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Time out of Time: Transworld Identity and the Collapse of Ontological Boundaries in *The Accidental* by Ali Smith

ABSTRACT

This article looks at Ali Smith's *The Accidental* as a novel in which pastiche and mashups of content create a kind of cross media storytelling that pushes the ontological boundaries of narrative. At the centre of the novel is Amber, a mysterious visitor introduced here as a transworld identity who weaves the novel's plot by using contents and knowledge belonging to extradiegetic worlds and their timelines. Thus, she is in a position to interact with the other characters as if they were metareferential elements of the story and change their fate. By using Amber as a literary device which oscillates between different temporalities, Smith also explores how language mediates contemporary subjectivity, which is divided into a variety of fictional realities.

KEYWORDS: allochrony; cross-media contamination; ontological boundaries; pastiche; transworld identity.

1. Introduction

This article examines Ali Smith's *The Accidental,* first published in 2005, as a novel based on the fluid ontological boundaries of contemporary experience, using a style influenced by processes of remediation (particularly concerning

cinema) and the interaction of multiple timescales. A classic study on the construction of cultural and political identity, published by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann in 1966, proposed that reality is primarily the result of societal and institutional processes, especially mediated by language. This approach can be traced back at least to Hans Vaihinger (1924) and his philosophy of 'as if'. He contended, however, that these forms of fiction tend to be short-lived, serving a specific purpose and being abandoned after the purpose is accomplished, whereas Berger and Luckmann held that they are essentially permanent. A socially constructed reality, in their view, is a jigsaw puzzle of meanings, a whirlwind of worldviews, thinking styles, and feelings peculiar to a given community. They therefore become part of an all-encompassing symbolic universe whose unity is ensured by applying systems of knowledge and production (such as philosophy, mythology, science, and capitalism), all of which affect the development of social reality. According to McHale (1987), this concept is consistent with Thomas Pavel's (1981) idea of ontological landscapes, in the sense that these other realities encompass the diverse narrative heterocosms we encounter in play, dreams, fiction, and so on. However, it is believed that these are marginal realms of significance within a primary or essential world:

> Compared to the reality of everyday life, other realities appear as finite provinces of meaning, enclaves within the paramount reality marked by circumscribed meanings and modes of experience. The paramount reality envelops them on all sides, as it were, and consciousness always returns to the paramount reality as from an excursion. (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 24)

Cohen and Taylor (1978) note that our age is characterised by a degree of ontological pluralism unprecedented in human history. The result is a fragmentation of interests that leaves us shuttling between different realities and times, or, in their words, we live as "split personalities in which the private life is disturbed by the promise of escape routes to another reality" (Cohen and Taylor 1978, 139). In 1980, Deleuze and Guattari proposed the concept of 'planes of existence' to represent the interaction of material, social, cultural, and capital realities that is often insufficiently considered. According to McHale, much of postmodern literature is a response to our inability to cope with such a complex world, and pastiche (Jameson 1998) is a way for authors to play with the interaction between reality and fiction, understanding the latter as an

extension of reality. In their stories, they often borrow content and techniques from different media, which can lead to a humorous or fantastical effect reflecting how many postmodern authors view human existence in general. This principle is crucial to understanding the writing style in *The Accidental*.

2. Fragmented timeline and variable multiple focus

The first two-thirds of the novel are devoted to Eve and Michael Smart's stay in Norfolk with their two children, the eldest Magnus and twelve-year-old daughter Astrid, whom Eve has from a previous marriage to Adam Berenski. At the beginning, the four protagonists are in the midst of a personal crisis that threatens to worsen. Astrid suffers from bullying and the separation of her birth parents; Magnus contemplates suicide after making a pornographic photomontage that drove Catherine Masson, a student at his school, to suicide; Michael is a university professor who has relationships with his students; finally, Eve is romantically dissatisfied and leads an essentially unhappy life that hinders her ability to write. Amber, a mysterious woman in her thirties who is admitted to their home under the pretext that her car has broken down, resolves the crisis by cunningly winning their love and trust, and finally steals the keys she uses to break into their city apartment. Her stay there turns the family's (un)happiness upside down. Interestingly, her arrival is an accident[1] that helps resolve their internal crisis.

The story of each character can be divided into three phases: psychological collapse, atonement or redemption, and rebirth. This tripartite structure is reflected in the chapters titled 'The Beginning,' 'The Middle,' and 'The End,' each of which contains four subchapters dealing with a particular character. The novel is written using the technique of stream of consciousness, with events described from the point of view of the characters as they experience them. This technique is taken to its extreme, for there is no hint of anything outside the protagonists' sphere of perception, cognition, or psychology. The narrative only reflects what a character perceives, hears, or does. Thus, there is no clearly defined narrator, but a narrative consciousness that adheres to the

[1] The term 'accidental' is also used in the musical field to describe the alterations of flats and sharps.

characters' perceptions and captures them directly, just as an optical device, such as a video camera, would. A character's internal activity is integrated into the writing so that it becomes narration as the action unfolds. However, this method is problematic in that it is impossible to know when the narrator's voice will shift from the character's perspective to considerations the narrator deems appropriate, perhaps to clarify an underlying state of mind. It is as if the narrator's voice is echoing in the background: it seems to be heard now and then, perhaps overlapping a character's voice, and then it disappears.

One aspect to which the author gives particular prominence from the outset is the contrast between inner life and chronological time. Data is arranged into a web whose nodes can be traversed chronologically or according to emotional priority. It is common for direct speech to be woven into a character's thoughts and perceptions, so that direct and indirect speech are united seamlessly into a continuity of distant moments. When Michael recalls Amber's words a few hours earlier after letting her in the house, Eve suddenly speaks something in the present while he is still thinking about Amber:

> She had rung the doorbell this morning. He had opened the door and she'd walked in. Sorry I'm late, she'd said. I'm Amber. Car broke down.
> Dessert, is there any? Eve was saying now, passing through the room. (Smith 2012, 63)[2]

These two direct speeches, which differ both in the speaker and the time period in which they were delivered, are connected in such a way that the reader becomes confused and must continue reading in order to understand what is happening. It is through the conflation of chronology and consciousness that Smith is able to explore memory in an infinite number of possible associations.

As already noted, each section is divided into four parts which tell the story from the perspective of a different character.[3] The plot is not linear, but it unfolds through the integration of information recorded by separate streams of consciousness. A number of the events repeat themselves as the characters change, and the only way to obtain a complete picture is to compare contrasting perspectives. It is necessary to organise the fragments scattered

[2] The version consulted for the references included in this article is the one available in the Google Play Store.
[3] They are also preceded by an introductory monologue by Amber herself.

throughout the various streams of consciousness and start a twofold reconstruction process: first, to develop a psychological profile of the characters by following their inner conflicts; second, to sequence the events that make up their story. When we begin a chapter, we are engulfed in the thoughts and feelings of the corresponding character. In order to reconstruct the narrative context, it is expedient to pay close attention to the details that emerge over time, forming hypotheses that are supported by either the character's development, or by switching to a new perspective. Pieces of information come together like a mosaic, converging into a coherent whole. The incompleteness of the context can sometimes make it difficult to assign them a specific location right away, at least until more information is available and another piece of the puzzle can be added.

The plot takes shape and expands as they are put together, encroaching on new external spaces and proposing new ones. In this phase, two timelines are woven together: one diachronic or transversal, in relation to the chronology of events; as for the other, it is synchronous or longitudinal in that the hands of the clock are reversed when passing from one individual to another, allowing us to revisit a period of time that has already happened. In place of a linear progression, the narrative follows a fractal structure that unfolds according to a divided or fragmented timeline. The alternation of perspectives is reminiscent of Genette's (1986) distinction between multiple and variable focus, and in fact represents a combination of both, with alternating views of the same event presented by different characters. This recalls Malcolm Bradbury's appreciation of Doris Lessing's prose in that "the aim of… fracturing is both to mime the breakdown in contemporary experience and create a new reality out of it" (Bradbury 1993, 362).

3. Pushing writing to its limits: transworld identity and porousness of ontological boundaries

Each chapter begins in the middle of a sentence whose lexical gap can be filled by the headings 'The Beginning', 'The Middle', and 'The End', that serve as a graphic anticipation of the actual chapters to follow. This is a 'dislocated' structure in which the title of each chapter refers directly to its content, as if they were part of the same sentence. In this way, the author denies the

existence of a chronological or linguistic beginning of the text. A flow of thought has already begun outside the text, a flow not necessarily connected to the 'same' story. Similarly, each chapter ends without a full stop. In lieu of stopping, the text seems to visually convey the idea of disappearing into the void of the page where the eye can no longer follow. Meta-literary devices such as the explicit absence of real beginnings and endings are used to explode the frame of reference in which the whole is supposed to be contained. Just as the chapters seem to be in the middle of their development without a definitive beginning, so too does narration not end but dissolves, as in a cinematic fade-out that leaves its subject to turn to another. A closer look reveals that the initial state of the protagonists could have been the final one and actually led to the abyss, as in the case of Magnus, for example, if he had been successful with his suicide attempt. In a similar vein, one could argue that the middle or even the last section can be seen as the beginning of a new cycle. In a psychological and structural sense, the novel explores the contrast between beginning and end, old and new, before and after, and its implications for everything in between.

Smith challenges the notion of limits or boundaries, not only from the perspective of time, but also in their ontological status as tools that enable the mind to organise space and time into objects of vision and thought, as Henri Bergson (1920, 1946, 1988) taught us. The novel opens with Astrid wondering when things begin in time, stating that it can be determined either by a recognizable event or by the conventional scanning of the clock. This is certainly a characteristic of Postmodernism, a movement that has historically been defiant of the concepts of origin and conclusion (Sheehan 2004). *The Accidental* draws on Derrida's concept of the "aphoristic energy" (Derrida 2008, 217) of writing to demonstrate that a book does not end with the last page, nor does one part of it necessarily stop to give way to the next. In Sheehan's words, writing "is not so much a process of completion, then, as a complex manoeuvring between ending and renewal" (Sheehan 2004, 21).

The idea of challenging the limits of writing in its broadest sense opens a third temporal dimension as the process of narrative reconstruction starts to incorporate all the elements of other media, including film, television, and music. Several TV shows, films, songs, commercials, music videos, and websites cited by the characters are not merely extratextual references, but

rather provide evidence of actual contamination between different worlds and time periods. Amber's recollection of her birth circumstances provides us with the first important clue. Amber recalls that she was born in a cinema in 1968. As her mother watched *Poor Cow* (1967), Ken Loach's first film, the sight of Terence Stamp, an actor she adored, caused her to leave her seat and have a sexual encounter with an unspecified person in the theatre, perhaps an employee or even the owner. However, her father's identity remains unknown and is even attributed to Terence Stamp, whose sight is said to have ignited her mother's passion. Her biological father is basically a tool that:

> […] slipped and grunted into her, presenting her with literally millions of possibilities, of which she chose only one.
> Hello.
> I am Alhambra, named for the place of my conception.
> Believe me. Everything is meant.
> From my mother: grace under pressure; the uses of mystery; how to get what I want. From my father: how to disappear, how to not exist. (Smith 2012, 8)

Amber is fathered by both the fictional character with whom her mother has an affair and whose genetic inheritance opens up literally millions of possibilities for her, as well as by the real-life actor who stars in a Loach film and captures her imagination. By combining biological and artistic fecundity, this dual paternity might intend to emphasise the generative potential of the contamination between historical and fictional realities. Although this led to the creation of Amber, the implicit meaning is that the real and the imagined are mutually dependent, and that much of what happens in historical reality is the result or consequence of what occurs in the imaginary. As soon as such contamination has been recognized, it is evident that seemingly insignificant references and details provide clues to the emergence of at least one alternative plot, spanning the various temporalities of the imaginary worlds to which they refer. Cinema is undoubtedly the most significant of these. By referring to 1968 and Terence Stamp, we may draw an analogy between the figure of Amber as an unknown visitor and the anonymous protagonist of Pasolini's 1968 film *Teorema*[4]. It is the story of a 25-year-old stranger who approaches the family of a

[4] The film would later become a novel by the same name. Smith herself admitted in a 2019 interview with RaiCultura that the character of Amber was inspired by the biblical figure of the

wealthy industrialist in Milan, which consists of a wife, son, daughter, and maid, and engages in erotic relations with each of them. At the end of the film, we are left with an in-depth understanding of the deeply hypocritical nature of the upper middle class, as the lives of each of them are turned completely upside down.

By connecting Amber to *Teorema*, it becomes evident that she shares a common identity with Pasolini's nameless visitor. In *Lector in fabula* (1979), Umberto Eco points out that two characters may not be identical by virtue of having a one-to-one correspondence or possessing similar names or appearances. The issue is whether the two figures differ in accidental or essential features. While they are two quite 'different' characters, namely a man in Pasolini's movie and a woman in Smith's novel, on Umberto Eco's terms we can still speak of the same character, in the sense of a 'retour de personnage,' since Amber plays the role of a visitor who inserts herself into a family nucleus, with unsettling consequences for those who constitute it. In Eco, this kind of identity is a "variante potenziale" (1979, 95) literally a potential variant, while Brian McHale describes it as a "transworld identity" (1987, 17). Based on the examples above, the novel assumes that its linguistic, temporal, and spatial boundaries are permeable, which means that if elements from other texts and media can enter, so can the characters themselves. Over the course of the novel, several metaliterary contaminations raise the suspicion that there is more going on than appears on the surface, and that it is necessary to draw on stories outside the text in order to understand what is happening. I will provide two examples to illustrate this issue.

Astrid witnesses the video of A-HA's song *Take on Me* on television at some point. The video shows a girl falling in love with the main character of a comic strip she is reading, who "becomes part of the story. The boy from the strip cartoon winks at her, then he holds out his hand, right out of the picture into her world and she takes it in her real hand and goes inside the cartoon world and becomes an illustration like him" (Smith 2012, 30). Both of them are able to escape the cartoon world at the end of the video, and he becomes a real person just like her. There is a clear message here: ontological boundaries can

needy wanderer and Pasolini's film: https://www.raicultura.it/letteratura/articoli/2019/09/Ali-Smith-Voci-fuori-campo-2cb84a53-09d1-48dc-8dff-280b90b5e6b8.html. In this regard, it is noteworthy that in the novel there is also a reference to the staging of the Medea myth, from which Pasolini also made a film in 1969, just one year after shooting *Teorema*.

be crossed, and characters can move from one world to another, as Amber did, and then influence or create new ones. Upon Amber disappearing from the family's lives, prompting Astrid to remark that "it was as if Amber had deleted herself, or was never there in the first place and Astrid had just imagined it" (ibid., 208), Michael watches Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes* (1938) with the children, a film that further illuminates Amber's character and the novel's overall plot.

It is interesting to note that, as Rossella Ciocca (2009) points out, contamination might even affect the writing process, as it can reshape how different media and language work together. In the passage describing Amber's mother and father's mating, a technique that clearly resembles cinema is employed:

> She stepped out of her shoes. She unbuttoned her coat. Behind the till the half-submerged oranges in the orange juice machine went round and round on their spikes; the dregs at the bottom of the tank rose and settled, rose and settled. The chairs on the tables stuck their legs into the air; the scatters of cake crumbs underneath waited passive in the carpet for the vacuum cleaner nozzle. (Smith 2012, 8)

The writing seems to resemble the lens of a camera which, after showing Amber's mother undressing, focuses on the objects in the foreground. In an indirect way, their description conveys the scene of mating, which remains out of focus in the background, suggesting that there is an association between the preparatory fumbling and the turning of the oranges or the rise and fall of the dregs; the immobility of the chairs on the table with legs raised suggests that she is lying and waiting, just as the cake crumbs are waiting for the vacuum cleaner nozzle, which is clearly a phallic image. This method mimics a camera lens that shifts its focus from the couple to the objects in the foreground, whose features are anthropomorphised, so Smith can continue talking about the intercourse.

The author takes advantage of the permeability of the ontological boundaries of narration and the possibility of contamination with elements from other media. According to McHale, "if entities can migrate across the semi-permeable membrane that divides a fictional world from the real, they can also migrate between two different fictional worlds" (1987, 36). As a transworld identity, Amber is able to breach the intertextual boundaries between different

fictional worlds, thereby creating "ontological knots" (McHale 1987, 18) in the intertextual fabric that constructs the heterotopian world of *The Accidental* (Foucault 2008). Amber is a character created under the influence of cinema. Not only can she move freely in the fictional world of the novel and leave it at will, but she can also draw information from historical reality and other fictional worlds. By moving between different media, Amber becomes a nomadic subjectivity that exists in a multitude of universes. Consequently, she cannot be defined, identified, or assigned to a particular time or place. Her time frame is different from that of the other characters. Her experience is both anchored in the diegesis and external to it. She is able to recognize the characters' internal perceptions as meta-referential objects, reminiscent of the second part of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1615), in which the protagonists encounter characters they have already met while reading the first part of their journey.

4. Tangled chronology

Though she appears to move in lockstep with the other characters, Amber is an allochronic figure. She belongs to both extradiegetic and narrative temporalities. Thus, the most relevant question regarding Amber is not "Who is Amber?" but "When is Amber?" She introduces extradiegetic motivations and knowledge that belong to different timelines and that the reader may never recognise or understand in their entirety. Pavel's notion of "ontological landscape" (1981, 154) can be applied to the coexistence and interaction between entities at different ontological levels, in which case, the novel becomes an exploration of the unprecedented diversity of the contemporary ontological landscape. Since Amber is not 'locked' into the timeline of the story, she can participate in its unfolding, coexist with it, and influence the rhythm and pace of the story. Echoing Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth's words about Postmodernism, time in *The Accidental* is "coextensive with the event […] the neutral, homogenized temporality of realism has largely disappeared [in favour of] (historical) time [understood] as itself a phenomenon" (1992, 22).

The following quotation portrays Amber entering Astrid's cognitive space with chronometric timing, thereby establishing a relationship between her and the person entering Astrid's imaginary room. Reading this passage in retrospect,

it appears as if Amber knows in advance what each character is thinking and what is going to happen, as if she can peek inside their heads:

> A living room, ha ha. Imagine if you were in the room, the living room ha ha ha, and you didn't expect it to be alive and you went to sit down on a chair and the chair said get off! don't sit on me! or it moved so you couldn't sit on it. Or if walls had eyes and could speak i.e. you could come into a room and ask it what had happened in it while you were in another room and it could tell you exactly ...
> Hello, someone says.
> Hello, Astrid says back. (Smith 2012, 33)

On another occasion, Amber brings up the very incident that Astrid is concerned about at the Curry Palace, even though she has just met Astrid. When the latter recalls seeing Amber with binoculars on the roof of her car - a detail that suggests Amber had already studied the family before meeting them - Amber accidentally replies, "Because listen. If you tell anybody at all, the person says, I'll kill you. I mean it. I will" (ibid., 38). It seems that she is responding directly to what Astrid has just thought, but because of the structure of the narrative, it may simply be a casual development of Amber's argument that Astrid does not notice because she is too absorbed in her own thoughts. Amber was clearly talking about something else, but her statement comes across casually as a threat to what Astrid was thinking, as if she possessed telepathic abilities. Likewise, when Amber goes to the bathroom just as Magnus is about to commit suicide, thus preventing him from doing so, it seems like nothing more than a stroke of luck; or when she drops from an overpass the video camera that Astrid uses to obsessively record everything, allowing her to re-establish a more positive relationship with her parents and classmates; or when her inexplicable coldness triggers Michael's crisis of masculinity, which eventually leads him to seek more solid affection than sexual adventures with his students. Similarly, we should interpret the fascination Amber can so naturally exert on every member of the family, the almost magical dexterity with which she brings about a change in their personality, the astonishing accuracy of her prophecies, the brutal sincerity with which she plays with characters as if she already knew she wasn't taking any risks with her words, as a remarkable coincidence, or whether she possesses an unusually high level of culture for a young petty thief.

A unique combination of Blanchot's (1969) 'voix narratrice' and 'voix narrative', Amber is the narration itself that also takes on the role of a character. Or rather, by pretending to be accidentally 'only' a character, she can intentionally create or contribute to the narration, participate in the story while telling it. In a way, she carries the story out. Amber's irresolvable ambiguity, her unique ability to combine good and evil in her actions, is the result of her transworld identity, as she has access to information and knowledge that no other character possesses. Therefore, Amber is able to purposefully intrude on the Smarts' home to save the family members, disguising her action as unintentional. Amber never admits to having philanthropic intentions. Based on the purely empirical development of events, her 'true' motivation for getting into the house is to steal the keys to their city flat, which she breaks into while the family is still on vacation. As we begin to piece together the clues from outside the plot of the novel, we can see that Amber's actions are based on extradiegetic knowledge. The author makes it seem 'as if' the effects of Amber's actions are accidental, when in fact they are intentional. Even though this alternative plot is not explicitly endorsed in the novel, it is the result of an alternative reconstruction process. Smith's talent is to deny one interpretation sufficient support that it can prevail over another. This novel exhibits an amphibious quality in that it can fluctuate between truth and verisimilitude. In reading it, we learn that this interpretation is valid, and we can even feel it internally, but we must limit ourselves to stating it only as a theorem or hypothesis. However, even if a strictly rational interpretation were to be adopted, the basis of the novel is enlivened with a fantastical effect that gives both the characters and the readers the sense that they are confronted with circumstances that appear logical and realistic, but that are also filled with meanings beyond our ability to demonstrate or comprehend.

Amber's transworld identity can be determined by examining the unique relationship between language and time. Once the process of reconstruction is initiated, it becomes apparent that what appeared to be a divided or fractured chronology is further complicated by the need to account for the influence of extradiegetic content as well. The narrative is imbued with the reflexivity and self-consciousness of Postmodernism, while at the same time attempting to overcome the apparent resignation to the meaninglessness of existence. The chaotic or seemingly confusing arrangement of narrative elements is meant to

remind us of the importance of stories beyond the narrative as opposed to simply arranging events chronologically. Like some works by Jeannette Winterson, Salman Rushdie, and Margaret Atwood, this novel does not follow a single chronological timeline, but rather explores a range of temporalities through the reflections that broken pieces of a mirror cast back in on themselves. It is likely that Fredric Jameson[5] would have described this as a tangled chronology, since the story is woven from multiple timelines that unpredictably converge within the linearity of language. In this way, narration undermines the notion that time is a linear axis of successive events connected by causes and effects, since we cannot determine Amber's exact motivation, why she makes the choices she does or why she wants to effect certain changes in the characters. The unexpected visit is a recurring theme in Smith's work (Monica Germanà and Emily Horton 2013)[6]. Visitors are depicted in several of her short stories and novels, as well as strange, ghostly disturbances. Therefore, Eve's decision to follow in Amber's footsteps and travel the world at the end of the novel makes her a possible successor of future novels by the author, or even a potential thematic precursor anticipating Amber's birth through a paradoxical temporal circularity, as her name, Eve, suggests.

As a result of the transgression of ontological boundaries, interlocutors involved in the author's communication circuit face an additional challenge. For example, consider what happens after Amber tells Eve about her life: "Gently she stubbed her cigarette out in the grass. She looked up, looked Eve right in the eye. Well? She said? Do *you* believe me?" (Smith 2012, 101, emphasis mine). Once Amber is accepted as a transworld identity that can intersect with the narrator's consciousness, and as the ontological boundaries between reality and the worlds of imagination dissolve, Amber's remarks can be addressed to both a character and the reader. Perhaps there is not one, but a multiplicity of 'yous' in Amber's story: in this instance, both Eve and the reader are faced with the question of whether to believe Amber's account of her life.

[5] See especially Jameson 1962, 1981, 1987.
[6] As in *Hotel World* (Smith 2001), *There but for the* (Smith 2011), and *Winter* (Smith 2017).

5. Conclusions: writing and contemporary experience

The Accidental is a nonlinear and multivalent writing of doubting. Its language dissolves historical time, understood as a stringing together of the present, the past, and the future in a "controlled pattern of signification" (Ermarth 1992, 25). Historical temporality in narrative tends to be omniscient, a "power of the past tense" (Ermarth 2011, 24), as Ermarth describes it, which implies that causal relationships can potentially always be deduced, elucidated and corrected. In contrast, *The Accidental* challenges the very construction of language, its subjects, objects, and motivations: who does what, when, and why. As a transworld identity capable of inhabiting different time periods, Amber participates in writing as an 'open' process. In the novel, neither the past is seen as 'one' having a necessary causal connection to the present, nor is it enough to sequence past events in a chronological, explicative order. Looking at the language used in the novel is like gazing into a shattered mirror that reflects back to us our fragmented image in the contemporary world, as subjects scattered in alternative, often self-contained realities, be they ideological, literary, or digital, each vying for our attention and orienting us to their particular features, memories, or times. This style of narrative employs a language that Ermarth describes as rhythmic. It abandons the notion of transcendent and teleological unity of consciousness inserted into historical time in favour of a different kind of consciousness. It adheres to a credo distilled in Julio Cortázar's *Hopscotch*: "I swing, therefore I am" (2020, 54): swinging from uncertainty to conviction, from chance to intention, from within to without, or from one imagined reality to another.

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