

“Until the Thousand and First Generation”: Generational Consciousness in the Contemporary Novel

by

Gavin G. Spence

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Auburn University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Auburn, Alabama
May 9, 2011

Keywords: Generations, tropes, phenomenology, historicism, contemporary novel

Copyright 2011 by Gavin Gregory Spence

Approved by

Marc Silverstein, Chair, Professor of English
Miriam Marty Clark, Professor of English
Sunny Stalter, Assistant Professor of English
Charles Israel, Associate Professor of History

Abstract

Generations, by their nature, stand at the crossroads of broad, collective experience (dividing national history into distinct decades) and personal experience (separating an entire lifespan into life phases). More than merely a commonplace phenomenon, each successive generation offers a dynamic structure that connects self to other, family to nation-state, and collective experience to historical time.

This study examines the role that generations play in four contemporary novels and one novella: Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Jhumpa Lahiri's *Hema and Kaushik*, Don DeLillo's *Underworld*, and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*. Despite evident stylistic and structural differences, each work foregrounds generational members who confront profound crises of historical disruption and existential dislocation. Collectively, these works are cast against the backdrop of three national contexts shaped by the legacies of post-imperialism—America, England, and India—all of which have endured profound demographic changes from within and without their established borders. This requires a closer consideration of the particular communities out of which authors emerge and the specific issues of cultural conflict and adaptation that these authors address in their works. The overarching scope of this study reflects an archetypal pattern that structures generations according to four dominant tropes: metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony. In each chapter, I reconfigure these tropes in terms of *generational consciousness* according to the following four areas: representational perspective (metaphor), allegory (metonymy), intentionality (synecdoche), and objectification (irony).

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Marc Silverstein, Miriam Marty Clark, and Sunny Stalter for their assistance as members of my advisory committee. More thanks to Marc Silverstein, whose tireless dedication extends from my first semester as a doctoral student until the final submission of this project; in various contexts—class seminars, office visits, coffee breaks, and email correspondences—he offered incisive, thoughtful comments and suggestions. Thanks to Dan Rose, whose insights into the fields of psychoanalysis and objects-relations theory proved invaluable to my chapter on Don DeLillo. Thanks also to Ben Lisle, whose feedback on my introduction helped me adjust my approach to generations, and Matt Thiel, whose technical advice proved helpful. I am grateful to my parents, Gavin and Gerry, for their boundless support over the past several years. Finally, my deepest love and gratitude to Anna Head, who saw me through the final stages of this project.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgments	iii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: “The New Regime”: The Crisis of Generational Perspective in Ian McEwan’s <i>Atonement</i>	25
Chapter 2: “State of Emergency”: Generational History in Salman Rushdie’s <i>Midnight’s Children</i>	53
Chapter 3: “On the Other Side of the World”: Generational Intentionality in Jhumpa Lahiri’s <i>Hema and Kaushik</i>	84
Chapter 4: “The Inner Divisions of People and Systems”: Generational Objects in Don DeLillo’s <i>Underworld</i>	116
Conclusion (Chapter 5): “After the End”: Generational Dialogues in Cormac McCarthy’s <i>The Road</i>	157
Bibliography.....	180

Introduction

After the arrival of 2010, reporters and staff writers looked back on the previous decade and shared an inability to characterize it in any coherent or satisfactory form. In a flourish of overstatement, *Time* magazine's Andy Serwer called it "The Decade from Hell": "the most dispiriting and disillusioning" ten years that Americans had experienced during the postwar period. To underscore this short-sighted perspective, tailored to fiduciary calamities alone, his article featured self-promotional tie-ins: *Time* videos, "cover-shoots," a photo-essay on Bernie Madoff, a top-ten list of crooked CEO's, and links to previous articles.¹ Adopting a more reasonable tone in *The New Yorker*, Rebecca Mead lamented the lack of consensus on what to call the last decade. Even *after* critics grudgingly settled on "the aughts," this proved to be, at best, a tentative compromise that "please[d] no one":

The oh's? The double-oh's? The zeroes? The zips? The nadas? The naughties?...the aughts? The naughts? The decade just gone by remains unnamed and unclaimed, an orphaned era that no one quite wants to own, or own up to—or, truth be told, to have aught else to do with at all (17-18).

Despite their differences of opinion, all of the journalists above express our collective aim to come to terms (literally) with "the aughts." *Slate*'s Christopher Beam echoed their sentiment when he pointed out a similar terminological crisis that occurred at the beginning of the last century.² Most notably, Timothy Noah (also in *Slate*) observed that through our chronic struggle to name our times, "society has created a serious rhetorical problem that spills over into the

¹Serwer's article culminates in a pitch for his book (published by *Time Books*): "Starting Over: Why the Last Decade was So Damn Rotten and Why the Next One Will Surely Be Better" (8).

²Eschewing the word "aughts" until 1933, journalists instead referred to this period as "turn of the century" or "first decade."

social sciences.” Discourses of sociology, history, politics, and literary studies divide time into decades as the smallest intelligible units of collective experience. Although often reductive, a consensus term allows us to collate events of a single decade (innovations, crises, catastrophes) into a chronological framework. Without one, it would be virtually impossible to define distinguishing features which set one historiographic period apart from another.

But there is a deeper crisis underlying our epistemic quest to define our times. The decade is only a shadow of another object: the generation that seeks to name it. Each generation that comes of age also locates itself—or is located—in relation to cultural history. Just as painstakingly as decades are named, generations are constructed, contested, and packaged for public consumption. Each generation, rooted in family experiences, can be defined as the temporal span between the birth of parents and the birth of children (roughly 20-25 years). Indeed, in mainstream vernacular, there is an explicit, widely accepted correspondence between generational configurations and periodic divisions. One emblematic taxonomy breaks the past century into generations spanning roughly twenty year intervals: World War I (1886-1905), World War II (1906-1925), Silent (1926-1945), Baby Boomers (1946-1965), Generation X (1966-1985), and Millennials (1986-present).³ Each of these categories indicates that a generation’s name, like a decade’s consensus term, is a provisional synthesis of historical time, cultural upheaval, and collective disposition. Each classification can be identified *a posteriori*, after the span of at least another decade and at most another generation. As a tacit guideline, then, a generation’s name always arrives too late for its own time; generational labels are applied to past historical periods, the horizon of which can only be grasped from a present perspective.

³These indicate birth years. Daniel E. Lee adopts these generational categories, although (as he admits) classifying population groups by dominant experiences is “somewhat artificial. Nevertheless, for reasons of convenience, it is useful to do so” (xv). These categories are by no means definitive or absolute.

As Saleem Sinai, the narrator of Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children* reminds us, "reality is a question of perspective: the further you get from the past, the more concrete and plausible it seems—but as you approach the present, it inevitably seems more and more incredible" (189). From a similar vantage point, I will reexamine five literary texts written on the cusp of the past millennium: Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001), Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), Jhumpa Lahiri's *Hema and Kaushik* (2007)⁴, Don DeLillo's *Underworld* (1997), and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006). Although the "aughts" and recent decades are still too fresh in collective memory to imagine in any coherent way, I hope to re-view these works from a present perspective, enlarged by the passage of time, that privileges two defining (but rarely paired) discourses of generational identity: historicism and phenomenology. Both originated concurrently in the context of Enlightenment modernity, and both achieved their most dramatic expression in the novel. While it is remarkable that early modern science and philosophy were less "products of leisure" than "responses to a contemporary crisis" of total war (Toulmin, qtd. in Schleifer, ix), it is even more striking that generations have not received major critical attention in literary studies until the late twentieth century.⁵ This is not so much an omission, it seems to me, as the emergence of modernist and postmodernist crises that foreground generations as bearers of collective historical experience. Consequently, this study will focus on generational members situated at the nexus of history and consciousness. It is my objective to demonstrate how all five works (four novels and a novella) foreground particular generations confronting crises of historical disruption and existential dislocation.

The roots of what I will call "generational consciousness" reach back in time to the early modern era. In his opening chapter of *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Jurgen

⁴ *Hema and Kaushik* is a novella in Lahiri's story collection, *Unaccustomed Earth*.

⁵ Stephen Toulmin has claimed that philosophers of the 17th century responded to "the political, social, and theological chaos" of the Thirty Years War (ix). Schleifer cites this as an analog to cultural modernism.

Habermas classifies the term “modern” as a distinct “historical-philosophical perspective” originating in the early 16th century, when discovery of the New World, the Renaissance, and the Reformation recast history as the “epoch that lives for the future” (5). From this point on, each period assumed the mantle of the modern world’s *zeitgeist*, an “epochal new beginning...to recapitulate the break brought about with the past as a continuous renewal” (7). Habermas does not pay explicit attention to the role that generations play in this ongoing, disruptive historical process. Instead, he focuses on modernity’s detachment from models of the past. While he admires the latter developments of modern time-consciousness in both the aesthetic criticism of Charles Baudelaire and the materialist historiography of Walter Benjamin, Habermas also exposes an unsettling, subject-oriented philosophy in the early 18th century. He identifies Hegel as the philosopher responsible for introducing a solipsistic strain of subjective idealism into Enlightenment rationality: “it is the structure of a self-relating, knowing subject, which bends back upon itself as object, in order to grasp itself as in a mirror image—literally in a ‘speculative’ way” (18). In short, Hegel’s Subject of History (abstract, idealized World Spirit) is privileged over and at the expense of the Object of History (concrete, realized individuals). Habermas justifiably recuperates modern time-consciousness by classifying it as a historical “horizon, open to the future, which is determined by expectations in the present, [and] guides our access to the past” (13).

While accepting Habermas’ critique of Hegel, I would also like to reframe modern, national time-consciousness as a symptom of the dynamic structure of generations. In fact, the dialectical terms that Habermas adopts—“continuing tradition” and “new innovation”—are often played out in tensions between successive generations (13). Moreover, there are generational tropes embedded in Hegelian theory that serve a vital rhetorical function: they connect self to other,

family to nation-state, and collective experience to historical time. To illustrate this point, I'll quote from the same excerpt of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* that Habermas cites⁶:

For the rest it is not difficult to see that *our epoch is a birth-time*, and a period of transition. *The spirit of man* has broken with the old order of things hitherto prevailing...to let them all sink into the depths of the past and to set about its own transformation. It is indeed never at rest, but carried along the stream of progress ever onward. *But it is here as in the case of the birth of a child* after a long period of nutrition in silence, the continuity of the gradual growth in size, of quantitative change, is suddenly cut short by the first breath drawn—there is a break in the process, a qualitative change and the child is born. *In like manner the spirit of the time*, growing slowly and quietly ripe for the new form it is to assume, disintegrates one fragment after another of the structure of its previous world (6) [my italics].

Hegel's central conceit of birth progresses from abstract meanings ("epochal birth-time" and "the spirit of man") to a concrete singularity ("the birth of a child"), then back to an abstraction again ("the spirit of the time"). A conventional reading might emphasize a binary logic at work, privileging subject over object. But Hegel's rhetorical use of analogy actually hinges on the child's "first breath," which constitutes the "break in the process" between periods of gestation and infancy. More than merely a figure of speech, this break is the necessary condition through which generations first emerge into consciousness; only after citing physical birth as an ontological orientation can Hegel analogize it to the zeitgeist ("the spirit of the time").⁷ In this sense, a generational cycle of birth and re-birth inheres in the recapitulated "epochal new beginning" that Habermas mentions. This process is best defined as convulsive since it vacillates between static times, at moments of birth, and dynamic times, during periods of growth ("carried along the stream of progress ever onward").

Concealed within Hegel's logic of subject-over-object are reciprocal relations between selves and others within a generational structure. He claims that "the divine law"—or World Spirit—is represented in family relationships. Between husband and wife, Hegel discerns

⁶ To reinforce the generational analogies, I've quoted a larger section of Hegel's text.

⁷ My reading that generational breaks constitute a primary order of consciousness is not meant to endorse a Hegelian view of history (or generations, for that matter).

the primary and immediate form in which one consciousness recognizes itself in another, in which each knows that reciprocal recognition...The relationship, therefore, finds itself realized not in itself as such, but *in the child—an other, in whose coming into being that relationship consists, and with which it passes away.* And this change from one generation onwards to another is permanent in and as the life of a nation (261-262)[m.i.].

Children constitute the ontological grounds through which parents “realize” a reciprocal relationship. They also remind parents of the temporal finitude of their role: “in whose coming into being that relationship consists and with which it passes away.” This awareness informs the eventual immersion of parents and children into culture, first into distinct generations (modeled on the family structure) and then into the nation-state. Once again, Hegel metaphorically links family to generation and, in turn, links generation to “the life of the nation.”

Hegel’s philosophy of history is in many ways emblematic of a corresponding development in modernity: the novel’s unique focus on human consciousness. In *The Rise of the Novel*, Ian Watt examines three writers of the generation preceding Hegel—Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding—and discovers that that combined “genius” and “accident” can not account for their unique contributions to the novel form (9). Instead, he turns to “favorable conditions in the literary and social situation,” in particular, “the total subordination of the plot to the pattern of the autobiographical memoir” (15). Rather than traditional plots from myth, legend, or history, 18th century novelists chose personal experience “as the ultimate arbiter of reality” (14). Watts claims that this individualist orientation originates in the work of Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, Butler, Hume, and Reid—all philosophers who assigned “thought processes of the individual’s consciousness supreme importance” (18). Following suit, the novel began to emphasize the particularity of human experience: persons living in specific places at specific times.⁸

⁸ Various histories of the novel diverge from Watts’ specific approach. Although he extols Watts’ seminal work, Michael McKeon also highlights two major oversights: (1) “Watts’ vulnerability in delimiting the formal characters of the novel,” which he inaccurately isolates from the romance; (2) his overdetermination of “the contextual aspect

These memories, associations, and emotions were not exclusively personal. As David Lodge reminds us, the new Cartesian “emphasis on the interiority of experience” extended into a broad cultural realm in which “the silence and privacy of the reading experience afforded by books mimicked the silent privacy of individual consciousness” (*Consciousness and the Novel* 39-40). Through the novel, the privacy of individuals was matched by the experience of collective consciousness. Over time, the novel’s formal development has attested to a dynamic tension between an awareness of self and an awareness of other. Within the scope of a single generation, early confessional autobiographies (Defoe) yielded to epistolary works (Richardson), then meta-fictional “histories” (Fielding).⁹ By the nineteenth century, novels began to adopt a free, indirect style with distinct and divergent orientations; Jane Austen’s plots were filtered through the consciousness of characters with an often “partial, mistaken, deceived, or self-deceiving” grasp of events, while Victorian novelists displayed an epistemological “confidence...that reality can be known, that the truth about human affairs can be told, and that such knowledge and truth can be shared collectively” (Lodge 49). In the first decades of the twentieth century, modernists like Joyce and Woolf would challenge the values of social realism and opt to reinforce the internal, isolated perspectives of individuals.

At each stage of the novel’s evolution, a new generation of writers has sought to capture the density of particular and collective experience on the backdrop of unique historical circumstances. In a direct way, the novel also reflects the *problematic* nature of generations, which struggle to come to terms with themselves *as* generations. Since the mid-nineteenth

of...the rise of the middle class” (*Origins of the English Novel* 3). Nancy Armstrong criticizes Watts (as well as Gilbert and Gubar) for presenting a “history [that] takes place not in and through those areas of culture over which women may have held sway, but in institutions dominated by men” (*Desire and Domestic Fiction*, 8). While accepting these criticisms, I cite Watts here to make a larger point about novelistic discourse.

⁹ Lodge points out that all three novelists depicted characters who accommodated their personal goals and beliefs to those of others (43-45)

century, concepts of historical generations have often been reduced either to a “biological-genealogical” continuity or to a historiographic periodization (Jaeger, 273).¹⁰ But the twentieth century ushered in a new set of wars, catastrophes, and economic crises that set generational ruptures and gaps into sharper relief (Jaeger, 291). In his pioneering essay “On Generations,” Karl Mannheim underscores the central problem of each contemporary generation: its capacity (or incapacity) to relate itself to a unified social whole—what he calls a “location phenomenon” (*lagerung*) (290). Analogous to a class position (*klassenlage*), a enacts a part-to-whole contribution to cultural and national history¹¹; but each generation is crucially distinct from a class in the following four ways:

1. It is period-bound, exposed to a limited temporal section of the historical process (an experience of the same phase in collective history) (297)
2. It shares a common cultural-geographic region (303)
3. It undergoes a *stratification of experience* (*Erlebnisschichtung*); each generation occupies a different generational location based on both external, naturalistic factors (birth-dates, life spans) and internal understandings of historical time (297). Early life occurrences shape age groups into a unique orientation to culture and history. Consequently, older and younger generations inhabit incommensurate (and often incompatible) strata of experience
4. It is often (but not always) broken into *generational units*: pairs of mutually opposed social and intellectual responses to common historical events (304-312)

Rather than view generations from a particular or absolute subject-position, Mannheim redefined them as relativistic, mutable, and fractional. Stratified generational experiences are characterized by complex associations and disruptions between self, family, and culture. Voices of parents and children rarely reach accord.

¹⁰ Karl Mannheim classifies these two diametrically opposed studies of generations as *positivist* and *romantic-historical*. The former, relying on “static” natural sciences, emphasize “the biological law of the limited life-span of man and the overlap of new and old generations (“On Generations” 276). The latter, relying on “dynamic” discourses of cultural (or human) science, cite “the existence of an interior time...grasped by intuitive understanding” of a shared contemporaneity (282).

¹¹ Here, Mannheim’s theory on generations appears to reflect Georg Lukàcs’ concept of totality.

The novel offers a harmonious structure to incorporate these disparate expressions. As Mikhail Bakhtin observed, the novel form is grounded in a heteroglossia of social speech types and diverse individual voices. It underscores the manifold historical phenomena of language, which is fragmented into multiple, socio-ideological languages. Among these, Bakhtin cites the *language of generations*: “the social life of discourse [lies] outside the artist’s study, discourse in the open spaces of public squares, streets, cities and villages, of social groups, generations, and epochs” which constitute “the fundamentally social modes in which discourse lives” (“Discourse in the Novel” 259). Rather than emphasize a unified national language (or *langue*), the novel is stratified into

social dialects...professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups...this internal stratification present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre (263).

Generational languages offer a vibrant record of the given moments of both historical and existential modes of consciousness. Two of Bakhtin’s translators, Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, claim that the novel’s uniquely polyphonic structure can assimilate multiple consciousnesses which “meet as equals and engage in a dialogue that is in principle unfinalizable” (*Mikhail Bakhtin* 238-9).

Within the novels that I have selected, there are countless generational dialogues at work, some explicit and apparent, others tacit and internalized. But in virtually every case, parents, children, and grandchildren engage one another through dialogue as a concrete discourse. Even in situations in which one figure is absent, the language structure remains intact. Bakhtin observes (in somewhat arcane terminology) that every word “directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, [and] weaves in and out of complex interrelationships” (“Discourse” 276). It is precisely this

dynamic, object-oriented mode of discourse that is adopted by generational members. Moreover, it fulfills a basic phenomenological purpose by orienting consciousness to language.¹² In order to become conscious of its own historical location, then, each generation must position itself in relation to a discourse.

Separate, overlapping stages in the evolution of generations, communicated through concrete objects, speech, gestures, and behavior, constitute a vocabulary which serves as a locus of continuity since preceding and succeeding generations invariably become ancestors of—and heirs to—this patchwork lexicon. In order to establish a broader framework for my studies, I would like to examine how generational dialogic relations provide a unique idiom which mediates between private and public realms; which negotiates the transition between domestic and cultural space; which both participates in established, official discourses of history and resists classification within a fixed, collective hermeneutic (a centralized interpretation of events).

In his own hermeneutical reading of postmodernism, Frederic Jameson has aptly observed that the late 1950's and early 1960's inaugurated a new "cultural dominant" that integrated aesthetic and commodity modes of production. More pointedly, Jameson relies on the generational framework of the nostalgia film, in which "the desperate attempt to appropriate a missing past is now refracted through the iron law of fashion change and the emergent ideology of generation."¹³ Citing *American Graffiti*, *Chinatown*, and *Body Heat* as emblematic of this trend, Jameson demonstrates how these films allow spectators to project contemporaneity onto a distant history, an "operator of 'pastness' and pseudohistorical depth, in which the history of

¹² Bakhtin notes that "consciousness finds itself inevitably facing the necessity of *having to choose a language*. With each literary-verbal performance, consciousness must actively orient itself amidst heteroglossia, it must move and occupy a position for itself within it, it chooses, in other words, a 'language'" ("Discourse in the Novel" 295).

aesthetic styles displaces ‘real’ history” (*Postmodernism*, 20). Jameson’s analysis offers shrewd insights into dominant modes of economic production. However, by orienting generations to aesthetic objects as mere spectacles or simulacra (the nostalgia film, among others), he evacuates these objects of the vital experiential associations and dialogic relations that they contain for grandparents, parents, and children. For generations, aesthetic objects are often encountered in the context of dialogue, which offers a historical framework encompassing contemporary, past, and future decades.

To begin my examination of generational identity in literary texts at the turn of this new millennium, I will concentrate on three national contexts shaped by the legacies of post-imperialism—America, England, and India—all of which have endured profound demographic changes from within and without their established borders.¹⁴ In recent years, the very conception of such borders has been blurred by corporate and national deregulation of traditional and emerging markets; conversely, frequent threats of terrorism (post-9/11) have caused a tightening of border controls in areas of national security and immigration. From at least one contemporary critic’s perspective, it seems almost irresistible to view the demise of communism and the rise of capitalism as corrective measures in a globalized climate of “democratic, consensual, free-market-oriented” economies, a giddy reminder that *the world is now flat*.¹⁵ However accurate this prospective version of history might be, it largely ignores the various historical crises (civil wars, geo-political re-partitions, natural disasters) that have produced a new diaspora comprised of generations which re-define identity in relation to prior and subsequent generations. This

¹⁴ Since my first chapter focuses on the influence of World War II (which created a historic break within modernity, between present and past) I’m using the broader term “post-imperialism” instead of post-colonialism.

¹⁵ Friedman, Thomas. *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007, 52. Friedman notes that the fall of the Berlin Wall on 11/9/1989 has "allowed us to think of the world differently—to see it more as a seamless whole...to think about the world as a single market, a single ecosystem, and a single community. Before 1989, you could have an Eastern policy or a Western policy, but it was hard to think about having a 'global' policy," 54.

process, of course, requires a closer consideration of the particular communities out of which authors emerge and the specific issues of cultural conflict and adaptation that these authors address in their works.

In order to investigate these varied cultural adjustments of the past century, I will adopt *generational consciousness* as a complex rhetorical term that encompasses both personal and cultural crises of identity. The overarching scope of this study reflects an archetypal pattern that structures generational consciousness according to four dominant tropes: *metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony*.¹⁶ As *archetypes*, metaphoric, metonymic, synecdochic, and ironic tropes inhere in multiple discourses.¹⁷ Typically latent in literary discourses on generations, tropic structures are manifested when one trope takes the place of another, a direct consequence of disruptions or “turning points” in experience. As Hayden White observes, there is a progression as

the narrative ‘I’ of the discourse’ move[s] from an initial metaphorical characterization of a domain of experience through metonymic deconstructions of its elements, to synecdochic representations of the relations between its superficial attributes and its presumed essence, to, finally, a representation of whatever oppositions or contradictions can legitimately be discerned in the totalities identified in the third phase of discursive representation (*Tropics of Discourse*, 5).

More than merely stylistic features of the novels examined here, all four tropes serve as paradigms “of the operations by which consciousness can prefigure areas of experience that are cognitively problematic in order subsequently to submit them to analysis and explanation” (White, *Metahistory*, 36).

¹⁶In an appendix of *A Grammar of Motives*, Kenneth Burke defines four “master tropes” according to an archetypal pattern that evolves from metaphor (perspective) to metonymy (reduction) to synecdoche (representation) to irony (dialectics) (“Four Master Tropes” 503-517). Hayden White aptly observes that these can be applied to “objects in different kinds of indirect, or figurative discourse” and offers a thorough background on their various uses (*Metahistory* 31-34).

¹⁷White extends archetypal tropes to the theories of Vico, Hegel, Marx, Freud, and (especially) Piaget (*Tropics*, 5-23).

To examine generations in close context, I will delineate these tropes using the terms *representational perspective* (metaphor), *allegorical reduction* (metonymy), *integrative intentionality* (synecdoche), and *ironic objectification* (irony). Applied more broadly to generational consciousness, each tropic paradigm charts “structures of relating self to other which remain implicit as different ways of knowing in the fully matured consciousness” (*Tropics of Discourse*, 11). Adjustments and accommodations between individuals and generations are rarely (if ever) smooth or simple. Consequently, each chapter foregrounds either a character or an entire generation’s problematic relationship between self and other. Although it is clear that these characters and cohorts vacillate between *all* tropes of generational consciousness, I will limit each chapter to a particular trope that isolates a specific historical-existential crisis; either through a narrative lens of metaphor (an equation of others’ perspectives with one’s own), metonymy (a fragmented reduction of collective consciousness), synecdoche (a (re)integration of collective consciousness), or irony (a distant reflection on collective consciousness that reveals internal complexities).¹⁸ Collectively, these generational figures trace a tropological development, from grandchildren to grandparents, from the limited perspectives of childhood to the ironic distance of senescence.

One’s earliest sense of his or her generation is grounded in a specific, self-oriented vantage point. The first phase in constituting generational consciousness entails the forging of a unique point-of-view, from which characters use metaphoric figures to familiarize new experiences. This process, rooted in infancy, introduces the child to outside objects as mere extensions of the self (as subject); he or she grasps no sense of “difference,” since all objects

¹⁸Burke acknowledges that classifying tropes invariably entails “an evanescent moment,” since “the four tropes shade into one another” (503). To depict a perspective (*metaphor*) involves a reduction (*metonymy*); “a reduction is also a representation” (*synecdoche*) (507); to represent is also to adopt a dialectical relationship (*irony*): “the interaction of terms upon one another to produce a development which uses all the terms” (512).

refer back to the body proper.¹⁹The world of others—largely parents and siblings—initially exist in relation to a private world. Consequently, my first chapter will concentrate on Ian McEwan’s *Atonement*, which dramatizes one character’s childhood crisis of perspective. As the central consciousness of the novel, Briony Tallis introduces herself to us as a child who represents experiences of parents’ and siblings’ generations *as if* they were those of her own. As a thirteen year-old, she is un-prepared to witness an unfamiliar, intimate relationship between her sister, Cecilia, and a family friend, Robbie Turner. Standing on the fault line between childhood and adolescence, Briony compensates for her lack of understanding by analogizing the distinct experiences of this older generation to those of her own. Indeed, her crime—the choice to condemn an innocent man for charges of statutory rape—is a symptom of her short-sighted perspective. This misrepresentation of others becomes a major turning point in the novel; it exposes a structural trope of Briony’s consciousness that pivots between one life phase and the next and (more crucially) between her awareness of self and her awareness of other.

It becomes clear that Briony manages this crisis, generations later, through the elaborate design of her art. By occupying a dichotomous role as both elderly narrator of events and young (if sometimes latent) character in the novel, she effectively sutures the rift between two perspectives of grandparent and grandchild. Having reached her final years during the late 1990’s, Briony constructs extensive fictions of the World War II era in an effort to achieve generational “atonement” between her present and past incarnations. Although it is clear that she relies on other tropes to achieve this aesthetic resolution, I will concentrate mostly on the source of her crisis: her novel’s initial drafts as problematic metaphors for her own real-life experiences. These metaphors, in turn, are extended to modernism as a *mythos* that provides Briony with a

¹⁹The ideas here (and in subsequent paragraphs) are based on Piaget’s four phases of the child’s cognitive development: *sensorimotor*, *operational*, *logical*, and *rational* (*Tropics of Discourse*, 7-11).

working grammar of literary archetypes.²⁰ Briony's metaphorical consciousness may appear primitive when compared to other tropic phases; however, as "the fundamental mode of poetic apprehension in general," it allows her to situate language in relation to both life and art (White, *Tropics*, 10). Although her early representational perspectives of others are solipsistic, they also help her to forge a primary characterization of her generation.

Every generational perspective is also a provisional synthesis of diverse perspectives. As one advances beyond the limitations of representing one's generation from a particular, limited point-of-view, one moves from inner experience to external environment. During this stage of cognitive development, the individual (child) encounters "difference" as a "total decentration" of egocentric space (*Tropics*, 8). Likewise, during the second phase of generational consciousness, the self is reconstituted through metonymy, which involves a displacement onto external objects. In collective terms, generational members identify with their most extensive, cultural "object," the nation-state. In short, each generation sees itself reflected in an image of the nation. Invariably, a process of disintegration occurs when these cohorts come to new terms with their sense of national and transnational identity. Turning "from West to East," my next two chapters will therefore chart the fissures, gaps, and cracks in the mold of two diasporic works. I hope to provide a contemporary cognitive map of immigrant families which have made—and continue to make—the difficult transition from India and Bangladesh to other nations. My second chapter will focus on Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), whose narrator, Saleem Sinai, constructs a generational narrative coinciding with India's official history of independence (both are born at the stroke of midnight, August 15, 1947). Saleem experiences a physical dissolution that reflects a metonymic dispersion across the field of national history; he constantly fears that

²⁰Northrop Frye used these terms (albeit in a different context) to categorize "the structural principles of literature...as closely related to mythology and comparative religion" (*Anatomy of a Criticism*, 135).

his body will disintegrate into “630 million particles of anonymous...oblivious dust” (*Midnight’s Children* 36). These anxieties are symptomatic of a larger phenomenon: India’s emergence as an independent nation-state. India’s “body politic” has not achieved national unification; rather, it has set in motion profound cultural changes (immigration, assimilation, partition, and resistance) that result in the emergence of fragmented, diasporic generations. To compensate, Saleem constructs a generational allegory which reduces national events to personal (and familial) events; which levels polysemous Indian history to his singular autobiography.

There are close affinities between allegory and metonymy. Indeed, almost all narrative commentary can be considered allegorical since it relies on reducing abstract ideas to concrete images (or visa versa).²¹ Since *Midnight’s Children* adopts *allegorical reduction* as a direct response to the Emergency State in India (1974-1983) and Indo-Pakistani wars (1965-1971), my approach will apply Walter Benjamin’s commensurate theories of allegory and historiography; in counterpoint to national meta-narratives of historical progress, Rushdie’s generational allegory enacts a discontinuous series of “now-times.” These often consist of fragmented images of family crises that disrupt official versions of national history (as continual and ameliorative). Pointedly, Saleem Sinai recognizes that such historical anomalies also threaten to devolve into anarchism. To prevent this threat, future generations must “redeem” the unfulfilled promises of past generations (Benjamin defines this redemptive potential as “weak millennialism”). Along similar lines, Saleem witnesses India’s parents of independence give birth to nihilist children and vows to turn the chaotic tide through the birth of his own child: “the sons of the great unmake their parents. But I, too, have a son; Aadam Sinai, flying in the face of precedent, will reverse the trend” (381).

²¹Frye has classified allegory across a broad spectrum, ranging from “naïve allegories” (*Pilgrim’s Progress* and *The Faerie Queen*) to doctrinal poetic allegories (*Paradise Lost*) to “ironic and paradoxical” allegories (Eliot’s modernist poems) (89-91).

In longing for such a reversal, Saleem also makes the tropological turn towards synecdoche, a figure which enacts reversible operations in relation to total systems (*Tropics*, 8). Every generation, in a broad sense, “re-makes” the previous generation, adapting or adjusting its values and modes of expression. In terms of generational consciousness, the next generation associates and connects experiences of the past generation to those of their own. This process relies on a “logic of classifications,” an integration of both past and present generational experiences into a tentative “whole” category (8). In her short stories and novels, Jhumpa Lahiri has shown an abiding interest in issues of intergenerational continuity and integrity. She has explored historical crises that radically disrupt both family and national histories; across the generation gap, first and second generations find common ground in the ordered totalities of family and Bengali kinship communities.²²In my third chapter, I will focus on Lahiri’s novella, *Hema and Kaushik*, which dramatizes a split between two title characters who diverge in their orientations toward these totalities; while Kaushik opts to absent himself from family and community (a metonymic move), Hema reconstructs both into a new whole (a synecdochic gesture).

Like Salman Rushdie, Jhumpa Lahiri draws inspiration from catastrophic historical events of the subcontinent; in particular, the second Indo-Pakistani War (1971) set in motion a civil war within Pakistan’s own borders, uprooting much of the Bengali population, whose legacy Lahiri has charted in literary works of the “second generation” diaspora. However, in her most recent work, national history recedes into the background and, in its place, a renewed emphasis is placed on the ontological relationship between parents and children. Between first

²² In *The Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), Lahiri depicts a younger generation struggling to come to terms with its own hybrid identity (as Bengali-American) in relation to a past that has become historically remote in place and time. *The Namesake* (2003) intensifies this sense of dislocation in its depiction of Gogol Ganguli, whose experiences typify an adolescent’s immersion into mass culture and an adult’s adoption of educational, professional, and marital roles.

and second generation Bengali-Americans, intentionality (thinking *about* one another) mediates and conveys their disparate experiences of the world. In order to examine this context closer, I will draw from phenomenology and object-relations theory, two discourses that provide insights into structures of consciousness. By shifting critical focus to the ways in which different generations achieve collective consciousness through *integrative intentionality*, I hope to shed light on narratives which disclose a synecdochic common ground. In this context, generational experiences are shared by parents and children, both of whom encounter each other face-to-face *as* other, as individuals cooperatively engaged in particular relations.²³

Even the most inclusive cross-generational narratives expose inner complexities and contradictions. Synecdochic categories of generations do not fully account for the various objects that resist assimilation (*Tropics*, 9). Within a single generation, as decades pass, cohorts gradually review their own objects with irony. They become critical of previous life phases (childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, etc.), dissociate themselves from rigid classifications, and imagine alternative forms of expression. When reexamined *across* generations, objects play even more self-conscious roles in reconstituting the relationship between self and other. Consequently, in my fourth chapter, I will segue from Lahiri's reintegrated kinship community, generated from outside American borders, to DeLillo's generations, radically displaced from *within* their own natural and cultural environments. *Underworld* foregrounds the ironic status of two major artifacts—waste products and weapons systems—passed down from coldwar generations to contemporary generations. Applying the object-relations theories of Christopher Bollas, I will examine families and individuals whose “generational objects” store their own collective, experiential sense of time. Each generation's identity reflects a unique concatenation

²³I'm basing this generational relation on Levinas' ethics of the other (see: Critchley, [The Cambridge Companion to Levinas](#), 12).

of life phases and historical decades; consequently, each generation uses objects to reevaluate incommensurate histories of other generations from a position of ironic distance.

In *Being a Character*, Bollas has classified objects as textures of life experience that “elicit within us not so much a singular memory as an inner psychic constellation laden with images, feelings, and bodily acuties” (3).²⁴ When considered in relation to larger collectivities, these become recast as “generational objects,” which consist of “persons, events, things which have particular meaning to the identity of that generation...[and] are potentially significant to another generation” (259). Bollas observes that, despite the dynamic and often oppositional qualities of collective identity formation, there resides in three generations (grandparents-parents-children) a structural integrity; over a lifespan, each generational set will experience similar developmental stages, which in turn correspond to decadal units of historical time (the 1960’s, the 1970’s, etc.). In early childhood, the younger generation remains a passive recipient of the older generation’s objects, but also begins to develop peer groups which collect their own objects; a decade later, adolescents develop a more oppositional orientation to their parents’ objects; in their early twenties, they become immersed in the process of identity formation, “transform[ing] culture into the generation’s image” (271); in their thirties, they become increasingly aware of their own transitory status as the next generation succeeds them; in their forties and fifties, they gradually come to terms with their transformation into historical objects; finally, in their sixties and seventies, they pass from “lived experience” (the self immersed in process) into “history’s time” (the self as object of history) (271-272).²⁵

²⁴ Bollas suggests that such objects become more than merely flat screens onto which we project our latent desires and fantasies; they become “evocative objects” that, once used, produce “a play of inner states” in the individual subject among six different orders. Bollas classifies these orders as *sensational*, *structural*, *symbolic*, *conceptual*, *mnemic*, and *projective* (*Being A Character*, 36).

²⁵ Bollas’ theories of generational consciousness bear an intriguing resemblance to Mannheim’s examination of generational *stratification of experience*.

Over the course of these developmental phases, objects chart a generation's gradual evolution from a state of naïve consciousness to critical self-consciousness. DeLillo's novel, *I* will show, collects multiple, evolving generations into two generational subsets: coldwar and post-coldwar. Both of these adopt the trope of *ironic objectification* to encounter inherited waste products and weapons systems as *generational objects* on (1) oppositional grounds, repudiating values that past generations have ascribed to them; and (2) productive grounds, metamorphosing these artifacts into inventive cultural and aesthetic objects (which, in turn, can be inherited by future generations).

This dialectical clash over the status of generational objects spans five decades of American history. Early coldwar generations often succumb to fears of nuclear holocaust and contamination—fears emblemized in characters like J. Edgar Hoover, Albert Bronzini, and Klara Sax. But DeLillo also depicts members of younger generations who seek a more affirmative, even redemptive perspective on cultural history. Throughout the novel, his narrator does not privilege or downplay either generational set; rather, his elusive, ironic tone often suggests ambivalence towards their generational objects, as exemplified in the following section (from the Prologue of the novel):

This is another kind of history...they will carry something out of here that joins them in a rare way, that binds them to a memory with protective power...Isn't it possible that this midcentury moment enters the skin more lastingly than the vast shaping strategies of eminent leaders, generals steely in their sunglasses—the mapped visions that pierce our dreams? This is the thing that will pulse in his brain come old age and double vision and dizzy spells—the surge sensation, the leap of people already standing, that bolt of noise and joy when the ball went in. This is the people's history and it has flesh and breath that quicken to the force of this old safe game of ours. And fans at the Polo Grounds today will be able to tell their grandchildren—they'll be the gassy old men leaning into the next century and trying to convince anyone willing to listen, pressing in with medicine breath, that they were here when it happened (59-60).

Through elaborate “play” with cultural and aesthetic objects, each generation fashions a unique collective identification out of a complex relationship with other generations. In the excerpt above, the precise moment of Thompson’s homerun—“that bolt of noise and joy when the ball went in”—becomes a privileged marker of collective experience for the midcentury generation by containing the crowd’s turbulent emotions and associations in an external, formal object. DeLillo depicts a generation held in captivity by its own object, which spans all four tropes of consciousness: (1) focalized perspectives, which jostle between “they” and “our”; (2) an allegorical reduction of official history to “the people’s history”; (3) the crowd itself, which retains a synecdochic wholeness that spans five decades through a parent-child dialogue; (4) ironic undertones in the narrator’s voice, which deftly conveys an intergenerational narrative through an atemporal mode using subtle tense shifts (between future, present, and past): “And fans at the Polo Grounds today will be able to tell their grandchildren—they’ll be the gassy old men leaning into the next century and trying to convince anyone willing to listen...that they were here when it happened.” Throughout this quote, a tropic mode of irony predominates: grandchildren of the past are conflated with grandparents of the present, multiple perspectives overlap, and even the concept of a generation as part of a unified nation splinters off into countless individuals.

As the above excerpt illustrates, irony offers the most advanced stage of generational consciousness since it sustains and assimilates structural operations of all the previous tropes.²⁶ Likewise, in this study, I have organized chapters so that each one builds on—and incorporates—the archetypal figures of the last. By doing so, I hope to chart a tropological development from perspective to allegory to intentionality to objectification. Collectively, these

²⁶Drawing on Piaget’s theories, White notes that “a given mode of cognition is not so much obliterated as preserved, transcended, and assimilated to the mode that succeeds it in the ontogenic process” (*Tropics of Discourse* 10).

chapters examine generations standing at the crossroads of history and consciousness; depending on their orientation to life phases and historical decades, generational members opt to apprehend their world by “turning” (to use a tropic phrase) to metaphorical, metonymical, synecdochic, or ironic modes of consciousness. Each of these modes has its strengths and limitations. For instance, in *Atonement*, Briony Tallis’ childhood point-of-view, immersed in art, both enlarges her real-life circumstances and restricts her understanding of others. *Midnight Children*’s Saleem Sinai offers a vibrant autobiography, but his narrative also reduces national history to a fractured, partial depiction of events. In *Hema and Kaushik*, to the extent that Hema succeeds in forging a new, “whole” kinship community for herself, she also fails to reassimilate Kaushik into this very structure. Even *Underworld*, which poses one generational set in ironic counterpoint to another, reaches a vexed conclusion regarding the future status of generational objects.

Yet it is precisely at the threshold between one trope and the next that characters encounter the limits of personal and collective history. Indeed, each trope serves a vital purpose in managing a specific crisis in historical circumstances or events; each of these also constitutes a major turning point in life, from self to family, family to nation, nation to kinship community, and generation to generation. To ease the transition between various phases and times, generational consciousness sutures the rifts within personal perspectives, between family and national allegories, among kinship communities, and across generational histories.

To grasp the limits of this study, my fifth (and final) chapter will make a radical turn, from tropes of generational consciousness to a mode of literary discourse that succeeds such tropes. Here, I will reconsider representations of generations in the new millennium in stark counterpoint to those of previous chapters. More than merely a chiliastic or alarmist catchphrase, “the end of history” assumes a contemporary resonance in literary works that foreground

demographic, economic, and environmental crises that rupture the continuity of generations. When reframed in light of the possibility of global apocalypse, the end of *all ages* also undermines humanity's capacity to locate itself in relation to history and consciousness. As I've pointed out above, these are the very conditions out of which modern time-consciousness and the philosophy of history emerged; moreover, as twin features of the novel, they have converged in the depiction of generations. In disquieting, gruesome detail, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* illustrates a "post-generational" crisis, in which all generations have been severed from their historical mode of being as well as their existential relation to History.

Set against a post-apocalyptic backdrop, *The Road* presents a challenge to the very notion of generations in a world that has rendered them obsolete. Stylistically reminiscent of Beckett, McCarthy relies on an aesthetic sparsely drawn, muted, and bracketed off from historical referentiality. Reduced to mere survival-techniques in a "post-postmodern" habitus, a father and son seek to forge a generational dialogue that constitutes the bare bones of culture, identity, and family. In this concluding chapter, I anticipate the convergence of all four tropes: the aesthetic "atonements" of past and present generational perspectives in McEwan; the fabulist allegory of Rushdie; the reintegrative intentionality of Lahiri; and the tragic, horrific fulfillment of DeLillo's apocalypse (as promised by the generational objects of nuclear weapons). However, McCarthy's novel also seems to de-construct these readings, grounded as they are in two major assumptions I'm making about futurity: (1) that these present conditions will necessarily preface the cultural habitus of future generations; (2) that the tropes of *representational perspective*, *allegorical reduction*, *integrative intentionality*, and *ironic objectification* can reconstitute generations after the end of modernity.

In sharp contrast, the author represents a dystopic future detached from any historical framework of previous and current generational decades. Consequently, his novel effectively erases Habermas' "horizon, open to the future, which is determined by expectations in the present, [and] guides our access to the past" (*The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* 13). As such, the father and son figures can neither recapitulate the break with past traditions nor locate themselves in relation to future decades. Despite the bleak prospect that McCarthy presents, I hope that this concluding chapter may both validate and challenge the various border-crossings—across historical and ontological lines—undertaken in prior chapters and imagine a new perspective on literary generations that exceeds such boundaries.

“The New Regime”: The Crisis of Generational Perspective in Ian McEwan’s *Atonement*

When do we become aware of our own generation? Although it may seem futile to try to locate this exact moment, residing in the distant past, it seems clear that our first grasp of a generation is paradoxically bound up with a corresponding sense of *losing* that generation. This primary moment occurs when children become aware that the world no longer reflects their own needs and interests; rather, their once-privileged status is actually timebound, limited by a personal and collective history that exists outside of their own experiences. Similar themes of generational loss have figured in almost all of Ian McEwan’s works; the source of this loss is often rooted in immediate family circumstances: the death of a parent, the disappearance of a child, the declination of a past life phase. Unlike the author’s previous fiction, *Atonement* (2001) relies on one central figure’s generational narrative, spanning the divide between her dual positions as narrator and character. Revisiting her past, Briony Tallis reveals a profound identity crisis on the frontier between generations. Her experiences reflect the initial trope of generational consciousness, which pivots between childhood and adulthood, when the isolated self encounters the outside other. Along these lines, McEwan’s novel offers his first extensive portrait of a narrator who departs from her solipsized, inner life and demonstrates “not just a private and psychological component, but a public and historical one as well” (Finney 67).

Indeed, on first reading, it may appear that Briony resolves the conflict between her private and public life through the act of writing the novel itself. In the book’s final section, she seals

“the whole matter...at both ends” when she exposes the entire work as a fiction; the circuit between private writer and public audience seems to have been closed (6). Having arrived full circle, the writer acknowledges her transgressions. She admits to having accused a family friend, Robbie Turner, of statutory rape, and condemning him to a short life of imprisonment and war service; in the bargain, she has betrayed her older sister, Cecilia, whose relationship with Robbie has been severed. On the surface, the novel appears to “atone” for this crime by fashioning a romantic reunion between Robbie and Cecilia as well as Briony’s own self-styled role as a repentant wrongdoer. However, when the book’s final chapter reveals that she has misrepresented all the major characters, the author exposes described events as (at best) provisional fictions.

What underlies this literary atonement is an even deeper crisis reaching back to Briony’s childhood experiences. Her original crime, it seems to me, is less an act of artful malice than a consequence of her limited, self-oriented perspective as a child. It is instructive to keep in mind that, when Briony accuses Robbie, she stands on the verge of two distinct generational phases: childhood and adolescence. Occupying a liminal status, she can neither sever the ties from her isolated youth nor adopt the rituals of her sister’s sophisticated collegiate milieu. Beyond the dire legal and ethical consequences for her actions, Briony Tallis makes a mistake grounded in a commonplace phenomenon. She struggles to come to terms with an inaugural consciousness of her generation.

For most individuals, this awareness emerges on the boundary between two stages: absorption in family life during childhood and an immersion into mainstream culture during adolescence. During this time, individuals locate the generational other—typically, a parent or older sibling—in relation to self, which (in turn) prepares the way for imagining the other’s

perspective. At this point, an awareness sets in that formative personal and family experiences are timebound, restricted by the duration of a single life phase (childhood). The next generational phase offers the promises and perils of assimilating into outside culture. To ease the disruptive transition into adolescence, cohorts often adopt a trope of *representational perspective* to analogize others' experiences to their own.

In light of this intergenerational approach, Briony's choice can be considered a symptom of metaphorical consciousness. On several occasions, she comes face-to-face with others—Lola (her cousin), Cecilia, and Robbie—whose older age confers on them an advanced generational perspective. When she encounters Lola, a casualty of a divorced parents, Briony can not relate this atypical predicament to her own family life. Even more unsettling is her encounter with Cecilia and Robbie engaging in sexual (or sexually charged) acts. As an inexperienced child, she can not understand these shocking episodes; to familiarize them, she makes a claim of representation on others' points-of-view to square with her own perspective.

In tropological terms, whenever Briony describes phenomena in this way, she adopts a “linguistic mode in which the original description... will implicitly rule out certain modes of representation and modes of explanation regarding the [phenomenal] field's structure and tacitly sanction others” (White, *Tropics*, 128) [m.i.]. At this stage in Briony's life, the mode of metaphor allows her to unveil meaning through a correspondence between objects in the world and images that preconceive them. As events unfold, Briony misapprehends Cecilia and Robbie's behavior according to pre-figured features of her fictional plays; but these pre-figurations also allow her to come to terms with a new domain of experience.¹ Over time, she resolves her crisis of perspective by reconfiguring representations of others in the context of other tropes (metonymy,

¹ White classifies tropological discourse as “a product of consciousness' efforts to come to terms with problematical domains of experience...effects such comings to terms with its milieu, social or natural as the case may be” (*Tropics*, 5).

synecdoche, and irony). But it is this principal crisis that we must examine first, since her misrepresentation of circumstances surrounding Robbie's "crime" becomes *the* turning point in both her life and the novel that she has written.

Indeed, Briony's first drafts of *Atonement* serve as coping mechanisms that analogize destabilizing events in her life to balanced figures of her art. In this chapter, I will concentrate on these drafts as tropic metaphors for her disruptive experiences of her childhood. I will chart her development as a writer across three overlapping stages, all of which rely on a metaphorical orientation: (1) her earliest phase of pure solipsism, during which she experiments with folklore, fairytales, stories, and a didactic play, *The Trials of Arabella*; (2) her forging of representational perspectives in the story "Three Figures By A Fountain"; and (3) her positioning of a contemporary generation within literary modernism (in dialogue with the critic Cyril Connolly). Each stage presents a unique crisis that contributes to Briony's authorial identity and her inaugural generational consciousness. As she crosses the threshold into adolescence, she refines her writing style, from primitive myths to sophisticated narratives, and she directs her generation from self to family/culture. Even during the third stage, when Briony first submits her fiction for publication, she falls back on a similar metaphoric orientation to situate modernism in relation to her own experiences. A consistent pattern emerges: just as in life she misconstrues perspectives of dominant, older generations, in art she has yet to grasp more contemporary stylistic features of modernist literature.

I

For Briony Tallis, art is the medium through which she encounters life. Like her childhood room, which contains a tidy collection of farm animals, dolls, and boxed-up treasures,

writing serves as “a shrine to her controlling demon” (5). Each of her early drafts contributes to an overarching aesthetic that encloses herself and the world within a precise, stable order of meaning. Naturally, then, Briony first gravitates towards folklore and fairytales, genres that posit universal values of beauty, self-control, and reason. *Atonement* opens with Briony’s frantic preparation for *The Trials of Arabella*, a play scripted for a small cast to perform for a family audience. Her drama applies classical Fortune to its principal characters: after yielding to passions for a “wicked foreign count,” the title heroine is first punished with cholera, then offered redemption through her relationship with a prince-in-disguise (3). The play condenses mythic events and legendary characters into a didactic melodrama: “the piece was intended to inspire...terror, relief, and instruction” in her audience (8). Clearly, then, *Arabella* has a moral in tow. It endorses a strict ethical economy, one which assigns marital bliss and longevity to heroes/heroines and messy divorce and death to villains:

A love of order also shaped the principles of justice, with death and marriage the main engines of housekeeping, the former being set aside for the morally dubious, the latter a reward withheld until the final page (7).

But these earliest drafts of her fiction also stave off incursions from the “morally dubious” outside world, the unfamiliar and potentially threatening realm of adulthood. Isolated within her private shrine of art, Briony sustains the illusion of a timeless, self-absorbed childhood. Here, she distills her sense of self in the absence of others. In tropological terms, she encounters experience through metaphorical consciousness; art is the primary mode through which she familiarizes the strange features of the “real world”—people into characters, surroundings into settings, routine episodes into fantastic events.

Indeed, Briony has staged *The Trials of Arabella* according to a deeply private formal design. Even in her consideration of the assigned roles and audience members, the interests and

concerns of others are subordinated to her own. Ostensibly, she intends to stage the play for her family, to win her parents' attention and coerce her brother, Leon, to abandon a series of fickle girlfriends for "the right form of a wife, the one who would persuade him to return to the countryside" (4). But for Briony, the "right form" is all; her meticulous preparation and crafting of the play produces a rigid set of formal and ethical ideals for her audience. Moreover, it is crucial to note that Briony's aesthetic also negates and excludes other potential forms: "her wish for a harmonious, organized world denied her the reckless possibilities of wrongdoing" (5).

Before turning to these excluded "possibilities of wrongdoing," I would like to examine the formative mythic structure(s) that Briony relies on to relate life experiences to art. Like many fledgling writers, Briony first turns to myth to encounter reality. Folklore, fairytales, and melodramatic plays are all mythic, pre-novelistic genres that privilege general types over individual characters and a time immemorial over an immanent "here and now" (Watt, 15). Northrop Frye has classified mythic archetypes as emblematic of an "abstract or purely literary world of fictional and thematic design, unaffected by canons of plausible adaptation to familiar experience" ("Theory of Myths," 136). Although Frye's archetypal criticism does not adequately account for *Atonement's* intertextual and metafictional features, his reading of myth sheds direct light on Briony's metaphorical mode of consciousness. Frye discerns in mythical imagery "*a world of total metaphor*, in which everything is potentially identified with everything else, as though it were all inside a single infinite body" (136) [emphasis mine]. Moreover, archetypal symbols reside in three regimes: that of "undisplaced myth," an initial organization bifurcated into "two contrasting worlds of total metaphorical identification, one desirable and the other undesirable"; that of "romantic" myths, which entail patterns "more closely associated with

human experience”; and that of “realism,” which emphasizes “content and representation rather than the shape of the story” (139-140).

Returning to Briony’s “love of order,” we can grasp her adoption and deployment of each of these three mythic regimes. Since the first is relevant to her earliest fiction, I will consider it exclusively here.² Her foundational myth of *Arabella* relies on a binary between the worlds of desirable marriage (“a reward withheld until the final page”) and undesirable death (“set aside for the morally dubious”); between the dramatic archetypes of “wicked foreign count” and disguised prince. Her aesthetic crisis occurs when she is *unable to relate* the messy world of others to this intricate world of total metaphor. Repeatedly, when she encounters adolescents and adults (Lola, Cecilia, Robbie, her parents, et al.), their experiences do not match (must less conform to) the rigorous formal design of her art. In large part, this misrecognition reflects limitations of her age. Briony, as of the opening of the novel, is still isolated in an extended period of childhood; consequently, she views the experiences of others “as though it were all inside a single infinite body” of her literary efforts.

Eventually, it becomes clear that Briony’s aesthetic order compensates for a profound lack of family unity and stability; there are circumstances beyond the writer’s control, among older generations within her family, whose personal and social conflicts challenge the intricacies of Briony’s art. In rapid succession, four episodes disrupt and destabilize her mythic orientation to reality; she responds to each by relating it to the fictional figures of *Arabella*. Notably, even *prior* to these events, her immediate family provides a context of dislocation. In addition to personal differences in taste and habits, The Tallis family is fractured by their mutual emotional

²Clearly, there are elements of Frye’s “romantic myths” and representational realism at work in Briony’s novel; in subsequent chapters, she relates Robbie Turner’s war experiences (during the Dunkirk evacuation) as well as his romantic reunion with Cecilia. However, Briony conceives of—and depicts—these narratives later, after the war serves as a catalyst for romantic and realist mythic regimes.

distance from one another. As the youngest member of the household, Briony is privileged by her siblings and parents—especially her mother, Emily, who has downplayed Cecilia for “poor darling Briony, the softest little thing” (62). Initially, Briony’s late birth, during Emily’s thirties, had reinvigorated family life, but both mother and daughter have since become alienated from each other, the former beset by debilitating migraines and the latter withdrawn into a private “intact inner world of writing” (65). Jack Tallis, more of a loyal civil servant than a dedicated father, typically stays in London (where, Emily suspects, he has been having an affair). Enrolled in universities, Cecilia and Leon also devote most of their time away from home. When reviewed in light of these family rifts, *The Trials of Arabella* serves as Briony’s final attempt to reconstitute a lost, idealized family union in the form of a fairytale.

From Briony’s perspective, the integrity of the Tallis family is even more threatened from *without* than from within. Their estranged cousins, the Quinceys, conjure the demons of marital dysfunction; Hermione, Emily’s sister, has become entrenched in “a bitter domestic civil war” with her husband, Cecil (8). While both parents pursue intellectual or romantic interests, their children (Lola, Jackson, and Pierrot) reside at the Tallis estate. It is clear that the Quincey’s separation and imminent divorce pose *the most* “reckless possibility of wrongdoing”—so reckless that Briony can not even imagine it. Divorce, “the antithesis of marital bliss,” represents an irreversible “affliction...and therefore offered no opportunities to the storyteller; it belonged in realm of disorder” (9, 8). When the Quincey children first arrive, they appear to embody the strife between their parents. Lola manipulates her way into the production, while the twin boys, Jackson and Pierrot, act like consummate nine year-old monsters.

But it is the moment that Briony allows Lola to assume her role as Arabella that the playwright can no longer maintain control over her fiction. Acting out of courtesy, Briony

inadvertently succumbs to a “self-annihilating compliance” to another person; this moment becomes a disruptive turning point not only in the play, but also in Briony’s inaugural consciousness as a writer:

She wanted to leave, she wanted to lie alone, facedown on her bed and savor the vile piquancy of the moment, and go back down the lines of branching consequences to the point before the destruction began. She needed to contemplate with eyes closed the full richness of what she had lost, what she had given away, and to anticipate the new regime (14).

At this moment, Lola’s intrusion has inverted an established formal design based on mythic-metaphoric tropes. The polarized roles of desirable prince and undesirable villain can not accommodate the part of a manipulative actress (the opposite of a righteous princess). Moreover, Lola, the child of divorced parents—an adulterous father and an impetuous mother—has appropriated the heroine’s role. Briony is forced to confront another “writer” whose script subverts her own. As an aspiring artist, she grasps the crucial knowledge that each re-scripted moment presents a myriad of potential alternatives. An apparent heroine may assume a villain’s role. Exigencies in the outside world might reshape events inside the play. Each assigned part, dramatized conflict, and orchestrated plot twist is always fraught with *possible* ramifications that extend back in time, prior to their point of closure, and forward in time, forecasting their revision within a new aesthetic regime.

Poised between past certainties and future possibilities, Briony becomes sensitive to the separate, incommensurable consciousnesses of other people. However, she also falls back metaphoric tropes to analogize Lola’s actions and behavior to her own. A moment later, she examines her own hand and marvels at “the instant before it moved, the dividing moment between not moving and moving, before *intention took effect*” (33) [italics mine]. By enacting her own intentionality, re-directing objects and other people to her own body, she struggles to

master the outside world, to “find herself at the crest...that part of her that was really in charge” (33). Clearly, at this point, Briony can only claim specious *knowledge*—not authentic *understanding*—of another’s consciousness (34). Her status as an older child, on the cusp of adolescence, limits the range of her sympathy. Not having yet experienced events from an older generational member’s perspective, she feels embarrassed by her “disadvantage of being two years younger than the other girl [Lola], of having two years refinement weigh against her” (12). Likewise, when Lola assumes the part of Arabella in the play, Briony grasps that advanced age can confer on one a refined self-consciousness; unlike Briony, Lola demonstrates a self-possession in unfamiliar social contexts that only comes with experience. In generational terms, Briony can only look forward to the “new regimes” of art, which can be re-imagined during future life phases.

Like Lola, Cecilia Tallis and Robbie Turner live during an advanced life-phase (both are in their twenties) that is temporally remote from that of Briony. The second disruptive event contributing to Briony’s generational consciousness occurs when she witnesses a mysterious conflict between Cecilia and Robbie at the Triton fountain. On the surface, the details seem relatively inconsequential: both challenge each other to retrieve a broken Horoldt vase from the fountain, and Cecilia succeeds in doing so. But McEwan uses free indirect style to depict this event from three conflicting perspectives. The first two are aligned with Cecilia and Robbie (respectively) and adopt the rhythms of frustrated desire, flirtation, and sexual power-plays—all channeled into possession of the vase (a precious family memento).³ When Robbie offers to hold it while Cecilia takes the flowers, she misreads his cue as a command of “urgent masculine authority” and tightens her grip, breaking apart the lip of the vase (27). Before he can salvage

³The first perspective, aligned with Cecilia, is dominant, while the second perspective, aligned with Robbie, is reflective. As readers, we’re offered Robbie’s enthralled (if frustrated) retrospection of this event in chapter 8 (73-89).

two shards from the basin, Cecilia removes her shoes and socks, then jumps into the fountain. Her movements are described as “savage,” while Robbie looks on, mutely watching her (29). Each instant is rendered from the wild, exhilarated perspective of two soon-to-be lovers in their twenties.

What is crucial to notice is that McEwan’s narrator first screens events through Robbie and Cecilia’s points-of-view. Consequently, we witness their burgeoning romance from a closer, more intimate, and more accurate vantage point. In essence, we are initially introduced to “Two Figures at a Fountain,” while the third (Briony) remains outside of their private seduction scene. By shifting to Briony’s position, the narrator de-familiarizes the scene, divesting it of any manifest erotic content. In sharp contrast, Briony’s point-of-view, focalized through a thirteen year-old’s consciousness, can not fully decode their sexually charged behavior. Consequently, she imposes folkloric formalities onto their flirtatious gestures. To her, Robbie first seems to stand in “a rather formal” way, as if offering Cecilia a marriage proposal, then orders her to leap into the fountain—a command “she dared not disobey” (36). Their actions strike her as illogical insofar as that they jumble up the established plotline of *The Trials of Arabella*; instead of rescuing a drowning princess first, then proposing to her, the prince has opted to *invert* the customary order of events (36-7). It is clear to the reader that Briony has misjudged the “parts” that Robbie and Cecilia play in their own private drama. Neither of them enact the roles of victim or villain, but rather, Cecilia acts as instigator and provocateur while Robbie remains the passive witness. Briony grafts aesthetic assumptions onto real-life circumstances as a compensation for her lack of experience. But even imaginary, tropic myths have their limitations. She can only observe the distant experiences of “adult behavior...rites and conventions she knew nothing about, as yet”:

Briony had her first, weak intimation that for her now it could no longer be fairy-tale castles and princesses, but the strangeness of the here and now, of what passed between people...what she had witnessed was a tableau mounted for her alone, a special moral for her wrapped in a mystery...This was not a fairytale, this was the real, the adult world (37).

By shifting to past perfect tense, Briony—as *narrator*—invests her memory with a sense of *temps perdu*, a feeling that her past immersion in fairytales is timebound, soon-to-be supplanted by her present attention to the “real adult world.” To reinforce this inevitable transition, McEwan depicts the fountain scene from an adult perspective first and a transitional child’s vantage point second. To cope with this unfamiliar tableau, Briony reacts in the same manner as in the previous scene with Lola. She wants to retreat into solitude to contemplate “the faint thrill of possibility she had felt before” (37).

There are also other possibilities, available to members of the adult world, that Briony has yet to understand (much less experience). The third disruptive event in her life occurs when Briony reads Robbie’s letter to Cecilia. Having been asked to deliver the letter (the crude version that Robbie never intended to send), Briony can not resist the urge to open it. After she reads it, Robbie’s blunt lust for Cecilia suggests new, proscribed emotions and acts. His words introduce Briony to “something elemental, brutal, perhaps even criminal...some principle of darkness” that poses an immediate physical threat to her sister (106-107). From this point on, she can not fully trust the adult world of Robbie and Cecilia. Their motives and behavior seem, at best, murky and devious. Likewise, the sanctuary of her art is violated by this new knowledge. Moments later, facing the dolls in her room, she views them as “the estranged companions of a childhood she considered closed” (109).

The fourth destabilizing event transpires when she discovers Cecilia and Robbie making love in the library. Her initial shock is compounded by her previous disposition towards each of

them: “Cecilia, whom she ought to protect...[and] Robbie, obviously, she should avoid for safety’s sake” (114). Unable to process their behavior in adult terms, she relies on her previous assumptions: “The scene was so entirely a realization of her worst fears that she sensed that her overanxious imagination had projected the figures onto the packed spines of books” (116). Rather than encounter them as real people, she creatively casts them as “figures” in a library—Robbie as the “attacker” and Cecilia as the frail victim—that conform to the demands of her craft. Like her other creations, Arabella and the Prince, they merely gloss the covers of books. Aptly, Robbie and Cecilia never respond to Briony, and their sudden disappearance from the scene suggests that the entire tryst had been (re)staged in the author’s imagination.

At this point in the novel, Briony-as-narrator departs from Briony-as-character. Like the “three figures at a fountain,” the figures above offer a metafictional glimpse into the various tropes—metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony—invested into subsequent drafts of the novel. On the one hand, the narrator identifies with her naïve young adolescent self, adopting a metaphoric orientation to real-life disruptions. On the other, she acknowledges that these formative events at the fountain and in the library have already been written down, in multiple versions. It is, in this broad sense, pre-determined by the larger design of *Atonement*, whose writer contains multitudes. Over the course of six decades, Briony admits to having “written her way through a whole history of literature,” ranging from European folktales to didactic dramas to “an impartial psychological realism” that itself is tinged with “a mock-heroic tone” (38). In the final chapter of her novel, she reveals that she has drafted at least “half a dozen different drafts” between 1940 and 1999 (349). Each of these drafts, recorded at decadal intervals, charts the dynamic evolution of Briony’s consciousness as a writer; each draft also contains ruptures, gaps, and erasures that are the unavoidable casualties of revision. As readers, we can only judge the

relative merits and flaws of the final draft. But I would like to claim that *The Trials of Arabella* constitutes the Ur-draft of the novel, one which precedes the ostensible “first” draft that she submitted (as a short story) to *Horizon* magazine in 1940. More importantly, it is the *primary trope* of Briony’s experience as a writer who will later fall back on similar metaphors and figures to adopt modernist techniques. Even though she claims to have abandoned the play’s fairytale morality for “an impartial psychological realism,” Briony can not deny that *Arabella* offered the first, formative contributions to her novel. Before surveying the writer’s debt to successive phases of literary modernism, I would like to examine her encounter with the perspectives of others.

II

In the wake of challenges to her dramatic works, Briony Tallis must test her assumptions regarding character, setting, script, and event.⁴ But before doing so, she makes a crucial choice. To reassert her control (compromised by these aesthetic disruptions), she crafts the “production” of another fiction: the indictment of Robbie Turner for raping Lola Quincey. By casting him in the part of the most diabolical, perverse figure, she returns to the realm of un-displaced myth. Despite her ethical lapse in judgment, Briony’s choice is intelligible in light of the formal polarities of her art; “desirable” qualities are attributed to Cecilia and Lola, while “undesirable” qualities are assigned to Robbie. Notably, her focalization through female members of her family elides these pat categories. Turning from binary myth to nuanced representation, in this section, I will briefly examine Briony’s imagination of her mother and sister’s perspectives.

⁴As Briony confronts these four dramatic (and literary) elements, there is a tropological development; at each turn, from character to setting to script to event, Briony faces autonomous individuals (Lola), shocking scenes (the Triton fountain), offensive “scripts” (Robbie’s letter), and an incomprehensible event (Cecilia and Robbie’s tryst in the library).

We are led to assume that Briony has revisited events at the Tallis estate with a renewed focus on perspective. As the apparent third “Figure at the Fountain,” she also acknowledges her direct involvement in witnessing and *misrepresenting* events. But this recognition does not occur until she turns seventeen, when she can review Robbie’s indictment from an advanced generational position. During the time of events, Briony remains in a transitional state between childhood and adolescence; until she makes the break between these two life phases, she discerns no noticeable distinction between her own generation and that of her parents. However, she also begins to locate her generation as distinct and separate, as *not-the-generation* of her parents.

Along these lines, her disposition is modeled on that of her older sister, who carves out an independence from her mother and father by adopting progressive educational and social goals. Focalizing through Cecilia prior to the scene at the fountain, Briony (as narrator) re-imagines the convoluted, murky genealogy of the Tallises. Cecilia had tried to sketch a family tree, but on her father’s side, “until her grandfather opened his humble hardware shop, the ancestors were irretrievably sunk in a bog of farm laboring, with suspicious and confusing surnames among the men” (20). Patrimony can only be traced back so far, to the meritocratic icon of her grandfather, who had patented a series of “padlocks, bolts, latches, and hasps” (18). In stark opposition, her mother’s side consists of staid Victorians, “a baffled and severe folk, a lost tribe who arrived in the house in black cloaks having wandered peevishly for two decades in an alien, frivolous century” (47). Cecilia’s inability to construct a fixed genealogical point of origin, from either a maternal or paternal side, is not so much a personal failure as an exposure of incoherent family histories. Neither Victorian heritage nor modern meritocracy allows her to locate herself in relation to her generation. Instead of relying on an inherited logic of lineage, then, Cecilia looks ahead, towards prospective experiences: “She could not remain here, she knew she should make

plans, but she did nothing. There were various possibilities, all equally unpressing” (20). She considers joining her brother or cousins in London—options that would circumvent her mother’s more conventional modes of courtship, marriage, and parenthood.⁵ Rather than submit to Emily’s wishes, Cecilia lives in—and for—the present moment, open to an indeterminate future. It is only when she becomes romantically involved with Robbie that she reorients herself to previous childhood attachments.⁶ Deftly, Briony has traced the relationship between two major “characters,” Robbie and Cecilia, back to their source in formative events during childhood. In this way, primary experiences constitute the “degree zero” of almost every generation in the novel. Her apparent identification with others’ perspectives reflects a more nuanced metaphoric orientation to reality; fairytales and folklore play, at best, a secondary role. Nonetheless, she still relies on the trope of metaphor. To the extent that Briony stakes a claim on the early life phases of her sister and Robbie, she also holds the mirror up to her own experiences.

This is exemplified in chapters in which Briony’s mother appears as a virtual stand-in for her. When Briony focalizes through Emily Tallis, she plots a closed loop between mother and daughter that reinforces the primacy of childhood experiences. Like both of her daughters, Emily ponders possibilities, but hers are exclusively oriented towards her irrecoverable youth. Since her migraines predispose her to drift “far out along the branching roads of her reveries,” her perspective wavers and rambles. Adroitly, the narrator recursively routes Emily’s daydreams back to Briony. When Emily dwells on “her aggrieved, overlooked ten-year-old self,” she apparently conflates her favorite daughter with herself, a haunting girl “even quieter than

⁵ Emily Tallis regrets that Cecilia’s “modern forms of snobbery at Cambridge” prevent her settling down with a “useful” husband like Paul Marshall (143).

⁶ Years earlier, after Robbie Turner’s father abandoned him and his mother, Jack Tallis began to cover his educational expenses—a privilege which granted Robbie access to the Tallis household. For all intents and purposes, Robbie was “adopted” into the family. Although initially disruptive of class conventions, this formative event predisposed both Cecilia and Robbie to forge an affinity for each other.

Briony” who had slowly withdrawn into an “autonomy which signaled the approaching end of Briony’s childhood” (141). It is this “approaching end” of Briony’s childhood (not her mother’s) that the author, six decades later, recaptures as the pivotal drama of her life and the inaugural consciousness of her art.

III

Just as Briony Tallis had turned from myths to first-person perspectives, she turns from limited points-of-view to a comprehensive modernist aesthetic. This process requires an even more profound tropological development as a writer. To locate herself within a new period of literary modernism, she must first formalize an affiliation with her own generation on cultural terms. Appropriately enough, the catalyst for her change is based on a renowned figure of modernist criticism: Cyril Connolly, the editor of *Horizon* literary magazine.

Towards the end of *Atonement*, Connolly sends a sugarcoated rejection letter for Briony’s short story, “Two Figures by a Fountain.” After complimenting her deft handling of multiple streams of consciousness, he reproves her for substituting narrative stasis for the well-shaped plot of a story; for throwing “the baby of fictional technique out with the folktale water” (295). Even more telling than the editor’s critique is Briony’s reaction to his letter:

She had come to see that, without intending to, it delivered a significant personal indictment. *Might she come between them in some disastrous fashion?* Yes, indeed. And having done so, might she obscure the fact by concocting a slight, barely clever fiction and satisfy her vanity by sending it off to a magazine? The interminable pages about light and stone and water, a narrative split between three different points of view, the hovering stillness of nothing much seeming to happen—none of this could conceal her cowardice. Did she really think she could hide behind some borrowed notions of modern writing, and drown her guilt in a stream—three streams!—of consciousness? The evasions of her novel were exactly those of her life (302).

Briony acknowledges that her aesthetic evasions of the actual truth—her condemnation of an innocent man to prison and war service—expose her as a cowardly criminal. But there are other evasions as well. It becomes apparent, as Kathleen D’Angelo has observed, that Briony’s “fiction cannot absolve or undo transgressions that have taken place in the real world”; rather, readers ultimately hold her responsible by applying a judicious “critical assessment and empathetic identification” to her crime (88-89). While it seems clear that there is no higher ground from which Briony can be absolved, “no entity or higher form that she can...be reconciled with” (*Atonement* 350), McEwan’s confessional mode of discourse might allow for a secular self-atonement.⁷ His fiction invokes our *understanding* of her, in both the critical and ethical senses of that term. This understanding is enlarged by an appreciation of her virtuoso craft as a novelist; she demonstrates a refined grasp of the history of the English novel and footnotes her prose style with “a rich depository of motifs and narrative techniques” (Hildago 84).

Even so, these “evasions of her novel are exactly those of her life”; her use of multiple perspectives constitutes a new set of tropic metaphors (albeit more sophisticated ones) that fictionalize disruptive events in her life. Connolly, a potential publisher, discloses her secret by discerning that she can no longer “hide behind some borrowed notions of modern writing.” Using Connolly’s letter as a starting-off point, Richard Robinson examines McEwan’s “conversation with modernism” in *Atonement*; whether or not his words indict a certain kind of high modernism (as subjective, aestheticized, and plotless), “Connolly’s appearance as C.C. alerts us to interwar debates about modernist innovation and prompts the thought that, to

⁷ Elke D’Hoker notes that “this secular sense of atonement, a combination of authority and acceptance, might provide an answer to problems besetting literary confessions. Being created in the slow process of writing, the truth of confession seems to involve an authoritative acknowledgement of this truth as *mine* after which, in the words of Foe, the confessant should ‘forever after be content to hold [his/her] peace’”(42). Contesting this reading, D’Angelo claims that “Briony’s ‘self-acceptance’...seems somewhat inconclusive” since she is fully aware that “her stand will be critiqued and questioned” by the reader who “holds the final role in constructing meaning” (“To Make a Novel,” 102).

appreciate how *Atonement* self-consciously undoes and rewrites the modernist novel, the reader should turn to its predecessors” (474). It is clear that C.C. (McEwan’s fictional version of Connolly) derides Woolfian elements in Briony’s story—a critique that Briony will address in future drafts of the novel.⁸ But Connolly also reveals that Briony’s “fictional technique” as an aspiring modernist writer is deeply indebted to her early efforts at writing folklore, fairy tales, and melodramatic plays. His implicit advice can be read as follows: she must, in short, *turn back* to these formative mythic tropes to engross her readers in engaging plotlines.⁹ Rather than abandon plays reliant on mythic features for stories imbued with an “impartial psychological realism” (38), Briony should salvage figures from each phase of her literary development.

Merely to substitute one metaphoric trope at the expense of all others can limit her range as an aspiring writer. Indeed, the structure of *Atonement* mirrors Briony’s consciousness as a writer who evolves from a childhood fascination with folktales to an immersion in various generic and narrative techniques. The first three chapters in Part 1 depict Briony from a “mock-heroic” perspective, minimizing her fledgling efforts as a playwright, while the remaining nine chapters elevate her to the stature of a prodigy, a budding novelist who will model her writing on works ranging from eighteenth-century novels to Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* to Waugh’s *Brideshead Revisited* to Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* (D’Angelo 89-92; Hidalgo 83-85). In Part 2, her representations of Robbie’s involvement in the retreat from Dunkirk evoke Hemingway’s war stories; even Briony’s own experiences as a probationary nurse recall Catherine Barkley in Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms*.

⁸ Here, C.C. resembles the historical Connolly. Reflecting on Connolly, Jeremy Lewis notes: “avowedly anti-Bloomsbury, he liked neither Woolf’s characters...nor her prose” (qtd. in Robinson, 476).

⁹ White observes that, even in the midst of logical development (in this case, the evolution of Briony’s style as a writer), there is always the possibility of *tropological reversion* (or “regression”) to previous cognitive processes (metaphoric consciousness) (*Tropics of Discourse*, 10).

All of these literary elements (and many more) confirm her engagement with multiple phases of modernism as well as several generations of writers. We might consider these various stages formative metaphoric tropes that chart and contribute to her unique consciousness as a writer born into the early 1920's generation. In a self-conscious manner, she has "written her way through" past and present periods of modernism just as carefully as she has captured specific phases of her life. On first appearance, however, Briony might appear to have arrived too late for literary modernism. Born in 1922 (the publication year of Joyce's *Ulysses* and Eliot's *The Waste Land*), she is part of a generation that includes disparate heirs to modernism: Kingsley Amis, Philip Larkin, Nadine Gordimer, Brendan Behan, and Brian Moore.¹⁰ Although she has little in common with her contemporaries, Briony shares with them a cultural and historical background. More importantly, her unique generational position situates her in relation to a past generation of writers and critics. She clearly strives to emulate her forebears—in particular, Woolf—and seeks final authorization through publication: "whatever happened drew its significance from her published work and would not have been remembered without it" (39).

Along these lines, returning to Cyril Connolly (b. 1903), we grasp how he plays a crucial role in shaping Briony's unique generational identity. His critique of her first draft of *Atonement*, "Two Figures at a Fountain" (referred to above), reveals the work as a derivative homage to Woolf. As the editor of *Horizon* magazine (1940-1949), Connolly managed a literary review that offered the promise of first publications for avant-garde writers.¹¹ Although McEwan's version of him is entirely fictional, Connolly did contribute significant modernist criticism that situates

¹⁰Although several of these writers were born a few years apart (1921-1924), they still inhabit the same generational position.

¹¹In this sense, *Horizon* imitates little reviews of the past generation (*The Egoist*, *The Dial*). Lawrence Rainey observes that these reviews provided members of the Anglo-American avant-garde (like Pound and Eliot) an opportunity to publish their "principal masterpieces" and (later) to follow-up with their "second appearance...uniformly in limited editions" ("The Cultural Economy of Modernism").

individual writers within generations, down to their exact birthdates. In his book *The Modern Movement*, he traces the roots of modernism back to “the crucial generation” that reconciled opposing tendencies of the Enlightenment and Romanticism: “the generation of Baudelaire, Flaubert, Dostoievsky (born in 1821), Whitman, Melvin, and Ruskin (1819) ...Renan (1823), Turgenev (1818), and Courbet (1819)” (1). Connolly recognized that one can not pinpoint a definitive, coherent “modern movement,” but only a diagnosable “event which is still modern to us” (2). He cites the 1880’s as this eventual decade, which brought us Eliot, Pound, Lawrence, Joyce, Woolf, Sitwell, Marianne Moore, et al. It may seem overdetermined for Connolly to group the works of writers so strictly according to their generation, but he shows that their lack of taxonomic, generic, or stylistic similarities is compensated by their synchronous dates of birth. In this sense, they are part of a shared generation, unified within a social whole and participating in a limited, temporal section of the historical development of modernism. Over time, modern generations carry forth a contested, malleable tradition.¹² Connolly tends to group generations *across* (rather than within) national borders, but he still locates generations in synchronic groups.¹³

Although Briony exists as a fictional character in her own novel, we can also figuratively locate her within the 1920’s generation. When we assume a long view of modernism, she can be situated (along with other writers) within a particular decadal phase. This tendency to group writers according to periodic configurations, so prevalent in literary anthologies, offers an insight into the broad, evolving span of modernism.¹⁴ Moreover, it helps us to avoid focusing too

¹² Connolly claims that each succeeding generation reshapes the traditions of both the “critical intelligence” of the Enlightenment and the “exploring sensibility” of Romanticism (1).

¹³ Connolly groups generations across national and regional backgrounds. He charts the modern movement from France to England and Ireland to America. In a direct way, this perspective puts him at odds with Karl Mannheim, whose views of generations are confined to intra-national borders (“On Generations” 303).

¹⁴ For instance, *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism* begins with a modernist chronology (from 1890-1939) that groups writers’ works roughly every year or two (xi-xvii).

narrowly on specific generations or investing certain ones—at the expense of others—with privileged, emblematic characteristics: Wyndam Lewis’s “the men of 1914,” “the World War I Generation,” “the Lost Generation,” and so forth. Modernist periods, as Michael Levenson points out, do not so much reflect a “dominant narrative” limited to artists within a rigid, official canon as they entail continual redefinitions, critiques, and readjustments (“Introduction” 2-3).

Classifying literary movements according to periods allows for a discernible (if somewhat diffuse) historical approach. Along similar lines, Connolly notes that, as readers, we can “look back across the drifting formlessness of contemporary literature...[and] see that the Movement had a shape—and that the peak period was from about 1900 to 1925” (4-5). We may dispute when this “peak period” took place, but there is a tacit consensus that it occurred during the first quarter of the nineteenth century.¹⁵

On this point, Connolly concurs with Malcolm Bradbury (a fellow critic and friend, as well as McEwan’s graduate instructor). While recognizing that periods are not synonymous with facts, Bradbury also divides modernism into “three orders of magnitude,” or three distinct stages. The first two orders are historical, broken down into decades and centuries (respectively), and the third is counter-historical, involving an “overwhelming dislocation” from civilization or culture (19). Since these orders shed light on Briony Tallis’ periodic relation to modernism, I will delineate—then apply—each to *Atonement*. Significantly, each order sheds light on the tropological development of Briony’s generational consciousness as a writer. From her formative experiences—the shock of events witnessed in 1935—to her most prolific activity as a writer to her inevitable decline in productivity, Briony’s personal history is intertwined with that of modernism.

¹⁵Critics writing after the mid-century generally locate modernism’s peak period during this time; Michael Levenson claims that Anglo-modernism spans the years 1914-1922 (“Introduction” 4); Michael Bell pinpoints its “peak period in the Anglo-American context lay between 1910-1925” (“The Metaphysics of Modernism,” 9).

Bradbury points out that generational rhythms are only reckonable every ten years, “the decade being the right unit for measuring the curves that run from first shock to peak activity and on to the dying rumbles of derivative *Epigonentum*” (19). In both life and art, Briony comes of age during the 1930’s. Her first “shock” occurs during the summer of 1935, when her once privileged status as a playwright is compromised by the encroaching authorial power of others. First, Lola assumes her role as author, then Robbie and Cecilia engage in flirtatious and sexual behavior. As a defense mechanism, Briony responds by attempting to assert full control over these disturbing crises. She resorts to her skills as a writer to weave events into a story in which “everything fitted...the affair was too consistent, too symmetrical to be anything other than what she said it was” (158). In *her* narrative, Robbie has not only abused her sister but also attacked and raped Lola. With prodding, Briony convinces Lola of the veracity of her version of events. Eventually, she manages to persuade her family, law enforcement figures, and court officials. By doing so, she falls back on art to conceal her private trauma (caused by the fountain, letter, and library episodes) in an aesthetic “labyrinth of her own construction”:

[She] was too young, too awestruck, too keen to please...She was not endowed with, or old enough to possess, such independence of spirit. When the matter was closed, when the sentence was passed and the congregation dispersed, a ruthless youthful forgetting, a willful erasing, protected her well into her teens (160).

As I have noted in previous sections, her “willful erasing” reflects a metaphoric apprehension of historicized events; she is capable of sustaining this illusion for several years. Although Briony had tidily contained Robbie’s indictment during her childhood, the next generational phase does not offer her this protection. The 1940’s—the period of her late adolescence and early adulthood—constitute the “peak period” of her writing career. It is during this phase that she replays, then elides, her duty to provide a faithful representation of the lives of others. Briony submits her first draft of *Atonement* to *Horizon* in early 1940, but Connolly’s

critique highlights evident flaws in her style. He cites her tendency to focus on “the crystalline present moment” of perception at the expense of a well-crafted, engaging plotline (294). “Two Figures at a Fountain,” he notes, owes “a little too much to the techniques of Virginia Woolf” and lacks a “sense of forward movement” (294). Although we never read this early version of the novel, it seems all-too-likely that Briony has adopted Woolf’s stream-of-consciousness technique as a calculated signal to her readers, notifying them that she has reached a point of a high aesthetic self-consciousness. In modernist terms, Bradbury aptly classifies this peak period as one of “non-representationalism, in which art turns from realism and humanistic representation towards style, technique, and spatial form in pursuit of a deeper penetration of life” (25). By writing and submitting “Two Figures at a Fountain,” Briony sublimates the conflicting perspectives of Robbie and Cecilia into an independent regime that transcends the actual event. Later, she is fully aware of the “real” plot that unfolds from occurrences at the fountain; however, she denies these occurrences—and therefore the narrative plot itself—by depicting the tableaux of interiorized, highly subjective points-of-view.

During her final years, Briony finally comes to terms with the “plot” of her life story in the context of the past century. On the surface, she seems to have succumbed to an inevitable period of decline; writing in 1999, at the age of 76, she reexamines the past with an acute awareness that her time and intellectual faculties are increasingly limited.¹⁶ However, she is empowered with a broad perspective that encompasses “extended periods of style and sensibility which are usefully recorded in centuries” (Bradbury 19). Revisiting the decades of her childhood, she recognizes a dual ethical and aesthetic inheritance. In life, she has betrayed her sister, committed an innocent man to prison and war service, and condemned them both to

¹⁶ Briony admits that she suffers from vascular dementia, which causes a series of small cerebral strokes that undo her memory and her sense of language (334-335).

premature death; she has also exonerated a pederast (Paul Marshall) who eventually marries his victim, Lola. In art, she has spanned the century and achieved a generational atonement between her present and past incarnations.¹⁷ Across six decades fraught with cultural disruptions and diremptions, she has forged an intelligible relationship between her distinct “selves,” as grandparent and grandchild. Briony, as writer, has also redeemed herself, as character, in her own fiction.

Briony’s capacity to reassimilate her life phases through art is by no means atypical of other modernist writers. Few members of the vanguard movement, which came of age in the 1910’s, were able to preserve their youthful revolutionary zeal in the form of extra-institutional social alliances or *séries libres*.¹⁸ This generation of artists “who had created so much turbulence in their own and the century’s youth [had] reached late middle age when the whole world began to shudder” (Levenson 6). World War II presented a third order of magnitude that divided older generations, drawn to the formative years of their cultural rebellion, and united emerging generations, encountering a set of artistic opportunities unique to their own times. The war resulted in “those fundamental convulsions of the creative human spirit that seem to topple even the most solid and substantial of our beliefs and assumptions...[and] question an entire civilization or culture, and stimulate frenzied rebuilding” (Bradbury 19). In somewhat predictable fashion, Briony responds to the war, the catalyst of all-pervasive social change, by reestablishing a first-order narrative of romantic redemption between two lovers.

Notwithstanding her experiments with modernist writing, she relies on her primary orientation to

¹⁷Since members of her parents’ generation (Woolf, Joyce, Auden, et al.) directly contributes to her identity, I’ve included it in this century-long period.

¹⁸ Referring to Mentré’s theories of generations, Mannheim observes that *séries libres* (“free human groupings”), comprised of salons and literary circles, preserved “a rhythm in the separation of generations” in counterpoint to established patterns of traditional institutions (“On Generations” 279).

folklore and fairytales to reunite Cecilia and Robbie. It is only during subsequent readings of the novel that we can apply other interpretations (tragic, metafictional, or political) of these events.¹⁹

In a striking way, Briony's generation lacks the solace of a revolutionary consciousness that inhered in past notions of decadal periods and centurial sensibilities.²⁰ Unable to fall back on pre-war cultural assumptions, she confronts a century that has become characterized by catastrophic, crisis-centered, and even apocalyptic perspectives of history (Bradbury, 20). But for Briony, *the* central crisis of the novel is not so much cultural as personal. Although the war is essential to the setting and structural integrity of *Atonement*, the deaths of Cecilia and Robbie present the most traumatic losses of her lifetime. Moreover, they are victims of her art, casualties of both her false testimony and the several drafts that have misrepresented them. Rather than resolve these inconsistencies, Briony offers us two narratives that present antinomical fates of Cecilia and Robbie. The first, redemptive storyline culminates in the lovers' reunion; in this version of their fates, Briony relies on formative tropes of metaphor and myth. The second storyline, which resolves itself in death, constitutes a violent break from the first. Consequently, Briony "turns" to advanced tropes to restructure the novel *Atonement*: she displaces herself

¹⁹ On the way to Cecilia's apartment in Balham, Briony does (to her credit) underscore the illusory, speculative quality of her decision to meet with her to recant her sworn testimony: "she felt the distance widen between her and another self, no less real, who was walking back to the hospital" (311). On a first reading of the novel, we are led to believe that her confession constitutes an atonement for her crime by exonerating Robbie and reuniting him with Cecilia. However, on a second reading, it becomes clear that this excerpt (and many others like it) indicates that Briony has suppressed one truthful, "no less real" narrative by adopting another. Both versions exist, side by side, as *possible* responses to the war. A romantic narrative aligns itself with those members of Briony's generation who supported the war—or, at least, rationalized it in light of the many soldiers who returned home to rejoin their spouses, families, and loved ones. A tragic narrative invokes the interests of those generational members who opposed the war on the grounds that it culminated in a disproportionate loss of life. To accept the first version is to validate art over history; to accept the second is to validate history over art. We might also engage with another possibility: that Briony has responded to Cyril Connolly's advice to remain "politically impotent," but not in the way that he likely intended. Suggesting that she read a recently published editorial in *Horizon*, he reminds her that "we do not believe that artists have an obligation to strike up attitudes to the war... Warfare, as we remarked, is the enemy of creative activity" (297).

²⁰ In 1933 (the time of Briony's youth), Herbert Reed claimed that "there is a revolution with every new generation, and periodically, every century or so, we get a wider or deeper change of sensibility which is recognized as a period [Romantic, Trecento, Impressionist, etc.]" (qtd. in Bradbury, 20).

across the narratives of Robbie, Cecilia, and Briony (as character) (*metonymy*); she later reintegrates these fragmented narratives into *Atonement* (*synecdoche*); and finally, she provides a metafictional ending that highlights jarring contradictions at work in the novel (*irony*). By allowing metaphor to structure readers' responses for most of the novel, Briony adopts other figures to shock readers into a catastrophic reorientation to events leading up to—and culminating in—the war.

Without the war, Briony could not have concealed crucial possibilities until the epilogue, after readers have believed—contrary to the facts—that Robbie has successfully endured the Dunkirk retreat and Cecilia has survived the German bombing of the Balham Underground. Contrary to our better judgment, our illusions have been sustained by primitive romantic tropes that recall figures in *The Trials of Arabella*. Pre-empting her readers' disapproval, Briony offers up an apologia:

How could that constitute an ending? What sense or hope of satisfaction could a reader draw from such an account? Who would want to believe that they never met again, never fulfilled their love? Who would want to believe that, except in the service of the bleakest realism? (350)

Briony first invokes, then shirks, the responsibility to two kinds of readers. The first resembles her childhood self; she insists on romantic closure within the simple narrative framework of a fairytale: “the lovers survive and flourish...then my spontaneous, fortuitous sister and her medical prince survive to love” (350). The second, a throwback to the pre-modernist period, demands an authentic adherence to the lovers' victimization “in the service of the bleakest realism.” While the first reader reorients Briony to primary tropes of metaphor, the second disrupts this aesthetic realignment and endorses an impartial, detached realism. Eschewing misrepresented events and individuals, she persists in asking “But what *really* happened?” (350)

Briony not only disclaims allegiance to both readers, she also reveals that *any* appeal for atonement from a higher power (whether God or novelist) “was always an impossible task” (351). What is not impossible is her capacity, even up to the very end, to evoke an unrealized (and unrealizable) event that would have strained the limits of realism but confirmed the imagination of the author; to turn back to the formative trope of her youth, the image of two lovers, reunited after years of tragic separation; to conjure Robbie and Cecilia, as if they were “still alive, still in love, sitting side by side in the library, smiling at the *Trials of Arabella*”(351).

“State of Emergency”: Generational History in Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*

Yes, they will trample me underfoot, the numbers marching one two three, four hundred million five hundred six, reducing me to specks of voiceless dust, just as, in all good time, they will trample my son who is not my son, and his son who will not be his, and his who will not be his, until the thousand and first generation, until a thousand and one midnights have bestowed their terrible gifts and a thousand and one children have died, because it is the privilege and the curse of midnight’s children to be both masters and victims of their times...

—*Midnight’s Children* (533)

The Emergency, too, had a white part—public, visible, documented, a matter for historians—and a black part, which, being secret macabre untold, must be a matter for us.

—*Midnight’s Children* (483)

At the heart of McEwan’s *Atonement* is a crisis of perspective. Briony Tallis relies on a self-oriented aesthetic to manage disruptive events in her life; by applying metaphoric tropes to members of older generations, she analogizes their points-of-view to her own. Briony stakes representational claims on the perspectives of others (Cecilia, Robbie, herself, et al.) that enlarge our understanding of them.¹ By the same token, she also succumbs to a highly subjective, interiorized aesthetic. Even her matured literary style, relying on high modernist and metafictional techniques, traces an elaborate solipsism. To move beyond these limitations, I would like to turn to another fictional work that dramatizes the second tropic phase of generational consciousness. During this phase, the self is reconstituted through a process of displacement; one’s sense of a generation is no longer internalized as an aesthetic object, but projected outward, onto a collective cultural object: the image of the nation-state. In Salman

¹ In “Four Master Tropes,” Kenneth Burke observes that in forging metaphorical views of others, “degrees of being are in proportion to the variety of perspectives from which they can with justice be perceived” (*A Grammar of Motives* 504).

Rushdie's seminal novel, *Midnight's Children* (1980), the narrator Saleem Sinai turns away from metaphor and instead encounters his generation through the figurative terms of metonymy.² "I am falling apart," he says in an early chapter, "I am not speaking metaphorically...in short, I am literally disintegrating...I shall eventually crumble into (approximately) six hundred and thirty million particles of anonymous, and necessarily oblivious dust" (*Midnight's Children* 36). Along these lines, Saleem's chronic anxieties over self-dissolution reveal a metonymic logic. He expresses a reduction of the whole-to-the-part on two grounds: (1) his personal identity, decentered across a field of countless others, and (2) the nation-state of India, dispersed across its disparate parts.

What accounts for Saleem's fixation on his disseminated generation are the words of India's first prime minister. In a letter, Jawaharlal Nehru congratulates Saleem, assuring him that "we shall be watching over your life with the closest attention; it will be in a sense, the mirror of our own" (139). Nehru confers on Saleem the official privilege of reflecting India's history, the lives of its citizens, a diverse and divided nation. Born on the stroke of midnight, August 15, 1947, Saleem embodies the providential moment of India's national independence. But Saleem is not born alone. During that same hour, 1,001 "Midnight's Children" also emerge and "through some freak of biology or perhaps owing to some preternatural power of the moment, or just conceivably by sheer coincidence...[are] endowed with features or faculties which can only be described as miraculous" (224). As members of a community defined by "the power of the moment" and "sheer coincidence," the *Midnight's Children* can be considered India's first postcolonial generation, a synchronous collective united by national history and divided by

² It is clear that Rushdie's narrator relies on multiple tropes, but it is the most problematic, disruptive trope that I highlight here. Likewise, in the works considered in other chapters in this study, figurative tropes (metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony) overlap one another in complex and often unpredictable ways (Burke, 503-504; White, *Tropics*, 10).

family histories. They constitute the *broken* mirror through which Saleem imagines shattered fragments of a heterogeneous society characterized by ethnic, religious, and political differences.³

The extent to which Saleem can adequately provide a historical account of these differences is the aim of this chapter. Even though the Indian state may officially mark the 1947 generation as its own nationalist point of origin, Saleem reminds us that it is also destined to become a terminus in history: “there were a thousand and one possibilities which had never been present in one place and one time before; and there were a thousand and one dead ends” (230). 420 of these children perish; some of them die as a result of “malnutrition, disease and the misfortunes of everyday life,” while others, more pointedly, become victims of state machinations: “since time immemorial, the number [420] [has been] associated with fraud, deception and trickery” (225). Since the *Midnight’s Children* possess the status as the nation’s *first* postcolonial generation, they wield a distinct symbolic authority (which the author figures in supernatural terms). Rushdie’s novel aligns its narrator with his generation in strict opposition to various Indian state officials; while these authoritarian rulers (The Widow, Zulfikar, Shiva, et al.) consolidate power at the expense of the 1947 generation, Saleem seeks to recollect these scattered fragments into a contrapuntal version of history. In tropic terms, he endorses a metonymic narrative in which each child’s story (including his own) exists as a possibility figured on the verge of eradication; by doing so, he challenges synecdochic metanarratives, which emphasize cultural homogeneity under the aegis of democratic ideals: self-determination, liberty, and progress.

³ In the essay “Imaginary Homelands,” Rushdie recalls his own childhood, growing up in Bombay, as a series of fragments evocative of “the partial nature of these memories.” He classifies *Midnight’s Children* (the novel) as a “broken mirror” reflecting a similar, irretrievable past (*Imaginary Homelands* 10-12).

In the intervening years since the first publication of *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie has reclaimed the mantle of his own 1947 generation—"the real-life counterparts of the imaginary beings [he] once made up"—with an acute attention to their status as oppressed or exploited citizens (*Imaginary Homelands* 26-27). Rushdie is predisposed to identify with them since the novel, from its outset, endured official censorship and libel charges under Indira Gandhi's Emergency (and post-Emergency) state (1974-1983).⁴ Her authoritarian rule not only tamped down on apparent political dissidents (like him), but also sowed seeds of future cross-cultural conflicts: "it was during the Emergency that the lid flew off the Pandora's box of communal discord. The box may be shut now, but the goblins of sectarianism are still on the loose" (3). More accurately than any whole mirror, these sectarian shards—broken, disparate, and partial—reflect India as a fractured nation.

It is through this broken mirror that I would like to reexamine *Midnight's Children* as a generational allegory forged in direct response to the Emergency state of India. With close affinities to metonymy, allegory offers a contrapuntal structure relating images to history and (in Saleem's case) nation to family.⁵ Consequently, sections in which Saleem Sinai deploys an *allegorical reduction* of national events will be highlighted (often at the expense of other tropes). Throughout this chapter, I will adopt a broad definition of the term "Emergency," drawn from

⁴ Rushdie wryly observes that Indira Gandhi's libel charge, during the early 1980's, centered on a single sentence (in chapter 28), in which Sanjay (her son) accuses her of being responsible for his father's death: "tame stuff, you might think...in a book that excoriated Indira for the many crimes of the Emergency. After all it was a thing much said in India in those days, had often been in print, and indeed reprinted in the Indian press...Yet she sued nobody else" (*Midnight's Children* xiv).

⁵ Allegory, like metonymy, involves a "one-way" (i.e. nonreversible) reduction of an abstract object (or system of objects) to a concrete object (or system of objects). In this novel, Rushdie adopts allegory to relate national history to Saleem Sinai's personal and family history; notwithstanding his grandiose national narrative, Saleem reduces major events to autobiographical (and, at times, trivial) episodes in his life. Northrop Frye has noted that allegory entails an explicit relation between "images to examples and precepts" that applies a "contrapuntal technique" analogous to canonical music (*Anatomy of Criticism*, 90).

Walter Benjamin's essays, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" and "Critique of Violence."⁶ Rather than consider Emergency measures as anomalous and exceptional restrictions on basic civil liberties, I will demonstrate that they serve a normative and regulatory function spanning at least three generations in Saleem's family history. Looking back on the past, Saleem assembles narrative fragments, culled from the ruins of national and family history, into a meaningful allegory of his own generation.⁷ In counterpoint to nationalist allegories, which endorse linear, progressive models of history, his version presents a constellation of revolutionary, discontinuous moments. By recollecting intergenerational experiences of Emergency in the midst of national independence movements, Saleem exposes the dark underside of dominant historiographies to the light of day: "the Emergency, too, had a white part—public, visible, documented, a matter for historians—and a black part, which, being secret macabre untold, must be a matter for us" (483).

Although Walter Benjamin's criticism addresses the immediate threat of German fascism, his theories also encompass the broader, enduring politics of historiography. More directly, they shed light on the dynamic tension between two oppositional models of history at work in *Midnight's Children*: historicism, adopted by official state representatives, and historical materialism, taken up by marginalized groups and individuals. While the former collectivizes Indian citizens into a deceptively "whole" sense of national identity (*synecdoche*), the latter is dispersed across an extensive range of regional, religious, and political differences (*metonymy*).

⁶ In this chapter, it is not my intent to conflate Rushdie's political views, as a democratic pluralist, with Benjamin's, as a historical materialist. However, Rushdie's perspective of the past shares traits with Benjamin's views of history; from a generational position, Rushdie stakes a claim on the past as fragmented, discontinuous, and partial: "fragmentation makes trivial things seem like symbols and the mundane acquires numinous qualities" ("Imaginary Homelands" 12).

⁷ Notably, Benjamin's early writings on allegory underscore the role that fragmented ruins play on history: "The word 'history' ...is present in form of the ruin. In the ruin, history has physically merged into the setting. And in this guise history does not assume the form of the process of an eternal life so much that of irresistible decay...Allegories are in the realm of thoughts what ruins are in the realm of things" (*Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 177-178).

As events unfold, it becomes clear that Rushdie's narrator aims to give voice to these general differences through fragmentary recollections of family crises. Even when Saleem becomes head of the "The Midnight's Children Conference," a politico-generational parliament, he still seeks to redeem the unfulfilled promises of past generations. However, as a result of internal dissension, the M.C.C. fails to carry out the delayed reforms of the past. *Midnight's Children*, as I will argue, explores even the limits of metonymic claims on the 1947 generation. Fragmented to the point of anarchism, Saleem's imagined community fails to fulfill the promises of his parents' and grandparents' generations. It is only through his son, Aadam Sinai, that the future might one day redeem the past.

I

Since Walter Benjamin's writings on historiography are complex and ambiguous, I would like to provide a brief excursus here before applying some of his theories to *Midnight's Children*.

Launching an immanent critique of historicism, Benjamin notes that it relies on the pernicious concept of *progress*, which is predicated on mankind's "infinite perfectibility" through an "irresistible" historical course (linear or cyclical) (*Illuminations* 260). "This concept of historical progress," Benjamin makes clear, "can not be sundered from its progression through a homogenous, empty time" (261). Progress operates as a conventional, dominant principle, flattening discrete events to a continuous plane of causality; each past event, therefore, loses its singular qualities and becomes prologue to the present. From this historical "present" perspective, the ruling class legitimates its hegemonic position in public affairs of the state. Moreover, historicism customarily justifies itself under the auspices of futurity, "assign[ing] to the working class the role of redeemer of future generations...of liberated grandchildren" (260).⁸

⁸ Benjamin refers explicitly to Social Democrats in this instance, but I'm applying his logic more broadly.

On the contrary, historical materialism privileges the present neither as a fulfillment of progress nor as a transition to the future; instead, “History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled with the presence of the now [*Jetztzeit*]” (261). For Benjamin, this *now-time*, “in which time stands still and comes to a stop,” endows the historical materialist with “a unique experience with the past...he remains in control of his powers, man enough to blast open the continuum of history” (262). No longer is the past subordinated to the present, as the historicist would have it. Rather, history belongs to a present [*Jetztzeit*] that disrupts the continuous passage of time. Benjamin claims that the “true picture of the past” is constituted by an instantaneous, evanescent image that lacks historical objectivity; rather, it must be “recognized by the present as one of its own concerns” or else risk irretrievable disappearance (255). David S. Ferris elegantly defines this convulsive moment as a dialectical “image as double: it is both history and its recognition”:

This present is constituted by the image as the sole means by which the image itself can be recognized. The relation of the past to the present (in which one is always the image of the other) is...discard[ed] because of its demand for temporal continuity. To Benjamin, history becomes legible and therefore readable through a relation of ‘what was’ with ‘now,’ that is, through a relation that can be articulated only from a present that belongs to the image and not to the passage of time that history is supposed to reflect (“Aura, Resistance, and the Event of History” 10-11).

The past (“what was”) can only be seized, as an image, from the specific moment of the present (“now”). In its arrest of the past, this present moment no longer serves as a transition (between past and future) but as an interruption that allows history to take place “in a meaningful way—that is, in a way that allows the appearance of the revolutionary potential concealed in the ideologies of the past” (Ferris, “On the Concept of History” 132).

Each temporally disruptive image of the present “unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger...[that] affects both the content of the tradition and its

receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes” (*Illuminations* 255). Benjamin explicitly classifies this threat as “a real state of emergency” that is often misrecognized by oppressed classes as “the exception” instead of “the rule” of statist *réel politique*: “One reason why Fascism has a chance is that in the name of progress its opponents treat it like a historical norm” (257). Consequently, it is necessary for critics of historicism to expose the underlying danger posed by progressive models of history *as normative* and reorient their historical perspective accordingly.

A state of emergency naturally evokes a paradox: how can a democratic nation-state (like Rushdie’s independent India) uphold the rule of law while violating its own legal norms?⁹ In *State of Exception*, Giorgio Agamben extends Benjamin’s views on the fascist emergency state to “the voluntary creation of a permanent state of emergency...[which] has become one of the essential practices of contemporary states, including so-called democratic ones” (2).¹⁰ Such a state constitutes a “legal mythologeme” that “lets its own nature as *the constitutive paradigm* come to light” [emphasis mine] (7). In this sense, it operates not [as] a special kind of law (like the law of war); rather, insofar as it is a suspension of the juridical order itself, it defines law’s threshold or limit concept” (4). Both supportive of—and threatening to—the integrity of the juridical order, the state of emergency has become a defining (if paradoxical) feature of national legitimation.

Over time, nationalist collectivities (factions, parties, etc.) may address and resolve various threats posed by dominant class ideology; however, it is in the ongoing dialogue between

⁹Benjamin calls this an “objective contradiction...whereby the state acknowledges a violence whose ends, as natural ends, it sometimes regards with indifference but in a crisis...confronts inimically” (“Critique of Violence” 240).

¹⁰ I’m using the terms “state of emergency” and “state of exception” synonymously, since they reflect what Agamben calls the “terminological uncertainty,” in various languages, of the emergency state; in German legal discourse, it has been classified as the “state of necessity”; in France and Italy as “emergency decrees” and “state of siege” (*état de siege*); in Anglo-Saxon theory as “martial law” and “emergency decrees” (*State of Exception* 4).

past and present *generations* that Benjamin discerns an awareness of the normative state of emergency. For instance, in Marx he observes that the “struggling, oppressed class” acts as the “avenger that completes the task of liberation in the name of generations of the downtrodden” (260). Recognizing in prior generations an “image of enslaved ancestors” (260), present generations mark the redemptive potential of their own political struggles:

The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim. That claim can not be settled cheaply. Historical materialism is aware of that (254).

Historicism settles this claim cheaply, co-opting (and even sacrificing) future generations in the name of progress. On the other hand, historical materialism acknowledges that the present generation can never fully settle the claim of past generations; to accept any such settlement—a fixed end-point (*telos*) to emergency measures—would subordinate them to the will of a millennial savior (*strong* Messianic power). Instead, Benjamin calls for a “secret agreement” between generations, which collectively communicate emergency and the concomitant need for redemption through “the temporal index” (or image).

II

Rushdie’s narrator in *Midnight’s Children* shares with Walter Benjamin a desire to re-imagine history from an intergenerational perspective that conveys the state of emergency. From this perspective, Saleem Sinai recognizes that his status as spokesman for past and present generations offers—at best—a tentative, provisional redemption of national and family history. Indeed, he concludes his narrative with an elegiac confession that, in the immense crowds of India, no single generation can claim exclusive lineage: 600 million people “reduc[e] me to specks of voiceless dust, just as, in all good time, they will trample my son who is not my son

and his son who will not be his, until the thousand and first generation” (533). Saleem self-consciously enacts the historical materialist’s “secret agreement” between generations; refusing to claim plenary authority over past or future generations, he exposes the fragile construction of hereditary privilege. Instead, he highlights the discontinuous nature of progeny in his own family (“my son who is not my son”) and reveals that generational history entails a series of indefinite displacements over time. Moreover, Saleem recognizes that India’s massive population threatens to “reduce” him to “voiceless dust”; for the duration of the novel, he manages this metonymic anxiety by reducing national history to his own family history. At every turn, he casts India’s various political, religious, and military crises in light of disruptive, accidental events in his own life.¹¹

Saleem’s cryptic, contradictory viewpoint of generations has emerged out of circumstances surrounding his own ambiguous birth. On the surface, he adopts a historicist method to trace events back to this ordinary, archival moment of national history: August 15, 1947 (Giles, 185). His listener, Padma, constantly prods him to advance events *forward* in time, “bullying [him] back into the world of linear narrative, the universe of what-happened-next” (37). Throughout the novel, it is this “world of linear narrative” that underwrites nationalist time; in the moments leading up to an official transfer of state power, Earl Mountbatten’s countdown clock records steady, metronomic progress in a series of “ticktocks” (100). However, at every turn, Saleem disrupts the mode of linear, progressive time through non-chronological, overlapping stories. Like ingredients in his celebrated chutneys which “leak into each other,” Saleem’s intergenerational narratives preserve past-times from the passage of recorded time: “memory, as well as fruit, is being saved from the corruption of the clocks” (37).

¹¹ It seems clear that Rushdie’s narrator likewise reduces events in his parents’ and grandparents’ generations to his own personal history.

Instead, he recollects his birth and all events leading up to—and following—it from a series of shifting, discontinuous *now-times*.

At birth, Mary Pereira, Saleem's future ayah, had exchanged his name-tag with the infant Shiva to give "the poor baby a life of privilege and condemn the rich-born child to accordions and poverty" (130). Her subsequent confession of the crime is underscored by another fiction: her claim that Wee Willie Winkie—rather than William Methwold—is the boy's father. Inadvertently, Mary Pereira's baby-swap has exposed the arbitrary, accidental construction of his birth. Despite her subversive act, his family "found that it *made no difference!* I was still their son: they remained my parents. In a kind of collective failure of imagination, we learned that we simply could not think our way out of our pasts" (131). Within his family structure, Saleem recognizes that generational continuity and linearity have "made no difference." All bloodlines, real or imagined, rely on figurative terms that reflect the interests of narrative exigency. As Neil Ten Kortenaar shrewdly observes, "even the rejection of genealogical succession and progressive history involves a choice of narratives" (*Self, Nation, Text* 40). Armed with this crucial knowledge, Saleem widens the field of his own "choice of narratives." He is endowed with both the "power of giving birth to fathers and mothers" and the ability "to invent new parents for myself whenever necessary" (120). Accordingly, Saleem plays multiple, intersecting roles—as grandparent, parent, and child—that collapse boundaries between truth and fiction, collective history and subjective imagination.

Aware that *his own* time is "running out" as his thirty-first birthday approaches, Saleem struggles to enact generational roles in order to "end up meaning...something. I admit it: above all things, I fear absurdity" (3-4). To make meaning, he traces his life story back through the lives of prior generations, whose own narratives precede any fixed origin of national history: "I

must commence the business of remaking my life from the point at which it really began, some thirty two years before anything so obvious, so *present*, as my clock-ridden, crime-stained birth” (4). In place of his and the nation’s overdetermined inception, Saleem substitutes *images of the present*. At each moment of his narrative, he adopts a contemporaneous vantage point (a *now-time*), forged during Indira Gandhi’s Emergency state, through which he re-imagines his grandparents’ domestic and national experiences of Emergency. Various present-images appear, often in elliptical or parenthetical asides that disrupt Saleem’s discourse on family history; the first flares out at the reader, containing several, condensed fragments:

(...And already I can see the repetitions beginning; because didn’t my grandmother also find enormous...and the stroke, too, was not the only...and the Brass Monkey had her birds...the curse begins already, and we haven’t even got to the noses yet!) (7)

Each fragment underscores the moment from which Saleem grasps past events through disintegrated *images* (“already I can see”). In a similar instance, mid-way through his grandfather’s story, another image materializes: “...*while I sit* like an empty pickle jar in a pool of Angle-poised light, visited by *this vision* of my grandfather sixty-three years ago” [emphasis mine] (14).

It is through such disruptive, imaginary visions that Saleem reconstructs a patchwork portrait of his grandparents. His grandfather, Dr. Aadam Aziz, initially appears in a state of profound religious and cultural turmoil. While praying, Aadam accidentally hits his nose on a tussock of earth, which leaves a “hole in him, a vacancy in a vital inner chamber, leaving him vulnerable to women and history” (4). He immediately decides “to never kiss earth for god or man,” a resolution that entraps him “between belief and disbelief,” inhabiting a liminal “middle place” (6). He first meets his wife, Naseem Ghani, through just such a “hole.” A practicing Muslim, Naseem covers her body with purdah-veils, which frustrate Aadam’s clinical

examination of her body; consequently, her father arranges a compromise, using a “perforated sheet” through which he can view her. During the early years of their marriage, Naseem adheres to customary rituals until her husband disparages her for acting like a “Kashmiri girl” instead of a “modern Indian woman” (32). Perhaps unwittingly, Dr. Aziz criticizes his wife adopting terms of (post)colonial modernization; however, he can neither believe nor disbelieve in the opposed concepts of “traditional Kashmir” or “modern India” since both are disrupted by subtle, interstitial differences.

In addition, Aadam is unable to reconcile multiple, opposing value systems, each one associated with a distinct period in his life. During his youth and adolescence, he experienced an intense attachment to mythic folklore and religious traditions. The boat-keeper Tai, Aadam’s childhood mentor, embodies a legendary icon of Kashmir’s timeless past. He inspires awe through a “claim to an antiquity so immense that it defied numbering” (9). But Aadam also carries with him an attaché, a remnant of his recent medical training in Heidelberg. Tai disparagingly labels this bag ““Abroad...the alien thing, the invader, progress” (16). From Tai’s endemic cultural perspective, colonial authority threatens to replace timeless local customs with “alien” progressive time. Dr. Aziz has at least partially assimilated into modernized European society; however, his involvement with an intellectual circle of German anarchists (Oskar, Isle, and Ingrid) predisposes him to sympathize with those at odds with official state institutions. When he returns home during the First World War, Aadam witnesses a similar struggle, writ large, between British colonial power and local independence movements. Mired in these conflicts, he is torn between identifying with both the perpetrators and the victims of colonialism. Moreover, he can not balance his secular beliefs as a European-educated doctor with his religious beliefs as a Kashmiri Muslim, since both subject-positions are associated with

different time periods: colonial and pre-colonial, respectively. Notably, Aadam's apparent crisis of faith is figured in temporal terms: "and now it was the tussock's time. *At one and the same time* a rebuke from Isle-Oskar-Ingrid-Heidelberg as well as valley-and-God, it smote him upon the point of the nose" (6) [emphasis mine]. At this pivotal moment, Aadam is inaugurated into a new, discontinuous *Jetztzeit* that interrupts the smooth current of history into either a timeless past (of "valley-and-God") or a progressive future (of "Isle-Oskar-Ingrid-Heidelberg").

In his renowned work *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson claims that nationalism, which has inherent "religious affinities," sutured the rift between dynastic realms relying on concepts of "time immemorial" and modern states dependent on ideas of "new time" (11). As a direct consequence of print capitalism, nation-states could effectively consolidate mass culture as an "imagined community" through the novel and the newspaper; citing Benjamin's notion of "messianic" time, Anderson observes that the nation operates in a "transverse, cross-time, marked not by pre-figuring and fulfillment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by the clock and calendar" (24). Anderson's central thesis sheds light on the emergence of nationalist time in *Midnight's Children*. It is only through the nation-state that Aadam Aziz's generation can transition from past, localized value systems into future, collective ideology. However, as Partha Chatterjee argues, Anderson also adopts a "sociological determinism" that denies "often contradictory, *political* possibilities inherent in this process" of nationalist self-determination (*Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, 21). Chatterjee points out that imperial Britain imported a "modular" version of nationalism, which imposed a cultural homogeneity onto India's emerging state apparatus.

Dr. Aziz figures one of the heterogeneous, "contradictory, political possibilities" at the heart of India's struggle for independence. The "middle place" that he inhabits—between

different, incommensurable times—is highlighted during the Amritsar Massacre (April 13, 1919), a watershed moment in Indian history. Fearing an overthrow of established institutions in the wake of World War I, the British Raj passed the Rowlatt Act, which imposed severe legal restrictions on civil liberties. Rushdie vividly depicts this Emergency state through Brigadier General R.E. Dyer, whose ruthless policies of martial law culminate in a massacre of peaceful protestors at Jallianwala Bagh. As diabolical as any silent film villain, Dyer idly waxes his mustache and remarks, after his men kill 1,516 unarmed citizens with 1,650 rounds of ammunition: “We have done a jolly good thing” (34). Dyer’s casual, cartoonish gesture is complemented by the narrator’s ironic identification with Amritsar as the “Great Event” of populist national movements, “divid[ing] history into past/future, tradition/modernity, stagnation/development” and initiating “the emergence of modern, secular, and national forces” (Chatterjee 22-23).¹² These incipient anticolonial forces, however, rely on the same logic of colonial narratives that bifurcate history into oppositional periods. Rushdie’s narrator represents Amritsar as an overdetermined event only to disrupt Manichean divisions.

In contrast to these binary constructions, Dr. Aziz’s experiences occur on the temporal borders between colonial and post-colonial history. *His* time, reflecting Mahatma Gandhi’s anti-Emergency *hartal* (strike action), is “a day of mourning, of stillness, of silence” to protest British rule (31-32). Reminiscent of Benjamin’s *now-time*, “in which time stands still and comes to a stop,” *hartal* disrupts the regular rhythm of commerce and condenses everyday events into singular, static images. Dr. Aziz first notices the word “*hartal!*”—as image—appearing on the city’s walls, mosques, and in the “large black print” of newspapers (30). He then recognizes a young Great War veteran who, like “so many [Indians] have seen the world by now, and been

¹² Chatterjee refers explicitly to the “advent of British rule,” but I’m applying it to encompass other watershed moments like Amritsar (23).

tainted by Abroad...will not easily go back to the old world. The British are wrong to try and turn back the clock” (31). This ironic comment suggests that Indians have assimilated into the new, irreversible time of post-colonialism as a direct consequence of colonial oppression. A moment later, after Aadam explains to his wife, Naseem, that the Rowlatt Act was passed to stem “political agitation,” he recalls Tai’s words:

Tai once said: ‘Kashmiris are different. Cowards, for instance. Put a gun in a Kashmiri’s hand and it will have to go off by itself...We are not like Indians, always making battles.’ Aziz, with Tai in his head, does not feel Indian. Kashmir, after all, is not strictly speaking a part of the Empire, but an independent princely state. He is not sure if the hartal of the pamphlet mosque wall newspaper is his fight, even though he is in occupied territory now (31).

By privileging Tai’s judgment over state authority, Aadam recognizes manifold differences that set Kashmir apart from India. At the moment when Emergency measures suppress Kashmir’s “contradictory, political possibilities,” Dr. Aziz imagines the fulfillment of these very possibilities. Replaying Tai’s words, he “does not feel Indian,” but a non-imperialized member of “an independent princely state” which does not necessarily adopt *hartal* as its *modus operandi* against the British. In fact, this political tactic eventually falls short since “the Mahatma’s grand design” of peaceful protest deteriorated into riotous mobs (32). Even though living “in occupied territory,” Kashmiri citizens might have opted to confront colonial power on other grounds. Refuting India’s broad-based nationalist definition of “independence,” Kashmir might even have separated from the embryonic nation-state of India. Indeed, Aziz’s thoughts suggest that Kashmir has been absorbed into a monolithic vision of India, constructed as an imagined community through a potent combination of religious institutions and print culture: “the pamphlet wall

mosque newspaper.” Pointedly, these manipulative tactics foretell future communal discord that would threaten to undermine India’s national foundation.¹³

The death of Tai, coincidental with Indian independence (1947), concludes the Aadam Aziz section of Saleem’s intergenerational narrative. Standing between Indian and Pakistani armies, Tai defends Kashmir only to be mowed down by the bullets of both forces. It is at this moment that Saleem notices “a thin crack...beneath the skin” of his wrist, a scar which literally stays his hand from documenting written records of Tai’s murder (35). Here, he pauses between transcribing his narrative to paper and reading it aloud to Padma, as if to privilege the boat-keeper’s death as un-representable in either writing or speech. At best, it can be recollected on the margins of either mythic folklore as an “uncorroborated rumor” or national history as a casualty of Partition: “Kashmir for the Kashmiri’s: that was his line” (35). Putting his own body on the line, Tai inscribes his death on the frontiers between geographic, political, and national sites of power: “Oskar Lubin would probably have approved of his rhetorical gesture; R.E. Dyer might have commended his murderers’ rifle skills” (35).

Lines crisscross Saleem’s body as well; fissures and breaks multiply at a rate proportional to each Emergency that he narrates. As he focalizes through generational forebears, he imagines particular lives attended by potential deaths. Each crack is recognized as a metonymic reminder that he is “literally disintegrating...[he] shall eventually crumble into (approximately) six hundred and thirty million particles of anonymous, and necessarily oblivious, dust” (36). Each crack records, in a Foucaultian form, singular, disruptive moments of family and national history carved on his body “as the inscribed surface of events” that “makes visible all the discontinuities which cross [him]” (*Nietzsche, Genealogy, History* 148, 162). These discontinuities are

¹³ In “The Riddle of Midnight,” Rushdie classifies Hindu-Muslim communalism of the 1980’s as the most potent threat to India’s national legitimacy: “Does India exist? If it doesn’t, then the explanation is to be found in a single word: communalism. The politics of religious hatred” (*Imaginary Homelands*, 27).

identifiable features of the characters whose authorship he appropriates on the fault line between various discourses: legal codes (the Rowlatt Act), mythic folklore (Tai), Muslim faith (Naseem), modern medicine, colonial power (R.E. Dyer), anarchical movements (Isle, Oskar, Ingrid), and national movements (Gandhi's *hartal*).¹⁴ The Amritsar Massacre sets all of these discourses in stark relief through the abrupt, unanticipated spectacle of bloodshed.

But Rushdie also reminds the reader that family history serves as a metonym for this national tragedy. By reducing Amritsar to familial terms, he manages to temper its violence in a more contained narrative. Images of blood—both real and mistaken—figure prominently in events leading up to the massacre, but it is a singular episode in family history that the narrator impresses vividly on our memory. Dr. Aziz attends to wounded protestors, “daubing them liberally with Mercurochrome, which makes them look bloodier than ever” (32). Naseem comically mistakes this “red medicine” for actual blood, which tragically is spilled, after Adam returns from Amritsar, covered in the blood of hundreds of victims (34-5).

III

Bloodshed may very well constitute the only visible feature common to multiple, distinct modes of power at work in *Midnight's Children*. Recast in this light, the *hartal* (of the previous section) is a general strike that “makes visible” the violence inhering in official state laws. In

“Critique of Violence,” Benjamin observes that in the revolutionary general strike,

labor will always appeal to its right to strike, and the state will call this appeal an abuse (since the right to strike was “so intended”) and will take emergency measures. For the state retains the right to declare that a simultaneous use of strikes in all industries is illegal (239-240).

¹⁴In “What is an Author?,” Foucault classifies the author as an object of appropriation, an individual whose role exists only in relation to legal codes that can exact punitive measures; a constructed, “complex” person whose identity changes over time; an entity whose “rational unity” can only be imposed by various discourses.

Recast in this light, the Amritsar Massacre is an assertion of military law, which “rests on exactly the same objective contradiction...as strike law”; instead of peaceful, democratic negotiations, the state regresses to “primitive conditions that scarcely know the beginnings of constitutional relations” (240). In a dramatic way, these legal contradictions of violence are inscribed on Saleem Sinai’s body, which splinters apart, more and more, with each successive emergency measure that the state employs. Benjamin examines violence in light of its relation to the overlapping discourses of ancient myth and modern law, both of which are characterized by discontinuous acts of violence (“Critique of Violence” 248). In his superb essay on this topic, “Momentary Violence,” Tom McCall claims that

Violence is always an inaugural, radically singular outbreak that can erupt forcefully into contexts but that itself can be assigned no determinate context, one that universally applies to all instances...by covering up the myriad intervals between disparate acts of violence, blood well exemplifies the particular character of mythical violence to universalize the unique incident, inscribing the discrete case into the bloody continuum (190-92).

Each scar, indelibly etched onto Saleem’s body, records a “particular character of mythical violence” in “the bloody continuum” of his generational allegory. Each specific violent act becomes a metonym for a more abstract national catastrophe or crisis. There are “myriad intervals” in his narrative that are concealed by—even subsumed into—accounts of violence and bloodshed. No fixed origin (*arche*) or precise end (*telos*) can be assigned to these violent acts, which emerge “from nowhere,” entirely “of the moment, incalculable, [and] unpredictable” (188-89). As a mode of historical recounting, then, Saleem’s narration underscores violence, sublimated into naturalized, normative forms of behavior, as a central organizing principle (187).

In confirmation of his constant anxiety over “cracking-up,” Saleem’s disintegrating body makes visible all the discontinuities which cross him, his family, and his nation. By exposing the manifest content of Emergency measures (genocides, wars, executions), he suggests the latent

content of violence (indeterminate and unknowable causes) from which they emerged. He acknowledges that the “new myth” of India as an emerging, independent nation-state relies on periodic spectacles of violence. At the expense of some of its own members, each generation offers up a *re-imagined* community:

a nation which had never previously existed was about to win its freedom, catapulting us into a world which, although it had a thousand years of history...was nevertheless quite imaginary, into a mythical land, a country which would never exist except by the efforts of a phenomenal collective will...a dream we all agreed to dream...shared in varying degrees by Bengali and Punjabi, Madrasi and Jat, and would periodically need the sanctification and renewal which can only be provided by rituals of blood (124-125).

Saleem concentrates on the momentous event of his birth as a “dream we all agreed to dream,” but he also indicts this national vision as a calculated diversion from “the mass blood-letting in progress on the frontiers of the divided Punjab...the violence in Bengal and the long pacifying walk of Mahatma Gandhi” (125). Every nationalist narrative of inclusion, he suggests, excludes other narratives inscribed on its outer limits.

One such narrative, in the years preceding national independence, is devised by a marginalized party: the “Free Islam Convocation.” For Saleem, the F.I.C. serves as the model political organization to govern India as a secular, pluralist, democratic state (and also the prototype for his own political convocation—The Midnight’s Children Conference—to which I’ll return later). Prior to the 1940’s, most of India’s population still followed the guidance of the Mahatma, trusting his *moral* authority as a selfless, courageous, non-violent mediator; by the mid-1940’s, however, India had adopted *political* terms to consolidate disparate localities around a central, sustainable state ideology (Chatterjee, 123).¹⁵ Aspiring to be elected as the first nationalist state party, the Free Islam Convocation resembles one of India’s competing factions

¹⁵ Chatterjee goes on to note that “forced to mark its differences with a nationalist state ideology, Gandhism could only assert the superiority of its moral claim; it could not find the ideological means to turn that morality into an instrument of the *political* organization of the largest popular elements of the nation against the coercive structures of the state” (124-125).

that sought “to reconcile the ambiguities of the Gandhian ideology within a single differentiated political structure, to appropriate all its meanings in the body of the same discourse” (Chatterjee, 125). Saleem encounters this political discourse through another, vivid image, a “mildewing photograph” featuring Aadam Aziz surrounded by luminaries of the F.I.C.: the Rani of Cooch Naheen, the party’s ostensible leader; Mian Abdullah, “the Hummingbird,” a conjurer politician from the magicians’ ghetto; and Nadir Khan, his personal secretary (44-46).

The Rani of Cooch Naheen embodies “the optimism disease,” which “leaked into history and erupted on an enormous scale shortly after Independence” (45). Like Saleem’s body-cracks, her skin has suffered the buffets of history, turning “sheetly-white” two years prior to independence day (62). These visible signs, she claims, are symptoms of her victimization—as a cross-cultural leader of the nation—by The Muslim League, a group of pro-Partition “toadies” loyal to the British government. In sharp contrast to these entrenched landowners, the Free Islam Convocation offers a “loosely federated alternative to the dogmatism and vested interests of the Leaguers,” comprised of “members of agrarian movements, urban laborer’s syndicates, religious divines and regional groupings” (47). Their hybrid, pluralistic vision for India succumbs to the brutal force of their opponents, who murder the Hummingbird and relegate the Rani’s party to exile.

When Dr. Aziz hides Nadir Khan from state authorities (in his basement), his house becomes “transmuted into grotesquery by the irruption into it of history” (59). By concealing the presence of a radical revolutionary, an official enemy of the state, Aziz allows broader political undercurrents to stream into private affairs of his family. It is from this source—Saleem’s maternal side of the family—that he traces his convoluted genealogy, thus downplaying a traditional, patrilineal version of family history. On the surface, his choice of one generational

narrative over another seems arbitrary, especially when considered in light of the fortuitous events surrounding his parentage. As he reminds us, “in [their] old house on the Cornwallis road, the days were full of potential mothers and possible fathers” (53-54). Indeed, his status as *neither* parent’s biological child appears to render moot any genealogical claim. However, I would claim that such a choice aligns Saleem with his mother’s suppressed, ambiguous lineage in order to reveal flaws and limitations in his father’s exclusionary pedigree. Rushdie’s narrator implicitly endorses a redemptive view of past generations in league with Benjamin’s historical materialism over a progressivist historiography complicit with narratives of historicism. Ahmed Sinai, as I will show, retreats into “the ‘eternal’ image of the past,” the misty, remote “time of the ‘once upon a time,’” while Amina’s experiences “blast open the continuum of history” (*Illuminations* 262).

Before their marriage, Ahmed Sinai insisted that his bride-to-be change her name to Amina, throwing her past identity—as Mumtaz Aziz, secret wife of Nadir Khan—“out the window” (68). However, his attempt to redefine her as his legitimate wife ignores complex, dichotomous aspects of her personality. Later in the novel, for instance, she carries on an affair with Nadir (whose name has also changed, by then, to “Lal Quasim”) (248-250). Ahmed neglects to encounter Amina outside of the domestic role that he has cast for her, in large part, because he seeks to assimilate into Bombay’s entitled bourgeoisie. To help fulfill this dream, he purchases the estate of William Methwold and immediately falls under the spell of the colonizer’s specious sophistication.

An Englishman whose family has held administrative positions in India for over 300 years, Methwold proudly claims that it was his family and nation that first defended “British Bombay” from foreign incursions and “set time in motion” for “India’s West” (102). By tracing

India's history to this inaugural moment of colonialism, he naively assumes the mantle of an oppressor who banished the "primeval world before clock-towers" (102). Methwold's assertion that Britain initiated the transfer of power between pre-colonial to colonial time recalls Benedict Anderson's affinities between dynastic "time immemorial" and modern "new time." However, to Methwold, nationalist power is merely a "game" played by a continuous series of colonizing agents and colonized objects. Despite varying political formations over time (Mughal Empire, British Raj, Indian Prime Minister), each successive generation submits to the rules of the game. These are best illustrated in Methwold's strict stipulations regarding his divested property: upon its sale on August 15, 1947, Ahmed must keep the colonial estate intact and abide by its ceremonial traditions (105). Even his servants comply, obediently following orders, celebrating cocktail hour promptly at six every evening, imitating "Oxford draws," and "learning about ceiling-fans and gas cookers and the correct diet for budgerigars" (109). Writ large on the backdrop of national history, Rushdie's characters enact roles, imbedded in the spoils of modernization, that mandate their subjection to European modernity.¹⁶

Beyond merely honoring his word, Ahmed Sinai internalizes Methwold's colonial-imperialist ideology. Two days before Saleem's birth, his father "invents a family pedigree that, in later years...would obliterate all traces of reality...he introduced into our lives the idea of the family curse" (122-23). Contrived on the spot, this curse is passed down "from eldest son to eldest son—in writing only," since speaking it would aloud only "unleash its power"(123). Ironically, Ahmed fulfills the curse, falling into a delusionary acceptance of an antiquated, unspoken law of primogeniture inscribed at the core of patrilineal legitimacy. In the secluded

¹⁶Chatterjee asks: "Why is it that non-Euro colonial countries have no historical alternative but to try to approximate the given attributes of modernity when that very process of approximation means their continued subjection under a world order which only sets their tasks for them and over which they have no control?" (10)

confines of the Estate, he succumbs to a historical amnesia that rivals that of his predecessor, Methwold.¹⁷ Historicists, Benjamin reminds us, always adhere to the victors: “all rulers are the heirs of those who conquered before them” (*Illuminations* 256). Inheriting the cultural treasures of Methwold’s estate, Ahmed Sinai becomes heir-apparent to an oppressive colonial regime. By doing so, he disregards the barbarism underpinning his shallow notions of “civilization.”

In the spurious Methwold-Sinai genealogy, Rushdie satirizes (in miniature) corrupt leaders of the “Nehru-Gandhi dynasty,” a secular democracy which conflated a hybrid national history with a singular family history (Kortenaar, 42).¹⁸ The same political participants who helped give rise to India’s independence had violated democratic ideals, promoted Hindu-Muslim sectarianism, and threatened the legitimacy of the nation (Kortenaar, 43). By privileging Mumtaz-Amina’s polysemous identity over dynastic lineage (both familial and national), Rushdie deploys her counter-narrative as a factually accurate alternative.¹⁹

Mumtaz-Amina’s relationship with Nadir Khan has predisposed her to sympathize with political outsiders, disenfranchised citizens, and the poor. In secret, she reestablishes contact with Nadir-Quasim, an official Communist party candidate (“Quasim the Red”). She begins to “accompan[y] him on his rounds, up and down the tenements of the district...as she helped him to get watertaps fixed and pestered landlords to initiate repairs and disinfections” (250). Returning to the age of nearly-nine, Saleem reappropriates these suppressed images of her past through a cinema screen depicting the Pioneer Café, “a notorious communist party hangout” (247). With voyeuristic fixation, he watches his mother and Nadir touching hands, only to have his forbidden vision shattered by “a cruel censor’s cut”:

¹⁷ Shrugging off Methwold eccentricities, Ahmed Sinai asks: “‘with our ancient civilization, can we not be as civilized as he?’”(109).

¹⁸ Kortenaar traces a clear, hereditary line from Jawaharlal Nehru to Indira Gandhi to Sanjay Gandhi.

¹⁹By exposing “the naturalized metaphor on which the dynasty was built,” Rushdie allows the reader to “accept or reject the countermyth, but the dynasty’s myth must be rejected as a lie” (Kortenaar, 42).

hands longing for touch...but always at last jerking back, fingertips avoiding fingertips, because what I'm watching here on my dirty-glass cinema screen, is, after all, an Indian movie, in which physical contact is forbidden lest it corrupt the watching flower of Indian youth; and there are feet beneath the table and faces above it (249).

Rushdie has lamented his early cinematic experiences of watching similar “screen kisses brutalized by prudish scissors which chopped out the moments of actual contact” (*Imaginary Homelands* 37). But Saleem takes it a step further. His scopophilia appears to reduce his *mother* to a passive object of his gaze, which has been cognitively mapped onto the “dirty-glass cinema screen” by visual codes of Indian filmmaking.²⁰ However, the excised images of their touch suggest that official state members have intruded to ward off all signs of intimacy—even the faint suggestion of physical contact—with the political “other.” As an elected Communist leader critical of Nehruvian ideology, Quasim poses an apparent threat to national unity. Saleem naively adopts an officially edited, “un-corrupt” representation only to expose jarring omissions and cut-aways at work in the diegesis. He draws our attention to fractured, disembodied parts of two figures (“there are feet beneath the table and faces above it”) to make us aware of the normative regulations of state ideology which disavow these “forbidden,” exceptional images.

The Pioneer Café episode also resonates with an earlier “primal scene” (of sorts), when Saleem hid in a washing chest and watched his distraught mother touching herself while speaking Nadir’s name aloud (183). Ankhi Mukerjee cites this traumatic moment as “the shocking discovery of Amina’s double life, her sexuality,” that “releases Saleem from a site of origin and the maternal chora into a different magnitude” (“Fissured Skin,” 56). Alienated from his family and home, “something bursts” inside of his head, transforming him into a radio receiver for the “deafening, manytongued terrifying” voices of India’s multitudes. Saleem’s

²⁰ In “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Laura Mulvey exposes the misleading, inaccurate representations of women as objects either appropriated by the male gaze or recast as imaginary “ideal egos” for the male spectator (178).

trauma of separation and independence also encompasses the “noise” attending his assimilation into a hybrid generation. Having looked back on the past time of his parents’ and grandparents’ generation, he now looks forward to his own. In this sense, the washing chest/cinema screen represents, for Saleem, “a hole in the world,” which mediates between the “middle place” of his grandfather and prospective place of his son (Aadam). Within this hole, Saleem admits to feeling “like Nadir Khan in his underworld, safe from all pressures, concealed from the demands of parents and history” (177). Here, he can recollect past and present generations through discrete, discontinuous images which exist outside of national and family narratives.

IV

While Saleem’s past family history figures prominently in the novel, his *present* generational history plays an even more significant role. The moment of his break from his mother, “tumbling down with laundry wrapped around my head like a caul” (184) signifies a new birth into the hybrid, mystically gifted generation of the *Midnight’s Children*. Among his generational cohorts, Saleem seeks to forge an alliance that surpasses Indian assemblies and parliaments, since these official institutions restrict their free expression. His metonymic consciousness of his generation underscores differences that set them apart—not among—other national citizens:

within the frontiers of the infant sovereign state of India...what made the event noteworthy...was the nature of these children, every one of whom was, through some freak of biology or perhaps owing to some preternatural power of the moment, or just conceivably by sheer coincidence (although synchronicity on such a scale would stagger even C.G. Jung), endowed with features or faculties which can only be described as miraculous...it was as though history, arriving at a point of highest significance and promise, had chosen to sow, in that instant, the seeds of a future which would genuinely differ from anything the world had seen up to that time (224)

Rushdie’s narrator stresses multiple metonyms, each of which reduces the nation-state to various versions of *the* originary 1947 generation. He stakes a claim on generational difference as

circumscribed within the following “frontiers”: (1) apart from other nations (outside the borders of Pakistan²¹), (2) distinct, as mutations, from biological normalcy (3) privileged as a unique, momentous occurrence, (4) synchronous, as a Jungian coincidence, and (5) endowed with historical provenance. Indeed, the *Midnight’s Children*, through the narrator’s imagination, figure difference from all normative “features” (racial, ethnic, and biological) and “faculties” (powers, authorities, and agency). They do not conform to rigid orthodoxies or traditional modes of representation; rather, they emerge as distinct possibilities of “the other.”

This generation is so distant from his family life that when Saleem admits to his parents that he hears their voices inside of his head, he literally speaks another language: “I think Ammi, Abboo...that Archangels have started to talk to me” (187). His words, strange as they may seem, have manifest Messianic implications (Mukerjee 57). They also recall Benjamin’s dialectical “conception of the past as ‘the time of the now’ which is shot through with chips of Messianic time” (*Illuminations* 263). Born at the stroke of midnight, August 15, 1947, Saleem and his dark twin Shiva personify *Jetztzeit*, the now-time of their entire nation which endows them with powers that surpass those of all the other children. Born during Kali-Yuga, “the age of darkness,” both Saleem and Shiva figure the frenzied millennialism accompanying a new epoch in history.²² As twins, they both reflect and invert each other’s identity:

Saleem and Shiva, Shiva and Saleem, nose and knees and knees and nose...to Shiva, the hour had given the gifts of war (of Rama, who could draw the undrawable bow, Arjuna and Bhima; the ancient prowess of Kurus and Pandavas united, unstoppable, in him!)...and to me, the greatest talent of all—the ability to look into the hearts and minds of men (229).

²¹To his credit, Saleem admits that he is unaware if a similar miracle happened in Pakistan since his perceptions were bound by geographical and “artificial frontiers” (225)

²² Describing Kali-Yuga, Saleem’s language reflects a new-age mysticism: “Already feeling somewhat dwarfed, I should add nevertheless that the Age of Darkness is only the fourth phase of the present Maha-Yuga cycle which is, in total, ten times as long; and when you consider that it takes a thousand Maha-Yugas to make just one Day of Brahma, you’ll see what I mean about proportion” (223).

To the extent that Shiva uses his military prowess to exploit mass poverty and communalism, Saleem uses his telepathic powers to remedy those very conditions by looking “into the hearts and minds of men.” Whereas Saleem establishes the Midnight’s Children Conference as a “loose federation of equals” in which “all points of view [are] given free expression,” Shiva disrupts their political convocation with one strict rule: “everybody does what I say...you got to get what you can, do what you can with it, and then you got to die” (252).

Saleem first establishes the Midnight’s Children Conference as a contemporary analogue to the Free Islam Convocation. Like the F.I.C., which posited itself as an opposition party to the Muslim League, the Midnight’s Children Conference offers a more democratic, pluralist alternative to the dogmatic hierarchy of the All-India Congress.²³ Saleem’s primary objective is to establish an open forum receptive to the voices of all generational members, including fierce critics like Shiva. Rather than dictate to the children of midnight (like Shiva) or represent special interests, Saleem uses his power of telepathy to construct a national dialogue, on purely generational terms, “in the lob sabha or parliament of my brain” (259). Their collective purpose spans a vast political and religious terrain, including collectivism, individualism, filial duty, revolution, capitalism, altruism, religion, women’s rights, and “the fantasies of power” (261); yet, despite their diverse, divided interests, the children of midnight still think about the “usual things, fathers mothers money food land possessions fame power God” (261). While each child presents a unique vision for national revolution or reform but fails to engage one another through a shared discourse, Saleem exchanges ideas with others, constructing a polyphonic dialogue.²⁴

²³Shiva is also hired by the All-India Congress as a member of the “Cowboys,” a gang of henchmen who would threaten potential voters and stuff ballot-boxes. Notably, the twelve million votes cast for the Communists, “the largest single opposition party,” were slated to elect Quasim the Red (254).

²⁴ In his study of the novel, Bakhtin classifies this kind of dialogue as a “polyphonic work...in which several consciousnesses meet as equals and engage in a dialogue that is in principle unfinalizable” (Morson and Emerson 238-9).

Although Saleem admits to being at the “center” of this generational dialogue, he also recognizes the threat that “the lure of leadership” poses to the conference (260). It is precisely under the threat of a dominant regime, centralized around a single autocrat, that Emergency measures are most often imposed on the citizenry. Consequently, he focuses on what sets the children apart from the rest of India—their supernatural features and faculties—as differences so radically *other* that they can not be assimilated into conventional meta-narratives of the nation. Pointedly, each child possesses a power of metamorphosis, doubling, disappearance, or mirroring; these constitute distinctions erased by the standard characteristics of nationalism: stasis, sameness, presence, and reification. Instead of appropriating their identities, Saleem tries to engage all of the Midnight’s Children in telepathic dialogue: “they were there in my head...sending their here-I-am signals, from north south east west...the other children born during that midnight hour, calling, ‘I,’ ‘I,’ ‘I,’ and ‘I’” (214). These various “I-signals” transmit a unique expression of intersubjectivity configured on imaginary (not ontological) grounds. Rather than rooted in a past time assimilable—as prologue—into the present, the children exist in a conditional tense of indefinite possibilities. Honoring their privacy and anonymity, Saleem refuses to reveal “their names and even their locations” to official authorities since they “deserve...to be left alone” (228).

I would like to conclude this chapter with an examination of Saleem and Shiva as incarnate versions of Messianic time, in both its “weak” and “strong” manifestations, respectively. Rather than reductively assign one version to each character, I will explore their interdependence in a *chiasmus*, a crisscrossing structure that both parallels and reverses the logic of the narrator’s generational discourse. In parallel terms, both Saleem and Sinai seek to reduce the whole of India to a discrete political apparatus (*metonymy*): a pluralist democratic parliament and a

autocratic emergency state, respectively. In reversible terms, neither twin's apparatus can coexist, since one's parliamentary methods undoes the other's military dictatorship and *visa versa* (*synecdoche*²⁵).

Marjorie Garber has elegantly defined *chiasmus* as producing a “dizzying effect” in the reader, “like a mirror facing a mirror... a kind of infinite regress: the *mise-en-abyme*, the *enfilade*, Freud's ‘navel of the dream’... [it] suspends for a moment the grounded logic of priority and reference: what we thought was solid ground... can be imaginatively put in question, even reversed” (*Shakespeare and Modern Culture*, xxxiv). Tellingly, Garber also cites a chiasmic line from Shakespeare's *Pericles* which matches both twins' genealogical quandary: “‘Thou that begett'st him that did thee beget’” (xxxiv).

Having begotten their begetters, Saleem and Shiva stake claims on their parents' generation. Such a claim, implicitly, inverts the referential logic privileging past generations over present ones—the very logic that legitimates hereditary and dynastic linearity. But it is only Saleem who deliberately disrupts this logic by imagining children as parents and parents as children; his own father as not his father and his own son “who will not be his, until the thousand and first generation” (533). In this way, Saleem honors Benjamin's dictum that, “like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim” (*Illuminations* 254). Claiming the past generation claiming him, Saleem acts as spokesman on behalf of his generation by speaking for subjugated, marginalized members of past generations. From this materialist historiographic perspective, he recognizes “a revolutionary chance in the fight of the oppressed past,” which “blasts a specific life out of the era” and “a specific work out of the life-work” (*Illuminations* 263).

²⁵ Synecdoche involves the “carrying out of reversible operations in relation to a total system”; I claim here that both Saleem and Shiva's political programs for India elude a synthetic “logic of classifications” (White, *Tropics*, 8).

In contrast, Shiva cheaply settles the claim of past generations by casting himself as their ultimate redeemer, the living embodiment of *strong* Messianic time. A consummate historicist, Shiva believes that India's national history has progressively culminated in the moment of his birth. He sees only a "picture of the world of startling uniformity," leveling all past events to the status of homogenous, empty time, and subordinating all values to "his terrifying, nonchalant violence" (250). In the Midnight's Children Conference, he successfully enforces an ideology of "money-and-poverty...have-and-lack, and right-and-left; there is only me-against-the-world!" (293). These binary distinctions stress priority and privilege over hybridity and difference. Applying them rigorously, Shiva turns back to primitive metaphoric tropes to uphold strict dualities at the benefit of *self over other*—a dynamic that negates the primacy of redemption.

Occupying a redemptive position in historical materialism, the Midnight's Children generation might have marked a chiliastic moment in national history. They might have separated colonial and postcolonial periods, demarcating a radicalized experience of the present generation's now-time. It is through this "might have," the modality of re-imagined possibilities, that Rushdie invites us to revisit the 1,001 children of midnight as "both masters and victims of their times" (533). The times of one could cancel out the times of the other. As Benjamin reminds us, however, any moment now might become "the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter" (264). At this long-delayed moment, the next conference might forge a political system that will incorporate their differences into a collective "whole." However, this synecdochic vision must be held off for a future generation to fulfill.

**“On The Other Side of the World”:
Generational Intentionality in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *Hema and Kaushik***

As a refugee of the 1965 Indo-Pakistani War, Saleem Sinai falls prey to “an aspect of detachment...a reminder of my family’s separateness from both India and Pakistan (*Midnight’s Children* 377). Six years later, another war between India and Pakistan would result in the formation of Bangladesh. Sinai condemns the “futility of statistics” that these wars and re-partitions produce: “during 1971, ten million refugees fled across the borders of East Pakistan-Bangladesh into India—but ten million...refuses to be understood” (411). The Bengali-American writer, Jhumpa Lahiri, can also count her parents among the many refugee families which left the subcontinent to settle in America. First-hand, she knows the experience of being both separate from—and connected to—these distinct national histories. Like Salman Rushdie, she examines the fragile lines between geographical, national, and ethnic borders that crisscross her characters.

While Rushdie concludes *Midnight’s Children* with the hope that the future might fulfill the long-delayed promises of past generations, he also recognizes that India’s emergency state has cast Aadam Sinai (Saleem’s son) as “the child of a time which damaged reality so badly that nobody ever managed to put it together again” (482).¹ Like his father, Aadam has been born into a family and a nation-state riven by various metonymic disintegrations and dispersions. In her most recent collection, *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008), Jhumpa Lahiri returns to the legacy of a diaspora produced by these very conditions; however, she revisits first and second generation immigrant families from an advanced perspective that highlights continuity and even cohesion

¹ Pointedly, Aadam Sinai (like his father) is born at an overdetermined moment, “on the stroke of midnight...at the precise instant of India’s arrival at Emergency” (482).

among them. Even though her generational members are fragmented by different values and predispositions, they tend to achieve compromises through the unifying structure of kinship communities. Consequently, I will concentrate on the third tropic phase of generational consciousness, which entails a synecdochic integration of self *and* other. Throughout this chapter, I will examine Lahiri's generations in relation to a *triadic structure of consciousness* that allows parents and children to integrate disparate experiences.

In *Unaccustomed Earth*, part-short story collection, part-novella, Lahiri depicts the lives of middle-class Bengali-American families from the vantage point of a detached observer; parents, children, and relatives (by birth or kinship) encounter one another through cultural practices, objects, dialogue, and rituals—all represented with spare, un-intrusive commentary. In keeping with her past fiction, these new linear narratives reflect the births and deaths of successive generations, the continuity of which are secured by marriages arranged either according to custom or choice. If *The Namesake* ends with the first generation's shift out of their privileged position in the mainstream, then this new collection charts their transition into parenthood. As both children *and* parents, Lahiri's characters are aware of new responsibilities that encompass both self and other. They also place more value on generational phases that precede and succeed their own existential contexts. Although these past, present, and future phases overlap one another in objective time, they are primarily grasped in *intentionality*, in the consciousness that grandparents, parents, and children direct towards one another. As the first generation adjusts to each temporal phase "absented" from family life (childhood, adolescence, the twenties, etc.), they also negotiate the loss of each corresponding cultural decade (the 1970's, the 1980's, etc.) and gradually assume familial roles left vacant by their parents. Both directly and vicariously, they experience an ontological gap through deaths, disappearances, and

withdrawals of members of their kinship community. This phenomenological absence of figures related by birth or affiliation disrupts the linear continuity between generations; fragmented into isolated individuals (or small groups), Lahiri's first generation devises new methods to reintegrate themselves into both family and communal societies.

Within the context of Bengali immigrant communities that prescribe ethical norms of settlement, assimilation, and adjustment, first generation individuals assume private, interpersonal responsibilities for one another. Often, these responsibilities clash with traditional marital and parental customs, but Lahiri avoids aligning herself with any one generation and instead explores how their distinct perspectives might be assimilated into shared perceptions and experiences. In this chapter, it is my intent to trace multiple perspectives extensively in *Hema and Kaushik*, a novella comprised of three overlapping stories narrated from the points-of-view of Hema, Kaushik, and a third-person narrator. Each title character's point-of-view is distinct from the other's insofar as that it grounds existence in an individualized set of objects, or an "idiom": concrete items, names, rituals, and customs. On the margins of established kinship traditions, Hema and Kaushik forge a generational consciousness about each other, their parents, and objects-in-the-world. My approach will rely on both object-relations theory and phenomenology, two similar discursive fields which will yield instructive insights into characters' perspectival orientation to presence and absence. As I will point out, despite their close relationship with each other, Hema and Kaushik do not share ethical intentions for members of their kinship community; while Kaushik deliberately absents himself from others in monadic isolation (a metonymic choice), Hema reconstitutes her generation in the context of marriage, family, and children (a synecdochic choice).

I

The daughter of Bengali parents who emigrated first to England, then to America, Jhumpa Lahiri deftly draws on autobiographical experience to depict characters shaped by geographical and cultural dislocation. In her recent stories, moreover, she accentuates an expanse of space and time that distinguishes one generation from the next. Notably, critical reviews of *Unaccustomed Earth* in India have cited recurrent themes of uprootedness and transplantation with a distinct concentration on generational differences. In an interview with Mukund Padmanabhan, Lahiri draws parallels between Bengali communities and the book's opening epigraph, an excerpt from Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Custom House"²:

the epigraph does allows me, my family, the hundreds of people we knew not only to embrace whatever upheavals that happened and later formed our lives, but to see ourselves as part of...a long line of people uprooting themselves and replanting themselves in unaccustomed earth. And yet with each successive generation, that experience feels so new and alienating.

Having inherited a diasporic, deracinated identity, Lahiri depicts characters who undergo a similar sense of attachment to—and estrangement from—their Bengali American lineage. Earlier in the article, Padmanabhan explores this “new and alienating” disconnection from family history: “affiliations are more ambivalent” among members of the first generation, which belong not to “the country of origin or arrival, but [to a] community that does not fully belong to either.”³ Indrajit Hazra observes a similar interstitial space in “that other space-time difference: the generation gap. What Lahiri does is use the (anticipated, perceived or real) effects of translocation of an older generation as fodder for embarrassment-cum-concern for their children.” More pointedly, Bhaswati Chakravorty discerns in these stories “the drama of a

² “Human nature will not flourish, any more than a potato, if it be planted and replanted, for too long a series of generations, in the same worn-out soil. My children have had other birthplaces, and, so far as their fortunes may be within my control, shall strike their roots into unaccustomed earth.” Lahiri quotes from Hawthorne's prefatory essay to *The Scarlet Letter*.

³ For technical accuracy, I've substituted “first” generation for reviewers' use of “second” generation.

shifting space, that may or may not be a ‘happening’ one can identify.” Lahiri’s art, she claims, has “become more self-conscious,” rendering opaque the representation of distinct ethnic markers: “it would be difficult to pin down exactly where one is to identify the specific features of dislocated Indianness.”

Hema and Kaushik charts a generational narrative, structured between the births of a mother (Hema) and her child, that is fractured by temporal gaps and spatial disjunctions. Lahiri dramatically captures the ambivalence of first generation characters who exist on the margins between private life and family life, adulthood and parenthood, ethnic and mainstream culture, “old world” and “new world” communities. To underscore their difficult patterns of adjustment, she focuses on the interlocking histories of two émigré Indian families which informally adopt one another along kinship lines. In the first story, “Once in A Lifetime,” two mothers forge a friendship that begins the moment that Parul Di Choudhuri discovers that Shibani is pregnant with Hema (the narrator): “she told you [Kaushik] to get off the swing, and then she and you escorted my mother home. It was during that walk that your mother suggested perhaps mine was expecting. They became fast friends” (224-225). Their reciprocal recognition of Shibani’s pregnancy provides a generational framework that supersedes rigorous class distinctions imposed in India: “in Calcutta, they would probably have little occasion to meet...[but] those differences were irrelevant in Cambridge, where they were both equally alone” (225). If not cousins by blood, they become cousins of circumstance, sharing the domestic burdens of marriage and childrearing. Parul Di also sympathizes with Shibani at the crucial moment when she first becomes conscious of her daughter’s existence. Although this event pre-dates Hema’s birth,

Shibani marks and retains it in the mnemonic object of the swing set.⁴ As such, she passes this memory down to Hema, who later uses it as a locus of inter-familial identification with her mother, Parul Di, and Kaushik.⁵

Conversely, when both families begin to drift apart, other objects “hold” them during their interval of absence. When the Choudhuris move back to India in 1974, Hema’s mother and father inherit their various possessions, which Hema recalls as an outside family’s “things”: Kaushik’s high chair, pram, and clothing, Parul Di’s “pots and pans, small appliances, blankets, and sheets...we continued to refer to these things as your mother’s” (225). These items connect both families together and bind them to a broad ethno-cultural community; more immediately, they help to bridge widening geographical and interpersonal distances between the Choudhuris and Hema’s family.

As lifelong emigrants who never fully settle in India or America, the Choudhuris elide normative codes of assimilation into an established kinship society. Having moved to New England in 1962, “before the laws welcoming foreign students changed” (224), they arrive before the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act ushered in a new wave of South Asian expatriates. This act, as David Palumbo-Liu observes, would collapse the segregated geopolitical “zones” of Asia and America and “give way to a new historical formulation...[which] radically changed the composition of Asian America, and this fact brought about a compensatory move to reduce the flow of Asians into the United States” (444). Early studies of this South Asian migration have emphasized economic factors: career and educational opportunities,

⁴ In *Being A Character*, Chris Bollas defines the mnemonic object as “a particular form of subjective object that contains a projectively identified self experience, and when we use it, something of that self stored experience will arise,” 21.

⁵ Hema inherits mnemonic object of the swing from her mother and later uses it, as a reference point, in a conversation with Kaushik. After identifying a swing set in her backyard, Hema remarks his skeptical reaction: “the word must have amused you...as if I’d invented the term” (235). Although Kaushik is unaware of its significance for both of their mothers—and, indirectly, for both of them—Hema tries to reconstitute it between them.

prospects for training and practice in specialized fields (Tinker 10). Settling in and around major cities and universities, emigrants eventually formed extensive communities and assimilated into the middle class. More recently, Katy Gardner observes that the complex pattern of migration “is an ongoing process” that can not be assigned a linear progression: “rather than one movement, it usually involves many: origins and destinations are moved between, and tied together by a whole complexity of linkages. The maintenance of kinship networks, or social institutions, may therefore be associated with one stage, eventually to be surpassed by other adaptive strategies” (*Global Migrants, Local Lives*, 5).⁶

Adapting to multiple contexts in multiple times, The Choudhuris are neither “settlers” nor “sojourners.”⁷ Lahiri admits that an interest “in writing about an immigrant family that goes back to India” prompted her to write *Hema and Kaushik* “because it is an exception and I wondered what motivated those kinds of moves” (Padmanabhan). Making similar, exceptional moves to-and-from India, the Choudhuris appear out of step with the post-1965 generation’s patterns of settlement and assimilation. Their acts of expatriation and repatriation complicate cultural mores. Addressing Kaushik, Hema notes that “your parents had decided to leave Cambridge, not for Atlanta or Arizona, as some other Bengalis had, but to move all the way back to India, abandoning the struggle that my parents and their friends had embarked upon” (223). The Choudhuri’s departure has radically disrupted kinship and family customs; by “abandoning the struggle” of their parents’ generation, they have withdrawn from a shared, collective sense of place and time. After they move back to New England in 1981, Hema’s parents agree to host them until they find a home, but Hema recalls their return being considered “a wavering, a

⁶ Gardner focuses primarily on relations between Sylhet and Bangladeshi emigrants to England; however, she contextualizes them in a broad diasporic frame extending to Bengali-American communities.

⁷ Inhabiting neither role, the Choudhuri family resembles immigrants who “are part of an increasingly creole world...where lives are no longer conventionally bounded or determined by space” (Gardner, 5).

weakness. ‘They should have known it’s impossible to go back,’ they said to their friends, condemning your parents for having failed at both ends. We had stuck it out as immigrants, while you had fled” (227-28). More than merely a value judgment, this statement endorses an ideological norm of diasporic experience: Bengali Americans should make a determined, irrevocable choice to settle among their kinship community.

Kaushik’s parents are also singled out for their unconventional habits, behavior and tastes. Shibani remarks that Parul Di’s short hair and slacks make her appear “stylish” (a pejorative term). Her husband, likewise, is faulted for over-indulging her fickle moods, drinking Johnny Walker, and acting careless. It soon becomes clear, however, that Shibani fails to grasp the underlying motives for the Choudhuri’s conduct since she evaluates it according to her own married life. After remarking that Parul Di “won’t settle for anything less than a palace,” she tells her husband, “you would never put up with that sort of behavior in me” (245). Comparing her guests’ marriage to the standards of her own, she reduces their differences to aberrations from conventional codes of kinship. Shibani, perhaps unconsciously, imposes an ideology of assimilation that distorts more complex social circumstances. With ironic understatement, Lahiri highlights limitations of her judgment, when both families gather together to watch a winter snowfall reminiscent of their farewell party, seven years earlier:

‘Seven years ago,’ my mother said. ‘It was another life, back then.’ They spoke of how young you and I had been, how much younger they had all been.
‘Such a lovely evening,’ your mother recalled, her voice betraying a sadness that all of them seemed to share. ‘How different things were.’ (248).

Shibani and Parul Di reflect on the past phase of their lives together (1968-1974), but it is what remains *unsaid* between them—the secret of Parul Di’s breast cancer—that underlies “how different things were.” In response to her terminal illness, the Choudhuri family has become existentially “different” than they were prior to this agonizing awareness. They have privately

committed themselves to conceal her dying from Hema's family—and their entire Bengali-American community—in order to face death on Parul Di's terms. As narrator, Hema reveals her own complicity in protecting this secret knowledge which Kaushik has shared with her. By not speaking it aloud, she also sympathizes with his family as irreducibly different from hers:

That was why you had left India. It was not so much for treatment as it was to be left alone. In India people knew she was dying, and had you remained there, inevitably, friends and family would have gathered at her side...trying to shield her from something she could not escape. Your mother, not wanting to be suffocated by the attention, not wanting her parents to witness her decline, had asked your father to bring you all back to America (250).

Hema, who explicitly addresses Kaushik as the implied reader ("you"), accepts a tacit pact not to disclose his mother's death to her "friends and family." Those who "witness her decline"—Kaushik, his father, and (indirectly) Hema—respect her decision to die alone, sheltering her from the attention of others. Had she chosen to die among either of their kinship communities (in India or America), her relatives' solicitation would have buffered her from an authentic experience of being-toward-death. Revealing this secret to them would have confined her to the care of those who exist in the social, everyday world.⁸

Hema and Kaushik share this awareness of Parul Di's illness and death, a co-intentionality about her absence-from-the-world that constitutes an almost inseparable bond between them. Indeed, the novella's three perspectives (Hema's, Kaushik's, and a third-person narrator's), are informed by her un-representable loss. From indefinite points in the future, Hema and Kaushik narrate events with an acute sensitivity to intentional objects situated in the intermediate space between their parents' generation and their own. While Hema directs her

⁸ Heidegger classifies *being-toward death* as an individual existential experience that must be "torn away from the they...[the] factual lostness in the everydayness of the they-self" (*Being and Time*, 243). He observes that an awareness of death sets one apart, in isolated being (*Da-sein*), from illusionary social structures: "What is characteristic about authentic, existentially projected being-toward-death can be summarized as follows: *Anticipation reveals to Da-sein its lostness in the they-self, and brings it face to face with the possibility to be itself, primarily unsupported by concern taking care of things, but to be itself in passionate anxious freedom toward death which is free of the illusions of the they, factual, and certain of itself*" (245).

attention to Kaushik to make absent objects (associated with him) present, Kaushik represses memories of his mother to make present objects (associated with her) absent. By emphasizing these two inverted perspectives of presence and absence, Lahiri explores the complex ways in which self and other are constituted within primary fields of perception which ground ethical judgments, choices, and responsibilities. Her characters' complementary differences also contribute to a synecdochic "whole" novella; as readers, we are called upon to consider how Hema and Kaushik's distinct dispositions might, in effect, balance each other.

Hema opens her narrative at the point when Kaushik's family departs from America and returns to India: "I had seen you before, too many times to count, but a farewell that my family threw for yours...is when I begin to recall your presence in my life" (223). His "presence," paradoxically, is first recollected through his absence from her world. Hema's subtle shift to the present tense ("is") underscores the narrative instant, the spatiotemporal point-of-view from which she recounts her story. From the outset, an indeterminacy sets into her discourse, laying bare the limitations and contingencies of her perspective. Even though she claims to locate her memory in time ("it was 1974. I was six years old. You were nine"), her description immediately wavers between other moments prior to it: the hours before the party which she remembers "most clearly" and Parul Di's discovery of her mother's pregnancy, six years earlier (224-25). Hema can not firmly ground Kaushik's inaugural presence in a single, coherent personal memory since he exists prior to her conscious awareness, in the fissures of an intergenerational narrative. Not yet instantiated in her memory, Kaushik can only be recalled as an absent presence.

During the interval that the Choudhuri family lives in India (1974-1981), Hema inherits Kaushik's hand-me-downs, sweaters, rubber boots, and a hideous winter coat that she hates so intensely that it causes her to hate Kaushik as well (226). Eventually, after she outgrows these,

they are replaced by others “until there was no longer any physical trace of you in the house” (227). For the duration of this time, Hema retains Kaushik’s presence in objects which serve as temporal markers for his existence “as a boy of eight or nine, frozen in time, the size of the clothes I’d inherited” (228). But when Kaushik returns with his family to stay with hers, he is “twice that [age] now, sixteen,” un-recognizably distinct from his previous incarnation. Distressed by eighth grade boys who “remain unaware of my existence,” Hema develops a crush on Kaushik rooted in a desire for reciprocal recognition. She is enthralled that her mother has arranged for someone “belonging to the world of my parents” to sleep in her bedroom: “after dreading it all this time, now I was secretly thrilled that you would be sleeping here...you would absorb my presence” (234).

In a striking way, Hema is still in the process of making an awkward, painful break from “the world of her parents.” Having recently stopped sleeping on a cot in their bedroom, she has yet to adapt fully to her own bedroom environment; when Kaushik is offered her bedroom, she resumes sleeping in her parents’ room, an experience that heightens feelings of cultural isolation from the mainstream. The move upsets her, and she disavows her mother’s assurance that this traditional parent-child ritual is “perfectly normal” compared to the “cruel American practice” of making children sleep alone:

But I knew that it was not normal, not what my friends at school did, and that they would ridicule me if they knew. The summer before I started middle school, I insisted on sleeping alone. In the beginning, my mother kept checking on me during the night, as if I were still an infant who might suddenly stop breathing (229).

In his studies of developmental psychology, D.W. Winnicott focuses on the crucial stage during which infants discover “the first object of object-relationships” (*Playing and Reality* 5). He classifies this as “the transitional object,” a primary term that “gives room for the process of becoming able to accept difference and similarity...[and] describes the infant’s journey from the

purely subjective to objectivity”(6). Familiar to most of us as a security blanket, teddy bear, or similar plaything, this object is indispensable to the infant during bedtime and moments of intense anxiety. At times, it may even endure into childhood: “a need for the specific object or behavior pattern that started at a very early date may reappear at a later age when deprivation threatens” (4). For Hema, Kaushik—and the various objects associated with him—becomes a composite transitional object that allows her to diminish anxieties by objectifying *her own* presence in an-other. He helps her mediate between parental attachment and self-identification, the separate “worlds” of parents and children.

Even during intervals of absence or disappearance, Kaushik’s presence is never internalized, repressed, or forgotten. Rather, his status as transitional object is maintained, if diffused in the cultural region spanning her subjective reality and the external world (Winnicott 5). After his family moves away, Hema continues to “hold” Kaushik in various objects—above all, in a photograph that his father gives to her for a book report. The picture features Kaushik and his mother, posing next to Trajan’s Column in Rome. Pointedly, Hema scarcely depicts the famous landmark (and few descriptive markers) and instead narrates from a perspective of intensified consciousness: “you were there in the picture...but it bothered me that you were there, your presence threatening to expose the secret attraction I felt and still hoped would be acknowledged somehow” (246-7). Frightened and excited that Kaushik will reciprocate her awareness of him, Hema pivots between active subject (the viewer) and passive object (the viewed). Her fear of “exposure” also alludes to Kaushik’s talent as a photographer, his rare capacity to disclose invisible or hidden objects. When Hema imagines his gaze focused on *her*, a present place and time remote from his past experience, she dreads that her private crush will be revealed to those within—and outside of—her family circle. To manage this anxiety, she cuts the

picture in two, pasting one part into her book report and keeping the other part with Kaushik hidden in her diary for years (247).

Hema and Kaushik share a need to draw a line between private and social acts and objects, but both demonstrate distinct orientations to domestic space. While Hema maintains a relation to loss that can be located within her family's house, Kaushik lacks this privilege and therefore sublimates his distress into a photographic aesthetic. In the wake of personal disturbances, both seek psychic stability in an imaginative exploration of their surroundings.

Winnicott classifies this process as “playing,” an investigation of oneself and one's environment that

can only come from desultory formless functioning...it is only here, in this unintegrated state of the personality, that that which we describe as creative can appear. This, if reflected back, *but only if reflected back*, becomes part of the organized individual personality, and eventually this in summation makes the individual to be, to be found; and eventually enables himself or herself to postulate the existence of the self (64).

In her adjustment between the separate spaces of her bedroom and her parents' bedroom, Hema has engaged in “play.” Witnessing Kaushik inhabit her space, she has also grasped it in reflection (albeit in an-other).⁹ Hema has yet to integrate it into her existence at this past point in her life—an act accomplished only retentionally, from her present narrative perspective.

Lahiri skillfully depicts their different perspectives at the end of “Once in A Lifetime” when Kaushik reveals to Hema that his mother is dying. The morning after the farewell party, they marvel at the backyard, transformed by snowfall into a “beautiful” pastoral scene that both covers the bare trees and conceals “so little” (249). For Hema, this site of disclosure earlier evoked the absence of Kevin McGrath, a boy who “got lost...and is still missing” in the

⁹There is a slight parallel here, it seems to me, to Lacan's theory of the mirror stage, the function of which, “turns out...to be a particular case of the function of imagos which is to establish a relationship between an organism and its reality” (Lacan 6).

contiguous deep woods (234-5). Since his disappearance, the woods have suggested the unfamiliar, forbidden areas extending far outside of her home environment. For Kaushik, a “lost boy” himself, the woods offer transitional phenomena that diffuse the fear of his mother’s imminent death.¹⁰ His use of the camera here offers a mediating lens through which he captures objects as they appear to him, in the inchoate process of play. His aleatory encounters with such objects—images of the snow-covered landscape—are recorded, developed, and later displayed in his parents’ house (“Years End” 258). However, he never reflects upon these objects adequately enough to assimilate them into his existence.

Camera in hand, Kaushik leads Hema to a cemetery where they encounter the tombstones of the Simonds, “a family of six” (249). Helping Kaushik wipe away the snow covering their graves, Hema describes the act as “unburying the buried”—an acknowledgement of her participation in disclosing private, concealed deaths of others to the world. While he admires the family plot, Kaushik tells Hema that he wishes his mother “could be buried somewhere” and regrets her decision to scatter her ashes into the Atlantic in accordance with Hindu custom (249).

Infuriated by this news, Hema admits feeling not sympathy for Kaushik or his mother but only “the enormous fear of having a dying woman in our home. I remembered standing beside your mother, both of us topless in the fitting room where I tried on my first bra, disturbed that I had been in such close proximity of her disease” (251). In this highly charged instant, Hema experiences associations of multiple generational phases: her dissociation from childhood, her emergence into adolescence, her awareness of motherhood, and—most prominently—her unconscious fear of death. This fear is displaced onto an anxiety over Parul Di’s breast cancer, which represses the contaminating presence of death in “close proximity” to her; incapable of

¹⁰ Winnicott defines *transitional phenomena* as very early “functional experiences” that pre-date the infant’s awareness of the transitional object (*Playing and Reality* 4). In play, however, these phenomena play a fundamental role: “on the basis of playing is built the whole of man’s experiential existence” (64).

being held in the breast as a transitional object¹¹, her disease exists on the margins constitutive of healthy subject and contaminated object as *abject*.¹² Although Hema can not “hold” this abjection in any formal object (since it eludes representation), she retains it as a secret. She admits that, during this earlier time in her life, when she still identified with her parents’ perspective of the Choudhuris, she was “too young to feel sorrow or sympathy” for Parul Di’s loss. Having recently made a difficult transition within her home (into her bedroom), Hema can not yet handle this new transition into a world existing outside of it. As a narrator, however, Hema reflects on her past, private encounter with the alterity of Parul Di’s death that she can now (from her present perspective) reintegrate into her experience. Doubling back on her intentionality of difference, she figures it through the liminal space of the wall separating her bedroom from her parents’ bedroom. After the Choudhuris recede from public view, her parents feel slighted, but the narrative voice insists that “I was back in my own room by then, on the other side of the wall, in the bed where you had slept, no longer hearing them” (251).

II

While “Once in a Lifetime” ends with Hema’s accommodation to an intergenerational domestic space, “Year’s End” begins with Kaushik’s alienation from his immediate family’s first (and only) American home. Three years after his mother’s death, Kaushik, a junior at Swarthmore, learns that his father has remarried without notifying him ahead of time. Having inherited a new step-family (Chitra, Rupa and Piu), Kaushik encounters them in the context of Parul Di’s final resting place, a privileged site that holds grief-stricken memories of his late

¹¹ Winnicott observes that “the transitional object stands for the breast, or the object of the first relationship” (*Playing and Reality* 9). It seems evident that Parul Di’s terminal illness threatens to collapse Hema’s distance from death—and therefore must be repressed on the level of signification (breast signifying death).

¹²Defining the term *abject*, Julia Kristeva claims that “it is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (*Powers of Horror* 4). Earlier, Hema admits that “though I had always been in good health, I had an irrational fear of doctors then, and the thought of one living in the house made me nervous, as if his mere presence might make one of us sick” (228).

adolescent years (ages 16-18). In this sense, the Choudhuri's house can be considered a *generational object* that provides Kaushik with a nexus of object-relations revolving around a formative parent-child relationship. He seeks to maintain a rapport with his mother in this context at all costs, despite the emergence of this new (step)family structure.

Initially, their first American home sheltered and concealed Parul Di's death from their kinship community, but in "Year's End," memories of her life are reencountered and disclosed through a set of hidden objects. These objects contain Kaushik's acute experiences of bereavement before and after his mother's death and father's re-marriage. Prior to this point, the Choudhuris used domestic items to formalize a private idiom out of inchoate experiences of migration, dislocation, and relocation; afterwards, father and son collaborate to hide them from view inside the house, which "had always maintained an impersonal quality, full of built-in cupboards concealing the traces of our everyday lives" (258). Vestiges of Parul Di—her jewelry, keepsakes, and photographs—have been packed up and sealed inside interior recesses of the household.

In sharp contrast, the modernist "open plan" of their house provides a permeable space in which sound travels easily, from room to room, even between walls. Like Hema, Kaushik has shared a bedroom wall with his parents, listening to them on the other side, but this feature also prevents him from creating a private, autonomous space: "It had been awful enough hearing my mother's raspy breathing at night, her moans. Now it would be Chitra and my father I would have heard conversing before bed" (267). This porous, open atmosphere is reinforced by the structural design of the house, which resembles the sleek, streamlined contours of institutional buildings: a double-high ceiling, "a window-seat running along the glass wall, enough space for twenty people to sit side by side, as they had during my mother's funeral" (259). Parul Di's

modernist furnishings complement these elements with a black leather, U-shaped sectional, kidney-shaped coffee table, and white fiberglass dining table. Kaushik recognizes traces of his mother in all of these objects, which provide him with the comforting appearance of permanence. Separately, each item contains and maintains existential states of his mother; within a constellation of objects, they collectively reinforce a primary “aesthetic of handling” that manages Kaushik’s various emotions, moods, and associations.¹³ It is crucial to note, however, that Kaushik fixates on his mother’s presence in idealized, imaginary terms which prevent him from adapting to his new step-family and, more dramatically, to his new role as step-son.

For Kaushik, his aesthetic of home is threatened by the appearance of Chitra, who inhabits his mother’s space and handles his mother’s things. When she offers him food, he is repulsed by her, since he associates this task with his mother:

I was suddenly sickened by her, by the sight of her standing in our kitchen. I had no memories of my mother cooking there, but the space still retained her presence more than any other part of the house. The jade and spider plants she had watered were still thriving on the windowsill, the orange-and-white sunburst clock she’d so loved the design of, with its quivering second hand, still marking the time on the wall (263).

Kaushik recalls no conscious, transparent memory of his mother in the kitchen, yet the space retains her earlier promise to cook kebabs for her family (259-260). In “Once in A Lifetime,” Parul Di had realized a similar intention by cooking a trifle, to Kaushik’s delight, in Shibani’s kitchen.¹⁴ Her objective absence from past and present times in no way thwarts an intuitive awareness of her presence, which continues to mark both space (the plants) and time (the clock) through her valued objects. In phenomenological terms, Parul Di stands in the foreground,

¹³ Bollas, “The Aesthetic Moment and the Search for Transformation,” 43. Bollas notes that the relation between mother and child constitutes a primary aesthetic insofar as that the child’s first experiences of pleasure—as fulfilled or withheld—vary according to the mother’s handling of needs.

¹⁴ Hema recalls Kaushik “breaking off a piece of the pound cake she’d sliced, stuffing it into your mouth. You seldom set foot in the kitchen, but that evening you hovered there, excited by the promise of trifle, which I gathered you loved and which I had never tasted” (248).

present as the exclusive object of his attention, while Chitra recedes into the background, absent from his recognition (as a sickening “sight”). Whenever Kaushik views Chitra, he compares her disparagingly to his mother. Imagining her growing old with his father, “her hair turning gray one day...made me conscious, formally, of my hatred for her” (276). Even the mere handling of his mother’s objects—the cutlery, teakettle, and telephone—upsets him profoundly (279).

It is in this context of object-perception that I would locate Kaushik’s basic misrecognition of his mother as pure self-presence and his consequential resentment towards Chitra. By reducing both maternal figures to a gestalt (figure/ground), he imposes a series of misleading judgments on them, privileging his mother and minimizing Chitra. In his later writings, Edmund Husserl claims that “every spatiotemporal perception” deceptively presents itself as “a direct apprehension of the thing itself,” but actually “concerns something cointended—and, in such a radical fashion, that even in the content of that which is perceptually given as itself, there is, on closer inspection, an element of anticipation” (qtd. in Zahavi 96). Husserl classifies this as the “triadic ecstatic-centered structure” of consciousness, which encompasses past, present, and future phases of all intentional objects. Within this structure, no object can be grasped “in itself,” a Kantian *noumena* that exceeds every possible perspective of it; rather, it can be encountered in a series of profiles, which are always indefinite and incomplete. Moreover, these multiple profiles reveal that the object intrinsically relies on no single vantage point, but on plurivocal perspectives: “every appearance that I have is from the very beginning a part of an open, endless, but not explicitly realized, totality of possible appearances of the same, and the subjectivity belonging to this appearance is open intersubjectivity” (qtd. in Zahavi, 199).

Throughout “Year’s End”, Kaushik misapprehends his mother as “the thing in itself,” a *metaphysics of presence* that supersedes all co-intentional profiles of her existence. Depending on his perspective alone, he neglects to recognize that the moment in which he constitutes her presence relies on a triadic structure that connects his present impression of her to both past (retentional) and future (protentional) impressions.¹⁵ As an intentional object, his mother spans separate temporal phases and spatial perspectives that have contributed to her existence. In most cases, when Kaushik foregrounds her presence in a specific place or time, he relies on aesthetic judgment to bracket her as an idealized object in the broad field of perception; in negative relation to Parul Di, Chitra exists as a repulsive, alien object that holds memories of her cancer. By relying on values of formal beauty, Kaushik reduces both maternal figures to fixed categories that operate at one remove from the flux of perceived colors, sounds, textures, and sensations.

In “The Phenomenology of Perception,” Merleau-Ponty astutely claims that this kind of “analytical reflection” is actually *un*-reflective since it values consciousness over world (66). As an event in the world and not an act of the mind, perception can not be located in “the same category as the syntheses represented by judgments, acts, or predications”:

Perception...is not even an act, a deliberate taking up of a position; it is the background from which all acts stand out, and is presupposed by them. The world is not an object such that I have in my possession the law of its making; it is the natural setting of, and field for, all my thoughts and all my explicit perceptions...there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself (67).

The world exists prior to any subjective analysis of it according to a single spatiotemporal point-of-view. Merleau-Ponty re-formulates perspective as an “object-horizon structure” that allows us to distinguish and disclose various objects in our environment. Each object is perceptually

¹⁵Husserl’s triadic structure of intentionality relies on (1) presenting a primal impression of the object to consciousness, and situating this object in both (2) a retentional horizon (retained consciousness of its past phase) and (3) a protentional horizon (anticipatory consciousness of its future phase) (Zahavi, 97). Zahavi astutely claims that this triadic structure precludes any “pure self-presence” since past and present horizons always constitute the object. In this context, Zahavi defends Husserl against those who charge him with a *metaphysics of presence*.

revealed by concealing others, in both space (alternately visible and invisible) and time (alternately past, present, and future) (80-81). In this mode, objects are grasped spatially in a “harmonious and indefinite set of views” and temporally “only in intention” (81-82).

While adopting Merleau-Ponty’s definition of perspective, I would like to reframe the object-horizon structure in an intergenerational context. In *Hema and Kaushik*, overlapping generations of parents, children, and grandchildren can be considered distinct “worlds” (demarcated by birth and death) that ideally allow for continuity and change. Each individual’s perspective offers, at best, a “presumptive synthesis” of object profiles extending over the scope of generational space and time (82). Hema and Kaushik, as first generation children, inhabit the world of immigrant parents in initial phases (infancy, childhood), but also adapt to the new world of mainstream American culture during early adolescence. In the last section, I demonstrated how Hema adjusted to this new phase by using transitional objects (primarily, her bedroom) within her parents’ house. In “Year’s End,” it is clear that Kaushik has not succeeded in making a similar adjustment since he has yet to resolve a disrupted attachment to his mother. To compensate for her loss, he displaces his grief onto an aesthetic that evokes his mother’s presence in absence. Kaushik’s sublimation is rooted in solipsism, a vision of the world that reflects his own need for mastery over objects in his environment.

Much of Kaushik’s alienation can be traced to the lack of continuity and intermediation between his family’s generations. In broad, existential terms, Parul Di’s lifespan is situated in a *triadic generational structure* that includes herself, her parents, and her son—a structure destabilized by her funeral, which is neither handled in the presence of her parents (and their extensive kinship community) nor observed according to traditional mourning rituals. Months after she passes away, Kaushik and his father visit them in India. For Kaushik, this encounter

“had been the hardest thing...having to go to Calcutta with my father and enter the home where my mother had been a girl, having to see the man and woman who had raised her, who had known her and loved her long before my father and I did” (253). Bearing the bad news of Parul Di’s death in person, Kaushik tells his grandparents in her childhood home, the customary place of her funeral. It is only in this context that they finally recognize her absence, “grieving freshly for my mother as neither my father nor I had done. Being with her through her illness day after day had denied us that privilege” (253). Kaushik’s resentful tone suggests the cultural distance between him and his grandparents. Being-with his mother in isolation from others, he and his father lacked the “privilege” of expressing their grief in traditional customs passed down from parent to child to grandchild.¹⁶

Although “Year’s End” offers a similar portrait of isolated family loss, Kaushik and his father never successfully transcend their isolation and reconstitute a “family.” His father handles his grief in his own way, secretly marrying Chitra to ease the pain of returning to an empty house every night. Their marriage, he claims, was arranged by relatives, but Kaushik discerns stubborn, personal motives in his father’s decision (255). Kaushik, likewise, conceals his emotions, but his father’s choice also offers him an opportunity to forge a new relationship with his two stepsisters, Rupa and Piu. When he first meets them, Kaushik notices that “their accents and their intonation [sound] as severe as mine must have sounded to your fully American ear when we arrived as refugees in your family’s home” (263). Here, he identifies with the girls’ difficult

¹⁶ It would be instructive to contrast this moment with the funeral preparations for Ashoke Ganguli in *The Namesake*. Through ceremonial rituals of mourning, Gogol can draw a direct intergenerational line between himself and his parents. Looking back on the death of his grandparents, he recalls noticing in his father’s grief a detachment mirroring his own: “sitting unshaven on the chair, staring through them, speaking to no one” (*The Namesake* 180). In observance of Ashoke’s death, Ashima, Gogol, and Sonia maintain a strict “mourner’s diet” for ten days:

Without articulating it to one another, they draw comfort from the fact that it is the only time in the day that they are alone, isolated, as a family; even if there are visitors lingering in the house, only the three of them partake of this meal. And only for its duration is their grief slightly abated, the enforced absence of certain foods on their plates conjuring his father’s presence somehow (181).

transition into American culture; but his self-referential comment, underscored by a rare, intentional address to Hema (as “you”), reveals that he has yet to consider their diasporic experiences as distinct from his own. It is only after he recognizes his status as a child who, “like them...had lost a parent and was now being asked to accept a replacement” (272) that he begins to accept his role as their surrogate brother and father figure. When he takes Rupa and Piu to a pizza parlor and Duncan Donuts, Kaushik replays his father’s parental role as a fast food aficionado (259-260) and helps them assimilate into the mainstream rituals of consumer culture. He responds to their fear of being stigmatized as foreigners in school, recalling his own experience as a sixteen year old transplant who “had to figure things out all over again,” despite his status as an American-born citizen (274). Through all of these simple gestures and words of encouragement, Kaushik becomes aware that he, Rupa and Piu need to guard one another “from the growing, incontrovertible fact that Chitra and my father now formed a couple...My presence was proof that my mother once existed just as they represented the physical legacy of their dead father” (282).

During these brief episodes with his step-sisters, Kaushik recognizes *his own* presence as a living, constitutive part of a series of generations. At age twenty-one, he has entered the decadal phase of *generational consciousness*, through which his generation (born in the mid-1960’s) becomes aware of itself as inhabiting a unique, shared sense of cultural space and time. He grasps his and the girls’ existence as both separate from—and inextricably linked to—the world of their parents. In a general sense, Kaushik, Rupa, and Piu are part of the same first generation, but in terms of age, he is an entire generation (ten years) older than they. This distinction enables Kaushik to assume a paternal role as “Kaushik Dada” (his father’s playful nickname for him) (262). Through a new appellation, he briefly adopts his father’s position as

step-parent. Waking up to the sound of Piu's nightmare, he remarks that "I did not hold it against them that they had begun calling my father Daddy. They never spoke of their own father, but one night I woke up to the sound of Piu screaming, locked up inside a nightmare, asking for her Baba again and again" (283). For both step-father and step-brother, names like "Dada" or "Daddy" serve as objects to contain and settle the girls' separation anxieties. Watching over Rupa and Piu, Kaushik even considers "what it might be like to have a child," a second-generation intentionality that hinges on sympathetic care for the other in place of the self (283). He encounters the general paradoxical relation between parent and child, between the self that exists-in-other and the other that exists-in-self.

What complicates this ethical responsibility is Kaushik's un-resolved inner conflict over his mother's death. He externalizes this conflict through the sublimated aesthetic of photography, which safely neutralizes his mother's presence as an absent object. Notably, the mechanics of photo-making are figured in various parts of the house—many of which evoke a shared mother-son perspective. Large windows function like camera lenses offering cherished "water views" of the pool she used to swim in; "the great wall of glass [looks] out onto the trees" that Kaushik shot, processed, then displayed as images on the interior wall (258-259). Tucked away "in a closet somewhere" and sealed in a shoebox are all remaining pictures of Parul Di (256). The basement, now used to store her objects, once served as a makeshift photo lab. Kaushik recalls his mother joining him there while he developed pictures, helping "keep time for me with her watch, familiarizing herself with the process enough to be able to tell me when to pour the series of fluids in and out of the processing tank" (278). As "time-keeper," his mother played a vital role in developing images of his art—an art shaped by his mother's explicit intentionality of death: "'It must be something like this,' she said once in that perfectly dark, silent, sealed-up

space, and I understood without her saying so that she was imagining what it might be like to be dead. “This is how I want to think of it” (278). On a conscious level, Kaushik represses this memory since it evokes his mother in her corporeal, concrete existence, marred by the contaminating presence of her cancer. He recalls that the hazardous chemicals surrounding both of them were “nothing compared to what was taking place inside her body” (278).

In this “darkroom” of his psyche, Kaushik maintains his mother’s deathwatch throughout his lifelong career as a photographer; his selected subjects—victims and strangers—displace the presence of her death through symbolic images. Eventually, he earns his reputation as a photographer by providing images of the anonymous dead to a human rights agency so that “relatives could attempt to identify the disappeared” (“Going Ashore,” 305). Through the technological apparatus of the camera, Kaushik enacts a *poiēsis*, a phenomenological “presencing” of un-identified others in compensation for the absence of his mother.¹⁷ On a sublimated level, he uses each photographed subject to replay the dynamic of concrete loss and imaginary recovery. Through this process, he detaches himself from a direct vision of his mother in pictures, which merely misrepresent her: “the thousands of days I had spent with her [were] reduced to a handful of stock scenes” (272).

When Rupa and Piu discover these “stock scenes,” they unwittingly forfeit Kaushik’s fragile trust and usurp his poietic authority. Discovering the sealed-up shoebox containing photographs of Parul Di, they expose prohibited, concealed objects in the world:

Even from a distance the banished images assaulted me: my mother wearing a swimsuit by the edge of the pool at our old club in Bombay. My mother sitting with me on her lap

¹⁷ In “The Question Concerning Technology,” Heidegger cites Plato’s definition of *poiēsis* as “every occasion for whatever passes over and goes forward into presencing from that which is not presencing...bringing-forth [*Her-vor-bringen*].” *Poiēsis* also encompasses *physis*, the “bursting open belonging to bringing forth not in itself, but in another (*en alloi*), in the craftsman or artist” (10-11). As a photographer, Kaushik is both craftsman and artist, fulfilling both meanings of the word “technology” (*techne*) (13).

on the brown wooden steps of our house in Cambridge. My mother and father standing before I was born in front of a snow-caked hedge (286).

Kaushik can no longer maintain aesthetic control over these “banished images,” which represent profiles of his mother from a wholly *other* point-of-view. This third-person perspective threatens to subvert his mastery over both his mother’s presence and the technological apparatus used to represent it.¹⁸ These pictures confront him with past generational phases that erupt into his field of perception so unexpectedly that he can not frame them according to subjective present or past perspectives. Instead, each snapshot exposes a shade of his family’s collective experience that stretches backward in time, prior to his memory, judgment, and ontological origins. Each image opens up concealed object-horizons (perspectives) of his father, his mother, and (by extension) all others that are irreducible to Kaushik’s singular experience of being-in-the world (*Dasein*).

Like Hema, he reacts irately at the discovery of Parul Di’s *abject* disease, but Kaushik also lashes out at others: “it was Piu that I grabbed, dragging her away from the shoebox as if her proximity would contaminate it, and thrusting her aside” (286). The girls’ existence as step-sisters merely reinforces his sense of generational dislocation from his own family and culture. Unwilling to recognize this alienation in himself, he displaces it onto them as noxious foreign bodies (disease) threatening to “contaminate” his mother’s idealized presence (in photos). Kaushik belittles the girls’ mother as “nothing in comparison” to Parul Di—another formal judgment that imposes a gestalt between beauty (figure) and ugliness (ground). Reducing the world of co-intentional beings to his aesthetic, he denies ethical responsibility for the girls. Kaushik also makes a *noncommittal* choice fully consistent with his disinterested attitude towards others; rather than commit himself to an affirmative decision (staying on as the girls’

¹⁸ Heidegger notes that “the will to mastery becomes all the more urgent the more technology threatens to slip from human control” (“The Question Concerning Technology,” 5).

guardian) or a negative decision (disowning them as step-sisters), he refuses to accept either undesirable proposition.¹⁹

Kaushik relies on a propositional “Catch 22” reasoning to justify his abandonment of Rupa and Piu. Their discovery of the photos causes his two, incompatible perspectives on the world—as step-brother and stranger—to collide. Unable to reconcile these differences, he deserts the girls and seeks out a new perspective that exists outside of the nexus of home-centered family relationships. After traveling north through New Hampshire and Maine, he encounters a spectacular shoreline, which is “like no other place I’d seen”: a colorless, “taut and unforgiving” sky suspends over “the most unforgiving” water: “nearly black at times, cold enough...to kill me, violent enough to break me apart” (289). For Kaushik, the ocean holds his mother’s death in all its inchoate, destructive, and disintegrative potentiality. It can not be located in any prior perspectival frame of reference (“like no other place I’d seen”), much less documented according to his photographic aesthetic. He can not claim the ocean, but it claims *him* “as nothing had in a long time” (290). Possessing him as its own object, the ocean figures his mother’s death, which surpasses the limited horizons of his own existence (in space and time): “No one in the world knew where I was, no one had the ability to reach me. It was like being dead, my escape allowing me to taste that tremendous power my mother possessed forever” (290). In the ocean, he recognizes his mother’s absence-from-the-world as an empowering presence, an abandonment of him and estrangement from all others.

In his penultimate gesture, Kaushik remembers the pain that he caused Hema, and restores (through wish fulfillment) a momentary sense of generation, family, and home.²⁰ He

¹⁹ Earlier, when his girlfriend Jessica asked him to visit her, Kaushik responded with “the same lie” that he told Rupa and Piu after they asked him if he were going to Disney World, namely: “that I would think about it.” Although he admits to feeling “guilty” about not accepting—or denying—either invitation, Kaushik remains unable to agree to “either proposition” (285).

now looks back on this past moment from a co-intentional perspective that reconstitutes parent-child relations in the context of the home. At the same time, he acknowledges that he can not claim this home—or any home—as his own. Finally arriving at a tenuous, separate peace, Kaushik visits the Bay of Fundy, the easternmost state park (closest to India) and buries the shoebox containing his mother’s photos. Unable to retrieve her scattered ashes from the ocean, a “nowhere” that obliterates all corporeal traces, Kaushik finally fulfills his earlier wish that his mother “could be buried somewhere,” albeit in sublimated form (“Once in A Lifetime,” 249). Having concretely located “somewhere” to mark his mother’s absence from the world, Kaushik contains the ineffable event of her death in the aesthetic object of her burial.

III

On first glance, the third (and final) part of *Hema and Kaushik* appears to bridge the narrative and ontological divide between both title characters. Up until this point, Hema and Kaushik were conscious of each other *in absentia*, as intentional objects in past generational phases. In “Going Ashore,” they are reunited in the present, in a shared place (Rome) and time (2004) remote from all past and future phases. Shifting to third-person narration, Lahiri balances their contrapuntal perspectives and achieves a structural symmetry to the novella as a whole; their reunion and love affair not only fulfills Hema’s long-deferred desire, but it also allows Kaushik to reencounter his mother as an aesthetic object. Along purely formal lines, “Going Ashore” presents an integration of the previous two sections into a synecdochic whole.

By the same token, this final section also underscores a phenomenological gap between their separate, irreconcilable worlds. While Hema recognizes the possibility of accepting new generational roles (as parent, wife, and mother), Kaushik chooses not to move beyond the limits

²⁰ He recalls Hema’s house as “the last place that had felt like a home. In pretending that my mother wasn’t sick and being around people who didn’t know, a small part of me had been able to believe that it was true, that she would go on living just as your mother had” (291).

of a self-oriented intentionality. In the previous two sections, I examined Hema's intentional objectification of Kaushik's presence as well as his aesthetic objectification of his mother's absence. Neither perspective is intrinsically incompatible with the other; rather, they can be accommodated within a common perceptual background, an intersubjective experience that is constitutive of their generation. Indeed, by locating both Hema and Kaushik in the same existential context, Lahiri suggests a possible dialogue between their isolated and overlapping voices.

It seems to me that the only condition for the possibility of such a dialogue resides in a communicative ethic.²¹ Meaning exists not in any isolated, subjective act of consciousness, but in the world of shared, collective objects. In the immediate circumstances shared by self ("I") and other ("you"), Hema and Kaushik encounter their generation as an ambiguous, plurivocal world that always exceeds their ability to represent it through language. In this sense, meaning is not so much decoded by a single consciousness as continually re-interpreted from multiple perspectives. Along these lines, I would like to conclude this chapter by examining Hema's and Kaushik's divergent perspectives of the *second* generation; their willingness to reroute intentionality towards—or away from—the next generation is the definitive grounds of their interest in others. To the extent that they focus on a new, possible "third person"—a child—they also prepare to pass down objects, customs, and rituals to him or her. It becomes clear that Hema is fully prepared to accept this new responsibility in a reintegrated generational framework; Kaushik, however, can only imagine—never commit to—such a prospect.

²¹ Thomas W. Busch notes that while Merleau-Ponty shares with Sartre "an ethics of mutual recognition and respect in the communicative situation," he also resists the latter's utopian belief in transparent language ("Phenomenology and Communicative Ethics," 172). While adopting Busch's term "communicative ethic," I'm also applying it here to a generational context.

We discover that since the last time they saw each other, twenty years earlier, Hema and Kaushik have reshaped idioms around their respective professions, talents, interests, and habits; yet these linguistic or aesthetic markers of the intentional process also displace anxieties deeply rooted in family history. For Kaushik, a world-class photographer, he has decided that “his origins were irrelevant,” whether located in India or America. This intensifies his alienation from his parents’ generation, which he reencounters from the detached, mobile perspective of a stranger in a strange land: “he was reminded of his family’s moves every time he visited another refugee camp, every time he watched a family combing through rubble for their possessions. In the end, that was life: a few plates, a favorite comb, a pair of slippers, a child’s string of beads” (309). Evocative of his mother’s household objects, which she had set up no “matter where she was in the world,” these transitory items are never documented through photography, but discarded as the “private detritus of life” (309). Kaushik demonstrates only a professional obligation to others, tempered by a constant willingness and “also a need—to disappear at any moment” (316). Existing in the flux of the present tasks at-hand, he rarely reflects on his relation to past or future generations.

In contrast, Hema orients herself, professionally and personally, to others in an effort to revivify past, absent, or “dead” languages. As a classics scholar, she specializes in translating Etruscan culture, a “sacred” practice that allows her to “bring a dead world to life” (299). Likewise, in her personal life, she resuscitates her formal, arranged marriage to Navin through a renewed intentional awareness about their children: “She had...denied herself even the possibility of thinking about children. But Navin had changed that, too. They were both aware of her age, and as soon as they were married, Navin told her, he was eager to begin a family” (301). Hema offsets this protentional perspective towards a future family with a retentional viewpoint

towards her past family. Her brief affair with Kaushik enables her to accept a diasporic experience that provides a transitional “present” space between the world of her parents and the world of her children: “their parents had liked one another only for the sake of their origins, for the sake of a time and place to which they’d lost access. Hema had never been drawn to a person for that reason, until now” (315). Through her relationship with Kaushik, Hema can objectify her own parents’ awareness of an absent, irretrievable origin (India/Bangladesh). She recognizes the alterity of this generational perspective but also reintegrates it into her own experience.

By orienting herself to these generation gaps, Hema accepts ontological absence of times and spaces as constitutive of intergenerational experience. She becomes aware that she exists neither entirely for herself nor entirely for an-other, but “For Themselves...against a background of For Others—I for the other and the other for me. My life must have a significance which I do not constitute; there must strictly speaking be an intersubjectivity” (*The Phenomenology of Perception*, 225). On the cusp of “middle age,” Hema encounters a break between one life phase and the next. During the past decade of her thirties, her affair with Julian has failed to provide any shared, significant meaning. When Kaushik takes Julian’s place as her lover, she eventually recognizes him as another, noncommittal person who will only impose his will upon her. Rather than enter her forties alone, she makes a determined choice not “to face this life indefinitely” (298). Instead, she affirms her ethical commitment to Others—Navin and her future child—in the place of self-reflective intentionality.

Aptly, Lahiri depicts the split-up between Hema and Kaushik during a ritual of *reintegrative intentionality*: “the hour of the *passeggiata*,” a traditional Italian stroll that foregrounds the concern that generations express towards one another. As if inhabiting separate, generational spaces, older men accompany older men, older women accompany older women,

and “with them, alongside them, were children and grandchildren, the generations knit casually and fondly together” (321). In stark contrast, Kaushik’s “proposal” to Hema does not extend outward to her (or, protentionally, to their children) but to his own narcissistic needs. In a spectacular moment, Hema and Kaushik join the *passeggiata* as fellow strollers, enacting a ritual that endows Hema with a meta-generational perspective:

They entered a small piazza where she was aware everywhere of children, boys and girls of five and seven, eight and ten, swarming around them as if a school had just been dismissed. She had known Kaushik at that age, she had worn his coat, given him her bed, dreamed of him kissing her, these facts of the past haunting her and steadying her at the same time...In ten years, she imagined, these boys and girls would begin to fall in love with one another; in another five, their own children would be at their feet (322).

Hema’s awareness “everywhere of children” demystifies the foreignness of Italian culture through the familiarity of generations. Through this transcendent vision, she perceives both retentional phases of her life holding memories of Kaushik as well as protentional phases of the school children’s lives projecting into imagined future times. It is this split consciousness that ultimately endows her with a second generation intentionality. Looking backward and forward in time, she finally claims “the existence I had chosen instead of you” (333). She also chooses to exist for Navin and for her child, whose presence inside her body is juxtaposed with Kaushik’s “absence from the world: I felt it as plainly and implacably as the cells that were gathering and shaping themselves inside my body” (333).

While Hema accepts a new orientation towards life, Kaushik experiences his own transcendent vision, mere moments before his death (as a victim of the Indian Ocean Tsunami). In contrast to Hema, who immerses herself in the *passeggiata*, Kaushik resumes his detached distance from generational others. After his breakup with Hema, he returns to professional photography; he resumes his previous stance of metonymic displacement towards other people in general (and other families, in particular). While vacationing in Thailand, he befriends Henrik, a

Swedish tourist, whose family recalls his own past and present kinship relations: Henrik and his wife strike him as “an incongruous couple” (326) resembling his father and stepmother, and their two small children invoke images of Hema and Kaushik, as small children. To assume a safe, aesthetic distance from these painful memories, Kaushik sails out into the ocean and takes a photograph of the family: “the resort retreated from view, the bungalows beneath the palms and the darting forms of Henrik’s children turning to specks” (331). These “specks,” occlusions of his visual perception, also suggest blind-spots in his second generational consciousness. At this turning point in his life, he can no longer imagine children beyond their status as photographic objects. Instead, he exists only for himself and the memories of his mother, whose absence he reencounters, one last time, by swimming with her in the ocean: “for a moment Kaushik saw his mother also swimming, saw her body still vital, a brief blur that passed as effortlessly as the iridescent fish” (331).²²

By juxtaposing both Hema and Kaushik’s final perspectives, we grasp a set of jarring contradictions that pivot on second generational consciousness. In addition to highlighting their divergent dispositions towards family, kinship community, and children, these stark differences also reveal a subtle ironic sensibility at work in Lahiri’s novella. Synecdochic classifications of any generation—first or second—do not fully account for those objects that resist assimilation (White, *Tropics*, 9). The elements excluded from these three stories become clear: Hema’s new family and recovered kinship community is integrated at the expense of Kaushik and the Choudhuri family; Kaushik’s photography bears witness to the final absence of the artist. As a result, we now turn to the final trope of generational consciousness: *ironic objectification*.

²² Pointedly, Lahiri concludes *Hema and Kaushik* with a similar, “vital, brief blur” that calls to mind both the imminent presence of future generations and the inexorable absence of past generations. Kaushik’s final photograph, posted on his weblog, is viewed by Hema: “I saw the last images you had posted...scenes of another coast. Two children playing, a gentle turquoise sea” (332).

**“The Inner Divisions of People and Systems”:
Generational Objects in Don DeLillo’s *Underworld***

While Jhumpa Lahiri considers the crucial role that self-other intentionality plays in integrating (and reintegrating) generations, Don DeLillo turns our attention to the ironic status that objects play within—and across—successive periods of the twentieth century. Having inherited valued items from the previous generation, the contemporary one often casts a more critical and creative eye upon them. In *Underworld* (1997), DeLillo anatomizes these objects as intermediaries between individuals, families, and American culture at large. Generational objects constitute sites through which each generation fashions a timebound sense of identity that, in turn, is contested, reshaped, and recycled by the next generation. During this fourth phase of generational consciousness, individuals and groups express views about the world using alternative, contradictory, and often self-conscious techniques. In the process, a generation becomes aware of the very institutions that shape its unique cultural and aesthetic status.

Along these lines, DeLillo’s literary figures enact a cultural provision and transmission of generational objects over the last five decades of the 20th century. DeLillo’s ironic mode of consciousness spans the Cold War, which divides his figures into two generational sets. More than any of his works, *Underworld* questions the dark legacy of the coldwar (and post-coldwar) era through dozens of voices, each of which interrogates events from a particular generational perspective. From the vantage point of the novel’s present (the 1990s), characters sift through sedimentary layers of the past to arrive at two overlapping incidents in October, 1951: Bobby Thompson’s celebrated homer and the Russian atomic tests in Kazakhstan. Virtually every

individual has a direct or mediated relationship to either “the Ball” or “the Bomb,” a feature that historically overdetermines both events. To quote several characters, who note similar, all-inclusive correlations: “everything is connected” (*U* 289, 408, 465, 825). But DeLillo’s novel (like Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*) also charts a “counterhistory” that both encompasses heterogeneous voices and runs against the grain of official historiographies¹; in this sense, his work might more accurately be considered “less a history than a reevaluation” that *un-*tells the story of the coldwar (Fitzpatrick, 151).

On the surface, a novel that both constructs and deconstructs historical meaning presents a striking paradox—one which highlights both metonymic and synecdochic tactics. Indeed, as Mark Osteen reminds us, even while *Underworld* investigates so many interconnections, “the myriad relationships...between weapons and waste,” it also depicts “the dissolution of the American community into isolated monads of fear and estrangement” (6). For mid-century generations, the coldwar metanarrative, which relied on a relentless U.S.-Soviet arms race, assimilated widespread dread into an “Us-Them” binary structure. However, after the coldwar, reforms in national and foreign policy (relaxation of “containment” strategies, nuclear disarmament, the rise of *glasnost*) fractured the once-monolithic First and Second World orders: “bomb-induced fears” were eventually supplanted by “newer anxieties resulting from the fragmentation of those former geopolitical certainties” (Knight, “Everything’s Connected” 825). Coming of age during this new, uncertain time period, younger generations occupied an ambivalent sociocultural status. They had inherited waste products and weapons systems as *generational objects* on (1) oppositional grounds, rejecting the use and exchange values that past generations ascribed to them; (2) productive grounds, transmogrifying these artifacts into

¹ The many correspondences between Saleem Sinai’s birth and India’s Independence are (at least indirectly) analogous to the associations between Thompson’s baseball and the nuclear bomb.

imaginative cultural and aesthetic objects (which, in turn, could be inherited by future generations). As *both* oppositional *and* productive, these generational objects assume a dialectical position that forges both new contradictions and unexpected syntheses.²

This intergenerational dynamic sheds light on the novel's convoluted narrative structure. Excluding the Prologue and Epilogue sections, *Underworld* traces events backwards in time, from the 1990's to the 1950's. Each of the six sections, framed by one or two decades, highlights experiences of two distinct generational sets of fictional and historical figures. The first, born during the early decades of the 20th century (1895-1920), emerges in a consciousness of coldwar dread and the loss of communal rituals: Sister Edgar, Klara Sax, Albert Bronzini, Marvin Lundy, Manx Martin, as well as various celebrities (J. Edgar Hoover, Toots Shoor, Frank Sinatra, Jackie Gleason). The second set (1935-1950), following the first, experiences countercultural forces that reframe and reshape past generational objects: Nick Shay, Matt Shay, Cotter Martin, and their spouses or peers (Marian, Janet, Brian Glassic, Simeon Biggs). In structural terms, we identify with the second generational set first, then gradually move backwards in time. On the surface, DeLillo arranges chapters in a retro-chronology that invites readers to sift through the sedimentary layers of past decades from a present perspective. Accordingly, many critics have read the novel from theoretical perspectives which excavate traces of historical events through either archaeological or Marxist hermeneutics.³

² In his archetypal study of master tropes, Kenneth Burke equates *irony* (the fourth master trope) with *dialectics* (503).

³ David Noon observes that the original source of collective trauma (the Lacanian "real") can not be disclosed, "only...recovered archaeologically" (84); Salah el Moncef bin Khalifa discerns in the novel "materials of garbage archaeology" which "index a historiography encoded in the quotidian" (153); Kathleen Fitzpatrick claims that in the absent of mythic representations, *Underworld* can not recreate the past, only "excavate and deconstruct the traces a reified history has left in the present" (151); framing decades of the 1950's and 1990's lay bare "the production of history as a commodity" that is marketed through a nostalgia for past decades (see also: Jameson, *Postmodernism; or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*).

While accepting the validity of these readings, I would also claim that *Underworld* exhaustively indexes generational object development *forward* in time. Like Marvin Lundy, the baseball's memorabilia collector, I hope to compile "a record of the object's recent forward motion while simultaneously tracking it backwards to the distant past" (*U* 320). Reconstructing the novel in chronological order accurately charts the unique idiom that each character forges in relation to evocative objects. A narrative that advances in time also approximates America's cultural movement from a coldwar era of ideological antagonism to a post-coldwar period of free market globalization, from social and political atomization to collective identity reformation. Moreover, this forward movement charts an ironic course since the very objects singled out to destroy humanity (weapons and waste) have invigorated new industries and novel art forms. Rather than inspect generational objects as static relics of the past, this chapter will chart their gradual evolution over time, as characters invest them with densely textured meanings. By applying the object-relations theory of Christopher Bollas to *Underworld*, I will examine the ways in which generations objectify their position in historical time and mark their unique contributions to American culture.

I.

Each character in *Underworld* has an intense (and often peculiar) attachment to objects which hold fragments of their past experience: memories, dreams, emotions, and associations. Their scale ranges from the infinitesimal—Matt Shay's atomic particles—to the colossal—Klara Sax's desert art project (comprised of 230 decommissioned B-52's). Their cultural status cuts across an encyclopedic range of disciplinary fields and discourses: baseball, mass media (newspapers, films, TV shows, videos), art (paintings, architecture, photographs), military technology, and waste disposal. All of these objects elicit profound, at times even mystical,

attention from those who encounter them. Waking up at night to hold Bobby Thompson's legendary baseball in his hand, Nick Shay marvels that it goes "back a while, connecting many things" (*U* 131). Along similar lines, Russ Hodges, the radio announcer of the 1951 Giants-Dodgers game, intuitively grasps the ball's singularity that "lives in the spaces of the play by play" as well as its capacity "to recapitulate the history of the whole game every time it is thrown or hit or touched" (*U* 27, 26). Chronicling this same object, Marvin Lundy interviews past owners and notices that their countless testimonials serve as "the people's medium of release," exalting them into "something larger" (320). The baseball's wide-ranging, "epic character" allows Marvin to fuse "the last link [to] the first link...the connection to the Polo Grounds itself" (318). When he finds Charles Wainwright's son ("Chuckie"), the most recent person to own the ball, Marvin also discovers the final heir in an advancing narrative of succession. He closes the loop—or so it would seem.⁴ Likewise, DeLillo invites his readers to connect first and last links between multiple "holders" of objects. Just as Thompson's baseball conflates categories of "first" and "last," Alpha and Omega, *Underworld's* myriad objects are both locatable in particular moments in time and transcendent above their historicized markers.

"In the loop," Tom Leclair reminds us, "epilogue can be prologue" (*Don DeLillo and the Systems Novel* 1). He shrewdly applies "systems theory" to DeLillo's earlier novels, which operate

as metasystems, even as paradigms, consistent ways of apprehending contemporary life as a whole...to imitate living systems, to be both spatial paradigm and temporal process, to give the medium of the text the illusion of reciprocal simultaneity, growth to complexity, an ecosystemic plenitude. One sees a whole, but listens to process (18).

With its overarching structure, recursive connections, and looping patterns, *Underworld* mirrors the intricate "living systems" of generations. As contemporaneous collectives, generations

⁴ Marvin never includes the true "first" owner of the ball—Cotter Martin—or his father, Manx, who steals the ball and then pawns it. I'll consider this marginalized, imbedded narrative later in the chapter.

occupy a shared space (“spatial paradigm”) and develop in a shared time (“temporal process”) that is reciprocated, through dialogue, with past and future generations. Despite their manifold differences along these very lines⁵, both generational sets—first and last—contribute to a conceptually comprehensive novel. Here, I would like to stress the point that *Underworld* does not present so much a synecdochic whole narrative as an ironic disjunction between the contrasting dispositions of prior (“first”) and contemporary (“last”) generations.

Relying on an interaction between individuals and social networks, generational living systems negotiate between internal psychic experience and the external environment. In *Being A Character*, Chris Bollas maps out a similar dynamic between individuals, who engage with “evocative objects” on personal levels, and cultures, which encounter “generational objects” on wide-reaching, sociological terms. Incorporating concepts from psychoanalysis, objects-relations theory, and his own life, Bollas seeks a “philosophy of the object’s integrity” (4). On structural terms, he observes that objects *hold* us, promoting an engagement with our inner experiences and an “environment which plays upon the self” (4). In this sense, “we are intermediaries, engaged in an interplay between our idiom and its subjective objects” (21). Consequently, the self is not a phenomenologically integrated “I,” but diffused through “a dense condensation of instinctual urges, somatic states, body positions, proprioceptive organizings, [and] images” (29). Rather than elicit “a singular memory,” these diverse, disseminated features present “an inner psychic constellation laden with images, feelings, and bodily acuties” (3). Particular objects, then, constitute more than merely flat screens onto which we project our latent desires and fantasies; they become “evocative objects” that, once used, produce “a play of inner states” in each individual among six distinct orders: *sensational, structural, symbolic, conceptual, mnemonic,*

⁵ Generations, by their very nature, begin and end in separate spaces and incongruous times.

and *projective* (36). To define and illustrate each of these orders, I will cite an episode in *Underworld* during which Nick Shay holds Thompson's baseball:

I had the baseball in my hand. Usually I kept the baseball on the bookshelves, wedged in a corner... But now I had it in my hand. You have to know the feel of a baseball in your hand, going back a while, connecting many things, before you can understand why a man would sit in a chair at four in the morning holding such an object, clutching it—how it fits the palm so reassuringly, the corked center making it buoyant in the hand, and the rough spots on the old ball, the marked skin, how an idle thumb likes to worry the scuffed horsehide. You squeeze a baseball. You kind of juice it or milk it... There's an equilibrium, an agreeable animal tension between the hard leather object and the sort of clawed hand, veins stretching with the effort... The ball was a deep sepia, veneered with dirt and turf and generational sweat... stained by natural processes and by the lives behind it, weather-spattered and characterized as a seafront house. And it was smudged green... where it had struck a pillar according to the history that came with it (*U* 131).

First, the evocative object of the baseball holds meaning for Nick on a *sensational* level.

Through his senses, he grasps the textured materiality of the ball: its buoyant heft, "rough spots," "marked skin," and "scuffed horsehide." He insistently mentions holding and "clutching it" in his hand, using his fingers and thumb to measure the unique "animal tension" and "equilibrium" that the baseball provides between subject (hand) and object (ball). As a *structural* object, the ball possesses an "atomic specificity" which "affects us in a manner true to its character" (Bollas 35): each spot of dirt, turf, sweat, and green paint testifies to its characteristic integrity. It is distinctly Thompson's Ball, "the actual object," as Brian Glassic calls it earlier in the novel (*U* 96). On a *conceptual* level, the ball evokes certain ideas, including (of course) the game of baseball as well as associations of recreational and athletic activities. Moreover, the ball fits into Lacan's *symbolic* order, in which all object-names are linked to extensive chains of signifiers. Thompson's "shot heard round the world," Marvin Lundy reminds us, signifies *both* the game of baseball and atomic tests in Russia: "They sensed there was a connection between this game and some staggering event that might take place on the other side of the world"; to emphasize these symbolic parallels, Marvin even remarks that "they make the radioactive core the exact same

size as a baseball””(U 172).⁶ As a *mnemic* object, the ball stores aspects of self-experience, the individual’s “self state stored in an object present at the time” which can be reactivated later (Bollas 35). Nick’s *first* memory of the event, albeit a mediated one, occurs while he sits on a rooftop, listening to the pennant game on the radio. He looks back regretfully, recalling that he immediately rushed indoors, then “closed the door and died” (U 95). For him, the baseball stores the exact moment when he became an initiate into the world of death and abandonment, ““the mystery of bad luck, the mystery of loss”” (97). Holding the ball allows Nick to ““commemorate failure. *To have the moment in my hand* when Branca turned and watched the ball go into the stands—from him to me”” (97) [emphasis mine]. In addition, the mnemic object recapitulates the loss of his father, whose traumatic disappearance creates a paternal void that he tries to fill with surrogate, criminal father figures, including that of his own murder victim, George Manza. Nick’s family intensifies this void by repeatedly disavowing his father’s departure through the guise of a commonplace tale: ““he went out to get a pack of cigarettes and never came back. This is a thing you used to hear about disappearing men. It’s the final family mystery”” (87). Finally, the baseball is *projective*, a dynamic object that allows Nick to “stretch” the self in the ephemeral context of “the here and now” (Bollas 35). He emphasizes the immanent associations of the ball: “*now* I had it in my hand” at the singular moment when he sits “in a chair at four in the morning.” As a projective object, it also traces a convoluted history back to its inception as a mnemic object; in fact, the baseball requires familiarity with past associations, with knowing “the feel of a baseball in your hand, going back a while, connecting many things, before you can understand why a man would sit in a chair at four in the morning” holding it.

⁶ For an excellent analysis of symbolic connections between baseball and atomic energy, see: Osteen, *American Magic and Dread*, 219-222.

All of these evocative registers—sensory, structural, conceptual, symbolic, mnemonic, and projective—contribute to Nick’s attachment to the ball. More significantly, in the above excerpt, the interplay of registers suggests ironic dimensions that any one (in isolation from the other five) would rule out. Nick assembles his thoughts and emotions into a meaningful idiom that articulates multiple, “sequential self states arising from the dialectical meetings between [his] self and the object world” (Bollas 29). These self-states, in turn, are presented to an imaginary other, the “I,” who can objectify each of them in relation to one another. Bollas calls this elaborate process *lifting*: “as each encounter [with objects] solicits us, lifts us up from our unconscious nuclearity, it shows an aspect of the self to the I and thus reveals some feature of our sensibility” (29). But it is also evident that Nick addresses himself in the first person in order to transfer object-cathexis from an “I” (“I had the baseball in my hand”) to a “you” (“you have to know the feel of a baseball in your hand”). This second person appears to fill the generational space left vacant by his father. By addressing an absent paternal figure in place of the self, Nick also imagines a dialogue with previous generations: “the ball was a deep sepia veneered with dirt and turf and generational sweat...stained by natural processes and the lives behind it.” As an evocative object, the ball has recorded, stored, and conveyed traces of the myriad “lives behind it.” Moreover, it is a bearer of forty years of personal and collective “history that came with it,” a generational object that assimilates and transcends Nick’s immediate experience of the ball.

Building on his theory of the evocative object, Chris Bollas devotes an entire chapter of *Being A Character* to a careful analysis of *generational* objects. In “Generational Consciousness,” he identifies, catalogs, and delineates distinct psychological and cultural characteristics of 20th century American generations. Instead of adopting a conventional definition of a generation (the interval between the birth of parents and their children), Bollas

examines two distinct features: (1) the successive life phases of generational members and (2) the bracketing of each generation within a ten-year span (252). Classifying our life phases, he lists seven stages in generational evolution⁷:

1. Childhood: the nascent generation inherits objects from the parental generation; these objects, in turn, will typically “reflect the adults’ generational preoccupation in their time” and convey “a type of unconscious transmission of collective identity.”
2. Peer culture: as children experience historical crises, they begin to refashion “these episodes and persons into collectively shared events...the earliest generational objects.”
3. Adolescence: as teenagers, they come to terms with their collective identity in opposition to the parental generation.
4. The twenties: young adults become immersed in “generational narcissism,” re-crafting “culture into the generation’s image.”
5. The thirties: they tentatively grasp that their once-dominant position in generational culture will soon be occupied by the emergence of the *next* generation.
6. The forties and fifties: in middle-age, they realize that their generational objects are “timebound,” gradually evolving into historical objects; generational members begin to move “from deep participatory subjectivity (the simple self) to the objectified.”
7. The sixties and seventies: the generation grasps their “passing from lived experience” into “history’s time” as they are transformed into a historical object that they will leave behind (271-272).

While experiencing a specific life phase, each generational member also occupies a specific cultural decade (the 1950’s, 1960’s, etc.) that achieves an objectified status decades later. For instance, those born in the 1940’s initially inherited their parents’ generational objects during childhood, then contested—or outright denied—their value during adolescence (in the 1950’s), and later forged new objects reflective of their tastes in their twenties (in the 1960’s). But it was only from the vantage point of the 1980’s that this generational set could grasp the 1960’s—their privileged time of “participatory subjectivity”—as a collage of fragments culled from music, film, politics, and history (268).

Each generation overlaps preceding and succeeding generations; since there is no precisely set time pattern of generational cycles, “there is always an intervening generation, born

⁷ While citing Bollas’ seven stages, I’ve also categorized them more concisely (for the sake of clarity).

of different parents, and bearing a different generational culture from the immediately preceding one” (253). Consequently, every generation, by no means homogenous or monolithic, encompasses diverse, conflicting social and political values. To coalesce divergent value systems, each one constructs a collective, unified identity either productively or oppositionally in relation to past and future generations. On productive lines, generations may borrow extensively from their predecessors, passing on their objects in a continuous line (albeit modified according to the times). Since productive identity formation attends few historical crises, it typically remains invisible as a sociological phenomenon.⁸ On oppositional terms, one generation may challenge, contest, or subvert the other’s objects. Bollas turns to the oft-cited Lost Generation to illustrate:

The lost generation of 1914-1919, exterminated by the relentless thoughtlessness of an older generation...drastically altered Western consciousness...If the Great War transformed the consciousness of a generation within two years (from 1914 to 1916) and if the ‘young men like flowers are cut and withered on a stem,’ something of that blind innocence that saw the battlefield as a football pitch is due to their impatience with the taciturn world of *fin de siècle* Europe (248-249).

Despite incommensurate, plurivocal points-of-view, the Lost Generation forged a shared identity in reaction against “the relentless thoughtlessness” of a bellicose parental generation that had betrayed them. Notably, it is the older generation that, after rejecting their Victorian forebears’ effete rationalism, embraced the game-like, “insensate marches” of World War I (249). The stakes in this cross-generational conflict were exceedingly high; the war eliminated most of the male adults coming of age between 1914-1919, effectively eradicating an entire generation. Noting a remotely similar betrayal of responsibility, Bollas cites “collective pathology of

⁸ For example, in terms of generational identify formation, there was a smooth transition between the 1960’s (a volatile decade) and the 1970’s (a comparatively quiescent decade).

consciousness” at work in Hitler’s Germany, un-mediated by an intergenerational system of checks and balances (266).⁹

Whether oppositional or productive, DeLillo’s generations are collectively part of a living system in which his characters negotiate their sense of identity at the intersection between life phases and cultural decades, the present and the past, lived experience and history’s time. Like Thompson’s baseball (in the excerpt above), each of their objects are “veneered...with generational sweat,” stained, smudged, and marked “according to the history that came with it.” Growing up and growing old during the mid-to-late 20th century, these generations encounter cultural history characterized by two defining, related features: war and affluence. The historian Niall Ferguson aptly observes that our past century’s democratic civil institutions have been buttressed by concentrated, total warfare: “just as it was an earlier revolution in warfare that had transformed the early modern state, it may well have been total war that made the welfare state, creating that capacity for planning, direction, and regulation” (*The War of the World* xxxix). As a consequence, Western democracies have witnessed unrivalled, staggering economic growth as well as improvements in technology and medicine (which, in turn, have led to increased life expectancy) (xxxv).¹⁰ At the same time, Americans witnessed the decline of their imperial status in the world—what Ferguson calls “the descent of the West”—over a forty-five year period inaugurated at the end of the Second World War (xli).

While *Underworld*’s generations share an acute awareness of war, affluence, and decline, they also grasp these historical conditions on individual terms. In order to streamline the process

⁹ Bolas goes on to pose a significant question: “is there a structural responsibility to the generational triangle? What if the triangle collapses implausibly, erasing the function of generational difference, where one generation serves to check and balance other generations, during times of social distress?” (266) On a larger scale, Bolas’ question resonates with my theory of the triadic structure of generational consciousness (in chapter 3).

¹⁰ Ferguson observes that, during the early modern era (1500-1870), the average national Gross Domestic Product increased fifty percent; in stark contrast, during the late modern era (1870-1998), G.D.P. rose 650 percent (xxxv).

of sifting through multiple, overlapping generations in DeLillo's novel, I have divided both generational sets (first and second) into *pairs* of characters who stand in mutual, ironic distance from each other. Although few of these characters communicate directly (or even know each other), each pair constructs an analogous object-idiom pieced together from generational stages and historical decades. This peculiar sensibility, articulated through a constellation of generational objects, is not so much a value system as a "dynamic set of idiomatic dispositions that come into being through problematic encounters with the object world" (Bollas 30). We might even consider each pairing an "I-You" dialogue, in which one character's idiom is dialectically contrasted by another's, achieving (at best) a provisional synthesis of images, emotional states, and associations. To isolate and locate these dialogues, I will apply a heuristic of *ironic tropes*, comprised of concepts, ideas, or figures central to constructing and deconstructing generational objects:

- First generational set:
 - Russ Hodges—Jackie Gleason: *mass media* (radio and television)
 - Sister Edgar—J. Edgar Hoover: *contamination* (church and state)
 - Marvin Lundy—Klara Sax: *memorabilia and art*
- Second generational set:
 - Cotter Martin—Manx Martin: *marginality*
 - Matt Shay—Nick Shay: *weapons systems and waste disposal*

These ironic tropes highlight particular aspects of generational identity formation. They also collate objects that extend from personal to collective experience and reveal how each generation constructs a shared cultural consciousness out of both the life phases and the decades that they inhabit. DeLillo's generations can conceive—but not represent—this consciousness in any synecdochic, totalizing event; instead, "the shot heard round the world," the source of multiple narratives surrounding the Ball and the Bomb, can not be recovered from the past, but only re-signified through objects in the present.

II

Perhaps two of the most memorable celebrities among the first generational set are Russ Hodges and Jackie Gleason. In the opening *Prologue: the Triumph of Death*, Hodges, WMCA's radio broadcaster who translates events of the 1951 pennant game into a play-by-play narrative for his audience. Jackie Gleason, star of the eponymous sitcom "The Honeymooners," fashions himself into a lewd, visually arresting spectacle. Hodges and Gleason, as spokesman and performer of mass media (respectively) bear a direct relation to the thousands of fans and spectators surrounding them. Ironic differences coalesce around this pair. While the former exists as a disembodied voice projected *outside* of the assembled masses, the latter thrives *within* the crowd as an emerging television icon. Outside or inside, both men use sounds and images to consolidate the inchoate multitudes into a collective imaginary or symbolic experience of 1950's American culture.

Reflecting the face of the aggregate through mass media, these two characters rely on what Jeffrey T. Schnapp calls the "emblematic" and "oceanic" practices of crowd control. While the first practice projects the disparate social body onto a single entity, "emphasizing the moment of transcendence when the one emerges out of the many," the second foregrounds a leader who harnesses the power of the crowd (or vice versa), "emphasizing the more volatile moment of immanence" (*Crowds*, 12). Indeed, both figures of the crowd predominate in DeLillo's depictions of the game. As the transcendent "voice of the Giants," Russ Hodges aligns himself with emblematic attributes of the crowd. Immersed in an assembled fan-base, Jackie Gleason captures its erratic, improvisatory rhythms. Notably, both Hodges and Gleason complicate the very modes of mass media representation that they inhabit; while the former reveals a rich inner history (both personal and familial), the latter exists as a wholly externalized persona.

Most overtly, there are *literal* emblems at work in the Prologue. After Branca, the Dodger's pitcher, walks up to the mound, Giants fans shower the field with discarded consumer goods, "resplendent products" that are leveled to one exchange value: "*it is all part of the same thing*. Rubens and Titian and Playtex and Motorola...these are the venerated emblems of the burgeoning economy" (U 39) [italics mine]. This spectacle of crowd-waste is reinforced by the sounds of frenzied fans, who respond to the haphazard rhythms of the game.

"When you deal with crowds," Russ Hodges notes, "nothing's predictable" (15). At the same time, he also "wants to believe that they are still assembled in some recognizable manner, the kindred unit at the radio, old lines and ties and propinquities" (36). In this sense, Russ mediates between the unpredictability of a mass audience and the narrative construction of the game. Through regulated pulses of sound, fans are assimilated into the official play-by-play: "rhythmic applause...spread[s] densely through the stands. This is how the crowd enters the game" (36). These incantatory repetitions are so unique to the context of baseball that they constitute "the claim of the ego that separates the crowd from other entities, from political rallies or prison riots—everything outside the walls" (37). Outside of the stadium, legions of fans listen to Russ' voice which assimilates them into the "old lines and ties" of his broadcast. They are "connected by the pulsing voice on the radio, joined to the word of mouth that passes on the street," an emblematic, unified identity emerging out of scattered multitudes (U 32). Russ' oral narrative achieves a technological transcendence the moment that a Brooklyn listener attaches a tape recorder to his radio. Capable of being repeated later in time, his voice closes the loop between generational subject-positions: "it is like hearing the game twice, it is like being young and old, and this will turn out to be the only known recording of Russ' famous account of the final moments of the game" (32). Russ' broadcast conveys "that bolt of noise and joy when the ball

went in” from one generation to the next (59). It allows grandparents, parents, and children to forge a dialogue across time and place; to connect early memories and subsequent recollections of the event: “fans at the Polo Grounds today will be able to tell their grandchildren—they’ll be the gassy old men leaning into the next century and trying to convince anyone willing to listen... that they were here when it happened” (59-60).

For Russ, popular sports allow him to replay his own recent and distant memories and associations. Each present play-by-play is also framed recessively in time, “located in some version of the past[.]” (15). While broadcasting the Giants-Dodgers game, he thinks back to 1919, when his father took him to see the Dempsey-Willard boxing match in Toledo. Pointedly, Russ recalls this match as an explicit generational object (between father and son) that has been forged on the fault line between childhood and adolescence.¹¹ Since Russ no longer has access to primal experiences of Dempsey’s fight, he re-visits it through a form of mass media: “when you see a thing like that, a thing that becomes a newsreel, you begin to feel that you are a carrier of some solemn scrap of history” (16). Russ’s memory of the actual match is “screened” through the spectacle of documentary footage, an emblematic record of the event that can be preserved over time.

Like the newsreel, the live recording mediates events through a mode of *cinema verité* realism. Just as his father inaugurated him into the mass spectacle of boxing, Russ initiates his faithful listeners into a collective experience of baseball. By relating and recording the Giants-Dodgers game, he more than merely carries “some solemn scrap of history,” he also *transmits* it to future generations as an evocative object. For past, present, and future fans, “The Shot Heard Round The World” holds sensational qualities: the field’s “strokes of color all around...green

¹¹ Bollas reminds us that it is at this crucial juncture that a child transitions from a state of adopting his parents’ objects into a state of fashioning his own objects.

grandstand and tawny base paths” (15). Enacted in an arena that dates to the early 20th century, the game also retains a structural unity of place; the Polo Grounds recalls “things and times before the century went to war”(15). As if unmarred by cataclysmic World Wars and domestic crises, the Polo Grounds objectify American History as a transcendent, nostalgic object. Russ’ voice emblemizes not only events of the game but also a collective sense of place.

There are similar, communal connections at work in DeLillo’s narrative discourse, which binds listeners of “the game and its extensions” (32). While the narrator ranges between multiple perspectives, varying direct and indirect discourse, he also punctuates the crowd’s sounds as a living organism with *oceanic* attributes: “the constant noise, the breath and hum” (19); “a chambered voice rolling through the hollows in the underbelly of the stadium” (24). This collective ebb and flow is channeled through Jackie Gleason, who appears as a chronic “man of the crowd,” immersed so deeply in the assembled masses that he does not manifest any distinct characteristics of his own.

As a stand-up comedian, nightclub host, and minor film star, Gleason thrives on the attention of his audience. Since he fails to attend a rehearsal downtown for “The Honeymooners” (which debuts two days later), he fashions an on-the-spot “live studio audience” at the game. Comically, DeLillo depicts him accompanying three other celebrities who remain aloof from the surrounding crowd: J. Edgar Hoover, Frank Sinatra, and Toots Shor. In stark contrast to Sinatra, who is “used to ritual distances to encounter people in circumstances laid out ahead of time,” Gleason improvises a wide array of stock roles. A self-styled public spectacle, he stands with two cups of beer at his feet and a scrunched hot dog in one hand, “talking to six people at once...season box holders, old-line fans with their spindly wives” (23). To their delight, he promptly spits out “lines of dialogue from the show”; he imitates a drunk, makes fun of one

man's "ragmop toupee," and mocks the elbow patches on another's tweed jacket (24). Jackie not only responds to his fans' demands to be entertained and offended, but he also holds up an imaginary mirror to them. As a popular icon, he cues—and is cued by—the prompts of his fan base. Aptly, DeLillo dissects his clownish routine into a visual montage that blurs the boundary between audience and performance: "they watch Gleason, they look at Sinatra for his reaction to Gleason, they watch the game, they listen to Jackie do running lines from his TV show"(23).

In a dramatic way, Gleason embodies seminal sociological crowd types that emphasize primitivism and loss of control (Le Bon, Freud, Canetti). But to the extent that he is engrossed into the body politic, Gleason is also flattened into a de-historicized persona, an image without substance. Later in the novel, he endures as his alter ego, Ralph Kramden, who offers a nostalgic refuge for his generational contemporaries. For them, both Kramden and "The Honeymooners" offer a generational object that accrues meaning over subsequent life phases and decades. Viewers like Rosemary Shay "grow old" with Kramden, savoring his familiar routines, jokes, and gestures as time-honored rituals. Watching reruns of the show, Rosemary feels "close to what she knew in an apparent rather than actual way" through the TV screen, "flat and gray and staticky with years, not unlike memories she carried to her sleep" (103). Like many characters in *Underworld*, she seeks out a communal connection with "the integrated company of the box" (110). TV, like the radio broadcast of Russ Hodge's voice, witnesses "the force of a single human voice coming out of a box" that is comfortably "surrounded by the crowd noise" (132). Rosemary's generation passes on their attachment to television to their children, who likewise pass it on to *their* children—all of whom become fixated by images resonating with the *zeitgeist*. Transfixed by endlessly re-played footage of the Texas Highway Killer, Rosemary's son, Matt, listens and searches for a "human utterance" to emerge out of the "itemized data" (217).

Similarly, Matt's nephew, Jeff, uses computer programs to discover some hint of the Texas Highway Killer's identity.

Through the image of Jackie Gleason, immersed in various crowds (both immediate and virtual), and the sound of Russ Hodges, transcendent above them, mass media forms consolidate heterogeneous viewers and listeners into a single audience. Television and radio mold generations into an objectified space and time in which audiences share a pleasure-in-recognition of familiar, public rituals, both traditional (baseball) and contemporary (television). Gleason and Hodges carry on a dialogue between sound and image, voice and spectacle that reinforces—and lays bare—the limits of mass media representation.

While both of these media icons maintain celebrity status throughout their lives, J. Edgar Hoover and Sister Edgar achieve, at best, notorious reputations. By the time of their appearances in the novel, they have been displaced from positions of cultural prominence and reassert authority by instilling fear and anxiety in members of younger generations. As empowered members of Church and State institutions, both seek to restore their own sense of subjectivity by objectifying the “other,” existing within official boundaries, as an external threat to the body politic. For both “Edgars,” crowds are pathogenic organisms that must be suppressed by force. Through both, contamination operates as an ironic trope that highlights a pathological displacement of internal anxieties (over hygiene) onto externalized objects (others).

J. Edgar Hoover's historical stature—as head of the F.B.I.—borders on legend. Serving as Director for thirty-seven years under six presidents, Hoover expanded the Bureau's law enforcement capacity in order to monitor and investigate potential political dissidents. In the *Prologue*, Hoover fits this profile perfectly, accompanying Gleason, Sinatra, and Shoor, and scrutinizing them—along with everyone in the crowd—for suspicious details. On the surface, he

“seems to be doing just fine,” smiling at their “rude banter”; but secretly, he plays the role of their “dearly devoted friend provided their hidden lives are in his private files, all the rumors collected and indexed, the shadow facts made real” (17). By classifying and cataloging others, Hoover constructs elaborate narratives in ostensible defense of America’s national interests. Hoover’s rationale for doing so is simple, if pathological: first, he categorizes apparent insurgents as viral threats to national security; second, he keeps them in check through the imminent use of destructive force. This paranoid fixation on mass culture as a seething cauldron of infection is rooted in his fear of bodily contamination:

[I]t is the unseeable life forms that dismay Edgar most...he wants to hurry to a lavatory, a zinc-lined room with a bar of untouched oval soap, a torrent of hot water and a swansdown towel that has never been used by anyone else. But of course there is nothing of the kind nearby. Just more germs, an all-pervading medium of pathogens, microbes, floating colonies of spirochetes that fuse and separate and elongate and spiral and engulf, whole trainloads of matter that people cough forth, rudimentary and deadly (19).

As an evocative object, the crowd’s infectious matter holds Hoover more than he holds it. Germs constitute “an all-pervading medium”—quite literally, the air that he breathes. In “floating colonies of spirochetes” surrounding him, he describes the biological language of generations; germs fuse into cultures, then separate, spread, re-fuse, and produce more cultures.

Hoover’s germaphobia is also cast in terms of moral-spiritual values. A staunch Presbyterian, he alludes to the seven deadly sins as a frame of reference that makes the crowd’s unbridled consumerism intelligible. This ideological framework becomes clear when a *Life* magazine article, displaying Brueghel’s *The Triumph of Death*, falls into his hands. Hoover marvels at the “landscape of visionary havoc and ruin” that displays “skeleton armies on the march” and “legions of the dead” who prey upon human beings (41). Beyond macabre fascination with death, he relishes admonitory images of “the dead fall[ing] upon the living...the living are sinners...the dead have come to empty out the wine gourds. He sees gluttony, lust and

greed” (50). It is clear that, in Hoover’s moral economy, dead generations are authorized to spread the message of “Terror universal” (50) to living generations.

While he assumes official state power as the mantle of legitimacy, Hoover ultimately rationalizes authority of *his* generation—the 1930’s generation—over younger generations. Later in the novel, he tells Clyde Tolson (his aide and close companion) that “I liked the thirties...I don’t like the sixties. No, not at all” (559). The 1930’s were Hoover’s times, the period during which he became Director of the F.B.I. (1935) and began to target bootleggers and mob men. During this decade, he also became aware of the next generation’s incremental encroachment into his generational space. The 1930’s, then, constitute the mold for Hoover’s professional, decadal, and periodic identity formation.¹² This accounts for his uncharacteristic nostalgia for a bygone time. Recalling the thirties, Hoover and his partner reminisce over posing in front of newspaper photographers, holding tommyguns like “Edgar and Clyde” (an overt, homoerotic allusion to “Bonnie and Clyde”) (559). It is revealing that J. Edgar Hoover recalls the 1930’s during the early 1960’s. From this perspective, he has already been displaced by at least three successive generations (in the forties, fifties, and sixties); ageing along with the passing of each decade, he has gradually moved from lived experience into history’s time. As the quote above illustrates, Hoover has fashioned Clyde and himself into historical objects that connote “1930’s-ness.” Furthermore, these objects have been overdetermined by mass media representation; like their notorious, criminal prototypes, “Edgar and Clyde” have been immortalized in the annals of sensationalistic newspapers.¹³

Hoover’s resentment toward younger generations reaches its culmination in the 1960’s. During this decade, the Bureau maintained a hard-line, retrograde position in the face of new

¹² Born in 1895, Hoover reached the life-phase (period) of his mid-thirties in the 1930’s.

¹³ Although this section of the novel predates the film *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) by four years, DeLillo likely plays off of his readers’ associations of this film with the 1960’s.

configurations of civic and political protest. Across an irreconcilable generation gap, Thirties culture confronted Sixties *youth* culture. Galvanized by the civil rights movement, the youth movement coalesced into various reformist, student-led organizations (CORE, SDS, SNCC). The sociologist (and founder of SDS) Todd Gitlin observes that

The American youth upheaval...was partly a product of social structure---there had to be a critical mass of students, and enough economic fat to cushion them—but more, the upsurge was *made* from the living elements of a unique, unrepeatable history, under the spreading wings of the *zeitgeist* (*The Sixties* 4).

While noting that the Sixties zeitgeist was by no means monolithic, Gitlin also claims that the student movement was inseparable from the course of “its historical moment”; out of these “social tensions came a tumult of movements aiming to remake virtually every social arrangement America had settled into after World War II” (5).

In stark opposition, Hoover’s Bureau sought to *unmake* social reforms of the younger generation. In the early days of the civil rights movement, the F.B.I. deliberately worked with “the entire local white-supremacist establishment” at the expense of organizers and activists.¹⁴ When “the national liberal conscience was galvanized” by thousands of demonstrators in Birmingham and the March on Washington, the Justice Department had no choice but to intervene on their behalf (144). But Federal investigators held fast to outmoded tactics of surveillance, disinformation, and crackdowns. By decade’s end, F.B.I. agents targeted members of the New Left, initiating a so-called counterinsurgency program (COINTELPRO) to infiltrate the American Communist Party (413-414).

Confronting mass movements of youth culture (in various guises), Hoover ignores their demands and resorts to the ultimate threat: “the dead fall upon the living” (*U* 50). It is the dead

¹⁴Gitlin points out that “when Hoover opened his Mississippi office, he conferred with the governor, the mayor, the head of the state highway patrol, the local police chief,” only to cede protection of civil rights workers to local authorities (141-142).

generations, which insist on the state's exclusive hold on nuclear weapons, that "fall upon" the living generations, which uphold progressive ideals of reform. Throughout *Underworld*, J. Edgar Hoover demonstrates an obsessive fixation on the Bomb as an antiseptic to the ever-present germ of civic upheaval and foreign aggression. At the pennant game, he learns (from the same *Life* magazine article) that the Soviet Union has conducted atomic tests in Kazakhstan: "they have exploded a bomb in plain, unpretending language...Edgar fixes today's date in his mind. October 3, 1951. He registers the date. He stamps the date" (23). Hoover immediately recalls America's nuclear confrontation with Japan in the past decade: "Pearl Harbor, just under ten years ago...the news seemed to shimmer in the air, everything in a photoflash, plain objects hot and charged...the sun's own heat that swallows cities" (24). A decade later, Hoover experiences a flash-back of the game, couched in atomic metaphors: "maybe the deep and fleeting light was making him nostalgic, or the noise perhaps, the muted clamor of taxi horns below, a sound at this protected distance...to carry a pitch of celebration" (556). For Hoover, the Bomb represents a generational object that evokes multiple associations of power, authority, and purgation. In the face of "secret groups of insurgents," from within and without American borders, it allows power to become identified with Federal government: "the passionate task of the State was to hold on, stiffening its grip and presenting its claim to the most destructive power imaginable" (563).

Sister Alma Edgar, "a cold war nun" (245), shares both Hoover's paranoid fixation on Communist infiltration and fear of contact with infectious viruses. Like her namesake, she has spent a lifetime using brute force to terrorize members of younger generations. Schoolchildren hapless enough to be enrolled in her classes recall her piercing, "bluesteel eyes—many a boy and girl of old saw those peepers in their dreams" (237). Fear of hell has been her most memorable weapon against wayward students. Aptly, her own features recall the nightmarish landscape of

Brueghel's *Triumph of Death*; her "blade face and bony hands" resemble "a detail lifted from a painting of some 16th century master" (237). She exhibits a medieval obsession with hell that rivals the Director's rapturous visions. Looking back on a Capuchin church she visited in Rome, she relishes depictions of the infernal dead "who will come out of the earth to lash and cudgel the living" (249).

Every day, accompanied by Sister Gracie, she visits The Wall, a barricaded, graffiti-sprayed city-within-a-city where droves of homeless men, women, and children reside; some are members of "nuclear families," others "junkies...foragers and gatherers, can redeemers," doxies, and "shouters of the Spirit" (242). On The Wall, the graffiti artist Ismael Muñoz has painted angels to represent deceased children, victims of urban violence. Initially, Edgar recoils from Muñoz, since she believes that he has contracted AIDS—and thus poses a viral threat to her. To protect herself from his (and others') pathogens, she washes her hands incessantly and wears latex gloves. Compulsively, she believes that even cleaning products hide germs, which "have personalities. Different objects harbor threats of various insidious types" (238). The AIDS virus, in particular, harbors a threat so sinister that its letters strike her as Communist-inspired "germ warfare," spread by KGB "networks of paid agents" (243).

However, Sister Edgar also works through her self-isolating phobias, since they are conditioned by secular institutions that compromise her faith:

At the same time Edgar force-fitted the gloves onto her hands and felt the ambivalence, the conflict. Safe, yes, scientifically shielded from organic menace. But also sinfully complicit with some process she only half understood, the force in the world, the array of systems that displaces religious faith with paranoia...safe, yes, but maybe a little confused (241).

She questions the popular belief in various systems, which have become frail surrogates for God. These afford her no definitive control (scientific or otherwise) over imminent threats of sickness and death. Regimes of power-knowledge offer, at best, an illusory refuge from mortality. Her

mundane rituals—rising at dawn, praying, wearing “old things with the arcane names, the wimple, cincture and guimpe” (238)—indicate a sacramental devotion to matters of life and death. Even her encounter with an addict’s discarded needle becomes a *memento mori*: “if you know you’re worth nothing, only a gamble with death can gratify your vanity” (242).

John A. McClure notes that DeLillo’s fiction has featured similar characters who seek “apophatic or sacramental modes of being” in counterpoint to “sponsoring projects of mastery” (“DeLillo and Mystery,” 167). In *Underworld*, Sister Edgar gradually moves from a state of epistemological mastery (over pathogens) to a state of existential surrender (to her community). Over time, she begins to recognize that official Church observances have appropriated systemic methods of control. For her, even prayer has been reduced to “a practical strategy, the gaining of temporal advantage in the capital markets of Sin and Redemption” (237). Her daily prayers are couched in the idiom of modern markets, contemporary indulgences that do not remedy—and may even exacerbate—the suffering of those whom she is obligated to serve. She discovers that institutional systems have co-opted her sincere faith, substituting it with “the faith of suspicion and unreality. The faith that replaces God with radioactivity...the all-knowing systems that shape them, the endless fitted links” (251). Edgar calls this false faith “infinite regression” (251), since it relies on various kinds of fear (suspicion, paranoia, dread, germaphobia) that endlessly reach backward into unknowable origins.

It is through her ethical responsibility for social outcasts—the poor, drug addicts, AIDS victims, prostitutes, and most importantly, *children*—that Sister Edgar dispels her fear. Although she grudgingly accepts this responsibility late in life, Edgar experiences a liberating communion with those entrusted to her care. While her chronic fear of contamination has “condemned her to

a self-isolation and emotional aridity” (McClure 174) from the generations she has vowed to protect, she eventually reclaims social and spiritual ties through mystery.¹⁵

The missing twelve year-old girl, Esmeralda Lopez, becomes the catalyst for Sister Edgar’s mysterious change. At night, she lays awake, disturbed over the existence of “something out there in the Wall, a muddled shuffling danger that waited for the girl” (*U* 251). She begins to pray for Esmeralda *in place of herself*. This re-orientation, from self to other, is completed the moment that Edgar discovers that Esmeralda has been raped and murdered. When she and Gracie see the angel that Ismael Muñoz has painted in the girl’s memory, Sister Edgar “feels weak and lost. The great Terror gone...All terror is local now” (816). The “great Terror” of institutional systems of church and state has been supplanted by the immediate terror that Esmeralda’s death poses to their community. To cope with her loss, local crowds gather at The Wall and share stories about “the same uncanny occurrence” (818) they have witnessed there: an apparent vision of Esmeralda’s face, appearing on a billboard ad for Minute Maid. When Sister Gracie disparages this collective act as ““something for poor people to confront and judge,”” Edgar chastises her for ““patronizing the people you love”” (819). Instead of criticizing the crowd, she immerses herself within it; by doing so, she surrenders herself to the “single consciousness” of a communal, evocative object: “a face appears above the misty lake and it belongs to the murdered girl. A dozen women clutch their heads, they whoop and sob, a spirit, a godsbreath passing through the crowd (821).

¹⁵Mystery resonates deeply with DeLillo’s Catholic background (McClure, 166). In an interview with Anthony DeCurtis, he observes that “my work has always been informed by mystery...I can’t tell you where it came from or what it leads to. Possibly it is the natural product of a Catholic upbringing” (*Introducing Don DeLillo*, 55); “Being raised as a Catholic was interesting because the ritual had elements of art to it and it prompted feelings that art sometimes draw out of us...Sometimes it was awesome; sometimes it was funny” (*Conversations with Don DeLillo*, 10).

From this moment on, Sister Edgar has joined the assembled “charismatic band,” thousands of people who seek “a sense of someone living in the image” (822). She shares in a secular, momentary act of communion in which interpersonal human values of sympathy, trust, and solidarity become the norm: “some deep level of lament that makes her feel inseparable from the shakers and the mourners...she is nameless for a moment, lost to the details of personal history” (823). Unlike Hoover, Sister Edgar no longer objectifies the crowd as a pathogenic menace; instead, she immerses herself within it as a source of redemptive interconnectedness. Most significantly, the image of Esmeralda becomes an explicit generational object: “the fleeting face on the lighted board, her virgin twin and *daughter*” (824) [m.i.]. On her deathbed, Sister Edgar recalls this object in all of its sublimity:

...she holds the image tight in her mind...she recalls the smell of jet fuel. This is the incense of experience, the burnt cedar and gum, *a retaining medium that keeps the moment whole*, all the moments, the swaying soulcap raptures and the unspoken closeness, a fellowship of deep belief [emphasis mine] (824).

Her vision of Esmeralda integrates multiple evocative registers: it holds Edgar’s sensational memories of the facial image, the smells of jet fuel, burnt cedar and gum; structurally, it presents a unique integrity in “a retaining medium that keeps the moment whole”; conceptually, it connotes ideas of religious worship (“the incense of experience”); symbolically, it is linked to various chains of signifiers, especially commercial media: a Minute Maid advertisement, television broadcasts, street hawkers; mnemically, it stores “all the moments” of Edgar’s rapturous intimacy with the crowd; projectively, it permits her to extend these past moments into the final (present) moments of her life.

In the coda of *Underworld*, Sister Edgar and J. Edgar Hoover are united through an internet search that links their names: “A click, a hit and Sister joins the other Edgar. A fellow celibate and more or less kindred spirit but her biological opposite, her male half” (826).

Hyperlinked online, DeLillo's "Sister and Brother" present the possibility of "seeing the other side and a settling of differences that have less to do with gender than with difference itself" (826). In cyberspace, both Edgars are conjoined in a mode of ironic difference; all conceptual oppositions (gender, biology, profession) are replaced with an intensive experience of "difference itself." In this mass mediated world where "all the connections [are] intact," Edgar is absorbed into a far-reaching social network. When she picks up a copy of *Time* magazine, she recognizes Klara Sax's name on the cover, then connects her to her ex-husband Albert Bronzini, a chess tutor for one of her former students, Matthew Aloysius Shay (*U* 250).

The artist Klara Sax can, in turn, be linked to the memorabilia collector Martin Lundy. Both individuals rely on an aesthetic disposition to generational objects. Both fashion particular objects into transcendent "works in progress" that bridge past generations to future generations. For Klara, her *magnum opus* consists of 230 de-commissioned B-52 bombers that she has assembled in the desert into a single art object. For Marvin, it is the epochal chronicle of Thompson's baseball that integrates each possessor of the ball into a coherent narrative. As members of the first generational set (like Sister Edgar and Hoover), Klara and Marvin identify with a coldwar balance of military power between America and the U.S.S.R.

In ironic counterpoint to the massive scale of Klara Sax's desert art project, Marvin Lundy's memorabilia is contained within small-scale simulacra. On behalf of Nick Shay, Brian Glassic visits Lundy to arrange a price for Thompson's baseball (\$34,500) and discovers a microcosm of the celebrated sport of baseball: flannel jerseys, autographed bats and baseballs, catcher mitts, cigarette cards, ticket stubs stadium seats from Ebbets Field, Shibe Park, Griffith Stadium (168). The most striking item in Marvin's possession is his floor-to-ceiling replica of the Polo Grounds scoreboard and clubhouse façade, which "included the Chesterfield sign and

slogan, the Longines clock...and finally a hand-slotted line score, the inning by inning tally of the famous play-off game of 1951” (169). Marking the exact place and time of Thompson’s homerun, the Polo Grounds miniature offers Marvin a detailed illusion of mnemonic containment. Even though this object is only a reproduction of the actual event, it holds Marvin’s recollections in a controlled environment.

In a more dramatic way, Marvin seeks absolute temporal control over the narrative of Thompson’s baseball. In his quest to locate the original owner of the ball, he paradoxically seeks to fix the precise, final moment in his chronicle. His aim is to shape “a record of the object’s recent forward motion while simultaneously tracking it backwards to the distant past” (*U* 320). He spends decades tracking down the ball’s previous owners. Exhaustively, he connects one to another by cataloging every minute detail: names, dates, places, times, character quirks, odd happenstances. He calls this “the dot theory of reality,” his staunch belief “that all knowledge is available if you analyze the dots”(175). But his nanoscopic perspective is largely a symptom of a paranoid fixation on nuclear annihilation. For Marvin, the coldwar is “the one constant thing” allowing state leaders to use atomic weapons to instill “power and intimidation” into citizens (170); without this capacity, the populace is no longer the primary “point of reference” (170). Within this referential framework, Marvin considers Brian Glassic a disconnected “dot.” When Brian shrugs off the end of the coldwar, Marvin calls him “a lost speck” and “the lost man of history” (170, 182).

Marvin “connects the dots” between two other overlapping events: Thompson’s homer and the Russian atomic tests. Observing that 25,000 stadium seats were empty on the day of the game, he insists that “people sensed some catastrophe in the air...that would obliterate the whole thing of the game” (171-172). To support his claim, Marvin cites the general withdrawal of

Americans during the 1950's—"people stayed indoors"—as corroboration that "some staggering event might take place on the other side of the world" (172). However plausible this may be, Marvin succumbs to conspiracy-theorist delusions, including the conjecture that a regulation-size baseball is the exact size of a radioactive core. His categorization of younger generational members (like Brian) as "lost specks" exposes retrograde, anachronistic views on generational identity. In actuality, Marvin is the lost man of history, adrift from a contemporary zeitgeist that has progressed far beyond the geopolitical limitations of the coldwar.

It is clear that Klara Sax, like the many artists whom she emulates, has recycled objects of weapons and waste, inherited from the coldwar period, in order "to redeem its artifacts and transmute them into lasting testaments to eccentricity and community...in which 'everything is connected'" (Osteen 245). Klara wants spectators to consider her colossal B-52 art project "a single mass, not a collection of objects" (83). Indeed, it serves as the singular culmination of her entire life's work and testifies to her extensive influences, interests, and models. Consequently, I will first catalog these formative elements—within the framework of Klara's artistic idiom—in order to show how they collectively contribute to her *magnum opus*. During previous life phases, Klara has singled out objects from various genres (photography, graffiti, cinema, and architecture). Consistently, she selects objects that bear the trace of anonymous artists, individuals, or marginalized groups. In most cases, her artistic influences reflect a contemporary avant-garde sensibility characterized by montage, pastiche, and bricolage.

In terms of both generational phases and decades, Klara launches her official artistic career late, when she reaches her mid-fifties during the 1970's. After leaving her husband (Albert Bronzini) and daughter (Theresa), she devotes herself fulltime to her artwork. It is during this decade that Klara immerses herself in a cultural milieu of artists, critics, agents, and patrons.

Early on, she is drawn to Acey Greene’s photography, which features marginalized urban groups, including the Black Panthers and the Blackstone Rangers. In pictures of the latter, Klara admires how “utterly modern” Acey’s subjects seem, “overtly posing or caught unaware, sometimes self-consciously aloof” (390). By highlighting figures who assume ironic, remote postures in the face of the camera, Acey lays bare the mode of verisimilitude that (mis)represents them: she “belies the photographic surface by making the whole picture float ineffably on the arc of a cartridge clip” (390). In these photos, Klara discovers that spontaneous gestural qualities—associated with poses, expressions, or looks—outweigh more conventional figural qualities—associated with compositional shapes, relations, and depth.¹⁶ These gestures document traces of *the human*, an overriding interest that informs much of Klara’s future artwork. In Acey’s depictions of bike riders and runners, Klara discovers that “the human action” emerges most vividly when subjects express “what they wear and who they are and the thing they develop together of a certain presentational self”; self-reflexively, they reclaim humanity with a shared awareness that “here the film is what they’re in” (392).

Klara is influenced by other underground “films” as well: *Cocksucker Blues* (a documentary on the Rolling Stones), the Zapruder footage of the J.F.K. assassination, and Sergei Eisenstein’s *Underwelt*. The latter affects her most, since it self-consciously reflects on the relationship between representational systems and the people inhabiting them. Klara attends a screening of the film with Esther, Miles Lightman (a producer), and several others members of the art world. She deeply admires Eisenstein’s subversion of *typage*, his inclusion of recognizable types of characters only to parody and expose them as markers of a repressive, authoritarian state: “these were people who existed outside of nationality and strict historical

¹⁶ Elsewhere, Klara states that in order to suggest ordinary life in her art, “she tried to scale her work to the human figure, even though it wasn’t figural. She was wary of ego, hero, heights and size” (U 375).

context...they were persecuted and altered, this was their typology—they were an inconvenient secret of the society around them” (443). Indeed, as an evocative object, *Underwelt* holds the “inconvenient secret” of countless victims of state violence and conveys this knowledge to an unsuspecting crowd of moviegoers: “an understanding begins to travel through the audience...This is a film about Us and Them, isn’t it?” (443-444) The film holds a mirror up to the audience’s identification with it, but Eisenstein moves a step beyond mere self-reflexivity; he confronts viewers with the awareness that “They can say who they are, you have to lie” (444). “They,” the Russian ideological state apparatus, “control the language” of citizens and “establish the limits of your existence,” while “You,” the audience, “have to improvise and dissemble” (444). Klara clearly identifies with Eisenstein’s subtle yet brutal “sneak attacks on the dominant culture” (444). She leaves the cinema in a state of awe, feeling “like she was wearing the film,” and overpowered by Eisenstein’s depictions of “the inner divisions of people and systems, and how forces clash and fasten” (444).

During the intermission of *Underwelt*, Klara’s agent, Esther Winship, insists that she view the graffiti art of *Moonman 157*—pseudonym of Ismael Muñoz—for inspiration (377). Renowned for painting entire subway cars, inside and out, Moonman inhabits an “underworld” beneath the *haute couture* of the New York art scene. His vibrant artworks, completed at enormous personal and professional risk, present ground-breaking innovations exceeding the confines of Klara’s privileged milieu. By “cutting” to Moonman 157 during the intermission, DeLillo reinforces another set of “inner divisions of people and systems”: the separate, but overlapping worlds of the artistic establishment and the avant-garde. Muñoz appears inside of one of his most stunning artworks, “a whole train burner” that he admires for the gestural flourishes expressing his eccentric personality. His signature—“Moonman 157”—becomes the

distinctive mark of his identity: “the whole wildstyle thing of making your name and street number a kind of alphabet city where the colors lock and bleed and the letters connect and it’s all live jive, it jumps and shouts” (433). Like a jazz composition in painted form, Muñoz’s graffiti incorporates whatever colors are at hand to express the artist’s idiosyncratic sensibility. In fact, he models himself on Charlie Parker, a jazz idol who allegedly studied men in the tunnels to invent bebop. Like “Bird,” Muñoz strives to leave an immortal mark on his culture. He stakes his claim on each painted subway car and rests assured that it will be “seen everywhere in the system” (435), projecting a cinematic montage of color and light for commuters (441).

Even when Klara is outside of an artistic context (studio, exhibition, museum, or theater), she constantly encounters architectural objects. From her rooftop, she marvels at “the hidden city” below, becoming visible from her vantage point as “distinct, preserved in masonry and brass” (371). She looks closer and discerns “some unaccountable gesture”—a sculpted angel, a white cottage atop an office building—that testifies to the anonymous authors behind it (371-372). As mnemonic objects, these articulate Klara’s deep-seated sense of failure; having not yet made a name for herself, at fifty-four, she feels “humanly invisible,” so these humanized artistic gestures vicariously allow her “to make and shape and modify and build” (372). In both modest and monumental forms of architecture, Klara discovers an atomic integrity that palliates her painful isolation from others. Parapets retain the precise, delicate “details of the suavest nuance” shaped by immigrant “Italian stone carvers” of the early 19th century (373). The Fred F. French building strikes her as “an accidental marvel...floating at the level of a glazed mosaic high on a midtown tower” (400). When she watches construction of The World Trade Center in 1974, an admirer of her work asks her to share her opinion; she responds that the twin towers strike her

“as one, not two...it’s a single entity”(372). Like all architectural objects, the towers constitute one conceptual object that contains Klara’s ideas of solitude, privacy, and autonomy.

For Klara, the B-52 artwork condenses her lifelong interests and involvement in various projects: architecture, painting, photography, cinema, and even finance.¹⁷It constitutes a “meta-generational object” that contains a myriad of self states over the past seven decades of both personal and American history: memories, associations, emotions, judgments, and experiences. “She wanted us to see *a single mass*,” Nick Shay remarks, after he first sees the project, “not a collection of objects” (83) [m.i.]. Like the World Trade Center, Klara intends for her audience to observe a “singular entity” that integrates planes, bright colors, the skyline, and even the surrounding desert backdrop. She calls it “a landscape painting in which we use the landscape itself,” an art project that incorporates the desert as “the surround” and “the framing device” (70). Klara deliberately uses the desert, the site of nuclear testing, to mock the military’s callous display of “mastery” over nature (71). She includes B-52’s since, as evocative objects of the coldwar arms race, they reactivate stored feelings of “awe...mystery and danger and beauty” (75). These aircraft, she recalls, resembled UFO’s that patrolled national borders in the North Atlantic and maintained “a meaningful power” over American citizens as “a force in the world that comes into people’s sleep” (76).

Although she does not endorse past American foreign policy, Klara belies her cultural debt to the tenuous balance of power that the coldwar period provided First and Second World nations. She acknowledges that “power meant something thirty or forty years ago”—in the 1950’s and 1960’s—when “it was greatness, danger, terror...it held us together, the Soviets and us” (76). Here, Klara cites her generation’s time of cultural relevance within the framework of

¹⁷ Klara learns about artistic sponsorship and production from Carlos Strasser (a financier) and Miles Lightman (a documentary producer).

American/Soviet binary oppositions. Looking back, she claims that this generation can “see ourselves more clearly,” while contemporary generations are mired in a culture in which the balance of power and terror, money and violence “seem to be undone, unstuck” (76). In her own way, Klara’s *magnum opus* reminds present and future generations that art, like the Bomb, can bring something unnamable and sublime into the world.

Nick Shay, in particular, appreciates her sublime artwork. When he first witnesses her spectacular collection of 230 B-52 bombers, he marvels at the

Sweeps of color, bands and spatters, airy washes, the force of saturated light—the whole thing oddly personal, a sense of one painter’s hand moved by impulse and afterthought as much as by epic design...these colors did not simply draw down power from the sky or lift it from the landforms around us. They pushed and pulled...in conflict with each other (83).

By displaying “one painter’s hand moved by impulse and afterthought,” Klara flourishes her own gestural identity. Her gestures immediately calls to mind Acey Greene’s subjects, who struck reactive poses within the representational medium of photography. Likewise, Klara “poses” with others—a staff of artistic collaborators—each of whom contributes sweeps, bands, and splashes of color to the piece’s overall “epic design.” Klara’s staff is also inspired by a more explicit gesture: “Long Tall Sally,” an anonymous woman painted on the nose of aircrafts by World War II pilots or mechanics. Her image becomes a sacred trace of humanity to them. Like Ismael Muñoz’s subway cars, Sally presents “a graffiti instinct –to trespass and declare ourselves, show who we are” (77). Just as the signature *Moonman 157* flaunts “a kind of alphabet city where the colors lock and bleed and the letters connect” (433), these colors “push and pull” in conflict with each other. By exhibiting these graffiti gestures, Klara’s project also restore the very individuals whose “art” (nose-painting) has been suppressed by the military industrial complex.

For Klara Sax, the B-52 Project offers her a primal expression of object-cathexis.

Painting, arranging, and displaying the aircraft provokes in her what Christopher Bollas calls “the *jouissance* of the true self, a bliss released through the finding of specific objects that free idiom to its articulation. . . . such releasing are the erotics of being” (“Being A Character” 17). In an ecstatic moment of *jouissance*, she tells an assembled camera crew that “I am drunk on color. I am sex-crazed. I see it in my sleep. I eat it and drink it. I’m a woman going mad with color” (*U* 70). Colors provide an instinctual, expressive outlet for Klara’s representation of her simple self. Blissfully lost in the making of art, she sheds complex relationships with others (staff, family, spectators) and embraces the range of disparate subjectivities that this object holds for her.

III

In unanticipated ways, the first generational set—Gleason and Hodges, Sister Edgar and Hoover, Marvin Lundy and Klara Sax—bequeath their objects to the second generational set—Nick Shay, Matt Shay, and Cotter Martin. Emerging out of the coldwar era, these younger generations reshape inherited mass media forms, institutions, and art according to the cultural features of their own time. Juxtaposed with the first set, the Martin and Shay children restructure generational objects according to even more pronounced ironic tropes. Lacking strong parental figures, these three sons provide narratives of familial dissociation that surpass all tropic modes of generational consciousness; their absent father figures, in particular, can not be reconstituted through self-oriented metaphors, displaced onto outside objects, or reassembled into synecdochic histories. In stark contrast, they stand apart as orphans who manage their losses through a renewed cathexis to inherited objects: Thompson’s baseball, waste products, and weapons systems. Notably, Cotter Martin and the Shays offer another level of ironic discourse *in relation to one another*; while Cotter fades into the narrative backdrop of *Underworld*, Matt and Nick aspire to sublime expressions of technology and art. While the Martin family exists as

marginalized characters in the novel, the Shays assume a more dramatic part that augurs a new, sublime era in late modernity.

I would like to focus first on Cotter and Manx Martin, since their contribution to the Ball is primary—yet suppressed—in the novel; it is only much later in chronological time that Nick Shay becomes its bearer and reshapes its narrative trajectory. With the exception of the *Prologue*, all of the chapters that include the Martins are set off in separate, concise sections, flanked by dark pages, which (unlike the other sections) lack titles. This peculiar feature reinforces the liminal nature of the Martin generational narrative, which exists as a stark complement to the Shay father-son storyline. In the opening pages of the novel, we discover that Cotter Martin is the missing “first link” in the history of Thompson’s ball. Having snatched it from a rival fan (Bill Waterson), he returns home and decides to keep the ball “so it can gather dust and develop character” (146). Cotter has yet to sort through memories of the game “he didn’t know he’d seen or heard” (141) into an integrated experience. Nonetheless, like Nick Shay, the baseball helps him to offset the instability of family life with the gratification of a mnemonic object. Cotter submerges beneath a “warm wave of contented sleep,” recalling winning the game that he has supposedly “lost” (148).

There are other clear parallels between Cotter and Nick; Cotter’s attachment to the ball heralds Nick’s subsequent object-cathexis, and both boys are abandoned and betrayed by selfish fathers. But Cotter’s father, Manx, takes betrayal a step further when he steals and pawns the ball. At a pivotal moment, Manx had agreed to delay selling it (“we sleep on it” (147)), a tacit promise that carries profound ethical responsibility. This becomes evident when Manx reveals to Antoine (his pawn broker) that he has the ball; after speaking these words, “Manx feels uneasy. He feels separated from what he’s saying...like a lie...independent of right and wrong, making

you feel like you're not responsible" (359). Violating private knowledge and commitment to Cotter, Manx has also broken a generational covenant between himself and his son. Even though he admires the ball's "perfect roundness and hardness," he ultimately reduces it to a mere scrap of currency, a curious piece of "history...written on the commonest piece of paper in your pocket" (365, 354). Even after Manx joins the post-game crowd, he misrecognizes the marketplace as a celebratory act of "wanting-to-be-among-them" (366). Even when faced with other "fathers and sons" among these masses, he uses this mass spectacle to deny generational responsibility. DeLillo's narrator, chillingly detached from these events, reinforces the muted quality of Manx's storyline, in stark counterpoint to the Shay's public, grandiose narrative.

While the Martin's narrative is diffused among the city's crowds, the Shay's generational legacy assumes a more visible and official status. Nick has become an "executive emeritus" (804) at a waste containment corporation; Matt has retired from a weapons systems firm. For both brothers, then, generational objects alternately pose a threat of environmental catastrophe and a promise of redemptive transformation. As they approach their sixties, Nick and Matt look back not only on past life phases and historical decades, but also towards the future times of their wives, children, and grandchildren. While the devastating loss of their father is never resolved, Nick and Matt still find consolation in the most fundamental of generational structures: the family. Like the Shay brothers, Cotter Martin is abandoned by his own father, Manx, who steals—then pawns—an object precious to him: Thompson's baseball. I will conclude this chapter with a brief sketch of the Manx-Cotter dynamic in order to emphasize a crucial, marginalized narrative inscribed within the scope of DeLillo's novel.

Throughout *Underworld*, Matt Shay remains in the shadow of his older brother. In fact, Nick becomes his evocative object—one that Matt repeatedly tries to eliminate: "Nick was

always the subject...Every subject, ground down and sifted through, yielded a little Nicky, or a version of the distant adult, or the adolescent half lout...these were the terms of the kinship” (220-221). Notably, Matt incessantly recalls *all* of Nick’s generational phases, as if he must bear silent witness to his brother’s checkered past. Eventually, Matt deflects his cathexis to Nick (as object) onto nuclear weapons systems. Working in an insulated think-tank called the “Pocket,” Matt finds solace in the anomie of “systems business, where all work connects at levels and geographic points far removed from the desk toil and lab projects” (401). Here, he marvels at the mysterious “arrays of numbers and symbols [that] might enter nature” in a flash of atomic energy (408). Despite the evident danger that “might alter the course of many lives,” Matt savors warheads’ capacity to hold his emotions of “splendid mystery” and “wonder” (408-409). However, his dedication to work is eventually outweighed by his concern for future generations. He imagines Nick prodding him over his plans to settle down, get married and have children, provoking “the guilt of raising children in a world you’ve made” (416). Indeed, both brothers hold the *planetary* world in such high regard that it becomes a shared, meta-generational object. Matt vividly recalls looking at Landsat photographs taken of the earth, “photo mosaics” that delineate “sweeps and patches of lustrous color...pulled out of the earth” (415). These vibrant colors are tied to emotions so complex that he can not even name them.

Nick Shay’s reunion with the artist Klara Sax offers him the promise of a sublimated generational reconciliation. After stumbling across Klara’s name on the cover of *Time*, Nick decides to visit her in the desert. He recalls that the last time he saw her he was seventeen and returns to this phase of his adolescence: “I was able to see her retrospectively. I could lift the younger woman right out of the chair...I could make her rise in some sleight of mind to occupy the space I’d prepared” (67). When he sees her again in the present (the early 1990’s), Nick

imaginatively recasts her in a role with shades of his mother (since Klara is roughly Rosemary's age) and his lover (evoking his past romantic affair with her). Even though he claims to "live in the real" (82), Nick has displaced an imaginary younger version of her onto her art. As soon as he learns about Klara's erotic investment into her B-52 Project (covered above), it becomes a mirror for his lingering, inchoate desire for her.

Through this evocative object, Klara conveys her aesthetic *jouissance* to Nick. When he and his wife Marian take a balloon ride over the B-52's, he marvels at "a heart-shaking thing to see" in the sundry, bold colors which attest to some latent "power in the earth" (125). Just as Klara uses the art spectacle to reactive stored associations with other projects, this vision helps Nick to dislodge forgotten memories and emotions. In his psychic economy, this new object supplants the place once occupied by Thompson's baseball. Likewise, it serves as a constellatory object that "connects many things" from his personal and professional life. As discarded, recycled products, The B-52's immediately call to mind his position at Waste Containment, Inc. It is in waste disposal that Nick experiences "a religious conviction": "We entomb contaminated waste with a sense of reverence and dread...waste has a solemn aura now, an aspect of untouchability" (88). The art project, likewise, emanates a revered, "solemn aura" that eludes any rational description. At one point in the past, Nick claims that *transforming* waste—into safe, concealed, or modified forms—brings him into the fold of modern-day "Church fathers of waste in all its transmutations" (102). A moment later, he draws a wary analogy between his work and Klara Sax's "own career...marked at times by her methods of transforming and absorbing junk" (102).

To the extent that the Ball has enabled Nick to conserve his depressive anxieties, the B-52 Project allows him to redeem his persistent sense of failure and defeat. As I argue earlier,

Thompson's ball stores and sustains Nick's "mystery of bad luck and loss" (97). Holding the ball in his hand may adequately "hold" his father's abandonment, but this gesture does not permit Nick to reach a state of acceptance. Klara's artwork, on the contrary, empowers him to shed layers of guilt and anguish. Her rapturous spectacle of planes and paint signals a new phase not only in Nick's psychological development but also "the end of an age and the beginning of something so different only a vision such as this might suffice to augur it" (126).

What this "something" may become remains a mystery, but it will clearly mark the emergence of a new generation. Through her art, Klara Sax testifies to the concept of this new generational object—conflating coldwar weapons with recycled waste—but she can not yet represent it. She can only stand aside and wait for future generations to refashion it in their own image. Until this moment arrives, Nick's generation will look back with nostalgia on the bygone coldwar era and look forward to bearing witness to an object best characterized by the postmodern sublime: "that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them, but to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable" (Lyotard, 81).

“After the End”: Generational Dialogues in Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*

The day providential to itself. The hour. There is no later. This is later. All things of grace and beauty such that one holds them to one’s heart have a common provenance in pain. Their birth in grief and ashes. So, he whispered to the sleeping boy, I have you.
–*The Road*, 54.

Although *Underworld* bears witness to the tragic possibility that weapons systems and waste products may ultimately destroy us, DeLillo’s novel also highlights the capacity of the younger generation to redeem the coldwar relics of the past through art or technology. Despite the risk of nuclear and environmental catastrophe, generational members take solace in various ironic tropes to objectify jarring contradictions between their collective identity and their cultural habitus. In stark counterpoint, Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* subjects humanity to the apocalyptic fulfillment of DeLillo’s nuclear holocaust. A mysterious event results in global environmental catastrophe: “The clocks stopped at 1:17. A long shear of light and then a series of low concussions” (52). Although we never discover the precise cause or larger framework of this event, one thing is certain: civilization has arrived at the end of recorded time. Set against this bleak backdrop, an unnamed father and son, who represent the last generation on earth, chart a desolate journey to the ocean. Along the way, they encounter an array of malevolent predators—bloodcults, hordes, catamites—who literally devour generations, young and old alike. McCarthy’s novel thus poses two unsettling questions that take us beyond the limits of

modernity: what happens to generational consciousness after the end of history? What happens when figurative tropes can no longer reconstitute generations?

In anticipation of these final questions, all of the novels that I have examined foreground crises of historical and existential dislocation. These crises stem from an unsettling awareness that contemporary generations must both locate themselves in relation to past generations and make a break from past cultural decades. In this sense, such generations enact Habermas' conceptual horizon of modernity by encountering "a present that understands itself from the horizon of the modern age as the actuality of the most recent period has to recapitulate the break brought about with the past as a *continuous renewal*" (*Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* 7). In the works of McEwan, Rushdie, Lahiri, and DeLillo, the present space of generational experiences stakes various claims on the past. Whether redeeming or opposing the unfulfilled prospects of past generations, each present generation negotiates the rupture between past experiences and future expectations. Each negotiation relies on a distinct trope to manage these temporal disruptions. In Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, Briony Tallis dramatizes her own break(s) with the past when she privileges her present *representational perspective*—as a seventy-seven year old woman living in the late 1990's—over her generational incarnations during past decades—as a young adolescent in the 1930's and a late adolescent in 1940. Although we read only the final version of the novel *Atonement*, each successive draft "renews" her status as a more nuanced, self-conscious modernist writer. Likewise, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* adopts *allegorical reduction* to displace national history onto family narrative. Saleem Sinai highlights the present moment (*Jetztzeit*) as a metonymic point from which he both restores and reconfigures past generational narratives of his family. As the self-proclaimed spokesman for India's 1947 Generation, Saleem hopes to redeem the unfulfilled expectations of past and

future generations. Focusing on close-knit families and kinship communities in *Hema and Kaushik*, Jhumpa Lahiri explores two contrapuntal visions of generational consciousness; while Hema negotiates a relation with her parents' generation by accepting responsibility for her children, Kaushik never surpasses the object-horizon structure of his generational experience. Hema takes solace in *reintegrative intentionality* to reassimilate herself into her Bengali-American kinship community. Against the broad backdrop of cultural change, Don DeLillo's *Underworld* depicts two separate generational groups—coldwar and post-coldwar—who engage each other through the provision and inheritance of generational objects. Surpassing the limits of other tropes—metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche—these items are characterized by *ironic objectification*.

As a post-apocalyptic work, *The Road* deconstructs one crucial assumption that all of these texts make about modern time-consciousness: that a continuous generational structure can negotiate changes in historical time and phenomenological experience. Having reached the end point in History, McCarthy's father and son figures have also entered a postlapsarian period of the future. Ravaged by nuclear fallout, their toxic environment poses a constant threat to their survival. In a dramatic way, their status as survivors fulfills the indefinitely delayed promise of modernity: its culmination in an eschatological telos. Reinhart Koselleck aptly notes that this peculiar orientation emerged during the Reformation, when signs of the world's imminent end resulted in the "peculiar form of acceleration which characterizes...the period in which modernity is formed" (*Futures Past* 5). In rhetorical terms, the temporalization of modern history compressed the century to the decade, the historical unit commonly adopted by generations.¹ Eventually, political power of modern states co-opted religious authority of

¹ To illustrate, Koselleck cites Martin Luther's claim that the end of the world would appear this year or the next year (*Futures Past* 7). The claim about decades here is mine—not Koselleck's.

churches (both Protestant and Catholic) and translated “apocalyptic and astrological readings of the future” into a “new and different perspective of time” (10, 12). Prognosis, Koselleck claims, took the place of prophecy:

The prognosis is a conscious element (*Moment*) of political action. It is related to events whose novelty it releases...[and] continually radiates time in a generally predictable but actually uncertain fashion. Prognosis produces the time within which and out of which it weaves, whereas apocalyptic prophecy destroys time through its fixation on the End (14).

Through prognosis, the philosophy of historical *progress* is articulated as “the integrating factor of the state that transgresses the limited future of the world to which it has been entrusted” (14).

In the context of millennial movements, this concept of progress has been shaped by a corresponding concept of decadence; “a long millennial tradition,” Eugen Weber has observed, “contributes images, language, stereotypes, and attitudes which suggest that an age, a generational experience, or a class assumption can be linked to the end of a world, and perhaps of *the world*” (*Apocalypse* 25). A peculiar chiasm inheres in each successive generation, which rhetorically analogizes its own finitude to an absolute, universal end. Notably, McCarthy’s text reframes the idiom of “a long millennial tradition” within the context of global catastrophe. It is this quality of all-pervasive disaster that levels entire communities and consequently “produces the questioning, the anxiety, and the suggestibility that are required; only in its wake are people moved to abandon the values of the past and place their faith in prophecies of imminent and total transformation” (Barkun 6).

What *The Road* presents us with is a temporal quandary. On the one hand, we encounter a world that has fulfilled apocalyptic prophecy, inaugurating an eschatological future that destroys the time(s) of the past; on the other, we witness a quasi-prognostic production of time in an imminent present (now-time). In the wake of state power and in the demise of official institutions, time can no longer be generated as a novel, future limit-point that shapes

modernity's consciousness of itself.² Instead, McCarthy's father and son figures inhabit a dystopic present in which their future is not guaranteed to occur at all, much less to fulfill expectations of their past experiences. Bracketed from past and future, this last generation can no longer orient itself to a temporal horizon. To compensate for this loss, father and son reconstruct futurity as a spatial destination—the southern shoreline—which holds the only potential topos for their existence. Virtually all concrete actions are directed towards arriving at this place.

While directionality clearly shapes narrative events to a *new* end, it is through dialogue that this final generation contests and ultimately resolves two conflicting impulses: the father's pragmatic response to exigent circumstances and the boy's desire to forge a set of transcendent ethical values. While the father levels all obligations to the baseline of their exclusive survival at any cost, the boy extends the scope of intentionality to others, whose needs surpass their own. Consequently, my primary focus here will encompass the dynamic, densely textured idiom forged between father and son. A peculiar language mediates between their varying practices in the world and the chronic condition of absence evoked by death. Verbal discourse becomes a sort of ever-shifting ground on which words and silences are negotiated with equal measure.

I

The Road eschews a plot in any novelistic sense and instead adopts a loosely structured set of events that resembles a fabulist allegory. Father and son are initially compared to “pilgrims in a fable swallowed up and lost among the inward parts of some granitic beast”; they inhabit “[a]n old chronicle. To seek out the upright” and the boy is described in deific terms as a “[g]olden chalice, good to house a god” (3, 15, 75). These features are common in McCarthy's

² As I've noted in the introduction, these are the very conditions that allow generations to locate themselves in relation to history and consciousness.

previous fiction, which relies on a “pastoral vision” characterized by a distancing, melancholic mood and an elaborate allegoresis that involves “the encryption of narrative contents in parabolic images and story lines in the manner of fables” (Guillemin 3). *The Road* follows suit in its depiction of the father figure, whose search for meaning extends beyond personal experience to an extra-diegetic, allegorical framework. He poses Job-like questions at God, interrogates the order of the Universe, and questions the validity of being (11-12, 15, 114). Indeed, the father constitutes the author’s most recent “biblical image of the agonized prophet on the hill who watches the world from afar on its course toward ruin” (Guillemin 6).

But McCarthy’s latest work, in its stark *fulfillment* of apocalyptic prophecy, also erases the traditional distance separating allegorical figures from environmental ruin. The Southern landscape, denatured by fallout, has infected almost all of humanity’s last survivors. In a dramatic way, McCarthy returns to the haunting image of the biblical prophet by focalizing through the father figure. However, this new prophet has been poisoned by “the ashes of the late world carried on the bleak and temporal winds to and fro in the void” (11). From his current position, he is unable to observe the devastated world from afar, assessing its flaws and vices, since he can not get outside of that world’s toxic environment. In this postlapsarian context, environmental catastrophe has divested the “world” of transcendent, allegorical content and replaced it with a pragmatic emphasis on human survival. For the father, there is no solace in retreating into the American South’s pastoral realm, which offered past cultures an imaginary escape from history. Even the refuge of traditional, landed pastoral structures (such as the plantation) fail to provide sanctuary from catastrophe. Consequently, he relies on a secondary displacement of pastoralia onto the liminal terrain of the shoreline.³ To evade contamination, he

³ John M. Grammar claims that the Southern pastoral in McCarthy’s fiction is classified by civic orders which deny their own transient status by “theoriz[ing] some social transformation which will effect an escape from history” (31).

guides himself (and his son) to this new location on the outer limits of land. As such, the Southern coast exists as a chronotopic ideal that directs the father's practical insistence on survival.⁴

Underlying this ideal is a primordial chronotope of *the father's house*, which is foregrounded at the beginning of their journey. By encountering this object, the father (re)constructs an intergenerational dialogue between his own father, himself, and his son. In an early scene at a gas station, after rummaging through discarded, useless objects, the man "picked up the phone and dialed the number of his father's house in that long ago. The boy watched him. What are you doing? he said" (7). On the surface, this gesture appears futile and absurd, yet it reveals the father's obligation to establish a dialogic connection in the midst of silence. Both the unanswered phone call and the boy's puzzled question (also unanswered) testify to their anxious need to speak across the void of another's absence. In this instance, the grandfather, an *ur*-father figure to both of them, is lost "in that long ago," which is less a timeless past than a lost, ordinary place.

The man remembers similar places that evoke his father's house. He recalls a fall trip with his uncle to gather firewood as "the perfect day of his childhood...the day to shape the days upon" (13). During this trip, "neither of them had spoken a single word" (13), and their lack of verbal communication conveys a tacit, close bond between (surrogate) father and son. After finding a tree stump along the shoreline, they tow it back home with them. Like participants in a sacred rite, they value the silence accompanying concrete actions over the muddled expressions

Citing Lewis Simpson, Grammar also notes that the plantation provided a double message: "it attempted to warn the outer world, the realm of time and change, to keep out" as well as to coerce the plantation to cleave "to the promise of changeless order offered by the pastoral realm" (31).

⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin classifies the *chronotope* as a unique "time-space" that condenses "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature...it expresses the inseparability of space and time...as a formally constitutive category of literature" ("Forms of Time and Of The Chronotope in the Novel," 84).

of speech. Words would only cheapen or spoil the integrity of such moments. This idealized memory allows the father to “shape the days upon” it—the quiet, anxious time that he spends with his son on their journey to the shore. When they later visit his father’s house, their dialogue is interspersed with heavy pauses haunted by an absent parent:

What is this place, Papa?
It’s the house where I grew up.
...
Are we going in?
Why not?
I’m scared.
Don’t you want to see where I used to live?
No.
It’ll be okay.
There could be somebody here.
I don’t think so.
But suppose there is? (25)

Here, the house signifies *the uncanny*, an ambivalent emotional state, both frightening and familiar, that can be traced back to repressed infantile complexes; in intergenerational terms, the home (*heim*) encompasses connotations of both “belonging to the home” (what is familiar) and “concealed...from sight” (what is unfamiliar) (Freud, 933-34). The father is able to reconcile these differences since has already resigned himself to the loss of his parents and childhood abode. Although aware of the house’s alien, menacing nature, he also recognizes it as home-like (*heimlich*): it is where he “grew up” and “used to live.” The boy, however, responds to the building as *un-home-like* (*unheimlich*): it elicits only terror and uncertainty. He worries that “somebody” could be in the house, a possibility which he articulates as an open-ended, unsettling question: “suppose there is?”

This imagined stranger, who assumes a polysemous role, reappears throughout the novel. He (or she) is the generational other who is figured on the borderline of the self’s identity. In this

instance, the other-position is occupied by the man's father, whose absence is foreign (and therefore disturbing) to the boy. To allay his son's fears, the man tries to communicate this missing "somebody" through actions rather than words. After they walk through the empty rooms of his childhood, the man stops at the fireplace and "felt with his thumb in the painted wood of the mantle the pinholes from tacks that had held stockings forty years ago" (26).

Reinforcing the depths of this personal loss, McCarthy adopts a rare use of first person to interweave dialogue and gestures:

This is where we used to have Christmas when I was a boy...On cold winter nights when the electricity was out in a storm we would sit at the fire here, me and my sisters, doing our homework. The boy watched him. Watched shapes claiming him he could not see. We should go, Papa, he said. Yes, the man said. But he didnt (26).

This memory of his youth, huddled around the hearth, condenses several associations: the firewood that he and his uncle gathered, the fellowship of family, and the primal relationship between humanity and fire. These imaginary "shapes" claim him in such a way that he is better able to understand the boy's analogous fears of the unknown. He recalls "the nights in their thousands to dream the dreams of a child's imaginings, worlds rich or fearful such as might offer themselves but never the one to be" (27). In the cathectic context of home, the father is able to make his son's nightmares more intelligible and familiar as "a child's imaginings," while the son can envision the ghosts of his father's past life ("the shapes claiming him he could not see").

Here, the man also unconsciously returns to the final conversation with his wife, years earlier. In stark opposition, she had *failed* to imagine the anxieties of their son in terms that would allow her to assuage those anxieties. She advised him that "you wont survive for yourself...A person who had no one would be well advised to cobble together *some passable ghost*. Breathe it into being and coax it along with words of love" [italics mine] (57). Noticing his lack of a response, the woman tells him that he has "no argument because there is none,"

calling to mind their previous philosophical debates over “the pros and cons of self destruction” (57). Having ended the argument—choosing suicide over an alternative life evading rape, torture, and murder—she has renounced her maternal responsibilities on the grounds of dialogue; she refuses to “tell him goodbye,” to give voice to any final sign that might have eased her son’s emotional suffering. The question that he poses to her, in response—“what am I to tell him?”—lingers throughout *The Road*. In her mute absence, the man is left to fill her void with speech, the only mode capable of approximating parental duties. Her selfish departure, though tragic, also renews the man’s opportunity to help his son and (by extension) others in need of dialogic consolation. Through dialogue, he can construct a *home* for “some passable ghost,” a symbolic figure, encompassing both his father and his son, that he can sustain with “words of love.”

II

This site of the home becomes the primary order of identification between father and son. Throughout *The Road*, it is continually re-signified as the hearth-fire, which assumes a dominant motif in their conversations, discussions, and debates. In McCarthy’s previous fiction, the passing of fire between fathers and sons connotes an indeterminate, shifting locus for the younger, living generation.⁵ In this work, however, “carrying the fire” suggests a dual responsibility: (1) for one’s own family, circumscribed within the relationship between parent-and-child, and (2) for extra-familial others, who might ensure the survival of future generations. While the man accepts the former and resists the latter, the boy commits himself to both. This

⁵ At the end of *No Country for Old Men* (2005), Sheriff Ed Tom Bell recalls a disquieting dream in which his father outpaces him, far ahead in the darkness: “I knew that he was goin on ahead and that he was fixin to make a fire somewhere out there in all that dark and all that cold and I knew that whenever I got there he would be there. And then I woke up” (308-309). Like Sheriff Bell, the man in *The Road* seeks to restore a sense of generational continuity by retracing his own absent father’s steps.

becomes evident in several parallel episodes, in which they are presented with the choice either to focus on their exclusive interests or to assist others in need. To illustrate this ethical quandary, I will focus on two similar incidents occurring in the context of a bygone pastoral structure: the plantation.

Outside of a small town, they encounter an antebellum Southern estate, a “once grand house” which sits atop an incline, “tall and stately with white doric columns,” a port cochere, and a “gravel drive that curved up through a field of dead grass” (105). The building is constructed of “handmade brick of the house kilned out of the dirt it stood on” and the porch evokes the “chattel slaves [who] had once trod those boards bearing food and drink on silver trays” (106). A relic of the Old South, this plantation recalls a period pre-dating late modernity, a static order of the pastoral realm (Grammar, 31). But McCarthy’s grandiose description, reinforcing timeless Southern iconography within a postlapsarian setting, seems self-parodic. His characters’ immediate circumstances have no pragmatic relation to a lost pastoral ideal. Although this home shares with the pastoral an atemporal status (insofar as that it is divorced from historical progress), it no longer indicates a meaningful relation to traditional culture or civilization.

Drawn to the plantation, the father inadvertently evades his own “history” (his immersion in the present) when he falls back on the same pattern of behavior and dialogue enacted earlier, in his father’s house. The boy expresses his anxiety with the *identical* question—“what is this place, Papa?” (25, 105)—and suggestion that they not go into the house: “We should go, Papa”; “Let’s not go up there” (26, 106). Once again, this is followed by a prolonged, silent view of the house and the father’s insistence that they go inside to “take a look” (105-06). Fixated on the plantation’s façade in a state of rapt silence, father and son succumb to another uncanny ritual which divides and doubles their selves through the “constant recurrence of the same thing”

(Freud, 940). Notably, their words extend beyond the limitations of (re)performed ritual when they contest the primacy of survival:

We've got to find something to eat. We have no choice.
We could find something somewhere else.
It's going to be all right. Come on (106).

The father's definitive claim that "we have no choice" is countered by the boy's open-ended statement that "we could find something somewhere else." While the father effectively limits their options to only one choice, the son imagines an unrestricted field of options in which multiple possibilities coexist, side by side. It is through language—not action—that another, better choice can be imagined, assessed, and prioritized. This new choice, we discover soon enough, might have evaded the immediate threat posed by a bloodcult, which has overtaken the house.

The bloodcult's existence, imbedded in the structure of the plantation, demonstrates anti-pastoral features. Having forged a primordial collective of cannibals, its members entrap, imprison, and devour survivors. This predatorial social order, which is estranged from any surrounding community, maintains cohesion only at the expense of human victims. Rather than preserve traditions (primitive or otherwise) in the face of change, the bloodcult order collapses inward on itself.⁶ This communal implosion leaves visible traces in the plantation's interior. Like the father's house, the cult members' "home" indicates a similar primal relationship to fire (and the fireplace), but they have also transformed the house from a place of family life into a locus of predation and entrapment, a place in which human bodies can be readily hoarded and consumed. What remains of the rooms have either decayed or become kindling for the fireplace, which itself is described in garish terms, "with raw brick showing where the wooden mantel and

⁶ This reading of the anti-pastoral is informed by John M. Grammar's analysis of *Outer Dark* (37-38). Even though Grammar concentrates on incest (and not cannibalism), the logic of this fractured social order's implosion is similar.

surround had been pried away and burned. There were mattresses and bedding arranged on the floor in front of the hearth” (107). Their gathering around the hearth-fire presents a macabre inversion of the man’s childhood memory of domesticity (26).

When the man discovers prisoners inside of a hatched cellar, he is presented with a risky opportunity to save them from the bloodcult. It is at this moment, a turning point in *The Road*, that he is offered the chance to extend “the fire” from his son to those who have been entrapped below. After leading the boy downstairs, he “swung the flame out over the darkness like an offering” to naked victims who implore them for help (110). Even though they turn away to save their own lives, the prisoners’ words—“please help us”—introduce a new moral imperative to assist others outside of their small circle. Later, the boy prods his father into explaining *why* they could not offer their help:

They’re going to eat them, aren’t they?
Yes.
And we couldn’t help them because then they’d eat us too.
Yes.
And that’s why we couldn’t help them.
Yes.
Okay (127).

Through these questions, the boy verbally reenacts the victims’ pleas (“help us”), restoring their lost voices within the structure of a litany. Each query discloses harsh truths that his father can no longer conceal from him; the man’s responses literally reaffirm his ethical choice to abandon these victims in order to save himself and the boy. His son concludes with “okay,” a word repeatedly used on their journey to convey discursive resignation. But the word here (as elsewhere) suggests not so much a final solution to problematic questions as an aporia; in the

context of assisting victims of the bloodcult, it is *and* it is not “okay” to help them. Unlike the father’s affirmative “yes,” the word retains a paralogical, value-neutral status.⁷

Perhaps unwittingly, the boy draws attention to profound consequences of their practical actions. To refuse to help other survivors will make their deaths all the more probable. Consequently, the ambiguous choice to help—or not to help—others entails an appeal to ethical values that transcend their immediate father-son relationship. Soon after this dialogue, silence prevails when the boy considers the bloodcult’s cannibalism in light of their own dire context. His father provokes him to “just tell me,” to express his misgivings over their own potential complicity in cannibalism (128). The boy persuades him to join him in a verbal pact not to eat people, under any circumstances, since “we’re the good guys” and “we’re carrying the fire”(129). Their words enact a shared promise to uphold an ideal concept of goodness for both themselves and others; from this moment on, “the fire” must be carried not only between father and son but also between family and culture. Greater moral commitments like these are forged out of quite ordinary obligations. As the boy had reminded his father in a previous discussion, “if you break little promises you’ll break big ones. That’s what you said” (34).

In the second plantation scene, they encounter another “solitary house in a field,” outside of the town center (132). Nearby, they discover a hidden, concrete bunker that contains dozens of crates of provisions. Inside the bunker, which offers a long-absent state of shelter and warmth,

⁷ In another emblematic dialogue, the man and boy discuss the fate of the term “state roads.” After the boy asks him what happened to the state roads, the man responds:

I don’t know exactly. That’s a good question.

But the roads are still there.

Yes. For a while

How long for a while?

I don’t know...There’s nothing to uproot them so they should be okay for a while (43).

Through this conversation, they expose the aporetic term “state roads” as a half-meaningful, half-meaningless phrase. The term is both obsolete, insofar as that states no longer exist, and lasting, insofar as that the road retains an immediate use-value for travelers. The father’s final statement—“okay for a while”—reinforces a semantic open-endedness.

the father bathes his son—a ritual of renewal. At various moments, this place is metamorphosed into a utopic site of ritualized communion and restoration. The interior is described as a “tiny paradise” (150) and the hatchway appears “like a grave yawning at judgment day in some apocalyptic painting” (155). This image, recalling the harrowing of hell common in medieval paintings, suggests ambiguous meanings; while the hatchway, in a practical sense, opens into a space of temporary survival, it also opens out to a redemptive escape from death in the most dismal circumstances.

In counterpoint to the bloodcult’s cellar, this private bunker bears witness to survivors who have rationed supplies in the interest of *others*. The man assures the boy that the deceased owners have acted out of charitable impulses that mirror their own gestures: “they would want us to take it. Just like we would want them to” (139). By adopting the rhetorical logic of analogy, the man links “we” to “them,” broadening the definition of goodness to encompass helping any non-threatening stranger in need of help. By using these provisions, they have accepted others’ help, which they can reciprocate by helping others. For the boy, giving voice to charity (*caritas*) realizes transcendent religious values that are fully consistent with his character (from the beginning, the father remarks that “if he is not the word of God God never spoke” (5)). Prior to eating the food, the boy offers a prayer of thanksgiving: “we know that you saved it for yourself and if you were here we wouldn’t eat it no matter how hungry we were” (146). In his address to the absent dead, the boy’s language of faith persists even after the loss of religious culture. As Cathy Caruth observes, such postlapsarian characters can still encounter a theological discourse in a world without God, in which “the language of theology lingers, even after the crisis of its own meaning, a language that abides in the aftermath of the disintegration of the very traditions

of theological thought (“After the End,” 121).⁸ Through spoken language, the boy re-signifies theological figures and tropes that have lost relation to their conceptual origins. It is his performance of faith through language, lacking reference to any fixed content, that restores it to (new) meaning. To ensure faith’s enactment in concrete instances, the boy uses his prayer to commit himself and his father to two new promises to the living: (1) despite starvation, they will not eat others’ food, and (2) whenever possible, they will share their food with others.

III

The boy’s earnest adherence to this prayer is challenged by his father’s practical instincts. In one of the more memorable episodes, they encounter an old traveler, calling himself “Ely,” who puts their tacit covenant to the test. At first, the father fears that he “could be a decoy,” a road-agent setting up a possible ambush (161, 162). These suspicions, however, are mollified somewhat by Ely’s pitiful condition; resembling a character out of Beckett, he appears wearing a “filthy towel tied under his jaw” and a pair of makeshift shoes made of rags and cardboard (161-162). Before committing themselves to helping him, the father and son try to determine whether he is either a bloodcult member (in which case, they can not help him) or not (in which case, they can).⁹ Strikingly, Ely evades such pat classifications when he responds with a series of ironic, aporetic claims and questions. When they insist that they are not robbers, Ely follows up by asking, “What are you?”—a question that leaves them speechless (162). Clearly, in order to survive, the man and boy have constantly resorted to stealing and hoarding food, clothing, and

⁸ Although Caruth addresses this article with a collection of essays in mind, she also directly responds to Shelly L. Rambo’s essay on *The Road*.

⁹ In the first cellar scene, this pact *not* to help predators was forged as an implicit corollary to the pact to help victims and survivors (127).

other provisions. This silence therefore suggests a range of open-ended, ontological questions, including: in a post-apocalyptic world, what *is* a survivor if not a thief?

But Ely's question also exposes a profound despair in humanity. Beyond being thieves, survivors might also lend assistance and emotional support to other survivors. This choice, between self-interest and altruism, is dramatized through the amount of physical distance—close or remote—that both characters keep from Ely. Despite his father's demand not to touch Ely, the boy reaches out to help him when he stumbles to the ground. Following this point of contact, the boy serves as a mediator between both men, translating their differences into a common language. After the boy communicates his father's first message to Ely—that they mean him no harm—an awed silence overwhelms them. While Ely looks up at them as if “he thinks [they're] not real” (162), the man falls under an odd spell of fabulist mysticism: “Perhaps he'd turned into a god and they to trees” (163). Similar figures of metamorphosis appear when Ely is described in bestial terms, alternately as a pet and a “vulture” with “scrawny claws” for hands (164). The man even refuses to offer Ely a spoon, as if he were incapable of using such a civilized instrument.

But the man's attempts to cast Ely in a reductive, sub-human role are challenged by their subsequent dialogue. In keeping with his character, he insists on setting clear, definite limits to conversation; when he engages Ely in conversation, he tries to pin him down ontologically, matching words with actions.¹⁰ He asks a series of point-blank questions, each of which is met with a cryptic, disingenuous response. Ely lies about his age (“ninety”), his possessions (he claims to have “nothing,” then admits to having “some stuff”), and even his own name, since these defined, spoken terms might threaten his survival: “I don't want anybody talking about me...I think in times like these the less said the better. If something had happened and we were

¹⁰ On the night before this dialogue, the father had conceded to new terms of a verbal deal worked out with his son: they will spend only one night with Ely.

survivors and we met on the road, then we'd have something to talk about. But we're not. So we don't" (171-172). Obligated to no one, the old man eludes any punishment that might follow a fixed crime (Kunsa 60). He seeks to divest himself of a stable identity attached to any specific name; by doing so, he prevents others from locating him ontologically through language. Although it remains unclear what underlies his motives, the man named Ely resists allowing verbal discourse to make set narratives out of their words and actions. He embodies a radical nihilism that negates history, existence, and even meaning.

It is only when the old man is posed an aporetic question that the void of his beliefs are revealed. Noticing that Ely is struck by the presence of his son, the man asks him: "What if I said he's a god?" (172). The old man responds by claiming to be "past all that now...Where men cant live gods fare no better...I hope that's not true what you said because to be on the road with the last god would be a terrible thing" (172). Ely negates an anthropomorphic divinity since he associates the word with a past time, during which "god" (as a higher being) had a place in a theological, humanist landscape. Instead, the old man has immersed himself in a postlapsarian, dystopic present, divorced from any fixed past. Appropriately enough, he responds to the man's question with a nihilist counter-narrative, in which Death remains after humanity has been expunged from the earth: "When we're all gone at last they'll be nobody here but death and his days will be numbered too. He'll be out in the road there with nothing to do and nobody to do it to" (173).

In a dramatic way, Ely imagines a *post*-postlapsarian fable in which human subjects, absent from the earth, can no longer be imagined in relation to history. Instead, they are replaced with the "post-human" subject, Death, which exists *sui generis* without any proleptic relation to an end. In this new fable, human existence is trumped by death and history is reduced to

nothingness. Ely's fable masks an elaborate denial of intergenerational responsibility. By erasing humanity from history, he fails to recognize the falsehood of his own claim: "Where men cant live gods fare no better...to be on the road with the last god would be a terrible thing." On the contrary, in this world, men (and women) *can* survive and therefore gods (higher values) *might* fare better than he expects. The fundamental existence of the father and son validates a transcendent value of generational continuity. Even though the father fails to live up to the boy's ideals of social responsibility, he still carries out his parental role in the generational structure.

This tension surfaces during the father's last days, when the limitations of his practical orientation to survival are fully exposed. After they return to the road, their belongings are stolen by "an outcast from one of the communes," a victim of another bloodcult (255). Clearly, the thief has acted out of pure self-interest and broken the covenant that the father and son have promised to uphold. In response to his transgression, they grapple with a new ethical dilemma: if a stranger steals from them (thus breaking their pact), are they still obligated to help him? Along these very lines, the father and son disagree in terms of meting out the proper form of justice for the thief. Out of vindictiveness, the father holds him at gunpoint for an interminable amount of time. The boy, in contrast, recognizes the thief's dignity in the midst of suffering and abject humiliation. While the father and thief only speak *past* one another (never to one another), the boy becomes their impromptu interlocutor; through a tense dialogue that he forges between both men, he convinces his father to reach a compromise formation: rather than kill the thief, he will exchange his life for the objects that he has stolen from them. After forcing the thief to strip and pile his clothing and shoes into their cart, the man replies, "you'd have done the same" and "I'm going to leave you the way you left us" (257). When they depart, leaving the thief naked and shivering in the cold, the boy recognizes that his father has violated their covenant to help others. His father's

moral justification for stealing from the thief merely relies on a twisted inversion of charity:

“what do you think would have happened to us if we hadnt caught him?” (258) The primacy of

concern for the other is undermined and transfigured into solipsism:

What do you want to do?
Just help him, Papa. Just help him.
The man looked back up the road.
He was just hungry, Papa. He's going to die.
He's going to die anyway.
He's so scared, Papa.

...

You're not the one who has to worry about everything.
The boy said something but he couldnt understand him. What? he said.
He looked up, his wet and grimy face. Yes I am, he said. I am the one (259).

Through dialogue, the boy uses implorations to deconstruct his father's practical self-interest, then elevates (in its place) an expansive alterity. Both adopt the third person (“he” and “him”), but while the man dismisses the thief on the general grounds of mortality, the boy reifies him as a person with particular needs and emotions. The father denies his own failure to help the thief by abstracting him from their immediate responsibility to others; moreover, he fails to understand that his son has assumed this responsibility by expressing concern (“worry”) about other survivors. At the very point at which language and communication break down—“The boy said something but he couldnt understand him”—the boy expresses an affirmative commitment to others: “Yes...I am the one.”

Moments before his death, the father finally comes to terms with this commitment. Having arrived at the shoreline, the topos he recognizes the fulfillment of his paternal obligations to his son. In a last confession (of sorts), he tells the boy to “carry the fire” residing inside of him, the realm of symbolic language that links father to son: “If I'm not here you can still talk to me...and I'll talk to you” (278-279). Through dialogue, the boy keeps his father's memory alive, but he also preemptively imagines the existence of other sons and other fathers

who communicate through similar dialogues. Together, they recall an image that the boy had once seen: another lost, “little boy” who sought reunion with his family. With his last words, the man assures his son that “Goodness will find the little boy. It always has. It will again” (281). “Goodness,” or a transcendent value of altruism, does prevail when the boy is adopted into a surrogate family that upholds charitable values. The boy meets a “veteran of old skirmishes,” who himself turns out to be father to a “little boy” and “little girl” (284). McCarthy stages their encounter along explicit generational grounds of dialogue:

Where’s the man you were with?
He died.
Was that your father?
Yes. He was my Papa
I’m sorry.
I don’t know what to do.
I think you should come with me (282).

While accepting the stranger’s offer of adoption, the boy also insists on the unique, intimate connection to his own father; through the course of this brief conversation, “*the man*” is modified into “*your father*,” then personalized as “*my Papa*.” Throughout *The Road*, this abiding relationship between father and son has elevated their status, as members of the last generation, above nihilistic despair (Zipp, qtd. in Kunsu 14).

By turning away from Ely, bloodcult members, and other predators on *The Road*, the boy denies those elements of the past associated with oppression and domination. Instead, he revivifies the past by sustaining an imaginary dialogue with his father.¹¹ By turning towards this family, which offers him redemptive survival, he plays a vital role in creating a new time (*Neutzeit*) for future generations. In this sense, he fulfills Walter Benjamin’s concept of *weak millennialism*:

¹¹The father’s final advice to the boy is to “talk to me and I’ll talk to you...make it like talk that you imagine. And you’ll hear me”; the boy lives up to his end of the bargain when he asserts that “I’ll talk to you everyday...and I won’t forget” (279, 286).

The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim (254).

In a post-apocalyptic world without the framework of a (strong) Messiah, past generations claim the boy as their final, secular redeemer. Implicit in this role is the boy's participation in an original narrative succeeding modernity's teleological orientation. In contradistinction to Ely's story, *this* fable occurs after Death has augured an uncertain beginning, not a final end, for humanity. This fable entails "carrying the fire" forward in spite of the destruction of civilization, states, and traditional modes of community.

If history is to be redeemed, it must first be recast in language and remade in the image of generations. Despite the various forms that generational consciousness has assumed in this study, all of these works foreground *crisis* as the defining feature of generations. We might even go so far as to claim that generations of late modernity are inherently crisis-forged. In *Atonement*, the sociological crisis attending Briony Tallis' transition from childhood to adulthood is articulated through a symptomatic response in her art. In *Midnight's Children*, the historical crisis of Indira Gandhi's emergency state provokes Saleem Sinai to reclaim the mantle of his own (and other) generations. In *Hema and Kaushik*, the phenomenological crisis of Parul Di's death both restricts Kaushik's development and offers Hema the chance to redeem this loss through the birth of her child. In *Underworld*, the cultural crisis of the coldwar stratifies generations into two groups, both of which must come to terms with weapons and waste systems as generational objects. In *The Road*, the final crisis of nuclear war fulfills all of these crises and even threatens the structure of generational consciousness itself. However, as McCarthy's narrator reminds us, "Perhaps in the world's destruction it would be possible to see how it was made... The ponderous counterspectacle of things ceasing to be" (274). In this unrelentingly bleak portrait of "things

ceasing to be,” in which families are dislodged from culture and culture is detached from history, generations might remind us how to re-make the world.

Bibliography

- Armstrong, Nancy. Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel. Oxford: Oxford U Press, 1990.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics. Trans. Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984.
- . The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: U of Texas Press, 1981.
- Barkun, Michael. Disaster and the Millenium. New Haven: Yale U Press, 1974.
- Beam, Christopher. "The Uh-Ohs: What Should We Call the Decade that Started in the Year 2000?" 18 Dec. 2009. Slate Magazine. 20 Jan. 2010.
- Bell, Michael. "The Metaphysics of Modernism." The Cambridge Companion to Modernism. Cambridge: Cambridge U Press, 1999.
- Benjamin, Walter. "Critique of Violence." Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings. Ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings. Cambridge: Harvard U Press, 1996. 236-252.
- . Illuminations. Ed. Hannah Arendt. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken, 1968.
- Bollas, Christopher. Being a Character: Psychoanalysis and Self Experience. New York: Hill and Wang, 1992.
- Bollas, Christopher. "The Aesthetic Moment and the Search for Transformation." Transitional Objects and Potential Spaces: Literary Uses of D.W. Winnicott. Ed. Peter L. Rudnytsky. New York: Columbia UP, 1993.

- Bradbury, Malcolm and James McFarlane. "Introduction." Modernism: 1890-1930. Sussex: Harvester Press, 1978.
- Busch, Thomas. "Phenomenology and Communicative Ethics: Husserl, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty." The Ethics of Postmodernity: Current Trends in Continental Thought. Ed. Gary B. Madison and Marty Fairbairn. Evanston: Northwestern U Press, 1999. 163-173.
- Caruth, Cathy. "After the End: A Response." Studies in the Literary Imagination 41.2 (2008): 121-129.
- Chakravorty, Bhaswati. "Shifting Space: Ruthlessly Immaculate." 28 March 2008. The Telegraph. 17 November 2008.
- Connolly, Cyril. The Modern Movement: One Hundred Key Books From England, France, and America 1880-1950. London: Grafton, 1965.
- Critchley, Simon. "Introduction." The Cambridge Companion to Levinas. Ed. Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi. Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 2002.
- D'Angelo, Kathleen. "'To Make a Novel': The Construction of a Critical Readership in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*." Studies in the Novel 41.1 (Spring 2009): 88-105.
- DeCurtis, Anthony. "'An Outsider in this Society': An Interview with Don DeLillo." Introducing Don DeLillo. Ed. Frank Lentricchia. Durham: Duke U Press, 1991. 43-66.
- Dekoven, Marianne. "History, the Twentieth Century, and a Contemporary Novel." Novel: A Forum on Fiction 42.2 (2009): 332-336.
- Deleuze, Gilles. Difference and Repetition. Trans. Paul Patton. New York: Columbia U P, 1994.
- DeLillo, Don. Underworld. New York: Scribner, 1997.
- D'Hoker, Elke. "Confession and Atonement in Contemporary Fiction: J.M. Coetzee, John Banville, and Ian McEwan." Critique 48.1 (Fall 2006): 31-43.

- Ferguson, Niall. The War of the World: Twentieth Century Conflict and the Descent of the West. London: Penguin, 2006.
- Ferris, David S. "Aura, Resistance, and the Event of History." Walter Benjamin: Theoretical Questions. Ed. David S. Ferris. Stanford U Press, 1996.
- . The Cambridge Introduction to Walter Benjamin. Cambridge: Cambridge U Press, 2008.
- Fitzpatrick, Kathleen. "The Unmaking of History, Baseball, Coldwar, and Underworld." UnderWords: Perspectives on Don DeLillo's Underworld. Ed. Joseph Dewey, Steven G. Kellman and Irving Malin. Newark: U of Delaware P, 2002.
- Foucault, Michel. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews. Ed. D.J. Bouchard. Ithaca: Cornell U Press, 1977.
- Freud, Sigmund. "The Uncanny." The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch. New York: Norton, 2001. 929-956.
- Friedman, Thomas. The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007.
- Garber, Marjorie. Shakespeare and Modern Culture. New York: Pantheon, 2008.
- Gardner, Katy. Global Migrants, Local Lives. London: Oxford U Press, 1995.
- Giles, Todd. "Writing and Chutnification in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*." Explicator (2007): 182-185.
- Gitlin, Todd. The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage. Toronto: Bantam, 1987.
- Gorra, Michael. After Empire: Scott, Naipaul, Rushdie. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1997.
- Grammar, John M. "Pastoral and History in Cormac McCarthy's *South*." Perspectives on Cormac McCarthy. Ed. Edwin T. Arnold and Dianne C. Luce. Jackson: U Press of Mississippi, 1999.

- Habermas, Jurgen. The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures. Trans. Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1987.
- Hazra, Indrajit. "Unaccustomed Earth." 1 April 2008. Hindustan Times. 17 November 2008.
- Hegel, Geog Wilhelm Friedrich. The Phenomenology of Mind. Trans. J.B. Baillie. Mineola: Dover, 2003.
- Hildago, Pilar. "Memory and Storytelling in Ian McEwan's Atonement." Critique 46.2 (Winter 2005): 82-91.
- Hogan, Patrick Colm. "Midnight's Children: Kashmir and the Politics of Identity." Twentieth Century Literature (2001): 510-544.
- Jaeger, Hans. "Generations in History: Reflections on a Controversial Concept." 1977. 15 Feb. 2010 <<http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/classes/201/articles>>.
- Jameson, Frederic. Postmodernism; or The Cultural Logic of Capitalism. Durham: Duke UP, 1991.
- Kecskemeti, Paul. "Introduction." Mannheim, Karl. Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge. Trans. Paul Kecskentic. Oxford: Oxford U Press, 1952.
- Khalifa, Salah el Moncef bin. "Historiographer, Archaeologist, Diagnostician: Don Delillo's Underworld and the Inscriptions of the Commonplace." Angelaki 13.1 (2008): 149-165.
- Knight, Peter. "Everything's Connected: Underworld's Secret History of Paranoia." Modern Fiction Studies 45.3 (1999): 811-836.
- Kortenaar, Neil Ten. Self, Nation, Text in Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children. Quebec City: McGill-Queen's U Press, 2004.
- Koselleck, Reinhart. Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time. Trans. Keith Tribe. Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1985.

- Kristeva, Julia. Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection. New York: Columbia U Press, 1982.
- Kunsa, Ashley. "Maps of the World in Its Becoming: Post-Apocalyptic Naming in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*." Journal of Modern Literature 33.1 (2009): 57-74.
- Lacan, Jacques. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function, as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience." Ecrits. Trans. Bruce Fink. New York: Norton, 2002.
- Lahiri, Jhumpa. The Interpreter of Maladies. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999.
- . The Namesake. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2003.
- . Unaccustomed Earth. New York: Knopf, 2008.
- LeClair, Thomas. "An Interview with Don DeLillo ." Conversations with Don DeLillo . Ed. Thomas DePietro. Jackson: U Press of Mississippi, 2005. 3-15.
- LeClair, Tom. In the Loop: Don DeLillo and the Systems Novel. Urbana: U of Illinois Press, 1987.
- Lee, Daniel E. Generations and the Challenge of Justice. Lanham: University Press of America, 1996.
- Levenson, Michael. "Introduction." The Cambridge Companion to Modernism. Ed. Michael Levenson. Cambridge: Cambridge U Press, 1999.
- Lodge, David. Consciousness and the Novel: Connected Essays. Cambridge : Harvard U Press, 2002.
- Lukács, Georg. The Meaning of Contemporary Realism. Trans. John and Necke Mander. London: Merlin, 1963.
- Lyotard, Jean-Francois. The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984.

- Mannheim, Karl. "On Generations." Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge. Trans. Paul Kecskemeti. Oxford: Oxford U Press, 1952.
- McCall, Tom. "Momentary Violence." Walter Benjamin: Theoretical Questions. Stanford: Stanford U Press, 1996.
- McCarthy, Cormac. No Country for Old Men. New York: Vintage, 2005.
- . The Road. 2006: Vintage, 2006.
- McClure, John A. "Delillo and Mystery." The Cambridge Companion to Don Delillo. Ed. John A. Duvall. Cambridge : Cambridge U Press, 2008. 166-178.
- McEwan, Ian. Amsterdam. New York: Anchor, 1998.
- . Atonement. New York: Nan A. Talese, 2002.
- . Black Dogs. New York: Bantam, 1994.
- . Enduring Love. New York: Nan A. Talese, 1997.
- . First Love, Last Rites. New York: Anchor, 1994.
- . On Chesil Beach. New York: Anchor, 2008.
- . Saturday. New York: Nan A. Talese, 2005.
- . The Child in Time. New York: Anchor, 1987.
- . The Innocent. New York: Bantam, 1991.
- McKeon, Michael. The Origins of the English Novel: 1600-1740. Baltimore: John Hopkins U Press, 1987.
- Mead, Rebecca. "What Do You Call It?" The New Yorker 4 January 2010: 17-18.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. Basic Writings. London: Routledge, 2004.
- Morson, Gary Saul and Caryl Emerson. Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics. Palo Alto: Stanford U Press, 1990.

- Mukerjee, Ankhi. "Fissured Skin, Inner-Ear Radio, and a Telepathic Nose: the Senses as Media in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*." Paragraph 29.3 (2006): 55-76.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch. New York: Norton, 2001. 2169-2181.
- Noah, Timothy. "Name That Decade: Can We Please Agree on What Era It Is We're Living In?" 27 Dec. 2004. Slate Magazine. 20 Jan. 2010.
- Noon, David. "The Triumph of Death: National Security and Imperial Erasures in Don Delillo's *Underworld*." Canadian Review of American Studies 37.1 (2007): 83-110.
- Osteen, Mark. American Magic and Dread: Don Delillo's Dialogue with Culture. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2000.
- Padmanabhan, Mukund. "Roots, Migration, and Exile." 23 March 2008. The Hindu. 17 November 2008.
- Rainey, Lawrence. "The Cultural Economy of Modernism." The Cambridge Companion to Modernism. Ed. Steven Levenson. Cambridge: Cambridge U Press, 1999.
- Rambo, Shelly L. "Beyond Redemption? Reading Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* After the End of the World." Studies in the Literary Imagination 41.2 (2008): 99-120.
- Rushdie, Salman. Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991. London: Granta, 1991.
- . Midnight's Children. New York: Random House, 1981.
- Schnapp, Jeffrey T. Crowds. Ed. Jeffrey T. Schnapp. Stanford: Stanford U Press, 2006.
- Song, Min Hyung. "The Children of 1965: Allegory, Postmodernism and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*." Twentieth Century Literature 53.3 (2007).

- Steinberg, Michael P. Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History. Ithaca : Cornell U Press, 1996.
- Tinker, Hugh. The Banyan Tree: Overseas Emigrants from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Oxford: Oxford U Press, 1977.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. Mihail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle. Trans. Wlad Godzich. Vol. 13. Minneapolis: U of Minneapolis P, 1984.
- Villanueva, Dario. Theories of Literary Realism. Trans. Mihai I. Spariosu and Santiago Garcia-Castanon. Albany: State U of New York P, 1997.
- Wallace, Molly. "Venerated Emblems: Delillo's Underworld and the History-Commodity." Critique 42.4 (2001): 367-383.
- Watt, Ian. The Rise of the Novel. London: Chatto and Windus, 1957.
- Weber, Eugen. Apocalypse: Prophecies, Cults, and Millennial Beliefs Throughout the Ages. Cambridge: Harvard U Press, 1999.
- White, Hayden. Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism. Baltimore: John Hopkins U Press, 1978.
- Winnicott, D.W. Holding and Interpretation: Fragment of an Analysis. Ed. Masud R. Khan. London: Hogarth Press, 1986.
- . Playing and Reality. London: Tavistock, 1971.
- Winnicott, D.W. "The Location of Cultural Experience." Transitional Objects and Potential Spaces: Literary Uses of D.W. Winnicott. Ed. Peter L. Rudnytsky. New York: Colombia UP, 1993.
- Zahavi, Dan. "Husserl's Phenomenology." Stanford: Stanford U P, 2003.