Symmetric and Asymmetric Relations, and the Aesthetics of Form in Poetic Language

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When linguists work on literature, we look at the formal characteristics of texts, and in particular explore the relation between literary language and ordinary language, which is characterized both by difference (literary language is not the same as ordinary) and by dependence (almost all aspects of literary language are dependent on some characteristic of ordinary language). This can be pursued autonomously, independent of more general concerns of literary scholars, but a more ambitious goal is to explore how the difference/dependence relations between literary and ordinary language relate to the fact that literary texts are 'aesthetic', experienced in particular ways. In this article, I ask how a feature (or pair of features, symmetry and asymmetry) which is associated with aesthetic objects is particularly enabled by literary language. In other current work I separately consider complexity (Fabb 2008b) and surprise (Fabb 2010) as characteristics of texts which may relate to the specific characteristics of literary language. In the present paper I ask how the properties of symmetry and asymmetry, as aesthetic properties, are realized in literary language. I will argue that language makes available many kinds of asymmetry, and that the asymmetry often holds between two elements which are at the same time in a symmetric relation. This coincidence of an asymmetric and a symmetric relation between the same linguistic elements may be one source of the aesthetics of literary language.

The projection of the principle of equivalence

> But wild Ambition loves to slide, not stand,
> And Fortune's ice prefers to Virtue's land.

This extract from Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel* manifests five of the common kinds of poetic form: it is in lines, the lines are metrical, it has rhyme, alliteration, and

parallelism. But why does poetry have poetic form? I look for one answer to this question by returning to Roman Jakobson's foundational article in literary linguistics (Jakobson 1960), and rework his suggestions about equivalence, selection and combination, to propose that poetry organizes elements of language into relations which are simultaneously symmetric and asymmetric, and that this is experienced in a specific aesthetic way.

Jakobson's account of poetic language starts from an account of language which operates by two procedures: selection and combination. A slot appears into which any member of a set of words (or other elements) might be inserted; a word is chosen, and a new slot appears after that word into which a new member is inserted. In this way, each word is combined with the next word to make up the sequence of the sentence. For each slot, a particular set of words exists; a word is selected from that set. The words which make up the set are equivalent in the sense that any of them could be chosen at that point, and furthermore they usually share subcomponent parts (they are all nouns, or they have related meanings, etc.). A set of such words might for example be the set of equivalent words [child, kid, youngster...], and one word 'child' might be selected from that set and combined with a preceding word 'the' and a following 'plays' (each of which is chosen from its own equivalence set). In ordinary language, the relations of equivalence (holding between the items in the set, only one of which is chosen) and the relation of combination (holding between the items chosen from distinct sets) are distinct from one another, with no expectation that there will be any interaction between equivalence and combination. But Jakobson argues that "[t]he poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection to the axis of combination" (1960: 358). In poetry (language in which the poetic function is

dominant) we expect to choose one item from a set, and then shortly afterwards choose another item from the same set, so that we would say first 'child' and then shortly after 'kid'.

Equivalence can be seen as a pre-existing relation between items, so that the sets exist in advance of composition: for example, 'land' and 'stand' are equivalent independently of any text in the sense that as a structural fact they end in the same sequence of sounds. But also (and this seems to be more Jakobson's intention) equivalence is 'emergent', something we seek out in poetic texts, so that we interpret items which have been combined as actually equivalent: in Dryden's text, we interpret 'land' and 'ice' as equivalent (i.e., as belonging to a set of related words, here as antonyms) because we expect to find equivalence in poetry.

Symmetric and asymmetric relations

I propose to replace Jakobson's notion of 'equivalence' between items with the notion that they are in a 'symmetric relation'. The relation that A has to B is symmetric if B has the same relation to A. Thus instead of saying that the words 'kid' and 'child' are equivalent, we could instead say that they have a symmetric relation: the relation of 'kid' to 'child' is the same as the relation of 'child' to 'kid'. But one word always precedes another in a text. The relation of precedence (i.e., on the axis of combination) is an asymmetric relation; in an asymmetric relation, if A has a certain relation to B then B does not have the same relation to A. In the quoted text, 'stand' precedes 'land' but 'land' does not precede 'stand'.

In a poetic text, items which are in a symmetric relation are also in a relation of precedence, one preceding another. This is Jakobson's projection of equivalence into the 'axis of combination'. So, the axis of selection is characterized by symmetric relations and the axis of combination by asymmetric relations, and *in poetic texts, the same elements are simultaneously both in a symmetric relation and in an asymmetric relation*. Each kind of poetic form combines symmetry and asymmetry: the relation of rhyme which holds between 'stand' and 'land' (in the quoted text) is on the one hand a symmetric relation of 'ending in the same sounds', and is on the other hand an asymmetric relation of 'precedence'. Other kinds of poetic form combine asymmetry and symmetry in the same way. For example the relation of parallelism holds between 'ice' and 'land'; this is both a symmetric relation of 'having a similar meaning to' and an asymmetric relation of 'precedence'. Alliteration, isometricality, lineation: all these kinds of form can also be understood as combining symmetry and asymmetry. The symmetry which the various kinds of poetic form share is a kind of resemblance, while the shared asymmetry is precedence.

Rhyme and the other poetic forms are all symmetric relations, but they are inseparably also asymmetric relations because they all involve precedence. This is another way of thinking about the central aspect of poetic language which Jakobson identifies: it increases and so complicates the relations between the parts of the language. Jakobson says that the projection of equivalence draws the reader's attention to the text's materiality (in his terms, an *Einstellung* towards the message, a particular way in which the reader positions him/herself with respect to the text). I suggest an alternative way of deriving aesthetic experience from poetic form: the mental representation of two verbal elements as simultaneously in a symmetric and an asymmetric relation correlates with a specific type of experience, which we call 'aesthetic'. That is, the mental representation of a certain kind of irresolvable contradiction (or the orientation of the reader to seek out such a contradiction) stimulates aesthetic experience. If applied to Dryden's lines, my claim is specifically that by writing 'slide' and 'stand' into the text, a pair of words exists which are both in a symmetric (parallel) and an asymmetric (sequence) relation. The reader mentally represents this pair of words as being both in a symmetric and an asymmetric relation, and this is experienced as aesthetic. Perhaps this arises in the context of many such relations; in poetry, there are many simultaneously symmetric/asymmetric relations which hold between many pairs of words in the text; perhaps the text's aesthetic comes from this mass of contradictions, not from any individual contradiction. Some of the other such relations

here include simultaneously symmetric/ asymmetric relations between [slide, stand] (alliteration), [fortune's, prefers, virtues] (alliteration), [fortune, virtue] (parallelism), [loves, prefers] (parallelism), [stand, land] (rhyme). Note that in some cases, the same pair of words is in several distinct symmetric/ asymmetric relations, which may further contribute to the mass demonstration of symmetry/asymmetry.

Jakobson suggested that the various kinds of poetic form project 'the principle of equivalence' into the linguistic sequence. I have reinterpreted this by saying that the various kinds of poetic form combine two incompatible types of relation: a symmetric relation combined with an asymmetric relation. One consequence of this is to produce 'contradiction' as an inescapable part of poetic form, though this is not part of Jakobson's original formulation. A second consequence leads into the remainder of this paper, where I argue for other kinds of symmetric-asymmetric combinations in poetic language.

Form as 'relation between' and form as 'structure of'

The word 'form' has many meanings. All the kinds of form I have considered so far are relations between two overt textual elements, and are transitive, extendable to more than two elements. However, many aspects of linguistic form, and some kinds of form which are specific to poetry, such as 'being a line' and 'being metrical', are better understood as structures which hold of part of the text (rather than relations between two parts of the text). For example, lineation can be thought of as relational (a text is in lines only if it is in a sequence of lines), but being a line is also a characteristic of a specific section of text. In this sense 'being a line' is the *structure of* something, such as the sequence of words 'But wild Ambition loves to slide, not stand'. Similarly 'being in iambic pentameter' is the metrical structure of each line of Dryden's text. Many kinds of linguistic form are structures in this sense: 'Ambition' is a noun, and 'wild Ambition' is a noun phrase; 'am' is a syllable; 'p' is a bilabial voiceless plosive, and so on. These are 'structures of'

elements of the text and not 'relations between' elements of the text.

The difference between form as 'structure of' and form as 'relation between' correlates to some extent with the distinction I make in Fabb (2002) between generated form and communicated form. 'Generated form' is form which is built-in to the linguistic system (e.g., the fact that a word is a noun, or that a sound is a plosive), or is produced by deterministic rules such as the rules of syntax, phonology or (possibly) metrics. Generated form is covert, determinate, and must be discovered by analysis (driven by theoretical considerations). In contrast, communicated form is a (self)- description of a text, implied by the text, and derived by interpretation. It is overt, because we recognize it explicitly and often name it. It is indeterminate in that we can disagree about its presence (is this a sonnet or isn't it?). And this kind of form is derived by general principles of inference, in the context of overt knowledge of literature, which is why it can be called communicated form.

Most kinds of poetic relation are 'commun- icated form', in the sense that we decide that the form holds of the text rather than this being a determinate fact about the text. For example, in the second line of Dryden's text, the words 'fortune's' and 'virtue's' begin with sounds which, systemically, share certain sub- component parts (as a structural fact): [f] and [v] are both labiodental and both fricative (they differ only in voicing), and this is an aspect of their generated form, a determinate covert fact about the elements. On the other hand, the deci- sion that the two sounds alliterate and hence are in a specific symmetric relation is an inter- pretation of the text, and hence a kind of com- municated form, contextually strengthened by the fact of another alliteration on [f] in this line, in the syllable of the word 'prefers', and by the alliteration in the previous line. Thus on the one hand the phonetic identity of the sounds is a fact about the text's form irrespective of whether we recognize this, but on the other hand the alliteration between the sounds is something the text tells us about itself, which we can decide to accept as legitimate (or not). This alignment of poetic form with communicated form follows

the general direction of Jakobson's argument: that form based on equivalence is discovered in poetic texts because we are looking for it (i.e., the text communicates it to us), rather than existing prior to the text as a systemic (generated) characteristic of the language.

The component parts of a linguistic structure are related to one another; for example the subject is related to the verb in a sentence structure. Syntactic structures are characterised by asymmetric relations between the parts, in almost all respects. For example the various relations between a verb and its subject are asymmetric because the subject is higher in the structure than the verb, and also because the verb takes the subject as its argument. Most relations within a sentence are asymmetric, but there are some relations which appear not to be asymmetric. One potential example of symmetry in syntax might be conjunction: in the conjunction 'John and Mary', each item is conjoined to the other, which is a symmetric relation (though Kayne (1994: 57) and others have argued that conjunction is in fact asymmetric).

Another, and for our purposes more relevant, example of a symmetric relation between parts of a sentence is concatenation, of the kind that we see in elements in a list (and possibly also parentheticals, interruptions, and so on). Though elements which are concatenated are part of the same sentence, they have no syntactic relation to one another, or to the larger sentence which contains them. Concatenation is a non-linguistic process, even when linguistic items such as words are the items which are concatenated. It is of particular interest that in poetry, there is a tendency towards concate-nation as a combinatorial practice: that is, poems often partially resemble lists. The greater amount of concatenation makes the poem structurally more symmetrical than ordinary texts, and correspondingly the weakening of syntactic relations between the parts of the poem deprives the poem of some of the asymmetry which is otherwise very pervasive in ordinary language.

If we now return to the asymmetries in a syntactic structure, those between for example a verb and subject, or verb and object, or modifier and modified element, we might note that these asymmetries do not appear to combine in any significant way with the symmetries of poetic form. Here apparently there is little to say about any aesthetic 'contradiction' between the asymmetry of language and the symmetry of form. There are two reasons for this. The first is that some kinds of poetic form, such as the kind of rhyme we see in Dryden's text, hold between any two words and there is neither a requirement nor a prohibition on the two words being linguistically related: for example, it seems that rules for rhyme never stipulate that two words must be in the same sentence. The second reason is that other kinds of poetic form, such as lexical and syntactic parallelism, actually work by discouraging hierarchical asymmetry. Verse itself first does this by replacing fully syntactic relations with either conjunction or just concatenation (listing, juxtaposition). Then the poetic forms produce symmetries between elements inside these concatenated elements, in effect extending the symmetry. Thus, in the Dryden lines, 'slide' and 'stand' are related in meaning as words, and embedded in larger structures which have similar syntactic structures and are conjoined.

In fact I will now argue that the general principle of symmetry poetic language to be synthesized by non-linguistic means, so that poetic language may be a copy of ordinary language, and is not a variant of ordinary language. This goes against Jakobson's original intentions.

The (attenuated) linguistic structure of poetic texts

The argument in the present section depends on the standard linguistic-theoretical assumption that ordinary language is generated from a mental database (including a lexicon) by applying rules or conditions or constraints, to produce structured outputs (tree structures), and finally to produce utterances or written texts. Ordinary language is characterized not by its output alone (the set of grammatical sentences) but by how that output is produced. I refer to

this type of text as a 'generated' text. Without this standard assumption, the distinction which I make in this section between poetic language and ordinary language cannot be made. On the other hand, given this standard assumption, I think it is very difficult *not* to make a distinction between poetic language and ordinary language.

In Fabb (2004) and Fabb (2008a), I explored the possibility that the language of at least some literary texts resembles but is not the same as ordinary language. I suggested that in poetic language, the text might be produced by concatenating 'fragments', which might themselves be words or pieces of generated text (recycled) such as phrases or whole sentences. Poetic language thus has some linguistic structure, but is not fully linguistic: it has attenuated linguistic structure, lacking some of the syntactic structure which would be found in ordinary language. The items are concatenated to produce a poetic text which must have certain formal characteristics (such as rhyme or metre). Another important condition on the concatenated text is that even though it is not an ordinary language utterance, it should consist of a sequence of words which resembles a sequence of words which might have been generated as an ordinary language utterance. The resemblance need not be exact: for example, words and phrases might be reordered in the line in ways which are not possible in the syntax. This could be achieved by producing the line by two parallel processes, both of which take as building blocks similar sets of elements (e.g., similar words): the line is produced by concatenation, and (separately) text is produced by generation. The former is licensed as poetic language by its similarity to the latter (ordinary language). The generated ordinary language text is not spoken or written out, but instead, unspoken, serves two purposes. One purpose is to give the line its shape, by making the line mimic the generated text. The second purpose is to give the line its interpretation. When words are combined by syntactic rules, their semantic relations are thereby determined: syntax feeds interpretation. To the extent that items in the line are combined

by non-syntactic concatenation, they have no semantic relation, so the overall interpretation of the line should be much less determinate. But in fact, lines have fairly clear interpretations. To solve this problem, we say that the interpretation of the concatenated line is derived by comparing it with a (fully interpretable) generated sequence of words, which does have an interpretation, and by copying that interpretation.

One significant advantage of this approach is that it explains where lines come from. Lines are found in many poetic traditions, both metrical and non-metrical, oral and literate; in fact lines may be a poetic universal. The oldest written texts are written in lines: Sumerian cuneiform nonmetrical poems have left-justification and indenting of long lines, just like contemporary poetry (Black 1998: 5). But lines present a problem because though they are made from ordinary language, they are not themselves elements of ordinary language (not constituents like sentences or phrases or intonation units), and so cannot be directly generated. Lines can therefore have one of two origins. Either they are formed directly as lines, but by some non-linguistic process; or they are formed as prose by ordinary linguistic processes and then edited into lines by some non-linguistic process. In the approach to poetic composition which I outlined in the previous paragraph, lines are composed directly by a non-linguistic process of concatenation. Recall also that lists and juxtapositions – kinds of concatenation – are in any case common in poetic language.

This might explain why poetic form is rarely sensitive to syntactic structure. Metrical rules refer to word boundaries (in caesura and bridge rules) but not to syntactic phrase or sentence boundaries. Rules of rhyme and alliteration seem to ignore syntactic structure completely. Only parallelism seems to be sensitive to syntactic structure, in the sense that parallelism can hold between phrases or sentence structures, but here too the structures are sometimes reordered or involve ellipses which do not conform to generated syntax, and so parallelism might just be an asyntactic copying of sequences of discrete units (Fabb 1997: 145-8).

In summary, I have suggested that one route by which poetry might be composed is by extra-linguistic means, taking as input linguistic material but concatenating it to produce the line. The process may be shaped by the need to produce an output which resembles an ordinary language output sufficiently to give the text a faked appearance of approximate linguistic normality, and to give it an interpretation. While this may not be the only route by which poetry is produced (perhaps sometimes it *is* edited down from ordinary language rather than produced as a copy), it is not implausible as one possible route. We know that ordinary language can be mimicked by texts which are produced non-linguistically. Avian mimics (such as parrots) can do this; games such as the Surrealists' 'exquisite corpse' produce sentences by nonlinguistic means; when we learn a language, our first sentences are concatenations of words which mimic a sentence of the language. We also know that a common practice in poetic composition is to write in a partially invented language, mixing ordinary language material with archaisms or borrowed terms. Some of the earliest written texts are written in partially artificial languages, including parts of the Gilgamesh story (in a "contrived, nonspoken dialect of the first millennium [BC] which was based on archaic Old Babylonian features": Huehnergard and Woods 2004: 219). And there are familiar examples of this throughout literary history: Spenser, MacDiarmid, Joyce, for example. Poetry draws on language, but is not necessarily composed by linguistic means.

Poetic forms – such as rhyme, or parallelism – introduce symmetric relations into language, which is otherwise pervasively asymmetric, both in the sequence of words, and in the hierarchical relations between syntactic elements. Further, the arguments of the last few paragraphs imply that poetic language may be more symmetrically organized than it at first appears to be, if concatenation (which produces symmetric relations) is one of the fundamental principles by which literary texts are synthesized. To make this concrete, consider the second line of Dryden's text, "And Fortune's ice prefers to Virtue's land". The element 'fortune's ice' is interpreted as the object of 'prefers' but I propose that it is not structurally its object: instead, the two elements have no syntactic relation to each other but are just put one after another (concatenated). The interpretation of one as the object of the other comes when we compare this text with an independently generated (but unspoken or unwritten) text 'and prefers fortune's ice to virtue's land'. In this latter text, 'fortune's ice' is generated as the object of the verb 'prefers'; they have a syntactic relation and an interpretation can thus be produced. The interpretation is now copied over to the concatenated sequence. Thus in Dryden's counterfeit, 'fortune's ice' is interpreted as the object of the verb 'prefers' even though there is no structural basis for this in the text itself.

In this section I have suggested that in poetic language, symmetric relations are demonstrated not only by the various kinds of poetic form, such as rhyme and parallelism, but also by the large amount of concatenation involved in the production of poetic language itself. These symmetric relations hold between elements which are at the same time in the asymmetric relation of precedence.

Metricality

In this section I look at a kind of structure which is specific to poetic language: metricality. Metricality has two faces. In many metrical texts, the metre of one line is the same as the metre of another line, which is either adjacent or in some predictable position (e.g., English quatrains in which odd numbered lines are iambic tetrameter and even lines iambic trimeter). This similarity between metrical lines is an aspect of metricality which we might call 'isometricality'; it is a symmetric relation between lines, and thus participates straightforwardly in the usual contrast of a symmetric relation based on similarity put into an asymmetric relation of precedence.

Metricality is also a kind of structure. 'Being in iambic pentameter' is like 'being a sentence' or 'being a morpheme' in that it is a structural characteristic of the sequence of syllables which form a line of verse. Most accounts of metricality propose a structure which is internally asymmetric. In this section I offer one such

account of poetic metre, based on Fabb and Halle (2008): all of the comments which follow are relative to this theory (there are no theory-independent ways of talking about poetic metre), and most of my examples are discussed in detail in that book, where we suggest that the various different kinds of metre can be understood in the same basic terms. We show this for selected metres of English, French, Spanish (and other Southern Romance metres, in a chapter by Carlos Piera), Greek, Classical and Vedic Sanskrit, Classical and some Verna-cular Arabic, Latvian, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Old English. Metricality is manifested most fundamentally by the fact that a line consists of a certain number of metrical elements (usually syllables), either a fixed number or a limited range of possible numbers. In many metres, a predictable rhythm depends on the counting of syllables: for example, every third syllable is liable to be stressed in an English anapestic line. In some cases the metre controls only a few syllables in the line: in the French *alexandrin*, only the sixth and twelfth syllables are subject to the special requirement that they must be stressed and word final.

Dryden's lines are in the metre called 'iambic pentameter'. Most approaches present a metre as a template or pattern to which the line is matched. Halle and I take a different approach. We think of a metre not as a template but as a set of ordered rules and conditions, which begin with the line of verse and produce from this line a representation of its metrical structure. This is a generative approach to metre (following the tradition of Halle and Keyser 1971). For example, iambic pentameter is a set of rules stated in (1) below, which when applied to the first line of Dryden's text produces from it a representation as in (2).

(1)

(a) Project each syllable as an asterisk on gridline 0.

(b) gridline 0: starting at the Right edge, insert a Right parenthesis, form binary groups, heads Right.

(c) gridline 1: starting at the Right edge, insert a Right parenthesis, form ternary groups, (final binary), heads Right.

(d) gridline 2: starting at the Left edge, insert a Left parenthesis, form binary groups, heads Left.

(2)

But wild Ambition loves to slide, not stand,

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)*  *) *  *)* *)   *  *) *  *)  0
   *     *) *    *        *)  1
        (*              *(  2
        *                   3
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In (2) we see a bracketed grid, a two-dimensional representation of the metrical structure of the line, which has been produced by the rules in (1), which project syllables as asterisks, group them by adding parentheses, and further project until a grid is formed with a single asterisk on the final line. Right parentheses group the asterisks to their left, left parentheses group the asterisks to their right; the counting procedure which fixes the length of the line in essence counts groups. Thus there is one group of two asterisks on gridline 2, two groups of three asterisks (one short, consisting of two) on gridline 1, and hence five asterisks overall on gridline 1, and each of these asterisks projects from group on gridline 0, where the asterisks are in pairs: hence ten asterisks on gridline 0. This method of counting by grouping fixes at ten the syllables of the iambic pentameter line. The syllables are organized by the rules for an iambic metre such that even-numbered syllables are also the syllables which project to gridline 1, and this generates the rhythm of the line if we associate being stressed with projecting to gridline 1. Thus counting and rhythm are associated by the bracketed grid. All lines of metrical verse in all metrical traditions are scanned in the same basic way: one of a large number of possible grids is generated from the line (the grid depends on the rules) and the grid is used to determine the rhythm or other characteristics of the line.

The metrical grid shown above is a model of a mental representation produced by the producer or hearer as part of their judgment that the line is metrical. It is asymmetrical; each

of the groups has one element more prominent than the others, the element called its head which projects to the next gridline. On gridline 0 and 1 the groups are all right-headed, on gridline 2 the group is left-headed. Because the prominent element is always the leftmost or rightmost within its group, the grid inevitably has an asymmetrical shape. Further, every asterisk is always either more or less prominent than at least one of its neighbours, and this produces an asymmetric relation between these pairs of asterisks. Though this is specific to our account of metre, it is true of most accounts of metre that the scansions are divided into two sub-parts which are internally asymmetrical.

There is also another kind of asymmetric relation which is characteristic of the metrical line, which is that the beginning and ends of the lines may have different characteristics, and more generally there are progressively changing characteristics from beginning to end. For example, Kiparsky (1970: 168) describes a generalization for the Finnish *Kalevala* line that "other things being equal, the words of a line are arranged in order of increasing length" (and this generalization holds beyond this text). In English poetry, some words, such as 'evil' can be treated as having one or two metrical syllables; earlier in the line, the word is more likely to be treated as one, and later in the line as two (Fabb 2002: 46, quoting Milton's 'Created evil for evil only good', where the first 'evil' counts as one syllable and the second as two). Similarly, Golston (2009) argues that the two verses comprising the *Beowulf* line are always mutually asymmetric, with the two verses always having different patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables.

Most types of poetic form – rhyme, alliteration, parallelism, versification and isometricality – are symmetric relations (which are put into the asymmetric relation of precedence). I have suggested that poetic form produces an aesthetic effect because it relates two elements both symmetrically and asymmetrically at the same time. Metricality, however, is fundamentally a-symmetric as a structure; it would seem just to be a way of bringing more asymmetry into the already asymmetric relations found in language,

and thus to be doing something rather different from other kinds of form such as rhyme or parallelism. This can be incorporated into the present account of contradictory symmetry/asymmetry by noting that metricality is a characteristic specifically of verse. There is no 'metrical prose': the regular rhythms of poetry are found only when the text is divided into lines (cf. Fabb 2002, chapter 5 on lines). In this, incidentally, language differs from music, where regular rhythms can be continued indefinitely without splitting the musical sequence into sub-sequences analogous to lines.

Metricality is thus introduced into verse, and verse is a kind of text which as we have seen is particularly characterized by symmetric relations. The splitting into lines produces a symmetric relation (between lines), metrical verse is often characterised by rhyme and other types of formal symmetry, and perhaps most significantly in verse the asymmetries of syntax are replaced with symmetric relations of concatenation. Thus, verse is more symmetric in general than language generally is. Perhaps the function of metre is to introduce asymmetry into the symmetries introduced by the other kinds of form. To recapitulate: ordinary language is extensively asymmetric; verse introduces various symmetries into language; metricality reasserts asymmetry. In poetry we see a struggle between symmetry and asymmetry played out between the same textual elements.

Conclusion

Symmetry and, to a slightly lesser extent, asymmetry, are terms often invoked in discussions of aesthetics. In this paper I have emphasized the extent to which verbal art combines symmetry with asymmetry, such that the same words can be both in symmetric and asymmetric relations at the same time. I have proposed that the density of symmetric/asymmetric relations in poetry may be one cognitive foundation on which poetic form produces its aesthetic effect. Though symmetry and asymmetry are found in all the arts, language offers some rather specific kinds of symmetry and asymmetry and some rather specific ways of combining these. Most of the

symmetries which characterize poetic form, in rhyme, alliteration, parallelism, isometricality and versification, depend on the articulated and compositional nature of language. Rhyme is possible because words are made from syllables, which have subcomponent parts (the rhyme targets the nucleus and rime of the syllable), which in turn are made from subcomponent sounds, and sounds in turn are made from component features. A rhyme can hold between two words which share only some of the component features of its final sounds; this is the basis of the symmetric relation between the words. Thus language offers a very rich variety of ways in which elements can be in symmetric relations to one another. On the other hand, most kinds of poetic form exploit another aspect of the articulated nature of language, so that the two elements in a symmetric relation are not identical but only share some subcomponent part: exact repetition is rare (but see Paton 2009). So symmetric relations in language and hence in poetry are very complex, perhaps more complex than symmetric relations in other arts. Language also offers kinds of asymmetry which are more varied than the asymmetry provided by the material base of the other arts. On the one hand, because externalized language is linear it has precedence as a basic asymmetry (shared with music and dance, but not so clearly with photography or painting or sculpture). On the other hand, language is characterized by many kinds of structure, syntactic, phonological, and metrical, which by virtue of how they are cognized are inherently asymmetric in complex ways. Thus verbal art is a particularly rich source of ways in which symmetry can combine with asymmetry.

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The AfterMode

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A story is the simplest way of organizing time, of putting it in (our view of) order, and trying to make it stay, wait, desist from its passage. It is the currency human beings felt they could buy their way out of time with.

It all began with the mural images in the stone-age caves, with incidents that continued to live after the death of the animal, the death of the hunter, the loss of the real moment, and with its prolongation into image, imagination, memory and expectation, prediction. In the beginning, art was born out of the need to save the moment and keep it as experience.

A coin is the abstract equivalent of work stored, used when you need to pay for objects other people have worked on, and which you need. We store in a coin our present work, for the moment in the future when we need to buy something somebody else has made. Stories are the coins, the currency of our imagination. We can use them when we need to buy more than our own present moment.

Art began as memory, and acquired the value of an experience repository. It rescued human life from absolute death, it extrapolated on it, it separated the mind from the body, and took the viewer by the hand, helping him step aside from powerless, unambiguous physicality into the endless ambiguity of thought.

After experience, prediction was one step away, and this is how the *ending* was born. Art is meant to teach us, to make us feel stronger than the beings it depicts, explain to us what to do in order to acquire a future which life has not offered yet, and maybe it never will. A man who stares at an object of art also stares at a record of mortality. He reads about the end of a hero, and feels his world is just beginning. He inevitably wants his world to go on forever. Art gives him that halo of immortality.

Art lives for as long as there are human beings that identify with it. Imagination has made art into a coin we can all save and buy life with. We acquire a hero's life, we learn how to be better than him at living, how to fool death – how to fool ourselves that, since we have the coin, we can buy anything. In short, art is – paradoxically – both a promising and a disappointing currency.

For at least nineteen centuries, in what I shall call here pre-Modernism, this currency which was art came in the wrapping of a common convention: the clear language of narration. When people read (listened to) a story, the language of that story could be understood by the whole community. If the language of Shakespeare, Chaucer or the Bible seems hard to understand today, it is because language itself has changed over the ages, not because it was meant to be ambiguous at first. The **clarity of language** was an incontestable common convention, which no author questioned in older times.

Nineteen centuries of Christian literature (and so many more stories B.C.) used the common convention of clear language. They loaded words with poetry, ambiguity, lyricism, understatement, but never endangered the communication of author-reader, which was a must in pre-Modernism. Reading was a collective experience, ruled by the necessity that the language of the narrative should be understood by readers from all walks of life. The language in which the story was told was not meant to draw attention to itself.

The peak year of Modernism, 1922 (when James Joyce's *Ulysses* and T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* were published), overturned the tables of clarity, of conventional perception of a story's imaginary time and space. Before 1922, it was common knowledge that any trend was a reaction against the previous one. When the Stream of Consciousness came on stage, the reaction was no longer against the immediate predecessor only, but a total defiance of everything that had gone before.

The most obvious (most necessary to the reader, too) convention Joyce and Eliot defied was precisely that of a common clear language.

The Modernist text defined itself as a *stream of consciousness* because it revealed the flowing associations of the mind, because its author felt the mind was a 'stream' which the author's language simply could not clarify and control (as all previous writers claimed to be doing). The term was coined in 1892 by the psychologist William James:

> Consciousness, then, does not appear to itself chopped up in bits. Such words as 'chain' or 'train' do not describe it fitly as it presents itself in the first instance. It is nothing jointed; it flows. A 'river' or a 'stream' are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. In talking of it hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life.

> (William James, *The Stream of Consciousness*, 1892)

Consequently, the author's language no longer expressed a clear meaning, but a simultaneity of verbality and preverbality. The author was now struggling to communicate thoughts before they were put into words. He was working under the sign of a paradox: he was positive he could use words in order to convey something that had not become language yet (emotion, association, thought). To put it more clearly, the word aimed at replacing coherent sentences. Verbal adventures (a psychology of the word, its birth in the hero's mind and its implicit richness of emotion, biography, meaning) became much more important than the explicit (clear) story the word was part of.

That used to be, in pre-Modernism, an ambition usually poets had. Modernists invented the illusion that verbality (their texts) could express preverbality (the meaning of a word before it was born). They all plunged into a psychology of the human mind and soul, and they came out of it after they had forgotten all about plot, ending, chronology, coherent heroes. All they cared about was their fascinating trip into the human mind, and the impossibility of catching it by means of verbality, of verbal clarity.

Their texts (mainly *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*) were formidable challenges to verbality. A word could mean a thousand things at once (what hundreds of other writers had made it mean), and the reader's memory had to undig its history. Starting from the need to convey the psychology of *preverbality* (to describe the palpitating birth of a certain word in the hero's mind), stream-of-consciousness authors drowned in multiple-meaning words, which aimed at becoming an inventory of many authors' texts and minds.

That poetic concentration killed the story, it almost killed the hero (who is usually the outcome of his story, but who, since Modernism, has separated himself from the narrative), and it alienated a reader who claimed his right to his fairy tale, his dream of a nonexistent clear, logical, predictable world, which only literature could offer. The texts written by Joyce, Woolf, Eliot were first and foremost confusing.

The change was so significant (even though only a few writers actually used it) that it has affected us, after-Modernists, to this day. Once we have read and learned to be pleased by Joyce, we are very unlikely to go back to George Eliot without a disabused feeling. No other literary trend before the Stream of Consciousness had bred such disgust for all previous ages.

When Joyce and Eliot engineered the change, they chose lyricism over narration. They encoded language in the same way a poet loads a word with a private, hidden history of *simultaneous meanings*. Privacy is not a major quality language is supposed to flaunt. There is a private language, of course, but, on the whole, when one speaks, one expects to be understood. Language is meant to communicate much more often than it hints, hides, suggests. Modernists chose the dark face of language when they began digging at the roots of the word before it was uttered, when they left verbality for the **exploration of the preverbal**.

Writers before Joyce and Eliot had great respect for their readers. They worshipped the reader's understanding. Henry James did his best to belong to two worlds at once: that of clarity and that of understatement. Following in his footsteps, Joyce and Eliot came when it was almost too late for a clear story, told in clear language. They came at a time which was fed up with clarity and was looking for games, for the pleasure of the puzzle. They were practically forced to shatter convention and defy tradition. Their words became incomprehensible because of too much encoding, too much lyrical

pressure on their value as common coins in plain communication.

Joyce was a declared fan of complexity. His confessed ambition was to concentrate the whole history of the human mind in one word. He attached the name of 'epiphany' to his attempt at globalizing the word. A little before, a little after 1922, ideas flowed in the air. Two more Modernists produced their own names for the same need to find the *mechanism of verbalization*, to see what a word was before that word was born in the mind. T.S. Eliot called it 'objective correlative', while Virginia Woolf talked about a 'luminous halo.'

By epiphany Joyce designated something very similar to Proust's *madeleine* (*À la recherche du temps perdu*). He meant to say that emotion came before the coherent sentence, that the struggle to verbalize it produced totally unexpected, totally private associations (of memories, of worlds, of ages, of the most dissimilar fields, in fact). A word can bring back one's whole childhood in a few letters. Without much narration, without heroes, without time or space. The novelist Joyce, while trying to demonstrate the endless power of a mere word, was also killing it with the imprecision born out of linguistic confusion.

Joyce was only half aware of the consequences of choosing lyricism over story telling. He proudly claimed that in *Ulysses*

> I've put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant and that's the only way of insuring one's immortality.

Almost ninety years later, readers of the 21st century sadly feel that, had another Joyce been born, the novel might have died. Professors have, indeed, been very busy with what could be termed the 'Joyce industry'. Decoding each word in *Ulysses* has taken thousands of pages. The enthusiasm lasted for a while. Small victories were won. Unexpected associations were traced. The most unexpected incidents were brought together in the most masterful and scholarly explanations.

The question arises: was the reader any happier when confronted with this essential text? Did concentration please him more than

straightforward story-telling? Did he enjoy this hybridization of literary genres, which made the novel a melting pot of fiction, poetry, drama, criticism, even history, music, etc? We shall see how after-Modernism reacted, how the AfterMode was born. We know very well that Joyce's contemporaries were of two kinds: the happy and the baffled. The word which might apply to their descendants – once the detective cultural thrill was lost – is 'disabused', to say the least of it.

The same fever of detecting associations is included in Eliot's 'objective correlative', which must express a story within a single word. With Virginia Woolf the stress falls on lyricism, since she sees the text more like a 'luminous halo' (meaning soul, experience, fragments of a story only partly told) than the tale of a hero in itself. The stress falls on emotion, then, not on the incident. The plot is only useful insofar as it generates feeling. The novelists (Joyce and Woolf) long for poetry while writing fiction. The Modernist poet Eliot longs for bits of stories while producing a poem. For the three of them, the key word is *hybridization*, mixing together fiction, poetry and drama in a verbal concentration never attempted before.

The natural question that comes to mind is: was Modernism a beginning or an end? It rejected all linguistic and fictional conventions. It ruined clarity – the major bridge between author and his readers. It made the Word the tyrant of the text. It rewrote the past, creating monstrous 'cultured' hypertexts. Let us not forget that Eliot's overwhelmingly allusive *The Waste Land* was called the 'piece that passeth understanding', the 'hoax' and the 'sacred cow' of the century.

Modernism was an unprecedented denial. In spite of it, Eliot was essentially lyrical, while Henry James, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf would not give up the story for anything in the world. The fact that the novelist and the poet peeped at each other as they went along made the reader's life very hard, though.

Each writer looks for his one and only way, which nobody else has found or will ever find. Originality is not a new expectation. What created the precipice between Modernism and

the previous nineteen centuries (at least) of telling stories is the revelation that the word was relative.

It happened simultaneously with Einstein and Freud. The intuition floated in the air. Einstein came with the idea that what we knew of the universe was unbearably relative. Freud extended the mood of insecurity to the human mind. He plunged into a never-to-be-known subconscious. A hysteria of relativity made Modernists commit the worst sin: that of questioning the use of the word. Once they had used it against communication, for concentration/combination of multiple meanings in one, a bond was broken. The reader had to fight for his mind. The author felt he could only be true to himself if he confused his readers, if he 'communicated before he was understood' (to use Eliot's belief in what poetry was meant to do). At that point in the history of literature, it was each man for himself.

Consequently, the defiance of narrative or poetic conventions was not the bone of contention. It is true, Modernism found out that one could tell the story of a mind instead of the story of a body, but was it really a discovery? We end up understanding the minds of Fielding's or Dickens's heroes, too. True, Joyce and Woolf speak freely about memories, the past, the simultaneous presence of time present and time lost. But were they so far away from the romantic 'recollection in tranquillity'?

The earthquake that made Modernism a new continent was the absurd belief that a writer could mistreat the word and get away with it. That they could claim the word was not meant to communicate, while they expected to be understood in the process. It was not unlike the impossibility of eating your cake and having it.

Once Modernism was safely away, around 1950, the two categories of readers, the happy and the baffled, changed their approach. Those who still liked reading Modernist works turned into literary critics. Criticism of Modernist essential texts is still a splendid source of tests, examinations, conferences. The baffled – meaning those who stuck to the pleasure of reading, after all – moved on.

The AfterMode is a resolute return to capitalized CLARITY. What we read today, the innumerable attempts at telling a story in a 'totally different manner', the desperate individual fights for crumbs of 'originality/ novelty' have this in common: they tell us everything in everyday words. The author is humbly aware once again that language is a means of communication before everything else. After the lyrical hybris in Modernism, today even poets sound cautiously prosaic, and ambiguity – the proud discovery of Modernists – is the least desired presence in a text.

Has literature lost or gained? Modernism abused the mystery of the word to such an extent that authors today feel forced to dissociate themselves from Modernist unpopularity and proclaim the same word's banality. We have come back to the pre-Modernist custom that each literary trend contradicts the previous (no more than that). After-Modernism has a rather bulky, very uncomfortable predecessor, to contradict, though – which makes its reactions rather extreme, its agitation somewhat hilarious in its inefficiency. But one thing is clear once again: now, as before, we need to understand one another's words, and we need our daily ratio of stories, as currency, as a way of adding what we have not lived to what we have.

After its Modernist adventure, after the exploration of preverbal thought, the clear word is back. Writers dissociate themselves violently from sentences that need decoding. They sound crystal clear. This drastic revival of the one-meaning-word is not a victory, though. It brings the sad tiding that the word has failed. When writers today tell their stories in simple sentences, the reader ought to feel relaxed, yet he finds himself ill at ease.

What is the reason why, after reading Ishiguro, for instance, we feel every sentence makes perfect sense, yet the SENSE of the whole story has nothing to do with it? Modernism crushed the meaning of verbality under the immense pressure of preverbality. After-Modernists apparently restore the word to what it once was, but the reader feels that what the author tells him and what the author means are two parallel lines that never actually meet.

The reason for this unreliable clarity of after-

Modernist texts is the word again. After the Modernists have loaded it with endless caravans of meanings, the after-Modernists no longer want to rush where angels fear to tread. The bafflingly rich Modernist word (arrayed in its halo of preverbality) is followed in our days by an impoverished, *failed word*, a word which fails to name the only meaning that is attached to it. While Modernists crammed the suitcase of the word with hundreds of meanings, after-Modernists travel light, with only one meaning aboard, and they never trust their word to convey even that.

The word fails to mean, and the reader has to find another road that leads to the author. Has clarity won? Have we come back full circle to pre-Modernism? Is the clear word a convention once more?

The AfterMode cannot understand its own disarray. The language must be clear, this much every author knows today. Clarity is the raft they cling to in order to survive. Their problem is that they become the unwilling fools of literary history. The anchor of Modernism weighs heavy on them. They have not yet come out of the Modernist spell altogether.

Their fear and their love of Modernist ambiguity turn against them. They do not dare defy their predecessor properly. They want to discard and preserve the Modernist defiance at the same time. The result is a mongrel between clarity and a puzzle. They feed us bits of a story clad in simple words, and yet, somewhere in the process, their words fail to communicate.

They are afraid of the death of literature under the blasphemy of Eliot and Joyce. It is a maiming fear. All they can think of is not naming their meaning at all. Let the word be clear and blank. Let the reader rest from the Modernist race across a forest of meanings. Let the reader focus on only one meaning, one word. And let that word be a blank bullet the author uses in order to bring his reader to the old Modernist question: Just how much can language convey?

Modernists answered that question with fireworks, with rainbows, with huge expenses of all kinds. The word was a feast. After-Modernists are paupers at the closed doors of language, today. They peep, they avoid, they forget bits and pieces on the way, and they live on crumbs. As a literary state in itself, the after-Modernist text has opted for an austerity budget.

Ishiguro refuses to name what he means, even though he totally neglects preverbality (that being the after-Modernist denial of Modernism). He reduces the *verbal* to the *clear*, and yet his lines are confusing. Decoding, explanation, association are all powerless in the land of the AfterMode. In spite of that, the emptied, blank word can hardly be trusted to reveal spontaneously the meaning of the story, which proves that the AfterMode has found its own resource of indirectness, of arousing the reader's interest, of suspense.

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Clarity of the plot, of the time-sequence in novels, the predictable development of the heroes' stories along the lines of what could be termed as *chronological causality* (a view on time as a past that causes the present, a present that causes a future, in precisely that order) has only apparently come back.

As the most important narrative universal, chronological causality approximates, then, the pattern of real life. From pre-Modernism to Modernism, this narrative universal was altered so as to differ from the 'realistic' perception of sequentiality. When Dickens wrote a novel, his narrative universal was of the type 'SO they fell in love, and (possibly) lived happily ever after.' The Modernists changed that into 'AND they tried to remember love (among other things).' The after-Modernists oversimplified the narrative universal to 'DID THEY.'

Consequently, the AfterMode of fiction relies on anything but a traditional plot, which Modernism blew up for good and all. That is the reason why we previously stated that, after reading a Modernist novel, one can hardly be happy to go back to pre-Modernism. The only way to go for a reader who has grasped Modernism to the full extent of its difference from whatever came before is to go ahead into the after-Modernist text.

The AfterMode is like the dark ritual of cannibalism in *Heart of Darkness* ('the horror! the horror!'). It forces the naïve story (which

used to lead once from the hero's birth to his un/happy ending, which turned everything into the past-present-future complex), to face the unnamable, the unutterable. Contemporary open endings look like no endings at all. They convey a fear never experienced before: the fear that there is no future for the human race. An unutterable expectation, which deprives the word of its mystery, the chronological plot of its use, its suspense – this is the essence of the AfterMode.

Before Modernism, all stories were fairy tales. The fairy-tale pattern was an orderly way of organizing human life from birth to death (past, present and future), according to the narrative universal. The fairy tale wrapped the chronological skeleton in feeling, the feel of real life, and it won the readers over by focussing on *love interest*.

The fairy-tale pattern was the story of an individual who found love. His chronology revolved round finding (or not finding) somebody or something to love. His time was a symmetry of before love – during love – the (un)happy ever after. To put it in a nutshell, the fairy-tale pattern was a love story ordered by the perception of human time as a narrative universal.

It would never have occurred to Fielding or Dickens that the hero could pop up on the first page of a novel to reveal that his story had died, and to wind his way back into it as if nothing had happened, afterwards. A story was a story, and it followed the line of a biography. It was not allowed to play with time. It was not allowed to question time. The narrative time and the time of human life were one and the same: one was born, one fell in love, and then the plot came to an end. The fairy-tale pattern had everything to do with the survival of the species.

Until 1922 (the peak year of the Modernist denial of a nineteenth-century narrative tradition), with very few exceptions, all stories had the same chronological frame of reference: the hero was born, he grew up and experienced a number of incidents, after which he left the story. The hero travelled across the narrative with a future in mind, and the ending was indispensable.

Chronological suspense was the soul of the story. You could even go straight to the last pages to find out the hero's fate (future), if you became impatient. The order in time was always the same. The reader's expectations fuelled a common tradition. Suspense made them all ask 'And then, what?' The past and the present necessarily led to an ending in the future.

Modernism found out that one could play with the narrative universal of chronology, because, as Virginia Woolf claimed, life was not 'like this':

> Look within and life, it seems, is very far from being 'like this'. Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; the moment of importance came not here but there; so that, if a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style, and perhaps not a single button sewn on as the Bond Street tailors would have it. Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end.

Virginia Woolf, *Modern Fiction (The Common Reader,* 1919)

The Modernist trick (if we can use the word 'trick' for an attitude that opposed at least nineteen centuries of traditional, fairy-tale narration) was to view chronology as highly relative.

Out of the three essential moments (past, present and future), Virginia Woolf James Joyce and T.S. Eliot began by definitely discarding the future. Mrs Dalloway lets us know from the very beginning that she is fatally ill. The novel allows her one day in London. Leopold Bloom is circumscribed by one day in Dublin. T.S. Eliot's only theme in *The Waste Land* is the escape from the *waste* that is to come. If we try to demonstrate that Joseph Conrad or D.H. Lawrence also belong to Modernism, we can prove it by invoking their lack of appetite for their heroes' future.

In this way, Modernism demolishes the pre-

Modernist pattern, discarding the utopia of the (un)happy ending of the fairy-tale pattern in the future. As Virginia Woolf insists, 'the moment of importance came not here but there.' Her 'there' is not in the future. She eradicates chronological causality when she states: 'Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end.' What she means to say by the 'gig lamps' is that viewing time as an orderly sequence of past, present and future moments is totally unrealistic.

The Modernist trick, then, is to shuffle the moments of chronology. First, Modernist authors render the future powerless. Second, they humiliate the present. What do Clarissa Dalloway or Leopold Bloom actually do in their narratives? The former gives a party. The latter walks around Dublin. Not much, if we look for present adventure. What keeps them busy is their memory. They REMEMBER. If the present and the future are rather numb, the past is an inexhaustible source of delight. It concentrates plot, adventure, suspense.

It would be terribly wrong to claim that Woolf or Joyce (or even Eliot, for that matter) do not have plot, suspense or character. They give up nothing of the substance of traditional stories. The only change is that they suppress the ending.

It must have been hard on readers accustomed to suspense solved on the last page to go home without a sense of closure. This is where the dramatic rift between pre-Modernism (nineteen centuries at least, as we said) and Modernism (one peak year – 1922, and a conglomerate of similar ideas floating in the air, from Einstein to Freud and the stream-of-consciousness writers) occurs.

Once Clarissa Dalloway and Leopold Bloom make it clear that they are not interested in the future, we have no alternative but to follow them in their passionate revival of the past. What they do is more than a mere narration of the past. Their minds are shown at work. They do not tell a story. They struggle with their subconscious in order to bring back disparate moments and understand them (their emotion, their preverbality) at last.

The implication is that the present and the future are too rapid for our understanding. The writer takes his time, makes a poem out of past incidents, by narrating them at ease, as feelings, not as adventure. Narration leaves the body for the soul. The novelist finds out that he is in need of lyricism, and modifies his language accordingly. This is why (as we said) the word becomes the tyrant of the text, while story telling is pushed backstage. The focus, which used to be on the 'told,' is now on the 'telling.'

Consequently, *The Waves* is a sequence of short poems. *Ulysses* concentrates several stories at once in each and every word. The novelist's mind (in Joyce's case, the same as in Eliot's) is not happy with mere individual history. It spreads over centuries of fiction, poetry, art, philosophy. The whole universe can be found in Leopold Bloom's back yard. The word is colossal. It is ready to erupt.

Not many writers can achieve this verbal concentration. Joyce and Eliot are the masters. Woolf, Conrad, Lawrence adapt as they can, with unavoidable compromises with the much hated fairy-tale tradition. Actually, besides Joyce and Eliot, who are prepared to throw tradition overboard, the others are betrayed by their education – since they all grew up reading precisely what they reject. All Modernists were, of course, educated in the spirit of obeying pre-Modernist tradition.

Virginia Woolf is the best example of this duality. She is the most eloquent theoretician (even more than Eliot) of Modernist change. She noisily demands that the hero should be a 'consciousness,' not a tale. She places Mrs Dalloway at the end of her life, and makes her mind look back. We get disparate moments yoked together. Yet when this demonstration that chronology must die is done, we close the book and – what do we remember? The story of Clarissa Dalloway's life from her youth to the present, in traditional biographical order. Chronology must die, long live chronology.

The feeling of baffled expectation we experience at the end of *Heart of Darkness* or *Sons and Lovers* comes from the same desire of the author to demolish the narrative universal. The truth of the hero is not in his

future, but in his past. That truth is in his mind, more than in the story of his life. Tell me what you think and I will tell you who you are.

It took readers a while to switch from the expectation of an ending to endlessness. They had to replace the old pleasure of following the adventures of an extrovert hero by the new indiscretion of peeping into the deepest recesses of an introvert. The Modernist hero is in love with his mind. So much so that we actually see (in Joyce and Eliot) his thoughts being born on the page. We know what he thinks before his words are formed. Since we deal with the human mind, with its mechanisms of associating memories, of shedding light on the past from a present standpoint, we find out that the 'stream-of-consciousness' technique is the best device a Modernist writer could use.

The reader has to learn to focus on something different from 'What next?' When he has tasted and learnt how to enjoy stream-of-consciousness texts (the complicated, elliptical story of the mind), his newly found pleasure for change makes him anticipate 'how' the author will innovate the fairy tale. At this point, we must see what happens to the Modernist denial in after-Modernism.

We have seen, so far, the utopia of the fairy tale, the survival of the species by means of love interest in pre-Modernism. We have also seen the (orderly) narrative pattern turn from life as seen from the outside to a contorted history of the mind, for which the traditional perception of order in time becomes meaningless. We have read both reassuring past-present-future tales and the confusing stream-of-consciousness novels, which look at the past through a magnifying glass, neglecting present and future.

We come to the gates of the AfterMode with no illusions, no expectations. Those who have grown up with the denial of tradition, who have started in life reading Woolf and Joyce, will find their narrative mode natural. Even if they have read older texts, they have learned from Woolf that chronology is there only to be demolished. They will take this denial a step further: they will demolish the demolishers.

Kazuo Ishiguro is a good example. Con-temporary British novelists (those considered part of the canon today) are quite similar in their reaction. It has become quite clear nowadays that the fairy tale can only survive in second-rate romances, successful bestsellers for mediocre audiences (the Danielle Steele type). It is a moment's escape in an old-fashioned world, a world that has nothing to do with real life any more. Real-life narratives must shatter narrative patterns, they must be unexpected.

Stream of Consciousness is not unexpected any longer. It fails to surprise the reader that a hero thinks instead of acting, that he brings up disparate moments of his past, according to unknown laws of his mind. Been there, done that. What would the use of denigrating the narrative universal be, when everyone knows it does not exist? Who would mistake Fielding's narrative for a true story?

The contemporary novelist will not have us ask 'what next?', or not only that. He will not urge us to see how deeply inside his heroes' minds he plunges, since the danger of James Joyce is only too real and too close. The only road the after-Modernist can call his is the road to dystopia. All writers after the 1950s (Aldous Huxley, George Orwell, William Golding, Lawrence Durrell, Martin Amis, Graham Swift, David Lodge, etc) live in a darkening world. They return to the pleasures of the story only to demonstrate that the true story is safely dead, we cannot believe in it any more, and we mock at our own expectation of closure.

As we read a novel by Ishiguro, Ackroyd or Lodge, our only reaction is far from 'What next?' or 'How' the novelist changes the fairy tale. The hero has lost his future (which is old news), and he has lost his past, too (since Modernists used and abused it). His only refuge is the present. A desperately clear present.

Suspense in the AfterMode has nothing to do with chronology or love interest. The anxiety of 'What next?' has died. Characters have no expectation of love. It has all vanished after the advent of sex. They do not even expect to go on with their lives. They have a constant apprehension of the end. Not just their end, but the end of the race.

All the reader wants today (the year is 2009)

is a deferral of this end. His back turned to the future, his face buried in the past, he advances backwards, surrounded by dystopic, loveless creatures, and all he can whisper is 'Not yet!' Do not let the end come. Do not let the race perish. This AfterMode dystopia is essentially a literature of the Apocalypse.

At this point in the history of fiction, when readers are fewer and fewer, and the literature of the screen is almost everywhere, we might find ourselves wondering if the Modernist profound change of the way we choose to tell a story has not opened Pandora's box. We have not come to dislike stories. It so happens that stories today come in a different package. We no longer gather round the fire in order to read Dickens's latest installment of *Little Dorrit*. From a common bond, reading has turned into a very private matter.

Stories on a screen use many devices fiction invented: stream-of-consciousness arrangement of incidents according to patterns of memory, a huge number of after-Modernist motifs and themes. From the AfterMode, the screen has borrowed the sense of dystopia, the loneliness of all heroes, their lovelessness, their unwillingness to utter the illuminating word (caused by the desperate attempt at differing from the poetic intensity of Modernist styles).

The feeling that the heroes are never at home, that the world is closing in on them, that sex is the only replacement for love that has survived, that life on earth is threatened with extinction, comes from the earliest after-Modernists, Huxley and Orwell. They are present in what we call 'good films' today. The soap operas, the romances built on the pattern 'boy meets girl, and they live happily ever after' seem artificial, totally unrealistic. They used to be the very stuff of fiction till 1922.

Modernism may have done more harm than good when it challenged the previous nineteen centuries. After-Modernists are taking a long time to recover after Modernism, and they still live with the nostalgia of the disease.

Contemporary novelists are struggling to produce the bestseller of the millennium and live on royalties from the book and the film for ever and ever. *Harry Potter* is a sad example. Kazuo Ishiguro, on the other hand, produces bestsellers which are impeccable novels, too. I should like to think that all the work that went into the writing of literature over the centuries, the excitement of reading it, will survive. I hope that a time will come when the AfterMode of literature finds a new beginning. Right now, it looks like a conclusion to a history of fiction that only connoisseurs will read...