, 421-4
- Gado, Frank, ed. 1973. *First Person: Conversations on Writers and Writing*. New York: Union College Press
- Gass, William. 1970. *Fiction and the Figures of Life*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf
- Gerlach, John. 1985. *Toward the End: Closure and Structure in the American Short Story*. Alabama: University of Alabama Press

- Gifford, Don. 1982. *Joyce Annotated: Notes for Dubliners and A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press
- Gillespie, Michael Patrick. 1989. *Reading the Book of Himself: Narrative Strategies in the Works of James Joyce*. Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press
- Gissing, George. [1898] 1977. *Human Odds and Ends*. London and New York: Garland.
- Goldberg, Michael E. 1996. 'The Synchronic Series as the Origin of the Modernist Short Story'. *Studies in Short Fiction* 33, 515-27
- Gordimer, Nadine. 1968. 'The International Symposium on the Short Story: South Africa'. *Kenyon Review*, 30, 457-463
- Graver, Lawrence and Federman, Raymond, eds. 1979. *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage*. London, Henley and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul
- Hagemann, E.R. 1980. "Only Let the Story End as Soon as Possible": Time and History in Ernest Hemingway's *In Our Time*. *Modern Fiction Studies* 26, 255-62
- Hanson, Clare. 1985. *Short Stories and Short Fictions: 1880-1980*. London and Basingstoke: Macmillan
- Hardy, Thomas. 1967. *Selected Stories of Thomas Hardy*. Edited by John Wain, London: Macmillan.
- Harris, Wendell V. 1994. 'Vision and Form: The English Novel and the Emergence of the Short Story', in May 1994, 182-91.
- Hart, Clive, ed. 1969. *James Joyce's Dubliners: Critical Essays*. London: Faber
- Hassan, Ihab. 1967. *The Literature of Silence: Henry Miller and Samuel Beckett*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf
- Head, Dominic. 1992. *The Modernist Short Story: A study in theory and practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Heller, Vivian. 1995. *Joyce, Decadence and Emancipation*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press
- Hemingway, Ernest. [1932] 1994. *Death in the Afternoon*. London: Arrow
- [1944] 1993. *The First Forty-Nine Stories*. London: Arrow
- [1964] 1994. *A Moveable Feast*. London: Arrow
- 1972. *The Nick Adams Stories*. Edited by Philip Young. New York: Scribners
- 1981. *Selected Letters*. Edited by Carlos Baker. London: Granada
- 1990. 'The Art of the Short Story', in Benson 1990, 2-13. First published *Paris Review* 79 (1981), 85-102
- Herring, Phillip. 1987. *Joyce's Uncertainty Principle*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press
- 1988. 'Structure and Meaning in Joyce's "The Sisters"', in Bloom 1988, 39-50
- Hill, Leslie. 1990. *Beckett's Fiction: In Different Words*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Hollander, John. 1985. 'Hemingway's Extraordinary Actuality', in Bloom 1985, 211-16
- Hutcheon, Linda. 1988. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. New York and London: Routledge
- James, Henry. 1905. *Partial Portraits*, London: Macmillan. Original edition, London: Macmillan, 1888.

- , 1934. *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces*. Edited by R.P. Blackmur, New York and London: Charles Scribner's Sons
- Joyce, James. 1950. *Stephen Hero*. Edited by Theodore Spencer. London: Cape. Original edition, London: Cape, 1944
- , [1914] 1988. *Dubliners*. Corrected, with explanatory note by Robert Scholes. London: Paladin. Original edition, London: Jonathan Cape, 1967.
- , [1916] 1988. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. London: Paladin.
- , [1922] 1993. *Ulysses*. Edited by Jeri Johnson. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- , 1991. *Poems and Shorter Writings*. Edited by Richard Ellmann, A. Walton Litz and John Whittier-Ferguson. London: Faber
- Joyce, Stanislaus. 1954. 'The Background to *Dubliners*'. *The Listener*, 526-7
- Keating, Peter. 1989. *The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Novel 1875-1914*. London: Secker
- Kenner, Hugh. 1972. *The Pound Era*. London: Faber
- , 1978. *Joyce's Voices*. London: Faber
- , 1996. *A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press. Original edition, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973
- Kermode, Frank. 1967. *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*. New York: Oxford University Press
- , 1979. *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative*. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press
- Knowlson, James. 1996. *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*. London: Bloomsbury
- and Pilling, John, eds. 1979. *Frescoes of the Skull: The Later Prose and Drama of Samuel Beckett*. London: John Calder
- Kruse, Horst H. 1967. 'Ernest Hemingway's "The End of Something": Its Independence as a Short Story and Its Place in the "Education of Nick Adams"'. *Studies in Short Fiction* 4, 152-66
- Kundera, Milan, 1996. *Testaments Betrayed*. Translated by Linda Asher. London: Faber
- Le Gallienne, Richard. 1896. *Prose Fancies*. London: John Lane
- LeClaire, Tom and McCaffery, Larry, eds, 1983. *Anything Can Happen: Interviews with Contemporary American Novelists*. Urbana, Chicago and London: University of Illinois Press
- Leigh, David J. 1975. 'In Our Time: The Interchapters as Structural Guides to a Psychological Pattern'. *Studies in Short Fiction* 12, 1-8
- Leigh, James, 1983. 'The Gnomonic Principle in *Dubliners*'. *The Lamar Journal of the Humanities* 9, 35-40
- Leitch, Thomas M. 1992. 'Donald Barthelme and the End of the End'. *Modern Fiction Studies* 28, 1, 129-43
- Lethen, Hemlut. 1986. 'Modernism Cut in Half: The Exclusion of the Avant-Garde and the debate on Postmodernism', in Fokkema and Bertens 1986, 233-38
- Lodge, David. 1981. *Working With Structuralism*. Boston, London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul
- , 1986. 'Some Ping Misunderstood', in McCarthy 1986, 119-127. First published, *Encounter* 3 (1968)
- Lohafer, Susan. 1983. *Coming to Terms with the Short Story*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press
- and Clarey, Jo Ellyn, eds. 1989. *Short Story Theory at a Crossroads*.

- Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press
- Luscher, Robert M. 1989. 'The Short Story Sequence: An Open Book', in Lohafer and Clarey 1989, 148-67
- MacCabe, Colin. 1979. *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word*. London and Basingstoke: Macmillan
- , ed. 1982. *James Joyce: New Perspectives*. Sussex: Harvester
- McCaffery, Larry. 1982. *The Metafictional Muse: The Works of Robert Coover, Donald Barthelme, and William H. Gass*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press
- McCaffrey, John K.M., ed. 1950. *Ernest Hemingway: The Man and His Work*. New York: Scribner's
- McCarthy, Patrick A., ed. 1986. *Critical Essays on Samuel Beckett*. Boston: G.K. Hall
- McHale, Brian. 1987. *Postmodernist Fiction*. London and New York: Routledge
- , 1992. *Constructing Postmodernism*. London and New York: Routledge
- and Ron, Moshe. 1991. 'On Not-Knowing How to Read Barthelme's "The Indian Uprising"'. *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 11, 2, 50-68
- Macksey, Richard and Donato, Eugenio, eds. 1970. *The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Press
- Maltby, Paul. 1991. *Dissident Postmodernists: Barthelme, Coover, Pynchon*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press
- Marler, Robert F. 1994. 'From Tale to Short Story: The Emergence of a New Genre in the 1850s', in May 1994, 165-81
- Martin, Peter, 1977. 'The Short Story in England: 1930s Fiction Magazines'. *Studies in Short Fiction* 14, 233-40
- Matthews, Brander, 1901. *The Philosophy of the Short-Story*. New York: Longmans, Green and Co.
- May, Charles E., ed. 1994. *The New Short Story Theories*. Ohio: Ohio University Press
- Meyers, Jeffrey, ed. 1982. *Hemingway: The Critical Heritage*. London, Boston and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul
- Miller, J. Hillis. 1976. 'Ariadne's Thread: Repetition and the Narrative Line'. *Critical Inquiry* 3, 57-76
- , 1980. 'The Figure in the Carpet'. *Poetics Today*, 1, 3, 107-118
- , 1980/1. 'A Guest in the House: Reply to Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's Reply'. *Poetics Today*, 2, 1b, 189-91
- Moddelmog, Debra A. 1988. 'The Unifying Consciousness of a Divided Conscience'. *American Literature* 4, 591-610
- Morrison, Arthur. 1896. *Tales of Mean Streets*. London: Methuen
- Myers, Robin and Harris, Michael, eds. 1983. *Serials and their readers: 1620-1914*. Winchester: St. Paul's Bibliographies; Delaware: Oak Knoll Press
- Norris, Margot. 1988. 'Narration Under a Blindfold: Reading "Clay"', in Bloom 1988, 143-60
- O'Connor, Frank. 1963. *The Lonely Voice*. London: Macmillan
- Olsen, Lance. 1991. 'Slumgullions, or Some Notes toward Trying to Introduce Donald Barthelme'. *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 11, 2, 7-15
- Parrinder, Patrick. 1984. *James Joyce*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Pater, Walter. [1868] 1980. *The Renaissance*. Edited by Donald Hill. London and Berkeley: University of California Press
- Patteson, Richard F., ed. 1992. *Critical Essays on Donald Barthelme*. New York:

- G.K. Hall & Co.
- Pearce, Richard. 1988. 'Voices, Stories, (W)holes: The Politics of Narration', in Scott 1988, 79-85
- Perloff, Marjorie. 1981. *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press
- Peterson, Richard F., et al, eds. 1983. *Work in Progress: Joyce Centenary Essays*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press
- Phelan, James. 1998. "'Now I Lay Me": Nick's Strange Monologue, Hemingway's Powerful Lyric, and the Reader's Disconcerting Experience', in Smith, P.1998, 47-72
- Pilling, John. 1997. *Beckett Before Godot*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- , ed. 1994. *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Pratt, Mary Louise. 1994. 'The Short Story: The Long and the Short of It', in May 1994, 91-113. First published in *Poetics* 10 (1981): 175-94
- Prince, Gerald. 1973. *A Grammar of Stories*. The Hague: Mouton & Co.
- Pritchett, V.S., 1980. *The Tale Bearers: Essays on English, American and Other Writers*. London: Chatto and Windus
- Putnam, Ann. 1984. *Retreat, Advance, and Holding Steady: Vision and Form in the Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*. Ph.D. diss., University of Washington
- Rabaté, Jean-Michel. 1982. 'Silence in *Dubliners*', in MacCabe 1982, 45-72
- Rabinovitz, Rubin. 1984. *The Development of Samuel Beckett's Fiction*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press
- Reynolds, Michael S., ed. 1983. *Critical Essays on Ernest Hemingway's In Our Time*. Boston, Mass.: G.K. Hall and Co.
- Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith. 1980/1. 'Deconstructive Reflections on Deconstruction: In Reply to Hillis Miller'. *Poetics Today*, 2, 1b, 185-88
- , 1983. *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. London and New York: Routledge
- Robbe-Grillet, Alain. 1989. *For a New Novel*. Translated by Richard Howard. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press. Original edition, 1965
- Roe, Barbara L. 1992. *Donald Barthelme: A Study of the Short Fiction*. New York: Twayne Publishers
- Rohrberger, Mary and Burns, Dan E. 1982. 'Short Fiction and the Numinous Realm: Another Attempt at Definition'. *Modern Fiction Studies* 28, 5-12
- St John Butler, Lance and Davis, Robin J., eds. 1990. *Rethinking Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Basingstoke and London: Macmillan
- Scott, Bonnie Kime, ed. 1988. *New Alliances in Joyce Studies*. London and Toronto: Associated University Presses
- Senn, Fritz. 1988. "'The Boarding House" Seen as a Tale of Misdirection', in Bloom 1988, 121-9
- Shaw, Valerie. 1983. *The Short Story: A Critical Introduction*. London: Longman
- Shenker, Israel. 1979. 'An Interview with Beckett', in Graver and Federman 1979, 146-8
- Simmel, Georg. 1971. *On Individuality and Social Forms: Selected Writings of Georg Simmel*. Edited by Donald N. Levine. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

- Slabey, Robert M., 1983. 'The Structure of In Our Time' in Reynolds 1983, 76-87. First published, *South Dakota Review* (1965): 38-52
- Smiley, Pamela. 1990. 'Gender-Linked Miscommunication in "Hills Like White Elephants"', in Benson 1990, 288-99
- Smith, Janet Adam. 1948. *Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson: A Record of Friendship and Criticism*. London: Hart-Davis
- Smith, Paul. 1996. '1924: Hemingway's Luggage and the Miraculous Year', in Donaldson 1996, 36-54
- , ed. 1998. *New Essays on Hemingway's Short Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Smith, Roch C. 1986. 'Naming the Minotaur: Beckett's Trilogy and the Failure of Narrative', in McCarthy 1986, 75-82. First published *Modern Fiction Studies* 29 (1983): 73-80
- Spanos, William V. 1987. *Repetitions: The Postmodern Occasion in Literature and Culture*. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press
- Stevenson, Robert Louis. 1997. *The Selected Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*. Edited by Ernest Mehew. New Haven and London: Yale University Press
- Strychacz, Thomas. 1996. 'In Our Time, Out of Season', in Donaldson 1996, 55-86
- Sukenick, Ronald. 1969. *The Death of the Novel and Other Stories*. New York: The Dial Press
- Tester, Keith, ed. 1994. *The Flâneur*. London: Routledge.
- Todorov, Tzvetan, 1970. 'Language and Literature', in Macksey and Donato 1970, 125-33
- Trieloff, Barbara, 1990. "'Babel of Silence': Beckett's Post-Trilogy Prose Articulated' in St John Butler and Davis, eds, 1990, pp. 89-104
- Turgenev, Ivan. [1852] 1990. *Sketches from a Hunter's Album*. Translated by Richard Freeborn. Reprint, with additional stories, Harmondsworth: Penguin. Original edition, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967.
- Updike, John. 1976. Interview in *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews*. Fourth Series. Harmondsworth: Penguin
- , 1992. *Odd Jobs: Essays and Criticism*. Harmondsworth: Penguin
- Valente, Joseph. 1988. 'The Politics of Joyce's Polyphony', in Scott 1988, 56-69
- Watson, David. 1991. *Paradox and Desire in Samuel Beckett's Fiction*. Basingstoke and London: Macmillan
- Wier, Allen and Hendrie, Don Jr., eds. 1985. *Voicelust: Eight Contemporary Fiction Writers on Style*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press
- Wilde, Alan. 1981. *Horizons of Assent: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Ironic Imagination*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press
- 1987. *Middle Grounds: Studies in Contemporary American Fiction*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press
- Williams, Raymond. 1973. *The Country and the City*. London: Chatto and Windus
- Woolf, Virginia. 1942. *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays*. London: Hogarth
- , 1975-80. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*. Edited by Nigel Nicolson and Joanna Trautmann. 6 vols. London: Hogarth Press
- , 1976. *Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings of Virginia Woolf*. Edited by Jeanne Schulkund. Sussex: Sussex University Press
- , 1978. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*. Edited by Anne Olivier Bell. 5 vols. London: Hogarth Press

- Wright, Austin M. 1989. 'Recalcitrance in the Short Story', in Lohafer and Clarey 1989, 115-29
- Yee, Cordell D.K. 1997. *The Word According to James Joyce: Reconstructing Representation*. Lewisburg P.A., London and Cranbury, N.J.: Associated University Presses
- Young, Philip. 1975. "'Big World Out There": The Nick Adams Stories', in Benson 1975, 29-45
- Zapf, Hubert. 1990. 'Reflection vs. Daydream: Two Types of the Implied Reader in Hemingway's Fiction', in Benson 1990, 96-111. First published, *College Literature* 15 (1988): 289-307
- Ziegler, Heide and Bigsby, Christopher, eds. 1982. *The Radical Imagination and the Liberal Tradition: Interviews with English and American Novelists*. London: Junction Books

Other Works Consulted

The following relevant works were consulted during the preparation of this thesis but were not cited in the text.

- Allen, Walter. 1981. *The Short Story in English*. Oxford: Clarendon Press
- Bayley, John. 1988. *The Short Story: Henry James to Elizabeth Bowen*. Brighton: Harvester
- Beachcroft, T.O. 1968. *The Modest Art, A Survey of the Short Story in English*. London: Oxford University Press
- Bergonzi, Bernard. 1970. *The Situation of the Novel*. London: Macmillan
- Bonheim, Helmut. 1982. *The Narrative Modes: Techniques of the Short Story*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer
- Burgess, Anthony. 1984. 'Anthony Burgess on the Short Story'. *Journal of the Short Story in English* 2, 31-47
- Canby, Henry Seidel. 1909. *The Short Story in English*. New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston
- Chapman, Michael. 1984. 'The Fiction Maker: The Short Story in Literary Education'. *CRUX: A Journal on the Teaching of English* 18, 3-20
- Didion, Joan. 1979. 'Making up Stories'. *Michigan Quarterly Review* 18, 521-34
- Dollerup, Cay. 1970. 'Concepts of "Tension", "Intensity" and "Suspense" in Short-Story Theory'. *Orbis Litterarum: International Review of Literary Studies* 25, 314-37
- Freedman, Ralph, ed. 1980. *Virginia Woolf: Revaluation and Continuity*. Berkeley: University of California
- Gibaldi, Joseph. 1975. 'Towards a Definition of the Novella'. *Studies in Short Fiction* 12, 91-7
- Gullason, Thomas, A. 1973. 'Revelation and Evolution: A Neglected Dimension of the Short Story'. *Studies in Short Fiction* 10, 347-56
- . 1982. 'The Short Story: Revision and Renewal'. *Studies in Short Fiction* 19, 221-30
- Hanson, Clare. 1989. *Re-reading the Short Story*. London and Basingstoke: Macmillan
- Harland, Henry. 1895. 'Concerning the Short Story'. *Academy and Literature* 51, fiction supp.
- Imhof, Rudiger. 1984. 'Minimal Fiction, or the Question of Scale'. *Anglistik & Englischunterricht* 23, 159-68.
- Moorhouse, Frank. 1977. 'What Happened to the Short Story?'. *Australian Literary Studies* 8, 179-82
- O'Faolain, Sean. 1948. *The Short Story*. London: Collins
- Propp, Vladimir. 1968. *Morphology of the Folktale*. Austin and London: University of Texas Press
- Reid, Ian. 1977. *The Short Story*. London: Methuen
- Roe, Barbara L. 1992. *Donald Barthelme: A Study of the Short Fiction*. New York: Twayne Publishers
- Scheer-Schaezler, Brigitte. 1970. 'Short Story and Modern Novel: A Comparative Analysis of Two Texts'. *Orbis Litterarum* 25, 338-51

- Szavai, Janos. 1982. 'Towards a Theory of the Short Story'. *Acta Litteraria Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 24, 203-24
- Wain, John. 1984. 'Remarks on the Short Story'. *Les Cahiers de la Nouvelle: Journal of the Short Story in English*. 2, 49-66
- Warde, William B. Jr. 1976. 'The Short Story: Structure of a New Genre'. *South Central Bulletin* 36, 155-7