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I and We: Hannah Arendt, Participatory Plurality, and the Literary Scaffolding of Collective Intentionality

**Abstract**

This article examines Hannah Arendt's contribution to notions of the 'We,' and tests key Arendtian concepts through relation and juxtaposition with philosophical and literary texts from different periods, thereby complicating discussions of (1) how individuals participate in, shape, and are shaped by various forms of 'We;' (2) how, within collective participation, individuals come to care about being themselves; and (3) to what extent literary texts enable and encourage processes of identity construction and (re)configuration. For Arendt, the "place in the world which makes opinions significant and actions effective" (*Origins*, 387-88) is "the result of our common labor, the outcome of the human artifice" (*Origins*, 393) – the shared practices and institutions that Wittgenstein calls "forms of life" (Wittgenstein 2009, 15). In this article, we argue that by exploring and critiquing "forms of life" literature can expand the range of activities we recognise as fostering "participatory sense-making" (De Jaegher and Di Paolo 2007, 465). The three literary provocations presented here – Callimachus's "Hymn to Apollo," Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, and Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* – all interrogate the situated interactions of 'I's and 'We's that instantiate the 'participatory plurality' of the shared world.

**Keywords:** Hannah Arendt, collective intentionality, narrative identity, comparative literature

## I. Introduction

Highly as they may prize their own individuality, very few people choose to live in complete seclusion. We are born into a shared world and participate, for better or worse, in multiple collective undertakings. So how can we critically appraise the variety of forms of collective participation; that is, the different ways of understanding and of being part of a 'We'? Sophie Loidolt (2018) has recently demonstrated how Hannah Arendt's philosophy is a fruitful and as-yet underexploited resource for thinking about this. Building on Loidolt's insights, this article examines further Arendt's contribution to notions of the 'We' and also makes strategic use of literary texts from a range of periods, so as to extend Arendt's thought beyond its historically determined blind spots. In the process, we propose a more nuanced account of how individuals experience the reciprocity of the 'We.' Furthermore, we suggest that literature not only represents and critically interrogates such experiences but also itself exemplifies a reflexive medium of 'participatory plurality': meaning that by reading, one is already actively participating in the constitution of a shared world, as we shall show below.

A particular benefit of combining an Arendtian model of participatory plurality with close literary readings is that the literature helps to flesh out what Arendt might mean by one of her key terms: the "world." As Loidolt shows, Arendt's use of the term draws on phenomenological precursors, Husserl's "lifeworld," and Heidegger's "being-in-the-world" (Loidolt 2018, 94-98) and also moves beyond them by focusing on how a world emerges in and through social interaction and joint acts. Entwining the world and human action in this way makes visible the irreducible human contribution to the process of sustaining a shared world, while at the same time emphasizing that the world is "frail and endangered" (Loidolt 2018, 101), given its dependence on certain forms of human care. Interestingly, literature is

one of these forms of care: a practice through which a shared world emerges (Cheah 2016), constituting a particularly instructive case of participatory sensemaking, as we shall make clear.

In this article therefore, we first present Arendt's insights into the context of shared cultural practices which create and sustain a shared world. Some slippages in her argument allow us to pinpoint roles that literary texts can play in fostering (and indeed undermining) forms of individual and collective being. Examples of such multifaceted mutual constitution are then developed further through three literary provocations. The first provocation, a hymn by the Hellenistic poet Callimachus, throws an alternative light upon the ancient Greek culture that is so important a point of reference for Arendt. The second provocation explores a key modernist text, *The Magic Mountain* (1924) by Thomas Mann, which Arendt and Heidegger read together in 1925. The third provocation, the contemporary novel *Alias Grace* by Margaret Atwood, further complicates an understanding of the relations between individuals and social institutions. When related back to Arendt, these literary provocations reveal Arendt to be an invaluable interlocutor in twenty-first century debates about ways in which literature can foster participatory plurality.

An important locus of such debates can be found on the interdisciplinary frontier between phenomenology and cognitive science. For instance, the philosophers Shaun Gallagher and Deborah Tollefsen argue that narrative plays an important role in the formation of stable collective identities and influences the way individuals develop a sense of self in relation to their wider social milieu (Tollefsen and Gallagher 2017; Gallagher 2018). This work builds upon a well-established tradition that explores how narratives shape identities (Bruner 1990; Dennett 1991; Ricoeur 1992; Hutto 2008; Goldie 2012) and complements current studies of collective identity (Zahavi 2014, 2018; Schmid 2014; Brinck, Reddy, and Zahavi 2017; León 2020).

Some critics of the narrative approach (Strawson 2004, 2017; Zahavi 2007; Ratcliffe 2009) worry that ‘narrative’ is perhaps too broad a term, encompassing everything from everyday conversation, through (auto)biographical accounts, to novels, myths, and films. These critics also question whether it is the specifically narrative elements of these phenomena that make the salient contribution, or whether it is linguistic interaction *tout court* (Tomasello 2019), or even the being accountable to others in the exchange of reasons (Mercier and Sperber 2017). We suggest here that considering these questions from a literary perspective can allay certain worries because literature (ironically perhaps) goes beyond strictly narrative practices by depicting and critiquing many other forms of human activity and identity formation. We are aided here by Celia Heyes and Chris Frith (Heyes and Frith 2014; Heyes 2018), who detail how sense-making practices are supported and scaffolded by wider interactive cultural processes. Heyes’s and Frith’s model coheres with Daniel Hutto’s Narrative Practice Hypothesis (Hutto 2008) but goes further, because it stresses that narrative is but one of an expansive range of activities that foster “participatory sense-making” (De Jaegher and Di Paolo 2007; Fuchs and De Jaegher 2009). The three literary provocations we present here tackle just these issues, enabling us to develop a more differentiated understanding of the situated interactions of ‘I’s and ‘We’s.

## **II. Arendt on individuality and the world of human artifice**

Arendt’s philosophy assumes that human individuality is irreducibly part of the general human condition “because men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world” (Arendt 1998, 7, henceforth *Human Condition*). Thus, each individuality is interlocked with the plurality of other individuals: “Plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live” (*Human Condition*, 8).

Arendt's approach to the plurality requirement is accepted and endorsed by many contributors to debates on collective intentionality. Martin Buber foreshadowed this debate when, in 1938, he wrote that: "By We I mean a community of several independent persons, who have reached a self and self-responsibility" (Buber 2002, 38; Zahavi 2021). More recently, Margaret Gilbert has argued that a 'We' is a plurality of persons (Gilbert 2014, 9) and the constitution of a plural subject "requires a plurality of individual participants" (Gilbert 2014, 238). For Arendt, a public realm, a common world, can exist only if there is plurality of perspectives; it cannot exist if we are isolated, or if we cannot agree with others on anything. But, interestingly, neither can there be a common world if conformism is overwhelming, and all people replicate and reproduce the same views and opinions. This, claims Arendt, is the case in both totalitarian regimes and in consumerist mass society "where we see all people suddenly as though they were members of one family, each multiplying and prolonging the perspective of his neighbor. [...] The end of the common world has come when it is seen only under one aspect and is permitted to present itself in only one perspective" (*Human Condition*, 58).

In her treatment of the necessarily first-person perspective of human experience, Arendt's model adds two interesting qualifications to the plurality requirement. The first is that my own access to the full implications of my unfolding individual life-story is not direct. For Arendt, "it is more than likely that the 'who,' which appears so clearly and unmistakably to others, remains hidden from the person himself, like the daimon in Greek religion which accompanies each man throughout his life, always looking over his shoulder from behind and thus visible only to those he encounters" (*Human Condition*, 179-180). Human beings are irreducibly individual but, to properly flourish, individual identity needs the plurality of which it is itself a precondition, a plurality "where people are with others and neither for nor against them—that is, in sheer human togetherness" (*Human Condition*, 180).

The second qualification arises from the first. For my uniqueness to be visible and meaningful to others, we need to inhabit a shared space which Arendt calls “the space of appearance” (*Human Condition*, 199) and which she understands to be founded in a world of “human artifice” whose “most important task [...] is to offer mortals a dwelling place more permanent and more stable than themselves” (*Human Condition*, 152). Human individuality is thus irreducible, but also opaque to itself, and requires a stable environment in which to unfold, to be seen and, crucially, to be remembered.

In *The Human Condition*, the space of appearance sometimes consists in the “man-made world of things” (*Human Condition*, 173), and works of art can play a special role because they are durable but not directly useful (*Human Condition*, 167). Above all, the ‘space of appearance’ is determined by social organisation, such as the Greek polis provided, and by shared human practices (*Human Condition*, 198). In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*—first published in 1951 but revised and published in a second edition in 1958 as Arendt worked on the material for *The Human Condition*—customs and institutions also emerge as integral to the world of human artifice. In making this move, Arendt develops ideas that parallel those of other critics of totalitarianism, such as Isaiah Berlin (Hiruta 2021, 48-123). In his famous essay on “Two Concepts of Liberty” (1958), that is contemporary with Arendt’s *The Human Condition* and later editions of *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Berlin draws attention to the tacit cultural habits which help protect individuality: “there are frontiers, not artificially drawn, within which men should be inviolable, these frontiers being defined in terms of rules so long and widely accepted that their observance has entered into the very conception of what it is to be a normal human being” (Berlin 1969, 165). Arendt is similarly sensitive to the fragility of the right to have rights, as illustrated by her critique of the “Rights of Man.” If the *Declarations of the Rights of Man* in 1789 imagined inalienable rights of man *qua* human being, then the era of the interwar years, followed catastrophically by the second

World War, demonstrated that having rights, and so being seen and treated as a unique human individual, depends upon institutions that acknowledge and respect those rights: “The conception of human rights, based upon the assumed existence of a human being as such, broke down at the very moment when those who professed to believe in it were for the first time confronted with people who [being stateless refugees] had indeed lost all other qualities and specific relationships—except that they were still human” (Arendt 2017, 392, henceforth *Origins*).

Arendt’s work can thus be read as a creative development of positions presented by Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Husserl (Loidolt 2018, 19-39). For all these thinkers, “mineness” or “for-me-ness” is a necessary attribute of human self-awareness (Mulhall 2005; Zahavi 1999, 2014). But Arendt then also questions the social context in which this irreducible first-person perspective can flourish; that is, the practical institutions that nurture and support individuals. Arendt concludes that it requires: “a place in the world which makes opinions significant and actions effective” (*Origins*, 387-88). This shared space is “the result of our common labor, the outcome of the human artifice” (*Origins*, 393), consisting of “the entire social texture” (*Origins*, 384). Drawing on Edmund Burke, she argues that local, customary rights are our “entailed inheritance” (*Origins*, 391-92). Individuality can be sustained only against a background of reliable, shared practices and institutions; what Wittgenstein calls a “form of life” (Wittgenstein 2009, 15); what Arendt calls a “world.”

What, then, is a form of life, or world, exactly? Arendt’s account is sometimes inconsistent. Infamously, she did not count African hunter/gatherer or forager cultures among those that have “created a human world, a human reality” (*Origins*, p. 251) (Owens 2017). Nevertheless, her Burkean approach presupposes just the shared knowledge, skills, customs, narratives, and social forms that one can also find in African forager cultures (Suzman 2017). Arendt’s wider account of a form of life is thus more historically and culturally nuanced than

her occasional lapses of judgment and, as Richard H. King persuasively argues, we would do well “to learn to distinguish Arendt’s own particular positions (and biases) from what might be called an Arendtian position on these matters” (King 2010, 134).

When formulating this ‘Arendtian position,’ literature can be doubly instructive. First, stories memorialize the actions of individuals, real and fictional, and examine the very interplay between self and society that Arendt analyzes. Literature thus offers detailed thought experiments for testing the Arendtian model. Secondly, as a set of shared conventions of communication, literature often also offers a meta-analysis, through which forms of individuality are situated, reflected upon, re-experienced, and questioned by storytellers, poets, and writers, their audiences and readers. Literature does not only depict the interactions between individuals and their shared world, but is also itself a site of “interactivity” (Price 2019, 22) we call ‘participatory plurality.’

The step to literature is one Arendt makes herself (Cavarero 2000). Because human action is ephemeral and its consequences are opaque to the acting agent, the outcome and shape of an action are more visible to others than to the agent. It is the stories told by others about that action that will honour and preserve the lived identity of the individual beyond their own limited self-knowledge. Arendt sets out her model of the complex interactions between literature and human agency as follows:

The disclosure of the ‘who’ through speech, and the setting of a new beginning through action, always fall into an already existing web where their immediate consequences can be felt. Together they start a new process which eventually emerges as the unique life story of the newcomer, affecting uniquely the life stories of all those with whom **he** comes into contact. It is because of this already existing web of human relationships, with its innumerable, conflicting wills and intentions,



that action almost never achieves its purpose; but it is also because of this medium, in which action alone is real, that it ‘produces’ stories with or without intention as naturally as fabrication produces tangible things. These stories may then be recorded in documents and monuments, they may be visible in use objects or art works, they may be told and retold and worked into all kinds of material. They themselves, in their living reality, are of an altogether different nature than these reifications. They tell us more about their subjects, the ‘hero’ in the center of each story, than any product of human hands ever tells us about the master who produced it, and yet they are not products, properly speaking. Although everybody started his life by inserting himself into the human world through action and speech, nobody is the author or producer of his own life story. In other words, the stories, the results of action and speech, reveal an agent, but this agent is not an author or producer (*Human Condition*, 184).

Thus, in Arendt’s reading of the *Iliad*, Achilles responds to this predicament by choosing a short life, which will be defined by his heroic engagement for the Greek armies. For Arendt, it is this attempt to sum up his whole life in a single deed ready made for its future narration that “gives the story of Achilles its paradigmatic significance” (*Human Condition*, 194). Yet this very summing up is open ended. It gains its “immortal fame” (*Human Condition*, 193), the Indo-European topos of *kléos áphthiton* (Watkins 1995), only in the report of others: it depends on practices of reciting heroic poetry that preceded the *Iliad* and extend far beyond it.

If individuality is, in some key respects, opaque to itself and also dependent for its realization on **there being** others to immortalize it, then it is fragile indeed. For this reason, in Arendt’s argument, the *polis* develops as “a kind of organized remembrance” (*Human*

*Condition*, 198): “The *polis*, properly speaking, is not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be” (*Human Condition*, 198).

In moving from the narrativization of Achilles’ life in Homeric epic to the “organized remembrance” of the *polis* (*Human Condition*, 198), Arendt reveals that her use of the term ‘story’ is often metaphorical. The “unique life story of the newcomer” (*Human Condition*, 184) means something like the shape of a human life, which is visible from no single perspective, which is ever-changing, and which subsequent cultural interlocutors indirectly record. The *Iliad* captures a version of Achilles’ story and transforms and transmits it for further variation. What sustains the story is the tradition of interrelated practices through which the story is preserved, transcribed, reprinted, adapted, reread, and retold (Price 2019): the wider cultural echoes of “the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together” (*Human Condition*, 198).

The heroic ‘story’ thus functions in Arendt’s argument as a figure of speech that captures the way our environment scaffolds, honors and transmits records of human uniqueness. This has led literary theorist Pheng Cheah to argue that, while Arendt follows Heidegger in recognizing that ‘I’ and ‘We’ can develop only against the background of a shared world, this world also has a specifically literary structure: “because it foregrounds by enacting in its form of address how human actors emerge in and change an existing world through narratives” (Cheah 2016, 153). Literary narratives, on this view, are the chief medium through which a shared world is constituted, maintained, transformed, and transmitted.<sup>1</sup> However, it is our contention that this transmission is not restricted to literature,

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<sup>1</sup> Cheah’s reading of Arendt is partly intended to qualify Marxian accounts of literature as a secondary representation of the economic base (Cheah 2016, 35, 81), rightly questioning the base/superstructure model, and insisting in its stead that social practices are meaningful all the way down to the most menial and material tasks of daily life which are, furthermore, open for renegotiation as part of an “ongoing material process of creation” (Cheah 2016, 75).

although it can include literary practices and analyses. Literature can in fact transcend itself, drawing attention to both literary and non-literary forms of participatory plurality.

The account of literary negotiations that we derive from Arendt's more philosophical texts differs from Arendt's own explicit understanding of literature. As she formulates it in an essay on Bertolt Brecht, the task of literature is "to coin the words we live by" (Arendt 2007, 255). Literature, for Arendt, as for her friend and contemporary W. H. Auden, is primarily a "defence of language" (Gottlieb 2003, 5), a task that seemed especially challenging to the generations born between 1890 and 1920 because, faced with the First World War, another world war, and the concentration and extermination camps (Arendt 2007, 232), the continuity needed to preserve a shared world and a shared language had been interrupted. The habits and institutions that insured language against insincerity and mendacious irresponsibility seemed irreparably damaged (Gottlieb 2003, 5).

Fortunately, Arendt managed to steer a course between "reckless optimism and reckless despair" (*Origins*, x). Despite her awareness of the fragility of the shared world, and her caution about over-secure theoretical appeals to "remnants of old-fashioned virtues" (Arendt 2018, 191), she nevertheless, like Auden, wrote, taught, thought, and gave interviews. Moreover, the tension in Arendt's view of literature can be productively approached by thinking in an Arendtian way about literature across a wider timeframe than the three generations "born, roughly, between 1890 and 1920" (Arendt 2007, 232). To support this claim, we will turn now to our three literary provocations to study how they offer a varied set of tools and concepts over and beyond 'narrative', for understanding the complex interactions between 'I's and 'We's.

### III. Callimachus, “Hymn to Apollo” (c. 260 BCE)

We have chosen Callimachus’s hymn as our first literary provocation, both because it engages with the classical tradition so productive for Arendt’s thinking, and because it examines relations between individuals and social contexts: our “entailed inheritance.” “Hymn to Apollo” is one of the most influential pieces of Hellenistic literature, taken up variously and often by Latin authors. Like the other five poems in Callimachus’s collection of hymns, it was intended for reading (whether it was *also* performed is a matter for debate) (Petrovic 2011, 264-5) and, like all of Callimachus’s work, it self-consciously and intricately engages with earlier literary traditions. The 113-line hymn is an example of participatory plurality, both reflecting upon, and performatively enacting, a meta-poetic writing that instantiates the fluidity of ‘I’s interacting with ‘We’s. The hymn is set at a festival of Apollo and mingles hymnic praise of the god with evocation of the festival. Apollo’s epiphany is awaited throughout, but when he finally speaks at the very end of the poem, it is in the past rather than present tense and pronouncing on poetry rather than anything related to the festival—one of many interpretative challenges (Williams 1978, 87-89; Cameron 1995, 403-09).

Writing in Alexandria in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, Callimachus shares with his Hellenistic contemporaries a poetics marked by a pattern of citation and adaptation (Acosta-Hughes and Stephens 2012). This is evident from the very first line of the poem, where the laurel branch shaken by the approach of the deity is described with a verb form that occurs precisely once in Homer, in a context that is both comparable and very different (Williams 1978, 15-16). In the process, Callimachus introduces a distinctive literary voice, which simultaneously and perhaps confusingly manages to be the voice of the poet, the festival chorus, Apollo himself, and an invocation for the audience to participate in the action (Bing 1993). In addition to these slippages between possible speakers, the text does not stipulate whether it registers the

speaker's speech, perception, or thought (Gramps 2018). This second kind of indeterminacy between external and internal is particularly evident in the first few verses which culminate in the text's first use of the first-person plural, an emphatic "We shall see you..."

The hymn opens at a central moment of the festival; Apollo's epiphany (perhaps ritually staged) is near, and the excitement is palpable (ll. 1-11, trans. Susan A. Stephens) (Callimachus 2015, 80):

How Apollo's laurel branch shakes! How the whole edifice shakes! Begone, begone, whoever is sinful! It surely must be Apollo kicking at the doors with his fair foot. Do you not see? The Delian palm gently nodded its head, of a sudden, and the swan sings beautifully in the air. Now you door-fastenings open of your own accord, and you bolts! The god is no longer far away. Young men, make ready for the song and dance. Apollo does not shine upon everyone, but upon whoever is good. Whoever sees him, this man is great; whoever does not see him, he is of no account. We shall see you, O One Who Acts From Afar, and we shall never be of no account.

Events are relayed in the present as they unfold: first the shaking of the laurel, sacred to Apollo, then the trembling of the whole temple, followed by the swaying of the palm-tree and the singing of the swan, and then the opening of the temple doors and the choral song. Yet critics have struggled to pin down who is speaking here (Bing 1993). In fact, any attempt to be specific (a priest?) fails. Part of the problem is the shift in modality. Some phrases seem observations ('How the laurel shakes', 'the swan sings beautifully'), others process those observations and draw conclusions ('It must surely be Apollo kicking at the doors'), and others are most easily read as actual speech ('Begone the sinful!', 'Young men, start the chorus!'). From a modern perspective it is tempting to read these lines as a train of

consciousness: the poet, *qua* unspecified participant in the festival, articulates his impressions, his thoughts, his wishes, without making it clear how we should imagine this articulation. Even avoiding anachronistic terminology, one notes that these lines are strong on engaging with the world, mingling the internal and the external, and weak on defining the subject that does the engaging. The grammatical condition for this is the absence of the first person: the lines are all world and no subject. The emphatic We, when it arrives, is thus even more striking. How have we got there?

One reason for tension, as the god's appearance is awaited, is that "Apollo does not shine upon everyone, but upon whoever is good" (l. 9). As it shifts between perspectives and modalities, therefore, the poem encourages the reader/listener to align themselves with the fortunate, to select themselves as elect. The reader/listener does not want to be among the sinful chased away with a formulation (*hekas hekas ostis alitros*, l.2) resonant enough to Callimachus's ancient readers to be echoed later by Virgil when, just before Aeneas enters the underworld in Book 6, the sibyl chases away the *profani* or uninitiated: *procul o, procul este, profani* (*Aeneid* VI. 258). Each of us wants to be initiated, to be great (*meGas*) not paltry (*litos*) (l. 10). The opening of the poem thus creates a breathless anticipation, but also a division between those who will and those who will not enjoy the esoteric epiphany. And all of this in a language that both depends upon, and constantly surprises, a familiarity with the literary language with which Callimachus operates. When, therefore, the voice suddenly aligns a We, the reader has been primed to want to be included: "We shall see you, O One Who Acts From Afar..." (l with. 11).

This inclusion will be confirmed a few lines later when a second-person plural is instructed to "Give the ritual cry" (l. 25): to utter the liturgical Apolline syllables *hie, hie*. If readers/listeners have witnessed or participated in the ritual before, they will themselves have used these words or certainly have heard them used on their behalf. The imperative will thus

resonate. The reader/listener might even utter the words, as in an Abrahamic setting a member of the congregation might add an *Amen* to an *Amen* just heard. We may not know who is speaking, but we ourselves are now one of the possible candidates.

With this participation enabled, the hymn moves on to its main business, the invocation of the figure of Apollo: “Who would not readily sing of Apollo?” (l. 31). Such praise is normal in a festival hymn (of which many examples survive) and would typically be performed by a chorus. But in whose voice should we imagine such praise in this hymn written to be read, in which the chorus itself is part of the represented world? The opening lines, as we have seen, include the command or silent hope that the chorus start their performance, and open the possibility that the bulk of the text is indeed performed by the chorus. However, indications across the text are insufficient and contradictory. The chorus are variously asked to sing and imagined to be singing, but we cannot tell whether the long passage of Apolline celebration – standard fare in choral song – is itself put in the chorus’s mouths. For long stretches it is unclear whether we are reading the poet’s (silent or voiced) articulations or a choral performance.

The tension between positions and voices is particularly stark when a voice claiming the first-person singular briefly emerges to insist on ‘my’ way of naming and celebrating Apollo: “But *I* [an emphatic *ego*, set off against a preceding ‘many’] call you *Carneius*, for that is my ancestral custom” (l. 71). The moment is surprising. It is likely that for Greek ears more accustomed to a chorus which says both ‘I’ and ‘We’ the jolt is less intense than it is for a modern reader. Nevertheless, the surprise is clarificatory, if we read it in parallel with the meta-poetic final lines of the poem: when Apollo, as we mentioned earlier, comments on ways of “singing.” The preferred poetic voice is “self-consciously innovative and experimental” but also risks being misunderstood by the mob (Acosta-Hughes and Stephens 2012, 81-82). Thus, the hymn itself can be read as embodying the very poetics Apollo finally

endorses. It reappropriates the myths of how the rituals developed, gives an account of how the current way, which also happens to be its own way of figuring Apollo, was established, and then declares: “And from that point you are hymned in this way” (l. 104). Most importantly, it encourages participation in the fluid performance, prompting readers and listeners to become co-creators of a new, literary re-imagining of the god of poetry himself: “We shall see you, O One Who Acts From Afar, and we shall never be of no account” (l. 11).

Where does this meet Arendt’s enabling background? Callimachus’s hymn presents a ritualized imagining of a shared world, one that suits a period aware of inheriting literary and political traditions that reach back as far as Homer but is not itself Homeric, nor instantiating a polity like the Athens of the fifth century BCE that Arendt had in mind. Instead of Arendt’s “organized remembrance” (*Human Condition*, 198) of the *polis*, Callimachus gives us a polyphonic site of conflict. Moreover, participation in the civic cult that the Hymn offers is an overtly literary performance, a poetic construction that may merely be imagined. The poem appeals to readers directly (“Do you not see?”), assuming them to be well-versed in the literary and liturgical building blocks, and then scaffolds and encourages their activity as co-creators of new forms of literary togetherness. Further yet, readers are not especially encouraged to say ‘I’, or only ‘I’, to understand the consciously enunciated ‘I’ as primary to the ‘We’: the occasion of the ritual itself is the focus which enables both ‘I’s and ‘We’s. Individuals can reinforce the ‘We’ and affirm and approve the voice which lays claim to “my ancestral customs,” but their agency emerges not through saying ‘I’ but through the activity of co-creation via skilled reading — it is an effect of situated, participatory plurality. To this extent, it is not the poet alone who coins “the words we live by” (Arendt 2007, 255). Rather, Callimachus’s poem curates a space for readers to be agents, not by expressing themselves but by responding to the poem’s literary affordances. The “organized remembrance” of the *polis* is sustained by people doing things together in ways that differentiate them from others.



Through their active re-use of the available literary tools,<sup>1</sup> and through their participation in the new cultural possibilities opened by the hymn, their individuality is affirmed as a lived skill. The affirmation of first-person agency happens through the combination of executing literary expertise and the concomitant evocation of a shared ritual context.

Nevertheless, despite the inclusiveness of the ritual, the dynamic, interactive, and situated individuality seems, in Callimachus's poem, to come at a cost of excluding the uninitiated garbage (*surphetós*) (l. 109) swept along by the bad poetry preferred by the personification of Envy who challenges Apollo in the final section of the poem. Is some degree of exclusivity an inevitable aspect of the shift from 'I' to 'We'? As we move from the theory of "an ethics of actualized plurality" (Loidolt 2018, 230) to the practice of messy, suboptimal, specific historical examples, will our active participation in the cultural practices through which our individuality is sustained and affirmed necessarily involve in-groups and out-groups? What is the price of our inevitably culturally situated first-persons singular and plural? Our next literary provocation tackles these questions.

#### IV. Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain* (1924)

Writing before, during, and after the Great War, Thomas Mann was increasingly aware of the potential human cost of collective undertakings. In *The Magic Mountain*, he develops literary techniques for reflecting upon and ironizing different collective discourses, while at the same time encouraging passionate engagement with our cultural environment. Indeed, the question of how individuals navigate their relationship with the discourses through which they come to a sense of their own identity was a topic Arendt and Heidegger explicitly considered, as they discussed Mann's novel in the summer of 1925.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Heidegger reports having started the novel on July 9<sup>th</sup> and summarises his impressions having finished it on August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1925 (Arendt and Heidegger 2002, 40, 45).

In so far as their discussions can be reconstructed from Heidegger's letters to Arendt—since Arendt's letters have not survived—it appears that he read Arendt's copy of *The Magic Mountain* during the later stages of his work on *Being and Time*. He wrote to her that, while he was not impressed with Mann as a philosopher of temporality, he was very struck by the novel's masterful portrayal of individuals who are, as it were, lived by their social milieu: “the phenomenon of how Dasein does not live its own life but is rather lived by its environment is approached with such mastery that I will for the moment focus on that aspect alone” (Arendt and Heidegger 2002, 40, our translation). Mann's novel indeed comments directly on how “A human being lives out not only his personal life as an individual, but also, consciously or unconsciously, the lives of his epoch and contemporaries” (Mann 2005, 36-37, henceforth *Magic Mountain*). The central character, the young Hans Castorp, is thus presented by Mann as “mediocre after all, though in a very honourable sense of that word” (*Magic Mountain*, 37). His mediocrity arises partly from an awareness of the contingency of social values. At school he did not “overtax” himself or strive to great achievements because “he saw absolutely no reason why he should, or to put it better: no *unequivocal* reason” (*Magic Mountain*, 36). Hans Castorp ironically chooses to be mediocre since excellence is itself a form of social conformity.

Mann's novel uses this combination of conformity and ironic distance as a device for exploring a wide range of vocabularies, habits, and attitudes available for making sense of the world in early twentieth-century Europe. Where Heidegger, in the mid-1920s, imagines the crisis of individualizing *Angst* as the best way to withdraw from and authentically reclaim for oneself the shared habits of which one might otherwise be the passive vehicle, Mann's novel of the same period, by contrast, deploys the ironic mediocrity of Hans Castorp and the topos of the sanatorium as a collection of possible attitudes and discourses to foster a form of engagement with his readers. Readers follow Castorp as he becomes more intellectually and

emotionally independent and develops a sensitivity to the way in which appeals to a ‘We’ can be mobilized or misused. As the two, often comically verbose, intellectuals at the sanatorium, Settembrini and Naphta, argue yet again over questions of pragmatism, pedagogy, and terror, Castorp notes that Naphta speaks in the first-person plural: “Who is “we”? I definitely must ask Settembrini later who it is he means by “we”” (*Magic Mountain*, 475).

Such reflections encourage readers to ask similar questions about the narrative voice that frames the dialogues as, for instance, at the end of the novel, when the narrator takes his leave of the central character speaking in the first-person plural:

Farewell, Hans Castorp, life’s faithful problem child. Your story is over. We have told it to its end; it was neither short on diversion nor long on boredom — it was a hermetic story. We told it for its own sake, not yours, for you were a simple fellow. But it was your story at last, and since it happened to you, there surely must have been something to you; and we do not deny that in the course of telling it, we have taken a certain pedagogic liking to you, might be tempted to dab the corner of an eye with one fingertip at the thought that we shall neither see you nor hear from you further (*Magic Mountain*, 853).

The narrator reflects on the effects of precisely the shared habits that interested Heidegger in 1925. Moreover, where, at the beginning of the novel, the point to be emphasized was Hans Castorp’s awareness that the habits he had acquired had only a contingent legitimacy, the eight hundred pages of the novel have allowed readers to experience the protagonist’s passion for exploration at the same time as they too question who is exploring and what reasons they —the damp-eyed, pedagogic narrator as much as the characters he portrays—might have for their particular enthusiasms. The result is *not* that the protagonist positively models ways of

relating to shared discourses. Instead, we leave Castorp on a battlefield during the First World War, distractedly humming to himself a tune from Schubert's *Winterreise*: "The way a man sings to himself in moments of dazed, thoughtless excitement, without even knowing" (*Magic Mountain*, 852). Castorp's cultural and scientific research leads him to the collective violence of war, and one wonders what use his learning may be in such a context. Neither intellectual nor emotional learning, nor his growing awareness of the uses and abuses of the first-person plural, cause Hans Castorp to resist the cultural catastrophe that has hung over the unfolding action since the very first pages (*Magic Mountain*, xxv). He does not embody an ideal passage from conformity to a robustly individual participation in shared social life. He is not the *Dasein* whose potential development towards an authentic reappropriation of their historical situation we track in the arguments of *Being and Time*.

And yet: the narrator's dabbing the corner of a tearful eye is not a surprise to readers, since we have been encouraged to participate in Hans Castorp's passions and confusions over the course of days, if not weeks, depending on how quickly we read a novel that takes more than 37 hours—a full working week—to read aloud. The novel thus accompanies a portion of the reader's life and is set alongside the concerns that preoccupy that reader at that time, which is itself a fluid process, since we never use quite the same combination of knowledge and expertise to assess a situation on two separate occasions (Sharot 2017, 183-85). Readers' concerns may be philosophical, like Heidegger's. But they need not be. One Amazon reader gave up halfway through, when the conversations in the novel switched into French for a few pages,<sup>3</sup> while Karolina Watroba has persuasively argued that it is precisely staying power and a willingness to be engaged and immersed that the novel requires of its readers.<sup>4</sup> As another recent Amazon reviewer wrote: "I'm sure I'll still be thinking about the mountain sanatorium

<sup>3</sup> Amazon review, "Not exactly scintillating," December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020: : [https://www.amazon.co.uk/The-Magic-Mountain/dp/B088FZZNKL/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?dchild=1&keywords=the+magic+mountain+everyman&qid=1622398688&s=books&sr=1-1](https://www.amazon.co.uk/The-Magic-Mountain/dp/B088FZZNKL/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=the+magic+mountain+everyman&qid=1622398688&s=books&sr=1-1) [accessed May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021].

<sup>4</sup> On immersion in particular, see Watroba (2022, chapter 2).

and its occupants many weeks, months and years from now. It's that kind of book - one you will return to over and over again, always finding something new to discover you missed the first time around."<sup>5</sup>

Callimachus's hymn showed how the skilful adaptation of existing literary and liturgical resources allows an audience with the relevant literary expertise to be trained in a new and fluid form of cultural agency that re-appropriated forms of I-ness and We-ness characteristic of community religion in its most traditional form. The poem, as it is read and transmitted, can become the confirmatory affordance for a particular sense of ritual participation (as indeed it can, through its manifold and at times disconcerting complexity, adumbrate a stranger and less agent-driven sense of numinousness). Mann's text tempers the exclusivity on which Callimachus's model depends, by staging an ironic detachment from the array of discourses through which individuals come to exercise their agency. Here, our for-me-ness, amongst other things, is experienced through affective participation in the process of encountering, trying out, and questioning available discourses: *placet experiri* (*Magic Mountain*, 115).

Three further points emerge at this juncture. First: emotional engagement is important, but not because we become 'like' the characters we read about (we similarly did not become 'like' Apollo in Callimachus's hymn). Instead, emotion facilitates the exploration of the issues by encouraging us to care. Forty years ago, a doyen of cognitive science, Herbert Simon, surmised it thus: "human beings are able to attend to issues longer, to think harder about them, to receive deeper impressions that last longer, if information is presented in a context of emotion—a sort of hot dressing—than if it is presented wholly without affect" (Simon 1983, 32). Although beyond the scope of this article, the affective dimensions of

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<sup>5</sup> Amazon review, "A very great work of art," July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020: [https://www.amazon.co.uk/The-Magic-Mountain/dp/B088FZZNKL/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?dchild=1&keywords=the+magic+mountain+everyman&qid=1622398688&s=books&sr=1-1](https://www.amazon.co.uk/The-Magic-Mountain/dp/B088FZZNKL/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=the+magic+mountain+everyman&qid=1622398688&s=books&sr=1-1) [accessed May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021]. For a detailed discussion of the academic and non-academic afterlives of the novel see Watroba.

engagement have since been the locus of copious research in psychology, neurology, and cognitive literary studies (Zunshine 2015, 2022), as have the pre-conscious, bodily aspects of the reading experience (Rokotnitz 2017, 2018; Caracciolo and Kukkonen 2021). Second: the length of the experience — the timescale of reading, processing, and absorbing— impacts its lasting effects. Sleep researchers like Rosalind Cartwright (2010) and Matthew Walker (2017) have shown that the locus of one’s engagement is not only conscious cognition but an extended 24-hour wake-sleep cycle that allows the processing and transformation of both ideas and behaviors as they are integrated with existing know-how through iterated alternations of practice and sleep. Alterations of habits and expectations resulting from an engagement with Mann’s text will be consolidated, if not initiated, beyond the horizon of first-person for-me-ness, and on a timescale that transcends the unfolding present moment.

A third point of relevance that impacts engagement is the involvement with characters. Literary characters afford a particular type of intense engagement and assist the work of integration that establishes viable relations between individuals and shared interactions. Amanda Anderson, Rita Felski and Toril Moi rightly argue that identification with a fictional character need not be simplistic. It can be “ironic as well as sentimental, ethical as well as emotional, may confound a sense of self rather than confirm it, and is practiced by sceptical scholars as well as wide-eyed enthusiasts” (2019, 19); indeed “talking or writing about characters is a language game in its own right” (Anderson, Felski, and Moi 2019, 65). Callimachus’s hymn elicits audience participation through the invocation of a ritual context in which Apollo appears to the esoteric in-group. Mann’s novel individualizes this process of emotional attachment, encouraging deeper reflection on the habits through which individuals become bound up with in-groups, and allowing for a slower, sub-personal process of reacting to the novel to unfold over time. In the Hellenistic hymn we are nudged towards joining the select ‘We’ who will see Apollo. In the modernist novel, we witness

Hans Castorp frankly baffled when he first hears his cousin refer to a special group of “us up here” at the sanatorium (*Magic Mountain*, 10). Both hymn and novel encourage our participation, but in the Modernist novel, this participation is motivated by emotion, since, like the damp-eyed narrator, readers have come to care about, and over the course of days or weeks, to review and rethink the inconclusive engagements of the protagonist. Reading the novel allows them to join a group of readers. In *The Magic Mountain*, characters have replaced ritual as the vehicle of participation, or perhaps we might even say: engagement with character is the new ritual.

Our third literary provocation similarly mobilizes the language game of character, but further complicates the use of the device by making the protagonist at once engaging and inscrutable.

V. Margaret Atwood, *Alias Grace* (1996)

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt reflects upon the “world” of shared practices, habits, and institutions required for the recognition of our common humanity, and upon the fragility of such institutions, which lend themselves to exploitation and subversion in support of various forms of slavery and despotism, either by excluding certain individuals or groups from the shared world or by placing them beyond its laws. In Margaret Atwood’s novel *Alias Grace* (1996a, hereafter *Grace*), the protagonist, although subject to legal process and so not completely “forced to live outside the scope of all tangible law” (*Origins*, 383), is nevertheless first marginalised then isolated at the periphery of society, where the fragility of the shared world carries implications for survival.

The historical Grace Marks was an immigrant, having arrived in Canada from Ireland in 1840. She was an orphan, having lost her mother at the age of twelve. She was a servant girl, having been sent to work by her abusive father, who then moved away with her siblings,

never to be seen again. She was a prisoner, having been convicted of a double murder at the age of sixteen, and subsequently incarcerated in Kingston Penitentiary in Ontario, and, for some of that time, sectioned at a psychiatric institution. Her experiences were thus, in many ways, defined by others' perception of her as a member of collective categories: orphans, immigrants, women, the Irish, the working class, felons, the criminally insane. Importantly, however, Atwood's treatment of the historical case, alongside her deft social commentary,<sup>6</sup> does more than merely portray Grace Marks as a representative of various disadvantaged classes of people. Through considering the specificities of her singular life, and elaborating upon these with masterful skill, Atwood creates a fictional tale that both celebrates the uniqueness of an individual life and, at the same time, challenges the very possibility of portraying, indeed characterising, any individual.

Atwood's narrative traverses a range of perspectives by alternating between Grace's own words, those of the physician employed to evaluate her sanity — Doctor Simon Jordan, a (seemingly) omniscient narrator, and miscellaneous songs, poems, and newspaper reports about the “celebrated murderess” (*Grace*, 25). With marked deliberateness, Atwood never resolves for readers which of these contesting perspectives is the most authoritative. As our discussion of Mann's novel elaborated, one of the attractions of literary fictions is that they present for readers examples of how individuals might interact with their environment. In *Alias Grace*, Atwood presents a variety of characters, their specific circumstances, idiosyncrasies, prejudices, thoughts, beliefs, and hopes, displaying different modes of behaviour, of expression, and of communication. She also leads readers to see in each character the faults, blind spots, and insincerities they try to hide from others and often from

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<sup>6</sup> Sandra Kumamoto Stanley focuses on Grace's class and gender transgressions (Stanley 2003), Alison Toron focuses on her identity as a prisoner and her unruly narrative (Toron 2011). Laurie Vickroy and others have studied the text as a trauma narrative (Vickroy 2015). Amelia Defalco considers its Gothic carnality (Defalco 2006).



themselves. But what is most intriguing about Atwood's narrative is her characterisation of Grace.

Most people, and so most literary characters, wish to present themselves in particular ways so as to convince others of specific (real or feigned) intentions and to impress upon others the validity or importance of their existence. But not Grace. As opposed to, for instance, Camus's Meursault, who seems indifferent to the outcomes of his actions (Anderson, Felski, and Moi 2019, 112-16), Grace appears to care deeply: for herself, for others, for certain principles, behavioral norms, domestic practices, religious beliefs, and even animals, like Charlie the horse. She reveals imaginative sensitivity in the intimate passages that describe her private musings, her waking visions, and her night-time dreams. And yet, experience has taught her that these make little difference: "Anyway, it's all been decided, the trial is long over and done with and what I say will not change anything" (*Grace*, 46). It is quite an experience for readers to follow the mind-set of a person who has relinquished any attempt to interfere yet remains fully alert and engaged. Thus, contemplating the vast disparity in reports of her character and (mis)deeds, Grace ruminates that it has been said:

that I am inhuman and a female demon, that I am an innocent victim of a blackguard forced against my will and in danger of my own life, that I was ignorant to know how to act [...] that I have blue eyes, that I have green eyes [...] that I am of a sullen disposition with a quarrelsome temper [...] that I am a good girl with a pliable nature [...] cunning and devious [...] soft in the head [...] And I wonder, how can I be all these different things at once? (*Grace*, 25).

Until the very end of the novel, she does not take a stand for or against any of these contradictory claims. She acknowledges that, although the newspapers primarily published sensationalist lies, they were correct to suggest that she “had a good character [...] because nobody had ever taken advantage of me, although they tried” (*Grace*, 30). Enigmatic as ever, it remains a mystery whether she only means sexual defilement.

The novel supports, from beginning to end, four alternate, incommensurable yet viable interpretations of Grace and of her story: that she was a conscious perpetrator of the murders (together with James McDermott); that she killed during an episode of dissociative absence; that she was possessed by the spirit of her dead friend Mary Whitney; or that she was entirely innocent. Although, by the end of the novel, Grace has acquired a fair measure of learning and is able to recognise the ignorance and superstitions of her youth (*Grace*, 141), it remains unclear whether she committed the murders of which she is accused. Grace professes throughout that she does not recall the crucial hours of the murders. Whether this is a convenient falsehood, traumatic amnesia, or the product of possession, we never discover. Grace remains opaque. She is observant, attentive, tactful, and compassionate, but forestalls any definitive judgment.

Many readers and critics have consequently suspected Grace of being a “trickster figure” (Lovelady 1999, 50), “deliberately flaunting her sexuality” (Rogerson 1998, 18) so as to deflect attention from her possible crimes. But Atwood provides little evidence to support specific suspicions. In fact, those in the novel who pronounce Grace a “devious dissembler” (*Grace*, 38), “an accomplished actress and a most practiced liar,” and “guilty as sin” (*Grace*, 440), are those whom readers learn to trust least. Instead, Grace evidences a fascinating acquiescence. She does not seek approval, sympathy, or validation, accepting that “you never can tell what time has in store for you” (*Grace*, 78). Dr Simon Jordan thinks “she has manifested a composure that a duchess might envy. I have never known a woman to be so

thoroughly self-contained” (*Grace*, 153). But he finds her neither haughty, nor defiant, nor apathetic. From what Grace does reveal in conversation with Simon and in private to the readers, she too would like to know what really happened, and yet she makes no discernible attempt to steer the course of her psychiatric evaluation. Except, and this is crucial, through her storytelling.

Grace’s only power lies in protracting her tale, like Scheherazade.<sup>7</sup> As Atwood has explained elsewhere, Grace “is a storyteller, with strong motives to narrate, but also strong motives to withhold; the only power left to her as a convicted and imprisoned criminal comes from a blend of these two motives” (Atwood 1996b, 36).<sup>8</sup> Grace learned in prison that, “if you have a need and they find it out, they use it against you. The best way is to stop from wanting anything” (*Grace*, 44) and “as a rule [it is best to] say nothing” (*Grace*, 73). To disguise her keen intelligence, she also developed “a good stupid look which I have practiced” (*Grace*, 43). It takes a while for her to trust Simon Jordan, but gradually she seems to wish to reciprocate his kindness by telling her “story” (*Grace*, 7, 169, 215), making it “as interesting as I can, and rich in incident, as a sort of return gift to him; for I have always believed that one good turn deserves another” (*Grace*, 246). Her sentiments seem genuine, but is the story itself? Each reader’s view says more about them than it does about Grace.

Similarly, Grace’s reflective self-examination is exploratory, without attempting to constrain or direct its outcomes (*Grace*, 79). She sustains throughout a sceptical attitude towards truth and even towards her own personality. Further yet, her (self) knowledge is revealed to be compromised in a scene related by the narrator in which Grace, under hypnosis, gives voice to her dead friend Mary Whitney. Whether this second voice is a

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<sup>7</sup> Coral Ann Howells argues that Grace is “a woman who is telling stories to save her life” (Howells 2005, ix), while Heidi Darroch suggests Grace offers her seductive stories to forestall Jordan's departure (or loss of interest in her 'case') (Darroch 2004, 17). Stephanie Lovelady notes she is compared to Eve, Pandora, and Scheherazade as a way of underscoring her status as a transgressor of norms. Atwood allows these interpretations to co-exist.

<sup>8</sup> Alison Toron has made an interesting case for Grace employing her narrative strategically “as a means of self-therapy (thus denying her psychologist the authority of performing therapy on her) and as a tool to secure her release” (Toron 2011, 1).

dissociated second ‘personality’ of which Grace remains unaware, or an alien presence — a form of ‘possession’ by the spirit of Mary, or just a trick Grace plays on the audience at the hypnotism, readers never discover.<sup>9</sup> Atwood thus successfully juggles multiple notions of self and other, singular and plural identities.

However, at the end of the novel, Grace creates a symbolic artefact — an Arendtian ‘space of appearance’ — which may provide an interpretive key. Through the benevolence of others, Grace has been released after thirty years in prison. She is forty-five and may be pregnant or developing a tumour like the one that killed her mother. She may be dying, or creating life, or both. She does not know. Yet she accepts this unknowing with tranquillity, just as she accepted many other afflictions in her life. Interestingly, at this point, and although she has not heard from him for over a decade, she decides to write a letter to Simon Jordan: one of the few instances of volition she has undertaken since her incarceration at the age of sixteen. She is free and married, and so there seems to be no reason to write to her former physician other than her professed desire to share with him that (having been a gifted seamstress and dressmaker her entire life) she is finally sewing a quilt for her own marriage bed.

At their very first meeting, Simon had brought Grace an apple. Because she expected this to be “a trick of some sort” (*Grace*, 44), she refused to reveal the many biblical and personal connotations the apple evoked for her. She discerned he was hoping to conjure The Tree of Knowledge: “any child could guess that,” but she refused to “oblige” by acknowledging this (*Grace*, 45). By the end of the book, she is voluntarily obliging by writing to him and disclosing, unprompted, that (although she did not tell him so when he asked) (*Grace* 112), she had always dreamed of making “A Tree of Paradise” quilt. She

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<sup>9</sup> The possibility of having multiple personalities is, of course, of relevance to an inquiry into the plurality principle, but is beyond the scope of this article. It is developed at length in Rokotnitz (2023): “Psychiatry and Narrative: Dissociation, Multiple Personalities, and the Agency of Integration.”

knows this is an unorthodox interpretation, but her understanding of the biblical tale is that there was only one tree in paradise, one tree inextricably linked knowledge and life. For her tree, therefore, she embroiders a border that may seem to others like vines, but which she knows are “snakes entwined” for, without a snake or two, “the main part of the story would be missing” (*Grace*, 534). The tree itself is made of triangles in two colours, purple for the leaves and red for the fruits, and three of the triangles will be “different”: “one will be white, from the petticoat I still have that was Mary Whitney’s; one will be faded yellowish, from the prison nightdress I begged as a keepsake when I left there. And the third will be a pale cotton, a pink and white floral, cut from the dress of Nancy [one of two people Grace is purported to have murdered]. [...] And so we will all be together” (*Grace*, 534).

The child isolated by brutality is, as a forty-five year-old woman, creating a home in which she is no longer alone. Atwood implies that each individual human is a quilted patchwork of the circumstances and experiences of their lives, and each is also a member of the patchwork of humanity: a pattern of reciprocal connection. The “organized remembrance” (*Human Condition*, 198) of this condition, like Atwood’s narrative, is produced by a self-reflexive patchwork of narrative styles and conventions, which instantiates the porous dynamism of human identity. Even at this stage, transparency is incomplete, for the reader knows Dr Jordan will never receive Grace’s letter. In a way, however, that no longer matters, because his presence as a sympathetic ally has been amalgamated into the ongoing process of the integration of her personality. The question of ‘what’ Grace did remains unanswered. But ‘how’ she has lived, can be performatively represented in her quilt and the letter she writes about it. She has communed with others, incorporating their participatory contributions, into her being, so that the entity that is Grace (and the quality she consistently expresses) is a conglomerate of proclivities, influences, narratives, and relationships, that remain at the same time distinctly discernible and creatively fused together. Her new home is one in which the

trinity of women who form the locus of her story are gathered on her marriage bed. A cynic might say she has subsumed those who came near. A more compassionate reading is that she loves this community, her family by choice, of whom she is the only survivor. She wishes to honor and remember their part in her 'story' as she embarks on a new chapter with Jamie Walsh (or prepares for its final chapter, her death). Finally, it is the shared experiences with those for whom she cares that matter most. In turn, Atwood draws us readers into that caring, offering us affordances for simulating Grace's we-centric attitude by creating a community of readers that enjoy a literary togetherness.

In Callimachus's hymn, we were nudged to join a group that combined literary expertise with liturgical know-how, and to experience the skill and thrill of that participation. In Mann's novel, our investment in the text depended on engaging with characters who care passionately, even while Mann emphasises the contingency of such cares. In Atwood's novel, Hans Castorp's ironic mediocrity is replaced by Grace's combination of penetrating insight and unnerving acquiescence, neither of which prevent her from caring for Mary, Nancy, Simon, Jamie, or herself. Indeed, her understanding of shared knowledge, skills, customs, and home life, is precisely of the kind that Arendt designates as the "world of human artifice." Letter writing and quilting are some of the everyday, manual practices through which she lends concrete permanence to her care and communicates it to (select) others. Grace's shared world is sustained by practices of acknowledgment that survive through, alongside, and despite the failures of courts, prisons, psychiatric hospitals, and even death itself; a shared world accessed through and tended by informal customs rather than official institutions. This shared world offers Grace what Arendt describes as "a dwelling place more permanent and more stable than [herself]" (*Human Condition*, 152); an environment in which to unfold, to be seen and, crucially, to be remembered.

## VI. Conclusions and Further Directions

For Arendt, the shared human world, as Pheng Cheah emphasizes, “is assembled and held together by the ongoing activity of human subjects” (Cheah 2016, 139). Our reading of Arendt and our three literary provocations have drawn attention to the network of habits, vocabularies, and practices through which individual actions reverberate. Our approach thus moves beyond Cheah’s claim that the Arendtian shared world is structurally literary and that, therefore, the meta-literary aspects of a text will give us a special understanding of the literariness of the world itself (Cheah 2016, 153). Instead, we position literature alongside other forms of participatory sense-making, and the literary provocations we presented here suggest the same: Callimachus juxtaposes literary traditions with ritual occasions, undoing old and making new connections; Mann explores competing vocabularies available for the joint processes of making sense of the world; and Atwood draws attention to informal, non-literary customs, like quilt making and letter writing. Our argument does not detract from the role literature can play in our (cultural) sense making so much as emphasizes that narratives are useful precisely because they are participatory practices.

To study this plethora of meaning-making participatory practices, it is helpful to view literary examples alongside other comparable practices, searching out what Wittgenstein called “objects of comparison” (Wittgenstein 2009, 56). Indeed, as we have seen, comparisons of this sort are already taking place in the literary texts themselves. Mann’s and Atwood’s novels can aptly be seen as part of a long tradition of novels that grapple with a wide range of habits by which togetherness can be nurtured, with, without, or even despite, literary narratives (Morgan 2017, 2011). The power of our three provocations thus lies precisely in that they are complex affordances combining religious, cultural, scientific, literary, medical, and historical discourses. They take us with literature beyond literature to

the enabling collection of habits and practices through which 'I' and 'We' flexibly support and co-determine one another. They instantiate the participatory plurality of the shared world.

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