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Hilary Mantel's Provisionality

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Abstract

Hilary Mantel's work, published over three decades, has only recently begun to get critical attention. This is partly due to the success and adaptation of her novels *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies*. The first woman to win the Booker twice, Mantel's writing has won the kind of praise that is the lifeblood of the commercial writer. However, critical responses to her work have so far been focused on three areas: the historical themes of her novels on Thomas Cromwell, biographical and autobiographical themes, and the realism of her fiction. This thesis seeks to contribute to Mantel scholarship by questioning its critical assumptions. In this it has one precedent, Eileen Pollard's critically ambitious 2013 thesis, which takes the ellipsis as an 'exploded full stop' and takes this as a figure through which to reread Mantel. Pollard offers detailed readings of texts *Fludd*, *Beyond Black* and *Giving up the Ghost*, and questions the assumptions that have tended to underpin Mantel scholarship so far: an over-emphasis on the 'unity' and 'origin' of Mantel's work, which closes off what Pollard calls the excess of her writings. Although my thesis shares a preoccupation with Pollard in emphasising the openness of Mantel's work, the focus on ellipsis risks abstraction, and loses contact with Mantel's own popular appeal. This thesis thus intends to wed a sense of the complexity and sophistication of Mantel with a criticism that remains true to the approachable and open quality of her writing. The openness of Mantel's work is thus my starting point, where I begin to think about her writing in terms of provisionality.

Provisionality is not ambiguity, nor indeterminacy, although both of these effects inform my reading of Mantel. Provisionality describes the way that Mantel's writing crosses spatial, temporal, imaginative and generic borders. I use the idea to discuss Mantel's transforming approach to vision, the spectral, realism, the child, and writing itself. What does it mean to write a full length work on an author who is alive and publishing at the same time? This work seeks to provide readings, as well as to take stock of the other provisions available to Mantel's readers for thinking about her work.

Chapter One focuses on *Beyond Black* (2005) and 'The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher' (2014), to developing the idea of provisionality and its connection to the spectral logic that in these texts relates writing to time and to the other. I think about the use of visual representations, drawing on Hardy and Wordsworth, and investigate the short story in terms of the 'blink.' Chapter Two uses *Fludd* (1989), *Wolf Hall* (2009) and *Bring up the Bodies* (2012), to discuss Mantel's relation to mimesis, realist representation and their implications for notions of time and history. Chapter Three offers readings of *A Change of Climate* (1994) and *Every Day is Mother's Day* (1985), connecting the provisional with the figure of the child. This chapter also develops Chapter Two's insights about time in Mantel. Chapter Four more broadly considers the idea of the writing process in Mantel's works, particularly focusing on her memoir *Giving up the Ghost* (2003). Taken together, these chapters will form a contribution into Mantel criticism which explores provisionality as an open figuration and a critical intervention into the oeuvre of an evolving writer.

Acknowledgements

Parts of chapter four appear in an essay, 'Subjectivity in Process: Writing and the "I" in *Giving up the Ghost* and *Ink in the Blood*': forthcoming in an edited volume from the Bloomsbury Contemporary Critical Perspectives series.

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Note on Abbreviations

The titles of Mantel's works are abbreviated as follows:

AMT "The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher"

APOGS A Place of Greater Safety

BB Beyond Black

BUB Bring up the Bodies

CC A Change of Climate

ED Every Day is Mother's Day

EL An Experiment in Love

GUG Giving up the Ghost

Ink Ink in the Blood

WH Wolf Hall

For Isobel and Alex, with love.

Introduction: Mantel as provisional writer

Hilary Mantel's works are 'rich and strange', as John Mullan writes in a Guardian profile of 2015.¹ Of her twelve published novels and two short story collections, she is best known for her historical novels *Wolf Hall* (2009) and *Bring up the Bodies* (2012). Both of these books won the Man Booker Prize, making her the first woman to do so twice. The intense critical acclaim for the 'Tudor' novels has highlighted the dearth of critical material on her other published works, and indeed a lack of public awareness of it.² There are no book length studies of Hilary Mantel's work currently published, although this is changing.³ This study will address a gap in Mantel studies, by considering a range of her novels thematically, discussing her work in relation to Jacques Derrida, Jacques Rancière, Roland Barthes, and Sigmund Freud, among others. The failure to categorise Mantel is demonstrated by a seeming reluctance to work across her oeuvre, which takes in a wide range of genres and modes. Scholars work on one aspect or book in Mantel's oeuvre; for example, Victoria Stewart's article on *Beyond Black*, which historicises the issue of mediumship as a renewed interest in spiritualism in contemporary British fiction.⁴

¹ Itself an allusion to Ariel's song in *The Tempest*, Act 1 Scene 2: Full fathom five thy father lies;/Of his bones are coral made;/Those are pearls that were his eyes./Nothing of him doth fade,/But doth suffer a sea-change/Into something rich and strange./Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell... (964) Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest*. in *The Complete Oxford Shakespeare*. Wells, Stanley and Gary Taylor eds., Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987.

² Being interviewed after winning the Booker for the second time, Mantel said, "As I said in my acceptance speech just now, there are people who think I was hatched out of an egg on the day *Wolf Hall* was published" going on to suggest they go back to her earlier work to "see what I've been up to all these years." *Nightwaves*. BBC Radio 3. 07/03/2013, 22.00. <https://learningonscreen.ac.uk/ondemand/index.php/prog/02F96856>. Accessed 15th July 2017.

³ Bloomsbury will publish a Contemporary Critical Perspectives collection in 2018, edited by Eileen Pollard and Ginette Carpenter, to which I make a contribution: 'Writing and the 'I': Subjectivity in Process in *Giving up the Ghost* and *Ink in the Blood*'. Eileen Pollard's 2013 thesis "*What is done and what is declared*": *Origin and Ellipsis in the work of Hilary Mantel* explores a selection of Mantel's books from a Derridean standpoint. Lucy Arnold's 2016 thesis *Where the Ghosts of Meaning Are: Haunting and Spectrality in the Work of Hilary Mantel* focuses on spectrality. Other theses discuss Mantel's work in relation to other women writers such as Jeanette Winterson.

⁴ Stewart, Victoria. "A Word in your Ear: Mediumship and Subjectivity in Hilary Mantel's *Beyond Black*." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*. 50:3, 2009: 293-312. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3200/CRIT.50.3.293-312>. Accessed 3rd November 2017.

What I call reluctance is both practical (Mantel is two books in to writing a trilogy), and, more importantly, theoretical. Finding it difficult to ‘place’ an author produces an uneasiness; the fear of work that somehow fails to stay in place or shape-shifts. With this in mind, provisionality developed out of a desire to explore the richness of Mantel’s work without imposing a framework or reductive reading. Taking the lead from the epigraph to *Every Day is Mother’s Day*, quoted from Pascal, ‘Two errors; one, to take everything literally; two, to take everything spiritually’; this thesis will develop a provisional reading practice that can suspend judgement, allowing meaning to ‘hang’. This constitutes a walking ‘alongside’ Mantel, rather than imposition from above or deconstruction from within. Provisionality is one of many deconstructions, and this thesis builds on the work of Jacques Derrida and others in order to explore deconstructive reading practices that complement, sit with and revel in rather than illuminate or interrogate.⁵

In “Aphorism Countertime” Derrida writes of Romeo’s name, and Juliet’s injunction that he should lose it: “Oh, be some other name” (Derrida “Aphorism” 137). In aphorism 34:

Irony of the proper name, as analyzed by Juliet. Sentence of truth that carries death, aphorism separates, and in the first place separates me from my name. I am not my name. One might as well say that I should be able to survive it. But firstly it is destined to survive me. In this way it announces my death. Noncoincidence and contretemps between my name and me, between the experience according to which I am named or hear myself named and my “living present.” Rendezvous with my name. *Untimely*, bad timing, at the wrong moment. (140-1 and *passim*)

‘What’s in a name? That which we call a rose / By any other word would smell as sweet’ exclaims Juliet as she contemplates her lover Romeo; also her family’s sworn enemy and the unknowing architect of her death. What is in a name, and more specifically, what is in the name of Mantel? The irony being here that her name is

⁵ Rita Felski in *The Limits of Critique* (2015) suggests alternatives to what she calls the ‘piercing but one-eyed gaze of critique’ (18). Provisionality is also offered in this spirit.

changed as well, the name of the father supplanted by her mother's lover. Her name suggests significant etymological moves, another way of thinking provisionally by figuring the reading experience. Provisionality is thus reading practice as much as anything else.

What's in Mantel's name? Chambers defines mantel, from mantle, latin mantellum as; 1. Protective garment or blanket, immediately bringing to mind the many uses in Mantel's fiction of cloaks, coats and coverings which signify in literary and social ways. For example, the pressure on Mantel to give up academia and work in a dress shop (*GUG* 174; "Sanity" 28-9) or Lynette's fur coat, in *An Experiment in Love*, so freely given and yet paid for with her life. The importance of weaving is explored in the second chapter through the idea of text and texture. To return to Chambers' definitions of mantel that are useful for the purposes of this study: 2. Figurative sense of anything which enfolds, entraps or encloses as a mantle; an immaterial thing likened to or described as a covering (also formerly guise or pretence, obsolete), and 4. A duty or position of authority assumed or inherited from another. These definitions of 'mantel' will be used throughout to suggest provisional readings.

The name is at the border: figuring the singularity of the bearer, it also takes on a life of its own. This life of its own is referred to by Derrida as a death sentence, for the name is destined to outlive its holder. The name exists only in language, but the lived experience of bearing a name suggests that naming has power: 'persons shouldn't name you' as Mantel writes in her memoir, after the doctor has coined a new name for her: 'He calls me Little Miss Neverwell. I am angry. I don't like being given a name, it's too much like power over me' (*GUG* 82). Names stick; to be

unnamed is to be inhuman, outside of the networks of time, subject to *contretemps*, as Derrida might say.

What is provisionality and why is it needed?

In short, provisionality is a reading practice that walks a fine line between the ethical demands of the present moment and the chaos of history. The etymology of provisional, according to Chambers dictionary, is the Latin *provisio*, which derives from *providere*:⁶ *pro* being before, and *videre* meaning to see. The obsolete usage of provide, ‘to make ready beforehand’ or ‘prepare for future use’ reflects this root as does the modern usage of provisioning supplies, such as for an army. Provisionality has connotations of foresight through its root in *providere*, which connects to an obsolete usage of provisional as ‘foresight’ (OED). Already there is an engagement between provisionality and etymology; provisionality denotes polysemy, although it is not only multiplicity of meanings, as we have already seen. Etymological investigation is in itself a kind of provisionality, which complicates knowing, makes it uncanny. There is something in provisionality’s ‘pro’, meaning before or in front, that invokes protection, the construction of a shield or fortress. Like the child Mantel’s favourite word, ‘citadel’, to provision suggests a defensive move. The problematic of this defensiveness returns in the final chapter, when I discuss the vulnerability in Derrida’s scene of writing.

Provisionality starts life in 1821, according to the Oxford English Dictionary.

Born into an explicitly political context, the word begins a trajectory of meaning

⁶ Nicholas Royle also makes this observation about *providere*, in relation to his idea of telepathy and seeing ahead *Telepathy and Literature* (34).

which travels into the present. Provisionality means ‘provisionalness’ in its first recorded usage in *The Examiner* of London. We discover that provisionality is heard during a debate in the much-contested lower house of the French parliament, during the Bourbon restoration. This parliament, increasingly dominated by the right wing, hears an impassioned speech from liberal moderate Monsieur de Corcelles. In this speech he accuses his political opponents of promoting ‘provisional justice’. Provisionality, he argues, ‘is infused into all the branches of your system, and enervates and withers you’.⁷ M. de Corcelles’ *cri de coeur* against the reactionary forces of the Bourbon Restoration describes a system which stands in for ‘proper’ justice, a calculated system, a system of law more than justice.⁸ Already a problem arises; in the post- and counter-revolutionary chaos of early-nineteenth-century France, provisionality effectively begins its life as a derogatory term levelled against conservative forces. How can the notion of provisionality provide any usefulness in reading Hilary Mantel?

By tracing provisionality’s beginnings in a time of political upheaval, I will show how provisionality as a reading practice can be employed to investigate the networks of meaning that exist within a selection of her novels, short stories and memoir. Provisionality will thus be the axis around which my central claim is stated: that Hilary Mantel’s work as an author has an overtly political and philosophical significance for how to live. (I say how to live to differentiate living from survival. It is not possible to ignore those for whom living is theoretical, who do just survive on a daily basis). Taking up the mantle (as it were) of thinking the present crises facing the

⁷ I infer this through the paper’s reporting of the reaction of the house to the speech: “*Long continued plaudits from the left, and silence on the right*” (emphasis in original).

⁸ See for example Joseph Goy’s entry on the “Civil Code” in *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution* Francois Furet and Mona Ozouf eds. Harvard UP: Cambridge and London, 1989. (437-448)

world means finding a different way of thinking those crises. Consider Mantel's political commitments: she publishes regularly in the *London Review of Books*, for example. She is on record as feeling a 'boiling detestation' for Margaret Thatcher, first female UK Prime Minister (Guardian).⁹ She refuses to be categorised as a 'British' writer, preferring instead to be considered European. As she writes, 'In my dreams of Europe, I had found the keys to the gates of an unknown city. For the constant and passionate imagination, no documents or passes are needed' (Leader ed. 97). As I write this, the UK has voted to leave the EU, Prime Minister Theresa May's decision to call a snap election has left a hung parliament, and the country is in disarray while the austerity-led Conservative party cling to power. There is turmoil within the country, but also hope that the current political upheaval will lead to a change of direction against austerity politics. Of course, I am responding to a particular moment here and now. What I am also suggesting is that these 'moments' in Hilary Mantel's work can be read as ways of helping us know how to live. This response will show how Mantel's provisionality is important for justice, a preoccupation that is implied throughout her work and explicitly stated in a Radio 4 interview where she states, 'I want to do justice to my characters' (Today programme).

Thinking about the connections between Mantel's work and today's social and political turmoil: it is no coincidence that provisionality's impossible birth occurs at a high point of upheaval. Relevant for today's struggle against late capitalism's inflexibilities, provisionality points to a critical juncture for justice, at its birth and right now. Take for example Mantel's novel *A Place of Greater Safety* (1992), which

⁹ 'Hilary Mantel on Margaret Thatcher: "I can still feel that boiling detestation"' *Guardian*. Damian Barr. 19th September 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/sep/19/hilary-mantel-interview-short-story-assassination-margaret-thatcher>

brings revolution and provisionality together. Although published in 1992, it was conceived and written earlier, throughout a period of mental and physical turmoil in Mantel's own life. The novel's genesis thus echoes provisionality's own birth in the tumult of post- and counter-revolutionary politics. By giving an account of the interiority of three characters (Camille Desmoulins, George D'Anton/Danton, Maximillian Robespierre) who comprise the revolution's 'actors', she asks the reader to consider the meaning and application of justice, both then and now. For instance, Mantel's use of Maximillian Robespierre's proclamation on justice, quoted as the epigraph to Part Five of *A Place of Greater Safety*:

Terror is nothing other than justice, prompt, stern and inflexible; it is not so much a particular principle as a consequence of the general principle of democracy applied to the most urgent needs of our country... The government of the Revolution is the despotism of liberty against the tyrants (quoted in APOGS 491).

Mantel gives an account of Robespierre that shows his inflexibility as a character flaw; his avoidance of intimacy with women represents an essential inhumanity and a frightening indifference to loss of life (including his own). About halfway through the text, a conversation takes place between Maximillian Robespierre and Camille Desmoulins:

‘But if we are not under Providence, what is everything for?’ Robespierre now looked wildly alarmed. ‘What is the Revolution for?’
 For George-Jacques [Danton] to make money out of, Camille thought. Robespierre answered himself. ‘Surely it is to bring us to the kind of society that God intends? To bring us justice and equality, to full humanity?’
 Oh good heavens, Camille thought. This Max, he believes every word he says. (APOGS 445)

Robespierre's idealistic zealotry is treated by his friends as a harmless character defect, until his unswerving devotion to the revolutionary cause means a purge of those who disagree with him. In many ways Mantel's portrayal of Robespierre conforms to the cliché of the work obsessed ascetic (on the same page as this conversation Camille Desmoulins examines Max's hard bed and tidy work desk),

who cares too much about books and not enough about life, and who inadvertently hurts those around him (see also the Thomas More of *Wolf Hall*). Mantel's exploration of the character of Robespierre employs this trope partly as a literary device, but also to show that the replacement of aristocratic despotism for the despotism of the rabble is a decision that turns libertarians into tyrants. Robespierre is ultimately guilty of thinking inflexibly: of not understanding that there is a just decision somewhere in between tyranny and liberty.¹⁰

The fictional — or at least exaggerated — tide of optimism that sweeps France in 1789 is something that Mantel holds in abeyance. In the novel, revolution happens through *realpolitik*, dominated by backroom bartering and double-dealing. The reader sees not the spontaneous uprising of the peasantry to overthrow the feudal master, but a calculated power grab by the bourgeoisie. The massed rabble of French peasantry are thus simply dupes, destined to replace one set of masters for another.¹¹ What Mantel's portrayal of revolutionary France demonstrates is the mutability of history and the necessity for caution in making interpretations; how easy it is to erroneously ascribe motives and thoughts to characters we only know as if through a fiction. In other words, to tread carefully with the dead. As Nicholas Royle states, 'The literary turn is about a new sensitivity to the ghostliness of literature', what he calls in the preceding paragraph 'a new appreciation of the ghostliness of fiction, the spectral virtualities of literature in which our culture and society, law and institutions are inscribed' (Royle *Veering* 134).

The ethical responsibility towards her characters, to 'do justice' to them thus echoes Derrida's thinking of (and for) the ghost in *Spectres of Marx*. The *Exordium*

¹⁰ For another modern assessment of Robespierre's thought, see *Virtue and Terror* edited and introduced by Slavoj Žižek. Verso, 2007.

¹¹ A thesis that François Furet puts forward in his revisionist *Revolutionary France 1770-1880*. Blackwell: Oxford, 1992.

sets out the responsibility towards the spectre as the exemplary ‘other’. This dead ‘other’ represents the ability (or otherwise) of what Derrida calls the ‘*socius*’ to ‘live otherwise, and better. No, not better, but more justly’ (xviii). The call of the dead must be responded to. The spectre functions as the model for just relationships. Unthinkable without responsibility, justice must respect those who are both no longer there, and the not yet living, which Derrida calls the ‘*non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present*’ (xviii). Learning to live can only happen between life and death, is what Derrida seems to say on xvii-xviii; at once an impossible yet also utterly necessary task.

The connection must be made with Mantel’s autobiography, *Giving up the Ghost* (2003), which begins with her step-father’s ghost. In a sense she sequesters the ghost; not denying its existence but placing in reserve whether or not he is ‘there’. In writing about the ghost and the logic of the spectral, they are both writing about being and existence, the responsibility of one to the other. Mantel’s writing participates in a thinking of spectral logic; one of whose manifestations is the ghostly figure. This logic also haunts writing, all writing; not just that concerned with the ghost as figure or a representation of the dead.

A spectral logic is also at work in Mantel’s writings, in her preoccupation with the ‘moment’. Like Derrida’s moment in *Spectres of Marx*, ‘a spectral moment, a moment that no longer belongs to time’ (Derrida *Spectres* xix), Mantel is preoccupied with the moment when everything changes. This is not the moment of decision, or of conscious intention, or of ‘time’ (‘as a series of modalized presents’ (xix): it is the ‘in-between’. This ‘in-between’ is suspended; in its play with the limits between reality and fiction it is also provisional. Suspended in the sense of no longer working, or being held in an indeterminate state (Chambers), provisionality is reading. But

reading in such a way as to avoid reducing the text and the experience to a real ‘referent’. Provisionality is the ‘word made flesh’; a material symbol which works on and in multiple spaces and times, in both literal and figurative modes. In terms of provisionality as a reading practice, it is not only an exegetical tool but a mode of political commitment that can withstand the affective, temporal, intersubjective, and verbal processes that we call literature. For Derrida, spectrality as a means of crossing divides between the living and the dead expands the scene of responsibility towards the other exponentially. It is this ‘scene’ of responsibility — to bring back in the visual component so crucial to provisionality — that Mantel’s work demonstrates in such a clear-eyed way.¹²

The example of the word ‘birth’ illustrates provisional reading. I have used the word ‘birth’ several times in the preceding pages: the ‘birth’ of provisionality, the conception and ‘genesis’ of the novel. Birth suggests origins, a fixed time and place where provisionality happened: but provisionality is constantly being made and unmade. In the process of making, certain elements come together and break apart, come together again. The reader traces Mantel’s idea of revolutionary France via provisionality, also a trace from revolutionary France. To hold provisionality up as connected to Revolutionary ideals embodied in the slogan *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, and in the process erase the other side, the uncertainty and ambiguity of the provisional. To embrace and enjoy the experience of ‘not knowing’. Provisionality works to expose the mechanisms of power in texts, and in the world. Returning to M de Corcelles, it seems that indecision is the enemy; for him, provisionality reflects

¹² I am indebted to Sarah Wood for this insight. Derrida, in “The Principle of Reason: The University in the Eyes of Its Pupils” uses the example of sclerophthalmic animals (5) to illustrate the figurative relationship between learning and seeing, also invoking the trope of the blink. *Diacritics*. Vol. 13, no. 3. (1983): 2-20. Similarly, Rita Felski suggests ‘neither [art or politics] is reducible to the piercing but one-eyed gaze of critique’ (18). The tension here is explored further in chapter two.

that indecision. For example: de Corcelles says, ‘provisionality...infuses your system,’ ‘enervates’ and ‘withers,’ suggesting that provisionality decays the system from within.

Where does M. De Corcelles’ uneasiness come from? Compare Derrida’s description of the ‘undecidable’ in *Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority*: the undecidable as a ‘ghost’, working from within to undercut certainty, to undermine any absolute notions of decisiveness that might arise from the existence of actual decisions:

The undecidable remains caught, lodged, at least as a ghost - but an essential ghost - in every decision, in every event of decision. Its ghostliness deconstructs from within any assurance of presence, any certitude...that would assure us of the justice of a decision, in truth of the very event of a decision. Who will ever be able to assure us that a decision as such has taken place? (965)

Who indeed? The judgement of the decision is endlessly deferred because it is beyond the human capacity; the judge is a stand in for God, in effect.¹³ Acting like a God, wielding such authority as to make oneself into God, is a charge levelled against Robespierre, in his time and beyond it. The circumstances of provisionality’s revolutionary birth exposes the ‘undecidable’: not, as M de Corcelles assumes, because of indecision, but because the decision ‘rends time’ like the cut of the guillotine. The cut of the guillotine blade forestalls any other decision; its downward stroke takes its place in the Reign of Terror and reverberates through the provisional government of 1821. M de Corcelles’ attack is thus also a warning; take heed of the provisional which ‘withers’ and ‘enervates’, which should give one pause to delay a decision, until that decision is entirely just. An admirable position that is also impossible, given the belatedness of any judgement; only when it is too late can the

¹³ Consider the royal slogan, *dieu et mon droit*, for example.

decision be judged. We arrive back at the question, by whom exactly is the decision to be judged? Who has the right to judge? Upon whose authority does one act?

Mantel demonstrates the link between power as terror and justice in *A Place of Greater Safety*; thus exposing the workings of a power that seeks to efface itself, kid you that it doesn't exist. Remember Robespierre's line which Mantel uses as an epigraph to Part Five; 'Terror is nothing other than justice, prompt, stern and inflexible' (491). This short quote encapsulates the ideology of the guillotine, its terseness like the swift downward movement of the blade itself, its swiftness analogous to the sureness of the Robespierrian revolutionary aim. The purity of Robespierre's conviction leads directly to death by guillotine: death by clinical machine, an efficient conveyor belt of death production. In an ambiguous passage in *A Place of Greater Safety*, the narratorial voice reflects:¹⁴

The weight of the old world is stifling, and trying to shovel its weight off your life is tiring just to think about. The constant shuttling of opinions is tiring, and the shuffling of papers across desks, the chopping of logic and the trimming of attitudes. There must, somewhere, be a simpler, more violent world (120).

The new, 'more violent world' is brought about by a clearing out of the old, Mantel capturing the physical act of getting out from under the old world's weight. The new world proceeds with the cut of the guillotine, clinical killing machine 'chopping' heads as well as logic. The rhythm of this passage presages the guillotine's action as well as the blade's cut; the 'shuttling' 'shuffling' 'chopping' and 'trimming' verbs miming the movement of the blade, its relentless downwards stroke. The *coup de grace*, the execution of the king, is anticlimactic in Mantel's rendering. Her spare description of Louis' execution is poetic in its tone. The reader does not see the guillotine killing King Louis XVI. In one moment, he is parcelling out his clothes, and then, 'People are swarming around the scaffold, soaking rags in the spilled blood.

¹⁴ I discuss point of view in greater detail in the first chapter.

Lepelletier, the martyr, lies in state. Louis, the King, is quicklived (*APOGS* 604). As Danton says, ‘We are trying, you see, to alter the nature of things’ (393). On the one hand, to ‘alter the nature of things’ is a commendable ideal: on the other hand, who is to stop history from being altered in an incontrovertibly terrible way? Who stands guard over time, in order to protect human beings from themselves? In Mantel’s novel the alteration occurs via the violent strike of the guillotine which cuts out the cancer of tyranny in the name of liberty, enacting an excision of all that is ‘anti-revolutionary’. The effect is, of course, the opposite; the guillotine only serves to alienate and shore up opposition to the Robespierrian cause. The novel enacts a repetition of the dream of God’s judgement, both wish and illusion; a reworking of an ancient messianic future. If we ask who makes the decision which ‘rends time’ and can ‘defy dialectics’, we are asking the wrong question: what Derrida calls the ‘justice to come’ is a ‘messianicity without messianism’. Derrida finds that Marxism still bears the traces of a Christian eschatology, demonstrating this via his deconstruction of Fukuyama’s end of history thesis. Derrida demonstrates his idea of ‘messianicity without messianism’ via his reading of Francis Fukuyama’s thesis of the end of history. In so doing he suggests that Marxism cannot shake off the traces of Christian eschatology. Fukuyama’s switching between the registers of real and ideal strengthens Derrida’s argument: the logic of the ghost must be insisted upon because it ‘exceeds a binary or dialectical logic.’ (Derrida *Spectres* 63).

A consideration of spectral logic helps us to think the ‘event’, the thinking of which Derrida says is missing from Fukuyama’s analysis. Fukuyama’s argument is founded on the distinction between *effectivity or actuality* and *ideality* (Derrida’s emphasis), an unacknowledged distinction which is disrupted when we talk to the spectre, lay it a place at the table. In *Beyond Black*, Mantel calls the realm of the dead

an ‘eventless realm’ but nevertheless the non event of the eventless is tied to the event. The non happening is an event in itself, ‘nothing happened’ being an example of such a paradox. In Mantel’s 2014 short story “The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher” (discussed in chapter 1), the saviour comes to provide a blow, that ushers in a new world. Mantel turns Thatcher’s ‘Rejoice’ on its head. Distinguishing law from justice, Derrida states: ‘Justice in itself, if such a thing exists ... outside or beyond law, is not deconstructible. No more than deconstruction itself, if such a thing exists. Deconstruction is justice’ (Derrida “Force” 945). That justice and the law are incommensurable with each other can be demonstrated by a cursory glance at legal proceedings; the law carries out judicial blunders, makes judgements that are unjust. Derrida’s claim that deconstruction is inseparable from justice, however, suggests that justice can only be endlessly deferred. Returning to M de Corcelles’ ardent cries of ‘provisionality’, it seems that his fears for the ‘provisionalness’ of the system rest on this deferral. To attempt to mete out justice is to come up against this experience, what Derrida calls an aporia; the paradoxical deferral of justice, and all its attendant delays and detours. Hence, for Derrida, ‘deconstruction takes place in the interval that separates the undeconstructibility of justice from the deconstructibility of *droit* (authority, legitimacy, and so on)’ (Derrida “Force” 945):

Law is the element of calculation, and it is just that there be law, but justice is incalculable, it requires us to calculate with the incalculable; and aporetic experiences are the experiences, as improbable as they are necessary, of justice, that is to say of moments in which the decision between just and unjust is never insured by a rule (947).

What Derrida calls the ‘aporetic experiences, as improbable as they are necessary, of justice’ expose the workings of justice as based on something other to reason or rational calculation, what Derrida has called elsewhere a ‘madness’. If provisionality is just one of many possible deconstructions, it has a relationship with this ‘madness’,

at the moment of decision and in reasoning. This logic (if it is possible to call it a logic) works in relation to texts too: narrative is supposed to take charge of the chain of decisions which make up the story. I say supposed to, because aporetic justice shows the impossibility of doing any such thing; the necessary paradox of deconstruction means that reason is ‘madness’ and ‘madness’ is reason. Derrida attributes this saying to Kierkegaard;¹⁵ ‘[T]he instant of decision is a madness.... This is particularly true of the instant of the just decision that must rend time and defy dialectics’ (967). Mantel’s novels demonstrate that reason and madness are paradoxically inseparable from each other. She is interested in the ways that madness and its effects open out onto other planes aside from the personal or psychological.

For example, in “Sanity Madness and the Family”, an article she wrote for the *Existential Analysis* journal, Mantel refers to a ‘moment’ in her life, when she came across Laing and Esterson’s book of the same name: ‘I should like to take you to an afternoon in 1973, a place, a time, a book, a moment of inner decision, dawning knowledge’ (“Sanity” 25). This book, she writes, ‘inflicted the shock of recognition’ (26) of her own family dynamic: ‘These family conversations, I have heard them. I could, I felt, have constructed another chapter and called it The Mantels’ (27).¹⁶ What Laing and Esterson did, Mantel says, is to ask us to ‘interrupt the process and suspend judgement’ (29): instead of working from the assumption of madness, to look closely and see if scrutinising the context of these young women would help. To hold it ‘in parenthesis’ as Mantel phrases it (29). To look more closely, might yield up interesting discoveries about the nature of schizophrenia; but

¹⁵ See Geoffrey Bennington’s “A Moment of Madness: Derrida’s Kierkegaard” *OLR* 33.1 2011 103-27, in which he reads Derrida’s reading and citation of this phrase from Kierkegaard, as a way of thinking about reading.

¹⁶ As she writes in an article for the Guardian ‘So many of these family conversations seemed familiar to me: their swerves and evasions, their doubleness.’ ‘Author Author: Every writer has a “How I became a writer story.”’ *Guardian*. September 6th 2008. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/sep/06/1> Accessed 2nd November 2017.

it also might threaten the existence of established notions of madness, upon which our ideas about sanity are based. Laing was at pains to point out that labels of sanity and insanity are functions of power.¹⁷ What Mantel describes in Laing and Esterson's method is the provisional. To hold judgement in abeyance; suspend assumptions; to question the reality of things (in this case the existence of schizophrenia). Mantel's writings occupy this provisional space, a space in between which manifests powerfully in her novels. Being of Irish catholic descent, Mantel begins her life in the north of England in a predominantly protestant village, subject to gossip about her family's unorthodox living arrangements: 'Jack, my mother's lover, came to live in our house. My father didn't leave; he just moved rooms' ("Sanity" 27). From then on she is the trustee of family knowledge and keeper of secrets: 'it was a secret I was charged with keeping, and I was considered to be the one most likely to blow the family's future to bits by revealing the truth...' (27). Her own part is in-between this makeshift family, neither in the old family nor part of the new. She understands the nature of the replacement of her father, while also shying away from any closure of the father's story.

Time (Scales) of provisionality: temporariness and contemporariness

Moving on from the 'moment', this section connects Timothy Clark's 'Scale' in time and space with provisionality, as a temporary way of being and as a means of being a 'contemporary'. I will read Mantel as a contemporary in relation to Agamben's essay, "What is the Contemporary?". As Mantel writes in *A Place of Greater Safety*: '[I]t was a special way of looking at the world, the necessary viewpoint of the worm when it's turning' (64), thus signalling the importance of vision to provisionality. Vision

¹⁷ What Mantel is also talking about here is repetition, within the psychological life of the individual and through generations of the family.

centres and anchors *provisionality*. ‘Open your eyes’, says M de Corcelles, ‘and you will see that provisionality itself is infused into all the branches of your system’. Provisionality suffuses your unjust political system, he says, but you do not see it through your blindness. Open your eyes; here is provisionality to undermine your faith and certainty. Again this exhortation to ‘see’ how provisionality ‘is infused into all the branches of your system’ offers unconscious confirmation of the importance of *vision* in provisionality. The system thus has an inbuilt ‘temporariness’ and the seeds of its own critique. The common sense definition of provisional as a temporary arrangement suggests the tenuousness of attachments to systems and structures. Temporariness is implicit within the etymological sense of provisional: ‘belonging to, or of the nature of, a temporary provision or arrangement; provided or adopted for the time being; supplying the place of something regular, permanent or final’ (OED).

In thinking this temporariness, what is more provisional than the span of human life? Provisionality can thus offer a recognition of humanity’s insignificance in the universe; something akin to what Timothy Clark would call ‘scale’. As he writes in the article of the same name:

Any broadly mimetic interpretation of a text, mapping it onto different if hopefully illuminating terms, always assumes a physical and temporal scale of some sort. It is a precondition of any such mapping, though almost never explicit in the interpretation. The scale in which one reads a text drastically alters the kinds of significance attached to elements of it, but, as we will see, it cannot give itself criteria for judgement. (Clark 157)

Clark attempts to read a Raymond Carver short story, ‘Elephant’ on three different ‘scales’; the ‘personal’; the broadly historical (which he calls the literary criticism scale); and the final ‘hypothetical scale’ which reads the story from a period of hundreds of years and encompasses the whole earth. About this final ‘experiment’ he remarks ‘the feeling of paralysis or arbitrariness in the experiment cannot override the conviction that to read at scales that used, familiarly, to “make sense” may now

also be a form of intellectual and ethical containment' (158-9). While Clark is writing from the standpoint of environmental concerns, it would be useful to draw the parallel between the idea of 'scale' and provisionality. By broadening out the frame of reference within which it is possible to analyse a text, Clark exposes the fragility, contingency and temporariness of human life touched on earlier. His idea of scale works in both space and time, *temps*, alerting us to Mantel's sense of the provisionality of the human life span.

Working on multiple timelines and across multiple systems, Mantel also shows how the human is rendered insignificant. Her short story "The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher", for example, is about a 'moment' in time, and at the same time about a whole 'buried' other history (invisible to the eyes of those who choose not to see it) and the door that constitutes the portal between this world and the next (imagined spatially as neighbouring flats in a block): that physical manifestation of a 'history [that] can always be otherwise'. The movement of Mantel's story, from temporariness to contemporariness demonstrates how the 'untimeliness' of the different time (scales) in Mantel's novels connects to Giorgio Agamben's notion of the contemporary as the literature of the untimely.

Mantel can be read as a contemporary in Agamben's sense of the word, as one who is 'untimely'.¹⁸ Thus the contemporary relates to 'anachrony' and 'dys-chrony': what he calls 'that relationship with time that adheres to it through a disjunction and an anachronism' (Agamben 41). But, he continues, this 'does not mean that the

¹⁸ The case for Mantel as a contemporary is strengthened considerably by her notable absence from a large proportion of books about twenty-first century fiction. For example, Peter Boxall's *Twenty-First Century Fiction: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge UP 2013) which deals thematically with issues such as Culture, Memory and the Future of the Novel, has a diverse range of writers but no Mantel. Ironically, as Boxall's conclusion suggests: 'the future of the novel, one might suggest, is suspended somewhere between two historical tendencies, two frames of mind, which is captured, what is more, in the double meaning that is at work in the phrase [future of the novel]' (210). Similarly, Daniel Lea's *Twenty-first century fiction: Contemporary British Voices* (Manchester UP 2016) focuses on writers such as Ali Smith, Sarah Hall, and Tom McCarthy.

contemporary is a person who lives in another time, a nostalgic who feels more at home in the Athens of Pericles or in the Paris of Robespierre' (41). Agamben employs the image of vertebrae in his point about the poet's contemporariness; the backbone of the 'century beast' cited by Agamben, that is shattered by time must be fused together, 'sutured' by the poet who 'insofar as he is contemporary, *is* this fracture, *is* at once that which impedes time from composing itself and the blood that must suture this break or wound' (42).¹⁹ In his final paragraph of the essay "What is the Contemporary?" Agamben writes, 'He [the contemporary] is able to read history in unforeseen ways, to "cite it" according to a necessity that does not arise in any way from his will, but from an exigency to which he cannot not respond' (53).

This exigence, the 'pressing necessity' of response occurs in Mantel as a need to articulate what must be articulated, whether in speech or writing. Agamben's word 'unforeseen' brings foresight and another place to bookmark provisionality; an obsolete meaning of provisional being 'to make ready beforehand' and 'to prepare for future use'. The interesting and surprising ways in which Mantel 'cites' history, in Agamben's words, make her a contemporary not merely in terms of subject matter but in the willingness to analyse the possibility of representing a history 'that can always be otherwise' ("The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher" (240). In using the 'Paris of Robespierre' as an example, Agamben exposes the repetitive citation of the event that keeps coming back. The definition of revolution contains its return : 'the

¹⁹ Bones and blood are infused into Mantel's own conceptualisation of her writing practice. In *Giving up the Ghost* she uses the image of bones to evoke writing; 'When you have committed enough words to paper you feel you have a spine stiff enough to stand up in the wind. But when you stop writing you find that's all you are, a spine, a row of rattling vertebrae, dried out like an old quill pen' (222). In the same memoir she exhorts the writer to, 'Eat meat. Drink blood... Rise in the quiet hours of the night and prick your fingertips, and use the blood for ink' (*GUG* 5). *The Giant, O'Brien* is full of allusions to skeletons and bones. Cromwell is referred to by Anne Boleyn as 'Cremuel' in *Wolf Hall*; a cremulator is used to grind any leftover bits of bone into powder, after a body is cremated. See also the child Cromwell's chance encounter at the Lollard Joan Broughton's execution by burning: 'His eyes were sharp even in the gloom, and out of the sludge and muck he picked a fragment of bone. Here's some, he said' (*Wolf Hall* 357).

act or condition of revolving’ and ‘a cycle of phenomena or of time’ (*Chambers*). The cycle in its circular motion reminds that Mantel, with her finger firmly on the pulse of the ‘century beast’, has got there before us. The narrator of her short story describes what will happen after the assassin escapes into the gap between the flats, ‘One day Trinity Place will fall down, in a puff of plaster and powdered bone. Time will draw to a zero point, a dot...’ (AMT 236).

Mantel’s evocation of time as ‘dot’ and ‘zero point’ represent the action of revolution. Not only the circular shape it makes as it revolves, as time draws to a zero point the interior of the ‘o’ is gradually filled in, until it is not perceptible. This figures the circular motion of permanent revolution, for who is to say when and where it stops? This sense of permanent revolution is a key element of provisionality, for the effect it has on writing. As Mantel writes in a private communication, ‘how can you sustain the revolutionary spirit?’ She continues: ‘How often did you throw out the government and make it new? As soon as you arrive, you must set off again. That is my perception about writing — there is no point of stasis’ (Appendix i 239).

That Mantel approaches writing as a revolution plays to other meanings of the word ‘revolution’: the archaic ‘turning things over in the mind’ and Shakespeare’s revolution meaning ‘mutation’ (*Chambers*). Revolution and the creation of texts and monsters: we have come full circle back to Agamben’s exposition of Mandelstam’s ‘century beast’. As the ways we have parsed the word ‘revolution’ shows, provisionality is one of the many deconstructions present in Mantel’s work. By reading revolution in this way, invoking Robespierre, Thomas More (and by association Cromwell), the political dimension can be discussed, without recourse to crude gauges of author, reader, or character politics. Politics in the sense that Jacques Rancière uses it: the choices writers make within texts and what these choices tell us

about the writer's commitments. Mantel's own engagements with the language of revolution demonstrate her commitment to provisionality as a state of permanent revolution.

'Indisciplinarity' and provisionality

To think about political commitment for the moment: Jacques Rancière states that all literature is political, but not in the sense of the writer having specific commitments, or writing about specific movements. I am guided in this by Rancière's idea of 'indisciplinarity'. In an interview published in journal of *Art and Research*, Rancière is asked, 'Would it be right to suggest that your work is not so much interdisciplinary as a-disciplinary?' (2) to which he replies,

Neither. It is "indisciplinary". It is not only a matter of going besides the disciplines but of breaking them. My problem has always been to escape the division between disciplines, because what interests me is the question of the distribution of territories, which is always a way of deciding who is qualified to speak about what (2-3).

He continues:

If emancipation had a meaning, it consisted in reclaiming thought as something belonging to everyone — the correlate being that there is no natural division between intellectual objects and that a discipline is always a provisional grouping, a provisional territorialisation of questions and objects that do not in and of themselves possess any specific localisation or domain (3).

The word 'indisciplinary' evokes the sense of boundaries being crossed while at the same time conjuring a rebelliousness. Rancière in his reference to emancipation issues a call to arms for the marginalised and the misfit. Also striking here is the sense of provisional that Rancière is suggesting, of a temporary solution for now: an arrangement of disciplines which are contingent, can be changed. The further sense of indisciplinarity as indisciplined or unruly, shows how Mantel and Rancière connect in a productive tension. The carnivalesque of Mantel's last non-Tudor work,

Beyond Black is testament to this sense of Mantel as mischievous, contrary. Her articles and speeches are unafraid to tackle important issues about representation: she has a reputation of saying what she wants to say, although by doing so she runs the risk of being misunderstood.²⁰

For Rancière, literature's specificity arises not from the specificity of its language use, a 'literary language', but from precisely the opposite, that everyday language use is shaped in new and different ways according to who is writing, whether it is spoken and so on. The 'autonomy of literary language' precludes thinking about politics without moving outside of literature, when literature's own specificity is held up as political. Rancière uses a line from a Rimbaud poem to illustrate 'a junction between two regimes of meaning' (Rancière *Politics* 6) and a 'new relationship between the distinctive and the indistinctive, the proper and the improper, the poetics and the prosaic... a new way language can act by causing something to be seen and heard' (7). Literature does politics, is political, by 'causing something to be seen and heard' and as such is closely related to what Rancière calls 'subjectivisation'. Subjectivisation describes becoming a subject in language, which occurs when the being's voice is heard as discourse, and not only as 'mere growl' (4).

According to Chambers, 'subject to' means 'owing allegiance' and 'under obligation'; this obligation is related to political commitment, in terms of participating in what Rancière calls the 'distribution of the sensible'. However, 'subject to' is also 'dependent upon condition or contingency' (Chambers): the

²⁰ Her "Royal Bodies" speech provoked outrage from the Royalist, right wing press, with even David Cameron then Prime minister wading in with a clumsy defence of the Duchess. Erica Wagner's *New Statesman* interview discusses the 'controversy'. See "I was on the end of a hate campaign." *New Statesman*. 18 April-1 May 2014: 38-43. The publication of her short story collection 'The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher' was also the occasion of an outcry from Norman Tebbit, who called the BBC's decision to broadcast the title story 'sick'. I discuss this further in chapter two. See for example the Daily Mail, 15th December 2014: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2873842/It-s-sick-book-promoted-sick-broadcasting-corporation-Lord-Tebbit-leads-fury-BBC-choosing-story-Margaret-Thatcher-murdered-Book-Bedtime.html>

seemingly unproblematic entrance that the subject makes into discourse, somehow graduating from howls into ‘full’ speech, is thus shown to be a contingent, provisional act. Mantel, in writing the story of herself, is both subjectivising, but at the same time, through the subject’s contingency also participating in her own erasure. An example to illustrate: Mantel’s first published work of fiction, *Every Day is Mother’s Day* (1985) is the story of Muriel. The ‘backward’ child of mother Evelyn, bullied and coaxed into submission, Muriel somehow gets pregnant, (‘somehow’ seems wrong here, but it is intended to convey the shock inferred in the novel by this surprising event).²¹ The novel begins with Muriel’s look of ‘daft beatitude’ (*ED* 7) and the reader’s invitation into Evelyn’s narrative perplexity. Muriel is eclipsed by her mother throughout (every day *is* mother’s day, in Muriel’s existence); her place in the narrative is fixed by Mantel’s free indirect style, which is skewed towards Evelyn’s viewpoint. Muriel’s speech is not reported, until the denouement, when Evelyn’s death allows her to speak (*ED* 204). Even then what she says is indistinct, lost in the noise.

The narrative representation of a character so eclipsed by the mother, even while becoming a mother herself, illustrates an important connection between Rancière’s idea of politics, and Mantel’s preoccupation with becoming a subject. This is not a word Mantel uses, but can be used here fruitfully; Muriel’s character demonstrates the danger of staying under the yoke, of being subject to but not subject in one’s own right. The emphasis on ‘autonomy’ (*ED* 27) within Muriel’s Social Services daycare setting is contrasted to the fused nature of her relationship with Evelyn. Muriel’s refusal to speak suggests that her autonomy is better served by

²¹ I read *Every Day is Mother’s Day* in more detail in chapter three, considering Muriel’s baby as a kind of delayed phantom.

silence, but is also connected to others' refusal to hear her utterances as intelligible. Muriel 'speaks' through action: kicking the neighbour's dog, stealing a tin opener and leaving it for her mother to find, writing misspelled notes which fuel her mother's paranoia and obsession with ghosts. *Every Day is Mother's Day* opens up the problematic of who is allowed to speak, and with whose voice: in other words, precisely the issue that Rancière is concerned with.

Shakespeare's spectral voice

Perhaps overlooked due to ubiquity, Shakespeare's spectral voice in Mantel's work (*Beyond Black* in particular) offers an example of Rancière's democracy of voices. Not only this, as Marjorie Garber suggests, in *Shakespeare's Ghost Writers*, Shakespeare's identity itself is under question, and is thus ripe for a provisional reading. Shakespeare's spectral presence makes a sneaky appearance in 2005's *Beyond Black*, as Wagstaffe, a ghost captured on tape alongside the voices of the 'fiends'. These 'fiends' are ambiguous figures, possibly figments of the damaged medium Alison's imagination, equally possibly the ghosts of men from her childhood, whom we are led to believe pimped out Alison's mother and in turn abused other women of the household, including the child Alison. There is never an attempt on Mantel's part to resolve this issue, and although the reader can try, it is not possible. Further complications ensue when the 'fiends' begin to make material interventions into this world, they spill out from the spirit world into the world of things, causing chaos and destabilising the already shaky ground of matter.

Wagstaffe is doubly spectral: as the ghost of Shakespeare he is a well known figure from history, the quintessential English writer, the archetypal literary icon. However, at the same time Wagstaffe is woven into the reported and recorded

conversations of the fiends, and as such becomes part of Alison's own landscape of psychodrama, abuse and trauma. Cultural knowledge of Shakespeare is passed down through the generations, based on textual evidence but also subject to change in its transmission. When in *Beyond Black* Princess Diana appears in Alison's mirror the same thing occurs; the image takes precedence while the substance vanishes with her, hence the newspaper cuttings pinned to her dress.

Wagstaffe conjures up an Elizabethan idiom far removed from the rough speech and gutter colloquialisms of the 'fiends', but still wedded to the textual, 'this sceptred isle' (*BB* 207), whom the 'fiends' themselves identify as Wagstaffe. In the final act of the novel, when Alison sets herself free from the fiends (the reveal is that she is the top boss Nick's daughter, and the fiends are scared of him), a handkerchief is mentioned in conversation, and again Wagstaffe interjects. Mantel thus points directly to issues of textual creation, transmission and reception. She has a particular way of figuring an intertextuality that goes beyond a self-conscious 'quoting', by exploring the issues of how we read and how we know. Alison's discovery of her own parentage emphasises her position as proto-author, paying homage to her forefathers (and mothers), just as Mantel does.

Provisionality as container

One way of thinking about provisionality is as a container.²² The idea of the container could provide a frame for the boundary-crossing and transgressive potential of provisionality. Just as the ego takes in, or introjects, the provisional container might build a way of seeing the world. Sandor Ferenczi describes introjection as ‘an extension to the external world of the original autocratic interests, by including its objects in the ego’ (Ferenczi *Final* 316).²³ The ego’s doubleness echoes a doubleness in Mantel also signalled by her name: the desire to both get to the bottom of things and at the same time to cover them up. This double movement of covering and uncovering situates Mantel as a provisional writer. To return to one of the child Mantel’s favoured words ‘citadel’ (*GUG* 40), so far this introduction has hinted that there are enclosing and protective moves contained within this ‘citadel’. The intersections between thought and matter, between an image and its concrete manifestation, and the collisions that exist in the world between thought and material are at the heart of provisional thinking.

The protective moves made are provisioning for a reading. Provisions are also the stuff that is provided,²⁴ as one provisions for a cold winter or an army, stocking up, taking stock. Provisionality then, as an etymological base from which to start; by provisioning ourselves to read Mantel, to read the stuff of Mantel. In terms of

²² This is Wilfred Bion’s word. He sees the container as thinking, in its most simple terms. In any case, it is not a ‘static condition’ (6-7). *Elements of Psychoanalysis*. London: Heinemann, 1963. See also Ronald Britton’s “Naming and Containing” in Britton ed. *Belief and Imagination: Explorations in Psychoanalysis*. London and New York: Routledge, 1998. Thomas H. Ogden’s paper “On Holding and Containing, Being and Dreaming” explains it as ‘on the one hand, thoughts and feelings derived from lived emotional experience (the contained) and on the other, the capacity for dreaming and thinking those thoughts (the container)’ (1359) *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*. No. 85 (2004): 1349-64.

²³ Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917) offers a discussion of how the healthy subject, in order to mourn, has to internalise the loved one as object. Without this internalisation, mourning is incomplete.

²⁴ Mary Jacobus writes extensively about stuff, provisions and matter in *The Poetics of Psychoanalysis: In the wake of Klein*. Oxford UP, 2005.

material, what I call provisionality interrogates the boundary between matter and thought and thinks it through in different ways. For Mantel, literature and the literary are not defined in terms of pure subjectivity or consciousness. There is a bodily, material element to her writing that transcends the ‘facts’ of her various documented illnesses. The body and the representation of the body, in sensations such as pain, provide the theoretical weight of provisionality as a tool which can be used across disciplines. The body, far from being tamed, paraded, funnelled, refuses to be still or quiet. We know this from childhood, letting out wind in silent assembly halls or involuntarily squeaking when tickled. Mantel reaches into the stuff of the body to pick apart how we represent it. Provisionality contains within its definitions the sense of a condition, of something being provided for, a clause in a deed or will, the sense of property properly disposed of, the wishes of the dead acceded to. Provisionality evokes the materiality of provisions, stuff, and the ‘metaphoricity’ of matter. It provides a container for an understanding of matter and spirit, concreteness and metaphor. It gives a container in the sense of framework, which allows a transposition across boundaries of the physical and mental, suspended between the two.

Chapter Overview

The first chapter, ‘Strange Hauntings, Uncanny Doings: Vision and the Spectral in *Beyond Black* and “The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher”’ explores the prevalence of visual metaphors (including the mirror) and how these contribute to provisionality. I use Derrida’s *Spectres of Marx* to show how the visual relates to spectrality, an already established corner of Mantel studies. Suggesting parallels between Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and Mantel’s family situation exposes Shakespeare as

a ghostly trope to which Mantel returns and which returns to her. I examine the sideways glance and the blink as a means of disruption, thinking about the intermittency of the blink and its relationship to the citation of Shakespeare as Wagstaffe in *Beyond Black*. The next section considers Mantel's placement as a 'visionary' writer, setting up the concluding section on the short story "The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher".

These explorations demonstrate Mantel's own commitments to reading as a writer. The second chapter 'Movements of Reading: Dis-Manteling Realism' takes on this theme of provisional realism as a reading practice. Beginning with a discussion of how Mantel's work has been categorised (as Gothic, or 'super-real'), I continue by returning to definitions of realism in order to situate Mantel's work in relation to it. I then use Roland Barthes and Jacques Rancière to investigate Mantel's particular brand of provisional realism in *Wolf Hall* and *Fludd*, with particular reference to the ideas of texture and weaving. Finally, I suggest that Mantel's work enacts both a realist compromise and an illusion.

The following paired chapters, three and four, consist of two parts which both explore different aspects of the child and childhood. Chapter three, 'Mantel's lost child: *A Change of Climate* and *Every Day is Mother's Day*' begins with the child's provisional place in cultural discourse and continues with Mantel's representation of the child Thomas Cromwell in *Wolf Hall*. Exploring the child in *Every Day is Mother's Day* and *A Change of Climate*, in relation to Abraham and Torok's notion of the crypt, I connect the child figure with the phantom. Chapter four, 'Childhood's Founding Fictions: *Giving up the Ghost*' considers various psychoanalytical figurations of childhood by Sigmund Freud and Melanie Klein in relation to Mantel's autobiographical work *Giving up the Ghost* (and briefly, *An Experiment in Love*).

Drawing on theories of autobiography, I make the claim for Mantel as a writer whose provisionality holds possibilities for opening scholarship up to diverse voices. My conclusion will point towards the future of Mantel scholarship, therefore, and the possibilities within it.

Chapter One
Strange Hauntings, Uncanny Doings: Vision and the Spectral in *Beyond Black*
and “The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher”

Introduction

In their introduction to *The Spectralities Reader*, ‘Conceptualizing Spectralities’, María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren argue that, ‘a specific metamorphosis [has] occurred of ghosts and haunting’ (1). The ghost and its ghostliness has been transformed into the spectre and the spectral: it is now what del Pilar Blanco and Peeren call a ‘conceptual metaphor’ (1). This ‘conceptual metaphor’ not only describes its object, in this case the spectre, but also has a hand in producing it. In del Pilar Blanco and Peeren’s terms, the spectre is an ‘analytical tool that *does* theory’ (1, emphasis in original). This chapter thinks Mantel’s ghosts, in their variety of guises, in terms of this ‘doing’ and its implications, specifically how Mantel employs spectrality to complicate the visual field in her novels. From the Latin *specere*, to see, the spectre and the visual are always already intertwined: seeing puts into question the presence of the ghost, just as the presence of a ghost distorts vision.²⁵

Scholars such as Victoria Stewart, Wolfgang Funk, Esther Peeren and Lucy Arnold have already addressed the question of the spectral in Mantel’s work, identifying its eery quality and her recognition of things beyond the grasp of human sight. These scholars institute the ghost as ‘other’, either by keeping strict watch on

²⁵ As del Pilar Blanco and Peeren also point out (2). This is what Garber refers to as the ‘anamorphic ghost’ *Shakespeare’s Ghost Writers* (129).

the dead/alive boundary, or by confining it to the metaphorical sphere.²⁶ Mantel's spectres differ; she does not allow the reader the security of consigning them to their proper place among the dead. Similarly, the visual in Mantel is explored beyond a simple seen/unseen boundary. A straightforward look is complicated in Mantel's work by the intermittency of the wink, the 'flicker(ing)', and the sideways look.²⁷ She employs 'flickers' and 'glimpses', to weave a narrative of the spectral which gets to the heart of what things 'are', that cannot be perceived by looking in an uncomplicated way. As Lucy Arnold trenchantly states, 'there is no straight path from an encounter with a spectre to an understanding of the implications of their spectrality' (Arnold 308). It is this path I will follow in thinking through the complicated permutations of Mantel's spectrality.

Mantel's spectrality is in what she writes about, of course: the mischievous and banal spirits of *Beyond Black*, the ghostly curate of *Fludd*, her childhood encounters with the 'other world' in *Giving up the Ghost*. But the spectral is woven through her writing, going beyond polysemy; her words infused with, as she puts it in another context, 'the ghosts of meaning' (*Giving up the Ghost* 222). What is singular to Mantel are the textual motifs she employs in thinking through the tensions between visibility/invisibility,²⁸ looking/seeing and reality/image. The literary motif is itself a spectral presence haunting the text which shares some of the characteristics of the glimpse. At times visible, at others invisible, the motif is nevertheless discernible and

²⁶ Esther Peeren, for example, in *The Spectral Metaphor: Living Ghosts and the Agency of Invisibility* (Palgrave MacMillan 2014) suggests that 'Derrida's hauntology... as an alternative ontology renders all being and meaning ghostly, and whose functions and effects are difficult to distinguish from those of other deconstructive notions such as *différance*...' (11). I discuss the other scholars in what follows.

²⁷ This logic of intermittency is similar to Peter Buse and Andrew Stott's reference to 'the ghost as a cipher of iteration... the anticipated *return* of the ghost may be mobilized on behalf of a deconstruction of all historicisms that are grounded in a rigid sense of chronology' (11). *Ghosts, Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History*. (London: MacMillan, 1999).

²⁸ As de Man points out, visibility as presence and invisibility as absence are foundations of ontological certainty, which go to the heart of representation and art. See "The Rhetoric of Blindness" in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism 2nd ed.* (London: Methuen, 1983), (123f).

affects reading in strange ways. If we consider the idea of the artist as a perceptive ‘filter’, then the writer’s privileged relation to perception is not new to Mantel: indeed, Thomas Hardy’s attempt to ‘pierce the material screen’ can be placed within a similar (pro)visionary tradition. Mantel’s work is infused with the spectral, not only because the ghost figures so prominently, but also because provisionality partakes of spectral logic in its disruption of the ‘real’.

The mirror

Take the mirror as an example of one such motif. The mirror brings to the surface a myriad of associations within Mantel’s oeuvre and in wider culture. Mantel’s writing plays with the various issues that arise from thinking about the mirror: recognition, reflection, distortion.²⁹ If clarity is sought by looking in a mirror, the viewer must be aware that this is not necessarily what they will get. Although it looks like a faithful reflection, reality is reversed in the mirror. The gap between the ‘real’ and the reversed image is a fertile ground for meaning to slip in.

Jacques Lacan’s work, for example, affirms the primacy of the real and metaphorical mirror in the development of the infant, its ‘jubilant assumption of his specular image’ (Lacan 76).³⁰ The infant is overjoyed at the appearance of his image in the mirror and being able to take on his reflection as ‘his’. The reflection of the small child’s image in the mirror is for Lacan the ‘root-stock of secondary identifications’ (Lacan 76), and the point from which the subject is instituted in

²⁹ Eileen Pollard’s interview with Mantel “Mind What Gap?” demonstrates how Mantel is ‘obsessed’ with mirrors (9).

³⁰ ‘The jubilant assumption [*assumption*] of his specular image by the kind of being - still trapped in his motor impotence and nursling dependence - the little man is at the *infans* stage thus seems to me to manifest in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the *I* is precipitated in a primordial form, prior to being objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject.’ (Lacan, *Ecrits* 76)

language, as it grows and learns the rules of the symbolic order. The visual image of oneself in the mirror is the primary identification, from which all others flow, and it underwrites (however imperfectly) the sense of self. For the self in culture then, according to Lacan, the mirror is its foundation, the apprehension of one's reflection through a clear and focused look. The image corresponds to its real life referent in an uncomplicated visual relationship; the human subject is reflected faithfully back to itself.³¹

Mantel makes the mirror a point of complication, and in so doing subtly affirms the preference given to the visual in our culture (of which Lacan is just one example). At the same time, however, her writing works to undermine this dominance by disrupting the unequivocal relationship between the image and its real world counterpart. In the 2005 novel *Beyond Black*, for instance, the mirror both sustains subjectivity and shatters its certainty. In the first section, which takes place in the dressing room of a theatre in an M4 corridor town, Alison the medium is applying her make up as she waits to be called for the evening's show. Her spirit guide, the irrepressibly annoying Morris, is sitting in the corner moaning because Colette, Alison's assistant, steps on him when she walks in (not being able to see him). Alison's image in the mirror acts as a signifier for her bodily presence: she is large and fills the room, 'When you came into a room she'd left — her bedroom, her hotel

³¹ For Donald Winnicott in *Playing and Reality* (new edition) London: Routledge, 2005, the mirror is the mother's face. The gradual differentiation between what is 'self' and what is 'other' is based upon the child's use of the mother to act out his/her omnipotence, which for Winnicott means that the child perceives the object at first to be something that is created by the infant, a "subjective object" (112). What should happen in this pairing is that the baby looks at the mother and sees itself reflected back: thus the mother looks at the baby and "*what she looks like is related to what she sees there*" (112). It is only if this happens regularly enough (recall Winnicott's famous formulation, the "good enough" mother) that the mother's face can be described as a mirror in any meaningful way at all. Yet, if this doesn't happen often enough, in consequence the baby will cast around to find themselves elsewhere in the environment. If the baby looks into the mother's face "and it is unresponsive, then the mirror is a thing to be looked at but not to be looked into" (113); and "perception has taken the place of apperception" (112-3). The mother's role is to "give back to the baby the baby's own self" (118): Winnicott likens this task to the analytic situation; that it is the therapist's job to give the patient back what he or she brings to him (117).

room, her dressing room backstage — you felt her as a presence, a trail' (*BB* 3-4).

This imprint of the physically imposing Alison persists even when she is on stage:

'her face — cheeks glowing, eyes alight — seemed to float still in the dressing-room mirror' (4). The mirror here shores up identity, allows it to be recognised as verifiably Alison; while the image of the image left behind in the mirror is both uncanny and reassuring. For Alison's assistant, Colette, the mirror functions as reassurance of her existence:

In the centre of the room Colette stooped, picked up Al's shoes. For a moment she disappeared from her own view. When her face bobbed back into sight in the mirror she was almost relieved. What's wrong with me? she thought. When I'm gone I leave no trace (*BB* 4).

The mirror fixes Colette's idea of herself, allows her to exist although she doesn't

leave a physical trace behind. The 'almost' relief she feels at seeing herself

demonstrates the spectral power of the mirror in the self's struggle for recognition:

recognition is always somehow mis-recognition. The reversed image in the mirror is

only ever an approximation to the real, never a faithful reproduction of 'reality'. For

Mantel, the mirror structures, not reflects, 'reality', exposing the reflection of the

mirror as a distortion.

Mantel's characters often look into mirrors; what they see there is rarely an uncomplicated reflection. In *Beyond Black's* retrospective parts, for example, where

Alison recalls her childhood, she shares a memory of being commanded to look in

the mirror by her mother. She does so, and expecting to see herself, instead she sees

'a man, with a check jacket on and a tie skew-whiff; a frowning man with a low

hairline and a yellowish face' (*BB* 109). This man is Morris, who becomes Alison's

spirit guide. The child Alison's encounter with the mirror bears a resemblance to her

(almost) name sake, Alice, who in *Alice Through the Looking Glass* conjures up

another world by looking into the mirror. Alice calls this other world the 'Looking-

glass House', admonishing the naughty kitten and threatening to put her into the world behind the mirror which is 'just the same as our drawing-room, only the things go the other way' (127). The surface of the mirror 'melts', she finds herself inside this other world behind the glass:

Let's pretend the glass has got all soft like gauze, so that we can get through. Why, it's turning into a sort of mist now, I declare! It'll be easy enough to get through—' She was up on the chimney-piece while she said this, though she hardly knew how she had got there. And certainly the glass *was* beginning to melt away, just like a bright silvery mist (*Alice* 127-8)

The Alice/Alison correspondence suggests the importance of childhood fantasy and the imagination's power: from seeing someone or something in the mirror, to going through the mirror into the other world behind it: the reading of a mirror image throws up complications to the visual.

The spectral power of the mirror image creates reality. In *A Change of Climate* (1994), the mirror is used in a different way but this also emphasises the distorted relationship between the mirror and its image. Anna and Ralph are a missionary couple who return to England with their family after a tragedy strikes them in Africa. While away, their twins are abducted and only one of the twins, Kit, survives. Mantel's description of Anna's frantic return with Kit, who she found in a ditch, 'like a woman breaking through sheets of glass, like a woman ploughing through mirrors' (CC 241) evokes the mirror glass's power. The naming of the character Amy Glasse, who as Ralph's mistress has an indirect effect on the family's fate, shows how mirrors and glass in Mantel figure as complicated surfaces. The splintering of these surfaces suggests the disruption of sense; broken surfaces cannot reflect back true images, instead showing them as fractured. When Muriel has her baby in *Every Day is Mother's Day* (1986), Mantel describes her as 'crawling up the side of her glassy pyramid of pain' (ED 172). The evocation of glass and mirrors

allows Mantel to play with what is reflected, what comes back; the ‘other world’ existing through the mirror encroaches on this world.

This encroachment occurs in *Beyond Black*, when the ghost of Princess Diana manifests in the hall mirror in Alison and Colette’s house:

She [Alison] turned away. At once Diana manifested: a blink in the hall mirror, a twinkle. Within a moment she had become a definite pinkish glow. She was wearing her wedding dress, and it hung on her now...She had pinned some of her press cuttings to her skirts; they lifted, in some other-worldly breeze, and flapped (213).

The manifestation of the dead Princess in the text demonstrates the ironic inversion of the fairy tale: one of the women gets their prince in the end, but he turns out to be Morris. What this episode also demonstrates, however, is how Mantel uses mirrors to connect the public image to what we might call the self-image identity. Diana is a ghost, a returnee from the dead, but by introducing the press cuttings into her haunting, Mantel is making a wider point about the spectrality of the image. The image of Diana in the hall mirror, shows the mirror to be a mediator of another world, a portal which can be entered into another reality, just as Alice enters the inverted world of the ‘Looking Glass house’.

A tool of the spectral, the mirror is open to distortion: a straight look into the mirror yields unexpected responses. The mirror’s reflection is open to perversion by mischievous spirits: the ‘debased, ridiculous and filthy’ spirits that populate *Beyond Black*, ‘make streaks and fingerprints on window panes. They cloud mirrors, and sometimes vanish with a chortle...’ (*BB* 270). These spirits cannot be trusted; the unsuspecting living ‘look into the side of an aluminium pan and see a face that’s not [their] own’ (*BB* 268). What is meant to be perceptible and clear to the vision is ‘clouded’, and thus Mantel plays with the distinctions between clarity and opacity, in *Beyond Black* in particular. The novel abounds with images of the opaque or translucent surfaces which ‘flash’ and ‘blaze’, acting as gates or thresholds from this

visible world to its other, the invisible world. The ‘lucky opals’ that Alison wears on stage change, ‘flashing fire’; ‘glittering’ (12); ‘blazed’ (27); “she blazed like a planet, the lucky opals her distant moons’ (35). Other translucent surfaces act as conduits for the dead, “She picked up her glass and peered into the fizzing liquid... ‘I think there’s someone coming through’” (14). The crystal ball becomes dirty, no matter how much Colette tries to clean it (268), and inside there are ‘shifting cloud banks, as if it were making its own weather’ (356).

Mantel’s exploration of the tensions between opacity and clarity demonstrates a greater connection between her novels and short stories than what is traditionally meant by intertextuality. She redraws the narrative threads which are woven tightly, knotted together by certain words and images. So this spectral visuality means that seeing is obscured by the ghosts of the dead in Mantel, but also the ‘ghosts of meaning’. The act of writing the story becomes cloudy, (to re-use Mantel’s phrase) like the opal jewellery Alison wears. This preoccupation with clarity and obscurity occurs also at the beginning of *Giving Up The Ghost*, where Mantel sets out her ideas about writing in reference to George Orwell’s famous windowpane in “Why I Write” (Orwell 7). Clarity is desirable, but as Mantel’s fiction attests, being clear can become obscured by spectral forces. The challenging ‘vision’ of provisionality, that things are not what they may seem, is constantly called into question in Mantel’s work. Derrida’s *Spectres of Marx* (1994) also deals with spectral visuality, and I will now consider how this text provokes a response from Mantel’s fiction.

Spectres of Marx, Spectres of Mantel

The previous section investigated mirrors in Mantel's work; their implications for her writing and the relation to the spectral. Here the question is posed, what happens when we look, not into a mirror, but at a ghost?³² *Beyond Black* could be criticised for its spirits' banality, but this banality is in fact all the more horrible when one considers the domesticity of the setting, the way the ghosts invade Alison's home and body. Mantel's concern with the opacity of surfaces, mirrors, and reflections all emphasise the *limits* of seeing: what happens when the 'real' and the spectral meet. Derrida develops this idea of a liminal space between the real and spectral in *Spectres of Marx*. He begins by thinking about the spectre of communism, and Marx himself, and then homes in on the famous ghost in Shakespeare's play. The ghost is allegedly Hamlet's father, but the possibility arises that the ghost is a trick, designed to scare Hamlet or make him mad. Who can tell if it is really the dead King? What Derrida emphasises here is not our gaze directed toward the ghost, but its look at us; 'this spectral *someone other looks at us*' (Derrida *Spectres* 7), the ghost's terrifying look in our direction. Derrida calls this the visor effect: '[W]e do not see who looks at us' (7).

There is something here in Derrida about disguise, which speaks to Mantel's work on the tensions between obscurity and clarity. If Hamlet's father's ghost is in actual fact not Hamlet's father — what then? The ghost has to be seen to be believed, but what it *is* cannot be perceived by sight; being dressed in the late King's armour is not enough proof for the economy of that sight. But the disguise is the logic of the spectral, if there is such a thing, because we do not and cannot 'know' or 'recognise' the ghost in its singularity as ghost. The 'spectral asymmetry' (7) that Derrida refers

³² Julian Wolfreys suggests that 'to "see" something is, however precariously, to initiate a process of familiarization, of anthropomorphizing domestication' (6) *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature*. (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2002).

to compounds this: if the ghost cannot be recognised, it is not the ghost's appearance to us that is at issue, but our appearance to the ghost. Our opening to the ghost as the ultimate other makes us vulnerable. Thus the ghost is more than a literary motif in Mantel; she uses it to explore the limits of being and the (im)possibility of representing 'reality': what is 'there', including the spectral, capturing the experience of 'seeing' a ghost.

In *Spectres of Marx*, Derrida writes, 'The spectre was there (but what is the *being- there* of a spectre? what is the mode of presence of a spectre?)' (38) These questions about being and the simultaneous particularity and ubiquity of the phantom resonate with Mantel's work. What is the 'being there' of a spectre? How can it be said in any way to *be*? Both Derrida and Mantel are interested in how it is possible to 'see' a ghost 'being there'? In what ways do we 'know' there is a ghost 'present'? Mantel's memoir *Giving up the Ghost* deals explicitly with this question. Published in 2003 and set a few years earlier, the opening sections deal with Mantel and her partner selling their house, purported to be haunted with the ghost of her stepfather. Mantel describes how she sees him one morning:

About eleven o'clock, I see a flickering on the staircase. The air is still; then it moves. I raise my head. The air is still again. I know it is my stepfather's ghost coming down. Or, to put it in a way acceptable to most people, I 'know' it is my stepfather's ghost. I am not perturbed. I am used to 'seeing' things that aren't there. Or – to put it in a way more acceptable to me – I am used to seeing things that 'aren't there' (*GUG* 1).

Mantel's use of the word 'see' in this passage opens up the possibilities for reading her work provisionally. More than just intertextuality, provisional reading can explore the tensions between the look at the ghost, the mirror, and seeing the ghost. Mantel qualifies the seeing of her stepfather's ghost using speech marks; 'seeing' things that aren't there, seeing things that 'aren't there'. Mantel's use of speech marks shows how she holds the experience in contradiction: she holds a view of the alternatives,

neither has to be the accepted ‘version’. She continues by describing how she has greeted her stepfather on the stairs, and how, ‘It was in this house that I last saw my stepfather Jack, in the early months of 1995: alive, in his garments of human flesh’ (*GUG* 1-2). The eerie effect of this sentence is then undercut by the breezy, impossibly light style of the next: ‘It may be, of course, that the flicker against the banister was nothing more than the warning of a migraine attack’ (*GUG* 2). Both notions remain ‘true’ in Mantel’s work; there are limits to knowledge, and there are ways of explaining spiritual experience as individual illness or grief. Mantel defers any attempt to dichotomise these two positions, for each contains within it the possibility for the other, and each also makes problematic what the other can mean: there is no ‘seeing’ without the ‘aren’t there’. Just as spectrality is implicated in being, for Derrida, Mantel shows how the spectral haunts her writing practice.

Take the semi-colon in the quoted passage, for instance. It functions as a marker of the moment, and its tension. Both full stop period and comma, it also marks a longer pause, a space in which meaning sleeps or is suspended. The semi-colon is integral to Mantel’s writing, and here, it marks tension and time: ‘The air is still; then it moves’ (*GUG* 1). As a temporal marker, the semi-colon pinpoints the exact moment at which the air moves, the flickering comes into view, and the spectral can be perceived. It is a moment of revelation: the air turns from being still, just *there*, to something else which comes from some other world. It lasts a few seconds, and then ‘The air is still again’ (1). Seeing the flickering is, from the beginning, inextricably bound up with perception of movement. It is dynamic and attempts to capture its ‘uncanniness’ will fail. The movement of the air that presages the stepfather’s ghost is perceived via sight, not head on, but as movement, a disturbance of the air. The effect of the short and matter-of-fact sentences is to create a sense of

certainty; *this* is what happened. And yet, the crucial interposition of bodily movement ‘I raise my head’ shows that this phenomenon is not entirely real, nor entirely unreal, its origin unknown and yet felt and sensed; somehow anchored within the physicality of Mantel’s body being at that particular place and time. Again, the tension arises within the writing between what is moving, an active, sensed presence (the ‘flickering’) and what is knowable through sense perception. The ghost remains elusive to attempts to fix its presence. The ‘flickering on the staircase’ is the spectral movement of an identifiable human being (who is at this moment not ‘in his garments of human flesh’) but also the spectral movement of Mantel’s writing, whose ‘flicker’ moves in and between worlds, perceptible in certain ways and lights and imperceptible in others.³³ The next section will explore the connections between the ghost’s ‘flicker’, the blink, and the sideways glance. I will explore the issues that arise from the use of these powerful metaphors, beginning with the work of Esther Peeren on spectrality in Mantel.

The sideways glance

As Esther Peeren’s 2014 study *The Spectral Metaphor: Living Ghosts and the Agency of Invisibility* asserts, the glance is distinct from the gaze, the ‘masterful, unitary and disembodied vision associated with realism’ (Peeren 136). Alison’s ‘sideways glance’ is opposed to Colette’s straight ahead ‘gaze’ in the novel so that Alison can ‘glance beyond what is given to visibility by the gaze’, as Peeren asserts (136). However, this opposition between Alison and Colette’s different ‘ways of seeing’ becomes troubled

³³ As Christopher Prendergast writes in “Derrida’s Hamlet” *SubStance* special issue, Jacques Derrida: *A Counter-Obituary* no.106. Vol.34, no.1, 2005: (44-47), ‘The spectre is a “Thing” (Shakespeare’s term) and yet not a thing, not a substance. It hovers uncertainly between material embodiment and disembodiment. It inhabits a space of pure virtuality, and what in that space is swallowed up is the ontological ground of Being itself’ (45). In other words, the spectre *flickers*.

by spirits who don't stay in their proper place. For instance, when Colette returns to her ex-husband Gavin, she discovers a sock belonging Morris,³⁴ a strong suggestion that the boundaries of physical matter are also subject to change, an altogether weirder prospect than the fleeting ghost that flickers and disappears. Peeren discusses Alison's chance at 'ethical redemption' through helping the vagrant Mart, suggesting that it is a failure: 'Mart is dead, while Alison settles back into her old, comforting routine' (Peeren 140). Peeren gives two related reasons for this failure: first, the distinction between 'earthside' and 'airside' is fixed, and thus Alison's 'sideways glance has been replaced by a straight gaze' (140). As we have already seen with Morris's sock, however, the distinct boundaries between the spirit 'realm' 'airside' and 'earthside' are made porous; Alison's chance to do a 'good action' is ultimately taken out of her hands by Morris. He makes a threat to Alison, 'I can take you over, you cheeky bitch. I can have you away airside' (she counters with a snarly, 'that was when you was earthside') (*BB* 245). His threat towards Alison is empty; when it comes to Mart, however, he is able to exert sufficient pressure to force Mart to hang himself. As Alison tries to shield the punters from the 'perfidy of the dead' (*BB* 153), so Mantel presents a version of the spirit world as 'eternal afternoon' sometime in the '1950s' (*BB* 43). But 'That eventless realm' (*BB* 43) is not so eventless after all: the sanitised version of the spirit world presented to the reader is subverted by the violence of the fiends and Mart's bringing over. There is an uneasy mingling of spirit and physical causality which the novel is continuously negotiating. The borders of

³⁴ See Pollard's 'Mind What Gap?' in which Mantel discusses this image (9)

the two realms are breached constantly in the narrative situation; breaches which go beyond a willing suspension of disbelief.³⁵

As valuable as Peeren's reading is, it does not take account of the ways that Mantel's language plays with the oppositions of living/dead, visible/invisible, real/unreal. How the ghost is 'seen' in Mantel's work cannot be separated from the spectral power of the words she uses to describe the act of seeing. Consider Alison's attempt to explain her 'gift' to Colette:

Alison said there was a knack to seeing spirit. It was to do with glancing sideways, not turning your head: extending, Al said, your field of peripheral vision (*BB* 36)

Esther Peeren rightly identifies the action of 'glancing' in opposition to the gaze, exemplified by Colette's customary way of looking (Peeren 136). Her reading, though, does not connect Mantel's use of the word 'glance' and 'sideways', both of which are used continually throughout the novel, with their etymological relations the 'wink' and the 'blink'. I will read these words together, in order to explore some of the 'uncanniness' of Mantel's writing, an uncanniness which is threatened with being occulted by other readings of the novel. For the ghost, which straddles the boundary of presence and absence, different ways of seeing come into play.

To stay with *Beyond Black*; shortly after the death of Princess Diana, her spirit appears to Alison in the hall mirror:

She turned away. At once Diana manifested: a blink in the hall mirror, a twinkle. Within a moment she had become a definite pinkish glow (*BB* 213).

Chambers gives several entries for 'blink': 1. To close both eyes momentarily; 2. To wink; 3. To glance, peep; 4. To look with the eyes half closed; 5. To look with amazement (at); 6. To shine unsteadily or intermittently. From the meanings given for

³⁵ In Coleridge's famous phrase from *Biographia Literaria*: '[I]t was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith' (6) From *The Collected Works of S.T. Coleridge Volume 7*. Ewell, James and W. Jackson Bate eds. London and Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983.

the word 'blink' it is possible to see the clear connections between the 'blink' of the spirit in the mirror and the glance which sees the ghost.³⁶ These words are all related in different ways; for example, the origin of blink is *blench*, which the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines as, 'To start aside, so as to elude, to swerve, shy, to flinch, shrink, give way'. To shrink or start back, as one might shrink back from the sight of a ghost. Not Alison; she remains calm in the face of what Mantel calls the 'perfidy of the dead' (*BB* 153), determined not to disturb the punters with her knowledge. Moreover, the noun form of the word *blench*, means a 'sideways look' and appears in Shakespeare, most notably Sonnet 110:

Most true it is that I have looked on truth
Askance and strangely: but by all above,
These blenches gave my heart an other youth

Far from being separate words used to describe or present seeing, the blink and the sideways glance are intimately related through their etymology, having common ancestors in the word *blench*, which comes from the Old English *blencan*, to cheat or deceive. Alison's 'knack' of 'seeing spirit' is also suggestive of deception, as the obsolete form of knack as 'clever contrivance' shows (*Chambers*).³⁷ The straight look is interrupted and made unstable by the blink, which has etymological origins in deception. Stable ways of seeing and knowing 'truth' are put into question by Mantel's writing of ghosts. What purports to be the 'spirit world' could always be a trick, as Hamlet is only too aware. Further, then: hauntology is the logic of the blink. The blink as it pulsates comes in and out of existence, traversing the boundaries of being, making knowledge uncanny. The blink is hauntology, the being 'there', being

³⁶ Nicholas Royle also employs metaphors and descriptors related to sight, in his text *The Uncanny*, which suggests that the notion of 'seeing a ghost' has important resonances in wider culture. For example, he refers to the blink at least twice, stating that the uncanny makes 'genre blink' (19) and again in 'Night Writing', 'the darkness or blink of the madness of the day, of the eye on the clock-face' (123).

³⁷ In light of Alison's childhood memories, 'knack' also has connotations of 'knacker' a slang word that can be used to mean both castrate and testicle.

‘not there’ of the spectre: Derrida refers to this as the “logic” of the spectre (Derrida *Spectres* 30).

The idea of deception, and what we know or see being put into question, resonates with aspects of fantasy that occur in *Beyond Black*.³⁸ Childhood fantasy intrudes at another point, where blink re-occurs in a different form, as the ‘wink’. Going back to the Alison/Alice connection made earlier, at this point in the novel the narrator is telling Alison’s childhood memories from Alison’s point of view. Alison’s recollection of her childhood centres on the ‘fiends’ who stayed with her mother, in her childhood home. Alison’s mother Emmy and the ill-fated Gloria are prostitutes: the inference being that Emmy has allowed Alison to be abused and/or sold to these men. Leaving aside questions of whether the men are ‘real’ ghosts or figments of the damaged Alison’s psyche for the moment (the novel leaves it ambiguous), the wink and its connection to eyes continues the emphasis on sight and knowledge, and disruptions to the straight look. One of the ‘fiends’ MacArthur’s habit of winking at the young Alison in a lewd and knowing way is represented as a violent act of appropriation:

He [MacArthur] stares at her, suspicious. He says to her, your mam says you need a lesson. He puts out his hand, grabs her right nipple and twists it. She cries out. There’s one, he says, do you want me to do the other side? He winks at her (*BB* 421).

Whenever MacArthur’s presence is invoked it is with mention of his eye, ‘Mac with a patch over his eye’ for example (*BB* 211). In one sense, MacArthur’s wink is a reminder to Alison of her powerlessness in the face of his masculinity and her mother’s inability to protect her from abuse. The young Alison is said to have ‘paid out’ the fiends who have abused her by taking MacArthur’s eye: an eye for an eye in a gruesome enactment of ancient Hammurabian justice. It is, however, an “eye for an

³⁸ Chapter four discusses fantasy more closely.

I” in the young Alison’s case, as she wrests back her ‘will’ and struggles to gain control over her self and her body. Alison calls upon Mrs McGibbet, a spirit from her childhood, to help her piece together what has happened:

[Mrs McGibbet is speaking]: And therefore I couldn’t have noticed MacArthur’s eye plop off a spoon and fall into a dish — surely I must’ve dreamt it, for such a thing could never be. And if your little self, no more than eight, nine, ten years old, were to have cried out, “Now wink at me, can you, you bloody bastard?” I wouldn’t have known it... (BB 433)

The eye becomes a displaced metonym for the ‘I’; the eye’s entrance into the story, minus its rightful owner, is a signal of its magical or talismanic nature. For instance, when the young Alison is walking home from school, she sees MacArthur’s eye rolling down the street. It gets squashed underfoot by her friends who are oblivious to it, but regains its ‘perfect orb’ shape and ‘continues to roll along’ (BB 434).

“Metaphor of the Eye”, Roland Barthes’ commentary on Georges Bataille’s *Story of the Eye* connects the image of the object with the surrealist practice of seeing language ‘askew’ or *devoiyé*. The flattened ‘real’ eye of MacArthur, which continues its journey undamaged, leads us into surrealist territory. The inclusion of such details into the story, of an object which ‘migrates’ (Barthes’ word) into places it does not belong, for ‘other usages than seeing’ (Barthes “Metaphor” 120) disrupts Barthes’ distinction between novel, story and pure poetic form. But, thinking about what the eye *does* in Mantel, wink, blink and so on, suggests further reference back to the ‘blench’, as a flinching, swerving or shying away. Just as Bataille’s story is structured around an eye and its exploits, so these moments in Mantel occur where she stretches the metonymic chain of eyes and seeing to its limits. The orb of the eye and its indestructible shape folds in on itself again as a circle. This circularity is replicated and reproduced throughout *Beyond Black*, and also occurs in Mantel’s spectral imagining of historical agency in the short story “The Assassination of Margaret

Thatcher.” In order to examine Mantel’s particular ways of representing sight, the following aspects are all relevant in how they make knowledge uncanny: the wink, glimpse, the sideways look, and the ‘tail’ of the eye. Mantel uses the motif of ‘tail of the eye’ to denote partial or incomplete ways of seeing in her novels, ways of seeing which do not pretend to full presence.

Tail of the eye

The circularity of the metonymic chain is replicated elsewhere through Mantel’s use of another phrase, the ‘tail of the eye’. According to *Chambers* dictionary, both ‘the outer corner of the eye’ and ‘the margin of the field of vision’. *Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* turns up nothing for this odd phrase; why use tail, when corner of the eye means the same thing? It appears in Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando*: Orlando ‘was adding a line or two with enormous labour [to his poem], when a shadow crossed the tail of his eye’ (*Orlando* 80).³⁹ Looking out of the tail, or corner of the eye suggests a link to peripheral vision that we can refer back to Alison’s ‘knack’ of ‘seeing spirit’ in *Beyond Black*: it involves being able to make the field of vision larger, to incorporate those things that do not appear to sight. Thus the expression ‘tail of the eye’ signals Mantel’s preoccupation with the opacity of perception and its necessary partiality.

The expression is used in slightly different ways in each novel: in *A Change of Climate*, for example, only the character Julian is said to see from the ‘tail of his eye’ (*CC* 133). This character’s reading problems prompt a sight test, ‘but his sight was perfect’ (*CC* 142). Julian’s apparent peculiarities and difficulties with reading

³⁹ Mantel’s engagement with Woolf is a rich topic that has been incompletely explored. I discuss Stella Bolaki’s reading of Mantel’s hospital diary which makes specific reference to Woolf’s *On Being Ill* in chapter four (Ryan and Bolaki eds.) See also Eileen Pollard’s fascinating paper which connects Woolf and Mantel using the figure of ‘invagination’ (24). Pollard, Eileen. ““But at second sight the words seemed not so simple” (Woolf 1929): Thickening and Rotting Hysteria in the Writing of Hilary Mantel and Virginia Woolf.” *The Virginia Woolf Miscellany* 80. (2011): 24-26.

worry his parents, but in the novel his issues demonstrate his understanding ‘beyond the range of normal vision’ (CC 143). His ‘wariness of surfaces’ (132) might suggest that this character has a privileged relation to insight or knowledge, that he is a visionary. The ‘tail of the eye’ occurs in *A Change of Climate* where apparent understanding is reached, or some insight obtained. Thus, not only about looking as a form of insight (an activity inextricably bound with knowing), the ‘tail of the eye’ and the sideways look become ways in which forms of knowledge are discovered. These different forms of knowledge cannot be perceived by looking head on in the usual way. ‘The tail of the eye’ functions in a slightly different way in *Bring up the Bodies*, and to a lesser extent *Wolf Hall*, in that Mantel uses it to ‘stretch’ perspectives, and include other points of view within the text, shifting the emphasis away from Thomas Cromwell momentarily, and onto a partial view of other character’s views of Cromwell.

Wagstaffe and Shakespeare: the spectrality of the citation

Wolfgang Funk’s article “Ghosts of Postmodernity: Spectral Epistemology and Haunting in Hilary Mantel’s *Fludd* and *Beyond Black*” asserts ‘the ghosts in Mantel’s novels are indeed spectres in a Derridean sense, challenges to the imagination, calling from a world beyond truth and reality’ (Adiseshiah and Hildyard 157). Putting aside the wider implications of this statement for a moment, I will focus on the ‘call’ that Funk identifies as a communication from the ‘Derridean spectre’. What is this call, and who is it addressed to? To call as in to name, summon or request to be present: Mantel ‘calls’ Shakespeare’s ghost, ‘summoning’ it in to *Beyond Black*, rousing it from sleep. The close association between ‘call’, ‘cite’ and ‘quote’ (*Chambers*) lends itself to thinking about Shakespeare’s presence in the novel as a citation. We have

already, in the etymology of ‘wink’, seen the spectral presence of the word ‘blench’ from sonnet 110, that haunts the novel. Mantel also ‘quotes’ Shakespeare’s plays: *Richard II, Hamlet, The Merchant of Venice*, with a nod to *Othello*.⁴⁰ Shakespeare is there, but he is also not there. Wagstaffe’s presence demonstrates the workings of the spectre.

Wagstaffe’s absent presence demonstrates how haunting works in Mantel; in the fabric of the narrative he pops up intermittently, like a light blinking. He functions as a kind of literary joke: if all times are together in spirit, why not have Shakespeare and ‘bloody Kyd’ knocking about in ‘pantaloons’ with low-grade twentieth century criminals in Aldershot? The names are the first clue, shake spear and wag staff, equivalent actions and appropriately phallic, considering the company he keeps in Morris. According to Anthony Holden in *Shakespeare his Life and Work* (1999), the names Shakespeare and Wagstaffe would have been markers of lewdness or disgrace among the people of sixteenth century England:

William Shakespeare of Stratford upon Avon was to bring lasting lustre to a surname long held to be an embarrassment. In 1487, on becoming a celibate don at Merton College, Oxford, one Hugh Shakespeare had changed his name to Hugh Sawnders... records the college register, ‘He changed that name of his, because of its base repute.’ (5)

Wagstaffe mixes with the fiends, his pronouncements contrasting with and made ridiculous by their lewdness, such that the reader wonders why he’s there. Mantel plays with the ‘story’ of Shakespeare/Wagstaffe through Morris’ telling, making the reader unsure whether or not a trick is being played on them. The identity of the ghost is a tricky business; made doubly complicated by the contestation of identity that takes place over Shakespeare, even now. His different names in the novel (Shakespeare, Wagstaffe, Crankshaft) reflect this but also suggest a trickster

⁴⁰ Nicholas Royle explores the ‘nod’ in *How to Read Shakespeare* (2nd ed.) (London: Granta, 2014), p. 106 *passim*.

archetype, a deliberate attempt to evade identification. No one knows quite what he is doing there, least of all himself, ‘Only Wagstaffe seemed baffled to be there’ (*BB* 207). This feeling of dis-jointedness comes through the snippets of plays that work their way onto the page. By ‘quoting’, Mantel disrupts time: if all times exist together in spirit, then why can’t Shakespeare turn up here, in the late twentieth century? The time is well and truly out of joint — this is what the ghost does. As Marjorie Garber states in her *Shakespeare’s Ghost Writers: Literature as Uncanny Causality*:

The Ghost is Shakespeare. He is the one who comes as a revenant, belatedly instated, regarded as originally authoritative, rather than retrospectively and retroactively canonized, and deriving increased authority from this very instatement, over time (Garber 176).

Mantel’s production of Shakespeare’s possible ghost subtly undoes this authority, as the ghost in its turn undoes the authority of the patriarch in *Hamlet* and in *Beyond Black*. Not only this, the revenant Shakespeare/Wagstaffe/Crankshaft throws reality into disarray by refusing to stay dead, representing a contamination of the narrative. Wagstaffe is a citation from outside the text that doesn’t belong, rendering the distinction between inside and outside meaningless. The muddle is shown by the confusion his presence engenders: Alison rings Emmy to talk to her and get answers about the past, and Emmy mentions Wagstaffe: ‘he [Morris] said Bill Wagstaffe owed him, I never could see how that was, but I suppose it was a bet on the horses and boys will be boys’ (*BB* 424). Even the permanently drugged and drunk Emmy can see that there’s something going awry with historical causality; the ghost as ‘uncanny causality’ in Garber’s words. When the ‘fiends’ are discussing the hanging of Mart and Aitkenside is holding Morris to account, ‘You failed to see he was her good deed,’ Wagstaffe interjects, ‘A good deed in a naughty world’ (*BB* 444) an allusion to

Portia's speech in Merchant of Venice Act 5 Scene 1.⁴¹ Evicted by Aitkenside, Morris is sobbing, and Wagstaffe pops up again when a handkerchief is requested, 'Any handkerchief in particular?' (BB 445), an allusion to *Othello*. Colette interviews Alison, who recounts the incident with Morris in an English lesson at school 'he'd come in halfway through English and said oh, William bloody Shakespeare is it? Bloody Bill Wagstaffe, Bill Crankshaft, I know that cove, he's dead he is, or so he claims, and he owes me a fiver' (132). The quotation here behaves as a ghostly foreign body that insinuates itself into the text, exploding the distinctions between the text and reality, the living and the dead.

These distinctions continue to be eroded and played with throughout *Beyond Black*. In an excerpt from the tapes that Colette is compiling as a record of Alison's life, Alison hears an unknown voice calling for respect, and a second unknown voice reciting excerpts from John of Gaunt's speech in Shakespeare's *Richard II*, Act 2 Scene 1: 'this sceptred isle... this precious stone set in the silver sea...' (BB 207). Aitkenside interjects, 'Oi oi oi oi! It's Wagstaffe!' to which Morris asks Wagstaffe if he's 'mended the bloody hole in your bloody pantaloons, yet?' He gets no answer, as Wagstaffe says, 'There's rosemary, that's for remembrance', a line from Ophelia's speech in *Hamlet*, Act 4 Scene 5. Wagstaffe isn't engaging in dialogue, only interjecting seemingly random quotations into the text which sit alongside the fiends' low humour, creating a comedic effect:

WAGSTAFFE: This sceptred isle...

MORRIS: My sceptred—

...

WAGSTAFFE: This other Eden—

MORRIS: My sceptred arse (BB 214-5).

⁴¹ That light we see is burning in my hall
How far that little candle throws his beams!
So shines a good deed in a naughty world. (Merchant of Venice Act V: i (89-91))

Sceptre is both a metonym for monarchic authority and a baton or staff carried to denote the bearer's power. To Wag the staffe is a disruption of authority in its very name and identity, the wag representing another sideways movement that disturbs. Transpose the c and p and sceptred becomes spectred; the seat of monarchical power made unstable by ghosts who don't play by the rules. Wagstaffe's presence not only exposes the spectrality of the citation, but also contaminates power by disturbing its straight path with a wag; both movement side to side and a person who likes to joke. In 'Mind what Gap?' when asked about Morris, Mantel refers to masculinity and 'men as a collective force...I realised as well that a lot of this goes back to Shakespeare and it's Nym and Bardolph and ancient Pistol...they are *marauding* through my work in all sorts of guises' (9, emphasis in original).

Goes back to Shakespeare, Mantel says: *marauding* Jacobean 'father', who pops up in the novel as Wagstaffe. Disrupting narrativity, his spectre-ness forces us to confront, as Derrida says in relation to Marxism, '[t]he question of life, spirit, or the spectral, of life-death beyond the opposition between life and death' (Derrida *Spectres* 67). The paradox being that life can only be approached through apprehension of death; through the spectre whose existence is in question and who blinks in and out of the novel. The spectre causes Mantel to pause in *Giving up the Ghost*; on the stairs, suspended between two choices, up or down. Spectre holds a jumbled 'step', containing within it the mis-step of inheritance disrupted. Go back to that quintessential spectre, Hamlet's father, who haunts Hamlet just as Henry (Mantel's 'real' father) haunts Hilary. Hamlet's father's brother is also his step-dad. The spectre makes weird things happen to relationships and families, a trope which recurs in Mantel's novel *Beyond Black*. Alison gains the trust of Colette by telling her the truth about her family, that the man she thinks is her uncle is in fact her father; the

man she thinks is her father is nobody to her, no blood relation. Colette's reaction to this information is not one of horror, or particular surprise; 'Not surprising her aunts were always exchanging glances, and saying things like, I wonder where Colette gets her hair from, I wonder where she gets her brains?' (87)

The next section will consider the idea of inheritance in spectrality in a slightly different way, by thinking about Mantel as part of a visionary tradition.

Spectrality of the image I: Wordsworth, Hardy and Mantel as Visionaries

Though absent long,
 These forms of beauty have not been to me,
 As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
 But aft, in lonely rooms, and mid the din
 Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
 In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
 Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart,
 And passing even into my purer mind
 With tranquil restoration:... (lines 23 -31)

This excerpt from Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey' makes the visual strange. The 'blind man's' uncanny eye, his inner eye of imagination opens up the spectral feeling of perception and its ability to stay with the narrative voice of the poem. The world is something that can be apprehended, yet, much like Freud's uncanny, its strangeness cannot be explained through intellect alone. There is perception which supersedes sight: 'In which the heavy and the weary weight / Of all this unintelligible world / Is lightened...' (lines 40-2). The act of conjuring up an image from memory acts as a tonic, or balm. For Wordsworth, the human soul and body are nourished by the power of 'nature', the 'wild green landscape', the 'pastoral farms' and these memories which he sees in his mind's eye, help to ease the stress and strain of everyday existence which wearies and picks at the human sensibility.

For Wordsworth then, the images are clear to him, the ‘...forms of beauty have *not* been to me, / As is a landscape to a blind man’s eye’(emphasis added). Although away from the physical scene, the poet mentally ‘sees’ the landscape; this is not an imaginative act, or an approximation as it would be if the protagonist were blind, and had never actually seen the sights he is referring to. There is something here about the image that Wordsworth is able to retain in his mind: a spectral quality, the sensation of an imprint. The experience of seeing a ghost transforms in some way, leaves a mark. This notion of the spectral quality of the image is confirmed when he goes on to describe the pleasure that accrues within his body, ‘Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart, / And passing even into my purer mind...’. There is a deep and uncanny sense of a return here, which is not an act of imagination but almost a conjuring, a summoning up of deep forces to restore his spirit. The spectral quality here is not about a revenant, a dead person, but the ghostliness of the image and the effect it has upon the feeling, the sense, the deep, hidden, invisible aspects that poetry attempts to bring to light, to the world of the seen. The ‘purer mind’ enables us to ‘see into the life of things’, to apprehend the real beneath the surface of the visual: to put it another way, to peer into the ambiguous realm of the spectre.

As Tim Armstrong writes, referring to Thomas Hardy’s poem ‘The House of Silence’, ‘...the poet is he who conjures up a scene of ghosts’ (Armstrong 51). This conjuring is key to understanding Mantel’s spectral allegiances, the shadows and spirits that populate her novels. First, however, it is worth going by Hardy, to see if his notion of ‘...the visioning powers of souls who dare / To pierce the material screen’ can offer us a way of thinking about Mantel, as a part of (and in excess of), a ‘visionary’ tradition. Hardy’s poem ‘The House of Silence’ is a conversation between a child, and an unnamed, presumably adult interlocutor. The child has remarked on

how ‘quiet’ the house is, ‘in the trees with the shady lawn’; to be told that the house is not a quiet place at all, it is actually the dwelling of a ‘phantom’, and ‘a brain spins there till dawn’. This is a surprising inversion of the cultural commonplace of the child visionary, who instructs the rational adult to look beyond the surface of the thing. When the child again says, “‘ But I see nobody there, - / Nobody moves about the green...,”” the adult replies, “‘ — Ah, that’s because you do not *bear* / The visioning powers of souls who *dare* / To pierce the material screen’ (emphasis added). In these lines the reasons for the inversion of roles becomes clear, as the adult has powers that allow him access to an ‘other’ world. Being able to apprehend the ‘real’ that lies beneath the optical surface of the thing is a burden that he/she has to ‘bear’. The power of vision that entails looking and seeing beyond the surface of things requires courage, as well as being a burden on the one who takes up this path. Hardy also taps into what might be called the spectral paradox here, in his repetition of ‘nobody’ in lines seven and eight: the ‘phantom’ that ‘abides’ there is a nothing, a space or gap where a material body might be. As the poem progresses, the voice of the poem describes the rich vision that he/she perceives beyond the surface reality that the child can ‘see,’ evoking a scene of ‘music and laughter like floods of light’ where ‘figures dance to a mind with sight’ (16-17). The idea of a mind with sight connects directly to ‘Tintern Abbey’, as for Wordsworth, for Hardy it is precisely the ‘mind with sight’ that offers a balm to the weariness of the world. Unlike the blind man, who has to make it up, the poet recalls with sharpness and accuracy; the resulting image is a spectral entity, with bodily effects, and a direct link to the ‘purer mind’ of the poet. The life of feeling that lies beneath/behind the ‘real’ can be apprehended by sight, in flashes, blinks that come and go.

Catherine Maxwell quotes Hardy writing about reality in a letter dated 13 February 1887: ‘the material is not the real - only the visible, the real being invisible optically...it is because we are in a sonambulistic hallucination that we think the real to be what we see as real’. Maxwell goes on to summarise,

The imaginatively contemplative mind, a mind which naturally expresses itself in poetry, sees as ‘real’ what is normally regarded as metaphysical, abstract, supernatural, or unconscious. If material things can have a supernatural aspect, then they vary only in degree and not in kind from those spectres and visions more generally regarded as supernatural...(Maxwell 205)

Maxwell is acknowledging a greater truth about the visionary capacities of the writer, and not only this, but also the way that the writer understands the porosity of the boundary between ‘real’ and ‘unreal’, between ‘material’ and ethereal, concrete and psychic. The spectral haunts, this is its banal truth, but if this is true, then everyday existence is also imbued with the spectral. One must look closely enough, and in the right way, in order to apprehend the strangeness that dwells within things.

Mantel also makes use of this spectral logic in *Giving up the Ghost*: her stepfather’s ghost does not take up space in the physical realm, but she ‘sees’ he is ‘there’ all the same. There are startling similarities between both these poets and Mantel in the representation of the ghostly, and how the ghostly connects to writing. Mantel’s evocation of the figure carrying bundles at the end of *Giving up the Ghost* directly links to the pastoral settings of the poetic visionaries in both ‘Tintern Abbey’ and ‘The House of Silence’. She describes the sale of Owl Cottage, the house that has a ghost in it, and the new house where herself and her husband and their army of ghostly unborn children now reside, depicting how

Sometimes, at dawn or at dusk, I pick out from the gloom - I think I do - a certain figure, traversing those rutted fields in a hushed and pearly light, picking a way among the treacherous rivulets and the concealed ditches. It is a figure shrouded in a cloak, bearing certain bulky objects wrapped in oilcloth, irregular in shape: not heavy but awkward to carry (252).

Mantel's figure 'shrouded in a cloak' has a metaphorical connection to the 'funereal shades' of the poet's bower in Hardy's poem. Likewise, the figure is also 'bearing certain bulky objects', recalling directly both the burden of visioning powers in Hardy's poem and the 'burthen' of Wordsworth's protagonist in "Tintern Abbey"—

'...the burthen of the mystery, / In which the heavy and the weary weight / Of all this unintelligible world / Is lightened... (39-42). The "visionary", for all these writers, bears this load, for he/she alone is able to interpret the 'unintelligible world', to make sense of its 'mystery'. Hardy is concerned with the 'real', and how it differs from what is commonly taken to be reality. To return to Catherine Maxwell, she writes thus on 'The House of Silence':

...we find out that the house of the title, which seems to the observing child 'a quiet place', but is said to teem with phantasmal life, is actually 'a poet's bower', the implication being that the poet is one who has 'The visioning powers of those who dare / To pierce the material screen', but also that the phantoms are of his perception and creation...The 'ghost space' of the house is here directly linked to the ghost space of poetry writing... (Maxwell. *Second Sight*. Manchester UP: Manchester, 2008, 216).

Maxwell's exegesis shows how Hardy symbolises the poet's ability to delve into things as they 'really are' by representing a house in which a 'brain spins until dawn' (presumably the poet's brain). Again, what connects Hardy with Mantel is the physicality of that same 'phantasmal life' and its dynamism. There is a contrast between the 'uncanny' and 'funereal shades' of the 'poet's bower' and the life contained within it, where 'Figures dance to a mind with sight, / And music and laughter like floods of light / Make all the precincts gleam'. The dynamism of this description exposes spectral logic at work, the strange crossings and re-crossings that occur across the boundaries of the mental and physical. Mantel imagines this boundary continually, and the physicality of the packages she describes in the above passage demonstrate this. Their awkwardness is a testament, perhaps, to the

incompatibility of life and art, but there is also something here about being a woman who writes, as well as an evocation of a primeval time, with its ‘oilcloth’ wrappings and cloaks. The hesitation in the words ‘I think I do’ is Mantel’s provisional stance, which is never stronger than when she is writing about spectres, perception and what constitutes the ‘real’. By drawing a direct link here between Wordsworth, Hardy, and Mantel, I am arguing that the provisional aspect of Mantel’s writing includes her ‘vision’. When the ‘visioning powers’ of the poet are taken up by Mantel in her fiction, as spectral presences which ‘see into the heart of things’ (in Wordsworth’s words), the world of everyday appearance is made strange and uncanny. Mantel does what Hardy claims poets must do: ‘pierce the material screen’.

Spectrality of the image II: ‘The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher’

There is a famous photograph of Margaret Thatcher in 1979 on the steps of 10 Downing Street. Margaret Thatcher, British Prime Minister 1979-1990; the first woman to hold the office. The blue suit jacket, tempered by the schoolgirl softness of the pleated skirt, hints at the woman beneath the Iron Lady. She seems to have been reviled and adored equally. You’ve heard the sayings — her cabinet calling her ‘mummy’, for example — the politicians who had a crush on her. Her right arm is held aloft, straight up, palm open; her left clutches what would become her trademark, the handbag. *Spitting Image* loved the handbag; I faintly recall her grotesque puppet hitting fellow puppets Geoffrey Howe and Douglas Hurd with it, a strange inversion of the Punch and Judy show. But actually, when I chase the reference it is even better than my hallucination — she’s presiding over her cabinet like a school ma’am, hitting them with rulers, ‘speak up Geoffrey I’m sure the whole

cabinet would like to hear it'.⁴² Perhaps we ought to feel sorry for her, caught in a gender double bind. She can only ever play the roles ascribed to women who take too much power — brusque primary school teacher, public school Matron. She is either pilloried for 'out-manning' the men, or for her 'fake femininity' as Mantel's narrator categorises it (AMT 220).

The story takes place in August 1983, when the Prime Minister is in Windsor, recovering from an eye operation. The unnamed narrator, who is expecting a plumber, lets a would-be assassin into her flat, which overlooks the hospital grounds. The narrator and assassin co-exist in an uneasy truce-like state; the narrator hates Thatcher as much as he does, and will do nothing to stop him. In fact, she offers to help the assassin by showing him the fire door between the flats which represents the possibility of him emerging from another flat a bit further down the street and getting away.

Mantel conjures the spectre of Margaret Thatcher back from the dead, resurrecting her in order to kill her again. To conjure, meaning to call on or summon; to perform a magic trick by sleight of hand. Thatcher exists in this story as surface, spectral image, down to the 'pussy cat bow' and 'the glittering helmet of hair' (AMT 242). Mantel does both of these, exploding the distinctions between the inside and the outside of the story; the image of Thatcher that she evokes is *the* image of Thatcher reproduced an infinite number of times, hated and adored. The aforementioned 'pussy cat bow' and 'glittering helmet of hair'; the heels, bag, 'tailored suit' (AMT 242), all exist in the actual and the imagination, such that she isn't dead, not really. Thatcher is alive, living on in a neoliberal ideology which 'worships the rich' (AMT

⁴² "Spitting Image" TV. Series 1 Ep.3 (1984) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jINZBOxdja8>

220) and places profit above the social good. Derrida identifies the jubilation in this right-ward march, writing:

This dominating discourse often has the manic, jubilatory, and incantatory form that Freud assigned to the so-called triumphant phase of mourning work. The incantation repeats and ritualizes itself, it holds forth and holds to formulas, like any animistic magic. To the rhythm of a cadenced march, it proclaims: Marx is dead, communism is dead, very dead, and along with it its hopes, its discourses, its theories and its practices. It says: long live capitalism, long live the market, here's to the survival of economic and political liberalism! (Derrida *Spectres* 64)

But what he also identifies here is the magical basis of the thought, the 'incantation' that is used to create and sustain this power. Mantel takes this power and subverts it: the telling conjures up the image of Thatcher, her legacy, but also creates a spectral moment in history. The spectral moment is a religious ceremony in which Thatcher can be ritually killed; 'once more I am reminded of something priestly' thinks the narrator about the assassin. She is 'a sacrifice' (AMT 241). Her fantasied death functions as an expiation of the sins of the 'dominating discourse', a shot in the arm for the resistance.

Perhaps we are getting ahead of ourselves, but the point remains: "The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher" is not just a story. There is no such thing as just a story. Those who say, 'it's just a story' are more wrong in their assessments than those who pilloried Mantel and called for the police to investigate. At least those people understand the story's power. All those who rejoiced at Thatcher's death miss the point as spectacularly as those who called for the police to investigate Mantel. Matters of verifiable record: Mantel lived close to where the Prime Minister had her eyes operated on (more on eyes later) in 1983. She says she 'detested her'. Mantel is interested in symbols, we have already established, and particularly symbols of nation building and power. In this story she draws together Empire, the Union flag, the Army, the government and the Queen. All these symbols are presented apart from the everyday yet intrinsically linked with it:

The Holy trinity church, islanded, is hung with garrison flags. Looking from a high window over the town (as I did that day of the killing) you feel the close presence of fortress and castle. Glance to your left, and the Round Tower looms into view, pressing itself against the panes. (AMT 208)

The narrator belongs to the ‘bourgeoisie’ (AMT 226): Perrier water, chat about plumbers, the ‘glass of warm white wine in the Arts centre’. She resides comfortably within south-east England, in which ‘all causes are the same, all ideas for which a person might care to die...are nuisances, a breach of the peace, and likely to hold up the traffic or delay the trains’ (AMT 223). Within this suburban description, Mantel’s irony hints at the shadow of Thatcherite policies: ‘In the early 1980s, England has not succumbed to the smell of burning. The carbonised reek of the weekend barbecue was unknown...’ (AMT 209). Mantel’s gentle mocking of suburban life hides the darker side of monetarism and the shadow of Thatcherism: economic policies that laid waste to whole communities in the North, leading to the subsequent demonisation of the working class. While Thatcher is having her minor operation in a Windsor hospital, insulated from the damage she has caused, parts of the country *had* ‘succumbed to the smell of burning’, in the race riots of London, Leeds and Liverpool.⁴³

Mantel employs markers of memory and resistance in this story which place it in a specific moment in historical discourse, while at the same time playing with the idea of tradition: ‘name an Irish martyr, go on, you can’t can you’(AMT 231). ‘It’s about Ireland. Only Ireland, right?’ the assassin tells the narrator, citing vengeance for the hunger strikers as his motivation. ‘You’re no nearer the old country than I am,’ the narrator retorts, to which the assassin replies, ‘I was brought up in a tradition....And look, it brings us here’ (AMT 229). The narrator thinks, ‘not that my

⁴³ For an authoritative socio-historical account of the ‘race riots’ see Paul Gilroy’s 1987 study of race in Britain, *There ain’t no black in the Union Jack* (Revised ed for Routledge Classics) London: Routledge, 2002.

visitor had named his affiliation, but I had spoken it aloud in my mind' (AMT 227).

Later she wonders if he is IRA after all: 'he may not be a Provisional' (AMT 229).⁴⁴

The assassin is a Provisional, regardless of his 'affiliations', due to his relation to history, and the event. As a disruptor of 'progress' who can slow time down, he exists outside of time.

The event

Having tricked his way into the narrator's flat, the assassin studies his watch: 'He kept looking at his watch, though he said he had no certain time. Once he rubbed its face with his palm, as if it might be fogged and concealing a different time underneath' (AMT 219). The assassin has 'no certain time' in that he will wait for the right moment. But he also has no certain time, as he does not belong to time. Even the moment exists outside of time; if there is all the time in the world, time ceases to have meaning. To have all the time one could need removes the boundedness of the real, and without any time, the story becomes impossible to tell. By emphasising the inevitability of the shooting, 'now that we are here at last' (AMT 242), Mantel takes the story out of history and into the realms of pure event, the event that shatters time.

The moment in which all this takes place is out of time, not in the sense of "running out of time", but is somehow *physically* displaced. The decision has been made, the finger resting on the trigger, the hands steady and the eye engaged; Mantel writes of that moment, and Thatcher's 'toddle' towards it. ('She's making efforts, but getting nowhere very fast' 242) The narrator foresees the suit, the assassin focuses his eye on the foresight of the gun. The barrel of the gun letting out 'one easy wink of the

⁴⁴ For a brief overview of the Provisional IRA see Tim Pat Coogan *The IRA* (Palgrave: London, 2002). For an alternative and more in-depth view, see Tommy McKearney's *The Provisional IRA* (2011). McKearney emphasises both the civil rights basis for dissent in Northern Ireland, and the oppressive nature of Westminster attitudes towards the Catholic minority.

world's blind eye'. 'Foresight' connects the event with Mantel's unique ways of writing about the visual, tapping into the obsolete meaning of provide, 'to make ready beforehand' or 'prepare for future use'. Contained within the visual are references to sight, blindness and therefore justice.

In order to explore the idea of blind justice, Mantel evokes the image of the hunger strikers; their poor treatment at the hands of the British government and their subsequent martyrdom:

What's a dozen Irishmen to them? What's a hundred? All those people, they're capital punishers. They pretend to be modern, but leave them to themselves and they'd gouge eyes out in the public squares. (AMT 231)

The narrator remarks of the hunger strikers, 'They may have been blind at the end, but their eyes were open when they went into it' (230). To have the eyes open is to understand; lack of knowledge is denoted by blindness. When Margaret Thatcher finally leaves the hospital her eyes are covered, not with bandages, but with 'big goggle glasses. Shading her, no doubt, from the trials of the afternoon.' (242). The narrator asks, 'Will they have to lead her? Will her eyes be bandaged?' (232), conjuring up a picture of the prime minister helpless and blinded. After all, she is protected from the 'trials' of the afternoon by being subjected to summary justice; executed by the assassin. The 'bandaged eyes' foreshadow her eyes 'shielded' by dark-glasses, and thus the monstrous image of 'eyes being gouged out in the public squares' (231) surfaces metonymically. Mantel's reference to summary justice, to punishment being meted out on the body of the perpetrator conjures the power of 'an eye for an eye'. The act of blinding evokes the Oedipal story in which metaphorical blindness or the refusal to know (at least to acknowledge what you already 'know') is punished by the putting out of Oedipus' eyes, while the blind Tiresias displays wisdom and understanding. Eyes stand in for the question of knowledge, in this short

story. The would-be assassin remarks, 'I'm here for your sightlines. I don't care about your affinities' (AMT 222). Justice wears a blindfold. Christopher Prendergast, in his "Derrida's *Hamlet*", describes the consequence of 'seeking to establish justice by reference to a final solution' as a 'reign of tyranny.' He continues:

At both ends of the temporal chain, the political intervenes to impose a form of self-legitimizing closure, called the Just, whereas Derrida wants to break that chain in the name of time as permanently and incorrigibly out of joint, disjointed, disadjusted, off its hinges, or if you prefer, spectralized, offering no site for the embodied manifestation of the Just. (Prendergast 47)

Mantel presents a textual chain of gruesome associations which disrupt any opposition between 'seeing' and 'blindness'. What she seems to recognise is the futility of the 'embodied' in the struggle for justice, suggested by allusions to hanging, eye-gouging, and blindness as a punishment.

Ultimately, the 'world's blind eye' is impervious to humanity. 'What happens, happens all the same' states medium Alison in *Beyond Black* (91). The glimpse of uncanny causality in Wagstaffe continues in Mantel's telling of the Alison's foreknowledge of Princess Diana's death. Alison wakes Colette up, sometime in August to tell her that Princess Diana is dead, although it emerges that the Princess isn't actually dead yet:

'I'm sure it will be clearer,' Al said, 'when it actually happens.'
 'What do you mean? You mean it hasn't happened yet? Colette ran a hand through her hair, and it stood up, a pale fuzzy halo. 'Al, we must do something!'
 'Like?'
 'Warn somebody! Call the police! Telephone the Queen?'
 Al raised a hand. 'Quiet, please. She's getting in the car. She's putting on her seatbelt —no, no she isn't. They're larking about. Not a care in the world. Why are they going that way? Dear, dear, they're all over the road!' (145).

Alison is an observer, God-like in her view but powerless to stop 'what happens':

She looked without surprise as the Twin Towers crumbled, as the burning bodies plunged through the air. Alison watched till the news looped itself around again and again and the same pictures were played. Then she left the room without comment. You feel as if you should say something, but you don't know what it is. You can't say

you foresaw it; yet you can't say no one foresaw it. The whole world has drawn this card. (255)⁴⁵

Unlike the assassin in “The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher”, whose presence disrupts causality and takes the event out of time, Alison is a bystander. A bystander who knows, but is unable to have any effect on events. Alison’s ability to foresee, her ‘knack’, is of little use when it comes to action. The assassin, however, not only tricks the narrator into opening her front door by sleight of hand, but has the door to the other flat at his disposal. The narrator’s suggested move sideways or swerve of leaving the flat via another door connects to the origins of trick in *blencan*, the swerve ‘What if I could buy you a moment?’ (AMT 234): suggesting that he could go out of another flat and ‘walk out like a boiler man, the way you came in...’ (234). The assassin thus has a chance to influence events without personal danger. The narrator leads the assassin through the liminal space between the households:

Neither in nor out of the house, visible but not seen, you could lurk here for an hour undisturbed, you could loiter for a day. You could sleep here, you could dream. Neither innocent or guilty, you could skulk here for decades, while the alderman’s daughter grows old: between step and step, grow old yourself, slip the noose of your name. One day Trinity Place will fall down, in a puff of plaster and powdered bone. Time will draw to a zero point, a dot: angels will pick through the ruins, kicking up the petals from the gutters, arms wrapped in tattered flags. (236)

The door is the threshold through which people pass, a door to another place. As the switch in vocabulary suggests, this in-between space is another time and another history; ‘...you could skulk here for decades, while the alderman’s daughter grows old...’⁴⁶ What Mantel describes as the ‘zero point’ of time connects the space between the two flats to the moment of the killing: the elliptical hole of the “0” depicting the shape of the eye at the point of its ‘wink’, almost too quick to catch. Stepping through the door, the marker of provisional space, means a step out of time

⁴⁵ In a painful reminder of the spectrality of history, its repetitions and strange coincidences, as I’m writing this about causality the Grenfell tower disaster happens.

⁴⁶ The significance of the Anglo Saxon ‘alderman’ in the context of a story which is at least in part about the struggle of Irish republicanism.

into the logic of the moment and its momentariness, also suggesting the circularity of history and its painful repetitions

This ‘zero point’ recurs in *Beyond Black* as the ‘loop’ which figures history as both cyclical and concurrent to itself, all happening at once. Alison ‘reads’ Colette’s return to Gavin in a tarot spread and seems to predict it, ‘Wheel of Fortune, reversed....The Chariot, reversed. I’m not sure I like to think of wheels turning backwards...’ (BB 232). The wheel of fortune figures in this novel as a reminder of fate; luck; redemption and justice. At the beginning of the novel, ‘It is a time to let go of expectation, yet not abandon hope; to anticipate the turn of the Wheel of Fortune. This is our life and we have to lead it. Think of the alternative’ (2). Connecting also with the ‘zero point’ and the loop, this novel has its own ‘blind eye’, the M25. Functioning as a loop, the novel begins with the drabness of the orbital road and ends with it too: a loop within a loop. While travelling around the M25, Alison’s body also contains the M25, its vastness and bleakness inside her, not just as an echo but as manifestation, ‘The car flees across the junctions and the space the road encloses is the space inside her: the arena of combat, the wasteland, the place of civil strife behind her ribs’ (BB 2). The ‘wasteland’ inside Alison, a medium travelling the M25 for work, maps in physical space the lacuna in the circle, the nothing at the centre typified by the letter o. She is enclosed by the road, enclosed by the liminal space of the outer limits of the suburbs, the ‘rejects’ and ‘anomalies’ of which she is one herself, the orbital ‘o’, the space inside it a blank or nothingness.⁴⁷ The loop offers a

⁴⁷ Catherine Spooner, in “[T]hat Eventless Realm:” Hilary Mantel’s *Beyond Black* and the Ghosts of the M25’ suggests that Mantel’s ‘vision of the M25’ is ‘a comic and partially affirmative one that accommodates the domestic, interior, and private’ (80-1). She comes at the issue of Alison’s body and ghosts from a different angle, arguing that ‘Inner and outer space are impenetrable, Alison’s ghosts manifesting physically in the landscape she inhabits’ (83). In *London Gothic: Place, Space and the Gothic Imagination*. Lawrence Phillips and Anne Witchard eds. London and New York: Continuum, 2010.

double figuration of that space, recurring almost constantly throughout the novel. As Colette helps Alison by hanging her clothes, she ‘looped the black skirt onto a hanger’ (BB 4); she is in charge of the stage dressing and has to drape a piece of material that Alison calls her ‘silk’, just so ‘At first she’d had trouble draping it, getting the loops just right, but now she’d got it off pat — a twist of her wrist made a loop over the top of the portrait...’ (9). As Alison is preparing to go on stage, she takes a mint out of her mouth so she can drink her G&T: ‘She wrapped the mint in a tissue, looked around, and looped it hesitantly towards a metal bin a few yards away’ (13-14). When Morris comes back, bringing the fiends with him, he ‘would talk, reprising the Aldershot days, running them back on a kind of loop...Round and round it went’ (390-1). The spirit Mrs McGibbet asks the child Alison if she wants her ‘round and about’ (102). The homeless man Mart camps out in Alison’s shed, and when Colette sees him on the lawn outside ‘He was walking around it in circles, as if under an enchantment’ (285). Alison thinks Mart is her new spirit guide, as ‘the creature smiled shyly and continued to circle’ (285). Mart describes to Alison how he managed to hide out in the garden centre: ‘They thought I was off the premises but I looped back.’ When he is describing his treatment or lack of it at the hands of the authorities he calls himself an ‘outloop’, dropped out and unreachable, out of the loop. Alison’s penultimate act of the novel is to flee from Admiral Drive and rid herself of the ‘fiends’, gaining some new and gentler spirit guides in the process. At the height of Morris’ rambunctiousness she left the tape ‘unspooling’ (BB 393); now in a kind of rebirth, ‘She sees...the tape unspooling in the empty house; her past unspooling, back beyond this life, beyond the lives to come’ (442). The final act, having finally rid herself of Morris (the implication being he has moved on with

Colette), she is riding the M25 with her new spirit guides. The novel functions as a loop, goes full circle.

Loops, spool: running backwards as well as forwards, like the wheel of fortune and the concurrence of history. This loop is not regular, however: it suffers from breaks, it turns backwards, is unpredictable. For example, the women's relationship. Having split from her husband and finding herself in need of guidance, Colette goes to Alison's psychic demonstration. Alison picks her out from the crowd, seeing a 'broken wedding ring' (BB 75). The women meet the next day, and Alison reaches out to Colette, 'She [Alison] spoke as if she had her life before her. She spoke as if her feelings and thoughts could be mended; she imagined popping into the dry-cleaner's, and getting the broken zip replaced, the zip that joined her thoughts to her feelings and joined her up inside' (75). Colette's interior monologue has already described her inner self in terms of an unzipped zip, 'a peculiar disjointed, unstrung sensation occurred in her head, as if her thoughts and her feelings had been joined together by a zip, and the zip had broken' (73). The slang meaning of zip, 'nothing, zero', adds evidence to what we already know about Colette. She is empty inside, and transparent outside; pale, colourless, beige. She leaves nothing of herself behind her. Zip. Colette's ring, her loops and the zero-nothingness in the centre of her life echo Alison's space within. But while Alison's body expands to enclose the liminal space of the M25, Colette's body is reduced to zero, or 'zip'.

Spectral angels, historical spectres

Mantel's invocation of the 'angels' recalls both the earlier *Beyond Black* and *Bring up the Bodies*. As a being which is transcendent, the angel is a creature of in-betweenness, intervening in the destiny of the human world, but unable to connect to

it. With God, but without his omniscience; a servant, a messenger (the 9th definition on the list in Chambers puts angel as ‘ a radar echo of unknown origin’, connecting it to the wink and blink):

Angels are messengers. They are creatures with a mind and a will... They hardly visit men nowadays. Though in Rome he knew a man, a turnspit in the papal kitchens, who had come face to face with an angel in a passage dripping with chill, in a sunken store room of the Vatican where cardinals never tread; and people bought him drinks to make him talk about it. He said the angel’s substance was heavy and smooth as marble, its expression distant and pitiless; its wings were carved from glass. (348-9)

The angel manifests itself to humanity not as living, breathing, matter but as a ‘substance’ which is cold, ‘smooth as marble’. There is no chance of a connection with this angel, hard as it is, with its distant expression suggesting lack of engagement. This lack of connection occurs in Walter Benjamin’s ninth of the ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’ (*Illuminations* 249): the ‘pitiless’ expression on the angel’s face, and the conjuring of angels which exist outside of time reminds us of Benjamin's description of Paul Klee’s painting, *Angelus Novus*:

His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. (249)

The Angel whose wings stretch across the world, who ‘would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed,’ instead finds itself propelled into the future, from which it is facing away. This angel of history is the being ‘with a mind and a will’ as Mantel writes; unlike Mantel’s ‘pitiless’ and ‘distant’ angels, though, its intention is to help. Klee’s angel of history, according to Benjamin at least, desires to make good the damage caused, but is unable to do so. Far from existing underground, in the ‘papal kitchens’, manifesting but unwilling to assist, Benjamin’s angel is deeply affected by the catastrophic and chaotic human world and its own inability to ‘make whole what has been smashed’. The angel shows us that history does not chart a linear path, or function as a causal state, but is disaster piled on disaster, each event

a moment as strong and powerful as the last; yet each unconnected to its predecessor and the events that come after it. Mantel's angels pick over the wreckage, are powerless to help; only able to drape rags over their arms and kick up the scattered petals. The outcome is the same for Benjamin's angel: despite its good intentions, 'the pile of debris before him grows skyward' (249).

Mantel's use of the moment as the 'easy wink of the world's blind eye' thus makes common cause with the Benjaminian idea of the angel of history. Each moment's disaster is a rupture of the angel's desire to make whole, to 'make good'. The assassin's joy in violence, 'Fucking rejoice!' (echoing Thatcher's 'rejoice!' in the epigraph to the story) is really the obverse of the desire to heal exhibited by the angel. Heal, or kill, it is all the same to the 'world's blind eye' which continues blinking regardless of the interventions of angels. Consider the ending of *Beyond Black*:

Alison checks her rear-view mirror. She pulls out to over-take a truck, she puts her foot down. She moves into the fast lane, half hidden by the spray. Unmolested, unobserved, they flee before the storm. If the universe is a great mind, it may sometimes have its absences (451).

For Mantel, the 'absences' (the lacuna of time's 'zero point' comes to mind here) of the universe's 'great mind' are the interstices where it is possible to be 'unobserved'. In the same way, the 'world's blind eye' takes no notice of the skulking assassin between the flats in 'The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher', or at least the possibility that he might dwell there, staving off his inevitable death.

When the protagonist presents this possible solution to the assassin he is scornful, but she persuades him, 'Try it. Do not put on the light. Do not speak. Step through' (AMT 239). The moment in which the assassin is invited to 'step through' into the darkness represents the stepping outside of history, the rupture of the moment that culminates in the winking of the 'world's blind eye.' The assassin and the narrator replicate the world's blindness in the space between the flats: the leap of

faith required, in darkness and silence, represents the illuminating power of the spectral, its power to expose what is ‘really there’ to the perception. Mantel conjures this spectral power through her use of the door. The door is the threshold to and from this world, but is also a symbol of visionary power, a solace to the human world in the continual state of crisis that we designate “history”:

Who has not seen the door in the wall? It is the invalid child’s consolation, the prisoner’s last hope. It is the easy exit for the dying man, who perishes not in the death-grip of a rattling gasp, but passes on a sigh, like a falling feather. It is a special door that obeys no laws that govern wood or iron. No locksmith can defeat it, no bailiff kick it in; patrolling policemen pass it, because it is visible only to the eye of faith. Once through it, you return as angels and air, as sparks and flame. That the assassin was a flicker in its frame, you know. (239)

The door offers matter the chance to become spirit, to ‘return as angels and air, as sparks and flame’: to evade the forces of law ‘locksmith’, ‘bailiff’, or ‘policemen’. The door is the threshold of spirit and matter, the place of possibility, of opportunity, ‘the invalid child’s consolation, the prisoner’s last hope.’ As Christopher Prendergast suggests, ‘Derrida’s re-reading of Marx rests, fundamentally, on a critique of entrenched versions of Marxism that locate Justice historically in some material embodiment or other’ (Prendergast 46). The assassin, then, is a ghost who functions as spectral justice, being neither bound by flesh, or spirit, but combining an element of both. When Mantel writes about how, as ‘flicker in its frame’, the assassin is able to escape, our view of ‘what really happened’ can continue unsullied: you’ve never seen anything about an assassin on the news, Thatcher carried on living until she actually died. Real events can be restored to their rightful place, as authorities on life, on living. ‘That the assassin was a flicker in its frame, you know’(AMT 240): the multiple meanings of the word frame here, pile upon each other. The door frame, the threshold which if you pass through it you return, as ‘angels and air, sparks and flame’ as the ontological certainty of being anchored into a particular place, time in a

particular story. But being in the frame means being accused of something; being in the frame means having an image made of oneself; and finally, the narrative frame which the assassin breaks free from, because he's there, but not there, all at the same time. The spectral 'flicker' in the frame undercuts its solidity. A frame has borders, a clear outline, it knows where it begins, where it ends. Unlike the spectral flicker, which has no clearly defined outline, no ontological certainty about where it belongs, what it even *is*. The social and material basis of the story, its anchor in the urgency of the class struggle for the 'dirty scouser', emblematic for so much of the North at this time, suggests another prism through which to read the 'flicker in the frame': as a 'dialectical image' or Benjaminian battle cry. Benjamin conceived of the dialectical image as a flash, a fleeting image of potential historical upheaval which heralds the coming of justice for the masses. One must always heed the lessons of history: in Mantel's alternate universe the worst excesses of Thatcherism are curbed, and social justice rather than monetarism takes precedence. But yet: the suburban petty obsessions with car parking, driveways, and sweeping up leaves from the gardens betray the ending. Thatcher never was assassinated, and middle England goes on as before.

We can read the assassin, as ghostly justice, again invoking Benjamin's 'Theses on the Philosophy of History'. The eighteenth thesis provides the basis for reading Mantel's short story as a Messianic call to arms. The Irish assassin is a saviour for the working class, a hero who rids the world of the Thatcherite menace. Mantel's writing of time echoes Benjamin's insistence that, 'for every second of time was the strait gate through which the messiah might enter' (Benjamin 255). But even as the messiah is preparing to deliver his people, pull the trigger, Mantel knows that justice won't be served, that another will spring up in her place who 'lives on the

fumes of whisky and the iron in the blood of her prey' (AMT 232). The final page of the story, 'Now that we are here at last, there is all the time in the world', and the invocation of the deed in 'one easy wink of the world's blind eye' (242), however, suggest a somewhat different resonance with Benjamin, that of the 'dialectical image'. Again in this moment, as in the moment of apprehending the spectre in *Giving up the Ghost*, the air is still, yet the movement here is a movement of the 'eye', of the world's eye which is history itself: everything that has ever happened and can ever be retold. For Benjamin, 'the true picture of the past flits by' and 'the past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognised and is never seen again' (Benjamin 247). The 'seizing' of the past is momentary, fleeting; like the seconds long flicker in the air, it is there to be apprehended briefly, or not at all. When Mantel writes, 'history can always be otherwise' the phrase echoes with the fleeting, winking power of the dialectical image. The brief point at which the story can change: other voices and ways of seeing can 'flash up'. 'But,' she continues;

...note the door: note the wall: note the power of the door in the wall that you never saw was there. And note the cold wind that blows through it, when you open it a crack. History could always have been otherwise. For there is the time, the place, the black opportunity: the day, the hour, the slant of the light, the ice-cream van chiming from a distant road near the bypass. (239-40)

This is provisionality: the *possibility* of a door opening out onto another world, the possibility of stepping through the mirror. The provisional space is imaginative; the place where fiction dwells, where truth is stranger than fiction and life imitates art. Provisionality is the place where the English suburban, middle class bourgeois woman can make common cause with the Irish working class Provo man, while also being aware that the common cause exists via the threat of death. It's not simply a case of things being 'true' in the imagination, or that one can make dreams come true.

Provisionality is about the recognition of 'reality', 'imagination', 'truth' as to some extents being fictional in themselves.

Mantel is laying all these things out in front of us, making the connections. On the one hand it doesn't matter at all if these details are 'true', but on the other it's the only thing anchoring the reader, shielding them from the irresistible step through the door. The door is the metaphor of provisionality here in this story. It's not about uncertainty, it's about the decision. The moment which provides the wink of the world's eye, the flash of an image. The strength of feeling in the story is the 'dagger' which cuts time; the 'door' that ruptures history, allows us to step out of it.

Provisionality does not mean ontological and epistemological uncertainty.

Provisionality is a special virtuality, the prerequisite for living life open to all paths, all eventualities: that takes heed of the cold wind that blows through the 'door', and knows 'history could always be otherwise' (240).

Chapter Two

Movements of reading: Dis-Manteling Realism

Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, the spectrality of Mantel's fiction precludes reductive attempts at categorisation. This chapter will investigate how Mantel's work questions the possibilities and limitations of realist fiction. By realist I mean, broadly, the suggestion that writing has a relationship to 'reality' and can tell us something about that reality.⁴⁸ Using Mantel's novels *Fludd* (1994) and *Wolf Hall* (2009), this chapter will suggest what that relationship could be. How realist ingredients such as character and omniscient narration, are subjected to a 'dis-Manteling'.⁴⁹ Surrounded and shaped by the play of language, which is the play of *différance*, the internal logic of the text is also subject to *différance*. Any attempt to codify form or style is always subject to a logic that undermines it; in a similar way, Mantel insinuates her texts into realism's internal logic, turning it inside out. The importance of Derrida's *différance* lies with its notions of the trace and spacing, which suggest a spatiality and a movement. The novel is 'in time'⁵⁰ but it also exists in space as a physical object and as networks of meaning. These movements in reading and webs of meaning suggest a dynamism that is present in Mantel's work, as this chapter will show through an exploration of texture, character, and narration. First, though, I will identify some of

⁴⁸ Belsey's classic *Critical Practice* is useful on assumptions of realism, 'naturalism as a commonsense approach to reading' (4) as she calls it. See *Critical Practice 2nd ed.* London and New York: Routledge, 2002.

⁴⁹ A conscious echo of the title of Peter Ivor Kaufman's "Dis-Manteling More". *Moreana*. Vol. 47. (179-80). 1-2, 2010: 165-93. <http://www.euppublishing.com/toc/more/47%28Number+179-180%29/1-2>

⁵⁰ See for example Paul Ricoeur's discussion of the novel's 'uncriticized temporal framework' (170) in "Narrative Time." *Critical Inquiry*. Vol 7 no.1 (Autumn 1980) 169-190 and Mark Currie's idea of the novel as a 'moving now' "The Novel and the Moving Now." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*. Vol 42, no.2 (Summer 2009): 318-325.

the elements in Mantel's fiction that make her hard to categorise, showing also how the label of Gothic is inadequate.

Gothic, super-realism, uncanniness: the spectre complicates realism

In a recent review, Timothy Morton suggests: 'We have trouble with art, because we have trouble with being spooked, and because being spooked might be *how things work*' (Morton 139). Things and people are subject to this spookiness in Mantel; movements are subject to unknown whims and malignities. The spookiness of Mantel's work leads to issues of categorisation: she causes genre trouble. Critics who attempt to fit her work into one generic mode fail. Or critics will write on one or two novels such as *Every Day is Mother's Day* or *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*, suggesting that these novels put her into the Gothic category.⁵¹ As Sara L. Knox writes: 'the Gothic seems too small a handle for Mantel's work. It might better be defined as super-realist — as fantastically real' (Knox 313). Knox rejects the idea of a magical realist categorisation, using Mantel's own words as evidence: 'Mantel registers her dislike for the "clumsy borrowing of fantastic technique"' (313), and goes on to say: 'she is no writer of the Gothic. By writing a world that includes the dead, Mantel is simply (though I use that word advisedly) deepening her themes of belonging, exclusion and exile' (314). Mantel uses fairy tale, occult or otherwise obscure tropes in her work. The theme of the changeling in *Every Day is Mother's Day*; the explicit reading of Cinderella's slipper in *Giving up the Ghost*; alchemy in *Fludd*; the tarot in *Beyond Black*.

⁵¹ There have been recent attempts to place Mantel into new sub-genres of Gothic, such as Catherine Spooner's comprehensive essay on *Beyond Black* and the M25 in *London Gothic*. See also Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik "'Releasing Spirit from Matter": Comic Alchemy in Spark's *The Ballad of Peckham Rye*, Updike's *The Witches of Eastwick* and Mantel's *Fludd*. *Gothic Studies* 2, 1 (2000): 136-47.

In *The Fantastic*, Tzvetan Todorov argues that, ‘the fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event.’ (Todorov 25) This definition of course allows for ‘supernatural’ events to be portrayed in literature, but therein lies the point; the supernatural is refracted through a traditionally ‘realist’ prism. Todorov’s strict criteria do not allow for reading in a ‘poetic’ or ‘allegorical’ way (33). Following on from Todorov, Knox posits the idea of a ‘super-realist’ (313) mode of telling that gives the ghost its due; exposing the spectral goings-on beneath the surface of the ostensibly unexciting suburban world, but at the same time including those features which one would expect to see in a realist novel. Knox’s suggestion has the advantage of giving the reader more tools to explore the spookiness of Mantel than the Gothic, the fantastic or the horror genre. The Gothic is not the only mode in which a spooky story can be told.

Although Knox recognises that Mantel ‘is no writer of the Gothic’, the idea of the ‘super-real’ is not fleshed out, and the moments she analyses in Mantel’s texts point back towards either Gothic, or realism. For example, by casting a definitive causal chain of events in *Every Day is Mother’s Day*, Knox has to omit the uncanniness of the novel’s temporal structure. This temporal structure and the effects of the strange shifts in time and relationships on the reader go beyond Gothic. Mantel’s texts expose spectral goings on, but use them in order to shape, interrogate, and transform realism into a mode that can accommodate this ‘other world’ without domestication.⁵² For Mantel, the ghost *is* real, and as such deserves its own genre.

Provisional reading practice, to re-invoke Derrida’s *Spectres of Marx*, needs to learn to speak with the ghosts of Mantel’s work, not try to tame them. Her

⁵² To borrow Julian Wolfreys’ term from chapter one.

work resists definition as a particular mode of telling, or another; it is, like the spectre itself, a hybrid. Freud's 1919 text "The Uncanny" (*Das Unheimlich*), in which what is familiar (*heimlich*, homely) becomes unfamiliar, will assist in providing a reading of Mantel's texts that resists definitive closure to meaning. As Nicholas Royle writes in his meditation on Freud's text:

[F]reud's essay teaches us that the uncanny is 'something one does not know one's way about in' and that this is where thinking must begin. It is not a question of giving oneself up to a sense of mere aimlessness or alienation, but rather of trying to follow a path as carefully and critically — in a certain sense as rationally — as possible, uncertain nevertheless, of where it began or appears to end. (Royle *Uncanny* 8)

Royle presents a necessarily incomplete guide to the reading experience. The (un)certain sense of rationality that Royle here describes is precisely the *feeling* of the reader who must find their way, not knowing where to go or what will happen. This sense of having no certain way to go resonates throughout Mantel's works. The uncanny inhabits her texts; the rationally defined and clearly delineated plot point is undermined by her work's strangeness. At the same time, she is concerned with the possibility of representing this uncanniness. Mantel's readers must also grapple with the (im)possibilities of Mantel's work: the crossings over that occur between spirit and matter in *Fludd* and *Beyond Black*, for example. Take the single grey sock that appears in Colette's washing machine in *Beyond Black*, after she moves back in with her ex-husband, Gavin: '[a] woolly sock, the kind you darn; the heel had gone into holes' (*BB* 438). This ordinary object is so nondescript, and yet at the same time terrifyingly specific. It doesn't belong to Gavin, but to Morris, Alison's spiteful ex-spirit guide. Through an everyday object, Mantel weaves a whole world of terrifying possibilities: playing with the 'real' in multiple ways allows her to keep the

‘otherness’ of writing to the fore. The next section will explore the idea of realism and its relationship to reality.⁵³

Realism

This section will investigate attempts to define realism; and how those attempts provide unsatisfactory accounts of the relationship of realism to the real. The ‘classical’ accounts of realism have a lot to say about ‘what’ is being represented, but tend to come unstuck when describing ‘how’ it is done. *Chambers* dictionary describes realism as ‘[a] style in literature, art that seeks to present an unglamorized and unromanticized view of the world’. For this dictionary at least, the world as-it-is is the object of the realist portrayal. The definition goes on: ‘literalness and precision of detail, with the effect of reality’. So far, so unilluminating, and the *Oxford English Dictionary* does not fare much better. It records that the first known use of the word realism was in 1797, going on to state:⁵⁴

[with] reference to art, film, and literature: close resemblance to what is real; fidelity of representation, rendering the precise details of the real thing or scene...it also suggests a deliberate rejection of conventionally attractive or appropriate subjects in favour of sincerity and a focus on the unidealised treatment of contemporary life. (*OED*)

What does realism mean? ‘Close resemblance to what is real’; ‘sincerity’; ‘unidealised treatment of contemporary life’. A realistic ‘rendering’ to show the world as it really is, not as it should be, or one would want it to be. How does this ‘rendering’ take place? Implicit in the *OED*’s definition is the idea of writerly choice: who decides what is appropriate, or sincere? How is its fidelity judged? How is it

⁵³ As Leigh Wilson suggests in “Historical Representations, Reality Effects: The historical novel and the crisis of fictionality in the first decade of the twenty first century” contemporary writers are ‘riven with anxiety about the use of realism’ (148). I would add Mantel’s interrogation of realism here. in Nick Bentley ed. *The 2000s: A Decade of Contemporary British Fiction*. London: Bloomsbury, 2015.

⁵⁴ Ian Watt’s *Rise of the Novel*, for example, suggests that realism and the novel are linked inextricably; dating the novel proper to the eighteenth century, the matching of dates is not a coincidence (10-11).

even possible to measure the ‘rendering’ against its reality, in order to judge its effect?⁵⁵ Most fundamentally, both of these definitions make assumptions about the status of the ‘text’ and the ‘real’. Unsatisfactory as these admittedly general definitions are, they expose some of the aspects to be explored.

Aristotle’s argument in the *Poetics* can assist here. The implication of both previously discussed dictionary definitions is that realism is the imitation of ‘real’ life. Aristotle’s work investigates the connection between poetry and imitation. For him, the purpose of poetry is imitative, and therefore natural because it is instinctive: ‘[i]mitation comes naturally to human beings from childhood...so does the universal pleasure in imitations’ (Heath ed. 6, 3.1). Malcolm Heath’s introduction explores how, for Aristotle: ‘[p]oetry and painting are rooted in basic instincts shared by even the least intellectually sophisticated people’ (Heath xiv). Heath’s note on the translation of *mimesis* (*Chambers*: imitation or representation in art) helps to identify possible routes to clarification. Heath uses imitation because he argues that representation is ‘unhelpful’ for two reasons:

[R]epresentation fails to capture the full range of Aristotle’s concept. The use of a quasi-technical term of modern aesthetics may tend to obscure the continuity which Aristotle perceives between *mimesis* in painting, poetry and music and in other, non-artistic forms of activity such as the mimicry of animal noises and other sounds and children’s play acting (xiii).

For Aristotle, *mimesis* is an instinct, and thus goes far further than a reflection of reality. For example, Heath says: ‘[representation] fails to capture an essential element...a similarity which does not rest wholly on convention’. (xiii) The idea of a likeness of something you can’t see, of an amorphous idea, seems to be at odds with a more materialist understanding of the idea of realism which somehow imitates the grittiness of everyday existence.

⁵⁵ Questions also posed by Pam Morris in *Realism*. London and New York: Routledge, 2003, 5-6.

Take Ian Watt's groundbreaking *Rise of the Novel* (1957) for instance; by bringing together the formation of the novel and the rise of empiricism, Watt has influenced generations of scholars' thinking about the naturalistic novel.⁵⁶ But his emphasis on empirical reality also suggests the positioning of artist as mediator. The artist — going back to Aristotle, who includes painting, poetry and music — shapes the 'stuff' of life that perceived directly might horrify or disturb. There is a representational 'layer' that does not exist independently of art or of the artist. This is what leads to the confusion engendered by the terminology of representation, imitation, mimesis and so on. Mimesis describes how we represent the world to ourselves, the artist as a mediator of experience. As Pam Morris states: 'the term realism almost always involves both claims about the nature of reality and an evaluative attitude towards it' (Morris 2). There is no 'true' reality that can be verified objectively, only an approximately shared experience: there is no such thing as realism which can represent reality without shaping it. A realistic text suggests a presupposed relationship to reality, as Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle argue in their *Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* (3rd ed. 2004):

This distinction [between the text and the world]...is implicit in a certain understanding of mimesis or imitation, and in notions of realism and naturalism, and of representation, as well as in metaphors which figure literary texts as offering a window on to the world or (in Hamlet's words) as holding a mirror up to nature. (Bennett and Royle 27)

I suggest that this shaping explodes the strict binaries upon which realism is based, but so often, these binaries are exploded from within those very texts that would be defined as 'realist'. This quote demonstrates two related ways of thinking about a text's relationship to the 'real'. Both rely on visual elements which efface themselves,

⁵⁶ In a similar move, Pam Morris links Victorian realism in particular with a 'burgeoning modern secular materialist understanding of reality.' (3) Catherine Belsey's seminal *Critical Practice* also teaches us that ideological investments of who is speaking in narrative are contested and shaped, through her use of Althusser's term interpellation. See also Michael McKeon's excellent *Origins of the English Novel 1600-1740*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1987, in which he updates Watt's thesis (80-87).

on showing rather than telling. This attention to the visual hides the moves that the writer has to make in order to present their version of the world. When M. H. Abrams, for example, describes the Socratic idea of making art in *The Mirror and the Lamp*, he suggests that the poet makes art by ‘holding up a mirror and turning it’ (Abrams 30). If the mirror is turned away from himself, what happens to the artist? If the mirror takes in the reflection of the artist with world as background, what happens to the world? The turning of the figurative mirror in either direction demonstrates the choices made by the artist: the mirror acts as a line between artist and world, reinforcing the logic of binaries.

The turning of the mirror also demonstrates that realism’s apparent attempts to fix meaning, or to enable a frozen or suspended language, actually conceal a movement. Turning to Fredric Jameson’s exposition of realism, it is possible to capture another sense of realism’s movements that are not immediately apparent. In *The Antinomies of Realism*, Jameson describes what happens when attempts at definition are made:

It is as though the object of our meditation began to wobble, and the attention to it to slip insensibly away from it in two opposite directions, so that at length we find we are thinking, not about realism, but about its emergence; not about the thing itself, but about its dissolution (Jameson 1).

Difficulties of definition lead Jameson to resolve this ‘aporia’ (Jameson *The Antinomies of Realism* 6). He posits a dialectical understanding of the ‘hybrid concept’ of realism (5); a cycle incorporating the ‘narrative impulse’⁵⁷ in conjunction with the ekphrastic, descriptive moment of the suspension of the temporality of the plot (8). For Jameson moreover, both of these moments are temporal: the telling of the tale of events already finished (*récit*), and the ‘affective investment’ in the ‘scenic present’ of the literary text, ‘that secretly abhors the other temporalities which

⁵⁷ Cf Peter Brooks’ *Reading for the Plot* 1984

constitute the force of the tale or the *récit* in the first place' (11). This is a temporal dialectic of realism, and a dialectic of mortality and eternity: the insertion of the mortal human subject into the eternal moment of the novelistic descriptive image.

Jameson calls this 'destiny versus the eternal present' (26), continuing:

What is crucial is not to load one of these dies and take sides for the one or the other as all our theorists seem to do, but rather to grasp the proposition that realism lies at their intersection. Realism is a consequence of the tension between these two terms; to resolve the opposition either way would destroy it... (26)

Jameson's dialectical resolution is interesting for thinking through Mantel in two ways. Firstly, it echoes the tension that is worked through and played with in her novels between the energies of experience and their expression in writing. More importantly, however, Jameson's 'wobbles' and 'slips' demonstrate the movements of reading that efface themselves in the making of the text. Like the turning of the mirror, these movements are part of Mantel calls 'texture'. The next section will consider Barthes' reality effect and how it relates to textu(r)al movements in Mantel's work.

The Reality Effect

The attention to detail in order to ‘give the effect of reality’ (*Chambers*) is not and never can be neutral.⁵⁸ In his famous essay, “The Reality Effect”, Barthes homes in on what he calls the ‘useless detail’ (Barthes *Rustle* 143), in this case a barometer that appears in Flaubert’s short story ‘A Simple Heart’. For Barthes, the barometer has no function; it does not ‘constitute some index of character or atmosphere’ and is thus “superfluous” (141). In the quest to ‘account for the totality of the narrative fabric’ this detail is ‘scandalous’ according to Barthes: figured variously as ‘luxury’ (141, emphasis in original), ‘insignificant detail’ (142) and more than once referred to as useless (141-3).

Within a system that must account for structure, the excess mark of detail constitutes a troubling of structure’s validity. Barthes’ solution to this problem is to switch this detail, that apparently serves no function, from the side of denotation to connotation; a linguistic sleight of hand that serves only to move the problem from one place to the other. Thus:

[t]he very absence of the signified, to the advantage of the referent alone, becomes the very signifier of realism: the reality effect is produced, the basis of that unavowed verisimilitude which forms the aesthetic of all the standard works of modernity (148).

The superfluity of the ‘useless detail’ thus produces the ‘reality effect’, precisely because it is stripped of meaning as it moves from connotation to denotation; it has no meaning, according to Barthes, within the textual fabric and so *must* connote reality. Barthes can only settle the argument by forcing the detail out of structure completely, into the sign ‘history’, or to paraphrase, the singularity of ‘*having-been-there*’ (147). Moreover, the spectre of the scandalous narrative luxury of the

⁵⁸ As Audrey Jaffe states in *The Victorian Novel Dreams of the Real: Conventions and Ideology* New York: Oxford UP (2016), ‘realist effects, as Roland Barthes calls them, are the result of conventions... such structures carry with them a host of ideological imperatives’ (2).

barometer presides over the undoing of Barthes' system: the *having-been-there* providing illegitimate extra-structural support for this apparently useless detail.

I slow over Barthes, not only because his references to textual 'fabric' suggest connections with Mantel's preoccupation with texture. Jacques Rancière's rejoinder to the reality effect, 'Madame Aubain's barometer' (in *The Lost Thread: The Democracy of Modern Fiction*), suggests another reading move that could be employed. Whereas the useless detail in Flaubert's *A Simple Heart* represents a scandal of representation for Barthes, which pits the action of narrative against the facts of 'bare life', for Jacques Rancière the barometer signifies 'the texture of this real, that is to say, the type of life that the characters live' (Rancière 12). For Rancière, the barometer is not there to 'attest that the real really is real' (12) but 'encapsulates an entire sensible world' (13). For Rancière, Barthes' tautological way of looking at texts doesn't work; it denies the democratic power of the literary. How can we read such details in Mantel? In some respects, the 'useless detail' in Mantel's *Wolf Hall* signifies the 'having been there' of historical fact, as Barthes suggests. Mantel's inclusion of objects, for example the family prayer book, lends weight to the account she gives of Cromwell. There is a strange reverse parallel in the ways that Mantel has been treated by history scholars to the way Barthes characterises Flaubert in his essay. Historians see luxury and scandal in Mantel's Tudor novels; she has been charged with not being historical enough, or misunderstanding history. Of course, this is about convention. The conventions of the historical novel differ from the academic historical textbook: but at the same time there is a paradoxical quality in the reading of detail in the Tudor novels that puts historical reconstruction and reimagining into question.

Reading Mantel against and alongside Barthes and Rancière, the ‘useless detail’ serves no excess or luxury; it is not ‘scandalous’. Take the death of the Cardinal Wolsey in *Wolf Hall*, for instance: Cromwell hears of it second-hand from George Cavendish, one of Wolsey’s servants, who recounts in great detail all the events leading up to the Cardinal’s demise:

It was eight the next morning when he drew his last breath. Around his bed, the click of rosary beads; outside the restive stamp of horses in their stalls, the thin winter moon shining down on the London road (*WH* 263).

The sound of ‘rosary beads’ suggests a luxurious detail that serves little purpose; why would we need to know that people are praying over a Cardinal’s bedside? Mantel uses sound here to link the inner world of the death bed with the outer world of Cromwell’s journey to reach that death bed. The ‘click’ of the beads converges with the concurrent ‘stamp’ of the horse’s feet that Cromwell would be hearing as he saddled his horse to reach the Cardinal. Everything in the ‘world’ of this novel is refracted through Mantel’s re-imagining of Cromwell’s perceptions. But she also writes into this re-imagining a simultaneity, which suggests what Rancière calls the ‘distribution of the sensible’. When Cromwell is thinking about the Cardinal’s death and what will happen to his clothes, the narrator says: ‘Another man would have trouble imagining it, but he has no trouble’ (*WH* 266). This short sentence contains the clue to reading the exorbitant detail: Mantel is sharing with us her imagining of Cromwell’s imagining. This sharing is utterly bound up with the democratisation of literature.

To recap, Jacques Rancière assesses Barthes’ argument in “The Reality Effect” as tautological: ‘[s]tructural analysis has to account “for the entire surface of the narrative fabric”’. So it has to account for superfluous details, which amounts to showing that they are not superfluous’ (Rancière *Lost* 4-5). Barthes sequesters ‘the

real' off outside the text, where it continues its troublemaking. Although he does not use the word 'trouble', this is what Rancière would call the democratic potentiality of literature: as he says, 'there is no "reality effect" that stands in as a substitute for old verisimilitude' (16). The old representational order which only admits certain types of people into their hallowed portals has to make way for 'a new texture of the real produced by the transgression of boundaries between forms of life' (16). Rancière's problem with Barthes' dismissal of the 'insignificant detail' rests on the commitment to structure which is 'dependent on the organic model that governed the representational order' (17). It is this dependence on a natural totality, the 'subordinating [of] the parts to the whole' (17), which excludes a good proportion of the population from taking part in the sensible order, of which literature is a part. As he says: 'the chain of perceptions and affects that weaves these thoughts themselves. This weaving is what defines the new textures of novelistic episodes' (16). I want to shift gears slightly here, and think more about this totality, so-called, before I move onto the connection between Mantel and these 'new textures'.

Rita Felski's *The Limits of Critique* (2015) proposes a new type of reading, and in so doing also suggests connections with Rancière's critique of realism as verisimilitude:

A text is deciphered as a symptom, mirror, index, or antithesis of some larger social structure — as if there were an essential system of correspondences knotting a text into an overarching canopy of domination, akin to those medieval cosmologies in which everything is connected to everything else. (Felski 11)

What Felski calls the 'larger social structure' is akin to Rancière's critique of Barthes, which 'contrasts descriptive excess to an idea of structure as the functional arrangement of causes and effects subordinating the parts to the whole' (Rancière *Lost* 17). What is figured as useless detail, even exorbitance, is thus part of realism's and verisimilitude's undoing. The luxury of the superfluous detail provides leverage

to undermine the structure by exposing its weaknesses and unacknowledged assumptions. The barometer and the click of the rosary beads are not there to signal whether the 'real is really real'. They are there to sound a death knell for the realist system of subordination of parts to the whole. This is also the subordination of the 'subalternate', those with 'souls of iron' in Rancière's words: the poor. The excesses of detail undercut any notion of life, the world, and the text as parts of a systemic whole, and at the same time disrupt the logic of metonymy. The part can no longer be made to stand for the whole; the part undermines the whole by its very existence. Rancière calls this democracy in literature (which isn't the same as social democracy): a new distribution of the sensible which demonstrates the previously ordered and tidy world as chaos, movement, dynamism. This exists in movements of reading, as Felski suggests. For Rancière, writing this new 'regime of the sensible' is movement; the appropriation of the impersonal writing through what he calls 'decomposition' and 'respiration' (Rancière *Lost* 21). These 'impersonal' movements of writing fragment into millions of tiny pieces, 'the dust of impersonal micro events'. At the same time, what Rancière calls the 'respiration of the sensible fabric' (21), later calls the 'common breath' (23) and 'the egalitarian power of the common respiration animating the multitude of sensible events.' (23) Literature takes part in the 'distribution of the sensible'; who, what, and how things, objects and people are brought about to be seen and heard. Cromwell (and Wolsey) are models of this democratisation in *Wolf Hall*, and Mantel's imagining of Cromwell's imagining takes part in what we have already called 'sharing'. I will continue the consideration of how Mantel's writing partakes in this distribution of the sensible, by reference to texture in the next section.

Texture in *Fludd*

This section thinks about how Mantel's reference to texture proposes a unique way of seeing the world, and how she engages in the 'shaping' of the world. How can we read the diffusion of the sensible fabric with and through Mantel? I will consider how her writing engages with the idea of texture, with reference to *Fludd* (1989). Based loosely on a historical figure associated with alchemy, the character of Fludd comes to transform the village of Fetherhoughton, in the guise of a curate. As the narrative unfolds, Fludd is revealed to be someone altogether unworldly, no curate at all, and possibly not even human. Mantel's inscription of the alchemical, as a metaphor for thinking about matter, is closely related to the idea of texture: what Rancière, via Barthes, calls the weave of the narrative fabric.

Mantel's take on texture, in her lecture 'Can these bones live?' from the 2017 BBC Reith Lectures, is woven into the idea of lived experience and the writer's recreation of that experience. She speaks of the role of the novelist as opposed to the historian:

But your real job as a novelist, is not to be an inferior sort of historian, but to *recreate the texture of lived experience*: to activate the senses, and to deepen the reader's engagement through feeling (Reith Lectures, emphasis added 3).

'To recreate the texture of lived experience' suggests an approach to writing that is tethered firmly in realist notions of the story as a faithful reflection of experiences. But her attention to 'the senses' and 'feeling' demonstrates that the story is not only about 'what happened', in what order, or to whom, but the sensual and emotional investments that the reader brings to the story. The etymological movements of

‘texture’ and ‘text’ can also propose interesting ways of thinking about what Mantel refers to as ‘lived experience’.⁵⁹

Chambers defines ‘texture’ as: the general quality of a material to the touch; the structure, appearance and feel; general ‘quality, character or tenor’ of something. ‘Texture’ and ‘text’ are related etymologically, with a common root in *texere*, to weave, from which we get ‘texture’, via Latin *textura*, or ‘web’, and ‘text’ from the Latin *textus*. Texture as the perception of an object’s quality evokes the sensation of how things ‘really are’. To perceive things as they really are is not only a possibility, then, but that perception, feeling, sensation is woven into objects themselves. The weave of matter occurs in Mantel’s writing as texture, an attention to the web and weave of objects and people, of lives. In *Fludd*, the eponymous curate arrives suddenly in Fetherhoughton to stay with the current vicar, Father Angwin, whose housekeeper is a woman named Miss Dempsey. Mantel’s description of Miss Dempsey evokes this sense of texture as weave, of objects and lives co-mingling. She begins with an instruction to the reader, and continues by exploring Miss Dempsey’s actions and appearance:

Consider Agnes Dempsey: duster in hand, whisking it over the dustless bureau. In recent years her face had fallen softly, like a piece of cotton folding into a box. Her neck too fell in floury, scalloped folds, to where her clothing cut off the view. Her eyes were round, child-like, bright blue, their air of surprise compounded by her invisible eyebrows and her hair, a faded gold streaked with grey, which sprang up from her hairline as if crackling with static. She had pleated skirts, and short bottle-shaped legs, and pastel twin-sets to cover the gentle twin hummocks of her bosom. (*Fludd* 7)

Miss Dempsey’s ageing is evoked by falling, folding, and finally, the box which suggests her coffin. She not only ‘holds’ a duster, ‘whisking’ it, but she is in some way part of the dust: being mortal, she ‘felt her mortality’, as Mantel tells us on page 43. The ‘floury folds’ of Miss Dempsey’s neck take part in her general dustiness: the

⁵⁹ Compare E.M. Forster here, ‘The artist aims at truth and succeeds if he raises the emotions.’ *Aspects of the Novel*. (London: Penguin, 2005) (174).

powderiness of pastry being rolled, the dough. Miss Dempsey's 'twin hummocks of bosom' and her face 'like cotton folding into a box' tie her incontrovertibly to the landscape: cotton is Fetherhoughton's industry, Mantel describing the 'folds of the hills' and the 'hummocks' on the same page (*Fludd* 11). Miss Dempsey is matter, dust, emblematic of mortality and decay. The movement in the passage indicates the mortal falling down into old age, while the childlike aspects of her demeanour, eyes, hair, are moving upwards, her hair 'sprang up from her hairline' (7). The 'folding' foreshadows Miss Dempsey's reaction to Fludd's arrival, which 'In later years, when she talked about it she would always say, *Did you ever see a pile of pennies pushed over? Did you ever see a house of cards fall down?*' (43, emphasis in original). One of the many meanings of 'fold' is to place cards face down, in order to withdraw from play in a card game.

Things and people are folded throughout this novel, in all senses. Miss Dempsey's creased face and the folds of the hills, as we have already seen; paper, handkerchiefs, nuns' habits. People are folded up, parts are laid over on another, Mother Perpetua and Philomena, Fludd and Philomena's relationship as she 'yields' to him, also an obsolete meaning of 'fold'. The figurative meaning of 'fold' as 'church or congregation' weaves a further strand into the textu(r)al fabric, a nod to the religious notation of the novel. The movement of folding⁶⁰ in *Fludd* that weaves the narrative fabric connects Miss Dempsey's understanding of mortality with the organic matter of her body and the landscape. Not only this: Fludd's presence and his stated aim of 'releasing spirit from matter' (106) show that the use of folding relates

⁶⁰ See also Gilles Deleuze's employment of folds and folding, in his volume *Foucault*, chapter 'Foldings, or the Inside of Thought (Subjectivation)'. University of Minnesota Press, 1998. Ebook. Accessed 14th October 2017. The 'continuous process of folding', (198) in Simon Conley's words, is what constitutes the subject. In Charles J Stivale ed. *Gilles Deleuze: Key Concepts*. Cambridge UP online, 2011. <https://www.cambridge.org>.

to the relationship between spirit and matter, body and soul. This is also shown by Miss Dempsey's enactment of a mini 'alchemical wedding'⁶¹ in which she eats a chocolate and twists the wrapper into a ring which she places on her wedding finger (*Fludd* 8). The ceremony concludes with her throwing the foil onto the fire, a clear foreshadowing of Fludd's aim.

Mantel's weaving of the textu(r)al fabric encompasses both a sensuous understanding of the quality of matter and how movements of writing are shot through with this material of life. What Rancière insists is a compromise in *The Lost Thread*, between 'narrative logic' and 'the power of his [Flaubert's] sentences', starts to be broken down in Mantel, as she employs figures such as the fold to erode such distinctions. He writes, with reference to Flaubert:

But the operation that abandons the character of new fiction to the old representative logic also turns this fiction into a compromise. Flaubert was the first to raise the problem of modern fiction: what system of relations between characters and situations can constitute the fictional work when the hierarchy of forms of life that defined the space of fiction and commanded its unity is ruined? How are we to reconcile the new world of perceptions and sensations that this ruin liberates with the necessity to construct a whole comprising a beginning, a middle and an end, that is to say also a history of wills and actions leading to successes or else to failures? (24)

The movements of matter in Mantel's writing break down the classic mimetic distinction between action (as the narrative force of the story) and description (there to provide 'useless' background information). For example, in Mantel's use of verbs: she creates a dynamic sense of identity for her characters, while also perceiving the tension between movement and stasis, portrayal as fixity. Mantel homes in on the bishop after he delivers his injunction to Father Angwin to modernise his parish (and Miss Dempsey is listening at the keyhole). 'Two strides carried the bishop through the hall, a thrust of his arms carried him into his cape, and he threw open the front

⁶¹ The idea of alchemy can also be linked to Jungian ideas of individuation in Fludd, the pretend curate acting as the agent allowing the human material to change and grow. See for example Susan Rowland's *C.G. Jung and Literary Theory: The Challenge from Fiction*, 1999 and *Jung: A Feminist Revision*, 2002.

door, tussling on the path with the damp, windy day' (*Fludd* 25). Of course, this description of the bishop's movements — leaving the room, putting on his cape, opening up the front door — is meant to remind the reader of his modernity, his briskness, his love for driving around the diocese in his fast car. But what Mantel's writing also does is to create a sense of the dynamic, a movement of the writing that thrusts itself onwards into the future like the bishop putting on his cape.

However, the force to compel the narrative on through beginning, middle and end, to obey a realist imperative, somehow comes to a standstill in the figure of the mysterious Fludd. Father Angwin, who senses modernity in the bishop and resists it as hard as he can, welcomes the 'curate' into his home, where they have a conversation about how the Father Angwin has lost his faith. Fludd says:

But faith, Father Angwin, is like a wall, a big, blank, brick wall. One day some fool comes along with a hairpin, and chooses some inch of it, and begins to scrape away at the mortar. When the first dust flies up, the wall falls down (52).

Fludd is referring not only to faith, but to the disintegration of physical material in the alchemical process of 'releasing spirit from matter.' The collapse in Fludd is an example of one of the moments that Mantel discusses, 'where the texture of normal life is faithfully described — then something slips, minutely but consequentially'. The consequences in Mantel's fiction of these minute 'slips' is that nothing is ever the same; 'after which life can no longer be lived on the old terms' (Message to the author, Appendix i). It is not only life that is subject to these slips, but fiction as well: the hairpin scraping away at the wall suggests Barthes' excess of exorbitant detail taking down the edifice of the structurally 'real'. Modern fiction's faith in the real is undone by the hairpin of insignificant detail.

Considering the real's shaky foundations, it is no coincidence that both Mantel and Rancière refer to dust as the micro-matter of life, its residue. Both

conjure the image of millions of particles circulating, seemingly at random, in order to evoke the chaos of 'life': while at the same time maintaining narrative order. This ordered randomness is also a concern of Henry James. Consider his reference to experience in "The Art of Fiction" (1884): a 'kind of huge spider-web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, and catching every airborne particle in its tissue' (James 388). Experience consists of this 'tissue' as James calls it; the fiction writer's job is to capture in words the movements of this tissue as it seizes and envelopes the micro-particles of life that surround it. This capture in the web of experience is a function of realism, in its attempts to 'represent' life in art; what Mantel calls texture also does this job, and in so doing enacts what Rancière calls a compromise. As he suggests in relation to Virginia Woolf, this compromise between narrative succession and the diffuse texture of the narrative fabric has to be negotiated for intelligible realism. Although this is not new to Mantel, what she does is to bring these issues a fresh slant, a look otherwise, in order to renew narrative's potential.

Painting consciousness: free indirect discourse

Mantel draws on the traditions of Woolf and James with their painstaking representations of the flow and dynamic movements of consciousness. Writing thus becomes an attempt to ‘fix’ or freeze consciousness, capture its intensity in language. The suggestion that a character’s consciousness can be represented is the ‘mark’ of a realist novel. This mark has its expression in free indirect discourse, as Rimmon-Kenan asserts:⁶²

The concept of free indirect discourse is meaningful only within mimesis... because the need to attribute textual segments to speakers, as well as the urge to account for apparently false statements and reconcile seeming contradictions exists only when the text is grasped as in some sense analogous to (mimetic of) reality (115-6).

This suggests that free indirect discourse’s problematic relationship to ‘reality’ is the ‘mark’ of realism, and attempts to write it only make sense within mimesis. The speakers in a novel are assigned ‘given speech features or attitudes’ and free indirect discourse acts as a convenient vehicle for interior monologue (Rimmon-Kenan 114-5). In the exposition of free indirect discourse Rimmon-Kenan inadvertently demonstrates Mantel’s use of realism to question reality; in other words, her provisionality.

One example of Mantel’s preoccupations with Cromwell’s consciousness is shown in her references to painting. In *Wolf Hall*, when Cromwell is invited to Chelsea to dine with Thomas More, he comes face to face with a Holbein family portrait. Over dinner he ponders the portrait and its relationship to the real characters in front of him:

⁶² David Lodge describes it, ‘free indirect style allows the narrative discourse to move freely back and forth between the author’s voice and the character’s voice without preserving a clear boundary between them’ (*Consciousness and the Novel* 45). Paul Cobley see it as ‘an extension of the mixed mode of mimesis and the poet’s or narrator’s voice’ (*Narrative*. London and New York: Routledge 2001, 231). For general discussions of free indirect discourse and what it means for narrative fiction, See also H. Porter Abbott. *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008, 77. Ronald Carter and Peter Stockwell eds. *The Language and Literature Reader*. London and New York: Routledge, 2008, 278-86.

He prefers their host as Hans painted him; the Thomas More on the wall, you can see that he's thinking, but not what he's thinking, and that's the way it should be (*WH* 230).

Cromwell's portrait also fails to yield any clue as to his thoughts. When the painting is revealed Cromwell's internal discourse thinks about what he was thinking at the time of painting: 'You cannot trace those thoughts behind his eyes' (*WH* 526). The writer is able to capture the thoughts of a character, their interior, where the painter is not. Mantel's narrative is an attempt to do just this; trace the thoughts that occur behind the eyes of Cromwell, and in so doing conjure an interiority into being, an interiority that painting can only hint at. The 'interior' offers something akin to the reality effect, in that Mantel's attempts to 'represent' consciousness create the effect of interiority. The illusion of interiority, just like the illusion of reality, is sustained by the realist novel's mimetic necessity.

Mantel employs what could be called classic free indirect discourse in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies*. In the following example there is an alignment between the narrator's voice and the character's voice, and Cromwell is the focalised character through whom the narrator's voice is refracted. We read the mind of Cromwell and in effect, see everything that happens through his eyes:

There are some people in this world who like everything squared up and precise, and there are those who will allow some drift at the margins. He is both these kinds of person. He would not allow, for example, a careless ambiguity in a lease, but instinct tells him that sometimes a contract need not be drawn too tight. Leases, writs, statutes, all are written to be read, and each person reads them by the light of self-interest (*WH* 228).

The reader learns about Cromwell's flexibility; he is adaptable, lives by his instinct. The layered consciousness in this passage shows Cromwell from both 'outside' and 'in': the reference to some people could be made by anyone, but the reference to 'instinct' comes from 'within' Cromwell. The final sentence moves to generalisation again, a ploy that Mantel uses not only to emphasise the particularity of Cromwell's

consciousness but to capture the essence of thought: how it switches, twists, turns and concerns itself all the time with thousands of different things at once. For example: as Cromwell leaves York Place (latterly the Cardinal's residence, before his fall) after meeting Anne Boleyn for the first time, the reader again reads his private thoughts:

There was a moment when Anne gave him all her attention: her skewering dark glance. The king, too, knows how to look; blue eyes, their mildness deceptive. Is this how they look at each other? Or in some other way? For a second he understands it; then he doesn't. He stands by a window. A flock of starlings settles among the tight black buds of a bare tree. Then, like black buds unfolding, they open their wings; they flutter and sing, stirring everything into motion, air, wings, black notes in music. He becomes aware that he is watching them with pleasure: that something almost extinct, some small gesture towards the future, is ready to welcome the spring; in some spare, desperate way, he is looking forward to Easter, the end of Lenten fasting, the end of penitence. There is a world beyond this black world.

There is a world of the possible. A world where Anne can be queen is a world where Cromwell can be Cromwell. He sees it; then he doesn't. The moment is fleeting. But insight cannot be taken back. You cannot return to the moment you were in before (*WH* 205).

In this passage Mantel charts Cromwell's thoughts, and his intuitive, almost felt insights into his situation. The punctuation allows Mantel to weave together insight, thought, feeling seamlessly within the narrative: focalised with Cromwell but also detached from him. 'Knowing how to look' suggests an intra- and inter-textual world of perception between the characters, the author and the reader. In the sentences that begin 'There is...', for example, the narration is ambiguous: this 'world of the possible' is somehow beneath the conscious awareness of Cromwell, who remains the focalised character.⁶³ Mantel stretches the boundaries of free indirect discourse, with Cromwell referring to himself in the third person. This narrative device, where the narration begins focused on Cromwell and then seems to move outwards, suggests an ambiguity within the text's focalisation but also attests to an intuition: 'he sees it; then he doesn't'. This is Mantel's attempt to capture what it is like to intuit something, as well as present to the reader Cromwell's grasp of this 'world of the

⁶³ See Mieke Bal who takes up Genette's idea of focalisation, as it helps to explain how 'language shapes vision and world-view' (19). *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative 2nd ed.* Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1994.

possible'. His handle on the thoughts, feelings, intuition, is 'fleeting'; it comes in flashes and blinks, it's there, then it's gone.⁶⁴ This referentiality of free indirect style means that Cromwell is almost writing himself. The use of third person creates distance and exposes the alignment between author and character. This illusion of a character writing himself shows the seamless focalisation and the narrator's near-invisibility.

An 'I' intrudes into the third person narration, at the place of Cromwell's switch of allegiance, when he survives the downfall of his master:

Very well. I dry my tears, those tears from All Hallows day. I sit with the cardinal, by the fire at Esher in a room with a smoking chimney. I say, my lord, do you think I would forsake you? I locate the man in charge of chimneys and hearths. I give him orders. I ride to London, to Blackfriars. The day is foggy, St. Hubert's Day. Norfolk is waiting, to tell me he will be a good lord to me (*WH* 162).

Mantel uses the 'I' here to point out Cromwell's actions, where the 'I' is usually reserved for thought and dialogue. Mantel is demonstrating the power of Cromwell's consciousness through the use of 'I', how he directs the action, but this anomalous 'I' is also used to explore the boundaries of free indirect discourse. Mantel employs a 'we' in this narrative for the same reason. For example, when Mantel describes Cromwell's son Gregory, '[H]e has plenty of growing to do, and we hope he will grow tall' (36), the reader asks 'who is speaking here?' This sentence is at once a reference to Gregory's terrible Latin, and at the same time a nudge at the limits of free indirect discourse and its ability to represent the multiplicity of consciousness.

This multiplicity of consciousness, of voices, seems to break out of the confines of free indirect discourse and becomes something altogether stranger than the realist text.⁶⁵ In *Telepathy and Literature*, Nicholas Royle advances the argument

⁶⁴ Discussed more fully in chapter one; I return to the idea of intermittency in the conclusion.

⁶⁵ See also Clare Connors' paper "Free - Indirect - Style (Derrida and Bowen)" which explores the form in interesting ways.

of the literary text being a ‘reading machine’, or ‘reading effect’ that complements its ‘telepathic structure’. The reader is invited to read the minds of the characters within this created world of the author’s devising. Nicholas Royle asserts the openness of this gesture ‘...without knowing where it is going, who is speaking or who is listening, or at what distance’ (Royle *Telepathy* 26). Mantel employs this openness in her use of free indirect discourse by stretching the bounds of focalisation; letting the focaliser refer to himself in the third person and blurring the observations made by Cromwell, and the narrator/author.⁶⁶ This blurring further occurs with Cromwell carefully noting others’ mannerisms and behaviour; for example, ‘he studies Dr Cranmer: his way of blinking, the cautious finger he lays to his chin, his eloquent eyes and his pale praying hands’ (*WH* 249). Cromwell’s practice of the novelists’ art of observation is noticed by the other characters. Emperor’s man Eustache Chapuys, for example, exclaims at the unveiling of Cromwell’s portrait, ‘one never thinks of you alone, Cremuel’ (*WH* 527). Cromwell’s observing consciousness organises the appearance and behaviours of the other characters. Like the writer, he is an exemplary reader, of people and situations, a master of words. The description of the Duke of Norfolk, ‘lean as a gnawed bone and cold as an axe-head’ (*WH* 162) bears the mark of Mantel’s writing (with shades of Dickens, Ebenezer Scrooge being ‘hard and sharp as flint’ in *A Christmas Carol*) and Cromwell’s own determinations of the Duke as a personality to deal with. Mantel continues:

He [the Duke] thinks book-reading an affectation altogether, and wishes there were less of it at court. His niece is always reading, Anne Boleyn, which is perhaps why she is unmarried at the age of twenty-eight (163).

⁶⁶ As Fludernik points out on page 6 of *The Fictions of Language and the Languages of Fiction: The Linguistic representation of speech and consciousness*. London and New York: Routledge, 1993. ‘on account of the close relationship to deixis, free indirect discourse is now seen to be crucial to the discussion about narrative point of view and the linguistic representation of subjectivity.’

The Duke's dislike of reading and writing marks him off as a philistine. He is presented as the man of action, whose 'joints seem knitted together of supple chain-links' (*WH* 162); who eschews intellectual labour for the craft of war. What this subtle distinction also does is to further align Cromwell with the author and the novelist's craft.

This connection of Cromwell with the author is demonstrated earlier, when Liz questions Cromwell if the gossip is true (that Henry wants to divorce Queen Katherine because she cannot have a son):

So this morning — waking early, brooding on what Liz said last night — he wonders, why should my wife worry about women who have no sons? Possibly it's something women do: spend time imagining what it's like to be each other.
One can learn from that, he thinks. (*WH* 44)

If we take Nicholas Royle's model of telepathy into account, isn't this precisely what the writer does? Mantel not only imagines what it is like to be Cromwell, but reads his mind and speaks for him as well. This is precisely what Mantel does, spends time imagining what it is like to be Cromwell. The ironic 'possibly it's something women do' enfolds within itself multiple meanings: the author as a woman who does just this; the novel as a domestic product and 'women's business';⁶⁷ and the putting into question of Cromwell's status as a literary and historical figure. Thus Cromwell demonstrates Mantel's commitment to the provisional, exemplified by her representation of his interiority.

The provisional is the possible, a word which occurs time and again as Cromwell explores the possible in the world Mantel creates for him. The cardinal has been forced out to Esher, and Lady Anne has taken over York Place. The cardinal is not yet dead, but he is out of favour with the King. The moment in which Cromwell

⁶⁷ As Clare Connors puts it '...the novel is *the* literary genre which, from its very bastard origins, has been written by women' "Free- Indirect- Style (Derrida and Bowen)." (16)

perceives the 'possible' comes after his first meeting with the Lady Anne in the cardinal's old house. The perception of this possible world for Cromwell connects him to Anne Boleyn, 'A world where Anne can be queen is a world where Cromwell can be Cromwell' (*WH* 205). The somewhat tautological phrase 'Cromwell can be Cromwell' leaves a blank; as other characters enquire of him, what is he? What is he made of? Any gaps in the historical record are exploited by Mantel to create this mysterious picture:

A man's power is in the half-light, in the half-seen movements of his hand and the unguessed-at expression of his face. It is the absence of facts that frightens people: the gap you open, into which they pour their fears, fantasies, desires (*WH* 359).

Cromwell's blankness is the source of his power, in terms of Mantel's characterisation and historically. As she describes him in *Bring up the Bodies*: '[H]is expression is as blank as a freshly painted wall' (*BUB* 16). Cromwell's blankness is employed by Mantel to express the contingent and provisional; his allegiances are mysterious and questionable, his opinions 'flexible'. For example, Gardiner and Cromwell's conversation after Anne is installed as Marquess of Pembroke: 'Well,' Gardiner says, 'if your mind is infinitely flexible. As yours, I see, would have to be' (390). Cromwell's flexibility of mind speaks to possibility and thus the provisional.

Free indirect discourse in *Fludd*

The idea of possibility takes a different form in Mantel's novel *Fludd*. While it is also a novel based on a historical figure, the character is written into the text as an absence. One of the nuns in the parish that Fludd (who does not pose as a curate but is assumed to be the threatened curate by Father Angwin) has 'transformed', Sister Philomena, runs away with Fludd. Her transformation from nun back into her previous identity of Roisin O'Halloran takes place with Sister Anthony dressing her from an old chest of pre-convent clothing, as elsewhere Father Angwin muses on Fludd, asking Agnes:

'Where is Father Fludd?
'In his room. I think I heard him go up.'
'I thought I heard him come down. Still, both are possible.'
Both at once, he thought. (*Fludd* 154)

Angwin, the angry agnostic alcoholic priest, is shown by Mantel to understand the nature of the curious Fludd, who the reader knows is an alchemist, come to effect transformations. A creature who appears, angel-like; who does not eat, or sleep, or drink, he transcends the boundaries of physical matter, has the secret of spirit and matter. Agnes and Angwin discuss the possible whereabouts of Fludd. This lengthy and circuitous dialogue tells the reader one thing while showing another, as both interlocutors 'know' that Fludd is not upstairs but persist in the assumption that he is there. 'I did not positively see him go up,' said Miss Dempsey. 'Or come down' (156). Mantel's narrator intrudes here, focusing out from the domestic scene in the vicarage, and back:

They knew, though, that the upper storey was empty, quite as certainly as they had ever known anything. Ashes rustled softly through the grate; on the walls twisted Christs continued dying; in the church grounds, yellow leaves floated in darkening air, birds huddled in the trees of the terraces, and worms turned.
'Shall I put the kettle on?' Agnes said (157)

There is an omniscient narrator in Mantel's *Fludd*, who sees into the private thoughts of a character but is otherwise effaced from the text. The narrator is effaced, as they should be in classical realism, allowing the reader to pretend to a neutrality which is anything but. Whereas in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies* we have an alignment with Cromwell, such that the choice of third person seems to have an estranging or detaching effect, in *Fludd* the narrator's invisibility belies a viewpoint which is presented by the author, who invites the reader, in turn, to share it. Take Mantel's characterisation of Miss Agnes Dempsey. The reader already understands that she is Father Angwin's housekeeper: timid, not too bright, thinking that sycophants 'are a kind of deacon'. She is deferential, calling the Bishop's secretary 'My Lord...' although in retrospect she knew that the secretary did not merit this' (5). The revelation of Miss Dempsey's busybody status invites the reader to judgement:

Might - if she had thought that anyone needed to know. She herself was the judge of what anyone needed to know. For Miss Dempsey occupied a special mediatory position, between church, convent and everyone else. To acquire information was her positive duty, and then what she did with it was a matter for her judgement and experience. Miss Dempsey would have eavesdropped on the confessional, if she could; she had often wondered how she might manage it (7).

Miss Dempsey's eavesdropping on the confessional suggests an unscrupulousness at odds with her status within the community, as helpmeet to the beleaguered Father Angwin. The irony is that Mantel opens up Miss Dempsey's mind to the reader, eavesdropping on her private thoughts and actions. She describes her eating a chocolate, twisting the wrapper into a ring shape and slipping it onto her finger. A miniature wedding ceremony, conducted by herself but also an alchemical wedding with the throwing of the material onto the fire: 'this was Miss Dempsey's private habit, which no one had ever seen' (8). Mantel concludes the description of Miss Dempsey: 'above her upper lip, on the right hand side, she had a small flat wart, colourless as her mouth itself. It was hard for her not to touch it. She was afraid of

cancer' (8). Traditional omniscience is employed by Mantel here, not only to introduce the important plot devices of ring, wart and alchemy, but also to lay bare realist tools and open them up to questioning.

At the same time as the tools of realism are laid bare, there is also a concealment. Despite the use of a traditionally omniscient narrator who reads a character's private thoughts, there is something incomplete and incomprehensible about Miss Dempsey. The description we get of her asks more questions than it answers; also seeming to conceal and twist even as the reader reads the mind of the character. The openness of the reading gesture informs Mantel's writing, in *Fludd* and elsewhere, and allows the reader to embrace an unenclosed ending, an ending which is also a beginning, as for example in the more recent *Bring up the Bodies*. This openness to reading invokes Royle's sense of 'telepathy', the telepathic reading experience suggesting the irony of the mind-reading narrator; a technique so 'anti-real' is used to present a narrative which is 'real'.

The realist construction of this novel is contrasted to the almost magical events it recounts. Miss Dempsey's wart disappears, the morning after she assists in disinterring the statues the bishop ordered to be removed from the church: 'She... caught sight of herself in the oval looking glass. Her face was dead white, weary; her eyes looked sore. But all the same, her wart had gone' (145). The ring and wart are devices which 'ring' the plot, allow it to come full circle and for divine justice (not the same, in Mantel's writing, as belief in the Catholic Church) to be done. Agnes makes a ring, from a gold toffee paper wrapper, which is put into an envelope and delivered to Sister Philomena, formerly Roisin O'Halloran, who is plotting her escape from the convent. At the same time, the bullying Mother Perpetua ('Purpit') has discovered a wart on her face. The alchemical transmutation that Fludd effects is

diffuse, spread throughout the characters. Knowledge transcends the physical world, while also being part of it. Fludd's final parting 'miracle' (as Agnes calls his manifestation later on, 184) is to burn the grotesque Mother Perpetua; to punish her for her sins, to stop her from getting to Roisin, or both. Roisin escapes with Fludd and they spend the night together. When Roisin wakes in the hotel and Fludd is gone, she finds that he has left her

...the railwayman's kerchief, which he had torn from the fence pole as he crossed the allotments on his way to the station. 'I left them something of my own,' he had said. 'I did not wish to go from the parish having made no mark' (180).

Mantel writes about the mark that Fludd has made, through free indirect discourse, and through the effaced narrator who is able to read the private thoughts of all the characters, but also offer an 'objective' account of their behaviour. The burning of Mother Perpetua, however, is attributed in Father Angwin's mind to the tobacconist Judd McEvoy:

'They call it spontaneous combustion,' the bishop said. He looked wild-eyed at the thought.
'Combustion, certainly,' Father Angwin agreed. Personally he doubted the spontaneity of it; he had doubted it at once, when he learnt that McEvoy was on the scene. It is a wise man, he thought, who can tell the firefighter from the arsonist (174).

Mantel cuts away between the scenes, writing two different 'versions' like the dialogue between Agnes and Angwin, in which one thing is known but another is said: both 'versions' are true in their own way. The many transformations Fludd brings about have the effect of destabilising the village's certainty of faith, while also redressing the balance in a moral sense. Those who are deserving are rewarded, those who are not are punished. In this way a text ostensibly about religion is a much more magically secular fairy tale. Nevertheless it is clear that Mantel's textuality wants to bend and extend realist practice; she appears to be setting the reader up for a kind of 'realism', when the novel offers something altogether stranger.

Character and Cromwell

Mantel's exploration of free indirect discourse in *Fludd* pushes at the borders of realism, just as she does in her attempt to occupy Thomas Cromwell's consciousness. In this section I wish to consider how Mantel operates within and pushes at the boundaries of another marker of realism: character. In her essay 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown', Woolf refers to character as a 'willo the wisp' and shape changer, it being the novelist's job to 'somehow reconstruct a habitable dwelling-place; it is from the gleams and flashes of this flying spirit that he must create solid, living flesh-and-blood Mrs Brown' (Woolf *Selected Essays* 35). Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle (with reference to *Middlemarch*), suggest that: '[w]hile realist conventions of character may rely on the opposition between inner and outer, mind or spirit and body, and so on, Eliot's description of Dorothea also shows how this opposition can be questioned from within the realist tradition itself' (Bennett and Royle 65).

Character and its 'portrayal' is one of the signals that what we are reading is 'realist'; ideas about character's 'depth' suggest assumptions of motivation and an adherence to depth psychology, for example.⁶⁸ We are invited into a particular way of reading by characters which will on some level make us 'like', 'identify with' or have 'sympathy' for them. Realist characters, as Bennett and Royle write, should have 'a certain complexity' but the complexities 'should cohere in a single identity' (62). They continue: 'Realist characterization presupposes a "mimetic" model of literary texts whereby what is primary or original is a real person, and a character in a book is simply a copy of such a person' (Bennett and Royle 62).

⁶⁸ See for example, E.M. Forster's differentiation between flat and rounded characters in *Aspects of the Novel*.

To read character in this way is “to assume a ‘depth’, a truth that is hidden but discoverable” (Cixous 385), which closes off the potentiality of character which is ‘open, unpredictable’ (385). Character is the insurance of a reader’s investment, and without it ‘[N]o one to talk to, to recognise, to identify with. The reader is loath to venture into a place where there is no mirror’ (Cixous 387). By reminding us of the etymology of character, *kharattein*, to engrave, Cixous is also reminding us of the force of identification that underscores assumptions of character. Character marks us off as singular, unique: we are like this, they are like that. By exploring character we can ‘dismember the marionette, cut the strings, distort the mirror’ (Cixous 389), in other words experience the strangeness and otherness of character, of the subject within ourselves. This subject takes part in what Cixous calls the fiction of a stable subject, a fiction that is bought into by discourses of character and underpinned by reading practices that bolster the illusion.

Mantel’s *Wolf Hall* suggests exciting ways of reading characters, particularly Thomas Cromwell. Thinking back to Barthes’ reality effect, I suggest that Mantel treats interiority in a similar way. By creating Thomas Cromwell’s inner life, she conjures a powerful interiority effect which aligns the author’s consciousness with the character’s consciousness. This seamlessness between author and character effectively kills the narrator, thus transforming the use of free indirect discourse. The use of the term ‘seamlessness’ is not coincidental: Mantel uses weaving in the Tudor novels as a metaphor for the stitching together of the narrative fabric. For example, Thomas More is described as ‘unravelling’ (*WH* 227), as is the cardinal (60). At crucial points in the novel the tightly wound textu(r)al weave appears to be unspooling. Thomas Cromwell’s inspection of More’s carpet yields a flaw in

the weave, 'he walks forward, puts a tender hand on the flaw, the interruption in the weave, the lozenge slightly distorted, warped out of true' (*WH* 228). Stephen Gardiner, also present at dinner, is another character of low birth whose illegitimacy is an open secret. Gardiner is reluctantly connected to Cromwell by his fabric trade family. The weave of textual fabric and Cromwell's appraisal of it connects to the social fabric and an understanding of Cromwell's (and Gardiner's) outsider status. His character is the flaw in the weave, his out of place-ness a notch in the seamless social fabric of the time. Mantel thus not only uses painting to demonstrate her characterisation's interiority effect, but also the trope of weaving to describe the construction of the narrative and social fabric. As *Fludd* uses 'folding' as a movement of texture, so Mantel employs the idea of 'weave' in the Tudor novels to complicate realism.

Mantel uses the word 'person' to demonstrate Cromwell's peculiar and provisional status as flaw, notch in the social fabric. According to Chambers, a person is: 'A living soul or self-conscious being; A character represented, as on the stage; A capacity in which one is acting; A personality; A human being, sometimes used contemptuously or patronizingly'. The latter definition, it is safe to assume, covers what the Duke of Norfolk thinks about the upstart Thomas Cromwell: 'Damn it all, Cromwell, why are you such a ... *person*? It isn't as if you could afford to be.' (*WH* 163) Norfolk's pause and the ellipses suggest that Norfolk has trouble categorising Cromwell, he is trying to work out what he is and where he belongs. A self-made man of low birth, Thomas Cromwell's position was unusual in 1529. Mantel also subverts realist characterisation by incorporating the term 'person' into the text at various

points: by doing so she exposes the connection that Cixous makes between the ‘*nature of fiction*’ (Cixous 383, emphasis in original) and the fiction of subjectivity. She continues: ‘[w]here the term “fiction” should not be taken simply (in the sense of *borne in mind*) as part of a pair of opposites, which would make it the contrary of “reality.”’ (Cixous 383, emphasis in original). The constructions of character that are written show the fictionality of what we call our ‘real’ selves. How does Mantel employ the word ‘person’ in *Wolf Hall*, and in what ways does it undermine realism?

Firstly, as just outlined, she uses ‘person’ to suggest Cromwell’s low birth and the reaction to it from the old aristocracy; Norfolk in particular. Mantel gets comic mileage out of Norfolk’s frustration with Cromwell’s seeming smoothness, his nonchalance. There was little terminology to describe the sixteenth century man of ‘low birth’ that would mark him out from the cattle he farmed. The term ‘gentleman’ was exclusively reserved for the high born, the noble. Both Cromwell and Wolsey upset this idea, through their low parentage, unsettling the social *status quo*; God, King, nobles and at the bottom, peasants and everyone else. Norfolk continues his vitriol towards Cromwell: ‘The duke stabs a forefinger into his shoulder. ‘You ... person,’ he says; and again, ‘you nobody from Hell, you whore-spawn, you cluster of evil, you lawyer’ (*WH* 187). Again the ellipses, although this time Norfolk has added more insults to the repertoire. Cromwell refers to himself as a person, talking to Stephen Gardiner:

‘I suppose he’s tired of churchmen. He wants to know what he can learn from ... whatever it is you call yourself, these days.’ ‘A person,’ he says placidly. ‘The Duke of Norfolk says I’m a person.’ (*WH* 232)

Mantel is alert to the complexity of the word ‘person’ as it relates to character in literary texts, the fictional construction of the historical figure, and indeed the fictional construction of the idea of the self. When Cromwell is invited to dine with the merchant Antonio Bonvisi, Spring 1530, his position at court is looked at with humour: “‘What do you think, now you are a courtier?’” There are smiles around the table. Because, of course, the idea is so ridiculous, the situation so temporary’ (*WH* 189). The temporary nature of Cromwell’s position is echoed by his dealings with the cardinal, as he says to Wolsey, “‘I’ll come to fetch you, the minute the king summons you back.’” He believes and does not believe that this will happen’ (212). The reader is poised, aligned with Cromwell, for the fall, the rise, and this speaks again to the idea of possibility, and the provisional stance; the temporary nature of his position, just at the cusp.

Mantel does much to make Cromwell an attractive character, particularly against the ascetic and heartless churchmen Stephen Gardiner and Thomas More: the provisional stance she takes up aligns the reader with his ‘self’, in all its constructed-ness. As readers, we feel and think along with him; we feel sympathy for him. Although the movement of the realist characterisation is strong here, and pulls the reader along with it, at the same time, we are alerted to the construction of Cromwell as not just a ‘person’ but a *persona*. Etymologically closely related to person, the *persona* adds a layer of suggestion, meaning ‘Social facade or public image’. The meaning of person as ‘bodily presence or action’ (*Chambers*) connects Mantel’s writing of the person of Cromwell, her imagining of his lived experience. The many uses of the word person that she employs allows her to explore the ‘beginnings’ of something, the individual, the nation, in all its multiplicity without simple recourse to an origin. This is demonstrated when he teases

Christophe, the servant, 'you can come Christophe, you're not a person' (*WH* 473). When he is at York Place, with Anne, and she tells him: "My father says, one can never be sure of that person, one can never tell who he's working for. I should have thought - but then I am only a woman - that it is perfectly obvious that you're working for yourself." That makes us alike, he thinks: but does not quite say.' (237)

The word 'person' thus seems to connect Cromwell and Anne Boleyn, in the sense of persons of presence, and as in *personas*. The masks that Mantel makes each of them put on are meta-fictionally alluded to, 'We are breezing in to push our luck' (*WH* 531). Princess Mary refers to Anne as 'the person' twice on page 290, and again on 555: the word is used where the speaker cannot categorise the subject of their conversation within the strict parameters of social life at the time. Only the King, interestingly, is able to voice what others say about Cromwell: 'You see this councillor of mine? I warn you, never play any game with him. For he will not respect your ancestry. He has no coat of arms and no name, but he believes he is bred to win' (*WH* 407). Cromwell's lack of 'background' is no disadvantage to him, but his provisional place affords him hitherto unthought of privileges of access to the King. Not only is Cromwell's place among his betters a temporary one, but Mantel also weaves in gossip and slander in order to show Cromwell's place in society:

He is a good friend and master; this is said of him everywhere. Otherwise, it is the usual abuse. His father was a blacksmith, a crooked brewer, he was an Irishman, he was a criminal, he was a Jew, and he himself was just a wool trader, he was a shearsman, and now he is a sorcerer: how else but by being a sorcerer would he get the reins of power in his hand? (*WH* 585)

Consider also Jane Rochford's description of Mark Smeaton:

'He sticks like a burr to his betters. He does not know his place. He is a jumped-up nobody, taking his chance because the times are disordered.' Cromwell replies, 'I suppose you could say the same of me, Lady Rochford. And I'm sure you do.' (*WH* 507)

The sticky burr that catches on the clothes of Cromwell's betters reminds us of James' web that catches experience in its grasp, drawing the connection between fictional captures of experience and the character's brushes with the real. The construction of Cromwell's character intersects with the 'real' in the etymology of 'person'. This two way movement of character and subject allows Mantel to develop a more fluid relationship than that suggested by realist conventions of character construction. This fluidity is alluded to by Leo Bersani in conversation with Nicholas Royle, as he says, 'I think questions of character are precisely a kind of petrification of the ability to move' (Royle "Conversations" 266).⁶⁹ Just as the subject in the world becomes fixed and stale through questions of character, so Mantel's feat consists of capturing some of the dynamism of the real while also questioning realism's conventions. Mantel's narrative uses apparent historical authenticity in order to expose the fictionality of the 'real' itself. The fictionality of the real also points to the fictionality of the idea of 'character' as a unified or discrete entity.

The realist compromise: Woolf, Mantel, and Rancière

Virginia Woolf desires that the novelist depicts life as it is, beyond the surface detail. The ability to ask the question, 'is life really like this?' is the constant negotiation for the novelist, whose craft is subject to frameworks of unconscious assumptions about the text and the world. The strange happenings of Mantel's work, their 'otherness' connects back to Jacques Rancière's thesis on the 'compromise' between narrative force and the diffusion of energies that constitutes the sensible world. To return to Virginia Woolf, we find another version of the 'compromise' which can be usefully

⁶⁹ See also his notion of 'psychic mobility' in *A Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature*. Toronto: Little, Brown, 1969 (9).

related to Mantel. Critical of writers who adhere to an unnecessarily constrained novelistic form, in her 1919 essay “Modern Fiction” Woolf writes:

The mediocrity of most novels seems to arise from a conviction on the part of the writer that unless his plot provides scenes of tragedy, comedy and excitement, an air of probability so impeccable that if all his figures were to come to life they would find themselves dressed down to the last button in the fashion of the hour, he has failed in his duty to the public. (Woolf *Essays* 33)

The dedication to an ‘air of probability’ and the writer’s desire to give the public what they want combine to strangle attempts at creativity. The writer, though, in Woolf’s view, must at some point ask the question ‘whether life is like this after all?’ (33). She continues:

Is it not possible that the accent falls a little differently, that the moment of importance came before or after, that, if one were free and could set down what one chose, there would be no plot, little probability, and a vague general confusion in which the clear-cut features of the tragic, the comic, the passionate, and the lyrical were dissolved beyond the possibility of separate recognition? (33)

Woolf’s argument here is that to impose novelistic order, essentially a realistic order, does not produce art that is life-like but stilted forms that stifle the life of the writer’s mind, ‘blotting out the light of the conception’ (33). Moving away from the constraints of the novel form, Woolf’s realism consists of the writer’s attempt to reproduce life’s minutiae as it is: not only the appearance of the writer’s room, but the consciousness of the writer within that room. Not only the material aspects and appearances that can be described, but something akin to what might be called spirit. The status of the visual in realism is complicated by both Woolf and Mantel; both realists in the sense that their attempts to capture the ‘real’ go beyond what is seen, beyond the directly perceptible: ‘The mind, exposed to the ordinary course of life, receives upon its surface a myriad impressions — trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel’ (33). It is the ‘myriad impressions’ that Woolf’s novelist must capture, and these ‘impressions’ that constitute the ‘real’ to which her kind of realism refers. Woolf’s attention to what is ‘really there’ is a preoccupation of

Mantel's, also concerned with how to represent 'the vision in our minds' (Woolf *Essays* 33).

Having only the 'formal railway line' of the sentence to express experience leads to limitations. An indisputably linear form; in Mantel's words, 'you do a little sentence and then another little sentence...' (Boylan ed. 39). The sentence as analogous to the flow of time reveals the time-boundedness of narrative but also obscures the myriad 'moments' that make up its construction. These 'moments' are not time-bounded; they allow for the possibility of movement across, within and around time. If what is going on in the notion of traditional realism we looked at earlier is an adherence to a model of time that flows, (aided and abetted by the sentence and its Woolfian railway line), then what happens in Mantel's brand of realism? The process can be metaphorised in different ways; as weaving, for one, which fits with the trope of the needle (and also provides us with domesticity and female-centred narrative). Or as a 'telescoping' of time, or a nesting within and between frames, which fits within the frame of vision, and the image. Adherence to time's arrow is called into question by Mantel's Tudor novels, by their commitments to reading and the connections Mantel explores between painting, writing and 'representation'. This causality upends the idea of the 'self' as independent actor in the drama of life; pointing instead to its ultimate fictionality.

Virginia Woolf's correspondence with Jacques Raverat, discussed by Quentin Bell in his biography of Woolf,⁷⁰ suggests an interesting connection between writing and painting, and the tension between linear succession and the texture of experience. He asks her what she is writing at that moment, and Woolf playfully but

⁷⁰ Also pointed out by David Lodge in *Consciousness and the Novel*, where he states: 'the primary limitation is this: that verbal language is essentially linear. One word or word-group comes after another, and we apprehend their syntactically cumulative meaning linearly, in time' (62)

firmly rebuffs his request. His reply to her points out that writing is ‘essentially linear’ (qtd Bell 106), that the writer can only write or read one thing at a time, whereas the painter is able to employ images that radiate out all at once, not one after another. This seems counter-intuitive; surely the flatness of a painted surface cannot express the multiplicity of language and its richness in narrative? Woolf’s reply acknowledges the constraints of the linear form, while also being clear that the writer must ‘go beyond “the formal railway line of the sentence”’ (Bell 106). As Bell puts it, ‘she is claiming for herself the ability, or at least the intention, to see events out of time, to apprehend processes of thought and feeling as though they were pictorial shapes’ (107). This is only partly the point. The tension arising between the linearity of the sentence and the form or quality of experience, rendered in writing (what we have been calling texture) is the driving force of the dynamism of writing.

Successiveness is at stake in the need to create intelligible discourse; we use language in a linear way, a ‘cumulative’ way, as David Lodge puts it (Lodge *Consciousness* 62).⁷¹ The sentence is the building block of the novel, ‘a complete grammatical structure’, according to *Chambers*. Put together, sentences build narrative. What Woolf is trying to do (as Bell suggests she does in her later work) is to work this tension between linearity and texture, incorporating a self-conscious understanding of successiveness in writing and how it can be manipulated into showing things how they ‘really are’.⁷²

⁷¹ The thought about successiveness is echoed by Ann Banfield’s choice of epigraph for her final chapter of *Unspeakable Sentences*, a quote from Foucault’s *Order of Things*, the relevant part excerpted here, ‘language cannot represent thought, instantly, in its totality; it is bound to arrange it, part by part, in linear order’ Banfield, Ann. *Unspeakable Sentences: Narration and Representation in the Language of Fiction*. London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1982 (256).

⁷² On the other hand, Brian Richardson argues in “Linearity and Its Discontents: Rethinking Narrative Form and Ideological Valence” (*College English* July 2000 no. 62 vol 6 pp 685 - 695) that the self-consciously experimental *Mrs Dalloway*, which wants to represent ‘[a] single consciousness moving through time – actually necessitates a linear sequence; time and consciousness both move unidirectionally, and to mimetically recreate the flow of thoughts a chronological order is indispensable’ (Richardson 686).

Woolf's commitment to exploring how things 'really are' suggests a way of thinking about Mantel's 'Tudor' novels and the attention given within these novels to painting. Cromwell's sitting for Holbein is an enduring interest of Mantel's and demonstrates the interweaving of painting and writing in her attempts to 'capture' the feel and texture of Cromwell's consciousness. This is a matter of 'tight little facts and figures' (Appendix i 241), but also a question of how historical novels can expose the illusions of fiction.⁷³ One example of how historical novels are presented is given by Jerome de Groot in his book *Consuming History* (2009). He suggests that:

The point and the attraction of the historical novel as a form are this dynamic between the 'authentic' or factual and the rediscovery of untraceable experience which is the keynote of fiction. The reader of the historical novel inhabits both a discourse of history and a discourse of fiction, and the interplay between the two is the dynamic crucial to the genre (de Groot 223-4).

Where and how is it possible to *rediscover* 'untraceable experience'? If it is 'untraceable' it doesn't exist to be *rediscovered*; the novelist must make it up. De Groot is correct that the historical novel occupies an interesting position with regard to both fictional and historical narratives. The historical novel is, by definition (running with de Groot's notion for the time being), a *realist* novel. The rediscovery that de Groot refers to (and which I am questioning here) is the rediscovery of predictable processes and outcomes; causality is pressed into the service of historical and realistic plausibility. Cause and effect are employed by realism to arrive at the already forgone conclusion of history. De Groot's dichotomy of 'authenticity' and 'rediscovery of untraceable experience' seems

⁷³ For a different view, see Rosario Arias' "Exoticising the Tudors: Hilary Mantel's Re-Appropriation of the Past in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies*." in Rousset, Elodie. ed. *Exoticising the Past in Contemporary Neo-Historical Fiction*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. See also Sara Knox "Hilary Mantel and the Historical Novel." Bianca Leggett and Tony Venezia eds. *Twenty-First Century British Fiction*. Canterbury: Gylphi, 2015. Knox places Mantel's work within a 'moment' of historical fiction's resurgence (129f).

to be false, or at least based on the exclusion of any aspects which don't fit neatly into those categories.

Indeed, de Groot's argument seems to be better geared towards a writing of history that takes historical accuracy to be entirely the point. Mantel's historical novels, however, are alert to and conscious of the historical record, being based on solid research, while suggesting that history could always be otherwise. Mantel plays with the idea of traces that de Groot explores, by using the metafictional 'motifs' of reading, writing, and drawing; by doing so, her historical works disperse claims to authenticity and complicate notions of historical accuracy. In this model, how we read the novel and how we read history merge. The reader traces meaning from what is left. Not only this: signalling the 'real' takes on a new dimension if the 'reality' being written has in some senses already happened. What if we can read forwards, as well as backwards? Traceability suggests reconstruction, which contains construction: by this we can infer that Mantel is creating this for the first time, not attempting to capture some form of lost story. Mantel throws the idea of reading into sharp relief, all the time, in the Tudor novels: her engagement with historical fiction allows a two-way reading which makes familiar history, familiar patterns strange, and puts causality into question. We can read several episodes in this way, putting into practice Rita Felski's suggestions about a reading that doesn't 'symptomise' or attempt to uncover some hitherto hidden bias (Felski 22).

The realist illusion⁷⁴

This final section will consider what I will call the ‘realist illusion’. This realist illusion or conjuring trick is the attempt to make something that has already happened appear as if it is happening for the first time, right now.⁷⁵ In effect, however, the attempt to write the ‘real’ is constantly beset by issues of causality.⁷⁶ Reading always occurs in retrospect. For example, in *Wolf Hall*, there has been an incestuous scandal in the Seymour family. Cromwell learns of the disgrace through Anne, during Lent of 1531, when enquiring as to the whereabouts of Jane:

‘Pasty-face? Gone down to Wiltshire. Her best move would be to follow the sister-in-law into a nunnery. Her sister Lizzie married well, but no one wants Milksop, and now no one will.’ Her eyes fall on his present; she says, suddenly anxious, jealous, ‘What is it?’
 ‘Only a book of needlework patterns.’
 ‘As long as it is nothing to tax her wits. Why would you send her a present?’
 ‘I feel sorry for her.’ More now, of course.
 ‘Oh. You don’t like her, do you?’ The correct answer is, no, my lady Anne, I only like you. ‘Because, is it proper for you to send her a present?’ (297)

When Anne is given the title of Marquess of Pembroke in September 1532, however, Jane Seymour is in her train, as lady in waiting. The suggestion with Jane Seymour is that she has a special place: her return to court is swift and against Anne Boleyn’s wishes. It is strange that Cromwell, who knows everything before everyone else, is the ‘last to know’ about the disgrace at Wolf Hall: the possible implication being that Anne’s politicking has caused the scandal to come out into the open, her desiring for Jane to be shut up in a nunnery.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Genette refers to an ‘illusion of mimesis’ in *Narrative Discourse: An Essay on Method*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP, 1983 (164).

⁷⁵ As Peter Brooks says in *Reading for the Plot* ‘If the past is to be read as present, it is a curious present that we know to be past in relation to a future we know to be already in place, already in wait for us to reach it’ (23).

⁷⁶ See Brian Richardson’s *Unlikely Stories: Causality and the Modern Narrative*. Associated University Presses, 1997.

⁷⁷ As we later find out in the sequel to *Wolf Hall*, ‘The queen and her confidantes had spread the story around the court’ (*BUB* 12), ‘But it is forgiven, it is forgiven. The flesh is frail. This royal visit seals the old fellow’s pardon.’ (*BUB* 12)

The informed reader knows that Jane Seymour becomes queen after Anne: what interests Mantel are the myriad machinations, paths taken and not taken, that result in Jane's coronation. Mantel describes Jane, walking behind her sister Lizzie: 'Jane whispers in her wake; her eyes are the colour of water, where her thoughts slip past, like gilded fishes too small for hook or net' (*WH* 502-3). With Cromwell, Mantel ensures we are witnesses to his thinking; with Jane Seymour, speculation will have to do. Jane is at court as a lady-in-waiting, and our first glimpse of her is when Cromwell goes to plead his Cardinal's case for reinstatement: 'Back in the shadows there is another girl, who has her face turned away, trying to hide' (200-1). Cromwell, 'Cremuel'⁷⁸ as Anne calls him, attempts to reason with Anne: they tussle over whether to speak English or French, and as he entreats Anne to choose one language or the other, 'He sees a movement from the corner of his eye; the half-hidden girl has raised her face. She is plain and pale; she looks shocked' (202). Cromwell leaves the chamber, his cause no further along, and he is waylaid by Mary Boleyn. Once Mary is needed again by Anne: '...the door opens and the small hiding girl manoeuvres herself around it. Her face is grave, her reserve complete; her skin is so fine that it is almost translucent' (204). As Lady Carey (Mary Boleyn) flounces off, Jane 'catches his glance; behind the retreating back of Mary Boleyn, she raises her own eyes to heaven' (204).

Later, as the Cardinal's case is continuing to weaken, Cromwell is called by Anne to court: 'We like to know where you are' (237) and is again entreated by Anne's uncle, the Duke of Norfolk, to visit her. On this visit, he meets Dr Cranmer for the first time: 'They embrace cautiously: Cambridge scholar, person from Putney' (*WH* 241). On this visit, Anne shows him a piece of paper which she found in her

⁷⁸ Cremulator - bone grinder

bed, consisting of three figures: ‘The central figure is the King. He is large and handsome, and to make sure you don’t miss him he is wearing a crown. On either side of him is a woman; the one on the left has no head’ (242). Anne is convinced that the paper portrays an image of herself, ‘Anne *sans tête*’ (241) with Katherine and the king, and is also convinced that the ‘sickly milk-faced creeper’ who ‘cries if you look at her sideways’ had put it in her bed, while turning down the sheet (242). Anne interprets the paper as a warning to herself from one of Katherine’s followers, that Katherine will continue to be queen and her ambitions will be thwarted, ‘*Ainsi sera,*’ she says. ‘Never mind who grudges it, it will happen. I mean to have him’ (243). There are strange things occurring with language here: the words of the ambassador on page 519, ‘*la ana is enceinte*’ is a play on the sound of ‘*anne sans têtes*’. Also appearing in *Bring Up the Bodies*, on page 392: ‘Anne the Headless. Anne *sans têtes.*’

Later, however, when Cromwell and Cranmer are leaving Anne’s chamber, they meet Jane Seymour; Cromwell confirms that she has been spying, and agrees to keep his talk with Anne in English, if he can:

Every rising family needs information. With the king considering himself a bachelor, any little girl can hold the key to the future, and not all his money is on Anne....

He turns to watch her as she patters off in the direction of Anne Boleyn. A small suspicion enters his mind, about the paper in the bed. But no, he thinks. That is not possible. (*WH* 244)

Cromwell’s ‘small suspicion’ is never stated out loud, so the reader is left to speculate on the (im)possibility the paper’s discovery has left in his mind. What if the blinkered and wilful Anne has misinterpreted the drawing, as depicting Queen Katherine and herself, when the drawing could imply Anne’s headless position in relation to Jane, who will be Anne’s successor as Queen. The suggestion of historical cause and effect also comes into play here, by opening up the possibility of Jane’s scheming (belying

her innocent and sickly appearance). Another possibility is that Jane's scheming is brought into being by the drawing; attesting to the power of the visual and the importance of painting. If this 'little pale girl' (*WH* 243) and her ambition or even her desire to be queen is 'not possible' then this impossibility is undercut: as Mantel states through Cromwell, 'any little girl can hold the key to the future'. The notion of what is possible pervades the text, whether it is voiced or remains unspoken.

What this episode does is to bring cause and effect into question, as Mantel does more explicitly in *Bring up the Bodies*, through a metafictional reference to reading and writing. For example, Cromwell is able to use George Boleyn, Lord Rochford's vanity and arrogance against him to outwit him in the court. Words are used to try the 'guilty', although the guilt is not for the deeds that they are being tried for; the guilt is for another matter entirely, and whether the deeds he is arraigned for happened or not, it doesn't matter. Cromwell hands Boleyn the piece of paper during the trial and states,

Certain words are written here, which the queen has said to have spoken to you, and you in your turn passed them on. You need not read them aloud. Just tell the court, do you recognise these words? (*BUB* 376)

George Boleyn, unable to resist the temptation to play to the crowd in the courtroom, 'relishing the moment', reads the words on the paper: 'The king cannot copulate with a woman, he has neither skill nor vigour' (*BUB* 376). Outmanoeuvred by Cromwell, George Boleyn effectively tries himself, facilitated by Master Secretary.

Similarly, at the *denouement* of *Bring up the Bodies*, gentlemen Francis Weston, George Boleyn, Harry Norris, William Brereton and the commoner Mark Smeaton are all charged with 'meddling with the queen' (*BUB* 340). We can read Cromwell's desire to catch these men and make them pay as motivated

by personal animosity. All of them were involved in a play called ‘The Cardinal’s Descent into Hell’, the gentlemen taking ‘one limb each of the dead man’ (*WH* 266). Reading cause and effect forward in the usual way, Cromwell’s need to take the men down is motivated primarily by his desire to please the King, who pays his wages, and secondarily as a means of revenge towards those who insulted the cardinal. Mantel’s references to ‘thought’ and ‘deed’ at first suggest cause and effect: the thought gives birth to the deed, gives mental contents a physical shape: ‘We call it “imagining” his death: the thought is father to the deed, and the deed is born raw, ugly, premature’ (*BUB* 260).

Invoking the idea of birth, the action comes into being before the expected time. In the next passage, though, the ‘delivery’ of the deed becomes ‘untimely’; eventually the action loses its parents altogether:

The design against Anne is unhallowed in its gestation, untimely in its delivery, a mass of tissue born shapeless; it is waiting to be licked into shape as a bear cub is licked by its mother. You nourished it, but you did not know what you fed: who would have thought of Mark confessing, or of Anne acting in every respect like an oppressed and guilty woman with a weight of sin upon her? (*BUB* 369)

Intrigue feeds on itself; conspiracies have neither mother nor father; and yet they thrive: the only thing to know is that no one knows anything (370).

Mantel moves from a world in which thoughts exist prior to deeds to a world where cause and effect are made strange, put into question. The punishment has already been decided, as the phrase ‘bring up the bodies’ (i.e., take the prisoners to execution) suggests. Cromwell has to make the crime fit the punishment; as alluded to in the passage above, this is made easier for him by the behaviour of the other ‘actors’. When he is interrogating Weston, for example, Mantel writes Cromwell musing on why he felt the need to go outside:

Perhaps it was when the boy said ‘forty-five or fifty’. As if, past mid-life, there is a second childhood, a new phase of innocence. It touched him,

perhaps, the simplicity of it. Or perhaps he just needed air. Let us say you are in a chamber, the windows sealed, you are conscious of the proximity of other bodies, of the declining light. In the room you put cases, you play games, you move your personnel around each other: notional bodies, hard as ivory, black as ebony, pushed on their paths across the squares. Then you say, I can't endure this anymore, I must breathe: you burst out of the room and into a wild garden where the guilty are hanging from tress, no longer ivory, no longer ebony, but flesh; and their wild lamenting tongues proclaim their guilt as they die. In this matter, cause has been preceded by effect. What you dreamed has enacted itself. You reach for the blade but the blood is already shed. The lambs have butchered and eaten themselves. They have brought knives to the table, carved themselves, and picked their own bones clean (*BUB* 341).

This strange passage brings different aspects into play. The chamber as a representation of consciousness; images of a chess game; the grotesquerie of the bodies hanging in the wild garden. The most crucial aspect here is the suggestion of an entirely different way of thinking about causality. The thinking of cause and effect has evolved even in the course of the same book. The deed has overtaken the thought, and on its own brings action into being, 'the dream has enacted itself'. Mantel shows how time functions as a loop, endlessly unspooling, and thus exposes the fictionality of life itself.

Chapter Three

Mantel's lost child: A Change of Climate and Every Day is Mother's Day

Introduction: contemporary ideas about childhood

This chapter begins with an overview of current thinking about the child and childhood, identifying problems from a cultural and historical perspective. Fiona Tolan, in *New Directions: Writing Post-1990* (2010), identifies an upsurge in interest about childhood and its construction in contemporary writing. She connects this to the status of childhood in twentieth-century culture, particularly the anxieties around child protection, sexuality and the perceived dangers of the internet (Tolan 258). She suggests a common cultural reference point: the murder of two-year-old James Bulger by two ten-year-olds, Jon Venables and Robert Thompson, in 1993.⁷⁹ Children who commit such evil acts can no longer be considered to be children, despite physical evidence to the contrary. Diana Gittins, in *The Child in Question* (1998), also refers to the Bulger case and contemporary discussions about the age of criminal responsibility; ‘whether the boys understood adult morality and, implicitly, when they effectively ceased to be children’ (4). She returns to the Bulger case to cement

⁷⁹At the time the case induced outrage on a mass scale, and the tabloid media whipped up public fears and confusions. The mood was one of punitive measures required, as Diana Gittins points out, *The Sun* even printed a coupon for its readers to fill out demanding the Home Secretary pass a long sentence on the perpetrators. Blake Morrison, author of *As If*, part memoir and recollection of childhood, part discussion of the Bulger case, points out in an interview by Jan Dalley “True Crime: interview of Blake Morrison” Feb 9th 1997. *Independent*. Books (6th July 2016) that the only balanced writer on this case is Gitta Sereny. I concur with Morrison on this — her two part piece in the *Independent* calmly outlines the boys’ family situations, deficiencies in the law, and the need to balance punishment with rehabilitation and compassion with strict sanctions for wrongdoing. See Gitta Sereny. “Re-examining the Evidence.” *Independent*. Sunday Review 6th Feb 1994, and “Approaching the Truth.” *Independent*. Sunday Review 13th Feb 1994. (Both accessed 5th July 2016). Sally Shuttleworth in *The Mind of the Child: Child Development in Literature, Science, and Medicine, 1840-1900* Oxford UP, 2010, argues that the ‘mind’ of the child is a relatively recent idea that gathers pace throughout the Victorian era, feeding into anxieties about children and their ‘nature’. These anxieties are closely connected to insanity, and it is interesting that Shuttleworth also cites the Bulger case in her introduction.

the point: ‘...Venables and Thompson were eventually defined not as “bad children”, but as “non-children”’ (8). The category of non-child is necessary, because otherwise the child is ‘accorded independence, agency’ (8).⁸⁰ To be a child means to conform to ideal notions of what childhood should be: ‘good, innocent and happy — and, most important, *dependent...*’ (8 emphasis in original).⁸¹

The discourse of innocence connected to cultural perceptions of childhood, however, seems to invite its opposite, in novels that deal with the abuse, murder and kidnap of children, for example Donna Tartt’s *The Little Friend* (2002). Tolan also identifies a parallel vein, one that endlessly works over the notion of children being ‘made’ or ‘born’ evil: Lionel Shriver’s 2003 novel *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, for example.⁸² The child is simultaneously venerated and denigrated in culture. The idealised child therefore exists alongside the monstrous, abjected child in our cultural

⁸⁰ Although it is interesting that the boys were tried in an adult court and sentenced to fifteen years. A subsequent successful appeal was made to the European Court, which as Shuttleworth notes resulted ‘...in pressure being put on the British government to change policy with regard to placing juveniles on trial in an adult court’ (Shuttleworth 9, n.28).

⁸¹ Hugh Cunningham makes this point in *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500*, aiming to ‘trace the development of this late twentieth century belief that children are real children only if their life experiences accord with a particular set of ideas about childhood.’ (1) The conception of childhood as qualitatively different, marked off from ‘adulthood’ is brought into question by children’s agency, as Michael Wyness suggests in the sociological study *Childhood*, Polity Press, 2015: ‘Hitherto, agency has been viewed as a property or disposition that children acquire once they have successfully progressed along a developmental pathway into adulthood’ (2). Contemporary childhood studies, however, recognise ‘children’s capacities as agents very early on in childhood’ (2). See for example, Allison James and Adrian L. James *Constructing Childhood: Theory, Policy and Social Practice* (Palgrave, 2004); *Theorizing Childhood* Allison James, Chris Jenks and Alan Prout (Polity, 1998); Chris Jenks’ *Childhood 2nd ed.* (Routledge, 2005). The 1989 *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* shows that the the rights, agency, and legal status of childhood are being taken seriously. See www.unicef.org.uk/Documents/Publication-pdfs/UNCRC_PRESS200910web.pdf. Accessed 6th July 2016.

⁸² Evil, creepy, ghostly children abound in film and horror, Henry James’ *Turn of the Screw*, Susan Hill’s *The Woman in Black*, to name two examples. See also the *Literature Interpretation Theory* special issue no. 22, on “Evil Children in Film and Literature” 2011. Particularly Wandless, William “Spoil the Child: Unsettling Ethics and the Representation of Evil.” 134-154, and Karen J Renner’s introduction, “Evil Children in Film and Literature: Notes Toward a Genealogy.” 79-95.

and literary representation.⁸³ The child in its contrariness is hard to pin down.

Helpless but powerful, innocent and wise, intrinsically good and blank slate,⁸⁴ all at the same time, the child is a contradiction. The existence of the young of the human species contains a challenge. This chapter will consider the possibility that we ‘adults’ remain children despite being ‘grown up’, creating false discourses of adulthood and majority in order to fence children off, and keep them at bay.

It is clear that the notion of childhood as a separate state of being is a cultural and historical construction, tied up with complex social factors and historical conditions, a construction of the modern world. Phillip Aries’ *Centuries of Childhood* (1962) is the first to challenge the view that childhood is a biological, pre-existent entity, arguing that childhood and the family as we know it is born in the eighteenth century.⁸⁵ It is clear that childhood, and particularly its pedagogical implications, did become a pressing issue in the eighteenth century, when philosophers began to question in earnest, what is to be done with this child?

The truism that we were all children once fills the vacuum left by our inability to define what childhood consists of. One certainty: the child’s existence exerts

⁸³ Hysterical characterisations of childhood and the child abound: Lloyd de Mause’s interjection in *The History of Childhood* (London: Souvenir Press, 1976): ‘the history of childhood is a nightmare from which we have only recently begun to awaken’ (1). Alison Lurie, in *Don’t Tell the Grown Ups: Subversive Children’s Literature* (London: Bloomsbury, 1990), somewhat hyperbolically calls children ‘an unusual, partly savage tribe, ancient and widely distributed’ (Lurie ix), although her subsequent discussion of subversive childhood texts is entertaining. Patricia Holland, in the 2006 book *Picturing Childhood: The Myth of the Child in Popular Imagery* (New York: IB Tauris) suggests a reason for the current preoccupation: ‘The crisis over childhood, reflected in the popular media, is real. Children *are* getting older younger. But it could also be seen as a crisis over what it means to be an adult at a time of rapid social change. In my view, repressive attitudes may well represent a panic stricken and sometimes vicious response to the increasing power and visibility of children in the public world’ (xiv).

⁸⁴ The idea of the mind as *tabula rasa* or blank slate is derived from Locke’s *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (c.1700) which sets out to determine the innateness of ideas, which was the dominant opinion of the human mind at the time. In Book Two, Chapter 1.2 ‘Let us suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper void of all characters, without any ideas. How comes it to be furnished?’ Raymond Wilburn ed. *John Locke: An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. J.M.Dent, 1947. 26. See also Wilburn’s introduction in this volume.

⁸⁵ This view has been refuted by David F. Lancy, for example, in *The Anthropology of Childhood: Cherubs, Chattel, Changelings* Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2008. Lancy provides numerous examples of depictions of childhood in the ethnographic and historical record.

powerful influence over us. We cannot handle its demands. We find its doubleness strange, spooky. On the one hand the child grows and matures, is a model of progress; on the other hand it continues to exist, somehow arrested or suspended. Doubling is expressed throughout Mantel's fiction, with Chambers defining doubling as 'the act of making double; a turning back in running; a trick; a plait or fold' (Chambers). The trick and the fold are both well known figures from previous chapters: somewhat neatly, doubling also has the obscure meaning of 'mantling', from heraldry. Thinking about the child's doubleness takes us to the heart of Mantel's literary project, allowing us to further explore the idea of life's fictionality.

This chapter takes the fictional child as its point of departure. The child we encounter in Mantel's novels is so often the traumatised child, the child who in its state of helplessness is let down and damaged. The child's existence in Mantel's fiction mirrors the existence of real children; by growing up, the child passes into memory, is fleeting and transient. How can we read the fictional child, without wanting to explain or diminish its power? How does Mantel write her child figures, in order to make the child's experience intelligible? The fictional child provides a crossover between the adult's 'inner child' and the child in reality, often bruised and traumatised, and questions the demarcation between them. The same demarcation applies within the idea of child; at once a sign of progress, it grows up and out of things, and at the same time the child is a marker of something unfulfilled and unexplored within all of us that resists categorisation. If philosophy cannot handle the child, is it only the literary writer that has the tools available to make this lived experience intelligible, legible to others? In the following two chapters I will consider how psychoanalysis has theorised and treated the child.

For philosophy the child is a taken for granted fact, sequestered off from the adult world. Associated with the mother as a self-evident being, the child has been swept aside along with her in an act of philosophical denial.⁸⁶ In 1762, Jean Jacques Rousseau writes in the preface to *Émile*:

We know nothing of childhood; and with our mistaken notions the further we advance the further we go astray. The wisest writers devote themselves to what a man ought to know, without asking what a child is capable of learning. They are always looking for the man in the child, without considering what he is before he becomes a man. (Rousseau 33-4)

Here then is one answer: allow the child to educate himself according to nature. As far as Rousseau is concerned nature is a greater guide for the child than any educative program or child rearing practice. Let the child be free, in other words, free from constraint and cruel child-rearing practices, free in order that he might grow up to exercise his freedom. Although it is worth noting that this was only available to men of a certain class,⁸⁷ and girls were clearly born to another destiny entirely.

G.W.F. Hegel, in the 1821 *Philosophy of Right*, also decries cruelty to the child. He questions the Roman practice of the head of the household treating the child as a slave, calling it a ‘gangrene of the ethical order at the tenderest point of its innermost life’ (118). But, in opposition to Rousseau, he advocates a strict education. He writes:⁸⁸

The necessity for education is present in children as their own feeling of dissatisfaction with themselves as they are, as the desire to belong to the adult world whose superiority they divine, as the longing to grow up. The play theory of education assumes that what is childish is itself already something of inherent worth... (118)

⁸⁶ Luce Irigaray, for example, suggests that the entire Western philosophical tradition is being nourished by an ‘unpaid debt’ (126-7) to the maternal. *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. London: The Athlone Press, 1993. For overviews on philosophy’s exclusion of the maternal and the feminine, see also Michelle Boulous Walker’s *Philosophy and the Maternal Body: Reading Silence* and Lynne Huffer’s *Maternal Pasts, Feminist Futures: Nostalgia, Ethics and the Question of Difference*, both 1998.

⁸⁷ Andrew O’Malley’s excellent study *The Making of the Modern Child: Children’s Literature and Childhood in the late eighteenth century* (Routledge: London, 2011) charts the importance of pedagogy in the invention of the child, arguing that the child is a bourgeois creation.

⁸⁸ Michael Inwood suggests that Hegel is reacting to the prevalence of the idea of a natural education, and to Rousseau’s ideas in particular. See n.2 §395, p.336 of *A Commentary on Hegel’s Philosophy of Mind*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007.

It is precisely that the child is *not yet* what he wants or needs to be that causes him to want to grow up. There is nothing of value as yet in the child's existence, apart from the ethical imperative that the helplessness of the child engenders in the adults surrounding him. The child exists as potential, a potential that needs to be nurtured by discipline.⁸⁹ His definitive and revised statement in *The Philosophy of Mind* of 1830 — 'the most rational thing a child can do with his toys is break them' (§396, 57) — cements the dismissal of childish play. The child's worth is in its potential to grow up and be educated, in order to conduct itself as a proper citizen.⁹⁰ The empirical and epistemological state of childhood for Hegel is a transition point to elsewhere, to majority and full rights, and his demonstration of what is right and proper to philosophy.

We began by talking about the child, and we get talk of rights, majority, nature, education, anything but what the child actually *is*. The inability to define the child leads us to suspect that there is more at work than the emotions that the child inspires. Thus Derrida writes of the supplementarity of childhood in *Of*

Grammatology:

Childhood is the first manifestation of the deficiency which, in nature, calls for substitution [*suppléance*]. Pedagogy illuminates perhaps more crudely the paradoxes of the supplement. How is a natural weakness possible? How can Nature ask for forces that it did not furnish? How is a child possible in general? (Derrida *Grammatology*146)

He continues, reversing the formula child equals supplement into supplement equals child: 'Without childhood, no supplement would ever appear in Nature. The

⁸⁹ As he notes in *Philosophy of Mind*, 'he must obey in order to learn how to command' (58), which of course reminds us that Hegel's interventions are also socio-political as well as philosophical. He is 'speaking' to and for a particular political class, the sons of which would grow up to be leaders.

⁹⁰ Hegel sees the child less as an individual being than as part of the system of family, civil society and the state. For example 'Ethical Life: The Family' in *Philosophy of Right* 'one is in it [the family] not as an independent person but as a member' (160). Recent volumes on Hegel which have sought to think about his thought in the context of the multiplicity of modern political theories, such as *Hegel: New Directions*, ed. Katerina Deligiorgi. Chesham: Acumen, 2006. Slavoj Žižek's *Less than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*. Verso: London, 2012 also has a useful commentary on Hegel's notion of the family in *Philosophy of Right*, pp 440f.

supplement is here both humanity's good fortune and the origin of its perversion' (147). Childhood is the original supplement, and thus a paradox, the logic of supplementarity proving once and for all there is no origin. The originary state of human being, childhood, marked by its need for supplementation proves the lack of an origin: the supplement is required in endless deferral from no fixed point. Hence what Derrida writes about education, which demonstrates clearly the paradoxical nature of the supplement, but also by extension childhood. What exactly is being asked here, when Derrida asks, 'how is a child possible in general?' In any case, Derrida doesn't answer his own question, which suggests there is not a straight answer but only an oblique one. For by giving us the child in its weakness, helplessness and dependence, Nature *requires* supplementation which adults are duty bound to oblige. As Derrida states, 'Yet all education, the keystone of Rousseauist thought, will be described or presented as a system of substitution [*suppléance*] destined to reconstitute Nature's edifice in the most natural way possible' (145). The logic of the supplement replaces nature with culture, exposing the cultural origin of what we so often take to be nature. But in the case of the child, Derrida is pointing out the relationship between interior and exterior: 'the supplement is *exterior*; outside of the positivity to which it is super-added, alien to that which, in order to be replaced by it, must be other than it.' (145)

What is both more interior and exterior than the child within the body of the mother? Unborn, the child is contained within the mother (her exclusion a whole other story) but, once born, it 'constitutes a security risk for the house of philosophy... [It] crawls in setting off a lot of noise' says Avital Ronell (Davis 102). It is something that shouldn't be there, an interloper disturbing the silent peace of this 'house', clearly a kind of library or church which cannot entertain the messiness of

the child. The child's sheer inability to sit still, its pure energy marks it out as *not belonging*: subjected to an 'exile' in Lesnik-Oberstein and Thomson's words. They take up this logic of the child in their 2002 article, "What is Queer Theory doing with the Child?" describing it as a 'theoretical exile':

On the one hand...[the child] may be seen as... wandering into text from without, and remaining somehow outside text and beyond interpretation, and thus simply true. On the other hand, and in the same moment, it is read as the thing that is most inappropriate, that ought not to be there, that is exposed or exploited in text where it ought to be shielded, or even just that it is irrelevant. The child has thus a very strange identity, one that is not at one with itself, even in the act of figuring the very thing that is at one with itself. (35)

Lesnik-Oberstein and Thomson formulate the problem succinctly: the child simply *is*, and what it consists of is self-evident. The child exists on the level of the real/Real and is thus not open to reading. Just being, it doesn't require exegesis. But it is also pathos-inducing, and consists of an appeal to the 'tenderness' we encountered in Hegel earlier. Tugging on the heart strings, the child cannot fail to have a positive effect on the adult, bringing all the human instincts to the fore. Unhelpful cultural narratives of childhood stymie attempts to think about childhood in a measured way:⁹¹ not only this, but the child's presence within the text threatens to derail meaning. Lesnik-Oberstein and Thomson continue:

[It] is the carriers of meanings and ideologies wherever it is encountered. Sometimes these are deployed purposefully, but more often without a clear recognition that the dynamics of the narratives within which the child finds itself may be powerfully directed, redirected, diverted, accelerated or dragged to virtual standstill by its presence. (36)

In other words, there are powerful interests at work within texts to keep the child in its proper place, but wherever it goes it disrupts, by moving when it should be

⁹¹ See also Stephen Thomson's "Derrida and the Child: Ethics, Pathos, Property, Risk." *Oxford Literary Review* 25 (2003): 337-359. The child requires our protection, and it is in the name of protection that 'grown up' discourse about the child is curtailed. See also James Kincaid. *Child Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture*. London: Routledge, 1992, which caused a furore on its publication. Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley's (eds.) *Curiouser: on the queerness of children* (Minneapolis and London 2004) details the controversy (xxxiii).

standing still, or standing still when it should be moving. The child is where it should not be, and is not where it should be.

The sequestered child (i): Mantel's "Clinical Waste"

It is not only within her fiction that Mantel addresses the problem of the child. Her contribution "Clinical Waste" to the volume *Inconceivable Conceptions*, for example, describes her experience of undergoing a hysterectomy at the age of 27. This operation, which she calls an "evisceration", provokes a desire to have a child, ambivalence, and anger at having her choice over-ridden. The feelings that she describes are complicated by the birth of her sister-in-law's fourth child. They were 'unexpected to me, and contained every sin: envy, pride, and a sullen babyish anger at being outdone'; she describes her behaviour as a 'dictator', a 'Tamburlaine the Great...born to lay waste' ("Clinical" 19). In this context, Mantel describes her child self thus:

I did not grow up assuming I should have a child of my own. I hardly assumed my own survival and was barely four years old when I first thought of the merits of suicide. The dead and embalmed babe that was me is, we must assume, strapped to the back of Tamburlaine's chariot; a young child in a carapace of linen, lashed together to preserve its shape. (19)

The use of the metaphor of embalming shows the child frozen in time, a physical representation of the psychic. This child is not within Mantel herself but outside, illustrating the notion of the child as an accompaniment through life, 'queering' time, making it strange. The 'dead and embalmed babe' may be lifeless in its 'carapace of linen' but its presence is felt, and carried on the back of the adult dictator. The doubling that the child is subject to (of) occurs here, as the dead infant makes its presence felt as 'potential' in Mantel's word. She writes, '...you are always thinking what you would have done. That's your condition. Your whole life exists in the realm

of potential' (20). The frozen and dead child, 'embalmed', is similar to Hegel's child of pure potential. The child thus becomes a mythical being; frozen in time while also representing unlimited potential for growth.

The sequestered child (ii): Wordsworth and innocence

Where do we get the idea of childhood as a time of innocence? How does Mantel's writing of the child differ from Romantic myths of childhood which are still pervasive? These myths, which collude to represent childhood as innocent and unknowing, also suggest the child is contaminated by adult contact. For example, Diana Gittins identifies in Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey': '[T]he template for "the child" and childhood innocence in the 19th and 20th centuries: other, idyllic, prelapsarian, something that we once were, or owned, and which is now forever lost' (Gittins 164). Gittins' *The Child in Question* (1998) investigates the idea of the child from a socio-cultural standpoint. Her analysis is limited in this respect, but illustrates a key point; that our understanding of children is based largely on the preoccupations of the adult world, and that innocence (and childhood as a special age bracketed off from the rest of life) is connected with Romantic ideals, and is largely a concoction of the last 200 years. As she puts it, 'it needs to be considered therefore whether in fact children's innocence is, in a real sense, largely created, maintained and defined by adults for their own reasons' (151).⁹²

If we consider the example of Wordsworth's poetry, it is possible to trace how the child is represented, and how that representation contributes to ideas about the child. In "Time and History in Wordsworth" (1987), Paul de Man investigates the

⁹² See James Kincaid *Erotic Innocence: The Culture of Child Molesting*. Durham NC: Duke UP, 1998, for a discussion of how innocence is constructed and maintained in modern culture.

recurrence of the verb ‘to hang’ in the section of the *Prelude*⁹³ known as “The Winander Boy” (book 5 p.190 line 389f).⁹⁴ He points to the significance of the verb which connects the two parts of the passage, which seem at first to be unconnected. De Man analyses the precariousness introduced by Wordsworth in the lines prior to and culminating in line 412: ‘uncertain heaven’, concluding that this precariousness is linked to a ‘central Wordsworthian experience’ (de Man “Time” 7) by the poet’s use of the verb ‘hung’ in line 406 (1805 *Prelude* 192). This experience is the realisation that we are not anchored any longer on the earth: ‘The experience hits as a sudden feeling of dizziness, a falling or a threat of falling, a *vertige* of which there are many examples in Wordsworth’ (de Man “Time” 7). He therefore links the verb ‘hung’ to its corollaries; suspension, suspense, vertiginous ‘falling or a threat of falling’ (7), and how this describes the subject in his/her relation to nature. This is the central preoccupation of the poet and the scholars who come after him. Yet, it is vital to interrogate further the verb form ‘hung’ for clues it can offer about the child, and thus to illustrate a further point about Wordsworthian poetry and its connection to the construction of the figurality of the child. The words ‘hung’ and ‘hangs’ are used to connect the two rather ‘abrupt’ (de Man 5) sections of the poem. The placement of the ‘Winander Boy’ section is interesting, also; occurring directly after the passage in which Wordsworth extols the virtues of childhood, bemoaning the evils of education. De Man’s criticism rightly places Wordsworth’s usage of the verb ‘to hang’ into the discourse of the subject in nature, and the nature of the subject, while glossing over the important fact that the subject as it appears in the poem is a *child*. However, de Man is vigilant towards the strangeness enacted by the child upon the time of the

⁹³ de Man refers to the 1805 version of the text.

⁹⁴ I discuss Derrida’s use of the verb forms *pendu* and *suspendu* in the following chapter.

adult. De Man comments that the poem was originally written in the first person, as a meditation upon the poet's own childhood and death. Changing it into the third person retains the adult contemplating his own death (the future), but this future is represented in the past, i.e. the past in the character of the boy. Thus de Man comes at the adult/child relation from the point of view of the adult poet representing some deeper truth through his portrayal of the boy child. Consequently, the child does not figure much in de Man's analysis. Despite his alertness to the child, its complex temporal frame is contained by his analysis:

It would be banal and inadequate to say that Wordsworth is praising and mourning, in the poem, his own youth, the boy he used to be. The movement is more radical, more complex. The structure of the poem, although it seems retrospective, is in fact, proleptic (de Man "Time" 9).

The prolepsis exists, according to De Man, because the poet is unable to figure his own death, without attributing it to an 'other' in the past. The inability to apprehend the frightening possibility of finitude in relation to one's own subjectivity thus causes a narrative throwback into the past. However, the significance of the child's death, when presumably it is the death of himself as an adult that the poet finds it difficult to represent, taps into the idea of the child discussed previously. At once lifeless, but full of potential, the child's suspension suggests the impossibility of ever getting over or past childhood.

What is the significance of the verb 'to hang' in relation to the child? To investigate this, it is important to note the placement of the section Winander Boy in the structure of the *Prelude*. The Winander boy, wedded as he is to nature, is connected eternally with one place, one time. Like the churchyard that hangs on the side of the hill (*The Prelude* 192 line 417), the boy is suspended, frozen in time at not quite ten years old (192 line 415). This hang is not the precursor to a fall, as de Man would argue, but a suspension that exists in another time and place entirely. This

suspensive ‘precariousness’ (to use de Man’s word) doesn’t presage anything, drop or fall, it just is, and as such has nowhere to go. Suspension differs from stasis, as in Mantel’s ‘dead and embalmed’ child earlier: the child is suspended in the body of the adult, which is another way of saying that childhood hangs around.

There are further associations in Book Seven with the child suspended in time. The poet recalls seeing a child while in London, in a theatre. This child is ‘beautiful/ As ever sat upon a mother’s knee;’ (270 line 369-70), the poet contrasting his beauty with the theatre’s ‘dissolute men’ and ‘shameless women’ (270 lines 386-7). The boy’s strangeness in his surroundings is further emphasised by line 377 ‘A sort of alien scattered from the clouds’ (270). Wordsworth then cuts back in time to the description of the ‘nameless babe’ (272 line 410), Mary’s child, who ‘sleeps/ Beside the mountain-chapel undisturbed’ (272 lines 410-11), performing some interesting temporal manoeuvres as he does so. Of course, the unnamed baby, asleep (suspended?) beside the mountain chapel, reminds us of the Winander Boy in Book Five, whose final resting place ‘hangs/Upon a slope above the village school’ (192 lines 417-18). Also sleeping, the Winander boy’s grave marks a spot of contemplation for the poet, a space of contemplation comparable to the space taken up by the memory of the ‘lovely boy’ of Book 7 (272 line 395). Wordsworth writes of the memory of the boy appearing as if embalmed by nature, making explicit connection between the child’s naive world and the stresses and strains of the adult world. Wordsworth addresses Mary directly with the words: ‘But he perhaps,/ Mary, may now have lived till he could look/With envy on thy nameless babe that sleeps...’ (272 lines 408-10), suggesting that perhaps it is better for children to die as infants. Children who grow up and live through pain, suffering the ignominy of adult life and its depredations, are better off frozen in time.

Metaphors of childhood

So far we have seen a variety of metaphors used in relation to the child: embalming and hanging to name but two. Childhood ‘hangs’ around. I wish to consider the work of Andre Green, from *Diachrony in Psychoanalysis* (2003), “The Model Child” and “Dead Time.” In “The Model Child,” Green asserts that childhood is never over; ‘the claim that childhood is a thing of the past is a myth’ (Green 137). This is what psychoanalysis has taught us, and to a certain extent, Wordsworth teaches us this too. At first, Green would seem to be arguing against the thesis of childhood haunting the adult. He writes that ‘fixations’ and ‘regressions’ are a ‘rejection’ of childhood; in other words, that they signal the inability to process childhood, to bring it back into oneself and understand that it is yours. As Green writes, to be cured is ‘to make it one’s own by internalising it’ (137). The child needs to return to be represented in one’s own psyche, which as Green alludes to by invoking *nachträglichkeit*, clearly shows that the bringing back of childhood constitutes a temporal movement. Yet crucially the inner child ‘speaks’; ‘as a constitutive mode of representation’ (137), rather than any attempt to recapture or re-experience childhood as it actually *was*. This is a clear example of a concept working on different levels at once. For as Green asserts, the banal truth of the child is that it never exists as pure child, it always has an adult setting the bounds of its existence. To define childhood, to seek what it is through observing it, risks behaviourism; to ascribe to it desires, sadisms, hatreds, risks losing the particularity of the individual psyche (and this is what Green is concerned with, from a clinical perspective). If we attempt to define the child, we risk the ‘illusion’ that the child belongs to simpler categories than the adult. Moreover, to reduce the child to elements that are structurally simpler than the adult suggests that a

‘temporal bridge’ (127) can be built between them. The child’s ‘intelligibility’ (128) is *always* the product of adult thought.

What is at stake here for Green is the legibility of the child’s experience in the adult. His move to childhood as representation is therefore an attempt to clarify the nature of psychic experience as it relates to memory and perception, but also to restore the meaning of psychic reality. For Green, in other words, the child only *exists* as psychic reality. This, for Green, allows the analyst (and by extension the writer) to free the child from the responsibility for fiction: he does not have to ‘live out the fiction which is in us’ (139). With the onus placed back onto psychic reality, childhood can be seen for what it is: a representation.

Wordsworth's idealised child

In terms of the Romantic child, this representation is an idealisation. Judith Plotz, in *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood* asserts that the child so cherished and favoured by the Romantic writers, particularly Wordsworth, is beyond the social.⁹⁵ By wedding the child to nature, that child becomes 'timeless' and 'an emblem of fixity' (Platz 24). On page 71 she presents a detailed analysis of the 'complex imagery' of lines 405-13 of Book Seven of *The Prelude*, showing how the child and nature are interlocking images, leaving the child in question as 'the most elaborate and exemplary instance of childhood fixity' (Platz 71). This fixed status accorded to childhood is damaging to real children, allowing as it does the promulgation of a certain type of idealised childhood. By extension, it is thus possible to ignore the plights of real children who through no fault of their own are no longer innocent; they are not 'really' children, the too soon worldly-wise (Platz 31). The male Romantic writer voraciously appropriates childhood for his own purposes, creating of it a 'vocation': childhood being, as in Platz's discussion of Elizabeth Bowen's "The Easter Egg Party", 'a sugary confection contrived by regressive adults for their own comfort' (Platz 43). And yet, Wordsworth's sense of the *memory* of the boy as embalmed suggests an association between the comprehension of time and metaphors of suspension. The connections to be drawn between the embalming in memory as a freezing in time, and the child as the point of this freezing, or suspension, opens up more possible readings than can be encompassed under Platz's argument. The poet's understanding of the suspended child as a means of experiencing childhood suggests

⁹⁵ In Peter Coveney's *The Image of Childhood*, revised ed. London: Penguin, 1967, he argues that the child figure's ascendance springs from twin currents. On one hand the artist's concern with his own development, and social movements of capital. Thus 'in a world given increasingly to utilitarian values and the Machine, the child could become the symbol of Imagination and Sensibility, a symbol of Nature set against the forces abroad in society actively denaturing humanity' (31). For a different take on Romanticism and childhood, see Ann Wierda Rowland's *Romanticism and Childhood: The Infantilization of British Literary Culture*. Cambridge UP, 2012.

his privileged status as ‘the father of the child who is father of the man’ (Plotz 45). For Plotz, ‘embalmed by nature’ is symptomatic of the ‘sequestered’ child, and the dead child buried in the churchyard that hung on the hillside.

‘Brought up by hand’ (i): Pip

Hanging features in *Great Expectations*: the story of Pip, brought up by his sister Mrs Joe Gargery in the shadow of both churchyard and hangman’s gibbet. We first meet Pip at the graveyard where his parents and siblings are buried, deciphering them by reading the names on the gravestone. Pip’s situation is a model of childish helplessness: he is at the mercy of his sister, who has ‘brought him up by hand’,⁹⁶ his only comfort being the gentle Joe Gargery.⁹⁷ The bringing up by hand of this Pip brings to mind the Hegelian stance: hard work and pedagogical adherence will ensure his healthy development. But what of the ‘hand’ that brings him up? Reinhard Kuhn argues that *Great Expectations* is a novel in which ‘the physical mistreatment of children is almost totally absent’ (Kuhn 71). Pip’s acquaintance with ‘Tickler’ would suggest otherwise, but perhaps Kuhn has a point: violence takes many forms; speaking for, belittling, ignoring, all of which do harm. Consider Mrs Joe’s impatient imprecations to Pip when he asks too many questions: ‘People are put in the Hulks because they murder, and because they rob, and forge, and do all sorts of bad; and they always begin by asking questions!’ (*Great Expectations* 16). The proto-criminal Pip must be brought up (and thus kept down) by this hand which keeps a tight grip on him. The ‘connubial missile’ (11), Pip is thrown and pushed about, from hand to

⁹⁶ Jerome Hamilton Buckley reads the hands in *Great Expectations* somewhat differently, connecting Pip being brought up ‘by hand’ with the various hand motifs that appear in the novel. Reprinted in Laura Peters ed. *Dickens and Childhood*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2012.

⁹⁷ As Anny Sadrin notes, ‘only solaced by Joe’s spoonfuls of gravy and inefficient outpourings of love.’ *Parentage and Inheritance in the Novels of Charles Dickens*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994 (105)

hand, a fate his brothers have escaped, ‘on their backs with their hands in their trousers-pockets’ (5). In fact, ‘bringing up by hand’ stands in for the whole symbolic world of the child’s frustrations, fantasises and struggles. When the convict Magwitch has extracted promises of help from Pip and leaves him in the churchyard, Pip has a fright. In the marsh mist, he can just make out the shape of the gibbet on the horizon,

...with some chains hanging to it which had once held a pirate. The man was limping on towards this latter, as if he were the pirate come to life, and come down, and going back to hook himself up again. It gave me a terrible turn when I thought so...
(9)

Pip perceives the man as the pirate’s reanimated corpse, thus scaring himself even more. There are subtle connections between the gibbet and being brought up by hand for Pip. As we have already seen, the significance of hanging within Romantic representations of childhood suggest another reading. The hand on Pip’s neck is figured through his fright at the gibbet, a signifier of parental authority.

‘Brought up by hand’ (ii): Thomas Cromwell

Like Pip, Thomas Cromwell is brought up by hand: *Wolf Hall* also poses questions about parental violence. This time, however, instead of being a ‘small bundle of shivers’, the blacksmith’s boy is laid ‘full-length on the cobbles’ in expectation of impending death. The novel begins with Mantel’s teenaged Cromwell abased in the gutter. Reading this first page is a powerfully unsettling experience:

‘So now get up.’
Felled, dazed, silent, he has fallen; knocked full length on the cobbles of the yard. His head turns sideways; his eyes are turned towards the gate, as if someone might arrive to help him out. One blow, properly placed, could kill him now. Blood from the gash on his head — which was his father’s first effort — is trickling across his face. Add to this, his left eye is blinded; but if he squints sideways, with his right eye he can see that the stitching of his father’s boot is unravelling. The twine has sprung clear of the leather, and a hard knot in it has caught his eyebrow and opened another cut.
‘So now get up!’ Walter is roaring down at him, working out where to kick him next. He lifts his head an inch or two, and moves forward, on his belly, trying to

do it without exposing his hands, on which Walter enjoys stamping. ‘What are you, an eel?’ his parent asks. He trots backwards, gathers pace, and aims another kick.

It knocks the last breath out of him; he thinks it may be his last. His forehead returns to the ground; he lies waiting, for Walter to jump on him. The dog, Bella, is barking, shut away in an outhouse. I’ll miss my dog, he thinks. The yard smells of beer and blood. Someone is shouting, down on the riverbank. Nothing hurts, or perhaps it’s that everything hurts, because there is no separate pain that he can pick out. But the cold strikes him, just in one place: just through his cheekbone as it rests on the cobbles. (*Wolf Hall* 3-4)

The traumatising actions of the all-powerful adult on the helpless child create a figure of childhood familiar in literature. Mantel’s truth to the life of the child makes a claim on the reader; a detached claim, but a claim nonetheless: Cromwell is ‘he’, the third person imposing a measure of distance, yet we are invited to shift our vision. Oriented at the beginning by the position of the fallen boy, we must turn our heads sideways along with him, cheekbone resting on the cobbles. When he manoeuvres his body, forehead to the ground, we move with him. Mantel is within the body of Cromwell: as she has said in various contexts, ‘the camera is behind his eyes’ (“The Lives of Others”; “How I came to write *Wolf Hall*”), and through this she is able to manipulate the perspective of the reader. Moreover, the present tense immerses the reader within Cromwell’s experience: it is happening now, we are with him. The father’s outburst, “what are you, an eel?” (*WH* 3) reminds us of the slipperiness of the child and its resistance to being pinned down. Exemplifying the struggle for dominance, father and son battling it out; the scene is set for the *return* of this brutal act, which reverberates through the text.

Why does Mantel begin Thomas Cromwell’s life here? Mantel says (Appendix i 241) that there is a top layer within her narrative that is what it is, it’s not all allegory: her creation of Cromwell’s character adds credence to the desire to get her hands dirty in the archive, with the grubby specificities of facts and neat figures. She has spoken, however, about her use of imagination in order to make the narrative more real, the details of life that bring Cromwell to life. Reviews of the text have

focused on its historicity; what interests me here is not the question of Cromwell's traumatic childhood as a historical fact, but the uses to which Mantel puts the trope of traumatic experience. This trope feeds into the discourse of lowly man done good, of course: from Putney blacksmith's boy to the Earl of Essex in a lifetime. There is something about how Mantel employs literary generalities into the service of Cromwell's specificity, contained within the symbol of the traumatised child.

The grip

How can we explore further this traumatised child, put a theoretical delineation onto the child's experience of misery, abjection, and fear? The deeply unequal relationship, even slavery, between the helpless child and its parent(s) is a universal experience. Jean-François Lyotard calls it *mainmise*, which has been translated as 'the grip'.⁹⁸ He begins by echoing what we have found out so far about the figure of the traumatised child, so deeply known yet utterly specific in its expression:

I would like simply to make a few observations. It will be difficult here, as it would be in any case, to designate the place from which these observations come. That place is not, I presume, the place of supposed knowledge, for I know nothing of what I have to say. Nor is it that place of the love of wisdom that the Greeks instilled in us as philosophy, for I have only ever liked that which does not avail itself of either knowledge or wisdom, as do so many things. Perhaps, then, it is not even a place; in any case, it is no more a localisable place more than it is a Utopia, for I would be more inclined to grant it the privilege of the real. Let's leave its name or label pending. ('*Mainmise*' *Philosophy Today* 419)

Lyotard admits: 'I know nothing of what I have to say' and neither do we. Not that there is nothing to know or find out; the act of discovery takes us to an

⁹⁸ See for example the version of this essay reprinted in *Political Writings* London: UCL Press, 1993. The dictionary definition of 'mainmise', from the translator's note to the *Philosophy Today* version of Lyotard's article, is '1. [in feudal jurisprudence] The action of taking hold of, of seizing. Such a seizure occurred in the case of infidelity or the paying of insufficient homage. 2. Figuratively, to exercise a seizure, to take hold of somebody or to strike him (archaic). 3. The freeing of serfs by their lords.' (419) Also translated as 'stranglehold', the action of having something or someone by the neck expresses the strength of the gesture in much more violent terms: and brings to mind also the 'strangling hand' written about by Mantel in *Giving up the Ghost* (106). Ruth Scurr's *TLS* review of the memoir also borrows this phrase. See Scurr, Ruth. "The Strangling Hand." *TLS*. 2nd May 2003. <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/giving-up-ghost-hilary-mantel/>. Accessed 1st March 2018.

unrecognisable place that philosophy cannot reach. Lyotard intimates through his invocation of the ‘real’ that psychoanalysis can provide the answers: for our inquiry it is literature which grants and is granted ‘the privilege of the real’. Beginning from this place that is no-place, Lyotard gropes his way through, explicating the onus on (wo)man to ‘become our own master and possessor’, which he sees as contradictory; ‘master and possessor of what, if we are to be fully emancipated?’ (419). He continues:

Does not something of infancy remain beyond infancy? Something unappropriated even when appropriation has accomplished its gesture, and we find ourselves exclusive owners? (419)

Childhood never goes away, in other words, and we are subject to it even as adults, as those who have reached an arbitrary age of majority.⁹⁹ Growing up is an act of appropriation, a compulsively repetitive and ultimately unsuccessful act. The desire to drag oneself free and claim autonomy goes unfulfilled, as Lyotard observes:

Dependency is inadequate to designate this condition [infancy]; it fails to reach the one who is seized and held by the hand of the other. Now we know that adults, or those claiming to be adults, have believed that they could define the child in these terms: one who is held by the hand. In contrast to this, I would like to think about the following reversal: held in the grip of others during our childhood, infancy continues to exert its *mancipium* even when we imagine ourselves to be emancipated, or independent (419).

The powerful image of the child as ‘one who is held by the hand’ takes us right back to Thomas Cromwell, at the beginning of *Wolf Hall*, cowering underneath the blows from his parent. The younger Cromwell’s action of keeping his hands hidden from

⁹⁹ The issue of majority as arbitrary is echoed in Avital Ronell’s article on Lyotard, “On the Unrelenting Creepiness of Childhood: Lyotard, kid-tested.” Defined under law as a being who has ‘not reached a certain legislated majority’ (101), the child brings into sharp relief both the foundations of the law, typified by the endless question ‘why?’, and the ethical call always placed by the birth of a being dependent on the other for its very survival. Note the connection between the undercurrent of arbitrariness, as alluded to in Ronell’s ‘certain’, and Hélène Cixous’ discussion of the law in *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*. New York and Chichester: Columbia UP, 1993: ‘So why are these birds *imund* [unclean]?: “Because.” As you know, this is the secret of the law: “because.” This is the law’s logic. It is this terrible “because,” this senseless fatal “because” that has decided people’s fate, even in the extremity of the concentration camps....It is this *because* that rules our lives. It pervades everything’ (117, emphasis in original). When the doctor forbids Mantel to write, he fails to give her a reason. She writes: ‘Because—’ he added; and broke off. He was not going to impart to me what came after ‘because’. (GUG 180)

his father, '[he] moves forward, on his belly, trying to do it without exposing his hands' (WH 3) disrupts the seizure of the father, whose 'holding' consists of kicks and blows. We think also of that other traumatised child, Dickens' Pip, 'brought up by hand'. The figure of the hand suggests a holding or binding. The double meaning of not showing one's hand, not revealing one's intentions also sets the reader up for Cromwell's later machinations, permeated as the narrative is with imagery of card tricks, magic tricks and 'sleight of hand'.

Nachträglichkeit and Wolf Hall

How might we read Mantel's working over of Cromwell's memory, her structuring of this beating which reverberates throughout the novel? We have already seen how she creates a complex idea of childhood and memory, invoking the child's wound through Cromwell's imagined childhood experience of being beaten by his father. By employing Freud's notion of *Nachträglichkeit* in exploring Mantel's recognition of the (re)construction of childhood, I will show the implications this has for provisionality. Freud's discussion of Emma in "Project for a Scientific Psychology" (1895) outlines how the origin of the patient's problem, not being able to go into a shop alone, is uncertain. Freud questions his patient to uncover her memories, and she relates to him events that have happened to her. He then investigates further into her memory to find the traumatic event, in this case assault by a shopkeeper at the age of eight (353). In this way trauma is recovered or uncovered and one moves backwards in time to retrieve it:

Here we have the case of a memory arousing an effect which it did not arouse as an experience, because in the meantime the change [brought about] in puberty had made possible a different understanding of what was remembered....Now this case is

typical of repression in hysteria. We invariably find that a memory is repressed which has only become a trauma by *deferred action* [emphasis added 356].

The analysis thus uncovers an intact memory masking a traumatic event, and becomes analogous to an archaeological dig. However, it is clear that Freud's original German *Nachträglichkeit* also has the sense of an action of the present which transforms the past, containing *nachträglich*, postscript or supplement: *nachträglich* also has the sense of belatedly or posthumously. The act of analysis rewrites the past, in light of later events.¹⁰⁰ Given the linguistic complexity of the term, the translation of *Nachträglichkeit* into the French 'après coup' ('afterwardsness') subsequently taken up by Jean Laplanche, describes more accurately its sense of psychic time moving in two directions at once.¹⁰¹ 'Afterwardsness' succinctly delineates what Freud already understands in 'The Psychotherapy of Hysteria', in which he suggests the psychic material is laid down like an archive, in layers, using the figure of a chess game to illustrate. The concentric layers are sedimented, laid down sequentially, creating a storage facility in which artefacts are stored according to their relative times. The further back you go, the deeper you get. The radial paths, the path of the knight in a chess game, however, can move in any direction and break through the sedimented layers and represent the unconscious processes of memory flashes, triggers and powerful recollections that are unknown even to the self (289-90).¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ See for example Laplanche and Pontalis 111-2. Also House and Slotnik, who argue that the term has always suggested a 'bidirectional' movement of time. House, Jonathon, and Julie Slotnik. "Après-Coup in French Psychoanalysis: The Long Afterlife of *Nachträglichkeit*: The first hundred years 1893-1993". *Psychoanalytic Review*. 102(5). October 2015: 692-708.

¹⁰¹ Although in 'Time and the Other' he suggests that the 'proper direction of time's arrow' is not compromised by *après-coup*, as the effect only occurs after maturation (235-6); he uses a complicated dialectic schema to show the child's relation to time, which for Laplanche is also the child's relation to seduction. See *Essays on Otherness* 1999. House and Slotnik argue that Lacan's emphasis on retroactivity reverses time in a 'retrospective modification' (685-6).

¹⁰² Andre Green summarises it thus: 'he [Freud] sees the mind, psychic activity, as made of two aspects. The first one is constituted of fine concentric layers of memory. Freud makes the comparison with the archives of a great administration or a library if you want. And here, since the beginning, there are radial side paths, which means they go through the layers and link elements belonging to the different layers. And it is at this occasion that he gives the comparison with the progress of the knight on the chess-board, which allows the knight to jump over pieces of its own camp' (1029). "Freud's concept of temporality: Differences with current ideas." *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*. 89. (2008): 1029-1039.

If childhood is accessed via its reconstruction, then our representations of the child are constructions. These provisional constructions demonstrate the idea of ‘afterwardsness’ in Mantel, and how she uses its logic to imaginatively construct Thomas Cromwell’s inner world. Mantel employs the ‘afterwardsness’ of the psychic event in *Wolf Hall*, positioning the reader so that they are in Cromwell’s head, thinking and feeling as he does. The beating that Cromwell receives from his father instantiates the reader’s understanding of his traumatic childhood, the wound of childhood’s *mainmise*. Mantel’s canny employment of Cromwell’s psychic traces is an intricately woven and complex organisation which makes Cromwell’s ‘life’ seem real to us. The temporal development of Cromwell acts in both directions identified earlier: we read Cromwell forward and backwards at once. For example, when Cromwell’s sister and brother in law are discussing what to do with him after the beating he receives from his father, it is decided that Thomas will go away, helped along with money from Morgan Williams, to which Cromwell promises to repay the debt, ‘I’ll pay you back,’ he says. ‘I might go and be a soldier. I could send you a fraction of my pay and I might get loot’ (*WH* 10). The reader understands that Cromwell will be rich, so we read this backwards, but we also read this forwards in the hopefulness of the young Cromwell, who changes as the narrative develops.

We already have the image, presented so forcefully by Mantel, of the tyranny of ‘seizure’ which keeps the minor under the parental cosh. The child looking forwards to its life, the excitement of unbounded potential and possibility. But what of time moving the other way? There is also the consideration of the tyranny that childhood ‘continues to exert’ over the ‘adult’,¹⁰³ long into that adult’s majority. One

¹⁰³ Implicit in my putting into quotes of the word adult, is a question of the extent to which we are ever ‘adults’ and not children anymore.

particular example illustrates the grip of childhood on Cromwell through the figure of the hand, raised against him. The cardinal is speaking to Thomas Boleyn, interrogating him while Cromwell sits in the corner. The cardinal's problem is Anne Boleyn, referred to as 'the lady' and 'daughter of the diplomat, Thomas Boleyn' (*WH* 66). She won't be told what to do: promised to the Butlers of Ireland, she has been courted by Harry Percy, the Earl of Northumberland's heir (67). The cardinal abuses Boleyn, putting him firmly in his place as an undistinguished nobleman: 'notwithstanding your remarkable good fortune in marrying a Howard, the Boleyns were in trade once, were they not?' (70) The cardinal does not know that Mary Boleyn, the elder of the two girls, is currently the King's mistress, and it is while Cromwell hesitates to give the cardinal this information, fearing it to be gossip, that an extraordinary event occurs.

Laughing, the cardinal pushes back his chair, and his shadow rises with him. Firelit, it leaps. His arm darts out, his reach is long, his hand is like the hand of God.

But when God closes his hand, his subject is across the room, back to the wall. The cardinal gives ground. His shadow wavers. It wavers and comes to rest. He is still. The wall records the movement of his breath. His head inclines. In the halo of light he seems to pause, to examine his handful of nothing. He splays his fingers, his giant firelit hand. He places it flat on his desk. It vanishes, melted into the cloth of damask. He sits down again. His head is bowed; his face, half-dark.

He Thomas, also Tomos, Tommaso and Thomaes Cromwell, withdraws his past selves into his present body and edges back to where he was before. His shadow slides against the wall, a visitor not sure of its welcome. Which of these Thomases saw the blow coming? There are moments when a memory moves right through you.

You shy, you duck, you run; or else the past takes your fist and actuates it, without the intervention of will. Suppose you have a knife in your fist? That's how murder happens.

He says something, the cardinal says something. They break off. Two sentences go nowhere. (71)

The sudden movement of the cardinal's shadow which 'darts out' causes Cromwell to take fright, ending up back to the opposite wall, beyond range of the cardinal's 'giant fire-lit' shadow-hand. This hand, so imbued with the threat of violence in that moment, is in fact a 'handful of nothing', and as the danger recedes for Cromwell he gathers himself back 'into his present body', takes back tentative control of his

person. For that moment, however, when the cardinal's hand sparks the threat of violence, who is he? Which of his selves 'saw the blow coming'? What is in control here is the past, the past which acts for you, 'without the intervention of will'. The great fire-lit hand leaping out at Cromwell reminds him of his father's hand, raised to slap him: both figure of memory and symbol of the *mainmise*.

The reader is left to fill in the blanks, striated through layers of memory, his father's beating, his actions in war, and the allusion to murder. But this incident is not just about the concealment of memories and their exposure: something happens in that moment which disrupts the self. The self is not at home in the moment; something else takes control when the 'hand of God' reaches out and Cromwell reacts. Just as the moment discombobulates the self, so time and even matter itself are disrupted. In the firelight the cardinal's hand 'melts into the cloth'; a trick of the light certainly, but also the actualisation of a psychic moment which has material effects. In the moments after, Cromwell draws his selves together: boundaries are redrawn, the past returns to its proper place. Stuttering, as evinced by the hesitation of the cardinal and the sentences that break off and 'go nowhere', time eventually begins to flow again. Mantel drives the point home five pages later: she describes Cromwell's memories of all these different selves as 'a series of warnings which have worked themselves into flesh... What went wrong was an accident of timing only' (*WH* 76). This 'accident of timing' is anything but: Cromwell's categorisation of the incident as accidental contradicts Mantel's own reflection on memory as 'warnings which have worked themselves into flesh'. The cardinal's hand is the hand of the father, which reaches out to Cromwell across time. Cromwell gets out from under his father's grip, the stranglehold of his father's authority, but his father's authority comes back; what Avital Ronell calls the 'hand of time... raised to slap the

pleasure out of the child.’ (Ronell 105)¹⁰⁴ We are the ‘wounded’, imprinted with the ‘untraceable fingerprints’ of the grip of childhood, ‘an age that is not marked by age — or rather, it does not age but recurs episodically, even historically.’ (104) As Mantel writes ‘*Wolf Hall* attempts to duplicate not the historian’s chronology but how the memory works: in leaps, loops, flashes’ (Mantel “How”).

A Change of Climate and the crypt

If *Wolf Hall* demonstrates the function of memory and the recurrence of childhood in ‘flashes’ (Mantel “How”), *A Change of Climate* (1994) offers the characters’ lived experience of childhood’s grip in its symbolic rendering of the lost child. The child in this novel is at once ‘frozen’ or suspended, and comes back; representing childhood’s ‘grip’ on the adolescent and the adult. This novel also suggests a reading of Nicolas

¹⁰⁴ See also Freud’s “A Child is being Beaten” and his insistence on analysing the earliest childhood of his patients. ‘The emphasis which is laid here upon the importance of the earliest experiences does not imply any underestimation of the influence of later ones. But the later impressions of life speak loudly enough through the mouth of the patient, while it is the physician who has to raise his voice on behalf of the child’ (183-4). The Father represents the Law, the Reality principle and prohibition against pleasure; but at the same time the act of disciplining the child has a relationship to infantile sexuality which cannot be easily explained away. It is Freud’s ideas about childhood sexuality which have sparked the most exciting interventions into queer theory’s resurgent interest in the child. See for example the Introduction to Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley’s volume of essays, *Curiouser: on the queerness of children*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2004, in which they take as given the notion that we are all sexual from birth. See also Kathryn Bond Stockton’s *The Queer Child*, which suggests interesting ways of thinking about the child(ren) in Freud’s writings. Perhaps the most famous and controversial, Lee Edelman’s *No Future* critiques the notion of an inner Child. He argues against the myriad uses this figure has been put to, not least the unthinkingly sentimental invocation of ‘children are our future’, reproductive futurism and the curtailment of civil rights for LGBTQ people. For a discussion of Edelman, see Mari Ruti “Why there is always a future in the future.” *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*. 13.1 (2008):113-126. Web. 27 Jun. 2013.

Abraham and Maria Torok's notion of the crypt,¹⁰⁵ in its exploration of secrets and their trans-generational expression.

A Change of Climate is a novel about the Eldreds, a family with four children. Ralph Eldred runs a charitable trust helping the poor and needy, who often stay in the family home, the Red House. With a prologue called '1970: Sad Cases, Good Souls', Mantel plunges the reader straight into the family's world, its moral system. This opening section demonstrates the peculiar singularity of family life for the Eldreds: '...this was how the world was divided, when Kit was growing up - into Good Souls and Sad Cases. There was no wickedness in it' (CC 3). Subsequently we learn about Ralph and Anna's past as missionaries in South Africa. During this time, Anna gives birth to twins, Katherine and Matthew. One night during a storm the babies are abducted. Katherine (Kit) is subsequently returned after being rescued from a ditch, but Matthew is never found. The implication is that the boy's body was used for witchcraft or medicine. Ralph and Anna eventually accept that they will never know what happened or find Matthew's body, and return to England. The existence of Matthew, the 'lost child' (CC 262), is kept from the remaining Eldred children, and the novel thus explores how the secret affects their lives as they reach the age of majority, and the sense they have of 'something missing'.¹⁰⁶

This 'something missing' is unclear: repression stalks the text.¹⁰⁷ The narrative time shifts complicate the characters' individual and familial relationships.

¹⁰⁵ Esther Rashkin's *Family Secrets and the Psychoanalysis of Narrative*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992 deals with the idea of the crypt in relation to narrative in more detail. See also Nicholas Royle's review of Rashkin's book, "This is not a book review". *Angelaki* 2:1 (1997): 31-35. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0969725970857/1914>. Accessed 8th December 2015. As Nicholas Royle suggests, in relation to *Wuthering Heights* in *Telepathy and Literature*: 'Telepathy is a crypt. And no doubt — given the extremely strange, scarcely imaginable relaying or network of "communications" necessary for its construction within the self, in the core of the Ego — it would be legitimate to describe the crypt, and especially the haunted crypt or "ghost", as telepathic' (34).

¹⁰⁶ See "Mind What Gap" Eileen Pollard's interview with Mantel.

¹⁰⁷ See Sigmund Freud "Repression" (1915)

The structure of the novel echoes this sedimentation and colludes in the secret's covering up. For example: shifting from 1970 then forward to the present, Ralph's sister visits a church, writing the names of her brother and his family in a book to be prayed for:

A notice promised ALL WHOSE NAMES ARE INSCRIBED IN THIS BOOK
WILL BE PRAYED FOR AT THE SHRINE.

...she wrote the names of her brother and his wife:

RALPH ELDRED
ANNA ELDRED

Beneath she wrote:

KATHERINE ELDRED

then hesitated, and skipped one line, before

JULIAN ELDRED
ROBERT ELDRED
REBECCA ELDRED

(26-7)

The missing child Matthew's name, is supposed to occupy the line after Katherine's (Kit). The lost child (though the first time reader does not yet know this significance) thus assumes a power in the narrative that structures the novel. The 'not'-writing of the child's name assumes its significance by absence.

Ralph's own childhood provides a subplot, illustrating the battle between himself and his father. Matthew Eldred comes from a line of printers and lay preachers. His social circle is described by Mantel thus:

Their homes, and the homes of their friends, were temples of right-thinking, of inky scholarship, sabbatarian dullness; their religion was active, proselytizing, strenuous and commonsensical. They saw no need to inquire into God's nature; they approached Him through early rising, Bible study and earnest, futile attempts at humility (CC 32)

Matthew Eldred's expectation for his son is service to God in the above mentioned capacity, but one day he finds a fossil by chance, the 'hundred and fifty million years old' *Gryphaea* (37) and subsequently becomes fascinated by geology and evolution. Ralph teaches himself how to think in geological time, to strip back the landscape to

before man has touched it, to see the ‘path of the glacier ...the desert beneath copse and stream’ (41). As his passion for the subject grows,

A frieze of evolution marched through Ralph’s head. Each form of life as its time and place: sea-snail and sea-lily, water-scorpion and lungfish, fern tree and coral. Shark and flesh-eating reptile; sea-urchin and brontosaurus; pterodactyl and magnolia tree; cuttle fish and oyster. Then the giant flightless bird, opossum in his tree, elephant in his swamp; it was as clear in his mind as it might be in a child’s picture book, or a poster on a nursery wall. The sabre-toothed cat, the little horse three feet tall; the Irish elk, the woolly mammoth; then man, stooped, hairy, furrow-browed. It is a success story. (CC 42-3)

Told to us from Ralph’s point of view, this subplot is a reminiscence, which has resonances throughout the text. One of these is the argument between Ralph and his family, when Ralph decides that he will not follow in his father’s footsteps. Matthew accuses Ralph of throwing off his religion, believing that to be a Darwinist means atheism. His parents ‘closed in on him...a pincer movement’ (CC 46) in which they exhort him to give up his plans. The final act, his ‘capitulation’ (52) occurs when they use his sister Emma against him: if he continues on this path, then she will not be allowed to fulfil her ambitions to be a doctor. Emma ‘did not know how he had been defeated’ (52). The language of war is no accident here: Mantel understands the attrition between parents and children, the generational struggles of blood, the ‘ancient argument’ that circles on:¹⁰⁸

These are the things sons say to fathers; these are the things fathers say to sons. The knowledge didn’t help him; nor did the knowledge that his father was behaving like a caricature of a Victorian patriarch. His family has always been cripplingly old fashioned; till now he had not realised the deformity’s extent. (CC 49)

Understanding his father’s intransigence in the face of perceived defiance, Ralph asks himself the question ‘Why didn’t he get some other, reasonable adult to weigh in on his behalf?’ (48). There is an echo of Thomas Cromwell’s impatience with his former

¹⁰⁸ Hélène Cixous in *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, refers to the “deadly war waged between children and parents, this war that turns in circles and began before us all...you want to kill me, says one, no, you’re the one who wants my death, says the other...Our murders are decided in an obscure and violent relation to *jouissance*, in jealousy, so dark, primitive, and remote we don’t even see it. There, in the shadows, a scandalous scene of deprivation is played out: the parent would like to starve the child or at least use hunger to keep hold of him or her. And all this is not without love, not without hate” (25)

self here, why doesn't he just get up? These questions both attest to the child's helplessness in the face of adult demands. The resistance to the child's desire to grow up demonstrated by the parents' cold treatment, their disapproval and derision of the child's dreams. Ralph's encounters with his father leave him bruised, battered and convinced that his father desires to be God: 'If Man was diminished, then Matthew Eldred was diminished: a lord of the universe was precisely what he wished to be' (49).

Later, on her deathbed, Ralph's mother Dorcas speaks candidly of his father for the first time:

...[S]ix months after I was married I gave up fearing God and started fearing your father. I mean that, you know. I don't mean it as a blasphemy. He always seemed to me like a person from another age. Abraham. A patriarch. (261)

Ralph is forced to tell his sister the true course of those events, '...this is such old ground, I didn't think I'd ever have to go over it' (261). Ralph's father is a modern Abraham. In sacrificing his own ambitions for his sister's,¹⁰⁹ Ralph gives in to the *mainmise*, he capitulates; the deck was stacked against him from the start. The stranglehold of childhood has the main character, Ralph, in its grip; '...he had never freed himself from his parents' (CC 20). The novel plays out the doubleness of childhood's grip: at once the pull and seizure of parental expectation, at the same time the grip of early childhood's helplessness and loss. Mantel describes Ralph's unconscious powerful feelings about his father, his dreams showing clear signals of repression:

What he could not endure were the thoughts of his heart, and the frequent dreams he had, in which he murdered his father...By day he entertained, he thought, little animosity to Matthew...So these dreams, these inner revolts, bewildered him. He was forced to concede that large areas of his life were beyond his control. (53)

¹⁰⁹ Pollard "Mind What Gap" (9)

The murderous feelings are buried and thus it is possible to read Ralph as somehow stuck; and the resulting horrific event as the disinterment of his powerful murderous impulses. The naming of the son for his father cements this reversal of the proper order of things - the loss of his son. God has called upon Ralph for the sacrifice, ironically when he perceives himself to be doing good: ‘There is no comfort. I am the one who opened the door to them. They said they wanted shelter. I decided to do a good action, and by it my life has been split open and destroyed’ (CC 243).

This displaced sacrifice disrupts the temporal logic of progress. Instead of evolving and growing up, as the other children do, Matthew is frozen in time. His presence taints, on into the next generation. After Emma and Ralph have spoken about his ‘sacrifice’ for her, and she has forecast their mother’s time of death, Mantel’s interjection about Matthew consolidates this notion of Matthew as absent presence, lost yet lingering:

It is a pity she cannot, with similar accuracy, put a term to the after-life of the missing child. It would be possible, if one were harsh, to regard this lost child not as an innocent, but as a malign half-presence, a destroyer, a consumer of hope. Katherine grows up; they search her face for signs of what her brother would have been. As babies, they were not much alike. So no consolation there; but no further suffering, either. Except you cannot help but mark out the course of the shadow-life...he would be six years old, he would be seven years old, he would be seventeen. He has all we lack, he is everything we are not; we have our gross appetites, but he is the opposite of flesh. Somewhere in Africa the little heart rots, the bird-bones crumble or — alternatively — the traces dry in their jar; their child becomes a bush-ghost, powder on the wind (CC 262).

The frozen child Matthew, suspended in time, seeps into the next generation’s collective psyche, despite the best efforts of the parents. They try to keep the repressed and dangerous knowledge of the child Matthew’s murder from Kit, as Ralph explains in a letter to his uncle James, ‘She will never remember what has happened... as Kit grows up she must be protected from knowledge of this horrible thing. If she learns about it, it will contaminate her life’ (244). This contamination occurs anyway: Kit, for example, knows something is wrong but does not know, at

the same time. She talks to her younger brother Robin one night, describing her memories of Africa, how she remembers Julian with her. She is, of course, remembering Matthew, her twin: but the family have successfully shielded her consciousness from the knowledge of her twin, and she can only assign Julian, younger by a year or so, to the place of the absent boy. The lacuna in her conscious knowledge doesn't exist in her unconscious. She describes early body memories of heat, the nanny Felicia, and this other child. When Robin challenges her chronology, she says, 'Who then? Who do I remember?' (177) and there is a conversation punctuated by silence, and Robin's '...act, which said, I wish to distract myself from the thought in my head' (177).

In Abraham and Torok's notion of the crypt, from *The Shell and the Kernel* (1994), the introjected secret forms a part of the ego that is utterly shut off from consciousness, and although it speaks, can only speak as the other. Thus Kit's desire to go to Africa, and Julian's over-protectiveness of his sister Becky, his preoccupation with abduction and murder. The lost child Matthew exists as a contamination, passed down through generations.

The lost child returns

We have seen already how the secret lost child Matthew infects the family. Although the child is irrevocably lost, there is a displacement from one lost child figure to another. The child returns, although it is not the same child, and is thus recuperated into its 'proper' place, through the return of the troubled Melanie. She makes her way back to the Red House after absconding from hospital. Ralph and Anna notice her first, as they stand at the door of the house:

A creature moved into their view, at a distance. It came slowly over the rough ground, crawling. It was a human being: its face a mask of despair, its body half-clothed in a flapping gown, its hands and knees and feet bleeding; its strange head the colour of the sun. It progressed towards them; they saw the heaving ribs, the small transparent features, the dirt-ingrained skin...They left the Red House together, stumbling over the rough grass. As they approached the child, she stopped trying to crawl. She shrank into herself, her head sunk between her shoulder-blades like some dying animal. But then, as they reached out towards her, Melanie began to breathe... (CC 340)

In her interview “Mind what Gap?” Eileen Pollard and Mantel converse about *A*

Change of Climate:

EP: ...[S]he [Melanie] is *returning*...And then I had this horrifying shock, and it doesn't even make any sense, and it must've only been for a split second, that this figure that is crawling and running towards them...

HM: Was the baby.

EP: *Was the baby!* Yes!

HM: I think it is. Well, she's got this head like the sun, and she's not quite a human thing as she comes crawling towards them...it's their going out to her that makes her human, she's being taken into the house (Pollard 7).

The return of the child Matthew from Africa ‘doesn't even make any sense’ if read on a spatially and temporally ‘real’ level, but its symbolic return offers the Eldreds some respite. The act of going out to meet Melanie, ‘stumbling’ and ‘together’, is a symbolic act of reparation for the family.

The displacement of Matthew onto Melanie's return demonstrates the suspension of the lost baby, its doubling. The description of Melanie's return is interesting for the figures of movement that Mantel employs, and how these recur through the novel as markers of evolution and progress. Chambers defines progress as ‘a forward movement, an advance to something better or higher in development’. Evolution is referred to as progress, but a progress that is laid down for the organism before it starts. And so Ralph refers to himself as having ‘...evolved very nicely... along the only possible route’ (CC 336). When Ralph talks to Kit about the sad cases, he explains how he can predict their lives from what they came from, ‘I used to think, of course they have free will. But then after a few years I saw these patterns repeat

themselves, as if people were born into them' (266). Ralph's quarrel with his parents over his belief in evolution leads him to inter the fossils he has painstakingly collected into a box. The box of fossils gives Rebecca nightmares; told by Kat that they were 'primitive creatures that once had swum and crawled' she 'saw them swimming and crawling again, mud-sucking and breathing at her bedroom door' (41).¹¹⁰ The fossils in a box, buried in the family's loft, run parallel to the family's secret, which lays inside Sandra Glasse 'like a stone' (281). 'Fossilised' knowledge paralyses the family and stymies their attempts at communication. Melanie unlocks the conundrum, in a mirroring of the baby's imaginings, by 'crawling' back towards the house. The fossils, as geological and archaeological stasis, act as a metaphor for frozen knowledge, their presence a symbol for the lost, suspended child. The child disturbs the rules of generational progress and critical reading, by rupturing temporality, by refusing to stay in its place.

The child in *A Change of Climate* exposes a double movement: Kit grows up and they see the child that Matthew might have been. Not only this; Melanie's retrieval draws the connection across Mantel's texts. The symbolised lost child becomes not only a synthesis between Matthew and Melanie in *A Change of Climate* (1994), but also acts as a resurfacing of the psychologically lost Muriel, and her unnamed and unsexed baby in *Every Day is Mother's Day* (1985). The letter M in Mantel, Matthew and Muriel demonstrates the networks between the novels and how these webs of meaning, despite chronology, cross reference each other in unique Mantellian ways. Whereas in *A Change of Climate* Anna finds Kit in a ditch, returning with the child in her arms, Muriel and Evelyn in *Every Day is Mother's Day*

¹¹⁰ Consider also how Mantel describes her writing experience: 'I remember really struggling with it; it was like a wild animal that had to be civilised somehow... Writing that book stands out as one of the most difficult times of my writing life' (O'Reilly 8).

put Muriel's baby into a box and then into the canal. Anna is effectively reclaiming the baby back from the inexplicable forces of the universe, where the women in *Every Day is Mother's Day* are inviting the possibility that no baby will come back, no changeling. The social worker Isabel Field's reference to 'mischance' exposes this too, as the Axons' actions run counter to the Eldreds' desire to entirely expunge any malignity from their lives, demonstrated by Kit's perspective in the beginning of the novel. When Muriel is giving birth she climbs a 'glassy pyramid of pain', (*ED* 172) the reference to glass another connection between the child figure's loss and return in *A Change of Climate*, Anna's approach with Kit in her arms described 'like a woman breaking through sheets of glass, like a woman ploughing through mirrors' (*CC* 241). The violence of Anna's frantic return in the hazy African dawn, using the similes of mirrors and glass show the treachery of surfaces which can no longer be relied on. The splintering of these surfaces suggests the annihilation of reason; the utter incomprehensibility of the act shatters any attempt to process or think about the deed. A further layer of significance occurs in the naming of Ralph's mistress, Amy Glasse, whose relationship with Ralph acts as a means for him to heal; she offers him a mirror.

The child becomes even stranger in *Every Day is Mother's Day* (1985), the story of mother and daughter Evelyn and Muriel Axon who live a strange, sequestered existence in the suburb of a nondescript city. The story of their relationship is told through free indirect discourse, social worker's notes and official letters. The novel opens with authorial commentary; Mrs Axon's discovery of her 'daughter's condition', about which 'she was more surprised than sorry; which did not mean that she was not very sorry indeed' (*ED* 7). We are introduced to the grotesque child Muriel, who in this situation 'sat with her legs splayed and her arms

around herself, as if reliving the event' (7). Muriel, although old enough to get pregnant, is not able to comprehend her plight. Interspersed is the story of the Sidneys, Florence and her brother Colin, who grew up next door to the Axons. There is an inference that Clifford Axon, Muriel's late husband, abused Florence Sidney (Mrs Sidney's daughter) when she was a child. Colin later has a love affair with Isabel Field, the social worker assigned to Muriel's case.

To return to the beginning of the novel, the reader 'sees' old Mrs Sidney (mother of Florence and Colin) on her way to Evelyn's house for a séance to contact her dead husband. What is first noted about the Axon household is the lack of life; '[N]o weeds pushed up between the stones of the path. And this was odd, because you would not have thought of Evelyn Axon as a keen gardener' (9). As Mrs Sidney enters the house, 'She took in the neglected parquet floor, the umbrella stand, the small table quite bare except for one potplant, withered and brown. "Nothing seems to survive," Evelyn said' (*ED* 10). The situation deteriorates for the unsuspecting widow Mrs Sidney, who is expecting a sanitised version of the after-death exploits of her husband ('a Cook's Tour of the other world', as Evelyn Axon calls it, (14). Where the consummate professional medium Alison Hart in *Beyond Black* shields her clients from the worst excesses of the spirit world, Evelyn Axon seems to take pleasure in informing Mrs Sidney of her recently deceased husband's whereabouts. The scene becomes a parody of the medium's contact with the dead, the closed eyes and gaping mouth signifying a body that is no longer in control of itself, a conduit, or as Evelyn has it, a 'cruise liner', an 'aeroplane'. Mrs Sidney gets instead one stark and spiteful sentence from Evelyn Axon 'Your husband Arthur is roasting in some unspeakable hell' (13).

This introductory scene leaves the reader with a choice of how to read Evelyn. Although the novel is narrated from her point of view, we are invited to consider if she is mad, psychic, or both? Is she a victim of her own ignorance, of circumstance, of an abusive husband, or of something more malign and other-worldly? These choices are left continually and deliberately ambiguous by Mantel. Evelyn is convinced of the existence of another world, 'a little removed but concurrent' (14); she is continuously tormented by the entities of this other world, who cross over to make mischief and try to hurt her. Upon finding objects lying around the house, in places they shouldn't be, Evelyn immediately blames the spirits. Muriel is denied any sort of agency, as Evelyn ascribes all of the strange goings on in the house to the tenants in the third bedroom. Notes are left strewn, and the mother is convinced that Muriel could not have written them, as she cannot write (22), but the reader learns that Muriel can write (21). In a social services letter it is described how, when asked to demonstrate her 'basic level skills' to her mother, she 'agreed...but when supplied with paper she scribbled on it' (ED 22). When a tin opener appears, seemingly out of nowhere, Evelyn is convinced the spirits 'have left her a gift' (20). The reader, however, has access to a Social Services letter, explaining that Muriel won't face charges 'regarding the removal of a tin-opener which occurred when a small party of clients was taken on a shopping expedition last week' (26).

Mantel uses the epigraph from Pascal to play with the reader's expectations of finding a definitive truth, by refusing to take everything either literally or spiritually. The first chapter demonstrates the provisional nature of this narrative. The reader gains access to certain information: Muriel's school years, her father's death at the age of six, the 'basic contempt' that Evelyn seems to have for her. The reader does not know what to do with this information, nor a clear idea of how to judge the

characters. The textual clues Mantel weaves about Evelyn and Muriel contradict and complicate; they are both at turns pathetic and vicious, credulous and knowing, sympathetic and disgusting. For example, the first visit that Isabel is able to make to the Axons, when Muriel finally opens the front door, occurs after Muriel returns from a catatonic trance:

So Monday morning brought relief. Muriel was back. Her pale eyes travelled around the house, without interest, but more freely than of late. ‘You are being a good girl today,’ Evelyn said kindly. Muriel got up and took herself to the lavatory.

Evelyn was in the kitchen when the knocking started up at the front door. Muriel heard it too. I know what is to be done, she thought, or what can be done, when that noise starts up. She remembered to rearrange her clothes, or to do as much rearrangement as was necessary under the enveloping blue dress. She watched her large feet going before her, placing themselves slightly sideways on each descending stair.

Evelyn snatched the pan off the stove. As she blundered down the hallway, she felt tiny malignant hands pull at her skirt and catch at her ankles. She could not, could not, make headway.

Her face contorted with effort and alarm. ‘Muriel!’ Muriel turned her head, gave her a blank look, her hand on the catch of the front door; then a slow, spreading smirk. The door swung open, framing mother and daughter, as if they had come to open it together in an expansive gesture of welcome. (63)

This passage could be the representation of a ‘normal’ domestic scene; mother speaking ‘kindly’ towards her young daughter, who is exploring her independence by going to the toilet on her own, by beginning to respond and react to stimuli such as the front door knocking.¹¹¹ Mantel undercuts this picture, when we realise that the child Muriel is physically a grown and ungainly woman, with large feet whose ‘enveloping blue dress’ hides her own maternity. Evelyn’s attempt to stop Muriel from opening the door is curtailed by ‘tiny malignant hands’, and Mantel ends the passage by further ironising the mother/daughter pair’s ‘expansive gesture of welcome’, in that tiny phrase ‘as if’. The narrative is thus not only undermined by the ‘impossible’ things that occur (‘against the laws of nature’, as Colette in *Beyond Black* says), but by the undercutting that Mantel does herself to skew the reader’s perspective.

¹¹¹ For example Winnicott’s notion of the ‘transitional space’ and the child exploring its independence. See *Playing and Reality* (new ed.) London: Routledge, 2005.

This undercutting occurs also with a textual allusion to the possibility of Clifford Axon, Evelyn's late husband and Muriel's father, being a child abuser. Evelyn's mind wanders back to 'another Christmas Day' (ED 116); we learn that her mother was an invalid and that she was sent to live with her aunt and uncle. Her uncle proposes Evelyn as a wife to Clifford Axon, a clerk in his firm, who 'had decided recently that his life would be better regulated if he had a wife to oversee his domestic arrangements' (118). After the wedding, 'Uncle Reggie was vaguely sorry. He suspected Axon of indulging in sexual deviations. But it was too late to do anything about that' (118). The suspicion is later confirmed the night that Muriel gives birth, when Evelyn needs some air and her thoughts turn to the shed 'where Clifford used to go' (174). Evelyn recalls his injunction to 'turn a blind eye' which she obeyed 'until one day she had seen the child from next door heading down the path, little Florence Sidney; little Florence Sidney, who was that great hulk of a woman now' (ED 174). She shoos Florence away and confronts Clifford. The suggestion is that Evelyn saves Florence Sidney, but also that she continues to turn a blind eye to Clifford's antics. Possibly more children are subsequently abused, as well as her own daughter.

This ambiguous knowledge changes the reader's perspective on the 'tiny malignant hands' that pull at Evelyn, stop her from moving. Who do these hands belong to, that impede Evelyn's movement? Are they even 'real'? The grasping, pulling tiny hands manifest as fantasies but the reader, yet again, cannot be sure. We are back again to the mainmise, to the grip that childhood exerts on the adult, that stop it from moving forward, its strange and irresistible logic, but again this is complicated by the ghostly suggestiveness of the text. These tiny malignant hands really *could* be the ghosts of children abused and murdered by Clifford Axon,

Evelyn's husband and Muriel's father. The tiny malignant hands then come to represent the sinister ghosts of the wronged, looking for justice, the physical manifestation of Evelyn's guilt, who knew what was happening and was powerless to stop it.

When Muriel gives birth to the baby she is carrying, she also gives physical form to Evelyn's fears. The baby comes to embody Evelyn's knowledge:

At first it would not breathe. Muriel's eyes signalled something to her. Leave it, she was saying. Shocked, Evelyn gripped the slippery thing and shook it. A thin hopeless bleating came out. A fine idea of Muriel's, the ghost under their feet for years, learning in the parallel world to crawl, walk and talk; and perhaps blaming them for its demise. (182)

Evelyn's fear of retribution from this 'thing' in the 'parallel world', echoes the fear she feels at the claims of the tiny malignant hands, the small seekers after justice who are coming (in Evelyn's mind) for vengeance:

All morning there were rappings and banging at the front door. The screams and laughter of spiteful children rang in Evelyn's ears. She went down the hall at last, and threw the door open; but no one was there. (ED 182)

There is a 'realistic' reason for the children banging on the door and making a noise: while Muriel is giving birth Florence is babysitting her brother's children. But again Mantel urges us not to choose, not to take everything literally (Isabel's mistake) and not to take everything spiritually (Evelyn Axon's mistake). Evelyn's fear grows:

She did not wish to admit to herself that now that the child was born she was confused, beginning to be frightened; menaces from the tenants she had expected, but she had not reckoned on a deep shrinking antipathy to what Muriel produced, the feeling that even their precarious foothold in the house was crumbling further; and that feeling dated, she knew, from her first good look at the baby's face. (186)

The source of her fear being the misapprehension that the baby has been fathered by her late husband: 'She bent over it; Clifford stared back' (186). Later this doubt returns, to horrific effect: 'She looked down at the baby, and saw Clifford again, sitting behind its eyes; behind the glassy layers the years peeling away' (189). The reader is pushed into a sickening denouement, the horror of which surpasses Mantel's

ironic intention and veers into unsettling territory, exposing as it does the strangeness of this ‘changeling’ child, the ‘creepiness’ of its temporality. She puts the baby into a box, and the women go out and put the box into the canal, in Evelyn’s hope that another baby will appear, once that is not ‘misbegotten’ or ‘demon-food’ (186).

Evelyn talks to Clifford in her head, ‘Back from the dead, are you? Your own daughter, in your own house. Damn you, Clifford; your handiwork hasn’t lasted long’ (192). Evelyn’s idea of Clifford as father to his own daughter’s baby is an impossible delusion. Clifford died when Muriel was still a child, and thus we ‘know’ it is a material impossibility.

The possibility of the baby being fathered by a ghost, however, makes macabre sense within the logic of the text, which *is* Evelyn’s logic, every day being mother’s day after all. Although the reader is able to realign him or herself, shaking off Evelyn’s perspective that the ‘misbegotten’ should be Clifford’s ‘handiwork’, within the framework of thinking about the lost child this event conforms to a twisted logic of mis-generation. Muriel is a child bearing a child whose father may be her own father; or her own father’s ghost. The returned child looks like its father which could also be its grandfather. It is no surprise within this twisted logic that Muriel’s cries of ‘mother’ sound to Evelyn like ‘murder’ (*ED* 44). The child has been stripped of its Romantic innocence and now figures death. The child does not represent generational time, or any linear time of the plot, but occurs here in ‘fable’ or fantastical mode. The gruesome return of Clifford’s phantom also suggests murder, with the circumstances of Clifford’s own death remaining ambiguous.

That the child figure in the novel represents something ‘other’ to the text is suggested by the child Muriel’s physical presence but psychological absence, ‘More and more, when Evelyn was in a room with her daughter, she felt as if no one was

there' (32). Muriel is monstrous, doubly monstrous for bearing a child herself, as we have already seen, but her obliteration in the novel also suggests her status as a 'blank'. This possibility comes to fruition in the sequel *Vacant Possession*, in which the rehabilitated Muriel, who was sent to an institution after her mother's death, takes on the name Lizzie Blank. Mantel shows Muriel as blocking out reality, taking 'one of her strange holidays from the world':

Muriel seemed to have lost interest in life. She sat a good deal of the time with her eyes closed, her fingers in her ears. Then her fingers would pinch her nostrils closed; when Evelyn had first seen this trick she had been distraught. 'What is the smell?' She had demanded, trying to drag Muriel's hand away from her face. 'What is the smell?' (62)

Mantel uses direct speech when she presents Evelyn, but not when she writes Muriel, whose words are only ever reported through her mother. The dysfunctional mother/daughter relationship is represented by Mantel, who through manipulating the reaction to events in the house, can keep any interpretation ambiguous, at arm's length from the reader. It is only when her mother is dead that she speaks, quietly so Isabel and Colin have to strain to hear her, what sounds like 'victor of the field'. in this way, every day really is mother's day, for Muriel anyway, whose life is subsumed under her mother's.

Muriel's experiences are also relayed secondhand via the social workers' letters. For example, the Axons receive a visit from Social Services, in which Evelyn calls Muriel an idiot. This 'fact' is confirmed by a social worker's report: '[f]or instance she referred to client in her hearing as a "hopeless idiot"' (*ED* 15). Later, when the pair argue about 'the spilt sugar, the small thefts, the china they smashed piece by piece', Evelyn says:

"I could move you from here. But where would you go? They are always getting into my bedroom." Muriel said there was a third bedroom. Evelyn stared at her. She could feel again her heart hammering and pounding in her throat. The woman had made a shocked face when she had called Muriel an idiot. She, Evelyn, lived with the daily confirmation of her idiocy. Only a hopeless idiot would suggest she took up

residence in a room already tenanted; and such tenants. "Wash yourself," she commanded her. She went downstairs. (*ED* 18)

This is one of many examples in which Evelyn's speech is reported, whereas Muriel's speech is indirect, effectively erasing Muriel and providing a textual manifestation of the ways that her mother smothers her subjectivity. Hurting herself by cutting and burning her arms, Muriel tests the extent of her mother's surveillance of her body, thinking that Evelyn will also feel the pain, but finds, 'Evelyn has not been in her body today, not even very much in her brain' (30). Muriel sees her surprise, and 'to be helpful, always to be helpful, she holds up her arms for Evelyn's inspection' (30).

When Evelyn exclaims at Muriel's torture by the tenants,

[m]oaning again, she washes her arthritic hands together. Could you not cry out? You have gagged me, Muriel thinks. Up the stairs you would have come, rushing to take my pain for yourself. With what? Sharp blades and fire, Muriel says, in her casually dead voice. (*ED* 30)

The obliteration of Muriel by her mother is textually coded again by the confusion of voices here; it takes the reader time to unravel who is speaking, and to whom.

Muriel's confinement, meaning both her pregnancy and her psychological retreat from the world, echoes Mantel's concern with burial throughout the novel. Isabel Field and Colin Sidney conduct their affair within the confined space of his car: during one of their meetings she tells him a fable about a family trapped underneath a farmhouse, in hiding from the Nazis. The man in the story hides underneath a farmhouse, entreating the woman to join him. She refuses, until she is so desperate that she gives in and joins him. They have a child, who is profoundly damaged, 'screaming like a wild animal or mute as though they still had their hands over her face', who after the war 'went from one institution to another' (131). Isabel offers the story to Colin as a fable of the 'stifling power of love', but the reader can read it as an allegory of Muriel's life and its smothered subjectivity, the three characters in the intra-diegetic frame standing in for Clifford, Evelyn and Muriel. Moreover, appearing

practically in the centre of the book, the metaphorical story is a pin which holds the various iterations of burial together. Take for example Evelyn's thoughts about her daughter:

Years passed like this, the nameable fears giving way to the unnameable, the familiar dread of evening muffled under a pall of fog, of blackness, of earth; all the days lived as if underground, and Muriel, she thought, if I could have mourned myself, if I could have drawn breath, I might have pitied you. (174)

The reader is left to draw the connection between the hole underground and the Axon's house, emphasised further by Isabel's reaction when Colin later announces his intention to buy it: 'they'll find your body and bury you' (209). His insistence that a coat of paint will hide the smell of misery is comical but also indicative of a central concern with the covering over of knowledge and the effects of concealment. When Isabel goes to investigate the Axons, having finally gained entry to the house, she is locked in the bedroom by Evelyn, describing 'a clammy chill like wet earth' (195). Evelyn's heart is described as 'molten heaving and pulsating inside its coffin made of lead' (192).

Abraham and Torok's notion of the crypt offers a way to read the preponderance of burial metaphors in both novels, without recourse to the idea of a textual unconscious, or the text as equivalent to the unconscious of reader or writer. Boxes, fossils, and burials all figure lost children and secreted knowledge. In *A Change of Climate* the dead child qualifies as a phantom in its form as 'memory buried without legal burial place' (Abraham and Torok 141). The hole in memory that is occupied by the baby is transmitted to Kit in the form of her incomplete memories of Africa. The repressions of the parents form 'a gap in the unconscious' (141).

In *Every Day is Mother's Day* Muriel's body is already a tomb in that the baby she births has no chance of life, being marked with an irrevocable punishment. The sins of the fathers are visited on the baby, giving the lie to innocence deserving

protection. But also the whole novel is based around containers and the illegitimate contents of those containers: the house and its ‘tenants’; the shed with its child abuser occupant; Muriel’s body containing the baby; Evelyn’s body having once contained Muriel. The crypt gives a way of thinking which is useful because it conceptualises trauma as both fantasy and reality. Primary repression is based on fantasy for Freud; the phantasms and distortions it produces are a by-product. Abraham and Torok are able to say, look, the trauma is real, the suffering is real. They do not make the error of taking everything spiritually or literally. Fantasy for Abraham and Torok is ‘not the translation of a psychic process; quite the opposite, it is the illusory and painstakingly reiterated proof that no process whatever has or should take place’ (Abraham and Torok 142). In other words, the unconscious’ equivalent of ‘move along, nothing to see here!’ which enables repression and its second life as transmitted parasitical speck in the ego. The dead child ‘speaks’ through the body of Anna, and the traumatised body of the unloved Melanie, and in Kit’s memories. In *Every Day is Mother’s Day* the child speaks via the tiny hands that pluck and the entities that ‘haunt’ Evelyn. In *Vacant Possession* a clean up of the canal turns up tiny bones. This baby skeleton is packaged up in a box and returned, in a gruesome re-enactment of its birth.

The child makes time strange, we might say. But instead of time, there are times: what André Green refers to as ‘multiple centres of time conjugations’ (Green *Time in Psychoanalysis* 37). Muriel’s relation to time is more like an animal’s than a human being; she lives in an ‘eternal present’ (*ED* 31). Confusion about time occurs in the novel, where ‘time is moving at its own speed’ (45). In presenting the psychic wounds of Evelyn Axon and the damaged Muriel, Mantel shows how the child, in its suspension, does not adhere to the time of narrative, it is within time or beyond it.

The timelessness of the unconscious rears its head; the psychic wounds that are borne by the characters, the return of the repressed. But the twisted logic of generation displayed here also has something to say to the child in its weirdness, if we recall Ronell. The child haunts, it never goes away: and so it becomes possible to read this novel as a fable of how we fail to get on, of what holds us back, to paraphrase Lyotard. The child that haunts is suspended within the narrative frame in both novels, coming back to haunt in strange and unexpected ways.

Chapter Four

Childhood's Founding Fictions: Giving up the Ghost

Introduction: Helplessness

It is a culturally accepted notion that the child is a helpless entity. One of the cultural myths that recurs from Hegel to Freud, the child is seen to be reliant on adult whims. For Freud, the child is helpless but the state of helplessness is not confined to childhood. Adult helplessness is closely related to the idea of the ego as subject to the unknowable whims of the unconscious mind; as Freud states in 'A Difficulty of Psychoanalysis', the ego 'is not master in its own house' (Freud 'Difficulty' 355). Not all of the mind is accessible to the conscious will. The realisation of the will's relative weakness in the face of all the unconscious elements of the psyche: this is what Freud calls a 'blow' to narcissism, and 'probably the most wounding' (352). Mantel concurs with Freud: 'Nothing governs down there,' she states (Appendix i 241). The child in its powerlessness exerts a powerful force. In its helplessness the child holds all the power, but in its helplessness the child poses a problem.

Although the child's body displays all of the features of the adult human body in miniature, which seems to separate him or her from animals, there is a power imbalance between the child and its caregivers. Hegel writes:

Even the most complete animal is unable to exhibit this delicately organised, infinitely pliable body which we already discern in the newly born child. At first,

however, the child appears in a far greater dependency and need than animals. Yet in this, too, a higher nature already reveals itself (Hegel *Mind* 56).¹¹²

For Freud, helplessness (*hilflosigkeit*) has a particular meaning apart from the general, denoting the state of the infant which relies upon another being to satisfy its needs. The infant feels the tension that arises from this need, but is unable to do anything to dissipate this tension. The fact of the human infant's long period of prematurity gives rise to this helplessness, which not only has implications for the infant if it doesn't get its needs met, but also for the adult. The whole psyche is structured upon the fact that we begin life entirely dependent on another for care.¹¹³ As Laplanche and Pontalis point out, the infant helplessness that structures the psyche is also 'the prototype of the traumatic situation which is responsible for the generation of anxiety' (Laplanche and Pontalis ed. 189). The struggle of the infant in its dependence leads to a situation where the infant cannot exist on its own. The child's first relationship to the world is one of a power imbalance, and this power imbalance leaves its mark. The 'child is father to the man' conceals the subsequent effects that parenting makes upon the child.¹¹⁴ The child cannot exist without the adult, is dependent and helpless: but the adult would not exist without the child's

¹¹² He continues, 'Whereas the animal is silent or expresses its pain only by groaning, the child expresses the feeling of its needs by *screaming*. By this ideal activity the child shows that it is straightaway imbued with the certainty that it has a right to demand from the external world the satisfaction of its needs — that the independence of the external world in face of man is void' (56, emphasis in original). There is thus a slight contradiction between the ideas of helplessness, potential and childhood as 'the time of natural harmony, of the peace of the individual with himself and the world' that occurs in the Zusatz to §396, *Philosophy of Mind* (53).

¹¹³ Ferenczi goes further in "Confusion of Tongues between the Adult and the Child" (1933), suggesting that the central problem is the child's inability to defend itself. This leads him to believe that the analytical situation is inadequate and will only lead to a re-creation of the damaging parent child dynamic in analysis. See *Final Contributions to the Problems and Methods of Psychoanalysis*. Balint, Michael ed. London The Hogarth Press 1955.

¹¹⁴ John Forrester sees this 'authority' in dialectical terms: 'Yet it is the *dialectic* of authority and servitude, of power and helplessness, of mutual dependence, of expectation and disappointment, of shame and embarrassment, which characterises the relationship *and which leaves its mark on the child*' (80, emphasis in the original). Forrester is replying to those such as Alice Miller, who see Freud's change from actual seduction to a fantasied seduction as cowardice, and accuse him of covering up the large scale abuse of children. See *The Seductions of Psychoanalysis: Freud, Lacan and Derrida*. Cambridge UP, 1990.

particular experiences. Adult and child co-exist in a mutually interdependent relationship which cannot be disentangled. The child exacts its revenge on the adult's authority, gets its own back by hanging around, making the nuisance of itself it was never permitted to be.

For Freud, helplessness has another effect of enabling narcissistic identifications to flourish. The child is a problem because of the effect it has on its parents. In the second part of "On Narcissism: An Introduction" (1914), he writes:

At the most touchy point in the narcissistic system, the immortality of the ego, which is so hard pressed by reality, security is achieved by taking refuge in the child. Parental love, which is so moving and at bottom so childish, is nothing but the parents' narcissism born again, which, transformed into object-love, unmistakably reveals its former nature (Freud "Narcissism" 91).

Narcissism, the taking of one's own ego as an object, is a necessary stage in the child's progress. Laplanche and Pontalis chart the development of Freud's notion of narcissism. Freud initially conceived of narcissism as a state coincident with the development of the ego as a unity and thus an internalisation of the relationship between self and self as 'other'¹¹⁵ However, later he conceived of narcissism as a first, 'objectless' state, in which the infant is immersed in his own world, his ego and id undifferentiated (Laplanche and Pontalis 256). This is primary narcissism. One never lets go of this primary narcissism: as Freud points out, we never give anything up anyway. Our desire is always displaced onto another object. Secondary narcissism retains the idea that narcissism and the formation of the ego are contemporaneous, 'through identification with the other person' (Laplanche and Pontalis 256). In Freud's view, parental narcissism is a re-awakening of the first relationship to oneself

¹¹⁵ As in Lacan's mirror stage, where the child's image helps form what will become the ego, the sense of self through the "reflection" back of the self as a unified whole.

as object. For Freud the child is a being to be protected: but in being so also offers a protection to its parents.¹¹⁶

The Child is the Problem

Issues of protection occur with Derrida. In his essay “Passions: An Oblique Offering” he states, both in the main body of the text and in a footnote: ‘the child is the problem’ (Derrida “Passions” 12; n.6, p.30). In *Bâtons Rompus*, (Dutoit 2009),

Nicholas Royle asks Derrida the following question:

I am intrigued by the apparent absence or exclusion of creative writing in the French university. What does this suggest about the problem of the child? What is the role of the child and the childish in your writing? In what ways is deconstruction childlike? (207)¹¹⁷

In answer, Derrida refers to *le chantage*, or blackmail.¹¹⁸ This blackmail ‘which somehow organises all lovers’ duels in fantasy and actuality...’ (207) holds the adult to ransom, extorting its duty. The child remains an organising principle of the psyche, years beyond any numerical definition of childhood. However, it remains in some senses unreachable: for Derrida this is because the child is a problem. Seemingly tautological, the Greek *problema* Derrida refers to means shield; thus the problematic is used to shield, cover over, protect. In French, *le bouclier* is shield. He continues about the problematic:

...organising insurance against that which is disquieting; the problem is reassuring. When you problematise something, well, it is already a set of shields, fortresses, protections, all sorts of insurance...deconstruction is not a problematic...these are questions that cannot even take the form of a problem, so that we are exposed without shield, helpless. This is deconstruction (Dutoit 207-8).

¹¹⁶ Lee Edelman takes up this argument in *No Future*, suggesting that the child offers the parents a “refuge”: the desire to make in one’s own image, to create, to be “God,” which shores up and ensures the survival of reproductive heteronormativity. However, Edelman complicates this: parental love is narcissistic, and this “all-pervasive, self-congratulatory and strategically misrecognised” narcissism animates what Edelman describes as “pronatalism” (13). The “misrecognition” occurs for Edelman in that the narcissism of the parents is dressed up as a sacrifice for the next generation, in the service of ‘perpetuating sameness’ (60).

¹¹⁷ All translations into English here and following are mine.

¹¹⁸ <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/french-english/chantage>

He uses the word 'shield' to characterise the 'problem' of the 'child,' commenting that if something is made into a problem it is already a coverage or protection under which one can shelter. Deconstruction exposes even the problem to itself. So by setting up the child as a 'problem,' to be interrogated the child remains simply as what *is*, a remainder, at the limit. Derrida thus seems to turn the 'problem' of the child on its head. The helplessness of the child must be protected, as we have seen in Freud and Hegel. Yet Derrida seems to suggest that the discourse of child as problem protects something else, covers over or shields us from something unspecified. Nevertheless the child is made to act as something else, as stand-in (or supplement, in Derrida's words) whether in reading, in theory, or in parental love itself.

Narcissism is notable for its exclusion from Derrida's exposition on the child-like and deconstruction. He seems to see the pre-linguistic child as analogous to *différance*, as the embodiment of a critique of logocentrism. He begins by speaking of philosophical doubt as child-like and goes on to say:

...the deconstruction of logocentrism is the infant. That is to say...is not yet speaking, is not subject to the law of language. It carries the possibility of speech but does not yet belong to the word. It is the child who does not speak, child before he spoke. This is also deconstruction....speech is also interrupted...(Dutoit 210)

The child is potential, in other words: all exists in his world, all at once. In this respect he is like the writer, who creates his world for himself, and anything can be possible within it. Yet in his innocence of language he resembles not so much the writer as the animal. Derrida continues:

Deconstruction begins by suspecting the authority of language, verbal language, language in general, in particular human language. So the question of the trace, which is not yet language, not verbal, not even human, is it the child's, the infant's, it is not necessarily even man...between the child and the animal, there are obviously all the usual passages. Deconstruction is the animal, from this point of view. It is child-like and animal-like (Dutoit 210-11).

A connection is being made here between the child and the animal, as beings that are closer to the 'natural': not by buying into the reification of childhood innocence, but

by questioning the basis of the ‘natural’. By doing so, the child and the animal are shown by Derrida to be as supplementary as the other. When Freud writes about the child’s helplessness, in “The Sexual Theories of Children”, he makes the connection between children and animals: ‘...it is the child’s observation of animals, who hide so little of their sexual life and to whom he feels so closely akin, that strengthens his disbelief in it [the stork fable]’ (Freud “Sexual Theories” 215).¹¹⁹ Perhaps it is infantile sexuality which suggests the animal connection; the child as mass of instincts and desires which must be tamed. But alongside this mass of instincts and desires is thirst for explanations. This ‘self-sustained instinct for research’ (213) is fuelled by the parents’ obfuscations about the stork, the gooseberry bush, and so on. Created by adults, these myths don’t put the matter to bed, but awaken even more the child’s deep curiosity about the situation in which he/she finds him or herself. The child, having an intuitive sense of what is actually going on, cannot prove it, and thus the myths only serve to set off a conflict within the child (214). For Freud, curiosity about sexuality is what begins the child’s quest for knowledge.¹²⁰

Freud writes about the child as thirsty for knowledge, but also suggests that the dreaming child is the model for the writer. In “Creative Writers and Daydreaming” (1908) he compares the creation of fictional worlds to the creation of a child’s game; ‘The creative writer does the same as the child at play. He creates a world of phantasy which he takes very seriously — that is, which he invests with large amounts of emotion — while separating it sharply from reality’ (Freud “Creative Writers” 144).¹²¹ The creative writer is able to present his daydreams and

¹¹⁹ A well worn trope in literature about and for children; Alice and her kitten, for example, who we have already met in a previous chapter.

¹²⁰ For a more in depth discussion of childlike wonder, see Juliet Dusinberre’s *Alice to the Lighthouse: Children’s Books and Radical Experiments in Art*. 2nd ed. Macmillan, 1999.

¹²¹ For a recent discussion of this paper see Keith Oatley. *Such stuff as dreams: The Psychology of Fiction*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2011. (26f).

fantasies to us as objects of our admiration, from which we derive pleasure. Yet, Freud asserts, if one were to relate these daydreams or phantasies in the course of everyday existence, they would hold not an element of pleasure; would ‘repel us or at least leave us cold’ (153). For Freud, the crucial question is, *how* does the writer ‘arouse in us emotions’ (143)? How is the writer able to effect enjoyment in an audience from material which in ‘reality’ is ‘actually distressing’ (144). In a paragraph characterised by Freud’s usual careful weighing of considerations, he writes:

A strong experience in the present awakens in the creative writer a memory of an earlier experience (usually belonging to his childhood) from which there now proceeds a wish which finds its fulfilment in the creative work...I am inclined to think that this way of looking at creative writings may turn out not unfruitful. You will not forget that the stress it lays on childhood memories in the writer’s life...is ultimately derived from the assumption that a piece of creative writing, like a day-dream, is a continuation of, and a substitute for, what was once the play of childhood (151-2).

Although in the final analysis, *how* this is done remains an ‘innermost secret’ (153).

Freud characteristically creates a system which for him accounts for artistic endeavour and the effect that it has on the audience. The writer’s memory provides the ‘raw material’ which is worked into writing by the same process the child uses in his or her play. For Freud this means that we can strictly demarcate what is real from what is fantasied: the child’s play or the writer’s imaginative re-workings of his store of memories.

Child’s play eventually comes to an understanding of itself as fantasy. For example, for Donald Winnicott, play is connected to fantasies of omnipotence.¹²² The fort-da game in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is also structured this way, while

¹²² For Winnicott in *Playing and Reality* it is the experience of ‘control’ (63) and the mother’s handling of this transition that determines the psychic health of the infant. Play is central: ‘I call this a playground because play starts here. The playground is a potential space between the mother and the baby or joining mother and baby’ (64). Routledge ebook edition 2005. <https://www.dawsonera.com/readonline/9780203441022>. Accessed 1st November 2017.

Melanie Klein's analysis of children takes the form of play. For the psychoanalyst, play is vital; the subject takes psychic 'nourishment' from its lack of bodily constraints. But fantasy (or phantasy, they use the spellings interchangeably) is also an ambiguous term, as Laplanche and Pontalis' definition suggests:

Imaginary scene in which the subject is a protagonist, representing the fulfilment of a wish...in a manner that is distorted to a greater or lesser extent by defensive processes. Phantasy has a number of different modes: conscious phantasies or daydreams, unconscious phantasies like those uncovered by analysis as the structures underlying a manifest content, and primal phantasies (314).

There is ambiguity implied in the term 'fantasy', as it broadly refers to imaginative fancies, daydreams, dreams, and of course fiction. Fantasy is something that crucially connects the child's and adult's worlds, as Mantel's memoir shows. For Mantel, the words she chooses to describe her life have to be equal to the task of underpinning that life's public face: as Freud, in "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death", writes, 'In the realm of fiction we find the plurality of lives which we need' (291). Mantel makes the connection in the memoir between childhood and the story: from writing her childhood, she pinpoints the story's structure. By this I mean: we can extrapolate from Mantel's work on her own childhood 'truths' about childhood in general, for the banal fact that everyone has been a child. But it is Mantel's exploration of what it means for her to be childless, overlaying the desire to discover her own childhood, which renders the narrative multifaceted, and the structure complex.

The setting of *Giving up the Ghost*, published in 2003, begins in 2000 with the author and her husband deciding to sell their cottage; a seemingly innocuous moment in their lives, until the reader understands that this house has 'a ghost in it' (*GUG* 5). Mantel uses this event to launch her memoir of 'mid-life' which is also the story of her childhood, complete with strange hauntings and family secrets.

Writing about her misdiagnosed pain from endometriosis, and the medical procedures which dominated much of her young adult life, Mantel describes in harrowing detail her hysterectomy at the age of twenty-seven. The memoir is written explicitly to describe and explain her childhood and her childlessness, to ‘take charge of’ the story of her life.

The state of childhood she writes about is an uncanny place. The child Mantel’s over-riding impression is the emphatic feeling that she will change into something else. This strangeness points to Mantel’s idea of childhood as the place of fantasy; within *this* child as described by Mantel, is the desire to be other, to be something else. For example, the desire to be a boy. Mantel writes of her three year old self as ‘fat and happy’: she asks, ‘Why should I move on in life?’ (44) Set against this, she is ‘waiting to change into a boy’, knowing that, ‘When I am four this will occur’ (40). As she continues to wait to change into a boy, ‘...the onset of boyhood has been postponed, so far. But patience is a virtue for me’ (52); ‘When exactly do I become a boy?’ (55). This sense of waiting to become something else is differentiated from the games that she plays: for example, the child Mantel imagines she was a

...Red Indian. I get a feathered headdress and a tepee...The tepee is set up in the middle of my grandmother’s floor and in it I have a small chair and a table. People step around me. I take my meals in the tepee, and believe my hands are brown, as they wield the spoon. But already it feels like a game...what I feel, for the first time, is nostalgia (54-5).

The passage through childhood comes with the knowledge that play is ‘only’ play; she understands now that play is pretending. Whereas before it was real; ‘I had a right to this kit’, now, ‘I know that there is no truth in this belief’ (55). The false belief, the child Mantel describes, that she will change into a boy continues even after this, and she writes of an incident where she is bought a cottage set by her parents, for ‘Some ideal daughter, that they don’t have’ (56). Her male cousin, however, is

bought a shooting range, and Mantel writes of the ensuing ‘fuss’ as she demands the toy designed for the boy, even though ‘I was too mature for the shooting range’ (*GUG* 56).

For Mantel, growing up entails a ‘slide’. Not only has she become insubstantial, but she recognises

I am only playing, inside the Indian’s tepee, and I know it. I have lost the warrior’s body I had before the fever. My bullet-like presence, my solidity, has vanished. Ambiguity has thinned my bones, made me light and washed me out, made me speechless and made me blonde. I realise — and carry the dull knowledge inside me, heavy in my chest — that I am never going to be a boy now. I don’t exactly know why. I sense that things have slid too far, from some ideal starting point. (57)

The infant Mantel feels that, rather than develop, she has ‘slid’ from where she was, fallen from grace. She perceives herself to be somehow inferior, not quite what she should be: her descriptions of her child self as weak, light and pale add to the impression that she is somehow insubstantial. This lack of substance, ‘speechless and blonde’, is directly connected with Mantel’s feelings about her gender. When she has a fight with a boy at school, she again acknowledges the boy she hasn’t yet, and will not, become: ‘Shame, is somewhere among my feelings about this incident. I don’t know who it belongs to: to me, or the boy I’ve beaten, or some ghostly, fading boy I still carry inside’ (*GUG* 73). The ‘still’ in that sentence is a lament to the time that has passed since Mantel realised that she will never be a boy. The two ideas, that play is real, and that she will switch genders, exist somehow in tandem, or, in other words, as Mantel discovers the difference between reality and pretence, she has to face the fact that she will never be a boy. Mantel has a growing sense of what it means to be who she *is* and her desire to be a boy, something *other*. Mantel’s desire to be a boy fades with the dawning realisation of what being a girl entails: ‘small’, weak and without expectation that, ‘my likes would have any sway in the world’ (*GUG* 42). When people laugh that she is smaller than her little brother, she describes herself as

‘a tiny doll creature with red smiling lips, stick limbs, and fair hair: an innocent abroad, a dumb broad, a feather on the breath of God’ (*GUG* 81).

To be female is to be weak and insubstantial, whereas masculinity (in the form of boys and men) equals power and access to the outside world beyond the domesticity of life at home. Mantel depicts this in the character of her grandfather the railway guard (33) and her father, who comes home smelling of ‘the complex city smell of smog, ink, tobacco’ (39). Just as the ghostly boy remains inside the insubstantial girl, so Mantel describes her six-year-old self clinging ‘to the prospect of a man’s life’ (74). Mantel and her friend play a game called ‘Men’ (74) and when she loses her first playmate, Jacqueline (‘Jack’), she tries to recruit another girl, but the game becomes boring when the little girl, whose adopted name is ‘Walter...never does anything manly’ (75). Mantel plays at being a man, having come to the realisation she will never be a boy. The two events are differentiated by an understanding of fantasy and reality: the fantasy of being a boy is more real than playing at being a man.

It is possible to read this desire to be a boy in the light of Freud’s conviction that there is a ‘bisexual disposition’ in all of us. ‘In every normal male or female individual, traces are found of the apparatus of the opposite sex’ (Freud ‘Three Essays’ 141). And at the end of a long passage in ‘A Child is Being Beaten’ in which Freud puts two theories of bisexuality to the test of the phantasy referred to in the title, he states, ‘in the last resort we can only see that both in male and female individuals masculine as well a feminine instinctual impulses are found, and that each can equally well undergo repression and become unconscious’ (202). The importance of the *unconscious* knowledge that she will not be a boy attests to this interpretation, as does the mention of the ‘ghostly’ boy within.

However, Mantel's childhood experiences as recounted in the memoir suggest an alternative universe in which things change or 'are not what they seem'. Her impressions of childhood suggest the strangeness of things and the feeling she has of not being able to trust her senses. Infancy is the place before play exists; for as Mantel attests, to play is to understand that there is a reality *other* to the play. It becomes about reality versus pleasure, reality beating pleasure hands down (as Ronell puts it). The potentiality of the child is limitless imagination, which for Mantel is the more trustworthy ally, learning young, as she does, not to trust the evidence of her senses. When her mother dyes her hair, for example, the child Mantel 'plucked up courage' to ask if it had always been that colour. Musing on her mother's reaction, she writes, 'it wasn't my wish to make her angry, in fact it was far from my mind. I just needed to know whether I could trust myself, my perceptions of things, the evidence of my senses. The answer, obviously, was no' (*GUG* 65). Mantel explores the child's world; the secret beliefs that structure how children see what is going on around them, the atmospheres that colour and shape the child's experience. She writes, 'deception seemed to be in the air'; the 'true nature of things was frequently hidden' (46). Knowledge is called into question time and again: you know, says Mantel, this ghost is just a migraine, but actually, no it isn't just a migraine. It 'is' my stepfather's ghost; it is my stepfather's 'ghost'. The multiple sense of knowledge withheld goes alongside the sense of powerlessness that the child Mantel feels: the 'true nature of things' seems to be within the power of adults to speak of, although they choose not to. Childhood was for Mantel a 'gulag': 'It was just that I was unsuited to being a child' (120). Being 'unsuited' to childhood suggests retrospective understanding due to self-analysis, but it also suggests there is a 'state' of childhood to be unsuited to. In Mantel's case childhood is a state of confusion

regarding the ‘true nature of things’ and the feeling she has that others conceal things from her.

This sense of the things’ true nature is related to the explicit reasons Mantel gives for writing her memoir, that the ‘book of her life was being written by other people’. She demonstrates using the metaphor of ‘copyright’:

I have hesitated for such a long time before beginning this narrative. For a long time I felt as if someone else was writing my life. I seemed able to create or interpret characters in fiction, but not able to create or interpret myself. About the time I reached mid-life, I began to understand why this was. The book of me was indeed being written by other people: by my parents, by the child I once was, and by my own unborn children, stretching out their ghost fingers to grab the pen. I began this writing in an attempt to seize the copyright in myself (*GUG* 70-71).

The ‘story’ of our lives is not owned only by ourselves, but by multiple authors with competing claims. The child is effectively someone else’s property, stamped with the mark of the parent; forced into the world under someone else’s auspices. The parent’s rights of disposal must be reversed by seizure of oneself, one’s own story. There is a suggestion of violence; but it is not that writing emerges as violence, but the human condition of the *mainmise* as the powerlessness of childhood, the *mainmise* that drags the child down in *Wolf Hall* and *A Change of Climate*. She uses the word ‘copyright’ in the context of her perceived inability to ‘create’ or ‘interpret’ herself, and her hesitation, the holding off of her writing, feeling as though someone else is writing her life. What does it mean to ‘write’ your own life in these circumstances? Why write an autobiography? There is a tension remaining between the ‘I’ who writes and the ‘myself’ to be represented through writing; this tension comes from writing itself. There is a force within the movement of writing which evades the writer’s desire to ‘seize the copyright’.

This tension can be illustrated with reference to Jacques Derrida’s interview “This Strange Institution Called Literature”. Asked about his thesis defence, he states

that his ‘...most constant interest, coming before my philosophical interest...has been directed towards literature, towards that writing which is called literary’ (Attridge ed. 33). The literariness that interests Derrida comes in conjunction with, and is inseparable from, philosophy, and Derrida speaks of his teenage self as attracted by writing, by this intersection between philosophy and literature:

No doubt I hesitated between philosophy and literature, giving up neither, perhaps seeking obscurely a place from which the history of this frontier could be thought or even displaced – in writing itself and not only by historical or theoretical reflection (Attridge ed. 34).

Derrida identifies the ‘least inadequate name’ of this place as “‘Autobiography’... because it remains for me the most enigmatic, most open, even today’ (34). He goes on to describe the need to write, to ‘inscribe merely a memory or two’, as ‘obscure as it was compulsive, both powerless and authoritarian’ (34). As Derrida begins to think about jotting a couple of memories, he is seized by the desire to write, what he calls an ‘autobiographical desire’ (34), but at the same time intuitively understands the ‘impossible and endless task’ ahead (34). The double desire so described by Derrida echoes Mantel’s presentation of how and why she writes her memoir. As Derrida states,

Still today there remains in me an obsessive desire to save in an uninterrupted inscription, in the form of a memory, what happens – or *fails to happen*. What I should be tempted to denounce as a lure – i.e., totalization or gathering up – isn’t this what keeps me going? (34)

On the one hand to ‘compulsively’ write an ‘uninterrupted inscription’ of what happens (and what doesn’t happen, which becomes relevant further on), and on the other to reject such a need as a ‘lure’, a ‘totalization’ which is not only impossible, but dangerous. And yet: the ‘lure’ is what underpins Mantel’s desire ‘to seize the copyright in myself’ (*GUG* 70). This desire is further complicated by Mantel’s insistence that the story ‘can be told only once, I have to get it right’ (*GUG* 5), and yet the Derridean double movement of this desire is exposed by Mantel’s own admission

that the ‘complicated sentence’ of her childhood ‘resists’ finishing. It seems as though Mantel works on the border between words not being enough, and words being too much: both ‘authoritarian’ and ‘powerless’, words and the desire to write circle about one another in endless play. As Derrida says, autobiography is that space where this play can happen:

I’ve just said “fails to happen” and “almost doing so” so as to mark the fact that what *happens* — in other words, the unique event whose trace one would like to keep alive — is also the very desire that what does not happen should happen, and is thus a “story” in which the event already crosses within itself the archive of the “real” and the archive of “fiction” (Attridge ed. 35).

If Derrida’s confessed drive here is the desire to record *everything*, but simultaneously to eschew that desire as dangerous, then autobiography keeps this desire in endless deferral with itself. By writing autobiographically, one exposes the ‘real’ and ‘fictive’ elements of writing as inseparable from one another. Derrida continues, ‘Already we’d have trouble not spotting but separating out historical narrative, literary fiction, and philosophical reflection’ (Attridge ed. 35).

What the memoir doesn’t do is provide a verified and factual account that can be signed off and Lodged with the copyright agency. Autobiography traditionally offers its subject up, with the inbuilt guarantee of a real life referent: for Mantel there is no such guarantee. As we have seen, her memoir functions in a different way to a conventional autobiography. To illustrate, I turn to David Lodge’s review of *Giving up the Ghost*, ‘Little Miss Neverwell Triumphs’. Lodge casts a sceptical eye over Mantel’s memoir, questioning the points in the narrative where her phraseology doesn’t ring true or is somehow anachronistic. He refers specifically to an episode in which the adult Mantel describes a holiday to Blackpool, and how she makes the group, her father, her mother, and herself create a ‘tableau’ in front of the mirror. The infant Mantel calls this grouping ‘All Together’, insisting that this be staged

whenever she requires it (*GUG* 52). The adult Mantel understands that this ‘charade’ must have caused her parents pain, as their marriage is in trouble:

Standing on the pier at Blackpool, I look down at the inky waves swirling. Again, the noise of nature, deeply conversational, too quick to catch; again the rushing movement, blue, deep, and far below. I look up at my mother and father. They are standing close together, talking over my head. A thought comes to me, so swift and strange that it feels like the first thought that I have ever had. It strikes with piercing intensity, like a needle in the eye. The thought is this: that I stop them from being happy. I, me, and only me...For what am I but a disposable, replaceable child? And without me they would have a chance in life (*GUG* 52-3).

David Lodge interprets this episode in the memoir differently, however: referring to Mantel’s assertion of her prodigious memory, and the ambiguous relationship that memory has to recall and writing. He argues that this event, and Mantel’s interpretation of it, do not accurately reflect the thoughts of a child:

‘Though my early memories are patchy,’ Mantel writes, ‘I think they are not, or not entirely, a confabulation.’ The qualification is important. Her powers of recall are obviously remarkable, but sometimes she reads an adult awareness into the vague intimations of the young child. For instance, at the age of four, looking up at her parents talking, ‘A thought comes to me, so swift and strange that it feels like the first thought that I have ever had.... The thought is this: that I stop them from being happy....without me they would have a chance in life.’ It is possible for a child of four to sense some parental unhappiness and blame herself for it, but not, surely, to have a concept like ‘a chance in life’ (Lodge ‘Little Miss Neverwell’ 42).

The reading stands in one respect, that it is difficult, if not impossible, to say whether the child has a concept like ‘a chance in life’, and Lodge errs on the side of common-sense to declare the child as incapable of this understanding. But his reading disregards the clarity of the infant Mantel’s thought, weakening its power, which is ‘like a needle in the eye’ (*GUG* 53). Lodge’s point, that the infant Mantel could not have possibly ‘known’ about her parents’ troubles stands if we accept the assumption of a strict division between adult and child.

David Lodge recognises that Mantel’s memoir is different from conventional autobiography in this sense.¹²³ However, the separation that occurs within the passage between the thought as it is experienced and what Lodge perceives to be an

¹²³ See also Derek Neale “Writing and Remembering: Paradoxes of Memory, Imagination and Fiction in Stories about Lives.” *Literature Compass*. 8/12 (2011): 951-961.

adult Mantel imposing her interpretation, is important. This separation allows the reader to apprehend the quality of the thought, its texture: its power as the child perceives it. Mantel's ways of 'knowing' cannot be confined within the boundaries set by the sharp-eyed reviewer: her work is much stranger in terms of how she sees the child.¹²⁴ The simile 'like a needle in the eye' forces the reader to apprehend the suddenness of the thought, alongside its painful, stabbing power. It is this power that guides the reader towards the child Mantel's intuitive knowledge of her parents' struggling relationship. The swiftness and sharpness of the thought contrasts with the 'swirling', 'rushing movement' of the waves; the conversation going on above the infant Mantel's head seems to blend in to the 'noise of nature'; demonstrating the hidden perceptions that the child picks up, eddying and swirling like the waves she is studying, 'far below' her. The 'needle in the eye' suggests damage to a vital organ, the eye/I, with the association of the importance of seeing and observing, with the needling of a thought, something scratching, bothering at the edges of sense, of consciousness. The connection of 'eye' to 'I' suggests the symbolism of a psychic or primal wound. Seeing retreats into the background as the intuitive takes over. The child's thought blinds her, and in that moment she has to rely on the feel of the situation, its texture in sound and movement.

Mantel's emphasis on the synaesthetic quality of her memory demonstrates her attempt to capture in words the texture of experience.¹²⁵ Words often fail to express this texture, and so writing her 'self' is a task that cannot be anything other

¹²⁴ For a philosophical critique of psychological theories of development, see Maurice Merleau-Ponty "The Child's Relation with Others" in *The Primacy of Perception and other essays on phenomenological psychology*. Northwestern UP, 1964.

¹²⁵ Neil Vickers suggests '[w]hat Mantel calls her synaesthetic perception could equally be described as a capacity to disperse her emotional experience into different sensory fields' (63). "Hilary Mantel and the Space of Life Writing" in Eveline Kilian and Hope Wolf eds. *Life Writing and Space*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2016.

than inconsistent, distorted, a ‘confabulation’ (*GUG* 23; 24): ‘the invention of past experiences either consciously or unconsciously, to compensate for loss of memory’ (*Chambers*). And yet, it is where this confabulation takes place that shows us most beautifully the ways that words cannot do justice to life and its ‘ghosts of meaning shivering between the lines’ (23). In its most radical form, Mantel’s writing exposes the inner workings of what we call reality and how we ‘know’ the world.

Phenomenality

I will now turn to Paul de Man’s notion of phenomenality, to assess if this idea can offer a way of thinking about reality and how we represent that reality to ourselves. De Man sets great importance on how the immediate perception of words through sound (and to a lesser extent, vision) exposes the split between word and thing, by being ‘involved’ in the convention of connecting a word with the thing that it connotes. Phenomenality thus encompasses consciousness, in how we perceive things, but is also the object of perception: there is an overlap between the meeting of consciousness and the world. He suggests that our perceptions ‘trick’ us into thinking that the world (the referent) functions like language. In fact the assumption underpinning the separation of fiction from reality springs from this trick, which is itself ‘the offspring of an uncritically mimetic conception of art’ (de Man *Resistance* 11).¹²⁶ Mantel’s explication of her childhood world employs fantasy in order to express its truth, which is not to say that the memoir is entirely fictional. In writing her childhood and its singularity, Mantel demonstrates the importance of fantasy and play: the strange temporalities of memory which have their own power.

¹²⁶ Rodolphe Gasché, in *The Wild Card of Reading*, analogously defines de Man’s use of the word ‘phenomenal’ and its different permutations as ‘the object of cognition’s appearing to the sense’ (53).

Childhood comes back; it haunts and won't leave us alone. Any explication of this strangeness requires a term more suitable than 'phenomenality' which does not encompass enough of the strange 'otherness' of Mantel's autobiography. I suggested the term 'provisionality' to capture the radical aspects in the memoir: the event is no longer pinned down by the logic of 'this really happened' or 'that really happened'. She holds her 'investment in accuracy' and the 'might have been' in tension which is unresolved by recourse to the referent. As she writes, 'when you turn and look back down the years, you glimpse the ghosts of other lives you might have led. All your houses are haunted by the person you might have been.... You think of the children you might have had but didn't' (*GUG* 20). It is the choices not made and paths not taken that structure the life story, as much as those choices made consciously. This understanding of 'event' as the unmade choice, untaken path is continually pitted against Mantel's 'investment in accuracy: I would never say, "It doesn't matter, it's history now"' (*GUG* 24).

It is this provisionality in Mantel's writing in which the sense of 'event' Mantel describes in unswerving detail the visions, hallucinations and aural disturbances that accompany these attacks, treating them all as if their epistemological status was the same, not stopping to demarcate clearly the different types of experience, including dreams. She describes the:

...strange dreams, from which I wake with hallucinations of taste. Once, thirty years ago, I dreamt that I was eating bees, and ever since I have lived with their milk-chocolate sweetness and their texture, which is like lightly cooked calves' liver (*GUG* 3).

Mantel places the dreams, hallucinations and visions into the context of her migraines, the day to day illness which impairs her cognition. However, this context is placed into question by the paragraph that begins directly after she describes seeing her stepfather's ghost in the cottage: 'It *may be*, of course, that the flicker against the

banister was nothing more than the warning of a migraine attack...*I don't know* whether, at such vulnerable times, *I see more than is there; or if things are there, that normally I don't see*' (emphasis added, *GUG 2*). The equivocation in these words shows a lack of definitive attribution, and the repetition of seeing what may or may not be 'there' is a powerful indicator of the questioning of reality that starts with the 'ghost'.¹²⁷ It is the questioning of reality, and Mantel's openness to 'other' ways of seeing and knowing which are at the heart of her provisionality as a writer. This is the source of Mantel's power: the ability to say 'yes' to all kinds of experience.

To return to the dream of eating bees: the reader is invited to share and revel in the synaesthetic sensation, '...ever since I have lived with their milk-chocolate sweetness and their texture, which is like lightly cooked calves' liver'(3). Again, Mantel evokes a physically and materially solid experience of an event (in this case the dream) that is somehow insubstantial. The taste and texture of the bees thus described opens up the reading, contrary to the specificity of 'milk-chocolate' and 'lightly cooked calves' liver'. The identification of specific flavours and textures situates Mantel's dream within the context of her outward experience, whilst also remaining necessarily subjective and unverifiable. The power of the dream, which stays with Mantel, suggests that the strangeness of the taste, itself a hallucination within a dream, somehow overrides the pleasure of the eating. To dream of eating is a common enough thing, as is savouring the pleasure of the taste on waking, yet the flavour invariably fades soon after. For Mantel the weirdness of being able to remember the exact taste mitigates the pleasure.

Mantel thus writes the texture of her own experience which is the heart of provisionality. The physical sensations of taste and sight that she explores relate to

¹²⁷ As discussed in the first chapter.

childhood fantasies, but also to the telling of her life story. The reader's sense of chronology in the text is influenced by the intertwining voices of the adult and child narrators. The dream of eating bees is narrated from a retrospective viewpoint.

Mantel's use of present tense narration, in another episode in which she fears she has swallowed a fly, signals a tonal shift to the child's voice. Moving back into the past, Mantel writes about learning to walk, 'in the house, but [I] don't remember that' (*GUG* 28). Moving outside onto the street, she turns left, although 'I don't know it's left' (28). She describes how there is a 'rusty iron ring' in the stone of the house, near the front door:

I always slip my finger into it, though I should not. Grandad says it is where they tied the monkey up, but I don't think they ever really had one; all the same, he lurks in my mind, a small grey monkey with piteous eyes and a long active tail (28).

The thought of the monkey is given real status by the child Mantel, filling in as she does all the details of its appearance. She knows there is no monkey, but the thought and the image of the monkey continues to exist within her consciousness, until she states, 'Two things not to believe: the monkey. People who say, "I have eyes in the back of my head"' (31). The change in tone signals a kind of transition for the child Mantel, in learning to differentiate between what is real and what is not; but the next episode demonstrates the limited extent of this differentiation:

I sit on the stairs, which are steep, box-like, dark. I think I am going to die. I have breathed in a housefly, I think I have. The fly was in the room and my mouth open because I was putting into it a sweet. Then the fly was nowhere to be seen. It manifests now as a tickling and scraping on the inside of my throat, the side of my throat that's nearest to the kitchen wall (31).

The short sentences, the repetition of I, and the use of 'and' and 'then' as connectives show the reader that this event is being presented to us by the child Mantel. She has not yet learned which way is left, and can only identify the affected side as nearest to the kitchen wall. The episode continues as the child's internal monologue, where she resolves to die quietly, is asked what is wrong and says

nothing, although ‘my resolve to die completely alone has faltered’ (*GUG* 32). The sweet that the child Mantel was eating when the fly disappeared represented an act of considerable courage on the part of the child, knowing as she did that to hesitate over the box would mean no sweet at all, but ‘now I’m on the stairs not knowing whether it’s green sweet or fly’ (32). The child’s perception of causality is exposed here, the fact that if the fly is no longer in the room it must be buzzing inside her throat, causing the rasping. The tragic-comic nature of the scene is alluded to, by author Mantel, in her mention of the word ‘absurdity’. The adult is intruding, here, although the scene is narrated in the present tense, and continues to be as the adult voice slowly takes over the child’s urgent telling of her story:

The dry rasping in my throat persists, but now I don’t know if it is the original obstruction lodged there, or the memory of it, the imprint, which is not going to fade from my breathing flesh. For many years the word ‘marzipan’ affects me with its deathly hiss, the buzz in its syllables, a sepulchral fizz (32-3).

The imprint of the fly becomes connected in the infant Mantel’s vocabulary with the word ‘marzipan’, the name of the sweet she did not get to choose in the first place, knowing that her hesitation in the choice would cost her the choice altogether. It is the choice *not made* that leaves the imprint. The fear of imminent death is forgotten, and all that’s left is ‘marzipan’, the sense of death having been displaced onto this word, with its ‘deathly hiss’ and ‘sepulchral fizz’ (*GUG* 33). A sweet paste used to decorate cakes is now associated with death, sibilance completing the connection with the fly as a signifier of decay. This moment marks a kind of education for the child Mantel, who is learning to differentiate between reality and fantasy; yet these lessons are not entirely absorbed by the child or the adult, and never completely for any of us. A bit like the sweet/fly, they stick in the throat, are not swallowed whole or completely taken in. It is the word ‘marzipan’, seemingly innocuous, that continues to denote the child’s feeling of imminent death: not entirely ingested, words stick in

the throat, like the fly she may or may not have swallowed. We have already seen how Mantel's writing of childhood fantasies blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction, adult and child. The implications of this blurring become clear in thinking about autobiography, and how Mantel bends the form to account for the singularities of her experience and its texture.

Memoir and autobiography: critical approaches

(David Lodge and Paul de Man)

Paul de Man summarises the assumptions underpinning the 'orthodox' notion of autobiography:

It [autobiography] seems to belong to a simpler mode of referentiality, or representation, and of diegesis. It may contain lots of phantasms and dreams, but these deviations from reality remain rooted in a single subject whose identity is defined by the uncontested readability of his [or her] proper name (de Man "Autobiography" 920).

The act of writing an autobiography, for de Man, exposes the workings of the 'proper name' in fixing the identity of the subject being written about. The exposure of these workings leads to the assumption of 'presence'; the self-evidently 'real' subject exists, the version supplied by the subject is 'the truth'. This exposure leads to another in its turn, that writing is a reflection, or representation of life and needs the life to 'guarantee' meaning. Autobiography in its 'traditional' sense is a second order representation, a record of what happens, and yet is not all it 'seems', for de Man, as for Mantel, who writes, 'I have an investment in accuracy; I would never say, "It doesn't matter, it's history now"' (*GUG* 24). She constantly undercuts her statement of intention, 'I have an investment in accuracy' by the very commitment to writing as a means of obtaining that accuracy.

With this in mind, Mantel's choice of the memoir form is already problematic.

Another example from David Lodge's review of *Giving up the Ghost* illustrates these assumptions. In "Little Miss Never Well Triumphs", Lodge writes:

In short there has always been something of an enigma about the person behind Hilary Mantel's novels, as if each of them were a mask held up to disguise herself in a new and unpredictable way. Now she has dropped or discarded the masks of fiction by writing an autobiographical memoir, focusing particularly on her childhood (42).

For Lodge, autobiography acts as a form of revelation, a means by which we might learn something startling about the enigmatic author. Autobiography becomes a personal history with an ontology that differentiates it from the fictional, indeed 'allows' the writer to 'drop' or 'discard' her masks to reveal the 'truth' hidden within the fictional. The autobiography is a history of childhood which can be used to glean facts about the life of the author which will stand as guarantor over the work.¹²⁸ A clear demarcation emerges between autobiography as truth, pertaining to real life, and fiction as created and untrue. If we take as read that *Giving up the Ghost* is somehow part of the creation of what Mantel calls her 'self,' it is possible to read the rich and strange in her work in a much less reductive way. Not only does she dispute orthodox notions of what 'autobiography' is or should be, her work also challenges traditional assumptions of writing as the translation of psychological experience into a concrete medium of expression. Reading Mantel demands that we attend both to her desire to 'seize the copyright in myself' (*GUG* 71), and to the assumptions which underpin the critical work on literary autobiography.

To put it simply: Mantel writes autobiography in a different way. Amy Prodromou, for example, rightly recognises Mantel's work as subversive and pushing

¹²⁸ Barthes' formulation of the 'reality effect,' in which the writer's 'useless detail' offers a verification of the writing's adherence to reality, operates in a similar way. Like the literary detail (Flaubert's barometer) which underpins the 'real', details in autobiography are used to explain and inform readings of the writer's novels, and offer a guarantor of authenticity. See Roland Barthes 'The Reality Effect' in *The Rustle of Language*. Los Angeles: U of California Press, 1989. 141-148.

boundaries: she writes about *Giving up the Ghost* and its 'inbetween-ness' as part of the grief memoir sub-genre she terms 'memoir of textured recovery' (Prodromou 58).

In this article Prodromou identifies Mantel's place 'in how these narratives of loss invoke and produce a gendered self' (60), arguing:

...so while...Mantel on the one hand engender[s] a whole, solid sense of self through the autobiographical act, the tension between self as either fragmented and discontinuous or whole and continuous (a tension never fully reconciled) is the basis for this nuanced, 'textured recovery' that I am arguing forces us to rethink theories of the self, narrative and healing (Prodromou 71-2)

'Textured recovery' works as a metaphor to a point, emphasising as it does the messy bodily functions and ways in which Mantel seems to draw the lines of her body through writing. I would argue, however, that there is never a 'solid sense of self' in Mantel that is not also at the same time in a process of decay. What Prodromou takes to be a 'solid sense of self' is the textual residue of Mantel's narrative voice that puts meat on the bones of her words. For instance: Prodromou quotes Mantel writing about writing, 'when you have committed enough words to paper you feel you have a spine stiff enough to stand up in the wind' (Prodromou 68). Continuing, Mantel writes, 'But when you stop writing you find that's all you are, a spine, a row of rattling vertebrae, dried out like an old quill pen' (*GUG* 223). In the act of writing Mantel builds a sense of self that can 'stand up' to scrutiny, but the act is the very thing that sustains the body's solidity. Without writing, she seems to say, she is dry bones and old feathers, and could blow away in a puff of dust.

This intimate and strange connection between the body and writing occurs even more powerfully in Mantel's hospital diary of 2010, *Ink in the Blood*. She writes, 'I am fascinated by the line between writing and physical survival' (*Ink* 28).

This short diary is full of parallels between the written word and Mantel's descriptions of her body. The description of her wound, 'it has a spiral binding, like a

manuscript' is written with her inimitable humour and self deprecation: 'on the whole I would rather be an item of stationery than be me' (*Ink* 5). She describes the new line she discovers on her palm, and the 'lines' of the drip going into her wrist: 'The iambic pentameter of the saline stand, the alexandrine of the blood drain, the epidural's sweet sonnet form' (*Ink* 7-8). When she has to stay longer in hospital due to complications, she invents stories in her head, 'the novel is composed in elaborate Jamesian circumlocutions, and I breathe along with the punctuation' (*Ink* 24). Text and body combine in this diary to form an unusual symbiotic entity. Leaving aside the references to Woolf,¹²⁹ Mantel's commitment to writing and its connection with the inside of her body, its most intimate spaces, is less a space of recovery than of exploration. Mantel goes exploring in her own abdominal cavity, in effect. She makes the body metaphorical to investigate her own insides, and through writing thus problematises the relationship between the inside and outside.

Looking at *Ink in the Blood* thus enriches the reading of *Giving up the Ghost* by showing how Mantel intervenes in autobiography: not as a predetermined subject representing oneself in writing, but as a subject whose physical existence cannot be separated from its textual existence. As Sidonie Smith trenchantly states, '...life narrative is a site of embodied knowledge...life narrative inextricably links memory, subjectivity, and the materiality of the body' (Smith and Watson 49). Mantel makes the explicit link in *Giving up the Ghost*:

I have been so mauled by medical procedures, so sabotaged and made over, so thin and so fat, that sometimes I feel that each morning it is necessary to write myself into being — even if the writing is aimless doodling that no one will ever read, or the diary that no one can see until I'm dead (*GUG* 222).

¹²⁹ Stella Bolaki discusses the connections between Mantel and Woolf in "When the Lights of Health go Down": Virginia Woolf's Aesthetics and Contemporary Illness Narratives', arguing that Mantel's critique of Woolf threatens to reinstate the hierarchy between mental and physical illness. In Ryan and Bolaki ed.

If by writing, then, Mantel is drawing and redrawing the limits of herself, the remaking that takes place ‘each day’ (222) is a social act. This may seem paradoxical, given the tension that judgement invokes, but her explicit statement of intent, to ‘write herself into being,’ shows that by writing autobiographically Mantel is grappling with identity, and this engagement is absolutely implicated in the wider social implications of class and gender in particular. As Leigh Gilmore writes in the preface to *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women’s Self-Representation* (1994), ‘self-representation’ is a ‘contradictory code whose interruptive effects can be located in other genres’ (ix). The contradiction of ‘self-representation’ Gilmore identifies is played out in Mantel’s autobiography as a dialogue between the I who writes and the ‘myself’ whose story the ‘I’ is attempting to tell.

This contradictory practice can be read as a social act. To explore this further, Marianne Dekoven’s essay “The Literary as Activity in Postmodernity” reimagines the literary as a practice within postmodernity, rather than simply denoting certain kinds of texts. ‘[T]he literary’ thus becomes a doing with a social and cultural application, with implications for what Dekoven calls the ‘non-hegemonic constituencies empowered by the opening of the canon’ (Beaumont-Bissel ed. 105). For Mantel, a woman from a working-class background, writing is a way of creating and delimiting the self. If the literary offers a site of resistance, as Dekoven argues, Mantel’s writing is a revolutionary act that calls into question accepted ideas of who should write, and what they should write about. Mantel’s attempt to ‘seize the copyright in myself’ not only puts the stability of the I into question, it also exposes the workings of the narrative self-in-the-world, the self that writes in order to be a part of the world and the social (dis)order. This ordering and disordering of the self, the making of ‘something fit to be seen in...to go out in and face the world’ (*GUG*

223) refers back to the suggestion of writing for Mantel as a space less of recovery - as Prodromou argues - than of exploration. Moreover, this exploration into the self demonstrates the primacy of visibility and the network of inescapable social connections that exist in *Giving up the Ghost*. Mantel's attempts to redraw herself through writing constitute a revolutionary literary act which reconfigures the way bodies and writing are represented and created in the social. Her need to create a 'spine stiff enough to stand up in the wind' (222) is only assuaged through writing. Writing her-self is a kind of defiance, a way of breaking out of socially prescribed ideas of what that self should be, whether these are mediated through her stepfather's proscriptions or the doctor who forbids her to write.

If the 'truth' of Mantel's autobiography rests in its value to the reader as a document of lived experience, then the reading of her autobiography becomes 'an intersubjective process that occurs within a dialogic exchange between writer and reader' (Smith and Watson 16). Taking this into account, moreover, means that the 'authority of the autobiographical, then, neither confirms nor invalidates notions of objective truth; rather it tracks the previously uncharted truths of particular lives' (Smith and Watson 16). Mantel has spoken about the 'texture' of lived experience in her Reith lectures ('Can these bones live?' 2017), referring to the process of writing about historical characters. This attention to 'texture' creates a relationship to writing and meaning which is predicated upon a different kind of reading; a reading which elucidates how Mantel challenges both autobiography and literary realism. The dialogue created through writing, between writer and reader, informs the process of creating and representing identity.

In her essay "'Fiction' and the experience of the other", Peggy Kamuf (Beaumont-Bissell ed. 2002) writes about what she calls the fictional operation,

characterising it as: '[T]he irreducible possibility of fiction that is brought to bear in such a way as to shift the ground on which any theoretical discourse may claim validity' (Beaumont-Bissel ed. 157). Mantel's creation and representation of identity makes use of such a 'fictional operation' in the places where she self-consciously references her own writing practice. For instance: 'Eat meat. Drink blood. Give up your social life and don't think you can have friends. Rise in the quiet hours of the night and prick your fingertips, and use the blood for ink...' (*GUG* 5). Writing, for Mantel, allows her to make her self recognisable. The mention of her diary as hidden until death suggests that what is at stake is not only visibility, but (il)legibility. The episode of the 'magic slate' in *Giving up the Ghost* adds weight to Smith's claim that writing is inextricably linked to the production of the self.

Mantel's magic slate

Mantel writes about her first writing as a child, 'letters from an imaginary me to an imaginary someone' which 'could be disappeared in an instant' (*GUG* 69). These attempts take place on a child's toy, the 'magic slate,' a piece of equipment well known to Freud as the '*Wunderblock*' or 'Mystic Writing Pad'. Consisting of a thin sheet of paper over a waxy surface, writing upon the paper with a stylus causes writing to appear: lifting up the paper makes the writing disappear. The secrecy of this writing is a comfort to the child Mantel, all the time she is unaware that it is visible to others: 'I could write anything I liked, but if someone loomed into view I could disappear it in an instant' (*GUG* 69); 'I believed I was doing it in perfect safety' (69). On closer inspection, however, the imprint of what has been written is still visible. When the child Mantel discovers that the 'pen left marks on the plastic sheet' (69-70), the magic slate is changed for her forever. She thus gives up writing on the magic slate, for fear that her words could be deciphered, 'I didn't dare to risk it' (70). What disconcerts the author Mantel so much about this episode is the feeling of a safe space being invaded or violated: the word 'loomed' suggesting an adult overlooking the child Mantel's writing. The reader is left with the sensation of the interruption as a negative event, a precursor to judgement or censorship. The tension created throughout this passage allows us to experience the child Mantel's fears. The continuing 'horror' the adult Mantel feels if someone reads her work in the drafting stages is translated into pragmatic writing advice, 'don't show your work before you're ready' (70). This fear of exposure not only betrays the persistence of the child's 'habit' of 'concealment' (71), it also demonstrates the power of writing to create the self. Writing brings order to the chaotic interior world, but at the same time creates a vulnerability.

Derrida writes about this vulnerability and the threat of exposure in “Freud and the Scene of Writing”: ‘There is no writing which does not devise some means of protection, to protect against itself, against the writing by which the “subject” is himself threatened as he lets himself be written: as he exposes himself’ (Derrida *Writing* 281-2). To write is to court the threat of exposure, and flirt with judgement. To not write, however, means the dissolution of the self, the inability to draw one’s boundaries tightly enough. This is Mantel’s dilemma: writing delimits the boundaries of the body, and marks off what is inside from what is outside, but this process is always unstable: writing is a risky activity. Mantel’s description of her body as ‘a shabby old building in an area of heavy shelling’ (*GUG* 222) emphasises the ever-evolving nature of her attempts to ‘write myself into being’ (222). The *Wunderblock* offers an analogy for this writing and structure of the psyche, suggesting a model of how the psyche receives ‘innervations’ (in Freud’s word) from within and without. The child’s toy provides for Freud an amalgamation of what were previously mutually exclusive, either one has a permanent mark, but the available surfaces are subject to the constraints of space and time (eventually we will run out of paper and ink), or the material to be written on is inexhaustible, but the writing is impermanent.¹³⁰ The *Wunderblock* allows for both to be available, *simultaneously*. What is interesting is how Freud defers the act of memory into its analogy with writing. Without the act of writing (in its banal sense of putting pen to paper/chalk to slate), memory cannot be guaranteed, cannot be said to exist. The mnemonic intrapsychic process always runs the risk of forgetting, according to Freud:

¹³⁰ “Freud and the Scene of Writing”, p.279 ‘All the classical writing surfaces offer only one of the two advantages and always present the complementary difficulty.’

If I distrust my memory...I am able to supplement and guarantee its working by making a note in writing. In that case the surface upon which this note is preserved, the pocket-book or sheet of paper, is as it were a materialized portion of my mnemonic apparatus, which I otherwise carry about with me invisible. I have only to bear in mind the place where this 'memory' has been deposited and I can then 'reproduce' it at any time I like, with the certainty that it will have remained unaltered and so have escaped the possible distortions to which it might have been subject in my actual memory (Freud "Mystic" 429).

Writing acts as the *guarantor* of memory, faithfully *reproducing* it and preventing it from becoming subject to 'distortions'; the vagaries of time, neuroses, and so on.

Freud's 'certainty' that what is written is solid, and a pure reflection of the memory, pervades this passage. Ironically, also, the act of memory is recorded and can be reproduced, but another act of memory is required in order to remember where the physical manifestation of the original memory is stored. Thus there is no originary memory which grounds the representation of it in the mystic writing pad's analogy.

Enter Derrida, for he is concerned in his exploration, 'Freud and the Scene of Writing', with representation, and how this imperfect machine can act, how it acts as an analogy, an analogy that slips out of Freud's grasp and refuses to behave, indeed cannot behave, as Freud expected it to. Freud's logic (whether he knows it or not) exposes the relationships between perception and memory, perception and impression, and how these relate to writing: 'When perception — the apparatus which originally en-registered and inscribes — is described, the "perceptual apparatus" can be nothing but a writing machine' (Derrida *Writing* 278). In short, what Derrida is referencing here is representation; the mechanisms by which the psyche and its contents can be described, physically manifested into the world, as word, or image. He breaks Freud's system into three analogies. The first analogy consists of 'the conditions which customary writing surfaces impose on the operation of mnemonic supplementation' (279), which while simplifying also problematizes the idea of an originary memory, or event from which that memory takes its impression.

The writing fulfils a dual function: ‘A double system contained in a single differentiated apparatus: a perpetually available innocence and an infinite reserve of traces...’ (280). Derrida thus calls into question the very perception of what we call ‘depth’ or ‘surface’, making and simultaneously undercutting empirical moves which would situate the subject-in-writing on solid ground:

Let us note that the depth of the mystic pad is simultaneously a depth without bottom, an infinite allusion, and a perfectly superficial exteriority: a stratification of surfaces each of whose relation to itself, each of whose interior, is but the implication of another similarly exposed surface. It joins the two empirical certainties by which we are constituted: infinite depth in the implication of meaning, in the unlimited envelopment of the present, and, simultaneously, the pellicular essence of being, the absolute absence of any foundation (281).

How we ascribe depth to the psyche holds the key to the idea that the psyche is foundational, that in its depth of meaning it has presence. In this sense, the mystic pad is like a mirror; its depth and surface, its ‘perfectly superficial exteriority’ are one and the same, there is no interior. The problem that Derrida draws attention to, via Freud’s mystic pad, can be illustrated by referring back to Mantel’s description of her inner world: ‘My thoughts remained in my head, multiplying, buzzing like bluebottles in a box’ (*GUG* 71). Writing this sentence creates the image, the simile of thoughts likened to bluebottles. Writing creates and defines the feel, the sense, but it does not reproduce. Mantel’s secret writing to *herself* allows the space to order, apply sense, but only if it remains secret, and this is something she now cannot trust to be secret. The structure of metaphor is being exposed here: itself the first clue to the lack of presence, even while its existence protests a foundational strength.

Which leads us to the next analogy: the permanent trace which ‘supplements perception before perception even appears to itself [is conscious of itself]’ (Derrida *Writing* 282). This is the aspect that concerns Mantel, her secret writing thwarted by the marvellous permanent trace, writing’s purpose obliterated. As Derrida continues:

“Memory” or writing is the opening of that process of appearance itself. The “perceived” may be read only in the past, beneath perception and after it’ (282). There is no presence that exists before perception; perception and its description always come after, the making of meaning in writing exposing the psyche as origin that is unattainable. The third analogy, ‘temporality as spacing’, links and divides all three levels of the psyche in their discontinuity, ‘the remarkably heterogeneous temporal fabric of psychical work itself’ (283). Or, as Derrida more succinctly puts it, ‘time is the economy of a system of writing’ and ‘traces are constituted by the double force of repression and erasure, legibility and illegibility’ (284). Derrida effectively demolishes Freud’s assumption of the psyche as presence and foundation of meaning. The permanent trace on the magic slate, which so filled Mantel with horror, is only permitted an existence through this ‘double force’. Thus, Derrida continues:

Writing is unthinkable without repression. The condition for writing is that there be neither a permanent contact nor an absolute break between strata: the vigilance and failure of censorship...The apparent exteriority of political censorship refers to an essential censorship which binds the writer to his [or her] own writing. (285)

Derrida questions the assumption of an inner ‘depth’ that contains the meaning of an outer surface or appearance, thus drawing attention to the porosity of boundaries between inside and outside. The relationship between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ (if they can be differentiated) is always already contaminated. When he writes in *Of Grammatology*, ‘there is no outside text’, Derrida is questioning the metaphysical assumption of ‘presence’ in representation and scrutinising the binary of inside ‘interpretation’ and outside ‘real’. This assumption is what is at stake in his argument with Saussure, and his use of the image of writing as ‘disguise’:

Strange “image”. One already suspects that if writing is “image” and exterior “figuration”, this “representation” is not innocent. The outside bears with the inside a relationship that is, as usual, anything but simple exteriority. The meaning of the outside was always present within the inside, imprisoned outside the outside, and vice versa (Derrida *Of* 35).

A book is an ‘outside’, a surface exterior which yields its meaning from within its pages, its ‘inside’. If we take the metaphysical view, any meaning given by the hypothetical book is fixed only by recourse to another ‘outside’: the author’s biography (which is the example Derrida gives), the historical context, the sex of the author, and so on. By interrogating the binary inside/outside, Derrida questions the existence of (and indeed the necessity *for*), some other place from which to fix meaning. This fixture of meaning only serves to close reading off. Words are always already implicated in the web of what Derrida calls ‘arche-writing’, and thus ‘what opens meaning and language is writing as the disappearance of natural presence’ (Derrida *Of* 159). And again, in ‘Freud and the Scene of Writing’: ‘Traces thus produce the space of their inscription only by acceding to the period of their erasure’ (Derrida *Writing* 284). What Derrida calls ‘arche-writing’ is a provisional stance of making meaning, an implicit but interrogative understanding of writing as never present to itself, always supplementary.

The supplementarity of writing connects with Mantel’s own sense of her writing practice: ‘The inner process, the writing life, it doesn’t change at all. Every day is like the first day, it’s like being a beginner. There’s no time for complacency. You need to be extending your range all the time’ (Elmhirst *New Statesman* 2012: 43). Writing is mandatory for making and remaking the self, this much is clear. What lies beneath, however, is always to some extent obscured: the interior that the mirror does not reach. Mantel writes this obscurity, which necessitates the provisional stance, by redrawing the connections between dreams, reality and writing. She does this in subtle ways to not only represent her experience (‘seize the copyright’) but to move beyond the crude differentiation of experiences that takes place in narrative, the theoretical *cul-de-sac* of ‘did this or that really happen?’ Mantel’s writing, by

troubling the boundaries set by ‘truth’ opens up possibilities for critical readings. By presenting the writer in hyperbolic fashion, and showing an aesthetic sensibility clearly worked over by the fictional, Mantel creates a kind of hybrid which invests the memoir’s narrative with rhetorical value. This traversing of limits between fact and fiction does not sit well with traditional autobiographical conventions, as David Lodge’s reading shows. But the emphasis on the visceral and bodily nature of the writing process opens up the autobiographical to reading provisionally. By making problematic the relationships between all the different modes of life that are represented in the autobiography, and her openness to ‘other’ ways of seeing and knowing, Mantel takes up a provisional stance.

An Experiment in Love: synaesthetic words

This is the source of Mantel’s power: the ability to say ‘yes’ to all kinds of experience. Words are synaesthetic things in themselves, for Mantel. As Timberlake Wertenbaker points out, at a Royal Society for Literature event, the reader is struck by the fascination with words, in *Giving up the Ghost* (citadel, vaunt), and the ‘sensory nature of description’ in Mantel’s work. She asks Mantel, ‘what is the process by which the flesh is made word, if you like?’, using a passage in *An Experiment in Love* to illustrate. In this episode the focaliser, Carmel, is switching between narrating her present life, newly arrived at college with two of her school friends, and looking back over her past life, giving the background story to her friendships with both of these girls. In one of these reminiscences, she and her friend are walking home from school when they pass a pub- the Lady Smith:

‘Let’s talk like grown-ups,’ I said. ‘I’ll be Lady Smith.’ There was no picture of her on the sign but I thought I knew what she looked like. She would have a tailored costume, like our landlady’s. ‘You can be my husband,’ I told Karina. ‘You can be...’

I searched my inner catalogue of painted heads, ‘...you can be the Prince of Connaught.’

‘I don’t want to play it,’ Karina said. (EL 60)

There follows a conversation in which Karina expresses her reticence at playing the game, and Carmel tries to convince her by saying, ‘You just talk. You say grown-up words’ (60). When there is no reply forthcoming from the resolutely unimaginative Karina, Carmel ‘offers’ her the word ‘pneumonia’. Karina says ‘I am the Prince of Connaught. I have pneumonia,’ (EL 61) and the narrator gets angry:

You have to be that person, I wanted to say to her, put their skin on your back. Grown-up words came bubbling into my mouth: rouge, piano stool, niece. I felt my face blossoming out, round as the full moon, and I smelt the fragrance of pink face powder: I had become Lady Smith. ‘I returned home last night,’ I enunciated carefully, ‘to find my favourite niece seated on the piano stool.’ (61)

Words are the gateway to ‘being’ someone else, and the words come first, in what Mantel describes as a process, ‘to do with viewpoint’ (Mantel “Lives”). Wertebaker asks Mantel, how is the flesh made into word, referring to the process by which ‘real life’ is transmuted onto the page; although clearly here, it is the other way round. The words precede the transformation from Carmel into Lady Smith. She *feels* and *smells* the effect the words have; to make her into a different person entirely, a ‘grown up’ person. Similarly, in another episode in the novel, the ‘girls’ have a fire drill in their halls of residence, and as they are herded towards the exits, the ‘posh’ character Julianne (who changes her name to Julia in the course of the story), who also comes from the Holy Redeemer to London, starts to cough on the stairs. Carmel addresses Julia:

‘Why are you doing that?’ I demanded.

‘Authenticity. We really ought to be down at floor level gasping in the air. We ought to crawl.’

The impact of these absurd words was so powerful that when I look back at this scene I seem to catch a whiff of smoke indeed. I seem to see it curling under the corridor’s closed doors, and gradually rising into the air to form a haze at the level of our shoulders....But in fact, on that night, there was nothing but the cold air and the siren’s wail...(EL 155)

Here Julia's words and the impact they have on Carmel is refracted through the narrator's knowledge of what happens next (on subsequent readings the reader is let into the story too), a real fire which kills one of the girls, with Karina, Carmel's childhood friend implicated in the death. Again, only Karina and Carmel 'know' this. However the call for authenticity from Julia demonstrates the complication between life and story in Mantel: the power of the words to evoke the smell of smoke and its insistent journey into the halls of residence reminds us of the 'Lady Smith' incident: the words create the feel, the smell, the sense. In one very important sense Mantel is the process of memory and recall, and in so doing storytelling's process is laid bare. In the 'Lady Smith' episode, the reader is carried along with Carmel's imagination, with the queer sense that words evoke the feeling, that the words, in some important sense, *come first*. In this novel the recall of the past is exposed through a foreshadowing. Just as she does with *Giving up the Ghost*, Mantel puts into question the causality of flesh first, words second.¹³¹

Mantel's work plays with aspects of causality. I will now consider how her work, in the memoir particularly, plays with ideas of psychoanalytic causality. Take the ego, for example, and Freud's understanding of its development. His model, set out in *The Ego and the Id*, suggests that the development of the self involves a certain adaptation to the world. It is the ego's function to lead this adaptation. The ego seems to be an accretion or particle which grows through layer upon layer, eventually forming the interface between the hostile world and the id, whose drives must be protected.¹³² Leo Bersani, however, in *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and art*

¹³¹ See also my discussion of the 'Tudor' novels in the previous chapter.

¹³² Anna Freud, in her work *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence*, shows how the ego builds up structures to protect itself from external threat; and in Kleinian thought the outside world, in the child's paranoid schizoid position, must consist of all bad objects in order to protect the psyche, which must be perceived as "all good".

questions Freud's conception of the ego, arguing that it becomes an 'affective dump' (93); 'moribund' (100); 'a kind of cemetery of decathected object choices' (100). Bersani argues that the description of the Oedipal complex, 'the theory of self on the basis of the human subject's first passionate attachments to the world' (93) eventually starts to dissolve under Freud's attempt to incorporate all possible identifications into it.

It is possible to see how Mantel's work in the memoir also degrades the Oedipal complex, for example with the existence of her double father identification. Both father and step-father are present; her father always shadowed by Jack, who her mother has taken as a live-in lover. Her father one day just becomes a 'not'; 'Within a few weeks we were moving house: myself, not my father, my mother, Jack...' (*GUG* 121). When they arrive she imagines he is still there, speculating that he has something to do with the ghosts in the house. The doubling of fantasmatic identifications through her two fathers is compounded by the ghost of childhood which always returns. Childhood exerts the greatest pull for Mantel; the ghostliness of childhood's return. Two episodes demonstrate this ghostliness. She writes of walking up the road to her godmother's funeral, which is the same road she walked to school as a child:

Retracing it as an adult, in my funeral black, I felt a sense of oppression, powerful and familiar. Just before the public road joins the carriage drive came a point where I was overwhelmed by fear and dismay. My eyes moved sideways, in dread, towards dank vegetation, tangled bracken: I wanted to say, stop here, let's go no further. (*GUG* 21)

That evocative sentence, 'stop here, let's go no further' is an injunction not only to stop the young child's gloomy walk into school, 'the Palace of Silly Questions' (63), but to stop the march of time itself and its ineluctable slide. School represents the proper order of things, according to the authorities that impose themselves on the

child's life. She writes about school as a disruption: 'I knew, also, so many people who were old, so many people who were dead; I belonged to their company and lineage, not to this, and I began to want to rejoin them, without the interruptions now imposed' (60). This sense of being out of step, out of time with her own generation is echoed within the text's structure and in lexical choice. 'I was both too old and too young for the place I had arrived at. My best days were behind me' (*GUG* 61).

Mantel's 'attempt' to write becomes an attempt at the impossible, to fix time. But time won't be fixed; it keeps returning, like Mantel's memory, like the 'bracken' which is the setting for Mantel's 'thing that she can't write' (102). The 'bracken' is thus the background setting for these two distressing incidents. The first recounted in the memoir is her emotional flashback on the day of her godmother's funeral, on the carriage drive. The second, which actually occurs before the first in 'real time' but appears after it in the memoir, is Mantel's encounter at the age of seven with 'some formless, borderless evil' (107). As she puts it, 'I am haunted by the ghosts of my own sense impressions, which re-emerge when I try to write, and shiver between the lines' (23).

Leo Bersani's conception of the ego as 'cemetery' suggests that there is a fantasmatic quality to the self that borders on the spectral. This is seen in Mantel's memoir as a doubling identification, father and stepfather, and her preoccupation with the texture of her experience. What about the mother? The mother/child relationship is often fraught in Mantel's novels, particularly *Every Day is Mother's Day*. I wish to turn to Melanie Klein's conception of the mother/child relationship, with a particular reference to Mantel's attempts to 'self-mother'. This idea connects to Mantel's writing practice as a means of mothering that is not about bearing

children physically, but is a means of coping emotionally with childlessness imposed by external circumstances.

Mothering Mantel: Klein and little Fritz

In the 1921 paper “The Child’s resistance to enlightenment”, Melanie Klein analyses her own son at the age where he is starting to become curious about ‘where babies come from’. Klein begins with the following logic, the ‘irrefutable deduction’ (Klein *Contributions* 38) that because in adult analysis the roots of trauma can be traced back to early childhood, the reverse ought to be the case. She thus sets out to deal sufficiently with the child’s neuroses in order to avoid its mental ill health as an adult. This is psychoanalysis as “prophylaxis” (38), and the proposition of an entirely symmetrical relationship ‘forward’ in time between child and adult, and ‘backward’ in time between adult and child. Klein soon realises through the course of the treatment, however, that the admirable ideal of curing the child of probable adult neuroses, before they have had a chance to harden into strong resistances, can only ever work in part:

It appears, *e.g.*, in spite of all educational measures aiming amongst other things at an unreserved satisfying of sexual curiosity, that this latter need is frequently not freely expressed. This negative attitude may take the most varying forms up to an absolute unwillingness to know...At times this attitude sets in only after partial enlightenment and then, instead of the lively interest hitherto displayed, the child manifests a strong resistance against accepting any further enlightenment and simply does not accept it. (Klein *Contributions to Psychoanalysis* 40).

What is it in the child, working to create this attitude of disinclination to accept the knowledge offered to it? Klein calls this something an “attitude” (40) in the child, while also pointing out the impossibility of disentangling the many influences on upbringing; environmental, parental, or internal. She then describes the questioning

of the child and charts his turmoil, which seems to oscillate according to the answers he is given and his ability to accept those answers, finally culminating in his fixation upon the stomach:

...the stomach had a peculiar significance for this child. In spite of information and repeated correction, he clung to the conception, expressed on various occasions that children grew in the mother's stomach (Klein 46).

Therefore the stomach, as J.B. Pontalis points out in his essay "The question child", becomes an 'all purpose signifier' to Fritz. The stomach, important for the taking in and expelling of nourishment, becomes the site of significance for him because he literally cannot 'stomach the explanations given to him' (Stonebridge and Phillips ed. 86). The oral fixations of the child Mantel function in a similar way. However, whereas Fritz's 'all purpose signifier' is the stomach and thus things taken in are digested and processed, in the child Mantel's case objects get stuck.¹³³ The persistence of both children in the face of their parent's obfuscations is striking; neither child believes what they are being told. But at the same time as needing the truth, both children don't want to know, and are engaged in refusals of knowledge which attest to the power of the child's unconscious Oedipal 'instinctual organization' (85). Fritz wants to know, but he doesn't know what it is he wants to know. In any case, it is certainly not what the adult in charge of these things wants to tell him. And Klein isn't so keen, when it comes down to it, in hearing his truth either, inscribing as it does in words the forbidden and transgressive nature of the little boy's love for his mother. When she explains how a child is made:

Fritz listened with great interest and said, 'I would so much like to see how a child is made inside like that.' I explain that this is impossible until he is big because it can't be done till then but that then he will do it himself. 'But then I would like to do it to mamma.' 'That can't be, mamma can't be your wife for she is the wife of your papa,

¹³³ Mary Cappello's study of foreign bodies explores the deeper psychoanalytical meanings of taking in a range of bizarre objects, and what it might mean to categorise them in this way. *Swallow: Foreign Bodies, Their Ingestion, Inspiration, and the Curious Doctor who Extracted Them*. New York: The New Press, 2011.

and then papa would have no wife.’ ‘But we could both do it to her.’ I say, ‘no, that can’t be. Every man has only one wife. When you are big your mamma will be old. Then you will marry a beautiful young girl and she will be your wife’ (Klein *Contributions* 47).

Pontalis’ investigation exposes Klein’s optimism: her false belief that she could cure neuroses in the child, what he calls the ‘prophylactic illusion’. More interestingly for the study of Mantel, he points out her desire to ‘participate in the “birth” of an unconscious and, as it were, to mother it’ (Stonebridge and Phillips ed. 89).

Klein’s desire was to create children free from neuroses by enlightening them with sexual knowledge, answering their questions with honest and simple answers, giving them the tools to overcome repression. Klein emphasises the social nature of repression, which she saw as an external social tool, forbidding the acquisition and practice of such knowledge (82). Sexual education, therefore, was to benefit society in the long term. Rather than see the child as somehow lacking in his infancy, dependent and helpless, Klein took a great interest in what the child had to say.

Klein’s attempt to project the truths of psychoanalysis forward into the child’s future is not so different from education, after all: yet this particular case gives a practical demonstration of the multiple relationship between adult and child. This multiplicity can enable us to think about the act of writing as analysis, even as confession.¹³⁴ The child grows into the adult, forms his/her character; the adult looks back upon his/her childhood; the child dreams of the adult he/she will be, or could be, and of all the things she wants to be but never will be, knowing that she is confined.

Mantel, however, writes of how:

‘Intransigence’ was not a word I knew. But I was learning from my mother, learning to keep intact my own opinion of myself. I was learning it too early, though, for my circumstances. My adult reasoning and my small status were at odds (*GUG* 130).

¹³⁴ Josh Cohen also explores the relationships between writing, analysis and ‘confession’ in *The Private Life: Why we remain in the dark*. London: Granta, 2013 (141)

Mantel's perception of this intransigence is not so dissimilar to Fritz's unconscious refusal to 'know' what is being offered to him in the way of sexual knowledge, yet the chasm that has opened up between Mantel's intellectual maturity and her bodily immaturity seems to work in the opposite direction with Fritz. In a sense, he refuses to 'know' what his body is already telling him. Or, to put it another way: the state of childhood as Mantel perceives it involves the very disjunctions that psychoanalysis is concerned with. The child of Klein's analysis and the child in Mantel (in this case Mantel's own child) have to negotiate their way in a state that is contradictory, not easily categorised, and consequently difficult to capture.

If Klein's aim is to somehow cure the neurotic before they become neurotic and thus to create a world without neuroses, then Mantel's aim is to find her child and plot its development. Like Klein, Mantel finds that there is no linear way for this to happen. Klein imparts the truth to her son, to ease his passage in life. There is a sense in which Mantel is trying to do this for *herself*: there is no mention of healing, or peace, just the 'seizing of copyright' (*GUG 71*), the desire to write 'words that are ready to stand up and fight' (*70*). Yet, the phantasmatic world of the child playing and the writer's imagination comes up against a model of psychoanalysis, that we, following Leo Bersani, would call psychology. This psychology seeks adaptation to the world, taking as its model an embattled ego at odds with the world that must conflict yet make peace with that world. Questioning this, then, is necessary for the thinking of the theoretical child.

**Conclusion: “You have to hold it loosely, so it doesn’t snap”: Mantel’s
provisional stance**

The attempts made in this work to limit provisionality, to define it, are failed attempts. Provisionality’s work is always unfinished, always temporary, ready to rip up its writing or unpick its stitches and start again. Always remaking, it is more than a textual metaphor, trope or figure. Movements of reading texture erode any uncomplicated sense of realism. Although Mantel is clear that she is, in the sense of being attentive to facts and figures, a ‘devoted servant of realism’ (Appendix i 235), her writing as texture evokes a sense of threads being tugged and pulled into shape.

She writes:

But if you imagine the artist’s thread stretching and stretching, it quickly runs beyond your individual vision, and it’s subject to all sorts of interference and fraying — picks up resonances from the country it passes through — you have to hold it loosely, so it doesn’t snap. That looseness sounds like ‘provisionality’ - anything could happen, and you should be able to accommodate twists and turns without dropping the thread (Appendix i 235).

Text as weaving is thus suggested by the etymology of text and texture: the preponderance of needles that occur in Mantel’s writing also demonstrates the stitching together of fabric. The stylus of the ‘magic slate’ is like a knitting needle (*GUG* 69). The needle is pointed, sharp, like an arrow. One end will always be used to thread the needle, the other to work the thread through the fabric. You can stitch together with a needle, or unpick. Provisionality suggests the metaphor of weaving, while also exposing ‘time’s arrow’ in the figure of the needle.

I suggested in my Introduction that provisionality is one of many, perhaps infinite deconstructions. More than a figure, provisionality suggests the suspension of ‘reality’ as a common-sense or taken for granted ‘fact’. This thesis attempts to use provisionality to explore aspects that are so often taken for granted: the visual, the child, reality, and so on. The metaphor of suspension hovers around this whole study, and is explored explicitly in chapter three. The metaphor of suspension expresses one way of thinking through the problem of the child that underpins the whole project: its doubleness, at once growing and developing, and at once arrested, ‘remains intact’, as André Green suggests (Green *Diachrony* 137). The problem of the child is, ultimately, how can the child speak, when it is subsumed and submerged in the adult it becomes? The adult always speaks for the child, always imprints its own meanings onto it.¹³⁵ The child chapters were intended to avoid this reduction of child into its future adult self, by attempting to explain the far stranger and uncanny relationship between child and adult, walking a fine line between indeterminacy and a breakdown in meaning. Christa Wolf’s way of getting round this problem, in *Patterns of Childhood*: she speaks her childhood in the third person (23). They get around, these Wolves, one could say they ‘loup’. We not only have Virginia Woolf overseeing the whole thing, as ancestor, precursor. Another ghost. *Wolf Hall*, which although giving its name to Mantel’s novel only appears at the very end of it. Another oblique figure, to add to the pile.

Getting to the problem: the explored and unresolved tension between obliquity and the ‘clear-eyed’ Mantel. On the one hand, provisionality is seen from

¹³⁵ See Blum, Virginia L. *Hide and Seek: The Child between Psychoanalysis and Fiction*. Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1995 (5)

the side. The first chapter suggested the sideways look, the blink and wink as figures for the provisional reading stance. These figures of intermittency are spectral: the ghost is seen in the in the moment, in glimpses, flashes. Chapter one discussed Mantel's use of the expression 'tail of the eye' and how she uses this trope, along with the sideways look, to signal a different type of seeing on the margins of vision. I made some tentative steps to the *provisional* nature of Mantel's writing, through etymological explorations of seeing, connected by the Shakespearean 'blench'. The sideways look appears within *Wolf Hall* intra- and extra-textually: as both textual device and way of reading. For example: the title of *Wolf Hall* signposts Mantel's oblique intention. The house of the title is to the side of the action, as Rosario Arias points out, until the very end of the text when Cromwell fills a gap in the king's itinerary with a visit to the Seymours: 'He writes it down. Early September. Five days. Wolf Hall' (*WH* 650). When Cromwell dines with Thomas More and his family in *Wolf Hall*, he comes across the family portrait 'Entering the house, you meet the family hanging up' (227). But something strange happens when he interacts with the flesh and blood family; 'it is as if time has performed some loop or snared itself in a noose' (230). Looking at the portrait signals something strange happening to time. Mantel describes the portrait, not in ekphrastic style, but as a figure of the provisional: looking 'clear-eyed' and obliquely at once.

It is time to call on anamorphosis to draw together the strands of my argument. Anamorphic painting presents an object that has to be looked at from an entirely different angle, in order for it to make sense to the viewer. The most famous example is the Holbein the Younger's painting *The Ambassadors* (1553), in which the figure of a skull is interposed between the figures of the men depicted. Distorted beyond recognition when viewed head on, the image comes into focus when the

viewer changes position to look sideways from the right. The viewer of a painting has to change his or her position entirely in order to ‘see’ correctly the juxtaposed image, which makes no visual ‘sense’ until the viewer adjusts his/her position relative to the picture. You have to come at it side on. In the dominant, head-on view, the anamorphic object is seen as an undefined shape. The dominant view in some way *fixes, anchors* or *guarantees* the anamorphic shape, in the same way that a narrative is ‘framed’ by a dominant perspective. The skull shape of Holbein’s painting would ‘make sense’ on its own, but is framed by the dominant painting. Margorie Garber connects Hamlet’s ghost with the painting:

For there is a way in which Hamlet performs the same operation as Holbein’s painting upon the gaze and the trope of *vanitas*. Its final tableau of the death’s head in the graveyard scene is another critique of the subject (Garber 136).

This sense of having to come at something ‘side on’, that it is looked at sideways rather than straight ahead connects Mantel’s novels with other thoughts about reading. Derrida’s ‘Passions: “An Oblique Offering”’ for example; in which he suggests that ‘some might think [of being oblique] as a failure of duty since the figure of the oblique is often associated with lack of frankness or directness’ (11). It is a case, for Mantel, of being direct while being indirect; of cutting straight to the heart of the matter, via the side on. Derrida rejects the oblique (13) while acknowledging its value. Mantel’s obliquity is a tool for reading, and part of her provisionality. Mantel’s representation of her stepfather’s ghost speaks to Derrida’s notion of spectrality as an other kind of ‘being’, hauntology rather than ontology, and thus to a notion of death on a provisional continuum with life. For Mantel, death is not about a cessation of life. The dead, she says ‘are always in process’ (Appendix i, 234). The ghost, the being that has passed into death, is another phenomenal (dis)guise which cannot be perceived straight but must be somehow beneath perception, looked at

indirectly, aslant. There is a particular form of looking required in order to ‘perceive’ the spectre. On the one hand then, the sideways look, the blink, glance, glimpse, all of these figures suggested by the anamorphic painting and the spectre. On the other hand, the loop which doubles back, figuring the image of the clear-eyed Mantel.

The circle

The loop figures in Mantel as a way of making time strange, as we have already seen. The loop connects the wolf (loup) and the circle that for Derrida is so often associated with time (Derrida “Given Time” 167). The circle also suggests an infinite ‘doubling back’, in Peter Brooks’ words (100). What does this doubling back consist of? So many different ways of thinking about provisionality are suggested by the circle. The word doubling, meaning ‘mantling’, is itself haunted by Mantel’s ‘ghosts of meaning’ (*GUG* 222): attesting to the power of words to carry their own spectral meanings with them. At once present and absent, the ghost is the best figure we have to explain the power of words, both full with meaning and empty at the same time.

As Derrida states in *Writing and Difference*, about the absence at the heart of the letter:

Absence is the permission given to letters to spell themselves out and to signify, but it is also, in language’s twisting of itself, *what* letters say: they say freedom and a granted emptiness, that which is formed by being enclosed in letter’s net...
Signifying absence or separation, the letter lives as aphorism (Derrida *Writing* 87)

This doubling back is not only a return, but constitutes a loop or circle, a figure that haunts Mantel’s novels, as circle and as loup (wolf). In Aphorism 28 of “Aphorism Countertime”, Derrida writes ‘The circle of all these names in *o*...He [Romeo] simultaneously gains himself and loses himself not only in the common name, but also in the common law of love...’ (138). The circle of loop, to plunder Derrida’s

idea, is the figure of doubling, mantling. Provisionality is mantling: to double meaning upon meaning, to create circles.

To circle back to Derrida and “Aphorism Countertime”, he writes in aphorism 12:

...the anachronous accident comes to illustrate an essential possibility. It confounds a philosophical logic that would like accidents to remain what they are, accidental. This logic, at the same time, rejects as unthinkable an anachrony of structure, the absolute interruption of history as deployment of *a* temporality, of a single and organized temporality (130).

There are two temporalities functioning in Mantel’s work. There is the temporality of time as it is lived, the tendency to see the past as behind us, and the future ahead.

There is the temporality of the psyche, the crypt, deferred action, which allows the past to infect the present and the future, changing the course of time’s arrow in Laplanche’s words. And even more radically, there is the time of the democracy to come, which for Derrida in *Spectres of Marx* is always on its way.

What is at stake in writing about Mantel is this notion of a democracy to come: of an equality before the social that infuses her writing about class, gender, families. Mantel’s trick is to be able to dress up her subversion and the revolutionary impacts of her work as literary fiction (and popular literary fiction, that *sells*).

Far from being a bourgeois desire to reproduce the *status quo*, Mantel’s work offers a way of thinking about objects, things, people that perhaps are otherwise taken for granted. Take for example the child. Lee Edelman in *No Future* rails against what he calls ‘reproductive futurism’ which

generates generational succession, temporality and narrative sequence, not toward the end of enabling change, but, instead, of perpetuating sameness, of turning back time to ensure repetition — or to assure a logic of resemblance (more precisely: a logic of metaphoricity) in the service of representation and, by extension, of desire (Edelman 60).

By contrast, I would argue that Hilary Mantel’s fiction and memoir do precisely this *through* the figure of the child: the child is the place by means of which this “metaphoricity” is counteracted. In other words, in Mantel’s fiction, far from treating

the child as a nostalgic construction she utilises it in the service of a new means of representation. A means of representation in which the child and creative writer can stand for the complicating of boundaries and limits between reality, dreams, ghosts, and in which even though there is death, the dead can speak.

The ego as provisional fiction: or, looking sideways

The very basis of who we think we are is fictional, and thus provisional. Lacan says:

...this form situates the agency known as the ego, prior to its social determination, in a fictional direction that will forever remain irreducible for any single individual or, rather, that will only asymptotically approach the subject's becoming, no matter how successful the dialectical syntheses by which he must resolve, as *I*, his discordance with his own reality. (76)

What does it mean to call the ego fictional? At its simplest, we have to create a story with which to live in the world. The consequence of the ego's fictional direction is that the 'self' which houses the subject's 'own reality', becomes a kind of shadow or ghost. When we consider the identificatory mis-steps that occur on the way to becoming a subject, all those lives that might have been lived haunt us. They dwell in the unconscious, and provide us with fresh material for frustration, for wishes and desires to be denied. The fictional ego, that pretender in the social order, has to function as a responsible citizen, but all those other selves are allowed the freedom to dream, to transgress. Lacan comes to a rather depressing conclusion with this aspect, that the subject is doomed always to be alienated, searching and never finding the thing that he most desires, of which he knows nothing, '...this gestalt...symbolizes the *I*'s mental permanence, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination' (Lacan 76). The ego is destined to 'miss' the self, and never be fully identified with it. For Lacan, the ego is an approximation and is thus alienated from

itself and from the social, familial context in which it has to function. The ego, the very basis of self, begins from the basis of *méconnaissance*, misidentification.

The subject's ego, its ability to function in the world, is based upon the first 'look'; and so the privileging of vision in culture is no surprise, and neither is the preoccupation with seeing things as they really 'are'. Mantel's writing thinks about these 'other lives we might have led' (*GUG* 20), but rather than face them straight on, she looks at them sideways: her line of vision is extended. If the ego is characterised by the inadequacy of looking straight on (quite apart from the fact that the mirror image is always distorted), Mantel's 'fictional direction' attempts to play with, or circumvent the image, in order to come at what is 'really there'. If misidentification somehow 'makes us', then the image (and not only the mirror image) has spectral quality. We are back to Bersani's complaint about Freud that the ego becomes a cemetery. The fictional direction of the ego and its irreducibility means that our entire psyches are on some level spectral. We are haunted at all times by choices made or not made and lives un-lived.

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Appendix (i): Message to the Author

Transcript of questions sent to Hilary Mantel, March 2016. Her emailed answers appear in italics below the questions.

- Your writing is full of allusions to other writers, to fairy tales and folklore. Your story, ‘The Present Tense’, makes reference to *The Mill on the Floss*. How would you describe the relationship your writing has to writers who have gone before? And George Eliot in particular?

I can't help think of myself as a creature bred within texts. I do remember my life before I could read, but even then it was replete with stories, and I had learned to repeat whole passages from books adults read to me, so I could fake reading before I could do it. I always thought of stories as an education, which meant that I thought they were already latent in me. And I thought of any added stories as an induction into the world, rather than an escape from it. It wasn't until I was about eight that I became aware of the existence of people called 'writers,' as a medium for stories: before that, I suppose I thought stories just naturally existed, and grew like trees in a form natural to themselves. But once I knew about writers - that many books were produced by one individual - I became suddenly hyper-conscious of form. I never read innocently again, but always with calculation, checking my own reactions, and looking to see how it was done. So it is natural that intertextuality is crucial to my own work - I am doomed to think and talk in quotations. As a child I had a sense of being saved by books, hauled back from an abyss of unknowing.

But at the point where I was able to imagine 'a writer,' I imagined authors to be mostly dead - anyway, all at an equal distance, and very far away. The idea of liking or following a particular writer didn't seem to occur to me until I was about 10. I didn't have the sense of writers having a body of work. I think this was because of the incoherent and sparse nature of my experience as a reader — I had simply not enough books at the right time.

*However, the estimates of writers I formed at about that age have been hard to shake. I couldn't then get on with Dickens and still can't. I didn't come across George Eliot, except as a name. I didn't read her till I was in my twenties. When I became (accidentally) a teacher in Botswana I taught *Silas Marner* to teenagers. I kept wanting to apologise for it. But they got on with it quite well. The moral nature of the story appealed to them.*

*GE [George Eliot] is probably going to go on appearing in my fiction. As I say, I was aware of her long before I read her. When I was about 8 I became fascinated by Susan Coolidge's *Katy* books. They are gruesomely unhealthy in some ways, but I was drawn by their picture of happy siblinghood and nurturing fatherhood, and I liked the slight exoticism of a book about American life — I was reading *Little Women* about the same time, but not yet *Tom Sawyer*. In *What Katy Did Next*, there is a moment which seems to me like a hallucination. *Katy* is a grown-up and travelling*

in Europe, and in London, she sees George Eliot in the street. An author IN a novel? I knew a frame was being broken. I found it very exciting. More exciting than Silas Marner.

- It seems to me that you are attempting something quite different from both traditional realism and detached 'postmodernism'. In *Beyond Black*, for example: although the text is ambiguous, there is an emotional quality to the portrayal of Alison that means the reader is invested in her. We care about what happens to her, quite apart from belief in ghosts. How do you see your relationship to realism, and the realistic form? Would you say there are surreal elements to your work?

I think the ghost story as a form has always fascinated me, and it seems to me that the most successful are those most rooted in realism, where the texture of normal life is faithfully described - then something slips, minutely but consequentially. I am looking for those points where we have to admit that our assumptions are useless - that because of the events or perceptions of a split second, everything we thought is invalid, that every perceived truth is trashed. If you saw a ghost, you would have to revise your idea of how time works, and what death is - radically. If someone shot the king, you'd be caught up in a revolution. If YOU shot the king, you'd have changed history. It's the work of a moment. I'm looking for those moments. I think they are common, in an individual life. They need not involve events that are public, or spectacular. They can be in a minor key - an epiphany, after which life can no longer be lived on the old terms. It's at that point of change I am working - where the status quo crumbles: and it may be that part of what falls away is the solid nature of the world, the 'universal laws.' It's not so much a question of leaving behind realism for surrealism, but of abandoning innocence or ignorance for a state of deep alarming knowingness. Once a character has realized nothing is as it seems, there's no going back into the comfort zone.

- There is a strong non conformist streak in your work, I think, an irreverence that in the social world we now inhabit is really important. You have described yourself as a non aligned radical in the past, and part of the reasoning behind using the word provisionality in my own work was to capture a sense of the questioning and the open reading of your texts, that there is no finished product. Is this something that you have set out to do deliberately?

It seems an inevitability. All situations that one might describe are in process. The dead are in process. A book is never really finished, only continued under another title and in a different form. If you are an artist of any kind and setting yourself out for a lifetime's work, you are trying to hold on to the thread which represents a continuity, which traces the path back - you are doing that in the teeth of impermanence - but it works, after a fashion. Whereas the non-artist is like someone who tries to keep a trace on the road home by dropping crusts of bread - they just get snapped up by the ravens, and when you look back you say, 'How did I get here?' But if you imagine the artist's thread stretching and stretching, it quickly runs beyond your individual vision, and it's subject to all sorts of interference and fraying - picks up resonances from the country it passes through - you have to hold it loosely, so it doesn't snap. That looseness sounds like 'provisionality' - anything could happen,

and you should be able to accommodate twists and turns without dropping the thread. My process as a writer is designed to leave structure loose - to postpone decisions till, of the many possibilities within a novel, some show themselves as clearly preferable. This means I generate much more text than I can use, and can never say where I am up to. As soon as I start a novel, I am up to everywhere. I am fascinated by the debates that went on in the French Revolution about how the revolutionary spirit could be sustained - how did you stop the new order ossifying and becoming the old order? How often did you throw out the government and make it new? As soon as you arrive, you must set off again. That is my perception about writing - there is no point of stasis.

- The Gothic and spectrality seem to be the dominant ways of reading your work at present, what do you think about this?

*Okay so far as it goes. I think *A Place of Greater Safety* is the least inflected by the supernatural, but even that has a single creepy scene. But then the Gothic is not about the supernatural - it is about power and the hiding of power, the concealed hand in the sleeve - not per se about groaning in vaults. We shouldn't mistake the trappings for the thing itself, but it is a mistake people do easily make. The paranoid position is common to victims of all sorts - we miss a lot if we over-identify it with the feminine, and describe gothic as a feminine form. I write about a lot of trapped women but also trapped men; it just takes the men longer to see the trap. I wouldn't like my work to be seen as entirely fable, or allegory. Everything is layered, but often there is a top layer that is entirely solid, and is just what it is. Critics of historical fiction often have trouble with this point,. They think that your writing about the past is an elaborate code for your commentary on the present. In my case it isn't. Thomas Cromwell really is Thomas Cromwell, no one else. That is why I pay a great deal of attention to documents and tight little facts and figures. In that way I think I am a devoted servant of realism. I often question the received version, but that is different from departing from the mode. I think, though, that historical fiction has often been a pedestrian and conventional form. I am trying to deploy imagination as a tool to reinforce the reality of the past - to make it more imaginable and more solid for others - rather than to vanish it into myth. Except when it insists on vanishing, at the edges if not the centre. What is fascinating about Mrs Thatcher is that she was wholly unconscious of her own mythic dimension. So were the people about her. They just didn't think on that plane at all. So they could never understand either her vote-winning popularity with some sections of the country, or why she was so hated by others. Contrast this with Henry VIII, Elizabeth I - they didn't have to fight elections, but if they did they would have won them all - because they were wholly conscious of what they represented in the collective imagination, and were able to manipulate their image, and they were served by people who understood the process. Whether the subject is herself conscious of her archetypal quality - as Mrs Thatcher was not - the author is conscious of it. So the author can write 'big' fiction. It's within the realist remit, but it goes deep, and digs down into the reader's psyche. You can't write or read it simply as an intellectual exercise. It requires commitment and the opening of your own imagination.*

- Poet Wayde Compton says his teacher called the semi-colon a ‘gutless colon’. Considering your commitment (addiction?) to the semi-colon, what do you think of that?

I'd never heard of that. I suppose he couldn't resist the awful pun. In my view, it should be possible to mark up prose like music, employing many more punctuation marks than we currently have in use. I don't like to write things that don't work when read aloud. SO the semi-colon is important to me, not only for meaning, but for breathing. I enjoy the colon too and would like to liberate it from some of the rules I once learned about how it should be deployed. I am conscious that I don't always use the semi-colon 'properly' - but needs must. There just aren't enough possibilities.

- I was fascinated by ‘The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher’. Firstly the representation of history, but also how the reactions to it (Tebbit’s being a notable example) seemed to prove the point about the philistinism of the Tory, the inability to grasp the intangible or what can’t be counted in monetary terms. Thatcher becomes an image, as representation she operates across time. Then I came across this about Margaret Thatcher, in a book called *Letters Against the Firmament* by Sean Bonney:

There are those who say Thatcher is just a frail old woman and we shouldn't pick on her. I prefer to think of her as a temporal seizure whose magnetosphere may well be growing more unstable and unpredictable, and so demonstrably more cruel, but whose radio signature is by no means showing any signs of decreasing in intensity soon. They can hear it on fucking Saturn. The paradox being, of course, that Thatcher herself sits far outside any cluster of understanding the bourgeois mind could possibly take into account.

There’s something about the coincidence here of the idea of Thatcher as image and sound wave that intrigues me. Bonney writes about the riots, which becomes even stranger (on a textual and temporal level, I think) when you consider your use of the name Duggan, as Mark Duggan’s killing precipitated the riots in Tottenham. There is something about how you write fictional texts around real life details that is interesting and intriguing. For example, the name Duggan which is on one level a signifier of ‘Irishness’, so that it becomes a shorthand for the plumbers possible ‘affinities’, but on the other a kind of wormhole that the reader can get stuck down, do you mean the Balcombe Street siege perpetrator Harry Duggan? Or Mark Duggan? Possibly all or neither, but I think what I’m trying to think about is the way you invite the reader to question and think these possibilities, without ever trying to limit those possibilities or close the reading down. Can you comment on this at all?

None of that was present to my mind when I chose the name ‘Duggan,’ but that doesn't mean it is wrong for other people to read it in. You have to allow people that; they release their own power into the story. I am the last person to claim a street-smart knowledge of my own sub-conscious. Nobody governs down there.

