# "WHY PASS A KNIFE BETWEEN TWO TEXTS?" GRAFTING NEW NOVELS AFTER MODERNISM: SHEILA WATSON'S *THE DOUBLE HOOK* AND THE *NOUVEAU ROMAN*

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# Abstract

This comparative approach to Sheila Watson's 1959 novel *The Double Hook* seeks to read it in light of the French *nouveau roman*, and Alain Robbe-Grillet's 1953 novel *The Erasers* in particular. *The Double Hook*, Watson's Paris journals and Professor Flahiff's unpublished biography on Watson show that her experimental fiction partakes in a certain *zeitgeist* surrounding literary debates of the late 1940s and early 1950s concerned with the future of the novel. Writing in the wake of a formally and aesthetically experimental modernism, but before the articulation of postmodernism, Robbe-Grillet and Watson found themselves in a liminal period which saw the re-emergence of the traditional realist novel, as writers were attempting to convey a renewed interest in the political and the social. I suggest that Watson and Robbe-Grillet sought to reinvent the novel through a process that Jacques Derrida calls "grafting," where change is achieved through a displacement in which what we traditionally perceive by a concept is spliced together with a "new" concept, giving priority to that which had been dismissed or marginalised in first place. I identify grafts at work in both *The Double Hook* and *The Erasers* and also graft together Watson and Robbe-Grillet, modernism and postmodernism.

Graft 1 examines Watson's novel in light of M. M. Bakhtin's concept of the polyphonic novel, Derrida's concept of textual grafting and Roland Barthes's response in *Writing Degree Zero* to Jean-Paul Sartre's call for a *littérature engagée*. Graft 2 examines Watson and Robbe-Grillet's call for new forms for their novels, with emphasis on the notion of character. As new forms require a shift in how we read and interpret, the only possible response for the reader is to enter Derrida's state of "play." Graft 3 discusses Watson and Robbe-Grillet's understanding of the term "new" and places Watson within

the French notion of *modernité*, which, unlike the Anglo-American dichotomy of modernism / postmodernism, does not allow for a clear break between "new" and "old," incorporating instead a more complex response to history and progress.

*For Carol, with love and squalor*

# Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge my indebtedness to Professor Fred Flahiff, who in an extreme act of generosity and goodwill lent me the unpublished manuscript of his biography on Sheila Watson. This manuscript has proved invaluable, not only because it is the first biography to be written on Watson, but also for the unique, often emotionally moving and always intellectually stimulating insight it offers into the life and thought of Sheila Watson. Moreover, in the self-effacing fashion of Watson herself, Flahiff the narrator becomes for a time Flahiff the editor, as he provides us with large sections from Watson's journals, in particular those which she kept while living in Paris from the fall of 1955 to the spring of 1956. With Flahiff's permission, I have quoted from both the journals and the biography throughout.

However, I would like to take this opportunity to stress that my approach to Watson's work is not at all biographical. My intention here is to illustrate a certain affinity between Watson and writers of the *nouveau roman* and my use of Watson's journals is limited to tracing a certain *zeitgeist*. To explain his intention behind including Watson's journals in the biography, Flahiff quotes Marshall McLuhan: "'The man of letters as engaged in self-expression is meaningless without his public,' he wrote to a friend. 'He can, as it were, carry on an inner dialogue between himself and his public'" (113-114). It is Flahiff's expressed desire "[t]o provide the reader with some experience of such a dialogue . . ." (114), and it is my hope that this thesis will show the result of one such experience of dialogue.

K. L., Vancouver, 2003.

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# Abbreviations

*AS – Age of Suspicion*

*Bio. - Biography*

*DH – The Double Hook*

*DI – The Dialogic Imagination*

*Erasers – The Erasers*

*FNN – For a New Novel*

*GM – Ghosts in the Mirror*

*LV – Labyrinths of Voice*

*OD – On Deconstruction*

*Problems – Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*

*WDZ – Writing Degree Zero*

*WL – What Is Literature?*

# Introduction: "The Structure of the Graft"

On March 31, 1956, the Canadian writer Sheila Watson wrote in her journal: "Except under particular circumstances one does not begin with God–one ends with God" (Flahiff, *Bio.* 194). But Watson, though the sole creator of a work of fiction, is of course not God. She has more in common with Coyote, under whose trickster eye live the old lady, James, Greta and the other characters that inhabit her 1959 novel *The Double Hook.* In "Death is a Happy Ending: a Dialogue in Thirteen Parts," Robert Kroetsch claims that

> the artist him/her self:
>
> in the long run, given the choice of being God or Coyote, will, most mornings, choose to be Coyote:
> he lets in the irrational along the with rational, the pre-moral along with the moral.
> He is a shapeshifter, at least in the limited way of old lady Potter. (208-209)

George Bowering, too, aligns Watson with the trickster figure in his Afterword to *Sheila Watson and The Double Hook*[1]: "Sheila Watson, Trickster," the title announces, and we hear a "syntactical rime" (188) with "Sheila Watson, Writer" or even "Sheila Watson, Artist," thus juxtaposing, if not conflating, the writer-artist with the trickster. And like the trickster figure of Coyote, Watson is present throughout this whole thesis, though her presence will be different depending on which shape she inhabits, depending on, in other words, whether we will be examining Watson in the shape of the 1950s novelist, the implied author of *The Double Hook* or the modernist / postmodernist.

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[1]Edited by George Bowering, this book contains a considerable selection of critical texts on Watson and *The Double Hook*, and Bowering's Afterword presents various interpretations, including his own, of Watson's Coyote.

The trickster figure in Watson's novel has been discussed in great detail elsewhere and, though we shall return to it later, let us instead dwell here on another image: that of the circus. Watson in her journal, while revising *The Double Hook* in Paris, wrote that

> [t]he circus becomes the symbol of life for the writer–for me at least. There is no message–there is the impossible–and men lifting it like a weight or jumping through it like a hoop–or trying to tame it: torn faces, falls from the tight rope–spectacular manipulations–tigers bowing humbly before men–clowns drooling. (Flahiff, *Bio*. 183)

Watson, whose distinctive writing style, as we shall see, favours minimal narration through an extensive use of mimesis (where mimesis is understood as "showing" through a preponderance of dramatic scenes in the form of direct discourse), is perhaps the equivalent of the ringmaster of the circus, introducing the show and setting various spectacles in motion, only to quickly pull out of the spotlight and blend into the discursive shadows, relinquishing any control over the multitude of performing characters and their acts (actions), being both of the circus and a mediator between the circus and its audience. Yet "life for the writer" is not simply limited to one role: the writer struggling with his or her text can take on the shapes of drooling clowns, men taming tigers or men jumping through hoops. I say struggling because Watson's metaphors all bring to mind connotations of struggle. It is not a world of effortless entertainment that Watson presents to us. Along with failed attempts–the "torn faces, falls from the tight rope"–there are images of attempts to conform ("jumping through hoops"), of manipulations beyond the natural ("tigers bowing humbly before men"). There is, too, the image of those who "lift [the impossible] like a weight." What experimental novelist would not feel weighed down by the impossible, especially writing in the 1950s, a time when the legacy of *Ulysses*, *Finnegans Wake* and *The Waves* still weighed heavily on the shoulders of new

generations of writers, while at the same time the traditional novel, in order to convey a new interest in the political and the social, had yet again taken precedence over any continuation of the formal and artistic experiments attempted by the Anglo-American modernists? We have here, too, an echo of that age-old riddle of Christianity concerning the question of God's omnipotence: "Can God create a stone so heavy that He cannot lift it?" The 20th century had begun to question the authorial omnipotence and narrator omniscience that had been so prominent in the 19th-century realist novel, and this questioning was, as we shall see, of great concern to Watson, whose experimental writing certainly did not jump through any conformist hoops.

How then does one write experimental novels after modernism? It must have been a daunting task indeed, for in what we shall come to see as the modernist "compulsiv[e] thinking about the New" (Jameson ix), the novel genre had in fact been declared dead. In 1923, T. S. Eliot claimed that the novel had "ended with Flaubert and James" and said of James Joyce's *Ulysses* that

> [i]f it is not a novel, that is simply because the novel is a form which will no longer serve; it is because the novel, instead of being a form was simply the expression of an age which had not sufficiently lost all form to feel the need of something stricter. Mr. Joyce has written one novel–the *Portrait*; Mr. Lewis has written one novel–*Tarr*. I do not suppose either of them will ever write another 'novel.' . . . It is . . . because Mr. Joyce and Mr. Lewis, being 'in advance' of their time, felt a conscious or probably unconscious dissatisfaction with the form, that their novels are more formless than those of a dozen clever writers who are unaware of its obsolescence. ("*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth" 177)

Eliot sees the novel as a leftover form from an age that still felt the need to impose restrictions upon art–restrictions which the 'the modern century' had managed to throw off–and as a formless novel is, in Eliot's opinion, no longer a novel at all, the novel should rightfully be pronounced dead. However, Eliot was not alone in issuing obituaries.

Virginia Woolf claimed after finishing *Mrs. Dalloway* in 1924 that "I'm glad to be quit this time of writing a 'novel'; and hope never to be accused of it again" (qtd. in Bradbury xvi). Yet what she hoped to be accused of writing instead was less clear: "'I have an idea that I will invent a new name for my books to supplant "novel",' wrote Virginia Woolf in her diary. . . . 'A new–by Virginia Woolf. But what? Elegy?'" (qtd. in Bradbury xii).

Nor did this trend of issuing death certificates end with modernism: as Bradbury notes, referring to the many debates surrounding the novel in Britain alone, "the novel has in fact been dead for every single decade of the century"[2] (xv). Yet Eliot's and others' negative pronouncements on its future were, in hindsight, more prescriptive than descriptive, since the novel to this day is very much alive. Bradbury is able to list, and continues to do so for nearly 600 pages, generation after generation of authors writing and publishing novels in every decade of the twentieth century. Rumours of the novel's death, therefore, can be said to be greatly exaggerated: in fact, Marte Robert, in *Origins of the Novel*, claims that " [g]raduating from a discredited sub-category to an almost unprecedented Power, it now reigns more or less supreme over the world of literature which it influences aesthetically and which has become economically dependent on its welfare" (58).

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[2]According to Bradbury, after Eliot and Woolf's pronouncements, "[t]he novel was dead again in the Thirties, when the Marxist critics and writers saw the novel as a Victorian bourgeois prison. . . . The novel was definitely dead by the coming of the Second World War, when Virginia Woolf declared its end in an essay called 'The Leaning Tower', and George Orwell announced, in another essay of 1940, 'Inside the Whale', that the writer had been left sitting on top of a melting iceberg. . . . After 1945, the novel was even deader. Cyril Connolly, the editor of the magazine *Horizon*, announced 'closing time in the gardens of the West'. . . . In 1954 the *Observer* newspaper ran an influential series, 'Is the Novel Dead?'. . . . It was in the Seventies that . . . *The New Review* ran a symposium in which it took nearly sixty British novelists to get together and agree there was nothing at all going on in the British novel. . . . When [the eighties] dawned . . . *Granta* devoted its third issue (1980) to mourning 'The End of the English Novel'. . . . In 1993, the *Guardian* newspaper was convinced, as so often, that British fiction was dead and American literature better" (xvi-xviii).

Why then are so many critics bent on declaring the novel dead? Moreover, how would they define this novel that was perceived to be dead or at least close to dying? In the essay "Epic and Novel" in *The Dialogic Imagination* (*DI*), M. M. Bakhtin, who presents a very different view of the novel from that of Eliot and Woolf above, claims that

> [t]he utter inadequacy of literary theory is exposed when it is forced to deal with the novel. In the case of other genres literary theory works confidently and precisely, since there is a finished and already formed object, definite and clear. . . . Everything works as long as there is no mention of the novel. . . . Faced with the problem of the novel, genre theory must submit to a radical re-structuring. (8)

Bakhtin's alternative is "to approach the novel precisely as a genre-in-the-making" (11), to see it not as "merely one genre among other genres" but as "the only developing genre" where all other genres are "long since completed and in part already dead" (4). Not only does Bakhtin see the novel as "this most fluid of genres" (11), but he also proposes a history of the novel whose "authentic, folkloric roots are to be sought" as far back as in "the low genres" of Ancient Greek literature. As Michael Holquist suggests in his Introduction to *The Dialogic Imagination*,

> Bakhtin is clearly not referring to that concept of a novel that begins with Cervantes and Richardson. These books, and especially the nineteenth-century psychological novel that evolved from them, have become the canon of the genre-novel. (xxxi)

We suggest that the limited concept of the novel rejected by Bakhtin is in fact the very one to which Eliot and Woolf refer above: in other words, what the modernists sought to declare dead was the "the canon of the genre-novel" that had begun with Richardson and culminated in the Balzacian realist novel of the mid-nineteenth century. To Bakhtin, however, this period of the genre-novel was only one stage among many in the on-going

development of the novel. The "unconscious dissatisfaction with the [novel] form" which Eliot attributed to Joyce and Lewis would therefore in a Bakhtinian perspective be seen as a dissatisfaction with the novel as a *genre*, because genre to Bakhtin is "the kind of formulae that have tended to limit literary discourse." In fact, the novel "is seen as having a different relationship to genre, defining itself precisely by the degree to which it cannot be framed by pre-existing categories" (Holquist, Glossary, *DI* 428). Instead, the *novel form* "is the name Bakhtin gives to whatever force is at work within a given literary system to reveal the limits, the artificial constraints of that system" (Holquist, Introduction, *DI* xxxi).

In this thesis, we shall seek to examine Watson and her novel *The Double Hook* in the light of a period in literary history that attempted to "reveal the limits" and shed "the artificial constraints" of a narrow concept of the novel in which what could be said to constitute a novel had become synonymous with the nineteenth-century realist novel as epitomised by Balzac. In France in the mid-1900s, the term *nouveau roman* was coined to encompass a group of novelists such as Alain Robbe-Grillet, Nathalie Sarraute, Michel Butor, Claude Simon and Marguerite Duras. The host of proposed terms to designate what some critics chose to see as a school of writing (*roman blanc*, *anti-roman*, *roman expérimental*) testifies to the difficulty of grouping such different writers together. What all these writers had in common, however, and this they also shared with Watson, was a common concern for the future of the novel and a desire to change the genre from within by ridding it of its many stale conventions. Though struggling against the same constraints as Eliot, Woolf et al., Watson's and the new novelists' approach differed significantly from that of the Anglo-American modernists because they did not seek to reject the novel as a label for their work. In fact, though critics would strive to find

alternative labels for *The Double Hook*, Watson herself never referred to it as anything other than a novel, claiming in an interview with Bruce Meyer and Brian O'Riordan in 1984 that though "[i]t has been said that technically it [*The Double Hook*] is not a novel and perhaps it isn't," it is nevertheless "a narrative structure of some kind" ("It's What You Say" 166). In this, she echoes the various writers of the French *nouveau roman.* Nathalie Sarraute, for example, claims in Lois Oppenheim's *Three Decades of the French New Novel* that "what I was writing could only be called a novel" (123), and Alain Robbe-Grillet's rallying of himself and others under the very term *nouveau roman* makes it difficult for us to see him as anything other than a novelist. By juxtaposing Watson's experimental fiction with the *nouveau roman*, we shall find in both a striving towards what Sarraute calls "a total liberation of the forms and the content of the novel" (Oppenheim 192). This, Sarraute claims, "is one of the advantages, one of the successes, of the Nouveau Roman that the forms of the novel have become free" (Oppenheim 193).

Therefore, we need to begin our reading of Watson's novel under the sign of Bakhtin by asserting that *The Double Hook* is in fact very much a novel, and not an example of poetic prose or other such non-novel labels commonly attributed to it. In this respect, we shall employ Bakhtin's distinction between single- and double-voiced discourses, the former denoting poetry and the latter novelistic discourse, and argue that the novelistic discourse in *The Double Hook* shows many similarities with the polyphonic novel as discussed by Bakhtin in *The Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (*Problems*). The purest example of double-voicing in prose discourse, Dostoevsky's novels share with *The Double Hook* specific traits, in particular characters "whose words about [themselves] and [their] world [are] just as fully weighted as the author's voice usually is" (*Problems* 7). Bakhtin, as we have seen, sees the novel form as a possibility or tendency that may or

may not be realised in literature and genre as attempts to impose constraints upon this form. Rejecting the homophony and the closed concept of the traditional realist novel-*genre*, Watson's novel embraces the polyphonic openness of a Bakhtinian concept of the novel *form* defying constraints and limitations imposed on it from without.

In fact, there will always be numerous constraints: "[o]pen to every possibility, its boundaries fluctuat[ing] in all directions" (Robert 58), the novel's supposed freedom is more often than not perceived negatively, as a sign of "arbitrariness or total anarchy" (58):

> For the novelist . . . the novel's power resides precisely in its total freedom. For the critic, on the other hand, such freedom is highly suspect. He feels some kind of boundaries should be established. But in the absence of any known rules he can only trust his own personal taste and particular state of mind to decide where they should stand . . . . (60)

And "as the genre gets older and looser . . . , so the need to constrain it within the boundaries of law and order increases–the need, that is, to restrict, if not deny its freedom" (62). Robert finds that most attempts at constraining the novel reach for categories outside of literature:

> History (true or idealized, past or present), Ethics (from the most elevated to the utterly trivial or the mere observations of conventions), Truth (religious, philosophical or metaphysical)–all such extra-literary categories are erected as so many "courts of justice" before which the novel is summoned. (63)

More than any other art form, therefore, the novel has been, and still is, "torn between innumerable external compulsions and swayed by the inextricable combination of ethics and aesthetics which is seen as a peculiarity of this art." Indeed, it is so torn "that its

creation, inevitably accompanied by guilt, occurs in a state of inner conflict whereby it usually evades one form of tyranny only to succumb to another" (Robert 63).

Attempts to change the novel and to allow it to be an art form among others without this succumbing to various forms of tyranny must involve "a radical restructuring" of theory, already suggested by Bakhtin above, as well as a similarly radical restructuring of the writer's own approach to the creation of novels. The deconstruction theory of Jacques Derrida, and in particular the deconstructive concept of the textual graft, offers just such a restructured theoretical approach. Speaking of metaphysics, though what he says here can be applied to any system or structure of thought, Derrida claims in "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" that so-called "destructive discourses"–discourses whose aim it is to discard 'old' critical procedures in order to embrace a 'new' in its place–are "trapped in a kind of circle":

> There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics. We have no language–no syntax and no lexicon–which is foreign to this history; we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulation of precisely what it seeks to contest. (354)

To deconstruct an opposition, therefore, says Jonathan Culler in *On Deconstruction* (*OD*), using recurring deconstructionist topics as examples,

> is not to destroy it, leaving a monism according to which there would be *only* absence or writing or literature, or metaphor or marginality. To deconstruct an opposition is to undo and displace it, to situate it differently. (150)

*Displacement* is a key term within deconstruction, and it is in the process of achieving this that the graft becomes an indispensable tool. "One must elaborate a systematic

treatise on the textual graft" (202), Derrida claims in *Dissemination*. Culler asks: "What would such a treatise describe?" and answers his own question in the following manner:

> It would treat discourses as the product of various sorts of combinations or insertions. Exploring the iterability of language, its ability to function in new contexts with new force, a treatise on textual grafting would attempt to classify various ways of inserting one discourse into another or intervening in the discourse one is interpreting. (135)

As we shall see, the very insistence, by both Watson and Robbe-Grillet, that their novels were indeed novels illustrates the deconstructive process of leaving a new concept "the old name" in order "to maintain the structure of the *graft*, the transition and indispensable adherence to an effective intervention in the constituted historical field" ("Signature Event Context" 21; emphasis in original).

Not just identifying grafts but actively "intervening in the discourses one is interpreting": by grafting Watson onto the *nouveau roman* and the closely affiliated literary debates centred around Jean-Paul Sartre's *What Is Literature?* and Roland Barthes's *Writing Degree Zero*, we shall seek to displace *The Double Hook* from its usual context of Canadian literature in order to illustrate that both in her fictional and in her non-fictional writings, Watson shows a definite awareness of the literary debates of the late 1940s and early 1950s and that her writing can today be seen as an important contribution to these debates. As we shall see, Watson's call for formal innovation echoes that of the *nouveaux romanciers* who stressed the impossibility of a "systematic repetition of the forms of the past." In fact, Robbe-Grillet in his collection of essays *For a New Novel* (*FNN*) deems this blind adherence to dead novelistic conventions not only "absurd and futile" but even "harmful" (9).

Watson's insistence that what she was writing was in fact a novel begs several questions: in what sense can Watson be said to offer a "radical restructuring" of the conventions involved in the traditional realist concept of the novel? Does Derrida's claim in *Of Grammatology* that "[b]ecause we are beginning to write, to write differently, we must reread differently" (87) indicate that any radical restructuring of novelistic conventions entails a similar restructuring of our reading habits? By splicing together Watson's *The Double Hook* and Robbe-Grillet's early novel *The Erasers* (1953), we shall in our second graft examine the new forms of the novel as offered by Watson and Robbe-Grillet. Here, we shall concentrate on *form* in its narratological sense and discuss form on the story level of the novels in question (novelistic conventions such as events, characters and setting) as well as form on the discourse level of the novels (forms of narrative discourse). We shall pay particular attention to Watson's and Robbe-Grillet's new approach to the conventional character and suggest that in order to grasp the radical nature of the novelistic forms with which we are presented, we need to replace the, in Bakhtin's words, "utter inadequacy" of conventional novel theory with the discourse of other artistic media, notably that of abstract expressionism.

Finally, in our last graft, we shall turn our attention to the notion of the new, which to Robbe-Grillet and Watson, despite a call for new forms for the novel, is in fact a highly complex notion. Situated in the wake of modernism and its call to "make it new"[3] (Pound's phrase), but writing in a time before the articulation of postmodernism and its disenchantment with the utopian modernist emphasis on progress, Watson and Robbe-

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[3]It is important to note already here that though we shall in this thesis be returning to both modernism and Pound's famous phrase on several occasions, we will not be examining modernism *per se* but rather a certain *conception* of modernism in which Pound's highly complex understanding of his own call to "make it new" has been appropriated and simplified (by later generations as well as by Pound's own

Grillet can be said to occupy a liminal space in literary history. We shall address the impossibility of any attempt to place Watson and Robbe-Grillet squarely within either modernism or postmodernism. We suggest instead that their paradoxical relation to the new, which involves a call for new forms of the novel at the same time as it problematises any simple transition from old to new, is better viewed within the context of the French term *modernité*. As Antoine Compagnon claims in *The Five Paradoxes of Modernity*, *modernité* as articulated by Baudelaire and Nietzsche, incorporates (or, in the terminology of this thesis, *grafts*) both modernism and postmodernism: incorporating, in other words, Baudelaire's call for the "advent of the new" at the conclusion of his *Salon of 1946* and his view of a modern history of progress through rupture as "[t]his gloomy beacon" (qtd. in Compagnon xv).

We shall proceed in this thesis by the use of grafts, and though we shall begin with the novel as a genre and not with Watson, we will find that each graft will take us closer and closer to Watson as well as to *The Double Hook*. I use "closer" here in its most physical sense: we will gradually approach the actual book and interact with the words on its pages, but we will not, by the end, be close in any figurative sense, as there will be no spectacular unveiling of a singular truth and no archaeological digging for a hidden meaning beyond the textual surface: "[t]here is no meaning," Watson warns us and implications of this on both the reading and writing of new novels will be seen throughout the thesis.

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contemporaries) in order to perform an emblematic function, becoming thus a somewhat clichéd slogan for a period which saw in newness and innovation the potential for improvement and overcoming.

# Graft 1: Conserving the "Old Name": Watson and Language and Form in the Novel After Modernism

*For a century now, every mode of writing has thus been an exercise in reconciliation with, or aversion from, that objectified Form inevitably met by the writer on his way, and which he must scrutinize, challenge and accept with all its consequences, since he cannot ever destroy it without destroying himself as a writer. Form hovers before his gaze like an object; whatever he does, it is a scandal: if it stands resplendent, it appears outmoded; if it is a law unto itself, it is asocial; in so far as it is particular in relation to time or mankind, it cannot mean but solitude.*

*Roland Barthes, Writing Degree Zero (4)*

* * *

The mid-20th-century novel that Watson had to confront when sitting down to write her own novel was, as we have seen, in suspect condition. Having survived despite the many death certificates issued by Anglo-American modernists and others, the novel soon fell victim to "courts of justice" wanting to curb its freedom along extra-literary as well as literary lines, with the tragic and inevitable result that "[t]o date the novel has never *officially* enjoyed the freedom to which it is and should be entitled" (Robert 63; emphasis in original). In other words, the novel, either because it has been cast aside as too narrow or attacked as too wide, has remained since its realist and naturalist heyday unchanged to such a degree that even today the model is largely the realist novel of the mid-19th century.

There were, however, notable exceptions, and among these we must count Watson. In her fictional and non-fictional writings, Watson can be said to share many affinities with the French *nouveau roman*, a movement in France that sought to liberate the novel from the confines of Balzacian realism. In the 1950s, a time when literary

debates centred largely around a Sartrean call for politically and socially committed literature, the *nouveaux romanciers*, backed by Roland Barthes's seminal *Writing Degree Zero*, would claim that the only commitment possible for the writer is "the full awareness of the present problems of his own language, the conviction of their extreme importance, the desire to solve them *from within* (*FNN* 41; emphasis in original).

If even the most "free" of all genres cannot enjoy much freedom, it would be tempting, as Culler has done, to argue for "a theory of non-genre literature," especially since we are here dealing with texts that seem to belong among what he describes as "those seminal and disquieting works which, falling outside of established genres, would be treated as a residue" ("Toward a Theory of Non-Genre Literature" 52). Since such an approach would also "[distinguish] between the *readable* and the *unreadable* and [assign] an important place to, and [explain] the significance of, these works which resist our reading" (52), it appears even more appropriate, as we in our second graft will be examining *The Double Hook* especially along those lines.

Yet this option is not open to us here. Watson and Robbe-Grillet both insisted that they were in fact writing *novels* and that any problems the novel was facing would have to be solved "*from within.*" Therefore, despite the hegemonic dominance of the Balzacian novel leading to ailing health and lack of freedom, the novel was nonetheless what both Watson and Robbe-Grillet emphatically embraced in their writing. In fact, Watson would express her strong *dislike* of some of the non-novel labels attributed to *The Double Hook*. In 1975, she told Daphne Marlatt, Pierre Coupey and Roy Kiyooka that

> I'm glad you avoided the term "poetic prose." It always upsets me because poetic prose means–to me–purple passages. I often think of Virginia Woolf in that way. I've always been afraid of sentimentality–the two kinds–the–the second as frightening as the first–the sentimentality of the naturalistic novel, the

> sentimentality of violence, the ash-can world and the prostitutes and so on. ("Interview / Sheila Watson" 359)

In 1984, she told Bruce Meyer and Brian O'Riordan in an interview entitled "It's What You Say" that

> You can't control response. I am unhappy when people describe *The Double Hook* as a prose poem because that phrase makes me think of purple passages and things like that. It has been said that technically it is not a novel and perhaps it isn't. It is a narrative structure of some kind. (166)

Why does Watson, along with Robbe-Grillet, Sarraute and other new novelists, find it so important to insist that what she was writing was still to be aligned, however ambivalently, with the novel, since it is "a narrative structure of some kind"? We shall seek to argue that Watson's insistence allows for a much wider understanding of what can be said to constitute novelistic discourse. If the forms of the novel are to be liberated from the confines of Balzacian realism so as to encompass Bakhtinian polyphony, the keeping of "the old name" becomes, as we shall see, essential in order to achieve a displacement of the conventional novel.

## "A Narrative Structure of Some Kind": Watson and the Polyphonic Novel

In the 1959 reviews collected by Bowering, *The Double Hook* was described by two reviewers as a novella, and by two others as a 'prose poem.' Only one reviewer did not explicitly question its status as a novel.[4] Its lack of typical formal features of the

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[4]Elliot Gose ("Coyote and Stag") and Hugo McPherson ("An Important New Voice") describe Watson's novel as a novella, whereas Philip Child ("A Canadian Prose Poem") and D. F. Theall ("A Canadian Novella") choose to see it as a prose poem. Only Don Summerhayes ("Glory and Fear"), who incidentally also wrote the most favourable of the five reviews, refers to it as a novel, though even he claims that "[i]n approach it is a fable" (Bowering 29).

traditional realist novel (such as rounded, well-developed characters and a clearly defined setting), coupled with the presence of formal elements that appear to have been borrowed from other genres (the indented poetic-sounding passages attributed mostly, though not always, to a mythical Coyote, as well as the initial play-like listing of the novel's characters), perhaps made *The Double Hook* seem an example of Eliot's formless novel or an illustration of Woolf's dilemma over labelling her work. Even more recent critics, if not explicitly questioning the labelling of *The Double Hook* as a novel, have focused extensively on the poetic and symbolic elements in Watson's work. In "'Between One Cliché and Another': Language in *The Double Hook*," Barbara Godard, for instance, draws out parallels between Eliot's *The Wasteland* and Watson's novel, finding among other things not only "similarities of theme [and] an adoption of nonlinear spatialized form" but also "a rejection of 'prose' in favour of 'poetry'" (163). The consensus seems to be that though Watson may be called a novelist, she is, in the words of Margaret Atwood, a "novelist whose work comes close to being poetry–that is, to being metaphor" (41). It is as if Watson's novel has taken prose language and injected it with poetic tropes to the point where the prosaic confinements of the novel genre have been burst open. Jan Marta's essay "Poetic Structures in the Prose Fiction of Sheila Watson," in which Watson's novel is defined as poetic prose, notes how "[m]etaphor, repetition, and creation of strong images stall the progress of the narrative" (150), the result being that "[t]he direct flow of narrative is continually jarred to create an image of life's double hook of darkness and light, of fear and glory" (150). Prose, in classical literature perceived as "a minimal form of speech, the most economical vehicle for thought" (Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero* [*WDZ*] 41), becomes poetic prose in Marta's view because it is no longer a

vehicle progressing efficiently but one instead stalling and jarring due to the presence of poetic tropes.[5]

It is interesting to note that one poetic element that has received a lot of critical attention was added by Watson's publisher and not by the author herself. That element is the novel's epigraph, where a quotation from the novel has been placed before the beginning of the novel's first chapter. Flahiff notes that "Sheila was quick to insist that the choice of Kip's words . . . was not hers. She was somewhat uneasy about their seeming patness when separated from their context" (*Bio.* 260). "Kip's words" appear on page 50 in the novel, where Kip is comparing James to James's mother:

> He's like his old lady, Kip thought. There's a thing he doesn't know. He doesn't know you can't catch the glory on a hook and hold on to it. That when you fish for the glory you catch the darkness too. That if you hook twice the glory you hook twice the fear. That Coyote plotting to catch the glory for himself is fooled and every day fools others. He doesn't know, Kip thought, how much mischief Coyote can make. (*DH* 50)

In the epigraph, the prosaic lines have been merged into a single poetic stanza, with frequent line breaks through which the words "glory," "fear" and "hook" are given emphasis. Gone is the circumstantial context of the prose passage, with its reference to the character Kip, to whom the non-verbal speech act belongs, as well as to other characters. Gone is also the invocation of Coyote:

> He doesn't know
> you can't catch
> the glory on a hook
> and hold on to it.

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[5]We should note that "stalling" and "jarring" are here positive rather than negative terms: using these words to describe the poetic qualities of a passage on page 28 of the novel in which Heinrich "stood thinking of the light he'd known. Of pitch fires lit on the hills. Of leaning out of the black wind into the light of a small flame," Marta notes how "[s]uch a passage intensifies the reality of . . . Watson's theme" (150).

That when you fish for the glory
you catch the
darkness too.
That if you hook twice the glory
you hook
twice the fear.

One can only speculate as to the publisher's reason for providing the epigraph.[6] Beyond the obvious fact that the epigraph would function as a "key" for the reader, providing a fixed point from which to start one's reading of a difficult and unusual novel (the various fore- and afterwords accompanying the novel since publication also suggest this[7]), perhaps the publisher had in mind the prosaic poems of Eliot and the poetic prose of Woolf, which, though initially denounced as ugly and scandalous, had by the time Watson was writing in the 1950s long since entered both the canon and academia.[8] The epigraph thus strengthening the novel's poetic qualities and weakening its novelistic attributes (its presence is, after all, the very basis for Marta's argument), Watson's work could be aligned to a certain degree with works with which its target audience were by now more than familiar. This argument is supported by the fact that Watson's publisher

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[6]Douglas Barbour, in "Editors and Typesetters", claims that "[b]ecause Professor Salter's Preface did not quite fill all the pages set aside for it . . . Kip's statement . . . was inserted as a prefatory quotation. Ms Watson never intended that any such statement be placed before the text of the story. Certainly, it cannot be denied that the prominence its appearance as an epigraph has bestowed upon it has made Kip's statement appear far more important to critics of the novel than might have been the case had it existed only as the thoughts of a single character at a certain point in the narrative" (9).

[7]According to Flahiff in the present edition's Afterword, Professor Frederick M. Salter, to whom Watson sent a copy of the manuscript in 1954, "proposed that editor and reader alike be given what he termed 'a necessary leg-up' in the form of a Foreword: 'Without some explanation, I think it has no chance of being published.' Because he feared that Watson would 'get off into the cloudy abstract and unintelligible symbolic' if she were to attempt such a Foreword ('What amazes me,' he had confessed to her, 'is that you should do such a perfect work and not be able to explain it'), Salter wrote it himself" (Afterword, 121).

[8]Says Frederic Jameson, "[n]ot only are Picasso and Joyce no longer ugly; they now strike us, on the whole, as rather 'realistic,' and this is the result of a canonization and academic institutionalization of the modern movement generally that can be traced to the late 1950s" (4).

was afraid that the publication would constitute a commercial, if not critical, risk and that steps were made "to minimize this risk":

> [The publisher McClelland] and his advisers proposed to publish the novel in the New Canadian Library, a series which had begun publishing that January under the editorship of Malcolm Ross. These were to be inexpensive paper-back republications of Canadian 'classics', and McClelland hoped to open the series to "new or contemporary writing." In this way he felt the novel would receive distribution at a price which would put it, in his words, "within the reach of the *undergraduate* market who are likely to be most interested. . . ." (Flahiff, *Bio.* 259; ellipsis in original)

We are not attempting to question the publisher's choice of Kip's words for the epigraph.[9] What we are attempting, however, is to question the approach of reading this epigraph as a poem, even as a poem whose coexistence with the prose passage creates the "fusion of . . . two modes" (Marta 149) that is Marta's definition of prose poetry.

A universalising tendency is present in the novel's prose passage, as illustrated by the "you" which signals not just James but man in general, the reader included, as well as by the fading antecedent of "he," which by the seventh sentence no longer refers solely to James (Marta 155).[10] Yet the novel's passage is nonetheless anchored in subjectivity: the passage is focalised by Kip, not an omniscient narrator, and Kip is not a privileged

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[9]Watson herself had provided an extract from Jacob Boehme's Preface to his *The High and Deep Searching of the Threefold Life of Man.* Flahiff writes that though "it is not clear who first proposed Kip's words as an alternative to Boehme's," it "is clear that Sheila was consulted about the change, and at the time accepted it seemingly without reservation" (*Bio.* 261). The passage, provided by Flahiff, is the following: "If we consider the great and wonderful Structure of Heaven, and of the Earth, and observe their Motions, and contemplate the Manifold Operations of their Powers and Properties, and the great Variety of Bodies of Creatures how they are then hard and soft, gross and subtil, obscure and glistering, thick and clear, heavy and light, we find the Twofold Origin of the manifestation of God, the Darkness and the Light, which out of all their Powers and Wonders have breathed forth and made themselves visible with the Firmament, Stars and Elements, and all the palpable creatures, wherein all Things, Life, and Death, Good and Evil, are together. This is the third Life (besides the two that are hid), and is called Time in the strife of vanity" (*Bio.* 260).

[10]For a more extensive comparison of the prose passage and the poetic qualities of the epigraph, see Marta, 151-55.

character focaliser but only one among many, as various other characters focalise throughout the novel and none are given focalising privileges over others. These, therefore, are *Kip's* thoughts, and though they convey significant insight, their juxtaposition with the speech actions, verbalised or not, of other characters makes Kip's voice only one in the multitude of voices that are being reported back to us by an external and effaced narrator. The locutionary context is one character comparing another character to a third, and the illocutionary aspect of Kip's statement takes on the quality of a comparative description, as certain qualities (a greedy striving for "glory," ignorance of "darkness" and "fear") are being attributed to James.

In the epigraph, the locutionary context has disappeared so that, on the basis of the epigraph alone, the speaking subject and the object described cannot be identified as Kip and James, respectively. Thus both "you" and "he" take on a greater universal quality as the observation is no longer grounded in an individual character; whereas the speaker, able to generalise on such a large scale, takes on omniscient and omnipresent qualities of perception. Instead of the character focalisation in the prose passage, therefore, the creation of the poetic stanza constructs a speaker who becomes "an *omniscient* 'god' *teaching* 'he,' 'you,' the reader" (Marta 153; emphasis added). Though the illocutionary aspect of the epigraph might still be descriptive, one possible perlocution (effect on the reader) is that of *teaching*. From its placement before the very first page of the novel, there is already the suggestion that the epigraph is preparing the reader by imparting essential insight and knowledge. This impression is further enhanced when the reader encounters the passage again in the novel itself, the epigraph now appearing in retrospect as an abstraction of central themes. Identifying the speaker as Kip, the reader will perhaps even allocate more importance to Kip's words than to the words of any other character.

Herein lies a problem (one which might also account for Flahiff's suggestion of "patness" above): whereas omniscience is the case in the epigraph, the novel actively *problematises* the idea of omniscience. The very notion of omniscience is negated in the prose passage, as we learn that the novel's only god-like presence, Coyote, himself "is fooled and every day fools others" (50). In *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, Seymour Chatman sees the narrator ("the transmitting source") as "a spectrum of possibilities going from narrators who are least audible to those who are most so" (146). As "pure mimesis is an illusion," Chatman suggests the labels "'minimally narrated'" or "covert narrator" for "[t]he negative pole of narrator-presence" (147). At the opposite pole, we find "pure diegisis" and an "overt" narrator who "speaks in his proper voice, uses the pronoun 'I' or the like, makes interpretations, general or moral observations, and so on" (166). *The Double Hook* can therefore be said to be minimally narrated: the narrator is covert, favouring extensive mimesis through the quoting of characters' speech and occasional thought, but renouncing the intrusive omniscient powers of a commentating and judging, and thus more overt, external narrator. Nor is the novel attempting to compensate for this lack of a clearly present, overt narrator on the discourse level by giving any of the characters a centralising role as a privileged character focaliser on the story level of the novel: in fact, focalisation is distributed fairly evenly among most of the characters throughout the novel. Thus, reading the epigraph as a poem would upset this even distribution of equally weighted voices and points of view by tipping the scales in favour of Kip, granting this one character omniscient qualities due to the reader's retrospective identification of Kip as the speaking, omniscient voice of the epigraph.

In fact, it is the ubiquity of minimally mediated voices that makes it impossible to read not only the epigraph but also the whole of *The Double Hook* as a poem, especially if we use Bakhtin's distinction between prose and poetry. To Bakhtin, poetry is *single-voiced* discourse, whereas prose is recognised by its *double-voiced* discourse. Voice is "the speaking personality, the speaking consciousness," and a voice "always has a will or desire behind it, its own timbre and overtones." Though poetic tropes might, and most often will, *mean* more than one thing, they emanate from a single voice, unlike prose tropes, which "always contain more than one voice, and are therefore dialogized" (Holquist, Glossary, *DI* 434). Dialogism is a fact of life: it is "the characteristic epistemological mode of a world dominated by heteroglossia" in which

> [e]verything means, is understood, as a part of a greater whole–there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others. . . . This dialogic imperative, mandated by the pre-existence of the language world relative to any of its current inhabitants, insures that there can be no actual monologue. One may, like a primitive tribe that knows only its own limits, be deluded into thinking there is only one language, or one may, as grammarians, certain political figures and normative framers of "literary languages" do, seek in a sophisticated way to achieve a unitary language. In both cases the unitariness is relative to the overpowering force of heteroglossia, and thus dialogism. (Holquist, Glossary, *DI* 426)

The novel is the art form that can do the most justice in its representation of this heteroglossic, dialogic world in which we all live, and dialogism in prose discourse, where multiple voices are heard equally without any one point of view dominating over the others, is in Bakthin's terminology known as "polyphony."

Initially, in his *The Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin found Dostoevsky's novels to be the purest example of dialogism in prose discourse, naming him "the creator of the polyphonic novel" (*Problems* 7). Later, and especially in

"Discourse in the Novel" (*The Dialogic Imagination*), Bakhtin was to modify his idea of polyphony and see it as characteristic of novelistic discourse in general. The polyphonic novel, as exemplified by Dostoevsky, exhibits specific characteristics:

> In his works a hero appears whose voice is constructed exactly like the voice of the author himself in a novel of the usual type. A character's word about himself and his world is just as fully weighted as the author's word usually is; it is not subordinated to the character's objectified image as merely one of his characteristics, nor does it serve as a mouthpiece for the author's voice. It possesses extraordinary independence in the structure of the work; it sounds, as it were, *alongside* the author's word and in a special way combines both with it and with the full and equally valid voices of other characters. (7; emphasis in original)

Yet not all novels can be said to share these attributes. As Wayne Booth notes in his Introduction to Bakhtin's work,

> Turgenev, Tolstoy, indeed most who are called novelists, never release their characters from a dominating monologue conducted by the author; in their works, characters seldom escape to become full *subjects*, telling their own tales. Instead they generally remain as objects *used* by the author to fulfill preordained demands. (xxii)

These characteristics stand in opposition to Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel, and are instead representative of what Bakhtin sees as "the fundamentally *monologic* (homophonic) European novel" (*Problems* 8). It is important to keep in mind that Bakhtin does not think of the novel "as some formalists would do, not as the actual works that we ordinarily *call* novels but rather as a tendency or possibility in literature, one that is best realized only in certain novels and lacking in others . . . " (Introduction, *Problems* xxii; emphasis in original).

We can see that this polyphonic tendency is certainly realised in Watson's novel. Writing in her journal on February 5, 1956, Watson observed in a rather Bakhtinian manner that

> [a] writer cannot will a work, he must wait for it–not as a man who sleeps and distracts himself–but as one waits for a person one loves. The writer must watch and wait. Then he must attend. He must, if he attends, believe in the existence of his characters–and respect them. For this reason he can't manipulate character–or plot, which is the action or living of his characters in time. He can't compel his characters to carry brief cases full of tracts–or to give radio talks on religion or politics or science or the way to get on with the neighbours. The moment he does, his characters lose their identity–as they do, too, when he pities or despises or exalts them.
>
> If there is any miracle–it is the recognition of existence–not the shaping of it to one's will. This is my answer to Kilgenius Dobbs. This is my answer to any one who asks. (*Bio.* 184)

Watson's characters in *The Double Hook* are not manipulated into becoming "mouthpieces" for their creator's ideological and religious beliefs, nor do they become objects that contribute their bit parts towards a predetermined artistic whole. In other words, they are not, to quote Bakhtin, "voiceless slaves . . . , but *free* people, capable of standing *alongside* their creator, capable of not agreeing with him and even of rebelling against him" (*Problems* 6; emphasis in original).

Watson's characters participate in dialogism to the point where "[q]uotation marks no longer 'fence off' a man's or a woman's words . . ." (Flahiff, Afterword, *DH* 130), as if recognising the fact that language is no less the property of the individual than is the land and the creek which the characters unsuccessfully try to prevent other characters from trespassing: Felix, after seeing the old lady fishing in his section of the creek, thinks to himself that "I'll chase her out. But he sat, tipped back in his rocking-chair, his belly bulging his bibbed overalls, while the old lady fished . . ." (15); or the boy, Heinrich,

calling to Kip that "James Potter's mother is fishing in our creek. It's her I'm going to fence out," only to find himself "wrestl[ing] with the roll of wire, which curled in on itself seeking the bend into which it had been twisted" (19), and then abandoning the work of setting up a fence.

The discourse of the character Ara is literally double-voiced at times, as juxtaposed with her discourse is her focalisation of her husband William's discourse, who thinks that "[p]eople keep thinking thoughts into other people's heads" (65):

> Ara wasn't sure where water started.
> William wouldn't hesitate: It comes gurgling up from inside the hill over beyond the lake. There's water over and it falls down. There's water under and it rushes up. The trouble with water is that it never rushes at the right time. The creeks dry up and the grass with them. There are men, he'd say, have seen their whole place fade like a cheap shirt. (13)

Ara's uncertainty belies a questioning, almost existential attitude that is here contrasted with William's certainty, which is founded in a practical and pragmatic approach to life. Ara's world is one of spirituality and metaphoricity, as she compares their land to that of the biblical Nineveh and its inhabitants to those that people the Old Testament: "the old lady, lost like Jonah perhaps, in the cleft belly of the rock the water washing over her" (24). Similarly, she looks at the drying creek where the old lady is fishing and "fe[els] death leaking through the centre of the earth. Death rising to the knee. Death rising to the loin" (13). Her world view forms an obvious contrast to her husband's literal one which allows him to deal with or resign to the everyday obstacles presented to those attempting to carve out a life for themselves in the harsh and demanding desert space that is the Cariboo: "You can save a cabbage plant or a tomato plant with tents of paper if you've got the paper, but there's no human being living can tent a field and pasture" (13). Yet

none is more weighted than the other: the ground of the novel is *both* the dry desert of the Cariboo in which the novel is supposedly set and the equally dry desert of the Old Testament, whose textual references colour both the textual space of the novel and the view through which characters such as Ara see the world. What Bakhtin says of Dostoevsky's polyphonic novels is therefore equally valid for Watson's novel:

> What unfolds in his works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a *plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world,* combine but are not merged in the unity of the event. (*Problems*, 6; emphasis in original)

There are many other instances of dialogism in *The Double Hook*, as when Angel and Theophil discuss the nature of Coyote:

> A man full up on beer saying in that beer how big he is. Not knowing that Coyote'll get him just walking round the side of the house to make water [Angel said].
>
> I don't set no store by Coyote, Theophil said. There's no big Coyote, like you think. There's not just one of him. He's everywhere. The government's got his number too. They've set a bounty on him at fifty cents a brush. I could live well at his expense. (47)

When William describes horses that escape only to "come wandering back to the barn and the hay" (66), Ara and William, too, come to discuss Coyote:

> There are some men I suppose who follow, their ropes coiled and waiting. Sometimes I think of God like that, she [Ara] said. The glory of his face shaded by his hat. Not coaxing with pans of oats, but coming after you with a whip until you stand and face him in the end.
>
> I don't know about God, William said. Your god sounds only a step from the Indian's Coyote. Though that one would jump on a man when his back was turned. I've never seen God, he said, but if I did I don't think I'd be very much surprised. (66)

Conflated in these two quotations are both the vengeful and judging Jehovah of the Old Testament, "coming after you with a whip until you stand and face him in the end," and the Native Coyote, whose wily and sometimes malicious trickster nature makes him capable of "jump[ing] on a man" and able to "get him just walking round the side of the house to make water" (47). Conflated, too, is the animal without the capital "c" which Theophil refers to in his description of a coyote that can be hunted and sold for "fifty cents a brush" (47). Again, neither perspective is favoured, as all points of view merge to form the multifaceted Coyote. Even Coyote's own discourse preserves this multiplicity, as no unified signification can be extracted:

> In my mouth is the east wind,
> Those who cling to the rocks I will
> bring down
> I will set my paw on the eagle's nest[11] (16)

Combined with the biblical cadences and the Christian image of the rock, we find the unmistakably North American eagle upon whose nest Coyote will set his paw.

Moreover, such a dialogue as this one initiated by the presence of Coyote is not one that can be exhausted and finalised. Indeed, what Bakhtin finds in Dostoevsky's polyphonic novels is exactly what we have found to be the case in Watson's novel:

> Every thought of Dostoevsky's heroes . . . senses itself to be from the very beginning a *rejoinder* in an unfinalized dialogue. Such thought is not impelled toward a well-rounded, finalized, systematically monologic whole. It lives a tense life on the borders of someone else's thought, someone else's consciousness. (*Problems* 32)

[11]Compare this passage with Obadiah 1:4: "Though thou shalt exalt *thyself* as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the Lord" (emphasis in original).

## Conserving the "Old Name"

Having established that Watson's novel is indeed a novel (or at least a Bakhtinian one), we now need to turn our attention to the particular problems that have confronted the novel and especially to what we in the introduction saw Robert call "the inextricable combination of ethics and aesthetics which is seen as a peculiarity of this art." In fact, Watson's novel was recently brought in for its very own "court of justice" by feminist revisionist critic Donna Palmateer Pennee in her article "Canadian Letters, Dead Referents: Reconsidering the Critical Construction of *The Double Hook*." Pennee reproaches Watson for rejecting the "purple passages" attributed to Woolf by Watson above and for not embracing the more typical genres of women's literature such as poetic prose and the regional novel. As a formally experimental novel, *The Double Hook* is seen by Pennee as being uncomfortably close to the more negative aspects of high Anglo-American modernism.

Whether or not Watson's attribution of such characteristics to Woolf's writing is merited, the very notion of "purple prose" would not be compatible with Bakhtin's understanding of the polyphonic novel. Its typical centripetal channelling of reader sympathies towards a single character or issue would tend toward monologism rather than dialogism. An authorial voice showcasing "a piece of fine writing" (Abrams 149) would draw attention to the author's discourse and run the risk of discrediting that of his or her characters. On the other hand, if this "fine writing" is lodged within the characters' discourse, it makes them objects of the author's intention rather than subjects emerging as "free people" (*Problems* 6).

Yet rather than aligning Watson with the Bakhtinian polyphonic novel and seeing her work as an attempt to deconstruct the monologic, and, we might add, highly *patriarchal* elements of the classical, traditional novel, Pennee places *The Double Hook* squarely inside the tradition of "T. S. Eliot's high anglomodernism" (235). According to Pennee, Watson's novel can be said to harbour the "ugly family secrets" of modernism (234). Moreover, she claims that the femicides at the core of the novel have been sanctified and institutionalised with the amount of critical attention the novel has received and finally with its entry into the Canadian literary canon:

> Murder is repeated in the criticism of *The Double Hook* insofar as it goes unquestioned or is regarded (sometimes implicitly, often explicitly) as necessary for fashioning of a cultured (fictional and academic) community, and insofar as a general Freudian aesthetic about women's sexuality and cultural positioning is imbricated with modernist aesthetics and structuralist anthropology and criticism. (235)

Watson, therefore, with, among other things, her rejection of Woolf's "purple passages," is aligned by Pennee with not only Eliot but also "Konrad Fiedler, Joseph Frank, Wyndham Lewis, and other theorists of modernist art" (242) whose rhetoric is that "of virility, hardness, and experiment" (243). We will return in greater detail to the discursive and thematic femicides in *The Double Hook* in our second graft. In our third graft we will also seek to question and *dis*place the now commonly accepted placement of Watson within modernism. But let us pause here upon this comment by Pennee in which she claims that "a *scandal* marks the English-Canadian literary canon":

> I suggest that, as Jacques Derrida notes of the anthropological scandal and metaphysical strategies in general, our traditional literary history "is designed to leave in the domain of the unthinkable the very thing that makes [its] conceptualization possible" ("Structure, Sign, and Play" 284): namely, the sacrifice of women and indigenous or ethnic others; or, to maintain the terms of

> the original scandalous identification, the sacrifice of nature–and with it gendered history, ideology, and not-culture–in order to found and sustain culture. (236)

The "scandal," of course, is Claude Lévi-Strauss's incest prohibition, scandalous because it is "something which no longer tolerates the nature / culture opposition [Lévi-Strauss] has accepted, something which *simultaneously* seems to require the predicates of nature and of culture" ("Structure, Sign, and Play" 357). There can only be a scandal, however, "within a system of concepts which accredits the difference between nature and culture" (358):

> By commencing his work with the *factum* of the incest prohibition, Lévi-Strauss thus places himself at the point at which this difference, which has always been assumed to be self-evident, finds itself erased or questioned. (358)

Says Derrida, these "system[s] of concepts" necessitate their own critique "[o]nce the limit of the nature / culture opposition [or any other such opposition] makes itself felt," and such a critique "may be undertaken along two paths, in two 'manners'" (358). The first path would "concern [itself] with the founding concepts of the entire history of philosophy" and seek "to deconstitute them" (359). This is not an easy task, however:

> The step "outside philosophy" is much more difficult to conceive than is generally imagined by those who think they made it long ago with cavalier ease, and who in general are swallowed up in metaphysics in the entire body of discourse which they claim to have disengaged from it. (359)

"[I]n order to avoid the possibly sterilizing effects of the first one," the second path available

> consists in conserving all these old concepts within the domain of empirical discovery while here and there denouncing their limits, treating them as tools which can still be used. No longer is any truth value attributed to them; there is a

> readiness to abandon them, if necessary, should other instruments appear more useful. In the meantime, their relative efficacy is exploited, and they are employed to destroy the old machinery to which they belong and of which they themselves are pieces. (359)

To critique a "system of concepts," therefore, would almost always involve the necessity of accepting into one's discourse "the premises" of another discourse at "the very moment" (356) in which one seeks to denounce it. Yet "if no one can escape this necessity," Derrida stresses that

> this does not mean that all the ways of giving in to it are of equal pertinence. The quality and fecundity of a discourse are perhaps measured by *the critical rigor* with which this relation to . . . inherited concepts is thought. (356; emphasis added)

Pennee's revisionist take on Watson's *The Double Hook* and what she sees as a "massive and repeated repression of politics and history" (239), tends to pull into the centre the *opposite* of the modernist "masculine aesthetics" (242) with its "rhetoric of virility, hardness, and experiment" (243). In her obvious favouring of the usually negatively laden notions of "soft[ness]" and "sentimentality" associated with "women's poetry" and "women writers" (242), Pennee risks contributing to what Derrida terms "a series of substitutions of center for center" (353). Rather than shaking the concept of structure, Pennee's approach may offer an "*overturning*" or reversal of hierarchical binaries but it is less certain if it allows for the necessary deconstructionist "*displacement*" of such binaries ("Signature Event Context" 329; emphasis in original).

More importantly, with sufficient "critical rigor" in our examination of "inherited concepts," we realise that Pennee, though "writing . . . specifically out of Derridaen deconstruction" (235), side-steps Watson's similar "critical rigor" in her approach to, and

ultimate displacement of, the *novel* as an "inherited concept." I suggest here and elsewhere that Watson's novel is largely the product of a process of *grafting,* as illustrated for instance in Watson's statement that "[w]hat appear to be poems in *The Double Hook* are actually, in many instances, the echo of Biblical passages which act like the choruses in the Greek dramas" ("It's What You Say" 166). We shall see in our second graft that when references to the Bible and Greek dramas become grafted onto the genre of the novel, these various references or textual "echo[es]" do not

> serve as "quotations," "collages," or even "illustrations." They are not being applied upon the surface or in the interstices of a text that would already exist without them. And they themselves can only be read within the operation of their reinscription, within the graft. It is the sustained, discrete violence of an incision that is not apparent in the thickness of the text, a calculated insemination of the proliferating allogene through which . . . texts are transformed, deform each other, contaminate each other's content. (*Dissemination* 355)

Grafted onto the text of the novel, these echoes, as we will soon see, perform just this "discrete violence of an incision," as their presence "deform" and "contaminate" our notion of conventional novel forms, allowing thus not only for an "*overturning*" but also for "a general *displacement* of the system" of novelistic discourse. The graft, therefore, becomes an indispensable tool in this displacement of an "old" system, since "[d]econstruction cannot limit itself or proceed directly to neutralization: it must, by means of a double gesture, a double science, a double writing, practice an overturning of the classical opposition and a general displacement of the system." In this process, "it appears necessary, provisionally and strategically, to conserve the *old name*," as "the old name" makes visible "the transition and indispensable adherence to an effective intervention" ("Signature Event Context" 329; emphasis in original).

Grafting becomes not only a way of actively intervening in any constituted conceptual field in order to displace it, but it is also ultimately a process of liberation:

> For example, writing, as a classical concept, carries with it predicates which have been subordinated, excluded, or held in reserve by forces and according to necessities to be analyzed. It is these predicates . . . whose force of generality, generalization, and generativity find themselves liberated and grafted onto a "new" concept of writing which also corresponds to whatever always has *resisted* the former organization of forces, which always has constituted the *remainder* irreducible to the dominant force which organized the . . . logocentric hierarchy. ("Signature Event Context" 329-30; emphasis in original)

Insisting then, as some have done, on reproaching Watson for *not* having embraced typical female literary genres–prose poetry[12] and "domestic or sentimental or regional romance" (Pennee 242)–would be replacing one set of predicates with another, and thus undertaking simultaneously a parallel process of subordination and exclusion. It would be overlooking the process of grafting that is arguably taking place in Watson's novel both on the level of construction and on the level of thematics. Finally, it would also be overlooking the fact that Watson does indeed embark upon a Derridaen "process of liberation" in *The Double Hook*, as we shall see shortly: her experimental approach to literary form is arguably also an ideological endeavour, in which previously "subordinated" and "excluded" (Derrida's words) voices are grafted onto a new concept of the novel.

This is Godard's viewpoint of *The Double Hook*, as she claims that "the revolutionary qualities in Watson's writing are a consequence of her femaleness." Seeing Watson's novel as "above all a story of 'the coming of the Word'" (159), Godard

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[12]Moreover, if one chooses to see 'poetic prose' as synonymous with the genre of prose poetry, its most famous proponents being Charles Baudelaire and Arthur Rimbaud, the pigeonholing of the genre as "feminine" becomes increasingly problematic.

compares Watson to Gertrude Stein and "French theorists of women's language" such as Hélène Cixous, and finds that they have in common the fact that for women, "language does not mirror any political, social, or psychological reality" (162). In a patriarchal society, "[l]anguage . . . is masculine: women are silent, creatively expressive through their bodies. . . . Woman's language is not a man's; it is a gesture, sign" (161-62). In Godard's view, therefore, Watson, along with everyone else of her sex, has been alienated from language and writing, and her "exploration of language" (163) is mirrored in *The Double Hook*. Godard claims that "[w]oman must put herself into the text–as into the world and into history" (162). We will take the liberty of replacing *put* with *graft* and suggest that in order to achieve change through displacement, woman must graft herself into the text and into the world.

## Ethics and Aesthetics–Watson and *Writing Degree Zero*

Yet putting oneself into the text of the novel cannot be achieved simply on the level of content alone, as literary form becomes the site of the graft. In a time when the formal experimentation of the Anglo-American modernism had taken a backseat to a renewed focus on political and social content, Barthes would argue in *Writing Degree Zero* for "a view of literature freed from the simplifications imposed by yielding to ethical euphoria" (Sontag xiv) by claiming that "every Form is also a Value" (*WDZ* 13). Godard has already acknowledged affinities between Watson and Barthes's seminal work which shall be explored here in detail:

> These women [French theorists of women's language as well as Watson] are obviously practising what Barthes has called "zero degree writing" . . . Watson's style bears similarities to the "written speech" that along with Camus' "blanched

> style" Barthes cites as examples of the extreme periods of this modernist movement. (Godard 162-63)

After the experimental and artistic innovations of Anglo-American modernism in the first few decades of the century, therefore, the emphasis can be said to have shifted from the aesthetic to the ethical, as the thirties saw the emergence of what appeared to be a reaction against such modernist aesthetic preoccupations. This reaction voiced a demand for

> a fresh awareness of historical realities and progressive aims, a move beyond aesthetic humanism to social realism and reportage, a need to search for a 'proletarian' writing. . . . The result was often a strange, uneasy marriage between 'Bloomsbury' and 'public writing,' aestheticism and social realism. (Bradbury 205)

In the 1950s, the period in which both Watson and Robbe-Grillet began to write and publish their novels, this "strange, uneasy marriage" saw the birth of the social realist novel, in which the emphasis was no longer on aesthetic innovation but on socialist *engagement*. Though politically and socially "committed" novels appeared in the English-speaking world, the literary debate attending to this shift towards literary engagement took place predominantly on French ground. As Susan Sontag notes in her introduction to the 1968 translation of Roland Barthes's *Writing Degree Zero* (published in France in 1953), a "vigorous debate"

> has engaged the European literary community since the decade before the war on the relation between politics and literature. No debate of similar quality on that topic ever took place here. Despite all rumors that there once existed a generation of politically radical writers in England and America, the question of the political-ethical responsibility of writers was never posed here in anything better than an embryonic, intellectually crude form. . . . (ix-x)

This debate was centred mostly on the genre of the novel, and the two main contributions to it, Jean-Paul Sartre's *What Is Literature?* (*WL*) and Roland Barthes's *Writing Degree Zero*,[13] differ significantly in their idea of the role and purpose of prose literature. These differences, moreover, are rooted in strikingly contrary attitudes to language and writing in general. As Sontag writes in her Translator's Preface to *Writing Degree Zero*,

> Sartre takes the position . . . that prose literature differs from all the other arts, by virtue of its means–language. Words, unlike images, signify; they convey meaning. Therefore, prose literature by its nature is bound, as is no other art, including poetry, to the task of communicating. The writer is (potentially) a giver of consciousness, a liberator. His medium, language, confers upon him an ethical obligation: to aid in the project of bringing liberty to *all* men–and this ethical criterion must be the foundation of any sound literary judgement. (xi)

Barthes, on the other hand, takes the opposite position as he claims that "[w]riting is *in no way* an instrument for communication, it is not an open route through which there passes only the intention to speak" (*WDZ* 19; emphasis added). Unlike speech, through which "[a] whole discourse flows . . . and gives it this self-devouring momentum which keeps it in a perpetually suspended state" (19), writing

> is a hardened language which is self-contained and is in no way meant to deliver to its own duration a mobile series of approximations. It is on the contrary meant to impose, thanks to the shadow cast by its system of signs, the image of a speech which had a structure even before it came into existence. (19)

Whereas speech "is nothing but a flow of empty signs, the movement of which alone is

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[13]Sontag claims that "one can name the specific adversary of Barthes' argument. Barthes' topic is the same as that posed by, and stated in the title of, Sartre's famous *What Is Literature?* Supplementary confirmation by dates: although *Writing Degree Zero* was published in 1953, early portions of it appeared in the newspaper *Combat* in 1947, the same year as Sartre's book was published. And both Sartre's first chapter and the first section of *Writing Degree Zero* have the same title. . . . It would seem that Barthes, though he never mentions Sartre's book, had it in mind when he wrote *Writing Degree Zero*, and that his argument constitutes an attempt at refuting Sartre's" (xi).

significant" (19), writing, on the contrary, "is always rooted in something beyond language, it develops like a seed, not like a line, it manifests an essence and holds the threat of a secret, it is an anti-communication, it is intimidating" (20).

Barthes is able to take this position because of a crisis of language which he locates in "around 1850," a time when classical writing began to disintegrate and since when "the whole of Literature . . . became the problematics of language" (3). Before 1850, classical art had not perceived language as being problematic: indeed, Barthes claims, it "could have no sense of being a language, for it *was* language, in other words it was transparent, it flowed and left no deposit, it brought ideally together a universal Spirit and a decorative sign without substance or responsibility" (3; emphasis in original). The "ideological unity of the bourgeoisie" (2) had in the classical and romantic "bourgeois periods" (3) given rise to "a single mode of writing" (2-3): according to Barthes, "literary form could not be divided because consciousness was not" (3). Yet the middle of the 19th century saw the end of this "ideological unity," and "as soon as the writer ceased to be a witness to the universal, to become the incarnation of a tragic awareness" (3),[14] not only did language become highly problematic, but with it so did literary form. The formerly transparent literary form now "becomes clouded":

> it fascinates the reader, it strikes him as exotic, it enthralls him, it acquires a weight. Literature is no longer felt as a socially privileged mode of transaction, but as a language having a body and hidden depths, existing both as dream and menace. (3)

[14]Barthes locates this shift to the 1850s because this period "bring[s] the concurrence of three new and important facts in History: the demographic expansion in Europe, the replacement of textile by heavy industry, that is, the birth of modern capitalism, the scission (completed by the revolution of June 1848) of French society into three mutually hostile classes, bringing the definitive ruin of liberal illusions. These circumstances put the bourgeoisie into a new historical situation. Until then, it was the bourgeois ideology itself which gave the measure of the universal by fulfilling it unchallenged" (*WDZ* 60).

From the initial clouding, literary form then passed through what Barthes sees as "a progressive solidification" (5) before it "was finally established as an object" (3). This solidification of literary form began with Flaubert, for whom "form became the end-product of craftsmanship, like a piece of pottery or jewel," a craftsmanship, moreover, that was "made manifest, that is, it was for the first time imposed on the reader as a spectacle" (4). Finally, there was Mallarmé, whose work was "exerted towards the destruction of language," and was therefore responsible for "the crowning achievement of this creation of Literature as Object, and this by the ultimate of all objectifying acts: murder" (5). From Flaubert and Mallarmé to Robbe-Grillet,

> [f]or a century now, every mode of writing has thus been *an exercise in reconciliation with, or aversion from,* that objectified Form inevitably met by the writer on his way, and which he must scrutinize, challenge, and accept with all its consequences, since he *cannot ever destroy it without destroying himself as a writer.* Form hovers before his gaze like an object; whatever he does, it is a scandal: if it stands resplendent, it appears outmoded; if it is a law unto itself, it is asocial; in so far as it is particular in relation to time or mankind, it cannot but mean solitude. (4; emphasis added)

In the 1950s, the modern writer's struggle with this solidified form has reached "a last metamorphosis: absence," thus becoming what Barthes calls "zero degree of writing":

> in those neutral modes of writing, called here 'the zero degree of writing,' we can easily discern a negative momentum, and an inability to maintain it within time's flow, as if Literature, having tended for a hundred years now to transmute its surface into *a form with no antecedents,* could no longer find purity anywhere but in the absence of all signs, finally proposing the realization of this Orphean dream: a writer without Literature. (5; emphasis added)

Since form cannot be destroyed without the writer "destroying himself as a writer" (4), to aim for "a form with no antecedents," that is, a form that can find purity only "in the

absence of all signs," would therefore be to aim for a literature which eventually becomes "the negation of itself, silence, absence" (Godard 162).

The crisis of language that Barthes brings to the forefront in *Writing Degree Zero* receives a "relatively pejorative treatment" (Sontag xi) by Sartre in *What is Literature?*: "The function of the writer is to call a spade a spade. If words are sick, it is up to us to cure them. Instead of that, many writers live off this sickness. . . . [T]oday, as I have shown, it is necessary to construct" (*WL* 278). Where Barthes sees in modernist literature such as the "[c]olourless writing" of Camus, Blanchot and Cayrol or the "conversational writing" of Queneau "the last episode of a Passion of writing, which recounts stage by stage the *disintegration* of bourgeois consciousness" (*WDZ* 5; emphasis added), Sartre takes the view that, in the words of Sontag, such "modernist literature . . . embodies the final *cop-out* of 'bourgeois consciousness'" (xv; emphasis added): rather than curing words and participating in a process of construction, these writers instead live off this sickness and only exacerbate the "cancer of words" (*WL* 278) that is eating away at literature.

Sartre does acknowledge the existence of style in prose literature: "to be sure, the style makes the value of the prose" (19). However, as he does not acknowledge any crisis of language in prose literature, claiming instead that "[t]he crisis of language which broke out at the beginning of this century is a poetic crisis" (10)–and even if there were to be such a crisis, critically ill words can always be healed–prose language has to Sartre retained a transparency and an instrumentality that Barthes sees as belonging to the bygone age of classical literature. Says Sartre, "[s]ince words are transparent and since the gaze looks through them," to prioritise style over content would be "absurd," amounting "to slip in among [transparent words] some panes of rough glass" (19). Sartre,

therefore, sees prose literature as consisting of two elements: language, "whose 'end' . . . is to communicate," and style, "understood as the most efficient way of expressing the 'subject'" (Sontag xii). Form is partly conflated with style and partly dismissed as the property of poetry and not prose literature, whose function it is to communicate and whose ideological content should figure in the forefront and not be overshadowed by formal concerns that would inhibit its essential task:

> If the contamination of a certain kind of prose by poetry had not confused the ideas of our critics, would they dream of attacking us on the matter of form, when we have never spoken of anything but the content? There is nothing to be said about form in advance, and we have said nothing. Everyone invents his own, and one judges it afterward. It is true that subjects suggest the style, but they do not order it. There are no styles ranged a priori outside the literary art. (*WL* 20)

Prose literature, therefore, is to Sartre "in essence utilitarian. I would readily define the prose-writer as a man who *makes use* of words" (13). It is here that we can locate a Sartrean distinction between prose and poetry, and, moreover, the foundation of Sartre's argument that prose literature should by definition be *engaged* literature:

> if prose is never anything but the privileged instrument of a certain undertaking, if it is only the poet's business to contemplate words in a disinterested fashion, then one has *the right* to ask the prose-writer from the very start, *"What is your aim in writing?* What undertakings are you engaged in, and why does it require you to have recourse to writing?" In any case this undertaking cannot have pure contemplation as an end. For, intuition is silence, and the end of language is to communicate. (15; emphasis added)

On the contrary, Barthes presents us with a "triad of language, style and 'writing' [*écriture*]" which are "the three dimensions of 'form'" (Sontag xii). Language, "a corpus of prescriptions and habits common to all writers of a period," is historical (*WDZ* 11), whereas style's "imagery, delivery, vocabulary spring from the body and the past of the

writer" (10) and is therefore "biological or biographical" (11) and "resides outside art" (12). Style and language together "map out for the writer a Nature [i.e., "a familiar repertory of gestures"], since he does not choose either" (13). Between language and style we find *écriture*, or "modes of writing." *Écriture* is that which is on the inside of art, that is, *particular* to literature, and is described as "the ensemble of features of a literary work such as tone, ethos, rhythm of delivery, naturalness of expression, atmosphere of happiness or malaise (Sontag xii). Style and language are objects, whereas *écriture* is a "function": "the relationship between creation and society, the literary language transformed by its social finality, form considered as human intention" (14), *écriture* is "where the writer shows himself clearly as an individual because this is where he commits himself" (13). Unlike style and language, both "blind forces," *écriture* "is an act of historical solidarity" (14).

We have discussed the differences between Sartre and Barthes at such a length not only because this debate is essential for the development of the *nouveau roman*, but also because it is traceable in the writings, fiction and non-fiction, of Watson. Like Barthes, neither Watson nor the *nouveaux romanciers* advocate "a doctrine of literature for literature's sake" but they do, however, argue for "a more complex view of literature" (Sontag xiv) than that which Sartre offers in *What is Literature?* Though *écriture* is not far removed from Sartrean engagement (it is, after all, "an act of historical solidarity"), "Barthes suggests that Sartre has suppressed the fact that the choices made by writers always face in *two* directions: toward society and toward the nature of literature itself" (Sontag xiv; emphasis in original). Moreover, if *écriture* is to be considered as "the relationship between creation and society, the literary language transformed by its social finality, form considered as human intention," the writer's commitment is in Barthes's

view located within literary *form*: "every Form is also a Value" (13), Barthes insists, and this is radically different from Sartre, who claims to "have never spoken of anything but the content."

It is the Barthesian emphasis on a crisis of language and the subsequent solidification of literary form, now hovering like an object and impossible to dismiss, which unites Watson with not only Barthes but also the *nouveau roman*. In 1975, Watson told Daphne Marlatt that "[Robbe-Grillet] says certain things which remind me of the problems I faced then" ("Interview / Sheila Watson" 357), thus making explicit the link between her own situation as a writer and that of the writers of the *nouveau roman*. There are numerous other links, and these links shall be outlined here before we embark on a closer examination of the affinities between Robbe-Grillet and Watson.

In an interview in 1984, Watson stated that she did not see literature as innocent because

> [w]ords are not simple exchange. They are charged. They have all sorts of possibilities which may explode at any moment. There are moments, for instance, when one is reading poetry aloud when one senses that one can't go on because the listeners can't bear it. Sometimes, too, there are books that one simply cannot read because they are too powerful, too disturbing. . . . That, I suppose, is what I mean when I say literature is not innocent because it has the power to produce a disequilibrium in your life. Or, as Marshall McLuhan would say, it is a kind of transgression. . . . As Ricoeur said, man is freed from his animal condition but he is freed into a more perilous condition through language. I've always felt that. ("It's What You Say" 162)

Though she mentions Paul Ricoeur and not Barthes, the idea that words are "charged," that they "may explode at any moment" and that literature can be "too powerful, too disturbing," echoes Barthes's notions of "hidden depths" and "dream and menace" above, as well as his view of writing as developing "not like a line" but "like a seed" which

"holds the threat of a secret," a secret, moreover, that "is an anti-communication, [that] is intimidating" (*WDZ* 20).[15] As we shall see, the "perilous condition" of language and the problem of communication become major themes in *The Double Hook*, from its very beginning:

> James was at the top of the stairs. His hand half-raised. His voice in the rafters. James walking away. The old lady falling. There under the jaw of the roof. In the vault of the bed loft. Into the shadow of death. Pushed by James's will. By James's hand. *By James's words*: This is my day. You'll not fish today. (11; emphasis added)

Here, James's words are as implicit in the matricide as his hands and his will. And his words are as charged with menace as his raised hand and his decision to commit the act of pushing his mother down the stairs. Words, therefore, are powerful: they are intimidating and menacing and can have a devastating impact upon others. The fact that the reference to "James's words" appears at the very end of the paragraph suggests perhaps that words can be even more powerful, even more devastating than a raised hand and a mind set upon murder, as his words become the final and most decisive element of the three that comprise James's act. Yet, overall, the absence of words is perhaps more prevalent in the novel, as most characters struggle to communicate with each other and fail to find words

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[15]Watson does not make the same distinction between speech and writing as does Barthes in *Writing Degree Zero*. By referring simply to "language," Watson's concept of language is perhaps closer to Derrida's notion of an *arche-écriture*. Derrida questions the commonly accepted order of speech and writing, where speech is seen as originary and prior to writing, which is given a secondary and derivative status as scripted or transcribed speech. If writing is something added, a supplement, it can only be so "if speech is not a self-sufficient, natural plenitude, only if there is already in speech a lack or absence that enables writing to supplement it" (Culler, *OD* 103). Moreover, writing is normally defined by its iterability, by the fact that it "can be repeated and circulated in the absence of the signifying intention that animates speech; but this iterability can be shown to be the condition of any sign." Speech, therefore, "is already a form of writing" (102). Says Derrida, "the alleged derivativeness of writing, however real or massive, was possible only on one condition: that the 'original,' 'natural,' etc. language had never existed, never been intact and untouched by writing, that it had itself always been a writing"–an arche-writing (*Of Grammatology* 56). However, Derrida echoes Barthes's emphasis on "the problematics of language" (*WDZ*

that could adequately express their needs. Felix, for example, realises that he has "no words to clear a woman off my bench. No words except: Keep moving, scatter, get-the-hell-out" (41). He remembers "ritual phrases. Some half forgotten. You're welcome. Put your horse in. Pull up. *Ave Maria. Benedictus fructus ventris. Introibo*" (41), and juxtaposed here are fragments from both daily life and the Catholic mass, all cut off from their sources to such an extent that he is left with simply the signifier whose relation to both the signified and the actual reference has become obscured and problematic. Finally he settles on a phrase, but its inadequacy and its failure to communicate anything meaningful to the young, pregnant girl whom he tries to get rid of renders the situation almost comic: "*Pax vobiscum*, he said. The girl lifted her head. She licked the saliva from the corner of her mouth. What the hell, she said" (41).

However, these problems are not experienced just by her characters, but also by Watson the writer. Writing in her journal on September 21, 1955, Watson describes how her husband Wilfred Watson, a fellow writer and academic,

> reminds me often that when I wrote *The Double Hook* in its first drafts, I believed that complete communication between two people was not possible. This belief he says had contorted all my writing: perhaps–and perhaps– (*Bio.* 126)

Yet in the perspective of the *nouveaux romanciers*, the problem of language and of communication does not run the risk of contorting writing, because this would imply that there exists the possibility of a writing that was *not* contorted. Contortion, rather, is a condition of language to begin with (or, remembering Barthes's crisis of language, at least from 1850 onwards), and Watson's tentative and hesitating expression of dissent

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3): "never as much as at present has it [the problem of language] invaded, as such, the global horizon of the most diverse researches and the most heterogeneous discourses . . ." (*Of Grammatology* 6).

("perhaps–and perhaps–") appears to signal an awareness of this perspective. To these writers, as well as to Watson, the problems of language and communication are the reality of writing with which the modern writer is confronted. Moreover, writers such as Alain Robbe-Grillet and Nathalie Sarraute claim that the literary text should not cover up faulty communication or attempt to compensate for the shortcomings of language. This, in fact, would be immoral, as the writer would end by presenting to the world "a negligent, conformist, hardly sincere, hardly honest attitude toward reality" (144), according to Sarraute in her collection of essays called *The Age of Suspicion* (*AS*). It is essential, therefore, as Robbe-Grillet states, that "[e]verything must happen within the text so that severances, faults, ambiguities, mobilities, fragmentation, contradictions, holes must be enacted. It is the text which must display them" (qtd. in Oppenheim 24). Robbe-Grillet found that Sarraute and himself shared the same preoccupations when he first encountered Sarraute's essays on literature, which he felt "rendered account of the same experience of the novelist grappling with a substance–the text–which itself had to be the arena for these fights between order and disorder" (qtd. in Oppenheim 24).

Watson traces her concern with language to an episode from her childhood, which she spent at the Provincial Hospital for the Insane in New Westminster, as the daughter of the hospital's director:

> I remember when I was small we had a pony which one of the patients named Jack looked after. I remember my father calling me into his office and saying, "What did you say to Jack?" And I must have had a bad conscience about it and admitted that I had said "'You're crazy, Jack,' but I meant it just in a general sense, without thinking." And my father just looked at me and said, "It's not what you mean, it's what you say." I can still hear him now. It is not what you mean, it is what you say. That was probably the most fundamental single influence on my attitude to language. ("It's What You Say" 166)

"It is not what you mean, it is what you say"–an early lesson, therefore, that shows the great importance of both form and content and the fact that form is not something we should only consider after the event, as Sartre would have it. To Watson, as to Robbe-Grillet, Sarraute and Barthes, form is not an empty vessel or a transparent vehicle for communication, but rather a solidified object which can be charged with meaning, and which carries with it the Barthesian potential for both dream and menace. Menace because words can kill, as in the case of James and the old lady, but also dream because this is where creativity, originality and innovation are located. Asked by Pierre Coupey in an interview in 1975 about "the uses [she was] making in the language that [she] felt were new . . . , Watson replied that "[b]y the time I wrote *The Double* Hook, one could hardly take language for granted. I did work with the form, the actual form" ("Interview / Sheila Watson" 352).

We shall return shortly to both Watson's idea of the "new" (Graft 3) and to "the actual form" that *The Double Hook* would end up taking (Graft 2). What is important here, however, is to note the explicit emphasis on language as a *problem*, as something that one can "hardly take . . . for granted." What is important, too, is the connection made between formal expression and the idea of newness. Form, then, is where originality is found, not in the thematic content of a literary work. Form, moreover, is where art comes alive:

> I think of life as a piece of metal which must be shaped, not thrown away–of work even as something which must be shaped not thrown away–the something to write once given or elected, turned *until it has form–until it lives.* One simply can't drop it and look for something else. This way man wears his life or his work like readymade clothes. He shops around until he finds something that fits–that will do with a little adjustment here or there. It is life off the rack–work off the rack–not living or creating. (*Bio.* 181; emphasis added)

Sarraute makes a similar connection between form and life, as she describes her initial discovery of tropisms, which she describes as "a kind of movement, an invisible dramatic action between two people" and which came to dominate her whole work:

> I did not claim to have made any discovery in the field of psychology. . . . What was important to me was that these movements gave rise to *a form that seemed alive*.
>
> It was alive because it brought to the outside something still intact, something which had not already been taken over by language, something still vague, still hazy. In order to take shape, it had to be carried by words, to slide into words, to melt with a language from which it would be inseparable. (qtd. in Oppenheim 122; emphasis added)

As we have seen, Barthes locates a shift in literature to "around 1850," a time which saw renewed emphasis on literary form, and which would claim with Valéry that "'[f]orm is costly'" (qtd. in Barthes, *WDZ* 62). Before then,

> there [had] been a whole period, that of triumphant bourgeois writing, when form cost about the same price as thought. . . . [F]orm was all the cheaper since the writer was using a ready-made instrument, the working of which was handed down unchanged without anyone being obsessed with novelty. Form was not seen as a possession; the universality of classical language derived from the fact that language was a common property, and that thought alone bore the weight of being different. We might say that throughout this period, form had a usage value. (*WDZ* 62)

Once language has ceased to be universal and "modes of writing begin to multiply" (60), there emerges "an image of the writer as a craftsman who shuts himself away in some legendary place . . ." (63). Usage value has been replaced by "the work-value of writing" (62). The writer as craftsman emerges, too, in the Watson quotation above, in which she compares life as well as work to "a piece of metal which must be shaped" and to clothes that are not "off the rack" (181). However, a strong sense of individuality is detectable in this comparison: there is no indication as to what shape the piece of metal should assume

once bent, and clothes that are not off the rack are tailored to fit one individual and that individual only. Watson's rejection of "life off the rack–work off the rack" in favour of "living or creating" echoes Robbe-Grillet and Sarraute's refusal to use ready-made forms in their writing. As Robbe-Grillet succinctly put it: "Each novelist, each novel must invent its own form" (*FNN* 12).

The formal hegemony of the realist and naturalist novels of the 1800s, therefore, represented the largest conventional obstacle for Robbe-Grillet and Sarraute, as these novels were perceived by writers and critics alike as the "pre-existing mold into which to pour the books of the future" (*FNN* 12). Sarraute found that imitating the forms which Balzac had created was impossible for the modern writer: these forms–"colorful characters of well-defined features"–into which Balzac had "breathed . . . this life which they preserved" had "little by little disintegrated." To Sarraute, "[i]t was no longer there that the source of life was to be found" (qtd. in Oppenheim 126).

Robbe-Grillet also sees the Balzacian novel as an impossibility for the modern writer:

> The error is to suppose that the "true" novel was set once and for all in the Balzacian period, with strict and definitive rules. Not only has the development been considerable since the middle of the nineteenth century, but it began immediately, in Balzac's own period. Did not Balzac already note the "confusion" in the descriptions of *The Charterhouse of Parma*? (*FNN* 135-136)

In the essay "On Several Obsolete Notions," Robbe-Grillet echoes Sarraute in his claim that "[t]he novel of characters belongs entirely to the past, it describes a period: that which marked the apogee of the individual" (28).

Watson, too, felt the need to point to the shortcomings of the naturalist novel. Writing in her journal on December 25, 1955, she noted that

> [a]pparently the clochards met five hundred strong under the bridge de Tournelle for their Christmas Eve party. I wish that I had been with them. It is a sad truth, that the Goncourts, who saw everything, wrote nothing of any account. (Flahiff, *Bio.* 170)

Again we see the emphasis on form, as the tragedy of the Goncourts was that they, in Watson's opinion, "wrote nothing of any account" despite "s[eeing] everything," despite, in other words, the explicit naturalist aim "to present their characters with an objective scientific attitude and with elaborate documentation, often including an almost medical frankness" (Abrams 154). In its striving towards greater realism and scientific objectivity through descriptions brimming with detail, naturalism achieved not the real but a convention of the real. Full "of the formal signs of Literature (preterite, indirect speech, the rhythm of written language) and of the no less formal signs of realism (incongruous snippets of popular speech, strong language or dialect)," naturalism's paradox was that "no mode of writing was more artificial than that which set out to give the most accurate description of Nature" (*WDZ* 67). Because of this paradox, "the writing of Realism can never be convincing":

> it is condemned to mere description by virtue of this dualistic dogma which ordains that there shall only ever be one optimum form to 'express' a reality as inert as an object, on which the writer can have no power except through his art of arranging the signs. (68)

The naturalist school falls short because its aesthetic dictates an objective, unobtrusive rendering of nature and of reality while paradoxically attempting to achieve this through only "one optimum form" which has been fabricated from a combination of formal signs and which is not natural or real in the slightest but highly artificial. To paraphrase

Watson, it is an aesthetic that sees every aspect of reality, but which fails to preserve this reality when attempting to express what it has seen.

If Barthes, and Watson and the new novelists with him, are right in claiming that writers of realism can "never be convincing" in rendering reality because their use of stale, set and highly artificial forms no longer mirror accurately the reality of the world with which we are confronted, then a reversal of our understanding of the terms "realism" and "formalism" would necessarily be in order. Accused of conducting "laboratory experiments" (*Tropisms* 1; *FNN* 41) and of creating "art for art's sake" (*AS* 125; *FNN* 38), both Robbe-Grillet and Sarraute felt the need to address the inappropriateness of the label "formalism" with which they were often charged. Turning such labels on their heads, Sarraute argues that a realist is

> quite simply–and it could not be otherwise–a writer who, above all–however great his desire to amuse his contemporaries, to reform them, to instruct them or to fight for their emancipation–applies himself, while making an effort to cheat as little as possible and neither to trim nor smooth anything for the purpose of overcoming contradictions and complexities, to seizing with all the sincerity of which he is capable, to scrutinizing as far as his sharpness of vision will permit him to see, what appears to him to be reality. (*AS* 133-34)

A realist would have to work "unceasingly to rid what he sees of all the matrix of preconceived ideas and ready-made images that encase" reality. Sarraute reserves the term 'formalist,' "however paradoxical and outrageous this may seem to them" (133), for exactly those who "generally use it in derision to designate the writers in the opposite camp," as "[i]t is quite obvious . . . that reality is not their main interest, but form, always, form, invented by others, and from which a magnetic force makes them unable ever to break away" (137). Tipping his hat to Sarraute, Robbe-Grillet states in similar tones that the term "formalist"

> should actually apply . . . only to the novelists overly concerned with their "content" who, to make themselves more clearly understood, abjure any exploration of style likely to displease or surprise: those who, precisely, adopt a form–a mold–which has given its proofs, but which has lost all force, all life. They are formalists because they have accepted a ready-made, sclerotic form which is no more than a formula, and because they cling to this fleshless carcass. (*FNN* 46)

Literature, therefore, should strive for forms that seem alive, and not accept stagnant and dead conventions. In this striving, Watson, like Sarraute and Robbe-Grillet, felt the need to reject the social realist novel, as it was founded on the now stale conventions of the naturalist novel of the 1800s. According to Barthes, communist writers, "far from breaking with a form which is after all typically bourgeois" in fact *need* to "assum[e] without reservation the formal preoccupations of the [bourgeois] art of writing" because

> the very dogma of socialist realism necessarily entails the adoption of a conventional mode of writing, to which is assigned the task of signifying in a conspicuous way a content which is powerless to impose itself without a form to identify it. (*WDZ* 70)

Form, therefore, in both classical art dominated by the bourgeoisie and in Marxist writing,[16] is essentially instrumental, in the sense that it is perceived solely as an instrument whose function it is to serve the dominant ideology. Because Marxist writing is inextricably linked to ideology, "each word is no longer anything but a narrow reference to the set of principles which tacitly underlie it" (*WDZ* 23), functioning merely as "an algebraical sign representing a whole bracketed set of previous postulates" (23). This attitude to writing is unacceptable to Watson, who, as we have already seen, stresses that a writer "can't compel his characters to carry briefcases full of tracts–or to give radio

[16]Barthes does not appear to be making any explicit distinctions between Marxist writing, communist writing and socialist realism. Cf p. 70, on which the terms "socialist realism" and "the communist mode of writing" are used seemingly interchangeably.

talks on religion or politics or science or the way to get on with the neighbours," because "[t]he moment he does, his characters lose their identity" (*Bio.* 184). Characters, therefore, cannot be manipulated into religious, political or moral beings at the will of the writer. To do so would not only deny them respect but also entail, in the words of Barthes, "presenting reality in a prejudged form, thus imposing a reading which involves immediate condemnation" (*WDZ* 24). Even exaltation or pity would involve characters being prejudged by the writer, and his or her characters would be denied any identity separate from that of the writer him/herself.

Sarraute, too, responds negatively to the notion of social realist literature:

> as a result of the novel's tendency to be an art that always lags behind the others, and that is less capable of breaking away from outmoded forms that have been emptied of all living content, people want to make it into a weapon of combat that will serve the revolution or maintain and perfect revolutionary gains. (142)

Echoing Bradbury's take on the "strange, uneasy marriage of 'Bloomsbury' and public writing" (205) above, Sarraute describes the consequences of literature turned into "a weapon of combat" as leading

> to strange results that constitute a rather disquieting threat not only to the novel–which, after all, would not be very serious, and to which, if need be, we might become resigned–but to the revolution to be achieved, to the masses it is intended to liberate, and to the safeguard of gains made by a revolution that has already taken place. (142-43)

Robbe-Grillet's criticism of social realism permeates large sections of *For a New Novel.* Though his criticism is manifold, the most consistent charge is centred on the relation between form and content. The writers of the *nouveau roman* see form and content as inextricably linked (and here we may also include Watson, because of her

insistence on the fact that "[i]t is not what you mean, it is what you say," above), whereas the authors of the social realist novel believe, like the writers of the 19th-century realist and naturalist novels before them, that form and content can in fact be separated. In this, therefore, these so-called revolutionary and radical writers happen to be in agreement with "the most hardened bourgeois critics." Though claiming to be revolutionary because their content "treat[s] the condition of workers and the problems of socialism," their novels' unquestionable adherence to a

> literary form, which generally dates from before 1848, makes them the most backward of bourgeois novels: their real significance, which is quite evident upon reading, the values they enjoin, are identical to those of our capitalist nineteenth century, with its humanitarian ideals, its morality, its mixture of rationalism and spirituality. (*FNN* 44)

In sharp contrast to the Sartrean engaged prose writer, for whom content is everything and form should pass unnoticed, so that "the word passes across our gaze as the glass across the sun" (*WL* 14), Robbe-Grillet claims that form–the manner of writing–alone constitutes the writer's "enterprise":

> Before the work of art, there is nothing–no certainty, no thesis, no message. To believe that the novelist has 'something to say' and that he then looks for a way to say it represents the gravest of misconceptions. For it is precisely this 'way,' this manner of speaking, which constitutes his enterprise as a writer, an enterprise more obscure than any other, and which will later be the uncertain content of his book. (*FNN* 141-42)

However, Barthes and Sartre are not as opposed as it might appear at first glance. In fact, much of Barthes's writing is, as Sontag has pointed out, "close to Sartre's ethical and political position of that time–the values of 'freedom,' the contempt for the impasses of bourgeois culture, the horizon of the Revolution" (Sontag xiv). Moreover, as Robbe-

Grillet was to suggest years later in *Ghosts in the Mirror* (*GM*), what these two philosophers share–and this is also their most important legacy, according to Robbe-Grillet–is the discovery "that the novel or the theater–more so than the essay–are the natural settings in which concrete freedom can be most violently and effectively acted out" (51-52).

The term *freedom* tends to appear quite frequently in Robbe-Grillet's and in Sarraute's writings. It is easy to assume that their idea of freedom would also include freedom *from* engagement, from any form of committed literature, as when Robbe-Grillet declares that "[t]he only possible commitment for the writer is literature":

> Instead of being of a political nature, commitment is, for the writer, the full awareness of the present problems of his own language, the conviction of their extreme importance, the desire to solve them *from within.* (*FNN* 41)

Yet when he continues to say that "[u]ltimately, it is perhaps this uncertain content of an obscure enterprise of form which will best serve the cause of freedom" (*FNN* 142), it transpires that Robbe-Grillet is not completely averse to the notion of Sartrean *engagement*. Indeed, Celia Britton, in *The Nouveau Roman: Fiction, Theory and Politics,*[17] observes that Sartre's emphasis "in making readers conscious of issues in their

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[17]Britton situates Nathalie Sarraute, Alain Robbe-Grillet et al. in this and various other theoretical and political debates that took place during the 1950s, '60s and '70s. She points out that "[the *nouveaux romanciers'*] critique of Sartre concentrates exclusively on the opening section of *Qu'est-ce que la littérature? [What Is Literature?]* which contains the famous, and indeed rather crude, definition of prose as an *instrumental* use of language, and ignores the subsequent refinements and redefinitions of this position" (15). Also, they "ignore the profound reciprocal hostility that existed between [Sartre] and the writers in the PFC [Parti Français Communist]" (15). Yet their opposition to Sartre was very much "motivated simply by his antagonism towards them": "His view of the Nouveau Roman was on the whole negative, and grew more so in the course of the 1960s through a series of rather polemical journalistic interchanges. . . . In other words, because their hostility towards Sartre arose from fairly specific (and often personal) arguments about the Nouveau Roman, it was able to coexist with implicitly more positive attitudes to his philosophical ideas in general" (15). Though Sartre initially helped Nathalie Sarraute publish her first novel, *Portrait d'un inconnu*, including writing an introduction in which he claims Sarraute has written an antinovel (a view which she was later to refute: "it was not an antinovel, but a contemporary novel, one that only a modern

own lives that they had previously been only dimly aware of" is echoed by Robbe-Grillet when he claims that

> the function of art is never to illustrate a truth–or even interrogation– known in advance, but to bring into the world certain interrogations (and also, perhaps in time, certain answers) *not yet known as such to themselves*. (*FNN* 14; emphasis added)

This is also echoed in Sarraute's concerns, as when she insists in *The Age of Suspicion* that only literature can help readers find "a deeper, more complex, clearer, truer knowledge of what they are, of their circumstances and their lives, than they can acquire alone" (145). Watson, too, as we have seen, appears to be in agreement with both Robbe-Grillet and Sarraute when she states that " [i]f there is any miracle–it is the recognition of existence–not the shaping of it to one's will" (Flahiff, *Bio.* 184).

Neither Sarraute nor Robbe-Grillet, therefore, nor Watson, discards the idea of commitment but are, as Britton says, "concerned to give [it] a different content" (26). Their linking of "freedom" with an insistence on what we just saw Robbe-Grillet call "this . . . obscure enterprise of form" shows that to them, "conscious experimentation with literary forms is *in itself* a kind of political engagement" (Britton 26), an enterprise which "by means of an obscure and remote consequence [has the chance] of some day serving something–perhaps even the Revolution" (*FNN* 40). Here, Robbe-Grillet "leans heavily on Barthes's claim that literary form carries an ideological weight on its own" (Britton 26), that, as we have seen, language and form are no longer transparent instruments but objects with their very own problematics to be reckoned with. As Booth notes in his

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writer could write" [qtd. in Oppenheim 124]), his relationship with the new novelists soured to the point where Sartre famously claimed in *Le Monde* in 1963 that he could not conceive of reading Robbe-Grillet in

introduction to Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics,* "form itself . . . is inherently ideological"–one does not have "value-free forms imposed on a 'content' that alone contains the taint of value judgements or ideology, but rather formed values, formed ideologies" (xx). According to Robbe-Grillet,

> [i]t is impossible to write a text which, as a narration, is based on the old established order when its purpose is to show that this order is wavering. On the contrary. Everything must happen within the text so that severances, faults, ambiguities, mobilities, contradictions, holes must be enacted. It is the text which must display them. (qtd. in Oppenheim 24)

"It is the text which must display them": the novel must not only *embody* this freedom in its content and by its theme but also act it out in its very *form.* Herein lies the writer's commitment–not in any factor external to his art, because

> [t]o speak of the content of the novel as something independent of its form comes down to striking the genre as a whole from the realm of art. For the work of art contains nothing, in the strict sense of the term (that is, as a box can hold–or be empty of–some object of an alien nature). Art is not a more or less brilliantly colored envelope intended to embellish the author's message. . . . Art endures no servitude of this kind, nor any other pre-established function. It is based on no truth that exists before it; and one may say that it expresses nothing but itself. (*FNN* 45)

If "art endures no servitude" or "pre-established function," the writer has to insist, as we have seen, on complete freedom to invent new forms. In fact, any blind adherence to the forms of the past will result in alienation rather than the intended liberation:

> By presenting readers with a reality that is mutilated and a snare, an indigent, flat appearance in which, once the first moments of excitement and hope have passed, they find nothing that really constitutes their lives, neither the real difficulties with

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a third world country, seeing Robbe-Grillet and other new novelists as writers for the comfortable bourgeoisie.

> which they must cope nor the real conflicts they have to face, we alienate them or arouse their distrust. . . . (*AS* 45)

In this insistence on freedom to invent new forms, which constitutes the moral obligation of the writer, we can finally locate what serves as the foundation of the *nouveau roman*. Robbe-Grillet comes the closest to articulating the common denominator of the various *nouveaux romanciers* when he says that

> [i]f in many of the pages that follow, I readily employ the term *New Novel*, it is not to designate a school, nor even a specific and constituted group of writers working in the same direction; the expression is merely a convenient label applicable to all those seeking new forms for the novel, forms capable of expressing (or of creating) new relations between man and the world, to all those who have determined to invent the novel, in other words, to invent man. Such writers know that the systematic repetition of the forms of the past is not only absurd and futile, but that it can even become harmful: by blinding us to our real situation in the world today, it keeps us, ultimately, from constructing the world and man of tomorrow. *(FNN 9)*

Years later, Sarraute still echoed Robbe-Grillet's sentiment and reaffirmed her own and others' belief in the validity of the *nouveau roman* as a necessary term despite the varied nature of the novels and novelists it encompasses:

> As has already been said, what Alain Robbe-Grillet writes and what I write are exactly the same, except entirely different. In my work, it is a stream of internal movements, and in his, it is an interplay of external stills. But as far as the *freedom* of novelistic forms is concerned and the necessity of constantly transforming them in order to *keep them alive*, we were in agreement. (qtd. in Oppenheim 128; emphasis added)

"[E]xactly the same, except entirely different": We can include Watson here, because form, for the new novelists, as well as for Watson, seems to exist "both as dream and menace." On the one hand, there is the moral imperative of formal innovation, which remains the writer's "deepest obligation: that of discovering what is new." On the other

hand, there is the dread of using the dead forms of the past, of "committing [the writer's] most serious crime: that of repeating the discoveries of his predecessors" (*AS* 74). Yet greater still is the danger of a world without such forms, a world without literature or art or tradition, a world without what Watson so enigmatically refers to as simply "mediating rituals":

> there was something I wanted to say: about how people are driven, how if they have no tradition, how if they have no ritual, they are driven in one of two ways, either towards violence or towards insensibility–if they have no mediating rituals which manifest themselves in what I suppose we call art forms. ("What I am Going To Do" 13)

"Ritual," Watson claims, "is the organization of community. If ritual becomes the ritual of commercial ads, then that is ritual for better or for worse" (160). The new novel, freed from pure instrumentality and reclaimed as an art form in its own right, can become a mediating ritual through an emphasis on formal innovation "capable of expressing (or of creating) new relations between man and the world." Yet in the case of *The Double Hook*, the novel is both a meditating ritual and a site that illustrates the absence of such mediating rituals. Watson has set herself a large and even paradoxical task: how does one create a novel that is able to display in its form the issues raised by its content, when the content is concerned with the very *absence* of such mediating rituals and art forms? What are these new forms for the novel that Watson chose for *The Double Hook* and in what sense are these forms new? These are all questions that we shall seek to answer in the following chapters.

# Graft 2: "Why Pass a Knife between Two Texts?"

*Traditional criticism has its vocabulary. Though it noisily abstains from offering systematic judgments on literature . . . , one merely needs to read its analyses with a little attention to discover a network of key words, betraying nothing less than a system.*

*But we are so accustomed to discussions of "character," "atmosphere," "form," and "content," of "message" and "narrative ability" and "true novelists" that it requires an effort to free ourselves from this spider web and realize that it represents an idea about the novel (a ready-made idea, which everyone admits without argument, hence a dead idea), and not at all that so-called "nature" of the novel in which we are supposed to believe.*

*Robbe-Grillet, For a New Novel (25)*

*[T]he abstract line is that defined by Michael Fried in relation to certain works by Pollock: multidirectional, with neither inside nor outside, form nor background, delimiting nothing, describing no contour, passing between spots or points, filling a smooth space, stirring up a close-lying haptic visual matter "that both invites the act of seeing on the part of the spectator yet gives his eye nowhere to rest once and for all."*

*Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus (575, n. 38)*

*I don't know why but I thought of Mrs. Dalloway.*

*Watson, Biography (179)*

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Robbe-Grillet's first novel *The Erasers* is perhaps not the most obvious choice for our task here: the least radical of his novels in its questioning of novelistic forms, it has also proven the easiest to recuperate, as it can be "stripped of its radicality, its strangeness, and reduced to a story that can be reconstructed and told" (Leki 19). Nevertheless, it remains "one of the first French novels to pose reading and writing as problematic" (19). In this respect a grafting of *The Erasers* and *The Double Hook* is interesting, as Watson's novel, too, problematises such issues, and is, moreover, one of the very first to do so within its own national literary context. Both novels, therefore, mark a literary shift. A shift in the

established order is in fact announced on the very first page of the two novels, as both describe a point in time beyond which things will no longer be the same. In *The Double Hook*, for example, we are told who "lived [i]n the folds of the hills under Coyote's eye," but the list of characters ends ominously with "until one morning in July" (11). The information swallowed by the silence of the gap left between this line and the commencement of the narrative is perhaps articulated by a similar passage in *The Erasers*, where we are told by the external narrator that "[s]oon unfortunately time will no longer be master":

> Wrapped in their aura of doubt and error, this day's events, however insignificant they may be, will in a few seconds begin their task, gradually encroaching upon the ideal order, cunningly introducing an occasional inversion, a discrepancy, a confusion, a warp, in order to accomplish their work: a day in early winter without plan, without direction, incomprehensible and monstrous. (7)

Leaving the issue of recuperation for later (for Watson's novel has also been a victim of numerous attempts to resituate its innovative discourse within various standardised and familiar frameworks–mythical, religious and otherwise–that undermine its radicality), we can observe many similarities between *The Erasers* and *The Double Hook*. In terms of structure, both have five chapters with numbered sub-chapters (though *The Erasers* also has a prologue and an epilogue), recalling the structure of the Greek tragedy. Like the tragedy, too, both observe a unity of time and place, though *The Erasers* more rigorously so than *The Double Hook*, where James's flight into town provides a notable exception. Yet the circular itinerary of James is also echoed by Wallas, whose wanderings along Boulevard Circulaire keep bringing him back to his starting-point. Both novels contain numerous references not only to specific Greek tragedies–*The Orestia* in *The Double Hook*, *Oedipus Rex* in *The Erasers*–but also to various other discourses, like

the Bible in the case of *The Double Hook*, as well as highly coded mainstream genres such as the western in Watson's novel and the detective novel in Robbe-Grillet's. In plot events, both contain a murder somehow *manqué*: in *The Double Hook*, the old lady is murdered by her son James at the beginning of the novel, yet the other characters continue to see her fishing at various points along the creek; in *The Erasers*, Wallas has come to investigate a murder which in fact has not yet taken place, only to find himself in the role of the murderer at the very end of the novel. In both novels, there are references to seeing and blinding, light and darkness. There are written and oral messages not received or received but misunderstood in both novels, and communication appears to break down between characters at various points. Finally, both novels contain "traces of the trickster," to borrow Ralph Yarrow's essay title: we have Coyote in *The Double Hook* as well as gargoyles and jesters in *The Erasers*, and the textual presence of the trickster figure in all its varieties "interact[s] with the consciousness which reads," stimulating, as we shall see, "the state of play, a condition in which play becomes the only possible response" (Yarrow 36).

*The Double Hook* and *The Erasers* are narratives that enact the very problem of narration in its novelistic forms. Reading, therefore, becomes a problem: in *The Double Hook*, Ara is after Greta's suicide unsuccessfully "trying to fit the pieces into a pattern" (65), echoing a similar attempt by the detective Wallas in *The Erasers*, who is surveying the city as well as the supposed scene of the crime on Rue des Arpenteurs (literally, "Surveyors' Street") in a hunt for clues which only leaves him with "the disagreeable sensation that he is wasting his time" (176). Yet the characters' problems are also those of the reader: how do we in fact read when the texts provide us with "[n]othing but reflections, shadows, ghosts" of the novelistic forms which we would expect to find

"tonight, once again, as every evening" (*Erasers* 198)? As we proceed with our second graft, in which we attempt to read *The Double Hook* and *The Erasers* in each other's light, we will need to examine not only the new forms within each novel but also how the two authors' rigorous questioning of traditional forms demands an equally rigorous questioning of the way in which we read. We as readers need, in other words, to make a similar "effort to free ourselves from this spider web" of ready-made ideas "about the novel" (*FNN* 25) in order to assemble a "pattern" that does not attempt to arrest play, but rather is able to play along. Though we shall attempt to touch upon several of the similarities briefly sketched above, we shall do so by way of one novelistic form in particular: that of the character.

## Reading the Mosaic

Sheila Watson in the late 1970s wrote an essay for a course at Athabasca University. The course, according to Flahiff, was "entitled 'Modern Consciousness: Habits and Hang-ups'" and as *Ulysses* was the main focus of the course, Watson contributed an essay "whose title accurately describes its nature and contents: 'How to read *Ulysses*'" (*Bio.* 345). In the essay, Watson "continued–and intensified–the method she had used [in previous articles] and earlier in her thesis" (*Bio.* 345-46); that is,

> [s]he created a space from what at first glance appear to be randomly chosen and unrelated references and pictures and quotations. Only very gradually does the reader begin to see the extent to which philosophers and scientists, poets, novelists and painters of the past and present cast light upon the novel, and at the same time, the extent to which *Ulysses* illuminates the reader's world. What she wrote of Joyce's method is as true of her own method here and elsewhere: "You will find that *the elements you expect to find in a novel are not missing, but that you are being asked by the novelist to assemble the pieces of the mosaic yourself.*" (346; emphasis added)

Note the absence of a simile: the novel is not *like* a mosaic, it *is* a mosaic. Moreover, the artistic composition produced from this assembling of fragments is not an actual unity as the diverse elements, though combined, retain their fragmentary status. Though the quotation hints at organisation, it is also invites the possibility that the mosaic can always be organised differently: there is no single 'true' or 'proper' mosaic, only the act of assembling its pieces, thus opening up to the fact that there are as many versions of the mosaic as there are 'yourselves' attempting to assemble it.

If this description is true of Watson's "own method here and elsewhere," it is equally true of Robbe-Grillet's method. Compare Watson's statement above that "the elements you expect to find in a novel are not missing" with Robbe-Grillet's claim that "[a] new form will always seem more or less the absence of any form at all, since it is unconsciously judged by reference to the consecrated forms" (*FNN* 17). In this *supposed* absence, the reader might attempt to impose upon the text the old, discarded forms, a temptation that leads only to frustration and disappointment:

> [i]f [the reader] is sometimes led to condemn the works of his time, that is, those which most directly address him, if he even complains of being deliberately abandoned, held off, disdained by the authors, this is solely because he persists in seeking a kind of communication which has long since ceased to be the one which is proposed to him. (*FNN* 156)

The reader, of course, is not in fact "held off": rather, the very opposite is the case, as Robbe-Grillet makes similar demands upon the reader as Watson:

> far from neglecting him, the author today proclaims his absolute need of the reader's cooperation, an active, conscious, *creative* assistance. What he asks of him is no longer to receive ready-made a world completed, full, closed upon itself,

> but on the contrary to participate in a creation, to invent in his turn the work–and the world–and thus to learn to invent his own life.[18] (156; emphasis in original)

If we as readers are to assemble the mosaic ourselves, and if the novelistic worlds with which we are presented in both *The Double Hook* and *The Erasers* are not closed but open, not ready-made but in the making with every new reading, we have entered the Derridaen "play of the world" ("Structure, Sign and Play" 369). As we shall see, Watson's and Robbe-Grillet's texts have forsaken the illusion of a stable, fixed core that it is the task of the reader to discover. Moreover, the novels themselves enact this lack: *The Double Hook* sees the annihilation of the Potters' house and when James returns to where his house once stood, he sees "nothing but a blank smouldering space" (115). In *The Erasers*, Wallas, often lost in a labyrinth of streets, asks for directions to the centre of town, and the people he asks are invariably confused as to what directions to give him: "The center? The woman tries to locate it in her own mind; she stares at her broom, then at the pail full of water. She turns toward the Rue Janeck and points in the direction Wallas came from" (51-52). Derrida has shown that in fact the very notion of a fixed centre, and thus a centred structure, is a false notion:

> the center . . . constituted that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality. This is why classical thought concerning the structure could say that the center is, paradoxically, *within* the structure and *outside* it. The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality . . . , the totality *has its center elsewhere*. The center is

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[18]This last, somewhat grand, claim–"to learn to invent his own life"–is not as far from Watson's sensibility as it might at first appear. Flahiff notes in connection with an essay on English studies by Watson entitled "Remedial Reading" (published in *The B.C. Teacher* in January 1945) that "Sheila believed then and continued to believe that English studies consisted of more than communication skills; their nature deriving from that "common body of knowledge" called literature, which requires of a reader, at the same time it instils, tentativeness, openness and suppleness of mind, willingness to make what Coleridge called an act of "poetic faith," to "hover" (the verb is also Coleridge's) free of perches offered by other modes of knowledge. Literature was not for Sheila a canon of works but a mode of knowledge and experience" (*Bio.* 172).

> not the center. The concept of a centered structure . . . is contradictorily coherent. (352; emphasis in original)

The centre, therefore, is "not a fixed locus but a function" (353), and it is a desirable one at that[19]: the centre does not only organise the structure, but also "limit[s] what we might call the *play* of the structure" by permitting only "the play of its elements within its total form" (352), thus creating "a reassuring certitude":

> And on the basis of this certitude, anxiety can be mastered, for anxiety is invariably the result of a certain mode of being implicated in the game, of being caught by the game, of being as it were at stake in the game from the outset. (352)

In Robbe-Grillet and Watson's novels this "reassuring certitude" is gone: the reader is very much "implicated in the game." Moreover, their novels do not seek to delimit play but rather encourage it on several levels. However, this notion of play does not imply that meaning is solely found with the reader. As Culler points out, the emphasis in reader-response criticism on "the reader's experience . . . proves to be not a given but a construct–the product of forces and factors it was supposed to help elucidate" (224). Indeed, factors in any "decisive determinant of meaning" are themselves "subject to interpretation in the same way as the text itself and thus defer the meaning they determine" (*OD* 132). Within deconstruction, therefore, "[m]eaning is context-bound, but context is boundless" (*OD* 123). The text will always allow for further connections to be made and new contexts in which to be read. Yet though there may be no single meaning to be discovered, the process of grafting can help to account for a production of meaning

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[19]Says Derrida, "as always, coherence in contradiction expresses the force of a desire" ("Structure, Sign and Play" 352).

that "engages it in its own *economy* so that it always signifies again and differs" (*Writing and Difference* 29; emphasis in original).

## Mrs. Dalloway, Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Potter: From Characters to Voices

In a journal entry dated January 18 [1956], Watson describes seeing Jean Cocteau, "the eulogist of Colette and Mistinguette [sic]" wearing a coat "cut like a doctor's gown" (178) in a Parisian gallery:

> His presence filled the room–and he knew that it did.
> When he left, people who had gone politely about their business while he was there, twittered to one another and turned to watch him go–lifting his hands and shaking the folds of his new coat and stepping delicately over puddles because it had begun to rain.
>
> When the chauffeur closed the door of the black car, which had been waiting in the side street, everyone began to talk. There was a great excitement, too, among a crowd of girls who were being brought by an elderly woman to see the "Troubles" [by Michaux] for it was among them that Cocteau had to make his way to reach his car.
>
> I don't know why but I thought of Mrs. Dalloway. (Flahiff, *Bio.* 179)

The final line's reference to one of the most well known characters of modernist literature is revealing in all its ambiguity. The situation in which Watson found herself is similar to the scene in Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* where Clarissa Dalloway peers out of her florist's window and sees the crowd outside mesmerised by a brief glimpse of "a face of the very greatest importance" (15) before the blinds of the motor car window are drawn. Unlike Watson, though, none of the onlookers knows for certain whose face it is: "Was it the Prince of Wales's, the Queen's, the Prime Minister's?" (15). Yet it seems as if it is not the *novel Mrs. Dalloway* that comes to Watson's mind, but rather Mrs. Dalloway herself. Perhaps it is the presence of the "elderly woman" that sparks the association, though the

middle-aged Clarissa would have been closer in age to Watson herself. The anecdote ends with a description of Watson "laughing on the Metro because I had been staring at Cocteau and listening as shamelessly as Boswell, while a poet [who] was writing a satirical novel which might portray Cocteau was waiting at 28 rue Vignon for his dinner" (Flahiff, *Bio.* 179), "28 rue Vignon" being the Watsons' Paris address, and "the poet" her husband Wilfred. Again a somewhat similar situation can be found in *Mrs. Dalloway*: Clarissa may have witnessed the presence of the head of state, while her husband, an aspiring politician, is out to lunch alone with the socialite Lady Burton. Not invited, Clarissa is left feeling excluded and even jealous, yet the witnessing of the motor car gives her "for a second . . . a look of extreme dignity standing by the flower shop in the sunlight while the car passed . . ." (*Mrs. Dalloway* 18).

Whether we see character as performing plot actions or as having a specific "character" or traits, all our attempts at constructing parallels remain only partly satisfying. Watson does not explicitly identify herself with Clarissa, nor are there any other people present among the crowd by the gallery that can function as the real-life equivalent to the character in Woolf's novel. Certainly, Watson's "I don't know why" undermines any attempt to provide a referent for the signifier "Mrs. Dalloway," which would leave us with a number of associations that can be said to constitute the signified part of the sign "Mrs. Dalloway." Yet Watson stops short of describing the signified, as the "I don't know why" signals that any attempt to attribute specific traits or characteristics to Mrs. Dalloway would prove so difficult that Watson instead is forced to end her sentence.[20]

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[20]This is of course also an issue of focalisation. As we saw in Graft 1, omniscience is highly problematised in *The Double Hook*. We shall see shortly that as the typically overt and omniscient narrator

We have included this anecdote with its ambiguous reference because it can be seen as symptomatic of a shift in our sense of literary character. Until now, we have talked about characters and setting in *The Double Hook* seemingly without reservation. Our initial graft, however, has shown that these are terms that will no longer serve, as they denote a return to the forms of the Balzacian novel. By simply glancing at the pages of *The Double Hook* and *The Erasers* we realise that Watson's and Robbe-Grillet's ~~characters~~ in fact mark a significant step away from the traditional realist notion of character. The crossing out of the term is an attempt to reproduce Derrida's writing "sous rature"[21]: "Since the word is inaccurate, it is crossed out. Since it is necessary, it remains legible" (Spivak xvi). The word no longer denotes what it used to denote, but it remains nevertheless the only one available to us: not only do we not yet have a word with which to replace it, but, more importantly, it *needs* to remain in place, since "[t]o make a new word is to run the risk of forgetting the problem or believing it solved" (Spivak xv). The crossing out becomes the mark of the graft, the seam that sews together new and old, allowing us to be both inside and outside the term and operate in double movement of disruption and creation of new connections in which, as we saw in Graft 1, the old name remains in place "to maintain leverage for intervention" (Culler, *OD* 140-41). Watson, therefore, presents to us her ~~characters~~ by name in the way of the traditional realist novel, yet the act of listing, the minimal amount of description and the indented, spatialised

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of the Balzacian novel is rejected in favour of minimal narration through a covert narrator, focalisation and in particular its limitations become central to our discussion of characters, as characterisation is reduced to a minimum.

[21]Spivak's translation of Derrida's "sous rature" is "under erasure": "This is to write the word, cross it out, and then print both word and deletion" (Spivak xiv).

manner in which the listing is performed are more reminiscent of the dramatic genre than of the novel,[22] all of which contribute towards a general atmosphere of defamiliarisation:

> In the folds of the hills
>
> under Coyote's eye
>
> lived
>
> the old lady, mother of William
> of James and of Greta
>
> lived James and Greta
> lived William and Ara his wife
> lived the Widow Wagner
> the Widow's girl Lenchen
> the Widow's boy
> lived Felix Prosper and Angel
> lived Theophil
> and Kip (*DH* 11)

In *The Erasers*, the narrator presents us with Wallas, the protagonist, at the very beginning of Chapter 1:

> Wallas is leaning against the rail, at the end of the bridge. He is still a young man, tall, calm, with regular features. The clothes he is wearing and his idle air provide, in passing, a vague subject of remark for the last workmen hurrying toward the harbor: at this time, in this place, it does not seem quite natural not to be wearing work clothes, not to be riding a bicycle, not to look hurried; no one goes for a walk on Tuesdays early in the morning, besides, no one goes for a walk in this

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[22]Compare, for example, with this list of characters from *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles:

OEDIPUS, *King of Thebes*
PRIEST
CREON, *brother of Iocasta*
TEIRESIAS, *blind prophet*
IOCASTA
MESSENGER FROM CORINTH
SHEPHERD, *formerly servant of Laius*
MESSENGER FROM THE PALACE

CHORUS OF THEBAN ELDERS
SUPPLIANTS, ATTENDANTS,
ANTIGONE, *and* ISMENE
*(mute characters)*

> neighborhood. Such independence of the place and the time has something a little shocking about it. (41)

The workmen's reaction to Wallas is reminiscent of the literary establishment's reaction to Robbe-Grillet's presentation of ~~characters~~: "at this time, in this place"–Paris in the 1950s–his ~~characters~~ were indeed perceived as "idle"–hence the oft heard accusation that "nothing happens any longer in modern novels" (Robbe-Grillet, *FNN* 33)–and unusual in every possible aspect, as were his novels in general. Indeed, "[s]uch independence of the place and the time" shown by Robbe-Grillet in his use of characterisation had, to many of his critics, "something a little shocking about it." Yet if Watson's and Robbe-Grillet's novels mark a step away from not only the Balzacian novel, their ~~characters~~ are also different from those of the Anglo-American modernist novel, which provided us with such memorable characters as Mrs. Dalloway as well as fellow urban flâneurs Leopold Bloom and Stephen Daedalus. Therefore, before we proceed to examine in what sense Watson and Robbe-Grillet's ~~characters~~ differ, we need to take a brief look at those characters that preceded theirs, in particular the modernist approach to character, as articulated by Woolf, and as experienced by Watson herself in the writing of her first novel, though second to be published: *Deep Hollow Creek.*

We are not by this suggesting that Woolf or Joyce did not feel the constraints of the realist novel's approach to characters. In "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," Woolf stresses the fact that the tools of Edwardian authors are not hers: "For us those conventions are ruin, those tools are death" (753). Rather, Woolf and her fellow Georgians attempt to distance themselves from the material preoccupations of the Edwardians, who "have laid an enormous stress upon the fabric of things" and thus "given us a house in the hope that we may be able to deduce the human beings who live

there" (754). Woolf claims instead that "if you hold that novels are in the first place about people, and only in the second about the houses they live in, that is the wrong way to set about it" (754). Using as her example an elderly and obviously poor woman she once observed while riding the train to London, Woolf claims that the next great stage of English literature "can only be reached if we are determined never, never to desert Mrs. Brown" (758):

> There she sits in the corner of the carriage . . . which is traveling . . . from one age of English literature to the next, for Mrs. Brown is eternal, Mrs. Brown is human nature, Mrs. Brown changes only on the surface, it is the novelists who get in and out–there she sits and not one of the Edwardian writers has so much as looked at her. They have looked very powerfully, searchingly, and sympathetically out of the window; at factories, at Utopias, even at the decoration and upholstery of the carriage; but never at her, never at life, never at human nature. (753)

As Georgian novelists need to focus more on human nature and less on houses and factories, the character becomes the sole foundation of the novel: claims Woolf, the focus on character is what makes novelists novelists, and not "poets, historians, or pamphleteers" (750).

Though Woolf anticipates a lot of "smashing" and "crashing" in the Georgian writers' attempt to rescue Mrs. Brown from her train carriage–for rescued she must be, "[a]t whatever cost of life, limb, or damage to valuable property" (755)–she could not have been prepared for the fact that in *The Double Hook*, it is the old lady herself who comes crashing down the stairs into her own death. Mrs. Potter–poor, old and, incidentally, described as "the brown figure" (*DH* 85) seen by a "brown pool" (*DH* 103) of water–is Watson's Mrs. Brown, and far from being rescued (or at least not in the sense that Woolf anticipated), she is killed by her son James on the novel's first page. Yet against James's declaration that "[y]ou'll not fish today" (*DH* 11), we are told by the

narrator that "[s]till the old lady fished" (11), and she continues to do so throughout most of the novel, defying not only death and her son, the thematic and symbolic implications of which we shall return to later, but also the "unspoken axiom," according to Seymour Chatman, "[t]hat characters are indeed simply 'people' captured somehow between the covers of books or by actors on the stage . . ." (108).

Though the death of Mrs. Potter is the only murder within the novel (but not the only death), another character assassination had to take place for *The Double Hook* even to come into being. Before writing *The Double Hook*, Watson had in the late 1930s written a novel called *Deep Hollow Creek*, which did not see publication until 1992. Unlike its successor, *Deep Hollow Creek* features a protagonist that is also the novel's privileged focaliser: a woman named Stella who resembles Sheila beyond the initial of the name, being a young, literate schoolteacher placed by necessity, not choice, in a small rural community in the British Columbia interior. Partly autobiographical, the title of the novel is another name for the tiny Cariboo town of Dog Creek, whose children Watson had come from the coast to teach from 1934 to 1936. Unlike *The Double Hook*, this novel contains references to not only specific people and places, but also specific events, making it possible to date its action to 1935/36.[23] It was, however, a novel with which Watson was not particularly happy. Though Flahiff notes that eventually she would speak of it with "a new note of defensiveness, as of a parent on behalf of an undervalued child" (*Bio.* 397), *Deep Hollow Creek* had nonetheless "created problems she sought to resolve

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[23]Flahiff notes how Watson's friend Catherine Moss, the inspiration for *Deep Hollow Creek*'s Miriam, wrote in a letter to Watson that "[r]eading it was almost like a game for me–each new page I turned left me figuring just 'who' everyone was–but I am sure I was able to attach the correct names–it is a novel experience for me to read of my feature[s] in your novel . . ." (*Bio.* 149). As for historical references, Flahiff quotes Watson claiming that although no actual year is mentioned in the novel, "[i]t is by specific references, however, like the reference to the reading of the riot act by Mayor G.G. McGeer in Van[couver]

in writing her second novel" (*Bio.* 396). In 1975, Watson claimed that *Deep Hollow Creek* "was wrong from the start really, I had to get rid of the narrator" ("Interview / Sheila Watson" 353). As an outsider in the Cariboo community, she felt she had "introduced an alien consciousness into a situation which had still to manifest itself in any meaningful way to that consciousness" ("Interview / Sheila Watson" 353). Flahiff observes that "Sheila's quarrel with her first novel remained a quarrel with its very premise, the encounter between an urban and urbane consciousness and a small, remote and hybrid community":

> Or perhaps it might be more accurate to say that her quarrel was with her working out of this premise, by means of a narrator who was not the protagonist, but who, like narrators in certain of Jane Austen's novels, privileges the main character by moving easily and approvingly into her consciousness. In this way . . . , Anne Elliott in Austen's *Persuasion* is established as an island of sense in a sea largely of fools. In *Deep Hollow Creek*, while the others may not be fools, they remained in Sheila's eyes 'other'. They might have been natives of the district into which an alien Stella comes, but they remained themselves alien in the ground of her consciousness. Sheila was determined to keep such an alien and alienating presence out of her next novel. Accordingly, as she told [Philip] Marchand [of The Toronto Star], she attempted "to get the narrator out of it" and, she confessed, "I killed the school teacher." (*Bio.* 56-57)

Before she could write *The Double Hook*, Watson "killed" the omniscient narrator *and* the central character, the school teacher protagonist with whom large sections of focalisation were lodged and on whose perceptual and conceptual points of view the narrator would focus. Eventually, what she had learned and observed while in Dog Creek did "manifest itself in a meaningful way." Describing "the moment of inception of *The Double Hook*" while walking to her teaching job at a college in Toronto (where she lived the first time from 1945-49), Watson said in an interview that "[i]t was just as if I had

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that the date is established" (Flahiff, *Bio.* 55). In addition, Watson notes, there are references to the Japanese

caught the sound of voices coming . . . and I was concerned" ("It's What You Say" 159). The novel did not start with characters or even events, but with *voices*, and, moreover, voices that did not stem from Watson as much as they were there, around her, leaving her with the task of transcribing or mediating what they were telling her. In the same interview, she claimed that "I wasn't thinking of these figures, or whatever one calls them, as characters in the conventional sense" (158). She "was thinking rather of a cry of voices–a *vox clamantis*–voices crying out in the wilderness. Something like the voices one hears in early litanies–voices reaching beyond themselves" (158).

The notion of character sat just as uneasily with Robbe-Grillet, who in an essay in *For a New Novel*–whose title, fittingly, is "On Several Obsolete Notions"–employs a vocabulary that echoes the homicidal violence with which Watson did away with the conventional character in *The Double Hook*:

> How much we've heard about the "character"! Moreover, I fear we haven't heard the last. Fifty years of disease, the death notice signed many times over by the most serious essayists, yet nothing has yet managed to knock it off the pedestal on which the nineteenth century had placed it. It is a mummy now, but one still enthroned with the same–phony–majesty, among the values revered by traditional criticism. In fact, that is how this criticism recognizes the "true" novelist: "he creates characters".... (27; ellipsis in original)

The character is obsolete; it is as dead and lifeless as the old lady's body in death, lying in bed "dry and brittle as a grasshopper" (Watson, *DH* 42). Yet her ghost or spirit is seen everywhere: by Felix, Ara and Heinrich along the creek, by James in town, and by Greta on stairs of the Potters' house. As such, the old lady can be seen as emblematic of Watson's and Robbe-Grillet's "killing" of the conventional character (a much less violent act than it would at first appear, if we believe Robbe-Grillet's claim that this character

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invasion of Manchuria and to a puppy named "Selassie."

was in fact long dead already). Yet the sheer force with which the other ~~characters~~ attempt to impose their own subjective readings upon the old lady and to limit her transgressions shows, as we will see shortly, not only how we tend to read with the aim of extracting meaning, but also cling to the novelistic forms of the past. However, Robbe-Grillet insists, it would be a mistake to draw the conclusion that "[s]ince there were not, in our books, 'characters' in the traditional sense of the word . . . men were not to be found there at all" (*FNN* 137). This, he continues, "was to read them very badly indeed" (137), as "the novel of characters belongs entirely to the past," to the period "which marked the apogee of the individual[24]" (28). In contrast, modern literature exists, according to Robbe-Grillet, in a world that "is less sure of itself, more modest perhaps, since it has renounced the omnipotence of the person, but more ambitious too, since it looks beyond" (29).

## "Fragment of an Escaping Body": Description and Focalisation

"I didn't want a voice talking about something. I wanted voices" ("It's What You Say" 158), Watson once claimed in a statement that recalls the Bakthinian polyphony I have discussed in Graft 1. The ramifications of this statement are many, and they affect characterisation as well as focalisation and narration. It makes an effaced external narrator essential, a narrator that remains neutral in his or her observations, offering little description and even less interpretation, thus leaving the readers to infer and draw conclusions from the seemingly disinterested observations provided. Yet if the narrator's

[24]The classical and, in Barthes's words, bourgeois period of literature existed in a society where "to have a name" was crucial, thus creating novels which seemed preoccupied with "the rise and fall of certain men, of certain families" (Robbe-Grillet, *FNN* 29). In this period, the measure of a successful writer was one who could give birth to a character who would "one day bequeath his name to a human type" (*FNN* 27).

objective discourse tends towards Barthes's zero degree of writing,[25] its aim being "to create a colourless writing, freed from all bondage to a pre-ordained state of language" (*WDZ* 76), the many voices which this narrator reports back to us through mimesis (where mimesis is understood as "showing") are not necessarily objective, as their focalisation is seldom purely perceptual. By putting forth disembodied "voices" as an alternative to the traditional notion of character, the statement also calls for a rigorous dismantling of the concept of character, instigating a removal of all the trappings normally associated with novelistic characterisation, such as physical attributes, various mental traits, personal and family history and other elements that would come together to create so-called "round" characters.

According to Robbe-Grillet, the traditional character would expect to be provided with a name ("two if possible"), parents and a profession, and "[i]f he has possessions as well, so much the better." Most importantly, "he must possess a 'character,' a face which reflects it, a past which has molded that face and that character" (*FNN* 27). How poor must Watson's ~~characters~~ seem in comparison! It is perhaps not surprising that Salter found in *The Double Hook* King Lear's "'[u]naccommodated man'": "Mrs. Watson disaccommodates man, and studies him" (qtd. in "A Note from the Publisher"[26]). Yet the ~~characters~~ Salter encountered when reading an earlier draft of *The Double Hook*–

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[25]Despite his convincing outline of literature's problematic situation after 1850, it would be a mistake to presume that Barthes's *Writing Degree Zero* provides a recipe for reading and writing modern literature, nor is it a "single-minded manifesto, advocating a stern retrenchment of literature into a desiccated, ascetic noncommunicativeness" (Sontag xvi). In fact, Barthes remains surprisingly brief in his description of possible literary attempts to find solutions to the problems of language and form that literature is now facing, and even here, as Sontag notes, Barthes is tracing "only a boundary concept," that is, "the logical extension of the type of rhetoric Barthes uses" (xvii), rather than attempting to predict with any certainty the future of literature.

[26]Salter's Foreword did not appear in its entirety in the 1959 edition of *The Double Hook*. Rather, McClelland and Stewart provided "A Note from the Publisher" in which segments from Salter's Foreword were quoted.

incidentally, Flahiff notes, the draft "for which . . . he wrote his Foreword" (Afterword 122)–were in fact less "unaccommodated" than those of the final version. As Flahiff demonstrates, Watson's revisions consisted for the most part of withdrawing material: "Details . . . disappeared: the name of a cow, the type of chair Ara and William have in their parlour, the pieces played by Felix on his fiddle, the bloodlines of characters, even family histories" (Afterword 122).

Looking at Watson's ~~characters~~ in the final version of *The Double Hook*, we find that though they may have names, few have more than one. Some have parents, but as for personal and family history, little information is provided, and the same can be said for possessions. What is perhaps most startling to the reader is the absence of what Robbe-Grillet above refers to as "a 'character,'" "a face which reflects it" and "a past which has molded that face and that character." There are hardly any faces described, nor bodies for that matter: character descriptions appear to be all but absent in Watson's novel. In fact, on the discourse level of the novel, the external narrator does not describe most of the characters, and the few instances in which we do find such description are limited to brief impressions constrained to one or two neutral observations. The description of James's physical attributes, for example, does not extend beyond the mentioning of his plaid shirt, which he replaces with a new one during his brief flight to town. His sister-in-law Ara has "a shag of bangs" (*DH* 12) and ties her straw hat "with a bootlace under the chin" (14). As for Felix, we know that he is fat, that he wears bibbed overalls and prefers to sit and play his fiddle: "He sat, his face pendulous above his horizontal bib, his knees wide, his belly resting between his thighs" (30). Lenchen's "yellow hair" is "pulled straight above her eyes like a ragged cap" (16-17), yet the significance of this description is only available through the reader's inference. The

manipulation of hair, the most common image of femininity, into a "a ragged cap" becomes an expression of Lenchen's tomboy ways when we learn through a flashback of Lenchen's how she had sought to attract James by working alongside the men in the corral, "roping one of their own calves so that James could see what he'd noticed for the first time" (21). Similarly, her pregnancy is not explicitly stated. Instead, we are given Heinrich's thoughts without narrator explanation: "There are things so real that a person has to see them. A person can't keep her eyes glazed over like a dead bird's forever" (17). A few pages later, we learn that Lenchen "pull[ed] the tongue of her belt until the belt bit into her flesh" (21), yet even through connecting this information to Heinrich's thoughts on people's willingness to deny the obvious, the reader is perhaps still not sure what exactly is being denied.

A similar lack of character description can be noted in *The Erasers*. Most ~~characters~~ are simply designated by a single object or piece of clothing: Wallas asks an old lady with a broom for directions on a couple of occasions, and a witness claims to have seen outside the victim Dupont's house a man in "a raincoat with a light gray hat" (109). Though there is an apparently detailed description of Wallas, it is somewhat deceptive as in actuality little information is transmitted. He wears an overcoat and scarf, but no information as to cut, style or price is divulged, and the garments can tell us nothing about their owner. He is a young man, "tall, calm, with regular features" (*Erasers* 41), but "regular" is a word that is semantically wide to the point of being empty of meaning, whereas one would think that "young," "tall" and "calm" are descriptions that could fit a number of people. As it turns out, at least one other person fits this description of Wallas: at a post office he is mistaken for a certain André WS, whose letter he is able to obtain. A second man–or the same?–is also confused with Wallas, as a drunk he

encounters in Café des Alliés insists Wallas is the very raincoat-clad man with an "L-shaped rip" on the left shoulder (115) with whom he had walked yesterday while attempting to tell him a riddle. Moreover, the fact that he remains largely *un-described* throughout the novel makes him appear a surprisingly vague and diffuse locus for the action, particularly in comparison to various minor ~~characters~~ described in greater, more evocative detail. Laurent, the chief inspector, for instance, is "pink and plump" (167), a "rubicund little man" (138) with hands that are either rubbing against each other or splayed flat on his desk, and the doctor Juard, whose clothes have a "middle-class dignity," is "a man in late middle age, tall and thin, dressed in black" who speaks in a "measured tone" (140) despite his "clownish gestures" and "anxious expression" (139). However, in keeping with his profession, Wallas also strives to appear highly *nondescript*. He remembers his boss's advice: "'The special agent,'" Fabius is always repeating, 'should leave as few traces as possible in people's minds; it is therefore important for him to maintain a behavior as close as possible to the normal in all circumstances'" (56).

Yet Wallas' nondescript appearance has the opposite effect, as it creates suspiciousness among the town's ~~characters~~ who see him as anything but normal. The woman with the broom examines him closely before "[f]inally . . . express[ing] the result of her scrutiny: 'You're not from around here, Monsieur?'" (51). We have already seen how Wallas raises suspicion among the harbour workmen because he is not wearing discernible work clothes. A similar situation occurs in a café, where Wallas is stared at by workmen and subsequently envisions how Fabius in his place would have acted out a clichéd role instead of Wallas' own self-effacing attempts at discreteness: "Fabius comes in. He is wearing a bargeman's uniform and rolls his hips when he walks–the token of

imaginary pitching on stormy seas" (223). Indeed, though Fabius is caricatured by his subordinates as the stereotypical sleuth with a "hat pulled down over his eyes, huge dark glasses, and an outrageously false beard hanging to the ground" (56), such idiosyncrasies would cause less stir, among the inhabitants of the town and the novel's readers alike, than the presence of Wallas' vague outline of a character. The removal of a moustache–"this too noticeable 'identifying mark'" (118)–works to Wallas's disadvantage, as his police card photo looks nothing like himself and is useless for identification purposes. Wallas's nondescript appearance, the secrecy surrounding his profession and the mysteriousness shrouding his assignment have put him in a weak position, which he realises after being confronted with Laurent's scepticism: "himself a member of one of these vague organizations, [in Laurent's eyes] Wallas himself could just as well be, like the conspiracy, a pure invention of an overly imaginative minister" (167).

Rather than the narrator, the ~~characters~~ flesh out these brief impressions for us by attaching significance to certain objects. In *The Double Hook*, James's "plaid shirt and studded belt" is to William a sign of his "gamebird ways," making him appear "like a gay cock on the outside" (25), while suggesting the need to hide the fact that on the inside "there's something cooked in James's fibre": "He's more than likely white and dry and crumbling like breast of pheasant" (25). Yet he, too, cannot say for sure if his subjective opinion is correct, as he needs to qualify it with "more than likely." The purchase of the new shirt is to Heinrich a sign of James's selfish lack of responsibility, causing him to reproach James for abandoning Greta and Lenchen: "Where have you been that you left the two of them alone at such a time, and come back two nights and a day later dressed up in a new shirt" (115-116). The narrator refrains from inferring any qualities from Ara's "shag of bangs," leaving the task to Angel: "She saw her loosening the bootlace and

taking off her hat to shove back her damp hair. She thought: William Potter got an ugly one" (23). In fact, some ~~characters~~ are described solely by other ~~characters~~. What we know of Angel is mostly limited to the subjective point of view of Felix, whom she left for Theophil: "Angel had gone. She had walked across the yard like a mink trailing her young behind her" (15). Later, attending the labouring Lenchen who looks "crumpled and worn as an old pillow" (110), Felix again thinks of Angel: "Dark and sinewed as bark. Tough and rooted as a thistle. I've never heard her cry" (110). Yet such observations are not left to stand unchecked: another, more wasteful and frivolous side to Angel is suggested by Greta, who tells Angel that "[y]ou've burned and spilled enough oil to light up the whole country . . ." (22). Similarly, many of the events of the story are revealed only through character focalisation: Lenchen's pregnancy becomes obvious when Felix focalises her "resting on her heels as he'd seen Angel stand when she was heavy with young" (30). James's blinding of Kip with "the rawhide whip he used to break his horses" (56) takes place 'off-screen,' leaving Greta and Lenchen as well as the readers to interpret signs and construct the missing scene: "Then they heard James's voice rising in the barn. They heard a cry. They heard Kip's voice. . . . They heard his words: If you were God almighty, if you'd as many eyes as a spider I'd get them all. They heard a bucket overturn and animals move in their stalls" (55). Yet the consequence of James's violence emerges only gradually: Felix sees Kip "[c]oming over the rise. Lifting his face windward like an animal," and we realise simultaneously with Felix that Kip, "[h]is face . . . a livid wound," needs to find his way "by the smell of the water" (62) because his sight is now gone.

Wallas, on his walks around the "gloomy provincial town, half asleep in the North Sea fog" (197), also follows the impulse to assign 'characters' and stories to the people he

sees: "A little farther, a gentleman in a black overcoat and hat comes out of a house and passes him; middle-aged, comfortable, frequent stomach trouble; he takes only a few steps and immediately turns into an extremely clean-looking café . . ." (47). When the man reappears, Wallas is forced to abandon his earlier impression: "Wallas notices opposite him the dyspeptic gentleman he has seen before, crossing the street. He doesn't look any better after having eaten breakfast; perhaps it is worry and not stomach trouble that gives him that expression" (54). Yet the necessary adjustment does not stop him from making another assumption: "He is wearing black: he is going to the post office to send a telegram announcing someone's death" (54). However, "[t]he mournful gentleman" takes an unexpected turn "into a narrow street," making Wallas adjust his impression yet again: "So he was not going to send a telegram from the post office after all . . ." (55). This exercise in which Wallas partakes is repeated by others throughout the novel: the chief inspector Laurent, though officially no longer in charge of the case, cannot stop thinking about it and provides various hypothetical scenarios in his attempts to reconstruct the events of the night before. With every new reconstruction, Laurent has to admit that "[t]here is still something that does not fit" (137): his favourite hypothesis involving a botched suicide instead of a murder does not convince him, as it "fits in so badly with the professor's character" (138). Yet Wallas's theory of assassination by a terrorist group seems to Laurent even less plausible, and he argues his point with such conviction that Wallas "consequently reached the point of no longer trying to react against the ready-made formulas that naturally occurred to him; they were the . . . easiest" (166).

The old lady becomes, paradoxically, both an illustration of reading character within the context of such "ready-made formulas" and a demonstration of the ultimate impossibility of such readings. Unlike any of the other characters, the old lady does not

appear outside of the focalisation of the other ~~characters~~. She is, as Watson suggests, a construct: "the seeing becomes the dread of all the others because they are terrified of being seen or seeing what they don't want to see. So they *create* the old woman. Even after she's gone, they see her because they always expect someone to be spying on them" ("Interview / Sheila Watson" 354; emphasis added). Their creation of the old lady is the creation of a character, and their observations upon seeing her become readings of character. As she is focalised by various members of the small community, we realise that not only is information being imparted regarding the focalised object but also something about the focalisor him/herself is being communicated. Ara, for example, offers one reading:

> Ara saw her fishing along the creek. Fishing shamelessly with bait. Fishing without a glance towards her daughter-in-law, who was hanging washing on the bushes near the rail fence.
>
> I might as well be dead for all of her, Ara said. Passing her own son's house and never offering a fry even today when he's off and gone with the post. (12)

Communicated here is Ara's own insecurity as an outsider in the Potter family ("I might as well be dead for all of her") and, though an impression of the old lady's egotistical and shameless ways is being formed, this impression is nonetheless lodged within Ara's focalisation, introduced by the word "saw" in the first sentence, and thus within her subjective point of view. Yet Ara's own feelings are not the only information imparted: as she continues to observe that "[t]he old lady fished on with a concentrated ferocity as if she were fishing for something she'd never found," she realises that "[i]t's not for fish she fishes. . . . There's only three of them. They can't eat all the fish she'd catch" (12).

What exactly the old lady is fishing for is not revealed, yet Ara, who is more inclined to think in metaphorical terms than her pragmatic and literal husband, invites the

reader to reject any common sense explanations as to the old lady's catch: "William would try to explain, but he couldn't" (12). Instead, the sighting of the old lady grows even more mystifying and ominous, as we are told through what resembles a prophetic vision that "as she watched the old lady, Ara felt death leaking through from the centre of the earth. Death rising to the knee. Death rising to the loin" (13). Is the old lady, who is fishing for something that is not fish, to be associated with Christ, the fisher of men? Yet she does not share her fish among the people of the community, unlike Christ, the feeder of crowds. Is her role rather that of the Arthurian fisher king, the guardian of the holy grail, as she is described as if on a quest for something that the others fear, "looking," as Greta claims, "for something even the birds couldn't see" (22)? As defiant as the old lady, the novel, here as elsewhere, resists any single interpretation. Greta's focalisation of her mother, with its focus on light, brings the old lady closer to Lucifer than Christ:

> I've seen Ma standing with the lamp by the fence, she said. Holding it up in broad daylight. . . . Something hid from every living thing. I've seen her defying. I've seen her take her hat off in the sun at noon, baring her head and asking for the sun to strike her. Holding the lamp and looking where there's nothing to be found. Nothing but dust. No person's got a right to keep looking. to keep looking and blackening lamp globes for others to clean. (22)

To Greta, the old lady is wicked beyond her lack of regard for others: looking for something hidden from mortals ("every living thing"), her excessive use of a lamp in daylight recalls Lucifer's expulsion from Heaven for attempting to claim for himself the glory of God: "For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God . . . I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High" (Isaiah 14:13-14).

Like Ara, Felix' sighting of the old lady tells us more about him than the old lady:

> Felix saw the old lady. She was fishing in his pool where the water lay brown on the black rocks, where the fish lay still under the fallen log. Fishing far from her own place. Throwing her line into his best pool.
>
> He thought: I'll chase her out.
>
> But he sat, tipped back in his rocking-chair, his belly bulging his bibbed overall, while the old lady fished, while the thistles thrust his potato plants aside and the potatoes baked in the shallow soil. (14-15)

He remains as inactive in dealing with her trespassing as with everything else, preferring to laze around rather than tend to his crops. Yet when he does go down to the creek, the old lady has gone, and Felix fishes for himself, returning to his house to cook his catch "in peace alone with his dogs" (15). The only one actually to fish rather than complain about the old lady's disregard for property lines, Felix after the meal is described as standing "with a fish spine in his hand. Flesh mountainous contemplating. Saint Felix with a death's head meditating" (16). Throwing the bones into the fire, "[t]he heat from the stove, the heat . . . from the day outside, anointed his face. Blest, he sat down again in the rocker . . ." (16). Focalised by the Catholic Felix, who has retained only fragments of the "ritual phrases" his father knew "by heart" (41), light, in the form of a fire fed by the sacrificial remnants of the fish, takes on connotations far more positive than those furnished by Greta above. "Anointed" and "blest," Felix is on his way to becoming "the novel's priest" (A. Bowering 52), the one assisting in the rituals of life as he attends the birth of Lenchen's child.

To Kip, the servant of Coyote, the old lady's association with light is to be read within the framework of Native mythology. Comparing James with the old lady, Kip sees glory and darkness as intrinsically linked: "when you fish for the glory you catch the darkness too." The glory is outside anyone's reach, including Coyote: "Coyote plotting to catch the glory for himself is fooled and every day fools others":

> Coyote reaching out reflected glory. Like a fire to warm. Then showing the brand between a man's teeth right into his belly's pit. Fear making mischief. Laying traps for men. . . . Fear skulking round. Fear walking in the living shape of the dead. No stone was big enough, no pile of stones, to weigh down fear. (50)

The stones that may "weigh down" a dead body cannot stop fear from "walking in the living shape of the dead": the spectre they see is fear personified in the shape of the old lady. Important here are the words "mischief" and "traps": the fear, like Coyote, is not omnipotent, nor necessarily evil. The notion of traps allows for the possibility to avoid being caught in them, of not being "swirled in a pool" (50) of fear and dread. Moreover, the notion of character becomes a trap: with the creation of the old lady, the issue of fear is displaced and dismissed in a subsequent concern with property lines and acceptable social behaviour. There are other examples of such displacement: Watson suggests that "Kip–a myth is built up around him in the context of the novel itself. Angel believes that he sees in a way other people don't see–even the bugs and the stripes on the stones" ("Interview / Sheila Watson" 354). With Kip as the seer, the issue of seeing–of confronting their terror of being seen and seeing what they do not want to see–becomes the responsibility of the other, not the self. This, too, eventually breaks down, as Kip is blinded, leaving a very upset Angel to ask "[w]ho'll see things now. . . . The bugs. The flowers. The bits of striped stone" (102). A page later, her question is answered by Felix: "I saw James Potter's old mother standing by my brown pool, he said. I was thinking of catching some fish for the lot of us. But she wasn't fishing, he said. Just standing like a tree with its roots reaching out to water" (103). Felix, who for large parts of the novel has neither acted nor communicated, claiming "I've got no words" (103), has found enough words to do what the boy Heinrich realises he should have done: "I've held my voice, he

[Heinrich] said, when I should have used my tongue like an axe to cut down the wall between us" (71). Felix reaches out with words to Angel: "Angel, he said, I need you" (68). In his peaceful focalisation of the old lady, the character has gone, the fear has dissipated, and left is a hopeful image of stability and of revitalisation.

Wallas, like Kip above, brings our attention to traps and to tricksters: starting his investigation by surveying the scene of the crime, Wallas enters Dupont's study and "[f]or a second he has the impression that he has just been caught in a trap" (85). This, of course, foreshadows the novel's ending, where Wallas is again in Dupont's study as Dupont returns, startling Wallas, who fires his gun. Yet there is something else: the house focalised by Wallas has a door that "creaks on its hinges, like the door in an abandoned house–haunted maybe"; the interior contains "everything that constituted the ornaments of a bourgeois residence early in the century"; there is "a lifeless kitchen that looks like a model," with objects that "seem fixed forever in their places on the shelves" (84-85). Wallas is caught in what seems an eerie combination of the domestic spaces in novels by Henry James and Balzac: he has been tricked–the sign of the trickster appears in "[t]he brass column at the foot of the staircase" shaped like a jester's head–and is now temporarily trapped in a space that recalls the bourgeois realist novel of the 19th century. In his attempt to solve Dupont's murder, Wallas is without a body, the main source of clues and information as to the nature of the crime committed. Without a character to read, so to speak, Wallas, trying to restructure the events of the murder, is left with only the supposedly dead man's furniture, books and belongings. But even these do not shed much light on the case: surrounded by "lifeless" models and even a "row of pots . . . painted on the wall in *trompe-l'oeil*" (85), Wallas can infer very little about Dupont from

his belongings, unlike the reader of the realist novel, who knows quite well what kind of woman Eugenie Grandet is from Balzac's description of her clothes and belongings.

## "And the Whole Scene Is Reconstructed": Readings and Recoverings

With ~~characters~~ stripped of all our expectations of novelistic characterisation, we appear to be left with nothing but "a fragment of an escaping body" (*Erasers* 22). Yet like the failed assassin Garinati, who nonetheless fires "one shot, trusting to instinct" at this body, we as readers, too, follow our if not natural, then social "instinct" and assign traits and interpret clues within a number of coded frameworks, be they anthropomorphic, psychological, mythical, religious or any other kind. This habit is a pervasive and long-standing one, and it is, moreover, an inclination with which both Watson and Robbe-Grillet play. The extent to which we continue to impose and arrest meaning despite this continual play of meaning is illustrated by Garinati, "the clumsy murderer of the day before, who only slightly wounded Daniel Dupont" (16), as he stands by the canal looking into the polluted water beneath:

> The scattered fragments, the two clocks, the little piece of blackened wood: now they look like a human face, with the bit of orange peel for the mouth. The oil slick finishes off a grotesque clown's face, a Punch-and-Judy doll.
>
> Or else it is some legendary animal: the head, the neck, the breast, the front paws, a lion's body with its long tail, and an eagle's wings. The creature moves greedily toward a shapeless prey lying a little farther on. The corks and the piece of wood are still lying in the same place, but the face they formed a moment ago has completely disappeared. The greedy monster too. Nothing remains, on the canal's surface, but a vague map of America; and even that only if charitably interpreted. (32-33)

The elements may be the same, and they may even be "lying in the same place," yet Garinati's focalisation provides first an anthropomorphic interpretation, which slides from

a human face to a grotesque imitation of a face, followed by a mythical reading as he deciphers among the debris the image of the sphinx. But this image, too, vanishes, which leaves only a flat, one-dimensional surface, like the page in a book.

An anthropomorphic assignation of traits to characters is, Chatman claims, an activity in which we are all ultimately engaged, in fiction as in reality: "the narrative audience is asked to read out characters in the same way as it does real people" (126). In fact, the difference between how we understand "real" people and fictional characters is so small that

> [i]t is enough to distinguish the narrative from the real-life case by adding 'narrative' or 'fictive' to remind us that we are not dealing with psychological realities but rather artistic constructs, yet that we understand these constructs through highly coded psychological information that we have picked up in ordinary living, including our experiences with art. (126)

In recent narrative theory, therefore, in which attempts have been made to provide a discourse that can account for "modern characters like Leopold Bloom or Marcel," whose numerous traits "tend not to 'add up'" (112), reading character as a "paradigm of traits" (126) has become common practice. Such an "open theory of character" needs to "preserve openness and treat characters as autonomous beings": "It should argue that character is reconstructed by the audience from evidence announced or implicit in an original construction and communicated by the discourse . . ." (119). Yet employing Chatman's theory of traits (where 'trait' is understood as "'relatively stable or abiding personal quality,'" distinguished from "more ephemeral psychological phenomena, like feelings, moods, thoughts, temporary motives, attitudes and the like" [126]) by asking "'[w]hat the characters are like'" (119) in either *The Double Hook* or *The Erasers* will not take us very far. Using James as an example, we may ask: what would be "the narrative

adjectives" tied to "the narrative copula" (Chatman 125) that is James? He kills his mother, he blinds Kip with his whip, and with the same whip lashes out at Greta, "leaving a line on her flesh" (*DH* 56), as well as Lenchen, before he runs off, attempting "[t]o bolt noisily and violently out of the present" (79), apparently without thought of the pregnant girl left behind. Can we reconstruct from this that he is therefore murderous, violent and cowardly, even mentally unstable? Or are these temporary states of mind, connected to the sequence of events rather than illustrative of James's actual personality? And is it this personality that we catch a glimpse of when he returns? The statement that "[w]hatever the world said, whatever the girl said, he'd find her" (111) might be indicative of his desire to right what was done wrong, especially since it is followed by an apparent admission of guilt: "Out of his corruption life had leafed and he'd stepped on it carelessly as a man steps on spring shoots" (111). Yet it is neither remorse nor guilt that facilitates his return: it is a result of "the flick of [a prostitute's] hand" (106) stealing his wallet, and he is brought back by his horse, who "turned its head towards home," carrying James, whose eyes are shut and whose hands are fastened "in his horse's mane," over "the shoulders of the hills" (107). Attempting to "read out" James's personality, to distinguish his traits from his feelings and temporary motives for his actions is if not completely impossible, then at the least highly problematic. In fact, the search for traits in either novel is an uncertain activity, perhaps akin to what Barthes in *S/Z* refers to as "metonymic skid[ding]":

> reading is absorbed in a kind of metonymic skid, each synonym adding to its neighbor some new trait, some new departure. . . . This expansion is the very movement of meaning: the meaning skids, recovers itself, and advances simultaneously. . . . (*S/Z* 92)

It is this very "skidding" which makes it equally difficult to follow Garinati's second impulse and read the novels' characters within a mythological and archetypal perspective. Several critics, though none as thoroughly and convincingly as Angela Bowering, have attempted to trace and discuss the many biblical, Native American and Greek references in *The Double Hook*. Within the framework of classical mythology, for example, James and Greta become the Orestes and Electra of *The Oresteia*, siblings conspiring to avenge their mother Clytemnestra's murder of their father Agamemnon. Yet even if we limit our analyses to the framework of classical mythology, we are nonetheless confronted with numerous "skiddings." Greta is, to Angela Bowering, not just Electra, but also "both Flora and Fury," Eurydice and Persephone:

> She makes vivid sense of a cliché: Greta's life *is* the hell and fury of a woman scorned. Her words recall Eurydice's fate and contrast her own with it. She says she has been "scorned" and "pitied," and "laughed at" because no one has come for her: "there's no one *to* come." Imagery that combines Persephone's flowers, the torches of hell that light her way underground, and the old lady's lamp, emphasizes her doom. (69)

These "skiddings," moreover, transgress any effort to contain them within a single mythological framework. As we have already seen with Coyote, a composite creature whose identity ranges from that of the Native trickster to the Old Testament Jehovah depending on 'the eye of the beholder,' James, too, is not simply Orestes but also James the usurper of the New Testament, laying down the law with a heavy hand against transgressors such as his own mother. Bowering has noted how the Potter family's house can be read as an allusion to "the rebellious house" of Israel in Ezekiel 17, having brought upon itself the wrath of God because of "crimes against life and kin" which "involve incest and the breaking of the mosaic law" (A. Bowering 74-75): "The words of the lord

came, saying: Say now to the rebellious house, Know you not what these things mean?"[27] (*DH* 99). Says Bowering, "Ezekiel's prophecies recall Jeremiah's, for they both speak of the same warnings, lamentations, and the destruction of the rebellious house" (A. Bowering 75). The allusion becomes even stronger as we learn of Jeremiah's parable of the potter:

> Then I went down to the potter's house. . . . And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter, so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel. (Jer. 18:3-6)

Usurper, Orestes, and now the potter who has "marred" his family as his biblical counterpart marred "the vessel he made," James flees the rebellious house, adding yet another reference to the many that crowd the text of *The Double Hook.* He crosses over into the discourse of the more recent myth of the Western as he crosses the bridge on horseback and enters the town below with its outlaws and prostitutes and himself as the mysterious lone ranger, discouraging human interaction with "hunched shoulders" and monosyllables:

> He hunched his shoulders round away from the men.
> We've had our troubles since William came down, he said. . . .
> I thought it would be something brought you down now, Pockett [the manager of the General Store] said.
> Ma, James said.
> Sick and brought to hospital? Pockett asked.
> No, James said.
> Not gone? Pockett said.
> James nodded. (*DH* 84)

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[27]Compare with Ezekiel 17:11-12: "Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Say now

James's journey and subsequent return have to some critics the qualities of the archetypal quest myth. According to Margaret Morriss, the idea of "regeneration of the wasteland from an elemental to a transcendental universe is accomplished in terms of a quest for value initiated by James and accomplished by community participation" (89). This idea of regeneration is found again at the end of the novel, as the community come together, physically and metaphorically, for the birth of baby Felix, the "felix culpa," "happy fault," the child conceived out of wedlock and in sin but whose entry into the world resembles that of the Messianic birth of Jesus the saviour. Yet Messianic tales are not restricted to Christianity, as for example the Shushwaps of the Cariboo also believed in the birth of a saviour who would guide them to more fertile lands, leading them out of poverty and misery. Moreover, Lenchen is more like Mary Magdalene than the Virgin Mary, and she is also associated with Aphrodite, "the foam-born" (A. Bowering 73), when described riding her horse "as foam on its circling blood" (*DH* 70). Like Aphrodite, who was born by emerging fully-grown from the foam of the sea, Lenchen emerged all of a sudden as a grown woman to James, who has "just not noticed [her] before" (*DH* 21).

Yet the perhaps most troubling aspect of the novel's mythical and archetypal allusions is Greta's suicide by fire, as her death, along with her mother's, have inspired charges of misogyny like those of Pennee witnessed in Graft 1. Employing a "psychoanalytic-feminist reading of the imbrication of death, the feminine, and the aesthetic in Western art," Pennee finds that countless women characters have died for the rebirth and regeneration of society: "We can find two examples in Watson's novel alone– not only is Mrs. Potter sacrificed for the redemption of the community, but so is James's sister Greta . . ." (248).

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to the rebellious house, Know ye not what these things mean?"

However, this claim does not answer the many questions to which it gives rise. For example, is Greta therefore to be understood as the Judeo-Christian sacrificial lamb, branded for slaughter by James's whip? Or should we perhaps read her self-annihilation in a psychoanalytic light, preceded as it is by the hearing of voices and statements such as "[t]hey're on me now. . . . The pack of them" (*DH* 72)? Her suicide would then be seen as a result of paranoia and delusion, and of insanity brought on by not only her mother's death but also her brother's violence. After all, it is his violence which had led her to urge Lenchen to "[g]o yourself while there is still time," claiming that "[h]e'll kill me too. . . . He'll shove me down for standing in his way" (*DH* 55).

In Lenchen's focalisation Greta's housecoat is seen as "[a]ll green and gold and purple in the lamplight. Fat clinging clumps of purple flowers. Honey-tongued. Bursting from their green stems. Crowding against green leaves" (*DH* 52). Her housecoat appears to Lenchen as an aggressive display of womanhood and fertility blocking the doorway and preventing Lenchen from having contact with James. Should Greta's burning of this housecoat perhaps be read on a symbolic level, as the symbolic illustration of how an older woman without the possibility to reproduce is left no other option than to concede her place to a younger, fertile version of herself? Or is Greta's suicide an act of malicious vengeance rather than sacrifice? A wish to "shatter all memory of the girl who had stayed too long, then gone off perhaps to die in the hills. Die suffering so that James would remember the pain of her. Die young so that James would remember the sweetness of her. Die giving so that he'd live in the thought of her" (*DH* 74)? A wish to shatter this memory but also to intercept it by dying first and in a more spectacular fashion?

Finally, can Greta's suicide perhaps be said to share similarities with Antigone's demise? Having defied the king by burying her brother, Antigone was imprisoned in a

cave without food or water. Sentenced to a slow death so that Creon could not formally be held accountable for her murder, Antigone performed a final act of defiance by committing suicide. Greta, too, is walled up, imprisoned in her mother's house and living a life of both financial and emotional thriftiness, as she is without love and companionship of any sort. Her liberal pouring of kerosene is perhaps in answer to Angel's earlier charge: "Why didn't you take your own lamp and go looking for something. . . . You've never all your life burned anything but a little oil to finish doing in this house" (*DH* 22). Her final act is, paradoxically, as much one of self-assertion and defiance as it is of self-destruction. Greta sees the ghost of her mother on the stairs. Attempting to chastise Greta in death as she had in life (for through William we find that "Ma was hard on her. . . . She thought grief was what a woman was born to sooner or later, and that men got their share of grief through them" [99]), her mother tells Greta to put the box of matches down: "Don't play with those, Greta, she said. They're hard to get. A person has to know how to play with fire" (74). Yet Greta not only "lit a match and dropped it in the stove" but also "reached for the tin and emptied it into the fire" (74). "Every living being has a right to something" (32), she had declared to Ara, and the only thing left for Greta to claim as her right is her own death.

*The Erasers* is also littered with mythological references. Unlike *The Double Hook*, however, where references and allusions are mostly floating around in the discourse of the novel, the actual space in which Wallas manoeuvres is crowded with solidified objects that invite a classical interpretation. Preceding the prologue is a slightly altered quotation from Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*: "Time that sees all has found you out against your will," and taking this quotation as our "clue," we find that the many

references can be read in the light of the myth of Oedipus.[28] In this perspective, "the statue that decorates the Place de la Préfecture," bearing the inscription "The Chariot of State—V. Daulis, sculptor" (80), described as "a bronze group representing a Greek chariot, drawn by two horses, in which are standing several individuals" (58), becomes a depiction of Oedipus's slaying of King Laius in a confrontation on the road to Corinthe. "Dalius" is an anagram of "Laius," and Wallas walks along a street named "rue de Corinthe." Left to die as an infant because of an oracle's prediction of parricide, his feet mangled so as to guarantee the child's death (thus the name Oedipus, meaning 'swollen feet'), Oedipus does not know that Laius is his father. The story of Oedipus's survival is depicted in the curtains of an apartment building window "decorated with a mass-produced allegorical subject: shepherds finding an abandoned child, or something of the kind" (45). A collection of objects is arranged and rearranged on the mantelpiece of a fireplace: one is a statuette of "a blind man led by a child" (208), recalling the adult Oedipus, who is led out of Thebes by his daughter Antigone.

The sphinx in Gartinati's interpretation of the canal debris reappears in the image of a drunk who, when he is not asking Wallas and others to solve his riddles, mutters in "a monologue" in which "[a] word that sounds like *foundling* keeps recurring, without any apparent reason" (113; emphasis in original). The mythical riddle, "[w]hat creature walks on four legs in the morning, on two at noon, and on three in the evening, and is weakest when it walks on most?" (Grant and Hazel 244), is echoed in the riddle the drunk asks Wallas, who tries his best to ignore him:

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[28]For the following discussion of mythological references, I am indebted to Bruce Morrissette's "Oedipus or the Closed Circle" in *The Novels of Robbe-Grillet*, p. 53 ff. Morrissette was the first to provide an extensive catalogue of the many references to the myth of Oedipus in *The Erasers*.

> "What animal is a parricide in the morning, incestuous at noon, and blind at night?". . . . "Well," the drunk insists, "can't you guess? It's not so hard: parricide in the morning, blind at noon...No...blind in the morning, incestuous at noon, parricide at night, Well? What animal is it?". . . . "Well, are you deaf?" the drunk asks. "Hey! Buddy! Deaf at noon and blind at night?"
>
> "Let him alone," the manager says.
>
> "And limps in the morning," the drunk concludes with sudden seriousness. (226)

Wallas may limp like Oedipus due to feet swollen from too much walking, but he is unable to solve the riddle. Yet the narrative appears to present both Wallas and readers with "clues" with which to solve both this riddle and the riddle-like narrative itself. Gradually remembering having been in the town before with his mother, Wallas finally realises that "[i]t was not an aunt they were looking for: it was a male relative, someone he had never really known. He did not see him that day either. It was his father. How could he have forgotten?" (231). Earlier that day Wallas visited a stationary store twice, not realising until the second time that the woman who operates it, and to whom he is obviously attracted, is in fact Dupont's estranged wife Evelyne. The reader, therefore, is inclined, as in fact Bruce Morrissette does in *The Novels of Robbe-Grillet*, to read the drunk's second version of the riddle as pertaining to Wallas, who is blind to the facts in the morning, attracted to his step-mother at noon, and murders his father Dupont at night. Yet having provided such a reading, the reader is left feeling, as Laurent does, that "[t]here is still something that does not fit" (137).

The many mythological references are upon closer inspection not as obvious in their nature as clues as it would at first appear. The statue of the Greek chariot, for example, is "probably symbolic," but its individuals are in "unnatural positions," "out of harmony" (58). Significant, too, is a train station loudspeaker voice "transformed into a gigantic oracle" which is ultimately "undecipherable" (200). Symbolic interpretation is at

various instances thwarted, for Wallas and readers alike. The objects which Garinati rearranges over and over again cannot be fitted into a satisfactory order, and these and others remain objects simply described, not interpreted: any systematic ordering of their possible meanings is left to the readers. But in participating in this activity, are we, like Wallas, at "the point of no longer trying to react against the ready-made formulas" because they are "the easiest" (166)? If the novel tricks us at times by luring its reader into filling in gaps and producing a coherent narrative as Wallas is lured into Dupont's house, it also provides us with examples of the *faux lecteur*, "a mock reader . . . who falls into all kinds of traps and who ends up being completely frustrated" ("Interview–Alain Robbe-Grillet" 40).

One such example is the reading that Laurent's inspector provides in his police report, which Laurent "finds an interesting piece of work" despite the inspector's lack of experience: "This boy is a little young, of course: you can tell it's his first crime" (190). The overzealous inspector provides a detailed overview of the scene of the crime: "It is apparent that the author only reproduces all these trifling remarks out of a concern for objectivity; and despite the care he takes to present what follows with the same detachment, he obviously regards it as much more important" (192). "[W]hat follows" is "the scene reconstructed" (194): interviewing Dupont's neighbours, it emerges that a young man has been visiting Dupont, and that his last "visit ended in a violent quarrel" (192). Apparently, "[s]ome twenty years ago, Dupont 'had relations regularly' with a woman 'in modest circumstances' who subsequently gave birth to a son" (193). Dupont, having hastily wed Evelyne to avoid having to marry his child's mother, is now being blackmailed by the son, whom the assistant has named Maurice. Maurice brings with him a friend, Jean, and their visit ends in the killing of Dupont. Wallas proves the inaccuracies

of the report's many assumptions when returning that night to Dupont's house, and simultaneously Laurent finds that Dupont's son is "fictitious" (238), the result of a bar manager witness eager to please: "The inspector asked if any young people ever came in here; I said yes. Over sixteen is legal. Then he insinuated that maybe this Dupont had a son; I didn't want to say no, so I said it was perfectly possible he had come in here to drink one day or the other" (238). The fact that this "Maurice" is not Dupont's son strengthens perhaps the theory that Wallas is, but to name Dupont his father would be to engage in the same act of fictional reconstruction in which the young inspector engages when naming the son "Maurice."

"Fictional reconstruction" is exactly what Bruce Morrisette attempts, though Stephen Heath in his criticism of Morrisette in *The Nouveau Roman: The Practice of Writing* suggests a more helpful terminology by distinguishing between 'readings' and 'recoverings.' Morrissette provides a combined mythological and psychological reading of Robbe-Grillet's novel which allows him to claim that "le complex d'Oedipe relie et explique toute l'intrigue" (Morrissette 84; qtd. in Heath 120). Heath notes how "Morrissette's reading is a quest for meaning, an activity of *fixation*" that is "basically the same mode of reading that the 'Balzacian novel' commands: a reading as realist writing that proceeds by the recovery from the text of a narrative truth" (120). In Heath's opinion, "Morrissette achieves not a *reading*, but a *recovery* of the text into a *vraisemblable* . . ." (121, emphasis in original). As such, even that which at first appears to escape the *vraisemblable*–for example, the many real and imaginary scenes in *The Erasers* which are juxtaposed without narrator commentary and thus given "the same status of presence without any explanatory indications as would conventionally be found in realist writing" (Heath 129)–can be recuperated "for a realist reading in terms of a particular theory of

perception" (Heath 129). Morrissette therefore provides an extensive plot summary of *The Erasers* which furnishes psychological indicators of perception such as "flashback," "visualizes," "recreates," "imagination," "vision," "literal (yet false) scene," "recalls," "associative flashback," "version" (44-49) that are absent from the text of the novel (though *missing* would perhaps be the term preferred by Morrissette, as it indicates that something has been lost and needs to be replaced).

In this light, the many critical readings of *The Double Hook* can be seen as similar attempts of recovery. Margaret Morriss, for example, takes the psychological / archetypal route of Morrissette when claiming that "[i]nhering in every aspect of this world [presented in *The Double Hook*] is repression embodied psychologically in the Old Lady, sexually in Greta, and supernaturally in Coyote" (83) and that this "repression" is overcome in an "archetypal pattern of redemption through death and rebirth, the religious ritual of celebrating the re-entry of love into the wasteland" (84).

## Towards an Abstract Expression of Character

Like James and Wallas, we come back to where we started, that is, to our initial question: How do we read these new novelistic forms instead of simply attempting to recover them? The few critical analyses of Watson's novel that have attempted to read differently have suggested the need to enter the discourse of other artistic media in order to grasp the new nature of forms with which we are being confronted in *The Double Hook*. Godard, for example, claims that "[d]issatisfied with the minimal forms of our common usage of syntax, Watson's prose, while employing them, seeks to dissociate itself and moves towards musical form" (175). Our previous discussion of polyphony in *The Double Hook*

employed a term from the realm of music, yet we shall suggest here that there is another parallel that may serve as well: that of abstract expressionism.[29] Compagnon has already suggested such a comparative reading by juxtaposing Pollock and Robbe-Grillet. He observes that if "[i]n America, the modern took hold in painting rather than in literature,"

> the French literary movement in French literature–with what was called the *nouveau roman* in the mid-1950s, after Robbe-Grillet's *Les Gommes* and *Le Voyeur*–can be linked to the flattening of painting by abstract expressionism, . . . because of [its] common reduction of values. (108)

There are many similarities between Watson and Robbe-Grillet's writings on the one hand and abstract expressionism on the other. The term *experimental* is often used to describe both, as is also the term *nonrepresentational*. Both saw their beginnings in the 1940s, and both are characterised as having "sources in earlier movements," yet also "embracing many individual styles marked in common by freedom of technique" (Webster's). Jackson Pollock's art can be seen as a reaction to the "important political and aesthetic movement aiming for a realism rather similar to that of the USSR and the frescoes of the Mexican artist Diego Rivera." Pollock's attempt to get away from "this American realism" (Compagnon 87) mirrors Robbe-Grillet and Watson's attempts to distance themselves from both the naturalist novel and its later political reincarnation in the form of the social realist novel. They can even be said to share the same paradoxical reception: as Compagnon notes in connection with Pollock, "far from producing a more accessible art because it was based on experience rather than on theory, far from breaking

[29]It is worth noting that Jackson Pollock, too, has been discussed in terms of polyphony: "[Clemence] Greenberg describes Pollock's painting as 'polyphonic,' in an allusion to serial music since Schönberg in which the twelve tones are equivalent instead of being in a hierarchial scale" (Compagnon 90).

down the barrier between highbrow culture and mass culture, . . . [this expressionism] resulted, for the first time in America, in a painting for the elite" (88). Watson and Robbe-Grillet have over the years garnered academic attention rather than best-selling notoriety, and Robbe-Grillet in particular has suffered much negative criticism for writing so-called 'laboratory' novels. As a result, both Pollock's paintings and Watson and Robbe-Grillet's writings can be seen as "inseparable from the intellectual discourse that justified it historically" (Compagnon 89). "Pollock's [self-appointed] spokesman" (88) was Clement Greenberg, whereas Robbe-Grillet gradually gained a more sympathetic reception thanks to Roland Barthes's unflinching (though not, as we shall see, unproblematic) support.

Moving from historical similarities to a closer comparison of Pollock's paintings with Watson and Robbe-Grillet's novels, the affinities between the three artists become even clearer. Pollock's enormous canvases from the late 1940s have been defined "as gestural or 'action painting'": "they are characterized by the action of dripping, in which the flow or squirting of liquid color is directed onto a canvas stretched out on the floor. . . . The gesture and material are so rigorously connected that the canvas appears to bear traces of the gesture itself, like a snapshot" (Compagnon 89). Comparing this with the opening of *The Double Hook*, we find that Watson's extensive use of the past progressive also "bear[s] traces of gesture itself":

> Greta was at the stove. Turn*ing* hotcakes. Reach*ing* for the coffee beans. Grind*ing* away James's voice.
> James was at the top of the stairs. His hand half-raised. His voice in the rafters. James walk*ing* away. The old lady fall*ing*. (11; emphasis added)

We are given a snapshot and a blurred one at that: the emphasis is on the gestures, caught as if frozen in the middle of their unfolding, and not on the outcome resulting from these

gestures: we see the old lady falling, but not the old lady lying dead at the bottom of the stairs. Moreover, there is little hierarchical distinction between events: rather than relegating some events to the background, as the progressive most often does, the series of progressives describes a scene where many activities are taking place at the same time, even activities one would expect to occur in the simple form, seeing that the verb is momentary and not durative, such as the act of "reaching for coffee beans."

In *The Erasers*, Robbe-Grillet, too, provides us with 'freeze frames' and snapshots, at least in the *prière d'insérer* written for the first edition of the novel: "the book is nothing more than the account of the twenty-four hours that ensue between the pistol shot and the death, the time the bullet takes to travel three or four yards–twenty-four hours 'in excess' (qtd. in Morrisette 41-42). This freezing of events in their unfolding is echoed in the fact that Wallas's watch has stopped at 7.30 P.M., only to start again when Wallas fires the deadly shot at Dupont the next night at 7.30 P.M., exactly twenty-four hours later. The novel is mostly written in the present tense, much favoured, along with the *passé composé*, by French writers of the 20th century attempting to reject the pervasive presence of the very literary tense *passé simple*. The latter is, Barthes notes, "[o]bsolete in spoken French"; "the cornerstone of Narration," the *passé simple* "always signifies the presence of Art; it is a part of a ritual of Letters" (*WDZ* 30). This ritual was famously upset in Camus's *L'Etranger*, written entirely in the *passé composé*, and is upset again here, in *The Erasers*. Though English lacks the equivalent to the *passé simple*, the past tense to which traditional novels have made us accustomed is, if not rejected by Watson, then at least questioned and played with in her use of the progressive.

Borrowing the title of a 1948 Greenberg article, Compagnon suggests that it is in its dealing with time and space that Pollock's art represents "the conclusion to 'the crisis

of the easel picture'": "Peculiar to Western culture, the easel painting generates the illusion of a three-dimensional cavity on the two-dimensional wall" (89). This illusion was challenged with Monet's "noteworthy flattening of the painting" in his water lilies paintings, yet remnants of depth could still be seen in "the "'shallow depth' that still remained in the cubist paintings of Picasso and Léger" (89). Pollock's canvases, however, reduced this "shallow depth" to the point of "abolishing all pictorial space" (89). By 1946, Pollock had "[done] away with the relationship between figure and background" (91) and

> [f]or five years . . . hastily painted a great variety of these labyrinths, black interlaces on the white canvas, or complex tangles of various colors. The entire surface is covered with crisscrosses. The contrasts are no longer worked out in width but in thickness. The spurts of color disappear into each other. Spots form a network connected with threadlike lines or, as in his *One* of 1950, where a white grid appears on the surface, looking like mold. Sometimes it is a shower of droplets. (93)

"Labyrinths," "interlaces," "complex tangles," "crisscrosses," "threadlike lines" and "grids": the vocabulary here could just as easily be applied to both *The Double Hook* and *The Erasers*. Not only is Wallas at times lost in "a labyrinth of tiny streets" (*Erasers* 80), the many mythological references examined above interlace and combine in a continual skidding of meaning. Moreover, the allusions to other narrative discourses like detective fiction and the Western provide coded surface grids that are exposed and subsequently dismantled as they do no longer provide us with the expected framework from within which one would expect to read the novels. The key, as we have seen, is not to found "elsewhere," outside the novels; rather, the illusion of three-dimensional depth is abandoned, as the novels do not attempt to reproduce mimetically any outside reality. Nor can they be read as mythical allegories with a blueprint for interpretation in either Thebes

or the Shushwaps' Cariboo. Instead, everything is within the novels, and meaning continually skids as layer upon layer of references are folded over and over, like the many layers of colour and paint in Pollock's canvases. "Figures" and "grounds" are fused together both in Pollock's painting and in Watson and Robbe-Grillet's writings: we no longer have characters moving around in a clearly defined setting, but rather "figures in a ground, from which they could not be separated," as Watson herself claimed:

> I didn't think of them as people in a place, in a stage set, in a place which had to be described for itself, as it existed outside the interaction of the people with objects, with things, with other existences with which they came into contact. So that the people are entwined in, they're interacting with the landscape, and the landscape is interacting with them . . . not the landscape, the things about them, the other things which exist. ("What I'm Going to Do" 15; ellipsis in original)

There is, as we have seen, a tension between the apparent objectivity of the two novels, resulting from an effaced, neutral narrator, and the subjective focalisation of the characters. The setting–landscape and objects surrounding characters in traditional novels–is not in either *The Double Hook* nor *The Erasers* "described for itself": it is presented through the characters' focalisations and coloured by their respective perception. Critics would read this tension in Robbe-Grillet's writing in two opposite ways. Barthes claimed that "Robbe-Grillet's intention is to accord objects a narrative privilege hitherto granted only to human objects," creating thus an "'objective' universe" in which "substance is presented no longer as a function of the human heart (memory, instrumentality), but as an implacable space which man can frequent only by movement, never by use or subjection" ("Literal Literature" 51-52). Morrissette, on the other hand, rejecting Barthes's "myth of a Robbe-Grillet indifferent to plot and human emotions, a 'chosiste' preoccupied with things and intent on filling his novels with minutely described

but 'gratuitous' objects" (40), suggests instead that "[d]espite his antipsychological posture, Robbe-Grillet continues to use themes deeply rooted in personal obsessions and complexes" (74). Morrissette thus paved the way for 'the second Robbe-Grillet,' or the Robbe-Grillet of extreme subjectivity, who had eschewed *chosisme* for *mentalism.*[30] The tension between subjectivity and objectivity was present in Robbe-Grillet's own writing already in *For a New Novel* ("as two irreconcilable poles of a contradiction" [*GM* 52]).

If, therefore, these and other pronouncements on the issue are to be seen as a polemical working out of the problems of objectivity and subjectivity, it is possible to discern a third Robbe-Grillet emerging in the liminal space between these two extremes, in which objectivism and subjectivism are replaced by a new *–ism*:

> Robbe-Grillet now says that the *nouveau roman* later went as far as "textualism," which casts doubt on the psychology of the subject that had been left intact in the early manner of the *nouveau roman* as it was in the modernist novel before it: Joyce's *Ulysses* multiplies levels of consciousness without doing away with the problematic of consciousness. From *chosisme* or mentalism to textualism, the *nouveau roman* followed the path of the human sciences, which have destroyed the solidarity of the subject, following Lacan, Foucault, and Derrida. (Compagnon 109-10)

It followed, too, the path of abstract expressionism, which, according to Compagnon, in its term "concealed the same ambiguity": "In its very ambivalence, in its uncertain play

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[30]In fairness, both the *chosiste* Robbe-Grillet and the Robbe-Grillet of extreme subjectivity were theories in part spurred on by Robbe-Grillet himself. When confronted with this, Robbe-Grillet tended to claim, as he did in an interview in 1976, that "I don't attach very much importance to my theoretical essays": "These theoretical observations are more like questions for me, they are questions which arise. And when I make believe I am giving answers, I am only making believe. . . . There is a polemical element. They were points that needed to be emphasized. I remember something that strikes me a great deal when I reread *Pour un nouveau roman.* It's that when I insisted upon 'objective,' it was really in response. And then, later when the word "objective" gained too strong a hold, I insisted on 'subjective'" ("Interview–Alain Robbe-Grillet" 36).

with subjectivity, the *nouveau roman* thus appears a rather good historical equivalent to American painting" (110).

This textualism would be Garinati's third option: to read the novels as textual surfaces in continual movement, not as "a testimony offered in evidence concerning an external reality, but [as] its own reality for itself" (*FNN* 153-54). Speaking of his novel *Jealousy,* though he could just as easily be speaking of *The Erasers*, Robbe-Grillet claims that "there existed for me no possible order outside that of the book":

> The latter was not a narrative mingled with a simple anecdote external to itself, but again the very unfolding of a story which had no other reality than that of the narrative, an occurrence which functioned nowhere else except in the mind of the invisible narrator, in other words of the writer, and of the reader. (*FNN* 154)

In surprisingly similar terms, Flahiff reads Watson's "final, extensive revision of *The Double Hook,*" in which "she moved against such guarantees as are provided by *possibility* and *causality* and *memory*" as a way in which

> [m]ore fully to realize that spareness and immediacy that come to the characters when they have no alternative but to *be* in their time and place–when they are characters who have no memory apart from the experience of their readers. (Afterword 125; emphasis in original)

Yet despite this spareness, there is an excess of signification in both *The Erasers* and *The Double Hook*: the novels skid and slide; there is no fixed, solid centre and the play of meaning cannot be halted or even limited as ~~characters~~ continually graft themselves upon new contexts, creating new connections with every reading. In *Glas*, his most extensive use of the graft in its column-like combination of Hegel and Jean Genet, Derrida asks: "Why pass a knife between two texts? Or, at the very least, why write two texts at once?" (qtd. in Compagnon 136), and rather than cutting and separating we have attempted to

graft together Watson and Robbe-Grillet's two texts. Yet grafts operate on every level of these novels, including the level of ~~characters~~, and grafting becomes an indispensable tool for writers and readers alike in their construction of texts "which ha[ve] no other reality than that of the narrative." We are reminded of Cocteau in his "doctor's gown" above, and of the doctor and father in Watson's short story "Brother Oedipus," who named his oldest son "in some moment of illumination as he snipped and sewed together the fragments of human life" (*Five Stories* 9): The writer and reader become surgeons, sewing together fragments of all kinds, but not in order to produce a seamless whole. Rather, this form of grafting–of characters and voices, settings and grounds, new and old–will necessarily leave a scar that becomes its own liminal space between two otherwise split or separate entities. It is this liminal space that we shall seek to examine in our next graft, with particular emphasis on the grafting of 'new' and 'old.'

# Graft 3: "Non Nova, Sed Nove"–The Paradox of the New

*It is under the pressure of History and Tradition that the possible modes of writing for a given writer are established; there is a History of Writing. But this History is dual: at the very moment when general History proposes–or imposes–new problematics of the literary language, writing still remains full of the recollection of previous usage, for language is never innocent: words have a second-order memory which mysteriously persists in the midst of new meanings.*

*Roland Barthes, Writing Degree Zero (16)*

* * *

How does one write new novels after modernism? Or, better still, how does one write novels in the wake of modernism, yet before the actual articulation of a literary postmodernism? This is the question with which we began our thesis, and it is the one to which we shall turn our attention in our final graft.

In our examination of Watson's creation of new forms for the novel, we have outlined her affinities with the Robbe-Grilletian *nouveau roman* with particular emphasis on attempts made to change the forms of the traditional novel. Having thus dealt with the novel as a genre in the wake of modernism and with Watson's and Robbe-Grillet's formal innovation within the genre, we now need to consider the first half of the term *nouveau roman*, because the new, to both Robbe-Grillet and Watson, is in fact a very complex notion. Only a careful examination will allow us to see that their notion of the new places both writers in a liminal position between the now familiar modernist call to "[m]ake it new" (Pound's phrase) and the postmodern disenchantment with the modernist utopian belief in progress and innovation. Within modernism, Jameson claims, the subject is still conceived of "as a monadlike container, within which things felt are then expressed by projection outward" (15), allowing thus for Freud's psychoanalysis as well as for

Munch's depiction of alienation in *The Scream.* Postmodernism saw a decentring and fragmentation of this "monadlike container," and with "the end of the autonomous bourgeois monad or ego or individual"[31] (Jameson 15) came, in art and literature, "the end . . . of style, in the sense of the unique and the personal, the end of the distinctive individual brush stroke" (15). Postmodernism, therefore, replaced the modernist emphasis on the new and on stylistic innovation with "the random cannibalization of all the styles of the past, the play of random stylistic allusion, and in general what Henri Lefebvre has called the increasing primacy of the 'neo'" (18). As we shall see, any superficial treatment of Watson's and Robbe-Grillet's relationship to the new would obscure the fact that a periodic placing of the two writers within either postmodernism or modernism can only lead to an impasse. As neither the celebratory modernist nor the disenchanted postmodernist take on the new (and with it, notions such as progress and overcoming) can accommodate the complexity the term holds for Watson and Robbe-Grillet, we shall propose instead the French term *modernité*, or, to be more specific, the *modernité* of Baudelaire, as a more suitable alternative. According to Compagnon, *modernité*[32] allows for both the new and a simultaneous scepticism of the new:

> [i]n France, . . . where Baudelaire and Nietzsche are the most prominent moderns, modernity includes nihilism and a distrust of history and progress. . . . The Baudelarian modern . . . includes the postmodern as an awareness of the end of

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[31]Jameson provides "two possible formulations of th[e] notion" of the "*decentering* of that formerly centered subject or psyche": there is "the historicist one, that a once-existing centered subject, in the period of classical capitalism and the nuclear family, has today in the world of organizational bureaucracy dissolved; and the more radical poststructuralist position, for which such a subject never existed in the first place but constituted something like an ideological mirage" (15; emphasis in original).

[32]*Modernité* should not be confused with the English *modernity* which designates the "the new civilization developed in Europe and North America over the last several centuries and fully evident by the early twentieth century" (Cahoon 11). In the translation of Compagnon's book, *modernité* has been translated with the English *modernity*, and unless otherwise noted, *modernity* will be used in this thesis to designate the *modernité* of Baudelaire and not the more common understanding of the term in English.

> history and a refusal of the modernist logic of overcoming, with its dialectic of progress that recasts old religious messianisms. (x)

"This is no place to offer a comprehensive definition of Modernism" (391), Ihab Hassan states in "POSTmodernISM: A Paracritical Bibliography," and the limited scope of this thesis coupled with the sheer multitude of debates concerning the nature of modernism and postmodernism prevent us from making anything but some generalisations on the issue. Nor is it our intention to pigeonhole Watson further, but rather, through a discussion of *modernité*, allow for new perspectives which highlight certain aspects of her work that so far have gone unnoticed, notably a grafting of *new* and *old* that eventually will lead us to the adage "Non nova, sed nove"–"not the new, but anew."

## "A Dangerous Book"? Robbe-Grillet, Watson and Problems of Periodisation

It should come as no surprise that what we have just outlined with our emphasis on reading in the previous graft is today no longer a radical idea. In 1970, Barthes made the distinction between "readerly" and "writerly" texts, the latter being one in which "the reader [is] no longer a consumer but a producer of the text" (*S/Z* 4), and these terms have since become an integral part of our critical discourse. Three years earlier, Derrida's statement in *Of Grammatology* that "[b]ecause we are beginning to write, to write differently, we must reread differently" (87) helped initiate his deconstructionist rereadings of among others Saussure, Lévi-Strauss and Rousseau. However, despite such claims, Robbe-Grillet's novels provoked much critical uneasiness (and to a certain extent still do), which, as we have seen, "might be demonstrated across a whole spectrum of critical reaction, ranging from outbursts of indignant hysteria to the more serious attempts

to retrieve these texts . . ." (Heath 67). Robbe-Grillet claims that critical reception of his novels to his surprise "made me understand that what I was writing was not what was expected of a *true good* novelist" (qtd. in Oppenheim 21; emphasis in original):

> I was under the impression that the criteria by which I was being judged had not been applicable to literature for a very long time and that after Proust, Kafka, Faulkner, Joyce, and so on, literature no longer bore any resemblance to the model which French academics continued to impose on it. . . . The major critics . . . seemed to continually expect of us novelists that we copy those models which had made the nineteenth century so glorious, but which I naively believed to have been old-fashioned for a long time. (Oppenheim 21-22)

"Old-fashioned" perhaps in an Anglo-American context, but in France the situation was somewhat different: in a 1988 interview, Robbe-Grillet claims that "the initial bad press for the *nouveau roman* was the doing of critics 'who knew very little about twentieth-century literature, Joyce, Kafka, or Faulkner, for example. They had not even read–or had misread–Proust'" (qtd. in Compagnon 109). It is therefore possible for Robbe-Grillet as late as in 1956 to ascertain that "[t]he only conception of the novel to have currency today is, in fact, that of Balzac" (*FNN* 15). Without a *closely* corresponding movement in France to that of modernism in England and the United States (for it would be incorrect to deny France any such modernist writers because of Proust, Beckett and others), one also begins to understand why there seems in North American to be some confusion as to the appropriate periodisation of Robbe-Grillet. Compagnon notes that "when I first took a job in the United States in the mid-1980s, [I was surprised] to hear everybody call *postmodern* things that I had never thought of labeling that way in France" (viii). Examining students' reading lists, Compagnon found these lists "odd":

> Italo Calvino, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Thomas Pynchon, John Hawkes, Robert Coover, and John Barth were included, as well as Claude Simon, Michel Butor,

> and Alain Robbe-Grillet, plus Marguerite Duras . . . , and also–as precursors, "early-postmoderns" or "prepostmoderns"–Jorge Luis Borges, Samuel Beckett, and Vladimir Nabokov. . . . I would try to argue that such lists did not make much sense outside American campuses: that the French *nouveau roman*, for instance, claimed its affiliation with the modern in its manifestos of the 1950s, or that Beckett's links with Proust and Joyce bespoke the modernism of his plays and novels. . . . I suggested that national specificities rendered such catchall labels of little relevance. But the cultural misunderstandings remained. (viii-ix)

Jameson claims that "[t]he case for its [postmodernism's] existence depends on the hypothesis of some radical break or *coupure*, generally traced back to the end of the 1950s or the early 1960s" (1), and this break implied in the label *postmodern* obscures Robbe-Grillet's indebtedness to modernism. It would be better, perhaps, to situate Robbe-Grillet among the list's "prepostmoderns," were it not for the fact that even this labelling does nothing to solve what Compagnon calls "cultural misunderstandings" between Europe and North America. In fact, from a French perspective, where the term *postmoderne* has had little currency outside the realm of architecture, it denotes a particular North American notion of progress by giving postmodernism an "overarching meaning" by which "everything was suddenly postmodern and one was ashamed to remain merely modern" (Compagnon ix).

Though critical response to Watson's novel has seen indignation as well as attempts at retrieval, the indignation is not only of a somewhat different nature to that which Robbe-Grillet's novels seemed to cause but is also more recent. In the case of Pennee, the criticism of *The Double Hook* came as a direct result of Derrida's call above for a need to "reread differently." If Robbe-Grillet, in the absence of French equivalents to Joyce, Woolf and Faulkner, was early on judged too modern by his contemporaries, criticism of Watson reveals a tendency today to see her novel as not modern *enough*: in other words, whereas "everything was suddenly postmodern," Watson was criticised for

"remain[ing] *merely* modern" (emphasis added). Other than a testimony to the cultural discrepancies between a largely modernist Europe and a North America aspiring toward postmodernism, this tendency has perhaps also something to do with the fact that Watson's novel received far greater attention from writers a generation younger than Watson herself than from her own contemporaries. George Bowering, for example, himself a postmodern writer, wrote in *Craft Slices* that "I call the interesting stuff written since 1959 the 'Sheila Watson canon'" (qtd. in Flahiff, *Bio.* 373) and ended a letter to Watson in 1982 with "[w]onderful age we're in. & it's yrs" (qtd. in Flahiff, *Bio.* 373). Michael Ondaatje in his Afterword to Howard O'Hagan's *Tay John* also acknowledges his indebtedness to Watson:

> Any reader or writer likes to find his own literary touchstones. These are often books that are not part of the great tradition. They are more like outriders–books that burn or splash on the periphery. . . . The first Canadian novel to reach me this way was Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook.* (271)

Yet as with most works that "splash on the periphery," *The Double Hook* has for better or for worse 'graduated' from the minor "outrider" canon within which Ondaatje and Bowering had placed it, to be absorbed into the major canon of Canadian literature. The tendency today, as we have already seen in Pennee's article on the canonisation of *The Double Hook*, seems to be to read Watson as one of the very few examples of a Canadian version of Anglo-American modernism. Stephen Scobie, for instance, writes that *The Double Hook* "made it possible for Canadian writers to assume that their readers were not naïve colonials . . ." because this novel "placed the Canadian novel firmly within the modernist tradition . . ." (11). Robert Kroetsch, in *Labyrinths of Voice* (*LV*), claims that Canadian writers "came into contemporary writing with relative ease because we didn't

have an Eliot or a Pound to deal with," due partly to the fact modernism was "a product of a high urban civilization and we just didn't have any" (111). Though he does not "see much Modernism in our literature," Kroetsch, like Scobie, nevertheless counts Watson as "an obvious exception" (111), and, moreover, is able to claim that "now I see Modernism falling apart in *The Double Hook*. I think the trickster really had tricked her, and she hadn't quite accepted the message from the figure of Coyote" (17). To Kroetsch, "there was some kind of anxiety operating in *The Double Hook* that Sheila was insisting wasn't there. She tries to assert a kind of control" (17). Our examination of polyphony in our first graft and our emphasis on focalisation in our second should go some way in dispelling Kroetsch's notion of a writer attempting "to assert . . . control" in her novel. However, Kroetsch is not alone in seeing the ruins of modernism inscribed on the pages of *The Double Hook*. In a letter to Watson written in July 1991, Angela Bowering describes a discussion with Frank Davey:

> Frank said that he thought DH [*The Double Hook*] was a dangerous book, and I said I thought it was too, but what did he mean? He said he thought it was essentially conservative and Roman Catholic in its vision, that it suffered from the problems of modernism. I remarked that that was what we all had to contend with, and that conservatism didn't automatically = WRONG; if it is conservative, it does not minimize the complexity of the bafflement we endure as human creatures. It focuses it, I said, pointing out what is obvious about formal innovation, pointing out also that b.p. [Nichol] learned a great deal from it; he seemed to think DH was something b.p. had to struggle to get beyond, which may well have been true, in a complicated way, but I said how do you know that he would have got anywhere important without it? (Flahiff, *Bio.* 376)

We do not know what, if anything, Watson wrote in response to this letter. What we do know is that Watson had lived outside the Catholic Church for many years by the time she wrote *The Double Hook*. As we can observe in Flahiff's *Biography*, "[i]n Paris in the mid-fifties . . . she noted [in her journal] that she had attended mass for the first time in

twenty years" (312). Though she would re-enter the church in the mid-sixties, Watson's "relationship to the church of her birth and her youth had, since her undergraduate days . . . , been at an arm's length" (*Bio.* 312). So much so, in fact, that she claimed in her journal on September 11th 1965 that "I have a whole language to relearn" (*Bio.* 311). Though the narrative presence of Catholicism in *The Double Hook* is undeniable, due mainly to the focalisations of the probably French-Canadian Felix, it emerges, as we have seen, not as a catechismal lesson of redemption through Christianity, but rather as one of the many residues of myth and other systems of thought, including modernism, available only in the most fragmentary of states to the ~~characters~~ of the novel, and thus also to its readers.

We begin to see that any attempt towards periodisation of either Watson or Robbe-Grillet can only lead us into an impasse, as we yet again encounter slippages everywhere. A reading of Watson and Robbe-Grillet in the context of Pollock's abstract expressionism would suggest high or late modernism, yet the reduction of depth into surface or a series of surfaces which we witnessed earlier could also suggest the postmodern rejection of what Jameson calls the modernist "depth model," as exemplified in "the Freudian model of latent and manifest," "the existential model of authenticity and inauthenticity," "the dialectical one of essence and appearance" and so forth, all models of depth that postmodernism has replaced with "for the most part a conception of practices, discourses, and textual play" (Jameson 12). Watson's and Robbe-Grillet's treatment of the conventional character certainly differs from Jameson's "monadlike container" which remains intact in, for instance, *Mrs. Dalloway*, where one is still able to ascertain the individual's indubitable presence in the novel's final sentence: "For there she was" (213). In *The Double Hook*, this presence is thrown into doubt and instead we have a confusion

of presence and absence, so that when it comes to the old lady, we would have to say: "For there she was and she was not." Finally, both Watson and Robbe-Grillet may flirt with the cliché, but it remains largely embedded in dialogue, or, as with the use of detective fiction in *The Erasers*, is exposed as a structural grid that no longer holds, as opposed to the postmodern tendency to "incorporate into [its] very substance" what Jameson calls "this whole 'degraded' landscape of schlock and kitsch, of TV series and *Reader's Digest* culture, of advertising and motels" (3). We could continue to list the respective characteristics of modernism and postmodernism, yet it is very unlikely that this will help beyond illustrating that Watson and Robbe-Grillet share characteristics with both and can therefore be said to fit neither period comfortably.

Somewhat more helpful is Godard's take on Watson's position in literary history. In contrast to Davey's provocative and facile stance above (for Kroetsch has to admit to the precariousness of attempting to pigeonhole Watson: "Sheila Watson is a Modernist but she is also terribly Sheila Watson" [*LV* 111]), Godard presents Watson, as we have seen, not only in a more radical light but also in a manner that invites a liminal reading of Watson. Yet even Godard, who recognises "the revolutionary qualities in Watson's writing" (159), stresses that "Watson has not gone as far as younger writers like bp Nichol in exploring the musical potentialities of language . . . ," leaving Watson with the limited role of "predecessor" (176). Postmodernist, modernist or a bridge between the two: Watson, therefore, to sum up, occupies a unique position as "pre"-postmodernist / "post"-modern similar to the position that Robbe-Grillet occupies in a North American perspective as outlined above. However cumbersome such a label may be, it does acknowledge the existence of a liminal space in which, as we shall see, Robbe-Grillet, Watson and their respective ~~characters~~ operate. Yet the problem of seeing Watson as a

bridge between *old* modernist writers like Eliot and Gertrude Stein, and *new post*modern writers like Nicole Brossard and b.p. Nichol, as Godard does, is that it necessarily entails a crossing *over* of this bridge, as well as both a movement *forward* and a leaving *behind.* It raises the issue of progress and of overcoming, and establishes hierarchical binaries, notably between *new* and *old*, thus encouraging a substitution of one centred structure for another and a negation of the state of play that we examined in our previous graft. In fact, bridges, in both *The Double Hook* and *The Erasers*, are never crossed just once. James crosses a bridge upon entering the town below, and returns by the same bridge. Yet the crossing of the river is for James associated with fear:

> Over the low railing he could look down into the flowing eddies of grey water. He edged closer to the rail. The horse quivered. Its mouth tightened on the bit. The water moved and stood still. An empty box floating downstream was caught and held suspended beneath him. His eyes searched the river bank and the naked silver bars. And there on a bar at the foot of the pier on which the arch of the bridge rested he saw the dark figure of his mother playing her line out into the full flood.
>
> He pulled his horse up. Then closing his eyes gave it its head. He felt it draw to the centre of the bridge. And heard its feet echoing on the boards until solid earth dulled their beat. (*DH* 80)

Moreover, the sight of his mother negates any possibility of leaving behind the problems of the past by a simple crossing over: James's longing for escape, his wish "[t]o attach himself to another life which moved at a different rhythm" (*DH* 79), proves impossible, and the only possibility left is to return. However, returning home does not automatically absolve James in any way from his fear, as he crosses the bridge for the second time as fearfully as the first:

> James felt the muscles moving under him. Then he heard the hollow ring of hooves on the bridge. The bridge lay a black arch over the clear sweep of the river. And in the shadow of the girders fear unwound itself again like the line from his mother's reel. (*DH* 107)

In *The Erasers*, Wallas crosses at least twice a drawbridge across the canal, and though he does so seemingly without James's fear, a detailed description of the drawbridge shows us that it is not as safe nor as faultless as at first expected. Though pedestrians are given the signal to begin their crossing, we find that

> on the other side of the barrier, it was apparent that everything was not yet over; because of a certain elasticity in the materials, the platform's descent had not stopped when the machinery did; it had continued for several seconds, moving a fraction of an inch perhaps, creating a tiny gap in the continuity of the roadway which brought the metal rim slightly above its position of equilibrium; and the oscillations–growing fainter and fainter, less and less noticeable, but whose cessation it was difficult to be certain of–consequently approximated–by a series of successive prolongations and regressions on either side of a quite illusory fixity–a phenomenon completed, nevertheless, some time before. (*Erasers* 150)

Bridges in both novels represent a perilous space, and, moreover, the repeat crossings and the space allocated within the novels to the description of both bridges and ~~characters~~ crossing them put the emphasis on the liminal bridge space itself rather than on what is either being left behind or moved towards.

Barthes's notion of "a colourless writing," traits of which we have already attributed to *The Double Hook* and *The Erasers*, stresses a similar liminality by speaking of zero degree writing as writing in the "third term." He uses a simile borrowed from linguistics in which

> some linguists establish *between* the two terms of a polar opposition (such as singular-plural, preterite-present) the existence of a *third term*, called a neutral term or zero element: thus between the subjunctive and the imperative moods, the indicative is according to them an amodal form. Proportionally speaking, writing at the zero degree is basically in the indicative mood, or if you like, amodal . . . . (*WDZ* 76; emphasis added)

If we extend this simile to what Barthes calls a "History of Writing" (*WDZ* 16), we can find an equivalent "third term" in the liminal space between another "two terms of a polar opposition": modernism and postmodernism. Barthes continues his description of writing in "the third term" by suggesting that the "aim" of "colourless writing" is "to go beyond Literature by entrusting one's fate to a sort of basic speech, equally far removed from living languages and from literary language proper" (*WDZ* 77). We find this "basic speech" in the bankrupt language of Watson's ~~characters~~, as exemplified by Felix who has "got no words" except for fragments of "ritual phrases" empty of signification (*DH* 41) and the equally empty aphorisms of, for instance, William ("a man gets used to things being as they are from day to day" [*DH 42*]). We find it, too, in the detached, almost mechanical observations of *The Erasers*' narrator describing the workings of the drawbridge above. Yet if this "basic speech" sets these two novels apart from both "living languages" and "literary language proper," we find another analogy to the dichotomy between modernism and postmodernism, allowing us to suggest that Watson and Robbe-Grillet occupy a liminal space "equally far" from the perceived élitist, dense and highly "literary language" of Joyce or Eliot, as from the "aesthetic populism" (Jameson 2) of postmodern writers such as Irvine Welsh, who, no longer content simply to quote, as Eliot would have done, the "living languages" of his characters, writes an entire novel in phonetic imitation of an urban dialect.

## Watson, Robbe-Grillet and "the Paradox of the New"

Despite their rejection of "the systematic repetition of the forms of the past" (*FNN* 9), both Watson and Robbe-Grillet show not only an acute awareness of their modernist

predecessors, but also a reluctance to announce any break away from this modernist heritage. In fact, Robbe-Grillet does not hesitate to acknowledge his indebtedness to modernism:

> Flaubert, Dostoevski, Proust, Kafka, Joyce, Faulkner, Beckett . . . . Far from making a *tabula rasa* of the past, we have most readily reached an agreement on the names of our predecessors; and our ambition is merely to continue them. Not to *do better*, which has no meaning, but to situate ourselves in their wake, now, in our own time. (*FNN* 136; ellipsis and emphasis in original)

On the other side of the Atlantic, Sheila Watson also found herself situated in much the same modernist wake. In an interview in 1976, she stressed that "[b]efore I even went to the Cariboo, I'd read Eliot, and Pound, and Joyce, and Lawrence, and novels like *Sanctuary* and *The 42nd Parallel*. I wasn't innocent. I wasn't naive" ("Interview / Sheila Watson" 360). In 1953, in a letter to her friend Anne Angus, Watson, as if anticipating the postmodern revisionist approach to modernism, wrote that

> [t]here is a tremendous voice rising in Canada (echoed from England and the U.S.A.) crying out for clarity. John Sutherland quotes from Poetry Chicago: "By now James, Pound, Eliot, Joyce are dowds, jades and trulls from Parnassus." This reminds me of the anti-Tennysonians of my youth. God rest James, Pound, Eliot and Joyce. They did and wrote as they could. Why must fury be used to drive out fury? I have little hope for The Double Hook even in its expanded form. (*Bio*. 100)

Is Watson's rhetorical question, "[w]hy must fury be used to drive out fury?," followed as it is by lack of hope for her own novel, an indication of her novel's close affinity with modernism? Or is it, on the contrary, an anticipation of a revisionist fury that is blind to *differences* between her novel and those of modernism to the point of wanting to erase them all in an effort to achieve the "*tabula rasa* of the past" rejected by Robbe-Grillet? While there is an acknowledgement of indebtedness, especially on the part of Robbe-

Grillet, there is also a sense of distance both temporal and artistic: although writers such as Woolf and Joyce were considered contemporary writers when Watson studied them at The University of British Columbia in the early 1930s, they belonged nevertheless to a different generation than Watson and Robbe-Grillet. As Watson points out, "Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and Wyndham Lewis were all born in the same year as my mother, 1882. Pound's *Personnae* was published in 1909, the year I was born" ("Interview / Sheila Watson" 352). The modernist writers that Robbe-Grillet lists belong, after all, to "the past," and an obituary of sorts emerges in Watson's letter with the phrase "God rest" and the use of the past tense: "[t]hey did and wrote as they could." This latter suggests, moreover, that writers in the modernist wake will have to do and write as *they* can, making do with the possibilities and limitations of their own time and place. Already here we see a problematising of the new and the notion of overcoming: there will be differences, certainly, but not necessarily improvements or progress. As Robbe-Grillet claims above, "to *do better* . . . has no meaning."

Paradoxically, we find in this lack of a clear break with modernism a sense of what actually separates both Watson and Robbe-Grillet from modernism as well as from postmodernism. Watson claims that "I don't suppose at that stage in my life I thought very consciously about being new. After all, people had been talking about 'newness' for a long time" (352). In fact, there had been many calls for "newness" before that of the *nouveau roman.* In 1871, for example, Arthur Rimbaud claimed in his "letter of the seer" that "[i]t is necessary to be absolutely modern" (qtd. in Compagnon 4). And though Ezra Pound's cry to "[m]ake it new" appeared in his prose in 1934 as well as in "Canto LIII" ("Tching prayed on the mountains and / wrote MAKE IT NEW / on his bath tub" [*Selected Poems* 147]), this maxim was a result of Pound's translations of Confucius.

Compagnon claims that modernity "started with the birth of the new as a value, for the new had not always been seen as a value" (xv). From the Renaissance onwards, "Western scientific progress . . . seen as the abolishment of authority and the triumph of reason" has provided a "model for our modern conception of time: successive, irreversible, and infinite" (Compagnon 9). Due to scientific, social, technological and philosophical advances, there was a similar "assertion of progress in the realm of taste" (9) as witnessed in the late seventeenth-century quarrel between the ancients and the moderns, where the moderns discarded the "primitive" belief in imitation of "the ancients as the only criterion for beauty" (10), claiming instead the superiority of their own progressive innovation. As the culmination of this modern period, modernism from 1850 to around 1950 was permeated by the imperatives of "newness" and the dream of breaking with tradition. As Jameson suggests,

> [m]odernism . . . thought *compulsively* about the New and tried to watch its coming into being (inventing for that purpose the registering and inscription devices akin to historical time-lapse photography). . . . The moderns were interested in what was likely to come of such changes and their general tendency: they thought about the thing itself, substantively, in Utopian or essential fashion. (ix; emphasis added)

In "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," Woolf, therefore, could famously announce the breaking away of the Georgians from Edwardian tradition in her statement that "on or about December, 1910, human character changed" (746), as well as proclaim the advent of the new: "we are trembling on the verge of one of the great ages of English literature" (758). Eliot described his admiration of Joyce's *Ulysses* in terms recalling scientific belief in progress: if "Joyce's parallel use of the *Odyssey* has a great importance" it is because "[i]t has the importance of a scientific discovery. No one else has built a novel upon such

a foundation before: it has never before been necessary" ("*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth" 177).

Postmodernism, and architectural postmodernism in particular, came partly as a reaction to modernism's failure to realise its utopian dreams of progress through a break with the past: modernism, once based "on a myth of the future–a myth of man, society, or of modern cities" (Compagnon 119), seemed to postmodernists to have become "synonymous with the alienation and dehumanization exemplified by skyscrapers, parallelipiped structures, and huge apartment blocks" (118). Yet by calling for a break with modernism, in architecture and elsewhere, postmodernism in fact paradoxically "reduplicates the modern process par excellence: the rupture" (Compagnon 115). With this rupture, as Gianno Vattimo suggests in *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture*, there is presupposed "an acceptance of what more specifically characterizes the point of view of modernity itself, namely the idea of history with its two corollary notions of progress and overcoming" (qtd. in Compagnon 115). Yet if ruptures and breaks characterise postmodernism as in modernism, there is nevertheless a difference in attitude: gone is the utopian belief in "new worlds," and, as Jameson claims, we have instead a postmodernism that "only clocks the variations themselves, and knows only too well that the contents are just images" (ix).

Where does this leave Watson and Robbe-Grillet? Certainly not with the avant-garde, for "the avant-garde presupposes a historical awareness of the future and a desire to be ahead of one's time" (Compagnon 32). Their dream would be the "*tabula rasa* of the past" rejected by Robbe-Grillet, as they "tak[e] the indefinite movement of the new for a critical overcoming of the past" (Compagnon 32). Robbe-Grillet sees the avant-garde as a label applied to just about any writer renouncing "well-worn formulas" in order

to attempt "to create his own way of writing" while also automatically conjuring up an image in the mind of the reader of "some hirsute young men who smirkingly set off their firecrackers under the Academy's armchairs . . ." (*FNN* 26). The stereotype, with its connotations of anarchy and violence, is in fact dangerous, inspiring fear of and resistance to change, as expressed in Henri Clouard's comment quoted by Robbe-Grillet: "'They want to saw off the branch we're sitting on'" (*FNN* 26). Yet, claims Robbe-Grillet, the literary "branch" is "actually dead of natural causes, by the simple action of time," and the negatively loaded avant-garde helps to obscure this fact:

> if all those who cling to it so desperately would glance up just once toward the top of the tree, they would discover that new, green, vigorous, hardy branches have grown out long since. *Ulysses* and *The Castle* are already over thirty. *The Sound and the Fury* was translated into French over twenty years ago. Many others have followed. In order not to see them, our good critics have, each time, pronounced one or another of their magic words: "avant-garde," "laboratory," "anti-novel" . . . . in other words: "Let's close our eyes and go back to the sane values of the French tradition." (*FNN* 26; ellipsis in original)

These other literary branches somehow magically disappear, obfuscated by the fogginess of the various stereotypical labels, with the unfortunate result of leaving only the "sane" and safe French tradition in the clear. Note that Robbe-Grillet here echoes Watson's comment regarding "newness" above: "the new" is a quality specifically attributed to Anglo-American modernist works, though this quality is further qualified by the fact that they "have grown out long since."

The new, to both Watson and Robbe-Grillet, is thus an insoluble paradox: it is a rejection of the status quo of the novel as they found it in the late 1940s, its forms frozen in the shape of the Balzacian realism of the mid-1800s, despite the experimentation of Anglo-American modernists. It is a modernist call for the new, steeped in terms that

invoke freedom and liberation (as seen in our first graft), which at the same time incorporates the postmodern admission that the modernist ideal of progress has not lived up to its promise and instead cancels itself out through "endless innovation" (Compagnon 113). We remember Watson's wry comment above: "God rest James, Pound, Eliot and Joyce. They did and wrote as they could." Sarraute is more explicit: "this [modernist] exploration, however bold and well carried out it may have been, however extensive and with whatever elaborate means, has ended in disappointment" (*AS* 78). To Robbe-Grillet, the disappointment with the new can be located even earlier, to the difference between Balzac and Flaubert. If Balzac can be called "the last happy writer," it "is because he is the last innocent writer: he does indeed have something to say, and he eagerly amasses dozens of novels, thousands of pages, without appearing to ask himself the least question as to the validity of this strange, paradoxical exercise: writing the world" (*GM* 169). In direct opposition to Balzac, there is Flaubert, who "in three books that took him a lifetime to write, discovers both the terrifying freedom of the writer, the vanity of claiming to express original ideas, and finally the impossibility of writing . . ." (169). From Flaubert onwards, if there is such as thing as "the new," it can be only be achieved through form, not content:

> the novel's content (saying something new, Balzac thought) can actually only consist in the banality of the always-already-said: a string of stereotypes lacking originality by definition. The only meanings are those established in advance by society. But these "received ideas" (which we now call ideology) will nevertheless be the only possible material for the construction of a work of art–novel, poem, essay–empty architecture entirely held up by its form. The substance and originality of the text will come solely from the organization of these elements, which are of no interest in themselves. The writer's freedom (that is, man's freedom) resides only in the infinite complexity of possible combinations. Hasn't nature constructed all living systems, from the amoeba to the human brain, out of only eight amino acids and four nucleotides, always the same? (*GM* 169)

Form as the sole place left for innovation seems also to be Watson's conclusion: having stated that she did not think "consciously about being new," she nevertheless stresses that "[b]y the time I wrote *The Double Hook* one could hardly take language for granted. I did work with the form, the actual form" ("Interview / Sheila Watson" 352).

Moreover, the new becomes paradoxical in both Watson's and Robbe-Grillet's writings because they show a clear awareness of the past but refuse the temptation to inscribe themselves onto a progressive history from past to future through a break with this past. As with Baudelaire and Nietzsche, Watson's and Robbe-Grillet's "recognition of modernity implies a disavowal of modernity" (Compagnon 17), a modernity that "reject[s] the comfort or the entrapment of historical time":

> To the perpetual and irresistible movement of a modernity that is enslaved by time and devours itself, to the obsolescence of an endlessly renewed novelty that denies the novelty of yesterday, Baudelaire contrasts the eternal or the timeless. (Compagnon 16)

This is in sharp contrast to Anglo-American modernism, described by Jameson as "a temporality-obsessed age" (134), concerned with time and memory, and with the narrative representation of memory and its relation to the present in the form of stream-of-consciousness and interior monologue. Memory, history and time are if not denied, then questioned and ultimately suspended in both *The Double Hook* and *The Erasers*: in our second graft, we saw the "[c]hronic realities" (Flahiff, Afterword 130) expressed by the use of the present participle, as well as the sparseness of the narrative denying ~~characters~~ recourse to a personal or family history, leaving them with "no alternative but to *be* in their time and place" (125; emphasis in original). In *The Erasers*, Wallas' vague childhood memories become a red herring of sorts: rather than offering any real insight,

these memories present us instead with an obstacle to our interpretation of the novel. In fact, insight achieved through memory becomes an illusion: the father he remembers may or may not be Dupont, and, to the readers, Wallas' memory of this father may or may not be a clue with which to interpret the novel. The possibility of a *denouement* gained through remembrance of past events is forever suspended in a timeless present.

Jameson suggests that "[t]he postmodern period . . . eschews temporality for space" (134), and Watson's and Robbe-Grillet's call for formal innovation can in this light be seen as a preoccupation with the two-dimensional space of the novel, especially when considering that Watson's expressed aim "was what she called 'writing spatially.' 'Characters out of space,' she wrote, 'become mere abstractions– an accumulation of detail–.'" (Flahiff, *Bio.* 239). The new may be found in an innovative spatial organisation of novelistic elements, but even this space is in both *The Erasers* and *The Double Hook* inscribed with traces of what went before, of myth, religious rituals and even fragmented memory. Barthes suggests a "History of Writing" that is in fact dual, and thus suspends any simple progression from the old to the new in a liminal space between "freedom and remembrance":

> at the very moment when general History proposes–or imposes–new problematics of the literary language, writing still remains full of the recollection of previous usage, for language is never innocent: words have a second-order memory which mysteriously persists in the midst of new meanings. Writing is precisely this compromise between freedom and remembrance, it is this freedom which remembers and is free only in the gesture of choice, but is no longer so within duration. True, I can today select such and such mode of writing, and in so doing assert my freedom, aspire to the freshness of novelty . . . ; but it is impossible to develop it within duration without gradually becoming a prisoner of someone else's words and even my own. (*WDZ* 16)

"Any written trace precipitates," Barthes claims, and "duration gradually reveals in suspension a whole past of increasing density, like a cryptogram" (17). Likewise, Watson was to declare that "[n]o mind is innocent. By the time I wrote *The Double Hook*, for instance, I had read Yeats, Eliot, Joyce, Pound. Their work had left its *traces*, become part of my thinking" ("It's What You Say" 162; emphasis added). The writer, therefore, is forever caught between freedom of innovation on the one hand and remembrance of the traces of previous writings. The reader, attempting to read Wallas' childhood memory, is suspended between the freedom from ready-made formulas of reading and the remembrance of the myth of Oedipus and the reading of this myth presented by Freud in the Oedipus complex. The ~~characters~~ of Watson's and Robbe-Grillet's novels are suspended between freedom from the conventional character and remnants of the conventional character's need for a name and a face. Wallas' search for the perfect eraser, "a soft, crumbly gum eraser that friction does not twist but reduces to dust; an eraser that cuts easily and whose cut surface is shiny and smooth, like mother-of-pearl" (*Erasers* 126), represents the modernist dream of a break with the past and a complete erasure of the traces of tradition: think of the striving for a streamlined and functional minimalism in modernist architecture. But this "imaginary object attributed to a lengendary [sic] brand" (*Erasers* 127) is nowhere to be found, and besides it is "always already" (Derrida's phrase) inscribed with a trace of its own: "The manufacturer's brand was printed on one side, but was too worn to be legible any more: only two of the middle letters were still clear: 'di'; there must have been at least two letters before and perhaps two or three others after" (*Erasers* 126). The two letters could be a trace of the name *Oedipe*, or perhaps a more common brand name like *Didier*, and the trace asserts itself even upon the object with which one would attempt to erase it. This is the Derridaen trace *par excellence*. One

cannot have the pure presence of the new and an absence of the past, because, as Derrida states in *Positions*, "the play of differences involves syntheses and referrals that prevent there from being at any moment or in any way a simple element that is present in and of itself and refers only to itself":

> Whether in written or in spoken discourse, no element can function as a sign without relating to another element which itself is not simply present. This linkage means that each "element"–phoneme or grapheme–is constituted with reference to the trace in it of the other elements of the sequence or system. This linkage, this weaving, is the *text*, which is produced only through the transformation of another text. Nothing . . . is anywhere simply present or absent. There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces. (qtd. in Culler 99)

If there can be any writing at all there has to be a compromise, as Barthes claims, between freedom and remembrance, between innovation of the new and traces of the past. In Robbe-Grillet's and Watson's writing this compromise takes the form of a paradox in which innovation is only possible through a grafting of new and old, of formal innovation and mythical references. Such a process of grafting is enacted at the end of *The Double Hook*: as James returns to see Lenchen holding their son Felix, Ara hears "the voice of Coyote crying down through the boulders":

> I have set his feet on soft ground;
> I have set his feet on the sloping shoulders
> of the world (*DH* 118)

These words contain hope, as new (the baby's feet) and old (the shoulders of the world) come together, one grafted upon the other, in one image in which both are made anew. The image recalls the twelfth-century commonplace attributed to Bernard of Chartres: "We are like dwarfs perched on the shoulders of giants" (qtd. in Compagnon 6). It recalls, too, the stained-glass windows in the cathedral of Chartres, "representing the apostles

sitting on the shoulders of the prophets" (Compagnon 6). Though it is doubtful that these have much to do with each other ("comparing the apostles to dwarfs–in contrast to prophets appearing as giants–does not fit the Christian conception of the relation between the two testaments" [6]), Compagnon sees these two "symbolisms" as foreshadowing "the paradoxical feature that throughout history will remain attached to the modern as a negation, including the negation of itself" (6). As Montaigne writes in "De l'experiénce," "[o]ur opinions are grafted one upon the other. The first one serves as a stem for the second, the second for the third. We thus climb from one step to the next" (qtd. in Compagnon 7).

This does not imply a progressivist overcoming "but a spiritual or typological progress" (7), and this image of new grafted upon old is admittedly a representation of Christian time, "making the cohesion between the Old and New Testament the model of the relation between present time and eternal life" (Compagnon 7). But it is also an image which in *The Double Hook* is displaced from a purely Catholic realm with its fusion with the Native coyote, in whose mouth these words are lodged. Moreover, "the sloping shoulders of the world" is not the square and solid foundation of the Old Testament, but a very human world, where nothing is certain, where there is always the possibility of slippages and where any ground, religious, mythical or metaphorical, will fold itself over and over, as do "the folds of the hills under Coyote's eye" (*DH* 11). If the world can no longer be made new, for this is the experience of James, who returns "the way a man does when he's lost" (*DH* 116) and of Wallas, who cannot find the perfect eraser and instead finds himself literally retracing the footprints of Garinati walking towards Dupont's house, there is still the possibility of making it *anew*. This is another adage which Compagnon sees as foreshadowing modernity: "Non nova, sed nove"–not the new, but

anew–depicts "the relation between current texts and those of the past that hold authority" (Compagnon 7). If we displace this adage from its biblical origin and use "text" in its widest possible application as a combination of signs, we find that this relation between old and new, between one person and another, and between people and their traditions and rituals is what the ~~characters~~ of *The Double Hook* are missing. As Watson writes in her journal:

> That is what Mr. Salter did not understand about *The Double Hook*. He thought that my people were stripped of society–conceived of as progressive. I meant that they were stripped of their bridges or centre, roots, traditions, which Thebon describes as bridges, S[imone] [W]eil as 'des metaux' between earth & sky–and between one another even. (Flahiff, *Biography*, 184)

The ~~characters~~ are living the fragmented postmodern experience, in which "the past as a 'referent' finds itself gradually bracketed, and then effaced altogether, leaving us with nothing but texts" (Jameson 18). In this world, which is both that of the novel and the author, grafting becomes the only response if there is to be life, reading and writing.

# Conclusion: "Will that Damned Machine Never Stop?"

*There is, however, another way of ending this discussion, and it has to do with endings themselves . . . What is satisfying, then, is the downward turn, prepare to terminate!, the airplane finally in the process of landing.*
*Frederic Jameson, Postmodernism, or, the Logic of Late Capitalism (153)*

* * *

Can we speak of endings here, of closure and of completion? Both novels come to a close: the printed words on the pages of *The Double Hook* and *The Erasers* do not continue indefinitely. Yet does our reading end with the novel? Is not the end another beginning, the last reading only a preparation for a new one? For one cannot ever read the same book: "There is, in fact, no 'book' other than these ever-different repetitions," Spivak claims, speaking of her preface to *Of Grammatology* which is both a beginning and already a repetition. "The 'book,'" therefore, "is always already a 'text,' constituted by the play of identity and difference" (xii).

In *The Erasers*, the end is the beginning, and the beginning is the end: Wallas has completed his circular trajectory of the city, only to find himself in a double role as both the criminal and the solver of the crime. The bar manager is at the end of the novel where he was at its beginning, "his features blurred, liverish and fleshy in his aquarium" (8): "In the troubled water of the aquarium, furtive shadows pass. The manager is motionless at his post" (256).

Perhaps more hopeful than *The Erasers*, *The Double Hook's* ending with its grafting of new and old implies the possibility of change, a chance for the people "under Coyote's eye" (11) to displace the binaries of glory and darkness, resolve and fear, life

and death. This is the double-hooked trap of the binary, and only a "double movement" of grafting can prevent the beginning from being just another ending.

What had we hoped to achieve with a grafting of Watson's novel onto the debates and concerns of the *nouveau roman*? Certainly, we had not hoped to label Watson a new novelist, nor *The Double Hook* a new novel. To create a new pigeonhole in which to wedge Watson and her novel once and for all would only be an ending with no room for a beginning. Rather, we have attempted to displace Watson and situate her work differently, and as such, it becomes necessary to acknowledge the fact that this process of grafting is only one of many possible ones. "Will that damned machine never stop?" (*Erasers* 102), a confused Garinati asks, and though his exasperated question is of a rhetorical nature, we shall nonetheless answer it with a firm "no." As we have seen Culler state, "[m]eaning is context, but context is boundless" (*OD* 123). There will always be new contexts in which to read *The Double Hook* and *The Erasers*, because "[e]ach text," Derrida claims, "is a machine with multiple reading heads for other texts" ("Living on / Border lines," qtd. in Culler 139): it is my hope that this text will provide such a reading head for others.

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