“THERE WILL BE TIME”: HEROISM, TEMPORALITY, AND THE SEARCH FOR OPPORTUNITY IN MODERN LITERATURE

by

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(Under the Direction of Jed Rasula)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on the convergence of heroism and temporality in Modernist literature. Its purpose is to illuminate both the ways in which changes in the perception of time transformed the portrayal of potential hero figures and, more importantly, how a viable alternative to the frequently assumed “death” of the hero within that period went largely unnoticed. The hero figure (who does the “right” thing, for the “right” reason, at the “right” time) is largely missing from literature of the time period because one or more of the elements of the formula is not met, and there are particular challenges during the decades in question to finding the “right” time to act due to an imbalance in Western cultural perceptions of temporality that favored an exclusively quantitative model over one that balanced both quantitative and qualitative aspects, such as that favored by the Greeks and demonstrated through the concepts of *chronos* and *kairos*.

I highlight the consequences of the Modernist, *chronocentric* temporal model by examining different works that illustrate the difficulties of creating and presenting heroes in a world in which the timing of heroic action is nearly impossible to get right. Moreover, the selected authors’ disparate backgrounds and literary interests underscore that the question of

heroic viability was of enough concern to appear frequently and across a broad spectrum of Western literature during the period in question. Specific examples include an analysis of four novels by Joseph Conrad that tracks his portrayals of the nature of heroism in the modern world; an examination of two specific forms of *kairic* failure—*akairic* desire and *akairic* environment, both of which permeate Modernism—found within works by T. S. Eliot, William Faulkner, Franz Kafka, and Ernest Hemingway; and an exploration of a solution to these problems of heroic action offered within Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, a work that gives new life to heroism, proving that the widely proclaimed "death" of the hero in early twentieth-century fiction and culture is a short-sighted notion.

INDEX WORDS: Heroism, Time, Chronos, Kairos, Modernism, Conrad, Eliot, Faulkner, Kafka, Hemingway, Woolf

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B.A., The University of Arkansas, 1999

M.A.T., Duke University, 2003

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2012

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May 2012

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to begin by thanking my committee members—Jed Rasula, Tom Cerbu, and Andrew Zawacki—for their patience and guidance throughout this process. I would also like to thank Bobby Burch and Golden Lloyd for starting me down this road as well as Charles Adams, Lyna Lee Montgomery, and Ro Thorne for their enthusiastic support of me in all my academic endeavors over the years. Kevin DeLapp has been a true friend and particular source of inspiration to me, and I thank him for many long conversations about ethics, *kairos*, and what it means to be a hero. Finally, my family has been tremendously helpful during my entire time here at the University of Georgia; I could not have begun to complete this degree without their assistance. To my mother, father, grandmother, and sister: thank you for propping me up when I needed it. To my mother- and father-in-law: thank you for your unwavering faith. To my sons, Jonathan and Adam: thank you for your smiles and for loving me whether I wrote anything that day or not. To my wife, Laura: thank you for *everything*.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Much has been written about the "death" of the hero in early twentieth-century Western literature, an event following a lengthy decline that began centuries earlier.[1] By way of explanation—maybe even justification—scholars generally point to the advent of industrialization, the formalization of psychology as a field of study, and the decline of religion in the face of science as reasons for this fall (Campbell 278). Each of these factors certainly shares a portion of the responsibility for the hero's temporary decline as a significant cultural phenomenon in Western societies during that period. However, there is another factor that has received far too little recognition for its role in the hero's fall from favor—time. This project focuses on the convergence of heroism and temporality in Modernist literature in an effort to illuminate both the ways in which changes in the perception of time transformed the portrayal of potential hero figures and, more importantly, how a viable alternative to the frequently assumed "death" of the hero within that period went largely unnoticed.

Before any examination of the hero can commence, the term itself must be pinned down. "Hero" is a word with many meanings, and an exploration of heroism can have very different outcomes depending on how the term is defined. A glance at the *Oxford English Dictionary* is instructive here. The *OED* lists four senses of the word "hero," as follows:

[1] See Bentley, Brombert, Campbell, Hägin, Edith Kern, O'Faolain, Reed, et al. for varying arguments about the decline of the hero in literature.

1. *Hist.* A name given (as in Homer) to men of superhuman strength, courage, or ability, favoured by the gods; at a later time regarded as intermediate between gods and men, and immortal. The later notion included men of renown supposed to be deified on account of great and noble deeds, for which they were also venerated generally or locally; also demigods, said to be the offspring of a god or goddess and a human being; the two classes being to a great extent coincident.
2. A man distinguished by extraordinary valour and martial achievements; one who does brave or noble deeds; an illustrious warrior.
3. A man who exhibits extraordinary bravery, firmness, fortitude, or greatness of soul, in any course of action, or in connection with any pursuit, work, or enterprise; a man admired and venerated for his achievements and noble qualities.
4. The man who forms the subject of an epic; the chief male personage in a poem, play, or story; he in whom the interest of the story or plot is centered.

According to the first definition, then, the hero appears as a figure who not only participates in and influences the "great events" of a culture but also serves as an important marker for what that culture considers moral goodness. Although this second quality—moral goodness— is only subtly included in the first three definitions of the word through the concept of the hero's "noble deeds" or "noble qualities," its importance to the essence of heroism cannot be overstated. The particular combination of a hero's "goodness" and "success" is what makes him or her[2] heroic, something that the *OED* fails to emphasize adequately in all but the third

[2] The necessity for the gender division of "hero" and "heroine" is unclear, with the most likely explanation being that the role was limited to men originally because they were the ones permitted to attempt actions that were deemed

definition. All other semblances of the hero are not actually heroes; they are "almost-heroes," which is to say that they are not really heroes at all.

Traditional definitions of the "hero," then, are varied and cause a good deal of confusion. Take, for example, the term "tragic hero," commonly attributed to Aristotle through his *Poetics* but, as George Whalley has noted, not a term that Aristotle ever even used himself (88). The tragic hero shares many of the qualities of the *OED* hero—often possessing "superhuman strength, courage, or ability;" or perhaps "distinguished by extraordinary valour," or possessing "greatness of soul." *Something* prevents this figure from reaching the true status of the hero, however. Aristotle calls this something "*hamartia*," which is the basis of the common term "tragic flaw" but is translated by Leon Golden as "miscalculation" (179). Larry Brown's translation is even more specific, though, as he notes that the word "literally means 'missing the mark' [and is] taken from the practice of archery." Being just off target makes all the difference and is what ultimately separates the protagonist of a tragedy from a character who could be considered heroic.

This distinction has not stopped such protagonists from being commonly referred to as "tragic heroes," though, with the implication that adding "tragic" to the term identifies the character as a type of hero rather than something else entirely. The perpetuation of this misnomer can be attributed to the fourth definition of the word hero. So many of the central figures from the earliest formative works of Western literature *were* heroes that the central figures of other genres, as literature expanded to include the myriad of forms that we know today, began to be referred to as heroes as well, regardless of whether they did anything heroic.[3]

"heroic." There is nothing in the definition itself that women today cannot do, however, so for the purpose of this study "hero" will be a gender neutral term. See Rankin and Eagly's study on the social construction of heroism for more on this topic.

[3] See Edith Kern's "The Modern Hero: Phoenix or Ashes?" for an explanation of this process.

The notion that a protagonist and a hero are synonymous has led to tremendous confusion in the field of hero studies, to the extent that the word hero has been almost stripped of its original meaning. The hero as protagonist is an extremely common usage today, and many studies of the hero are not what they claim to be but are, instead, historical accountings of the development of the protagonist in literature. These are misleading detours in the term's usage. Tragic heroes and anti-heroes are not simply other versions of the hero; they are different figures altogether.

In order to clear away the jargon that has been wrongly attached to the word and get back to a more workable definition, a "reboot" of the term is in order. The first three *OED* definitions share two qualities (whether implied or directly stated) that can form the core of a single, simplified classification of the hero: nobility and success in action. The recurrence of nobility aligns the figure with moral "goodness," which establishes the hero as a figure of tremendous cultural import through whom many of the ethics of a society can be gleaned (according to what is considered "good" and what is considered "successful" in heroic actions). Thus, the hero as a cultural figure is a person of action but also one of *ethics*, for heroism is inextricably linked to a positivistic notion of success—that something "good" comes as a result of a triumphant heroic action. Whether a heroic action is considered successful or not is therefore tied to a culture's beliefs in right and wrong.

A clearer picture of this revised definition of the hero can be extrapolated from *The Nicomachean Ethics*, in which Aristotle provides a sort of formula for ethical action that can be applied to the hero. He does not define the virtue of heroism specifically, but the repetition of similar terminology when describing other virtues can serve as a general description of all the virtues. For example, he describes the virtue of generosity as follows: "Now virtuous actions are noble and done for the sake of the noble. Therefore the liberal man, like other virtuous men, will

give for the sake of the noble, and rightly; for he will give to the right people, the right amounts, and at the right time, with all the other qualifications that accompany right giving" (80). Similarly, when defining the virtuous response to anger, Aristotle notes, "The man who is angry at the right things and with the right people, and, further, as he ought, when he ought, and as long as he ought, is praised" (96). A hero, then, can be redefined according to what Amélie Frost Benedikt defines as the "ideal for ethical action: the right person doing the right thing at the right time *and for the right reasons*" (233, italics in original), with the complicating stipulation that he or she must be successful in his or her endeavor. This is the definition that will be used throughout this dissertation, with the minor exception that Benedikt's notion of the "right person" will be dropped due to its potential to create confusion about whether there remain restrictions on who can be a hero. For this study, whoever is willing and able to do the "right" thing, for the "right" reason, and at the "right" time *is* a hero; thus, the "right person" is identified through heroic action itself and could be anyone.

One of the benefits of this definition is its flexibility. It is broad enough, for example, to include both the original aggressive, martial version of the hero that was so prevalent in Greek culture, orature, and literature and the most significant alteration of that model to appear in the millennia since—the Christian sacrificial hero. The differences between these two models were for a while a significant roadblock in hero studies. Norman Burns and Christopher Reagan note, for example, that one of the challenges of writing heroes during medieval times was "the problem faced by the early medieval authors in reconciling the concept of the hero of classical antiquity—whose inherent virtue lay in prowess in battle—with the Christian ideal of the *imitatio Christi* and the attainment of salvation" (vii). Stripping down the definition to its ethical, active roots thus allows these two disparate figures room to coexist as heroes. The new

definition also includes the most contemporary version of the hero, which was prevalent in the second half of the twentieth century and, as Morton Bloomfield suggests, moved the hero away from the sacred figures of the divine warrior and Christian sacrifice and into the mundane, allowing "any admirable human being" the potential to ascend to heroism (27-29).

This does not imply that meeting the standards of the definition is easy, however. Were this meaning to take hold in studies of literature, for example, there would be far fewer characters that could be called heroes than there currently are. The hero would not disappear, but, rather than being a mere substitute for all protagonists, the figure could more appropriately be positioned as a very specific type of protagonist whose presence (or lack of) can be useful in studies, such as this one, examining cultural notions of moral action.

The widely proclaimed "death" of the hero in early twentieth-century Western literature, then, is all the more useful for its ability to be examined even with this revised version of the term. In addition to the "death" of the hero-figure of the traditional epic represented by the first sense of the *OED* definition, the Aristotelian ethical hero, while not "dead," is largely missing from literature of the time period because one or more of the elements of the formula ("right" thing, reason, or time) is not met. The *OED* provides some interesting, if anecdotal, data to support this claim. In the centuries that the *OED* has tracked usage of the word "hero," no single period has fewer entries than 1900-1949. During that half-century, one usage of the term is listed in the quotations that accompany the definition, whereas the half-centuries preceding and following 1900-1949 have fifteen and twelve quotations, respectively ("hero"). That the hero is missing is a claim that brooks little disagreement; the question of why, however, has sparked much debate.

Determining why the hero is almost exclusively missing in early twentieth-century literature begins with an examination of the sharp rise and subsequent fall in interest in heroism during the previous century. This rise and fall centered on a belief in the traditional "Great Man" model of the hero that has been prevalent throughout so much of Western cultural history, and a reaction against this model is responsible for much of the core negativity toward heroism that exists in early twentieth-century literature. This is not to say that negative attitudes toward the figure of the "Great Man" were new in the nineteenth century; by that time, traditional views of the hero-figure as an elevated form of humanity had been challenged in literature for centuries (Edith Kern 276). Romanticism, however, led to a frenzied revival of interest in heroism, focused on what Walter Reed describes as "that singular and energetic individual whose character contains his fate, who dominates as well as represents the society around him" (1). This renewed interest in "Great Men" was doomed to fail from the outset, however, for it contained two fatal flaws in equating tremendous actions of historical importance with heroic ones and in attempting to revive the heroic model in which "Great Men" were divinely appointed, with accompanying actions that were not to be doubted or questioned.

A careful reader need look no further than one of the most prominent writers of the nineteenth century, Thomas Carlyle, to see why the "Great Man" as hero had no chance of survival in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century thinking. Carlyle is at the forefront of the pro-"Great Man" side of the hero question, and his work *On Heroes and Hero Worship and the Heroic in History* sums up his feelings on the matter. Carlyle believed that the fall-from-grace of the hero figure was not a consequence of the shortcomings of the heroes themselves but instead the result of a lack of understanding and faith from the people who admire them. He was aware that, by the time he was writing *On Heroes* (published in 1841), the hero had fallen from public

favor, and he believed he was living in an age that "denie[d] the existence of great men [and] denie[d] the desirableness of great men" (Carlyle 20). For Carlyle, such denial was a travesty because he believed in a strict hierarchy of authority among human beings, with those at the top (i.e., his "Great Men") being better suited to rule than those at the bottom.

Carlyle attributed this need to deny or inability to recognize "Great Men" to the fact that "No man can be a *Grand-Monarque* to his *valet-de-chambre*" (255). In other words, familiarity breeds contempt, and the "familiarity" between all people increased throughout the nineteenth century as self-consciousness became the norm. Self-consciousness, according to George Levine, discouraged "belief in any authority beyond the household" (Levine 48), and, if there is anything Carlyle's theory of the hero is dependent upon, it is the notion of authority. The problem, according to *On Heroes*, is with the valet, not with the hero, and Carlyle's treatise identifies the inability to appreciate heroes as a meanness of spirit which is belittling mankind. His solution is to ask his readers to ignore the human failings of heroic figures and instead judge them exclusively on the greatness of their accomplishments.

Ultimately, Carlyle's theory of the hero requires that moral judgment on the actions of "Great Men" be suspended, not only because "lesser" people should simply trust and admire the decisions of their "betters," but also because, for Carlyle, the history-shaping power of such men trumps morality. Eric Bentley labels Carlyle's creed of hero-worship "Heroic Vitalism" (69), and he notes that, "For the Heroic Vitalist 'everything includes itself in power,' or as Carlyle phrases it: 'All power is moral,' or as Nietzsche phrases it: 'The universe is will-to-power and nothing else'" (158).[4] This is where Carlyle's theory falls apart as a philosophy of heroism.

[4] The similarities (and differences) between Carlyle's and Nietzsche's thoughts on power and heroism have been extensively covered by Eric Bentley. Their thoughts on heroism being above and beyond morality are similar enough, however, that an extensive review of Nietzsche is unnecessary here and would take this Introduction too far afield.

Carlyle sees the "Great Man," and thus the hero, solely as a cultural and historical figure and not as an ethical one, or, rather, he believes that the hero determines what is ethical rather than the other way around. Heroism, though, is linked with and dependent upon ethics and the communal, collective notion of what is good. It is possible that a Carlylian hero could meet the ethical requirements of heroism and do the "right" thing for the "right" reason at the "right" time when undertaking an action, but just because a significant historical figure undertakes a task, that does not mean that his or her choices will be ethical. History itself gives proof to the falsehood of Carlyle's premise, and by the time the "Great Men" of the early twentieth century (e.g., Hitler, Mao, Stalin, et al.) have finished wreaking havoc on the planet, any notion of an important historical figure automatically being a heroic one is gone from the general public consciousness.

Cultural resistance to "Great" human beings who could rise above the norm and do tremendous things to benefit humanity was temporary, however, and for a while was really more about rejecting elitist notions of heroism, such as Carlyle's, than denying the idea itself. As Victor Brombert states, "The very concept of man is bound up in that of the hero" (11), and, even when belief in heroism has been at its lowest, that figure has loomed large by way of comparison. Thus, Carlyle's belief that hero-worship was a core belief of humanity was not entirely wrong, but his theory ran aground due to his insistence that heroes were a separate class of humans and his attempt to change morality from a force that evaluated heroism to one that was created by it. Incidentally, Carlyle's misguided theories were not the only danger to heroism in the nineteenth century. Other writers and thinkers, often working against Carlyle's ideas, shed light on an even bigger problem.

Nowhere was resistance to the ideas represented in Carlyle's theories more strenuous than in the writings of Leo Tolstoy, whose great novel *War and Peace* reads as if it were a direct

rebuttal of *On Heroes*. Unfortunately, in his attempts to debunk the myth of the "Great Man," Tolstoy also touches upon an even greater challenge to heroism that was beginning to take hold and build tremendous momentum leading up to the twentieth century. This challenge came in the form of suspicion about the validity of heroic action itself—that is, whether it is possible for individuals to act in a way that allows them to be thought of as heroic for anything other than accidental or circumstantial reasons. The notion of the "Great Man" as hero had popular appeal for a while during Romanticism in part because it harkened back to a mythical time in human history when a lack of outside perspective and singularity of purpose made doing what was believed to be the "right" thing, at the "right" time, for the "right" reason a much simpler task than it was in modernity. People in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, on the other hand, often took circumstance into account to such a degree that the "right" course of action often no longer seemed possible, much less discoverable.

Isaiah Berlin discusses the differences in these two perspectives in his famous essay on Tolstoy, "The Hedgehog and the Fox." Berlin describes Tolstoy's suspicion about the validity of human action as part of a larger struggle taking place in Western cultures between two competing views of reality: monism and pluralism. Monistic views, as Aileen Kelly notes in her introduction to Berlin's text, are "the basis of all traditional morality" and are thus the root of humanity's belief in absolutes such as "right" and "wrong" (xv). Her description of pluralism is much more complex, but it sheds light on the difficulty of coexistence between the two concepts:

> True pluralism . . . recognizes that human nature is such that it generates values which, though equally sacred, equally ultimate, exclude one another, without there being any possibility of establishing an objective hierarchical relation between them. Moral conduct therefore may involve making agonizing choices,

> without the help of universal criteria, between incompatible but equally desirable values. (xv)

The nineteenth century, then, was one in which Western cultures experienced a great nostalgia for monistic thinking while simultaneously experiencing a tremendous upsurge in pluralism, resulting in conflicting feelings about both the role and validity of traditional figures of cultural importance such as the hero. *War and Peace*, as it happens, is a perfect example of the consequences this conflict had on the belief in heroism in Western cultures leading up to the twentieth century.

Tolstoy's conflicting feelings about monism and pluralism manifest in *War and Peace* as he deflates Carlyle's figure of the "Great Man" to a point from which that traditional version of the hero cannot recover. In the novel, Tolstoy establishes that historical events previously attributed to the wills of "Great Men" (e.g., Napoleon) are, in reality, the result of a combination of forces far beyond the influence or control of a single individual. In battles, for example, Tolstoy repeatedly depicts situations where the orders of generals are not followed because they are not received or they are impossible or they no longer make sense due to being too slow to arrive. This notion of the individual's inability to impact large-scale events due to their naturally inherent chaos is not Tolstoy's, as Berlin notes (57-68), and can in fact be traced directly to Joseph de Maistre, a figure Tolstoy researched heavily when writing *War and Peace*. Tolstoy's book, though, captures the essence of this problem in a way that resonates much more strongly than Maistre's writings, and the impact of *War and Peace* on the concept of the hero carries well into the twentieth century and is still relevant today.

In spite of the negativity Tolstoy displays toward the Carlylian version of the hero, he does not obliterate the concept of heroism itself, and, overall, *War and Peace* generates a sense

of paradox about the topic that Tolstoy was either unaware of or unable to resolve. Given his distaste for the "Great Men" of history, one might think that Tolstoy would go in the opposite direction and elevate the common man and his actions into the stratosphere of the heroic, but Tolstoy's own philosophy of action prevented this from being a possibility. Tolstoy organized individual actions into two categories: voluntary and involuntary. Voluntary acts involve only the individual and thus depend on his or her will. Involuntary ones are influenced and determined by others. Tolstoy sums up his opinion on this matter by noting that in "observing the conditions of the manifestation of our greatest freedom and greatest dependence, it is impossible not to see that the more abstract our activity is and therefore the less connected with the activity of others, the more free it is, and, on the contrary, the more our activity is connected with other people, the more unfree it is" (1224). The catch here is that *very* few actions, especially those which can be said to have *any* impact on mankind, can be made outside of a "connect[ion] with the activity of others." Thus, Tolstoy is seemingly denying the possibility of meaningful, "heroic" action on the part of individuals.

One problem with Tolstoy's dichotomous scale of action is that the term "unfree" is misleading. The vast majority of human actions have some element of choice in them on the part of the actor; otherwise, they would never occur. It is certainly true that the greater the number of people who are involved in the decision, the greater the *influence* on individual human action. Nevertheless, individual choice is still indispensable as a formative element in all human events. This is where the paradox comes in, for Tolstoy does recognize the importance of individual action and will in *War and Peace*.

This recognition can be seen in Prince Andrei's thoughts on the uselessness of military science after listening to a group of generals discuss war plans: "What science can there be in a

matter in which, as in any practical matter, nothing can be determined at a certain moment, and no one knows when that moment will come?" (643-4). Knowing the "moment" to act is key for Andrei, as is having the opportunity to act in a way that can have an impact on the outcome of the war. For this reason, he decides to serve "in the army," meaning that he will be at the front, commanding soldiers in battle, as opposed to giving orders with the generals at the rear. Andrei's recognition—that there is a moment in which one *may* do something, and if one does nothing, then that moment passes—is a key prerequisite to any action that could be deemed "heroic," according to the Aristotelian ethical model of heroism. The challenging part is that, when the moment arrives, one must try to act "rightly" in the situation with no knowledge of how the actions of countless others may be simultaneously affecting the circumstances. This does not absolve the individual from acting, however, for Andrei later notes to Pierre that the success of a battle does not depend on position or strategy but on the will of individual soldiers, who determine whether an army will break (773). If such will is not present in a sufficient amount, an army will lose a battle.

Thus, for Tolstoy, action during a massive event involving many people, such as a battle, is both "unfree" (in that there are myriad forces acting upon the individual that shape his or her options) and dependent upon the wills of the people involved, whose "free," individual decisions combine to shape the forces that are limiting the freedom of decisions in the first place. In *War and Peace*, then, Tolstoy's stance on the validity of human action remains unresolved, and his final position on the potential for heroism in humanity is unclear. He was, as Berlin describes, "by nature a fox [pluralist], but believed in being a hedgehog [monist]" (24). This is the conflict facing all people who wanted to believe in heroism as Western cultures moved toward the twentieth century.

While Tolstoy does a great deal in *War and Peace* to illuminate the problems of identifying heroism during his lifetime, his waffling on the concept's viability prevents him from redefining the term so that it could maintain its essential monistic elements (e.g., "right" thing, reason, and time) in a pluralistic world. One attempt at such a redefinition can be found in José Ortega y Gasset's 1914 work *Meditations on Quixote*, which serves as a useful indication of attitudes toward heroism at the beginning of the twentieth century. Ortega contrasts the modern notion that awareness of circumstance is a prerequisite for heroic action with the singular focus required in Classical versions of heroism, thereby raising the question of whether man can be both fully human and a hero at the same time, according to long-established definitions of the term. Rather than trying to define man in general as heroic, Ortega creates distinct definitions of mankind and heroism that illuminate how difficult it is to simultaneously realize one's highest potential as a human being and fulfill any traditional definitions of the hero. The key to that potential, according to Ortega, is a full awareness of circumstance that would dictate the course of one's actions no matter what the ultimate goal of those actions might be, but the quality that best defined the "epic" hero of the past (whose descendant is Carlyle's "Great Man") was an intense focus that ignored circumstance altogether if it in any way interfered with the accomplishment of a goal.

In the twentieth century, then, the qualities that once made the "Great Man" heroic are instead qualities that could be seen as monstrous, and the heroes of the epic world have no place in the novel, which is inextricable from a world in which circumstance plays a central role. To survive in modernity, epic heroism would have to be judged by circumstantial success, which is to say it could exist under any circumstances, which is to say it would lose its "epicness." In order to address this problem, Ortega spends the majority of his book seeking a new definition of

heroism that does not take the success of an action into account and instead focuses on the will to make a heroic action in the first place. The key, for Ortega, in evaluating this new kind of hero is how long he or she can maintain a desire for the impossible. Rather than slaying a dragon, his new standard for heroism is upholding a will for what cannot be had long after any "non-heroic" person would have given up.

Relocating heroism from the realm of action to the realm of desire does create some major problems for evaluating heroic figures. The most noteworthy of these is that it prevents Ortega's description from actually being a definition of the hero. Heroism is inextricable from action. The Aristotelian definition is heroism stripped to its barest essentials, and it still describes one who *does* the "right" thing, for the "right" reason, at the "right" time. Ortega completely denies the possibility of significant individual human action, however, for many of the same reasons that Tolstoy questions it. He does this because he believes that "sensitivity to environment" is one of the most profound changes that modern man has undergone (42), and this pluralistic thinking has set mankind on a track that Ortega feels is both unavoidable and permanent. He elaborates on this deplorable condition late in his book:

> The human organism, which seemed an independent unit, capable of acting by itself, is placed in its physical environment like a figure in a tapestry. It is no longer the organism which moves but the environment which is moving through it. Our actions are no more than reactions. There is no freedom, no originality…. Darwin sweeps heroes off the face of the earth. (164)

For Ortega, the possibility of acting independently, outside of circumstance and with singular focus, no longer exists in the world (if it ever did outside of epic literature). Actions and their results are no longer acceptable measuring sticks for human accomplishment because

circumstance has removed all significant meaning from the terms. What can be judged, however, is the will to act and how long one is able and/or willing to sustain that will. Ortega wants to keep the "epicness" of heroism, yet he does not believe in the viability of individual action, so, in an attempt to save the hero from extinction, he substitutes epic will for epic action. His formula is ultimately a failure, though, because what he creates is a definition of heroic intent, not of heroism itself.

Ortega's failed attempt to redefine heroism is instructive, though, in that it shows the depths to which belief in heroes and heroic action had sunk in early twentieth-century Western thought. It also highlights the true difficulty of defining heroism for the twentieth century and beyond. In writing that "our actions are no more than reactions" (164), Ortega is right in line with what many people in the first decades of the twentieth century believed. Thus, the twentieth-century hero must not only meet the stringent requirements of the Aristotelian model—doing the "right" thing, for the "right" reason, at the "right" time—he or she must also act without any feeling of certainty about what "right" is. Furthermore, while the physical success of his or her actions can be immediately determined, the evaluation of moralistic success does not come until after the fact and under much scrutiny; thus, one cannot even know whether he or she has done the "right" thing after attempting to do it. To be a hero in the twentieth century, then, means acting on faith that what one is doing is "right," in a time when faith in many of the traditional beliefs of Western cultures was under constant attack. This is why the period represents the nadir of belief in heroism in the history of Western thought and why the "death" of the hero, especially in Modernist literature, has been so widely proclaimed and agreed upon.

The contrast of an essentially monistic concept in a pluralistic world, then, is at the heart of the problems with heroism at the beginning of the twentieth century, and, as a result, virtually

all of the critical analysis of these problems has focused on how changes in society made it more difficult to find the "right" thing to do or the "right" reason to do it. Even if one could pin down these two elements of the heroic formula, though, early twentieth-century thinking also interfered with another unexpected and overlooked area that is just as essential to heroic action—finding the "right" time to act. This oversight is unfortunate because an analysis of literary struggles in heroic action related to qualitative aspects of time yields many very interesting results.

Much as traditional, Classical notions of heroism came under attack and proved unviable during the nineteenth century, some traditional notions of time that originated in ancient Greece and had influenced Western cultures ever since faded fully into the background of public consciousness after a long and protracted diminishment. No period had more drastic changes in the perception of time than the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries—an idea Stephen Kern explores in *The Culture of Time and Space: 1880-1918*. Referencing Kant, Kern argues that time is one of the foundational pillars of all experience (space being the other) and that altering conceptual notions of time has an impact on the way that people experience and think about the world around them (5). In fact, one of the reasons Kern centers his study on the decades he does is that he believes the "most momentous development in the history of uniform, public time since the invention of the mechanical clock in the fourteenth century was the introduction of standard time at the end of the nineteenth century" (11). One result of this alteration is that people have more difficulty recognizing and taking advantage of those moments when a "heroic" action might be possible; thus, they are unable to do anything about them.

In focusing his work on such a limited historical period, Kern misses an opportunity to explore fully the impact that these changes in temporal perception had on ideas about human action. The introduction of Global Standard Time was very important, but it was also the

culmination of a number of changes in Western temporal perception that had been evolving for centuries. For example, Kern identifies "the affirmation of a plurality of times and spaces" as a major change in the period of his study (8), but in doing so he ignores the plurality of Greek concepts of time, which heavily influenced Western cultures until the need arose for precision timekeeping instruments during the Industrial Revolution. The Greeks divided time into two broad concepts: *chronos*, representing objective time, and *kairos*, representing a specific type of subjective time.[5]

Chronos is easily identifiable and is what people in Western cultures generally think of as "time" today—quantitative time, such as that which can be measured by a clock. *Kairos*, on the other hand, is a complicated concept that is used to describe many different aspects of qualitative time. The *OED* defines *kairos* as "Fullness of time; the propitious moment for the performance of an action or the coming into being of a new state." Among its many uses, *kairos* is frequently cited in rhetoric as the "right" moment to make a point or take an argument in a certain direction. Carolyn Miller notes that this version of the word "is closely associated with propriety and decorum" and that "knowing the *kairos* means understanding an order that guides and shapes rhetorical action, whether that order is given and absolute or socially constructed" (xiii). Miller also describes a second usage of the term that has more connotations associated with spontaneity and opportunity, and she notes that "this sense of *kairos* encourages us to be creative in responding to the unforeseen, to the lack of order in human life" (xiii). Additionally, *kairos* is a term that can have religious connotation in reference to moments or events that are governed by a higher power than humanity. In the Bible, for example, a version of *kairic* time is emphasized

[5] Significantly, not all aspects of qualitative time are covered under the notion of *kairos*. For example, there are many mental interactions with time that are clearly not quantitative but fail to occur within the framework of a *kairic* moment (see Chapter 2 for examples of these in Conrad's fiction). The Greek system is not a perfect dichotomy, then, but it remains useful as a means of separating out time that can be measured and predicted (*chronos*) from time that is instead qualitative in nature (and potentially *kairic*).

in a well-known passage from the book of Ecclesiastes, which states, "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven" (*The ESV Study Bible* 3.1). Of the connotations of *kairos* mentioned thus far, this meaning has held on the longest in Western thought and is still relevant to Christians today. Still, seeing *kairos* as God's time is so different from the other meanings of the word that it could almost be a different word altogether, for it both treats time in a more general sense apart from individual moments of experience and removes the notion of agency in favor of a view that time is "ordained" or "fated."

The most significant characteristics of *kairos* as it relates to heroism, then, are its fundamental implication that time is more than quantitative and its connection to opportunity—to the belief that there are critical moments, or "*kairoi*," as Gregory Mason calls them, in which the chance to do something significant presents itself (199). A truly heroic action cannot occur accidentally, and believing in the "right" time for something to be done is an essential part of the formula. Identifying the "right" thing to do and the "right" reason to do something are significant enough problems for potential hero-figures in early twentieth-century life (both "real" and "fictional," the latter being unavoidably influenced to some degree by the time period in which authors were writing), but the delay in acting caused by such confusion is compounded by the illusion that humans *control* time just because they can organize and measure it quantitatively. That belief is due, in part, to the recent cultural dominance in the West of the perception that quantitative, chronometric time is the only time that exists. Mason effectively sums up the imbalance of this temporal perception:

> We moderns, by contrast, tend to think of time only in terms of quantity, as a commodity to be used with maximum efficiency. We struggle to negotiate an incessant flow of uniform time with no thought for qualitative differentiation.

> The experiential issue at the heart of *kairos* sets quantitative against qualitative time. Are we willing to live *within* time, to be sensitive to its inherently dramatic and changing character, to recognize and to seize the critical moments—the *kairoi*—as they present themselves; or do we wish to try to define or refine the time dimension out of truly significant experience? (199, italics in original)

As a result of this one-dimensional view of time, people can be trapped into thinking that one moment is virtually the same as another and that they have more time than they really do to make a decision, and—while they debate internally over the "right" thing to do—the "right" time to do it passes them by. In order to act heroically, then, one must first understand that heroic moments cannot be controlled and require deliberate, *timely* action in order to be fulfilled; this requires a dual understanding of, or at least an ability to work within, time's quantitative and qualitative aspects.

The balance between quantitative and qualitative time modeled by the Greeks remained prevalent in Western societies in some form or another through the nineteenth century. The model took its first hit long before that, though, and Carlo Cipolla's book *Clocks and Culture: 1300-1700* explains one reason for the general cultural movement away from *kairos*. Cipolla focuses on the rise in prevalence and stature of clocks during those four centuries. A significant consequence of this rise was a shift in favoring objective over subjective notions of time. This change was a gradual process, for early models of clocks had both *kairometric* (or attempts at such since *kairos* cannot truly be measured) and chronometric functions. For example, Cipolla notes, "In 1473, Bartolomeo Manfredi asserted that the complicated cosmological indications of the public clock in Mantua (Italy), served the purpose of showing 'the proper time for phlebotomy, for surgery, for making dresses, for tilling the soil, for undertaking journeys and for

other things very useful in this world'" (42). The drive to quantitatively measure such qualitative tasks is part of the reason that early clocks took up so much physical space, often filling entire rooms.

More than just entertainment, the qualitative aspects of early clocks were viewed as essential components for good timekeeping. Cipolla argues that this is due in part to the early clocks' lack of accuracy in keeping quantitative time, pointing out that they regularly ran fast or slow and were so imprecise that in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries most clocks did not even possess minute hands (43). Another reason, though, was that the notion of "correct" time was not the same then as it is today, and so much of the early efforts of clockmakers were not aimed at increasing the accuracy of their machines' timekeeping but instead at finding new methods of measuring the more *kairic* notions of time that were important then (i.e., finding the "right" time to do things according to cosmological or religious beliefs). Cipolla explains:

> The most striking occurrence in the early history of clocks is that while medieval craftsmen did not improve noticeably in precision, they soon succeeded in constructing clocks with curious and very complicated movements. It was easier to add wheels to wheels than to find better ways to regulate the escapement. On the other hand complicated movements had quite a popular appeal and most people believed that a correct knowledge of the conjunction of the heavenly bodies was essential for the success of human enterprises. (43-4)

Once advances in technology allowed for both greater precision and portability in clocks, the interest of measuring *kairic* time began to fade. Cipolla notes several causes for this move toward chronometricism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including advances in astronomy and navigation which required precise time-keeping in order to measure star

ascension and determine longitude, respectively (57). From this point forward, the dominance of *chronos* over *kairos* was well established, and the impact of this shift was subtle but far reaching. Cipolla argues that the obsession with measuring time changed the way people interacted with the world:

> The clock was invented and constructed to satisfy the human need of measuring time. . . . At the same time, the machine which had been devised to satisfy particular human needs created new ones. Men began timing activities that, in the absence of clocks, they had never thought of timing. People became very conscious of time, and, in the long run, punctuality became at the very same time a need, a virtue, and an obsession. (103)

Stephen Kern has written about this consciousness of time as well, but rather than identifying a separation between *chronos* and *kairos*, he distinguishes between what he calls "public" time (objective, measurable time that is external to human consciousness and manifested in the twentieth century as World Standard Time) and "private" time (plural time that "may vary from moment to moment in the individual, from one individual to another according to personality, and among different groups as a function of social organization"—private time could be either mental or physical; its only constant is a lack of uniformity) (33). The advent of World Standard Time in the late nineteenth century marks the lowpoint for awareness of *kairic* time in Western cultures during the last three millennia. The erosion of interest in qualitative aspects of time that began with the scientific and technological advances Cipolla mentions is completed in the nineteenth century by the advances that moved the Western world into the

modern, industrialized age.[6] In fact, the preference for "precise" time as "right" time is so great by the mid-nineteenth century that traditional notions of *kairic* time as "God's" time can be trumped in favor of metaphors setting God up as "the most exquisitely adjusted and exact" chronometer in the universe, an idea proposed in the fictional pamphlet "Chronometricals and Horologicals," which appears in Herman Melville's *Pierre*.[7]

Like Cipolla, Stephen Kern also argues that the cultural obsession with the mechanical, quantitative aspects of time influenced the way people saw and interacted with the world around them, but he describes the process as "a subtle intrusion, one that appears sharper in historical perspective than it did around the turn of the century" (34). While the intrusion itself may have been subtle, its effects were not, as Jonathan Crary shows in *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*, an in-depth study on the nature of attention and distraction in Modernity. In *Suspensions*, Crary links time to one's experience of the world through the medium of attention. For him, the concept of attention takes a central role in the development of subjectivity after the 1870s, when one can find it "consistently being attributed a central and formative role in accounts of how a practical or knowable world of objects comes into being for a perceiver" (21). More importantly, Crary uses the thoughts of William James and Henri Bergson to place attention as an event that occurs in multiple times: past (memory), present (immediate experience), and future (anticipation) (26-7).

For Crary, though, one of the most significant problems of attention in Modernity is its inseparability from distraction: "attention and distraction cannot be thought outside of a continuum in which the two ceaselessly flow into one another, as part of a social field in which

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[6] No single invention better represents the speed and power of the cultural move toward *chronos* than the Railroad, and Wolfgang Schivelbusch's *Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* explains the broad impact travel by rail had on the way early participants in that technology viewed the world.

[7] Brian Higgins argues that the tone of the pamphlet is satirical and does not reflect Melville's views. But, even if this is the case, what Melville is satirizing is the dominance of thinking about time in terms of "precision" only, rather than considering it as a multi-faceted concept with both quantitative and qualitative properties.

the same imperatives and forces incite one and the other" (51). If attention represents a connecting point between mental and physical time, then a combination with distraction places it largely within the power of synchronized bureaucratic time, which has represented an almost constant distraction from the moment of its inception through various alarms, tickings, whistles, and so on. As Kern notes about uniform public time's ability to distract, "Whatever charm local time might have once had, the world was fated to wake up with buzzers and bells triggered by impulses that traveled around the world with the speed of light" (14). Thus, since attention and distraction are interchangeable, and synchronized bureaucratic time can constantly demand the former by means of the latter, it is possible to view the ultimate consequence of universal public time as a world with no private notions of or interactions with time whatsoever, and a world without private, individual interactions with time is a world in which the contemplative readiness that is necessary for heroic action cannot occur. Life in such a world would be made up of one external distraction after another, with no opportunity for people to retreat into their minds long enough to have a private "distraction" from the chaos around them.

Thus, the gradual removal of *kairos* from the consciousness of Western societies leads, on the one hand, to a false sense of security (due to a belief that "time" can be controlled since *chronos* is measured and measurable) and, on the other, to an inability to distinguish between "important" and "unimportant" moments in time. Moreover, as people become "lost" in an oscillation between internal time and the "distraction" (as Crary labels it) of external time, they lack an awareness of the need to concentrate on the present and, as a result, miss *kairic* opportunities to act. When this happens, they see the present as merely "clock time" and do not truly distinguish any qualitative difference between moments. A return to an awareness of *kairic* time, however, would inform people of the need to—and perhaps even give them the ability to—

come out of their reveries *in time* to act. The opportunistic side of *kairos* cannot be controlled, and if one is not poised to take advantage of it, then the opportunity will be missed, and heroic action will not be possible.

In addition to the evidence generated by cultural histories such as those written by Crary and Kern, the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries' imbalance between quantitative and qualitative aspects of time is readily apparent in literature from that time period. Novels and poems of the period are filled with characters that are searching for, struggling with, or cut off from appropriate *kairic* moments in which heroic action could occur. Thus, the hero figure, already identified as "dead" by that time due to the paradox of having to fulfill a monistic role in a pluralistic world, is also largely missing due to an inability to find the "right" time to act.

The following chapters examine different works that illustrate the difficulties of creating and presenting heroes in a world in which the timing of heroic action is nearly impossible to get right. Moreover, the selected authors' disparate backgrounds and literary interests (ranging from colonialism to race to gender issues and more) underscore that the question of heroic viability was of enough concern to appear frequently and across a broad spectrum of Western literature during the period in question. Chapter 2 focuses on four novels by Joseph Conrad which track the progression of his portrayals of the nature of heroism in the modern world, culminating in an examination of the relationship between time and heroic action in *The Secret Agent* that was decades ahead of its time. Chapter 3 establishes a connection between works by T.S. Eliot and William Faulkner through an analysis of characters who long to act heroically but fail to do so for various reasons. In each case, however, the characters' inability to act heroically can be traced to a specific kind of *kairic* failure I call *akairic* desire, modeled on Philip Sipiora's definition of *akairos* as "time without opportunity" (2). Chapter 4 also examines *kairic* failure

on the part of potential hero figures with the significant difference that such characters are acting in situations where no *kairic* opportunities exist, a concept that I call the *akairic* environment. No idea in Modernism was more threatening to heroism than this one, and Chapter 4 focuses on the presentation and consequences of such environments in works by Eliot, Franz Kafka, and Ernest Hemingway. While the *akairic* environment represents the low point for heroic potential in Modernism, not all was lost with its inception. Chapter 5, unlike the others, examines a potential solution to these problems of heroic action that is offered within Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, a work that recognizes the challenges to traditional notions of heroism in the twentieth century and, as an alternative, embraces the heroism in seemingly "small" events with which Tolstoy had such trouble coming to terms in *War and Peace*. Upon closer inspection, however, Clarissa Dalloway's actions are not superficial, and, more than any other character of the time period, she represents a new model for the beleaguered and almost forgotten hero, one that meets the Aristotelian ethical requirements of "right" thing, "right" reason, *and* "right" time.

Woolf's new heroic model met with considerable resistance, and some of the causes for its lackluster reception (areas for potential further study) are discussed in a brief Epilogue following Chapter 5. Nevertheless, the search for *kairos* is the search for meaningful moments in time that can be acted upon; therefore, Clarissa remains a viable model for the early twentieth-century hero figure. In a world where the systems of religion and cultural history no longer provide reassurance in the "rightness" of one's actions, people must create their own meaningful moments, and the most productive place to look for them, Woolf reveals, is in unexpected places. Thus, Woolf gives new life to heroism, proving that the widely proclaimed "death" of the hero in early twentieth-century fiction and culture is a short-sighted notion.

CHAPTER 2

CONRAD'S SEARCH FOR CONSCIOUS HEROISM

In his famous Preface to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* Conrad writes, "And art itself may be defined as a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underling its every aspect" (xxxix). It should come as no surprise, then, that since they were composed at a time when conceptual belief in heroism was under full-scale assault, many of Conrad's writings can also be read as a search for "the truth" of heroism in the modern world. Four novels in particular—*Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim*, *Nostromo*, and *The Secret Agent*—offer a steady progression of questions on the nature of heroism, the mental and physical components of heroic action, and the possibility that neither heroic action nor the concept of heroism itself is realistic in a world where self-consciousness is the norm and where *kairic* moments are so rare.

Conrad examines heroism in his works by contrasting "instinctual" with "conscious" forms of the concept. Instinctual heroism is represented by two figures: the first is the fool—an individual so ignorant and unself-conscious that he[8] will complete actions that others think of as heroic without thinking about them. Robert Ducharme describes the components that make up this figure as follows:

> Two of the necessary conditions for the operation of instinctual courage in Conrad's men are intellectual limitation and imaginative stupidity. Too much mind disables the instinctual response or the learned behavior that constitutes the

[8] While there is nothing preventing women from being "fools" or "blind followers" (discussed later in this chapter) were those models to be applied elsewhere in literature, within Conrad's writing both roles are always fulfilled by men.

> essential ground for dutiful courage in Conrad's universe of moral testing. The unruly imagination similarly intervenes to prevent the swift acting out of the brave deed. (6)

Ducharme does not designate this figure as a "fool," however, and he argues that Conrad prefers this thoughtless model of action because of the tremendous difficulty of acting heroically as a fully conscious being. In doing so, though, Ducharme ignores a crucial factor in understanding Conrad's perspective on heroism—consciousness is unavoidable in modernity, so for heroism to continue to exist it must be reconstructed as a concept that can be undertaken and successfully completed by a thinking, self-aware person. Ira Sadoff supports this idea of self-awareness as an almost inescapable force in Conrad's writing, noting that Conrad "maintain[s] that man can not live his entire life asleep, without consciousness" (520). Sadoff reinforces his claim with the following quotation from *Lord Jim*'s Marlow: "There are few of us who have never known one of these rare moments of awakening when we see, hear, understand so much—everything—in a flash—before we fall back again into our agreeable somnolescence" (qtd. in Sadoff 520).

The "few" Marlow references are Conrad's instinctual heroes, but their ability to "do" without contemplating the multitudinous consequences is a model that is closed off for modern humanity. To return to Isaiah Berlin's model of monistic versus pluralistic thinking—once one is a fox, there is no going back to being a hedgehog, no matter how much one might wish for it (24). The Russian in *Heart of Darkness* is a prime example of how the fool cannot serve as a heroic model for modernity. That the young man possesses a level of courage is beyond doubt: he has traveled through and survived, virtually alone, in the jungle for years. He even elicits a sort of bewildered admiration from Marlow, who sums up the effect of first encountering the Russian as follows:

> If the absolutely pure, uncalculating, unpractical spirit of adventure had ever ruled a human being, it ruled this be-patched youth. I almost envied him the possession of this modest and clear flame. It seemed to have consumed all thought of self so completely that, even while he was talking to you, you forgot that it was he, the man before your eyes—who had gone through these things. (*HoD* 161)

While the Russian may have qualities that Marlow admires, his lack of self-awareness, something Marlow recognizes right away, ultimately prevents him from being an acceptable model for heroism in *Heart of Darkness*. Rather, the Russian is so out of place in the world of that novel that Marlow has trouble believing in the possibility of the existence of such a figure: "His very existence was improbable, inexplicable, and altogether bewildering. He was an insoluble problem. It was inconceivable how he had existed, how he had succeeded in getting so far, how he had managed to remain—why he did not instantly disappear" (161). If Ducharme's claim about Conrad's preference for instinctual heroism were true, then the Russian would serve as a behavioral model in *Heart of Darkness*, something he clearly does not do. The heroic "quest" in the work—and in Conrad's writing in general—is not to return to the "blissful" ignorance of a monistic world but instead to try to behave ethically in situations where the "right" choice is unclear or where no "right" choice exists, a thought echoed by Gary Adelman when he asserts, "The true center of *Heart of Darkness* is the subtly revealed psychology of an ethical human being struggling to maintain a moral perspective—a sense of moral cleanliness, at any rate—in a situation revoltingly immoral" (27). The recognition of a "revoltingly immoral" situation requires a level of consciousness that the Russian does not possess, and thus he cannot serve as a model of the heroism that Conrad seeks.

Instinctual heroism, then, fulfills a role in Conrad's works not as something to which humanity should aspire to return but instead as an example of the impossibility of resurrecting a monistic view of heroism in a pluralistic world. Any doubt about the negative consequences of instinctual heroism in Conrad is removed completely with a close inspection of the second type of this model: the blind follower. Where the fool acts, or reacts, without thought, the blind follower is consumed by and reliant upon a single idea. This figure blindly adheres to, or is influenced by, a system of beliefs (such as the moral superiority of Western civilizations over African ones), and, as a result, ends up acting without taking time to consider the ethical ramifications of his deed. Kurtz, Jim, Nostromo, and Verloc all serve as models for this figure, who is presented as a greater heroic failure than the fool in part because of the damage done by his deeds. The danger of acting unethically as a blind follower is tremendous, and along his way to exposing this "heroic" model as a fraud, Conrad eviscerates the "Great Man" model of heroism as thoroughly as Tolstoy did before him and shows that instinctual heroism is not actually heroic at all but rather the most common example of failed heroism prevalent in the West.

Contrasted against the examples of instinctual heroism in Conrad's writing is the search for the conscious hero—that elusive being who can purposefully do the "right" thing, for the "right" reason, and at the "right" time. Conrad's works display a full awareness of the difficulties of achieving this model, and, while he does not find a solution to the problem, the questions he asks along the way illuminate fundamental aspects of the issue that allow writers who follow him to continue the quest for redefining heroism in modernity. Conrad's method for trying to ascertain the possibility of conscious heroism is to break down and analyze the component parts of the heroic moment, focusing specifically on ways in which the conscious

mind interacts with both objective and subjective modes of time. Even though he does not mention *kairos* specifically in his writing, Conrad's works at the end of the nineteenth century and start of the twentieth—beginning with *Heart of Darkness*, building successively through *Lord Jim* and *Nostromo*, and culminating in *The Secret Agent*—display an awareness of the link between *kairos* and heroic action, and they explore that connection by illustrating both the challenges to acting appropriately when a *kairic* moment presents itself and the rarity of *kairic* opportunities in general.

Much of *Heart of Darkness* is devoted to breaking down the "Great Man" myth in order to expose the blind follower as an untenable model for heroism in modernity. Conrad uses Kurtz as a straw man to expose the vast gulf that exists between the ideals, the "words," of Western civilization and the reality that is put into practice through the actions of the "Great Men" of Europe in Africa. That Kurtz is to be taken as a model for a "Great Man" is made clear early on in the novel through the vague yet consistently laudatory praises heaped upon him by the people describing him to Marlow. The first time Marlow hears of Kurtz, the chief accountant at the outer station describes him as "a remarkable person" (*HoD* 120). The station's manager soon echoes this praise, telling Marlow that Kurtz is "an exceptional man, of the greatest importance to the Company" (124). The brick maker, the manager's spy at that same station, describes Kurtz as a "prodigy" and a "special being"—part of the "gang of virtue" whose task is to bring the Light of civilization to the darkness of the African jungle (127).

The image of Kurtz as a light-bearer for the West is the clearest indication in *Heart of Darkness* of Conrad's intent to establish him as a "Great Man" because it leads to direct connections to Thomas Carlyle. An analysis of two objects created by Kurtz, the report and the painting, helps make these connections more clear. The report is significant because it serves

both as the first direct example of the power of Kurtz's words in the novel and of the danger of believing that "good" words will automatically equate to "good" actions. John Van Domelen argues that words and vocalization were no trivial matter for Conrad: "One preoccupation which was present from the beginning in Conrad's work and which remained with him throughout his literary career was his fear of mendacious eloquence and contempt for empty rhetoric" (228). In spite of his mistrust of them, however, words remain very powerful for Conrad, and much of Kurtz's influence is attributed to his voice. It is his talks with the Russian, for example, that lead to the young man's unwavering devotion to Kurtz. When Marlow suggests to the Russian that Kurtz might be mad, the latter refutes the diagnosis and says that Marlow "wouldn't dare hint at such a thing" if he had only "heard him [Kurtz] talk, only two days ago" (*HoD* 163).

Marlow, too, is aware of Kurtz's vocal power even before he meets him, noting that "the man presented himself as a voice" in Marlow's imagination (152). He elaborates soon after, adding a thorough description of that power:

> The point was in his being a gifted creature, and that of all his gifts the one that stood out preeminently, that carried with it a sense of real presence, was his ability to talk, his words—the gift of expression, the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness. (152)

Rather than elevating words as worthy of praise, though, Marlow's insightful description instead serves to highlight their most dangerous qualities for a blind follower—their flexibility and their mutability. Words can mean anything, and words can be used to promote anything; thus, they have moral value only if they lead directly to "right" actions.

Kurtz's most powerful words in the novel are expressed in the report he constructs for the "International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs" (154-55). Marlow describes the effect of reading this report as follows: "It made me tingle with enthusiasm. This was the unbounded power of eloquence—of words—of burning noble words" (155). This description of perceived power contrasts sharply with the words' actual emptiness, however, for the text of the pamphlet itself contains no practical advice on how to carry out the exertion of a "power for good practically unbounded" (155). Moreover, the words themselves, for the most part, do not lodge in Marlow's memory; only their effect does. The few words Marlow does remember are extremely important, though, as is evidenced by his description of the report's specifics:

> He began with the argument that we whites, from the point of development we had arrived at, 'must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings—we approach them with the might as of a deity,' and so on, and so on. 'By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded,' &c, &c. (155)

This is where the connection to Carlyle becomes significant, for Cedric Watts sees these words as the "echo" of other "burning noble words" from Carlyle's *Past and Present* that directly influenced the behavior of Europeans in Africa during the nineteenth century (Watts 63, *HoD* 155).

Watts elaborates on this connection by noting that H. M. Stanley, whom Watts describes as "the propagandist for Leopold II's enterprises in the Congo," cited Carlyle as a positive influence on Belgian activity in that location, the horrible results of which were the real-life inspiration for *Heart of Darkness* (60). The specific reference made by Stanley was, "Carlyle says that 'to subdue mutiny, discord, widespread despair by manfulness, justice, mercy, and

wisdom, to let light on chaos, and make it instead a green flowery world, is beyond all other greatness, work for a God!'" (qtd. in Watts 60). Stanley, unfortunately, does not get the quote from *Past and Present* exactly right; Carlyle's actual words from that part of the text are:

> Subdue Mutiny, Discord, widespread Despair, by manfulness, justice, mercy and wisdom. Chaos is dark, deep as Hell; let light be, and there is instead a green flowery World. O, it is great, and there is no other greatness. To make some nook of God's Creation a little fruitfuller, better, more worthy of God; to make some human hearts a little wiser, manfuller, happier, —more blessed, less accursed! It is work for a God. (291-92)

Stanley is close enough to the main idea, however, and the image of "let[ting] light on chaos," as he puts it, is the prime error of blind followers of Western ideals that Conrad works to expose in *Heart of Darkness*. This is not the only reference to Carlyle in the work either.

Much earlier, before Marlow even leaves for Africa, he realizes in the course of a conversation with his aunt that she believes he has a moral purpose in going there, one that he had not yet considered for himself. Marlow states, "It appeared, however, I was also one of the Workers, with a capital—you know. Something like an emissary of light, something like a lower sort of apostle. There had been a lot of such rot let loose in print and talk just about that time" (113). The capital W "Workers," Watts observes, is a direct reference to Carlyle's philosophy of Work as explained in *Past and Present* (60). While Watts overlooks Marlow's analysis that such ideas are "rot," however, Alison Hopwood carries this idea forward effectively.

Hopwood argues that the strongest connection to *Past and Present* in *Heart of Darkness* can be found in the scene where Marlow stumbles upon the dying "helpers" at the Company's outer station (118-19). Of this encounter, Hopwood observes:

> Conrad's scene turns Carlyle's inside out to show the heart of imperialism as it is, not as an idealist wishes it to be, and so foreshadows the moral course of the story he tells. Similarly, Kurtz, the successful ivory-hunter, worshipped by the people he lives among and uses, is like a picture of Carlyle's industrialist-ruler-hero with the values reversed; as a journalist with a turn for the exalted and the rhetorical, a prophetic voice of civilization and empire, Kurtz looks rather like a sardonic sketch of Carlyle himself. (168)

The phrase "industrialist-ruler-hero" opens up a potential connection to *On Heroes* that both Hopwood and Watts fail to make, and the omission is significant. Carlyle's "Great Men" are the beings who make empires possible, and the result of their efforts, what apologists such as Carlyle would call "civilization," supposedly justifies the means of getting there. Kurtz's report, then, stands as a direct refutation of Carlyle's assertion, especially when compared to the behavior of Company men in Africa. This repudiation is echoed throughout the work and reiterated metaphorically by the other object created by Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*—his painting.

Kurtz's painting hangs in the brick maker's room, out of the way and almost unnoticed by Marlow (127). Marlow's description of the painting is brief: "Then I noticed a small sketch in oils, on a panel, representing a woman, draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch. The background was sombre—almost black. The movement of the woman was stately, and the effect of the torchlight on the face was sinister" (127). It is not mentioned again. In spite of the brevity of its appearance in the novel, though, this painting represents Conrad's opinion of all the "light-bearers" in Africa, those blind followers of Carlyle's ideal of Work, which he believed would be best overseen by the "Great Men" of the West. The painting might be overlooked as innocuous,

as a representation of appropriately blind justice bringing light to the darkened places of the world, if not for two words: “sinister” and “torch.”

The “sinister effect” on the woman’s face is not surprising, as it aligns with the tone of the novel that Conrad repeatedly establishes. The “Work” of the company does not bring about results that better Africa in any way; it does not “enlighten” the continent. Rather, that “Work” ranges from being absurd—such as the “objectless blasting” of the cliff or the “vast artificial hole” dug for no discernible purpose at the outer station (116-17)—to being downright evil, which Marlow begins to realize when he sees its consequences in the helpers dying beneath the trees. His description of that moment is significant:

> They were dying slowly—it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now,—nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom. […] Then, glancing down, I saw a face near my hand. The black bones reclined at full length with one shoulder against a tree, and slowly the eyelids rose and the sunken eyes looked up at me, enormous and vacant, a kind of blind, white flicker in the depths of the orbs, which died out slowly. […] While I stood horror-struck, one of these creatures rose to his hands and knees, and went off on all-fours towards the river to drink. He lapped out of his hand, then sat up in the sunlight, crossing his shins in front of him, and after a time let his woolly head fall on his breastbone. (118-19)

Readers already familiar with *Heart of Darkness* might latch on to Marlow’s description of himself as “horror-struck” because of how the phrase foreshadows Kurtz’s famous last words:

"The horror! The horror!" (178). The word "Flicker" also appears elsewhere in the novel, though, and, while its import may not be as obvious, its implication is crucial.

At the beginning of the novel, as he and his shipmates sit aboard the *Nellie* and before he begins his tale about Kurtz and Africa, Marlow's first words are, "And this also […] has been one of the dark places of the earth" (105). Marlow goes on to describe the Romans as the light-bearers who brought civilization to England, saying, "Light came out of this river [The Thames] since" (105-6). His meaning is initially lost on his listeners, who believe he is referring to the age of knights (106). Marlow corrects that misunderstanding and says that the light to which he is referring "is like a running blaze on a plain, like a flash of lightning in the clouds. We live in the *flicker*—may it last as long as the old earth keeps rolling!" (106, italics added for emphasis). What "civilization" really brings to "darkened" places, then, is fire—a distinction that is essential to understanding Conrad's warning about the danger of being a blind follower to ideals such as those proclaimed by Carlyle.

The torch-bearing, blindfolded woman in the painting, then, is not carrying light. She carries *fire*. Light, especially the kind that "flickers," can be a byproduct of fire, which, if used appropriately, can provide warmth and light and life to people. However, if fire is used carelessly, irresponsibly, it can of course lead to devastating results. Fire is energy that burns, that consumes, and if one blindly carries fire, he or she cannot be aware of what is destroyed along the way. Thus, the "light-bearing" intent exemplified in Kurtz's report is shown for the destructive force it really is in his handwritten addendum: "Exterminate all the brutes!"—a piece of advice that Marlow ironically notes is the only "practical hint" in the report of how to carry out its goals (155).

Kurtz, the "Great Man," sets out to uphold the righteousness of Western society and ends up committing unnamable, almost indescribable, depravities while setting himself up as a deity to be worshipped and obeyed by the natives of Africa, a contrast that underlines the danger of believing blindly in an ideal and not being able to carry that ideal through into action. The contrast of ideal versus real, of intent versus practice, is embodied in Kurtz, as Ted Billy notes: "Like the deceitful propaganda of the imperialism he represents, Kurtz objectifies the contradiction of a pleasing appearance and a frightful reality" (71). Through him, Conrad shows the blind follower to be an untenable model for heroism in a pluralistic world.

Conrad's rejection of the "Great Man" model of heroism is complete, then, with the recognition that Kurtz serves as both a Carlylian and an instinctive hero. Kurtz follows the ideals of Western society blindly, as if adhering to them would be as easy as an instinctive reaction, but to follow blindly is to give over the thought and the reasoning behind one's actions to someone or something else and to believe that person or idea no matter the circumstance, that is: *always* (and "always" cannot be interrupted by the "right" time). When the reality of the tremendous difficulty of making an ethical, heroic choice in an unwitnessed situation finally presents itself, the cultural ideals Kurtz values are not enough to keep him from repeated *kairic* failure. For this reason, the old models of heroism, which held sway so long in the West and are exemplified in the "Great Man" model, are categorized by Conrad as "instinctive" and are doomed to failure in the twentieth century.

In spite of this damning indictment of an older type of heroism, Conrad does not completely close the door on the concept in *Heart of Darkness*. While he proves the instinctive models to be inadequate through his portrayals of the Russian and Kurtz, Conrad also begins the search for a way to recover the concept of heroism and rebuild it for a modern, pluralistic world.

The key to this "conscious" mode that Conrad seeks is having an awareness of circumstance that would allow one to determine the "right" thing to do in moments where such determination is possible (i.e., in *kairic* moments). Making the correct decision means nothing if it is not followed up by appropriate action, and the importance of action, of *doing*, is clearly emphasized in *Heart of Darkness*; the difficulty lies in understanding the "right" thing to do and doing it at the "right" time.

Hopwood argues that Marlow serves as a model of a kind of "right" action, noting the positive contrast of Marlow to men such as Kurtz who speak of good but do not *do* it. She points out that Marlow "repairs his steamboat and keeps it going, takes it up the river, rescues Kurtz, and takes it down-river again. He rules too, not like Kurtz by imposing his will through oratory, but by technical knowledge and ability. Even the manager must defer to his judgment" (168). Marlow, then, is a man who does things, but what Hopwood misses in her analysis of his actions is that the things he does are "surface-level" things, the kind of actions that one can practically do *without* thinking, and Conrad firmly establishes that such actions can no longer be considered heroic (if they ever should have been).

Marlow himself admits that he used surface-level thoughts as a means of protection, of keeping himself from thinking too deeply about what was going on around him during his time in Africa. At one point in his telling, one of Marlow's listeners interjects doubts about his ability to resist the madness that seemed to be infecting everyone around him. Marlow defends himself, claiming, "I had no time. I had to mess about with white-lead and strips of woolen blanket helping to put bandages on those leaky steam-pipes—I tell you. I had to watch the steering, and circumvent those snags, and get the tin-pot along by hook or by crook. There was surface-truth enough in these things to save a wiser man" (140). Marlow's defense mechanism may protect

him to an extent from the horrors around him, but it also has the unintended consequence of rendering him unprepared for heroic action.

Marlow's lack of readiness is made apparent during the one event in which he has the opportunity to act heroically according to the Aristotelian model: the attack on his steamship. During that incident, Conrad introduces an interesting idea about the interaction between temporality and thought that he builds upon in later novels. Mostly, the concern has to do with how consciousness can interfere with timely action by making time appear to either speed up or slow down during an event. When the natives start attacking the steamer, Marlow is initially confused by what he sees and struggles to comprehend that they are under attack. In the matter of a few seconds he has "time" to think about why his poleman is stretched out on the deck (he's dead), why the fireman sits down abruptly and ducks his head (he recognizes the attack), why there are little sticks flying through the air all around him (arrows), and why everything is so quiet—with the exception of the rhythmic thumping of the steamer's wheel (*HoD* 149). In reality, very little time passes, but the whole passage, due to the many details he notices, seems much longer from Marlow's perspective.

Ian Watt calls this phenomenon "delayed decoding" and describes it as a narrative device that "combines the forward temporal progression of the mind, as it receives messages from the outside world, with the much slower reflexive process of making out their meaning" (175).[9] It is a technique that Conrad uses repeatedly in his writing to highlight problems associated with action and timeliness. The key to analyzing Marlow's actions is that, while time *seems* to slow around him, in reality it does not, and although he takes appropriate action quickly enough to

[9] See Bruce Johnson's "Conrad's Impressionism and Watt's 'Delayed Decoding'" for a counter-argument to Watt's "delayed decoding." Johnson recognizes that Marlow is having surface-level thoughts during the attack, describing them as "uninterpreted or minimally interpreted observations" (53). Johnson's differs from Watt's—and also my own—reading, though, in that he denies any preference for "deeper" thoughts over surface-level ones, believing that the latter are closer representations of how people interact with and perceive the world.

save his ship and several lives, he does not act in time to save his helmsman. Because of that failure, Marlow cannot be said to have been fully successful in his heroic effort. He does the "right" thing in pulling the steam whistle, and he does it for the "right" reasons—both for stopping the attack and for preventing the pilgrims from uselessly and dangerously firing blindly into the jungle—but his only companion aboard ship dies before he can figure out what to do to deter the attack. He is courageous and resourceful, but his timing is a bit off.

The implication is that the interference caused during Marlow's moment of delayed decoding could have been prevented if he was mentally prepared to assess the situation and act immediately. Instead, Marlow is busy doing his "surface-thinking" routine just before the attack, and—when time seems to slow down during the *kairic* moment, giving him the impression of having more time to think about what is happening and what he should do about it—the only thoughts he initially has are surface-level thoughts (e.g., he sees "sticks," not arrows). The result is that Marlow is not prepared at that time to fulfill the requirements of Conrad's conscious heroism. Being mentally alert—ready to act—is essential to this concept, a notion that Conrad picks up immediately in the next novel he published, *Lord Jim*.

Heart of Darkness and *Lord Jim* focus on many of the same questions about heroism, which is not surprising considering that Conrad meant for them to be read as companion pieces (Jones 83). Their composition history is even intertwined—Adelman notes that Conrad began *Lord Jim* in 1898, interrupted work to compose *Heart of Darkness* in December of that year, then finished *Lord Jim* afterward (xiv). While *Heart of Darkness* focuses mostly on exposing the false nature of instinctive heroism, *Lord Jim* is centered conceptually on the potential consequences of failure when an opportunity for conscious heroism presents itself.

The *kairic* moment in *Lord Jim* occurs aboard the *Patna*, when the craft collides with a hidden obstruction beneath the surface of the water (21). The slow, drawn out contact with this impediment, which Jim describes as being like "a snake crawling over a stick" (21), is nevertheless jarring enough to create a sense of dread among the crew: "What had happened? The wheezy thump of the engines went on. Had the earth been checked in her course? They could not understand; and suddenly the calm sea, the sky without a cloud, appeared formidably insecure in their immobility, as if poised on the brow of yawning destruction" (20-21). Jim and the crew, convinced that the craft is sinking, abandon ship, leaving behind hundreds of passengers to die. This is the point where Jim's imaginary world of easily-achieved heroism—he is described early in the novel as being full of thoughts of "valorous deeds" and "imaginary achievements [which he believed to be] the best parts of life, its secret truth, its hidden reality" (17)—and the reality of horrific uncertainty during extraordinarily stressful events come into conflict. C. B. Cox correctly points out that everything in Jim's universe instantly changes with the collision: "In one sense, Jim's romantic quest ends here, with the invasion of his life by a horror that lies behind the smoothness of appearances. It is a moment of recognition, of insight into ultimate reality" (31). His inner conflict is magnified when the *Patna* manages to stay afloat and the passengers survive. Then, after word reaches shore that the crew abandoned the ship's passengers, Jim is forced to testify at a formal Inquiry on his and his crewmates' dereliction of duty.

During the course of his trial, Jim comes into contact with Marlow, who is mesmerized by the situation to the extent that Jim and the questions his tale elicits about heroism and truth stick with Marlow for the rest of his life as "innumerable shades—[that are] so fine, so difficult to render in colourless words" (*LJ* 60). Much of the criticism of *Lord Jim* begins with the

assumption that Jim's actions during the crisis are an example of cowardice. Gerald Garmon, for example, goes so far as to claim that "all of the readers know [Jim] to be a coward" (38). There is a tone of dismissal in such a summing-up, particularly with the use of such a loaded term as "coward," that is incongruous with the details of the novel, however. If Jim's act *were* simply an act of cowardice, it would hardly be worth notice, as such acts are commonplace in the world. Instead, what happens to Jim is something more than simply a question of fight or flight with the latter winning out, something much more confusing and difficult to pin down, a mystery so intriguing that when Jim begins to tell Marlow his tale the latter states, "I listened with concentrated attention, not daring to stir in my chair; I wanted to know—and to this day I don't know, I can only guess" (51).

Marlow, ironically, has his own moment of delay in action aboard his steamboat in Africa in *Heart of Darkness*, a fact that cannot be off-handedly dismissed considering Conrad's declaration that the two works should be taken together. Unlike the incident with Marlow on the steamboat, though, Jim's decisions come under the full view and scrutiny of the public, reinforcing the notion that heroism is a "social convention" (Jones 87). Another significant difference between the two events is that Marlow's delay in acting appropriately is the result of his willful preoccupation with surface thoughts, which aligns him more closely with Conrad's "fool" model for instinctive heroism at that point in *Heart of Darkness*. Jim, though, is a "blind follower," and through him Conrad examines what happens when someone who believes in an ideal fails to live up to it during a *kairic* moment that takes place in full view of the public.

The events surrounding Jim's *kairic* opportunity on the *Patna* highlight the difficulty of acting heroically when one feels extremely pressed for time. One cannot be a hero and act instinctively, as Conrad has established, but the tremendous difficulty of thinking through the

decision, making the "right" choice, then following through on that choice with appropriate action is made all the more clear through the speed at which all three must be completed during matters of urgency. Marlow reports Jim's recollection of the problem, echoing the urgency Jim felt: "There were boats enough for half of them [the passengers] perhaps, but there was no time. No time! No time!" (*LJ* 55). The lack of time to make a decision, or, more precisely, the *perception* of a lack of time, leads to a kind of paralysis that Yannick Le Boulicaut labels "immobilism" (42). Le Boulicaut observes that this condition occurs frequently in Conrad's writing and that it is accompanied by a loss of the "power to speak" and occurs when characters "are confronted with unexpected situations" (42). In Jim's case, both are true.

When Jim returns to the deck—after examining the damaged bulkhead which he believed did not have a "ghost of a chance" of being repaired (*LJ* 58)—his first thought is to call out and warn everyone of the danger. Next, according to Marlow, "He told me that his first impulse was to shout and straightway make all those people leap out of sleep into terror; but such an overwhelming sense of his helplessness came over him that he was not able to produce a sound" (54). Sadoff argues that Jim's "fear of death" is the "cause for his immobilization" during this crisis (522), and such a reading certainly supports the general claim that Jim is a coward. Sadoff's reading ignores Jim's own claim that he was not thinking of his own safety, though, which Jim heatedly explains to Marlow:

> 'Do you suppose,' [Jim] said, 'that I was thinking of myself, with a hundred and sixty people at my back, all fast asleep in that fore-'tween deck alone—and more of them aft; more on the deck—sleeping—knowing nothing about it—three times as many as there were boats for, even if there had been time? I expected to see

> the iron open out as I stood there and the rush of water going over them as they lay. . . . What could I do—what?' (*LJ* 54, ellipsis in original)

More important than Jim's own claims, which might fairly be considered dubious since he wants to defend his actions, is Marlow's judgment on the matter, and Marlow tells his listeners that he believes Jim's account of what happened and why he did what he did, saying, "He swayed me. I own to it, I own up" (58).

What freezes Jim, then, is not fear for his safety or even a fear of dying. Rather, he is paralyzed by an inability to decide what to *do*. Throughout his description of the event to Marlow, Jim remains focused on the impossibility of being able to rescue everyone, which prevents him from attempting to rescue anyone. No heroic action can take place if one is focused on what one cannot do; instead, one must think of what one can do and do it—without the comfort of foreknowledge of one's success. Sometimes the best imagined result is not realistically possible, and the only heroic option is to do the best possible under the circumstances.

The truth, and Jim knows this because he is haunted by his failure aboard the *Patna* for the rest of his life, is that there *was* a "right" thing to do. The "right" thing to do was to do something, *anything*, to help the people who were in danger of dying, but Jim does not realize this in time to act. Instead, all he can think is "eight hundred people and seven boats" (55), focusing on the hopelessness of saving everyone aboard before the ship goes down, which he believes with all his soul will happen any second. Such a scenario clearly never came up in Jim's many childhood fantasies of danger and heroism at sea, despite his genuine intention to prepare himself for a life of adventure. Marlow describes these youthful dreams, saying, "Ever since he [Jim] had been 'so high'—'quite a little chap,' he had been preparing himself for all the

difficulties that can beset one on land and water. He confessed proudly to this kind of foresight. He had been elaborating dangers and defences, expecting the worst, rehearsing his best" (60). Clearly, such rehearsals do little to prepare one for acting in the chaos of reality, as Marlow indicates when he tells Jim, "It is always the unexpected that happens" (60). Because of Jim's devotion to and blind adherence to romantic ideals of heroism, he does not have the flexibility of mind necessary to act heroically aboard the *Patna*.

Thus, when Jim tells Marlow, "It is all in being ready. I wasn't; not—not then" (52), what Jim was ill-prepared for aboard the *Patna* was the possibility of chaos, of the unexpected, of the metaphorical "wreck hidden beneath the surface" of his expectations. None of these are situations in which a blind follower can thrive, and Jim fits that profile much better than the dismissive label of "coward," even considering the fact that he eventually abandons ship (69). While the real cowards aboard the *Patna*, Jim's crewmates, scramble furiously to release a boat and save themselves, Jim remains frozen in his inability to determine what can be done to save either the ship or the passengers—an immobility brought on by the shocking contrast of his idealistic dreams of what a moment of heroic opportunity would be like for him and the reality of how unprepared he is to act appropriately when the chance arises (61). Jim's *kairic* failure is complete long before he finds himself looking up at the *Patna* from the lifeboat, unaware of how he had gotten there (69-70).

The significance of that *kairic* failure, which Jim identifies repeatedly as a "chance missed" (53), follows him for the rest of his life, causing him to "leave suddenly the seaport where he happened to be at the time and go to another—generally farther east" as soon as anyone finds out about the *Patna* and who Jim is (8). On top of their significance to Jim's development as a character, the events aboard the *Patna* also prove key to Conrad's writing about the nature of

heroism, serving to underscore the importance of taking advantage of a *kairic* opportunity in which a "right" thing to do can be identified. Jim's battle with himself, forever questioning his failure, wondering at his inability to be, in that moment, the hero that he believed himself to be is one way that the value of *kairic* opportunity is established in *Lord Jim*. Conrad's intentions are further reinforced by Marlow's astute observation of Jim's internal conflict in progress:

> He was not speaking to me, he was only speaking before me, in a dispute with an invisible personality, an antagonistic and inseparable partner of his existence—another possessor of his soul. These were issues beyond the competency of a court of inquiry: it was a subtle and momentous quarrel as to the true essence of life, and did not want a judge. (59)

Understanding why Jim did what he did, why his "chance" was "missed," is an attempt to understand the "true essence of life." Marlow echoes this sentiment a few lines later, summing up Jim's effect on him by saying that "the mystery of [Jim's] attitude got hold of me as though he had been an individual in the forefront of his kind, as if the obscure truth involved were momentous enough to affect mankind's conception of itself…" (59, ellipsis in original). The repetition of "truth" in this description (it is actually the third usage of the word in that paragraph) should garner the attention of readers familiar with Conrad's stated goal as an artist, "bringing to light the truth" of the "visible universe" (Preface xxxix). Thus, there is no bigger moment of heroic opportunity in Conrad than Jim's "chance" aboard the *Patna*, and Conrad subsequently devotes tremendous energy in his writing to understanding reasons why people often fail to reach their full heroic potential in such moments.

Another way that Conrad emphasizes the importance of the *kairic* opportunity aboard the *Patna* is by establishing the rarity of such events. Sung Ryol Kim notes that Jim devotes the rest

of his life after that failure to trying to be a hero: "As his acts in Patusan indicate and confirm, Jim holds in earnest a romantic belief in heroic conduct, a genuine faith, by which he abides and to which he cleaves at the risk of his own life" (94). None of his subsequent acts is the equal of the opportunity aboard the *Patna*, though, and the uniqueness of that earlier event is highlighted by the heroically ambiguous ending of the novel.

Marlow labels Jim's decision to sacrifice his life in the name of honor an "extraordinary success" (*LJ* 246), but seeing it that way requires one to ignore both the fact that a *kairic* failure on Jim's part leads to his feeling obligated to give up his life and that, in doing so, he is breaking another promise he has made to his beloved, Jewel. The *kairic* failure comes as a result of trusting Brown, whom Jim mistakenly believes to be a kind of distorted reflection of himself—an image of what Jim could have turned into had he reacted the way Brown did after being "afraid once in [his] life" (227). When Jewel asks Jim whether Brown and his men are "very bad," he responds, "Men act badly sometimes without being much worse than others," clearly thinking of the ways in which he and Brown are alike. Brown and Jim are *not* alike, however, a truth that is driven home when Brown betrays Jim's trust and kills Dain Waris (239). Jim's poor judgment in trusting Brown is bad enough, but he compounds the problem when he offers to forfeit his own life should any harm come to anyone as a result of Brown and his men being allowed to leave peacefully (232-33).

Once Dain Waris is murdered, Jim keeps his promise to give up his life in exchange, and Doramin accepts, shooting Jim in the chest and killing him (246). In keeping his promise to Doramin, however, Jim breaks another he made to Jewel, as she reminds him before he leaves her for the last time: "Do you remember the night I prayed you to leave me, and you said that you could not? That it was impossible! Impossible! Do you remember you said you would

never leave me? Why? I asked you for no promise. You promised unasked—remember" (244). Jim's willingness to leave Jewel and do what he perceives to be his duty might be considered by some, such as Marlow, to be commendable, but it cannot be considered heroic. The situation is not a *kairic* failure on the same level as the *Patna*, where he clearly failed to do what he should have, but there is no real heroic opportunity at the end of *Lord Jim*. Rather, the events at the end of the novel could be described as *akairic*; that is, there is no "right" option for Jim under the circumstances, so there is no possibility for heroic success.

Todd Bender writes about the problematic ending to *Lord Jim*, arguing that the reader is confronted with the problem of seeing Jim's behavior as heroic and ignoring his "jumping away" from his responsibility to Jewel or of seeing his choice as yet another example of his failure to act heroically in a *kairic* moment (182). Bender elaborates:

> With Marlow leading us, we are confronted with ambiguous moral questions. It is no simple matter to match the European literary ideal of heroism to situations involving chance, indeterminacy, and ambiguity. The text forces the reader to cross the border from comfortable assurance about right and wrong, heroic and cowardly behavior, and to enter an ambiguous domain where the rules are no longer clear. (182)

Thus, the end of *Lord Jim* reemphasizes the problem of identifying and completing heroic action in the modern world by showing that truly *kairic* moments where there is clearly a "right" thing to do, such as Jim's heroic opportunity aboard the *Patna*, are extremely rare. Most choices, in contrast, are *akairic*, making the consequences of a "chance missed" that much more significant (*LJ* 53).

In fact, the rarity of *kairic* opportunity is so great that in *Nostromo* Conrad explores the possibility of abandoning action altogether as a requirement for twentieth-century heroism. As Ortega would do a decade later in *Meditations*, Conrad uses *Nostromo* as a testing ground to explore whether the desire to be a conscious hero is enough for one to be considered heroic in a world where *akairos* dominates. The parallels between *Nostromo* and *Meditations* are numerous; except for the fact that it precedes Ortega's work by several years, Conrad's novel seems as if it were written as a direct rebuttal of the theories of heroism Ortega later formally introduced. That Conrad anticipates the paradox of Ortega's new standard of heroism (i.e., sacrificing the active part of heroism in an attempt to make it viable for Modernism instead renders it unheroic) a decade before it was actually written demonstrates just how in tune Conrad was with contemporary problems of heroism during his lifetime. Conrad's conclusion differs from Ortega's, though, and while he tests the waters of replacing heroic action with heroic will as the fundamental requirement for twentieth-century heroism, he ultimately returns to the idea that action is an irreplaceable component of the heroic process. Conrad's rejection of desire as a sufficient replacement for action is shown through the development of his novel's title character, who, at the outset, embodies the essence of Ortega's classic, goal-driven hero but shifts partway through to a more contemporary model of heroism that considers circumstance when making decisions.

At the beginning of the work, Nostromo is presented to the reader as efficacy itself, as if there is nothing else at all to him. The first two times his name is mentioned, "invaluable fellow" and "a fellow in a thousand" are appended to it as if they were merely part of his full title (11). Furthermore, physical descriptions of his person are very limited, and what is provided serves to add to his mysterious nature rather than to reveal more about him. He is "black whiskers," white

teeth," and "a pair of eyes gazing straight" early on in the novel, but a complete description of his appearance is never given (12, 34). This fragmentation of Nostromo as a person serves to highlight the most consistent attribute tied to him—that he is a man who gets things done and nothing more. Even when the story leaves Nostromo behind for nearly forty pages in Part I of the novel, his return continues the motif of describing him as a legend that is somehow extra-human: "the appearance of a phantom-like horseman mounted on a silver-grey mare solved the problem of labour without fail" (72).

Nostromo is singular; no one else is like him, and no one else can do the things that he can do. It is as if Nostromo is not human in the same way that those who surround him are, as if he is somehow "more" than them; in terms of agency and success, he is "more" than anyone save perhaps Gould (although one could argue that Nostromo could be successful at his tasks without Gould while the opposite is not true). This is one of the main reasons that Nostromo can be seen as an unlikely epic hero, out of place and out of time, at the beginning of the novel. As Ortega notes, "The epic figures are not representatives of types but unique creatures. Only one Achilles has existed and only one Helen; only one war on the bank of the Scamander" (126). For Sulaco, there is only one Nostromo.

In addition to possessing a reputation for success in all endeavors, Nostromo also fits Ortega's guidelines for an epic hero in that he seems completely unaware of circumstance at the beginning of the novel. When he has a task to do, he focuses single-mindedly on getting it done, such as when he has to gather his workers after a one day strike during bullfight season (72-3). Nostromo's technique in this instance includes terror, physical violence, and the threat of death for anyone too slow to accede to his demands. Afterward, though, Nostromo is once again described as "invaluable" and "a fellow in a thousand" (73). Method is not important; all that

matters is success. This is just the sort of amoral quality that Ortega describes when he writes of the epic hero stomping on the flowers on the way to his goal (42), and it even echoes the sentiment expressed in *Nostromo* that "primitive men . . . went straighter to their aim, and were more artless in their recognition of success as the only standard of morality (276). Notably, Conrad has already established in both *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim* that such blind following of an ideal (in this case the ideal of the unassailable virtue of success) is more immoral than amoral, and for readers familiar with those works Nostromo's heroic failure in the tale would seem to be unavoidable so long as he maintains that perspective.

What separates Nostromo from previous protagonists in Conrad's works (even Jim, who wants to be a conscious hero but cannot stop blindly following his romantic ideal of that concept) is that his role as a "blind follower" of the ideals of epic heroism does not last. After he has completed his final task of keeping the silver from falling into the rebels' hands (albeit not in the manner envisioned by Decoud or Gould), he experiences a rebirth that jolts his consciousness forward in time so that he becomes aware of circumstance in the same way that the other characters around him have been for the entire novel: "Nostromo was some time in regaining his hold on the world. It had slipped from him completely in the deep slumber of more than twelve hours. It had been like a break of continuity in the chain of experience; he had to find himself in time and space, to think of the hour and the place of his return" (296). This "new" Nostromo sees the world very differently than before, and he recognizes that his former reliance on reputation is completely unsuited for the world in which he lives. The most consistent thought he has in this time of transformation from epic hero to modern man is that he has been betrayed, and the result is that, after considering the various contexts of the situation, Nostromo decides to keep the "missing" silver for himself, thinking that "nothing should be allowed now to rob him

of his bargain. Nothing" (360). It is just as the doctor says to him: "You should have asked yourself before you allowed Decoud to lead you into all this. It was your place to think like a man; but if you did not think then, try to act like a man now" (328). Although he does not do so in the way the doctor imagines, Nostromo acts like a "modern" man for the rest of the novel.

Still, Nostromo's transformation is not yet complete, and he moves onward from being "just" a modern man to inhabit the role of Ortega's modern hero. This is accomplished through his desire to make a new man of himself by stealing the treasure even though he believes success is impossible due to the curse placed on him by Mrs. Viola (338). Such willfulness in the face of certain (in his mind) failure is the essence of Ortega's redefinition of the hero. Nostromo even fulfills the different possibilities of judgment that accompany manifestations of the modern hero. His attempt to better himself while seeking a sort of passive revenge against those who took advantage of him can be seen as tragic, comic, or a mixture of the two. Conrad, however, underscores the untenable nature of Ortega's model of heroism via this very desire for the impossible, a refutation made clear in Nostromo's rejection of Giselle's last appeal to take her away:

> "You have come back to carry me off. It is well! Open thy arms, Giovanni, my lover. I am coming."
>
> His prudent footsteps stopped, and with his eyes glistening wildly, he spoke in a harsh voice.
>
> "Not yet. I must grow rich slowly." . . . A threatening note came into his tone.
>
> "Do not forget that you have a thief for your lover." (390, italics in original)

The tone of this final conversation between the two lovers illuminates one of the more serious problems with Ortega's heroic model, that it ignores all aspects of morality and seems to

treat any manifestation of will in the face of impossibility as heroic. It is true that epic heroes, in stressing success, were not required to factor in questions of "right" or "wrong" in performing their heroic deeds, but those events seemed to be more about amorality than immorality. The same is not the case in *Nostromo*. Nowhere does the title character feel less like a hero than he does at the end of the novel. He identifies himself as a thief multiple times, and he dies in an ignoble fashion when he is shot "like a thief" (396). While being a thief does not automatically preclude one from being a hero in a world of infinite contexts, Nostromo's lack of satisfaction with himself toward the end of the book as compared to the beginning seems to challenge the notion of a heroic will being a universally good thing. The heroism, or lack thereof, in one's *actions,* according to Conrad, is the final arbiter in determining whether one should or should not be considered heroic, as Van Domelen argues when he sums up *Nostromo* by claiming that "the primacy rests with the deed, not the word or the unrealized ideal" (231).

Conrad also demonstrates, in this last conversation between Nostromo and Giselle, that Ortega's modern hero is no more "fully human" than the epic hero was. The singularity of will necessary to maintain this "heroic desire" interferes with taking context into account to the extent that this modern "hero" could very well be considered mad. After all, as Conrad writes, "A man haunted by a fixed idea is insane" (*Nostromo* 271), and Nostromo is so haunted by the silver and all it represents that he abandons his love and gets himself killed in its pursuit—an ending that echoes *Lord Jim* and leaves readers with the same problematic questions. In the end, if a chart of Ortega's philosophy of heroism were to show movement through time from someone unaware of circumstance and fixated on a (physical) goal to someone aware of circumstance but still just as fixated on a (mental) goal, Conrad seems to be saying that nothing has been gained. Ultimately, Ortega's redefinition of heroism is not enough to reclaim the concept for the modern world, and

Conrad shows the singularity of focus in epic will to be merely another form of blind following that lacks the flexibility of mind and the "readiness" required for his ever-elusive model of conscious heroism.

How, then, is such readiness for action to be achieved? In *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim*, and *Nostromo,* Conrad goes to great lengths to explore various problems that prevent people from being able to do the "right" thing, for the "right" reason, and at the "right" time, but he is unable to come up with a workable solution to those problems that would be appropriate in the modern world. In that regard, Conrad's next novel is no different from its predecessors because it is limited to identifying problems that inhibit conscious heroism. *The Secret Agent* stands apart, however, in that it focuses specifically and exhaustively on aspects of time that prevent conscious heroism from being achieved. Eventually, the novel settles on Global Synchronized Time as the ultimate distraction because it interferes with the way people typically experience the world around them—through the natural process of movement between internal and external notions of time.

Conrad's interest in time in *The Secret Agent* is apparent even to the most casual of readers, and the breadth of criticism that attempts to explain his usage of the concept in this novel verifies both how complicated and how extensive that usage is. Many early analyses of the work, for example, centered on what was perceived to be its political purpose, relying on Conrad's admission in the Author's Note that the tale had its origins in real life events (*TSA* 229). Eloise Knapp Hay notes that the novel aligns closely with newspaper accounts of "the Greenwich Observatory outrage" of 1894 (220), and the fact that that real-life attempted bombing and Conrad's fictional portrayal of it were perpetrated by Anarchists led to the frequent assumption that Conrad was expressing a political opinion in *The Secret Agent*. Stephen Arata

notes that Hay herself "considers the novel not bleak but richly comedic, the outpouring of an artist at last securely settled in a nation whose political ideology he unreservedly affirmed" (169). A political reading is not necessarily inaccurate, but there are other usages of time in *The Secret Agent* that go beyond seeing the Greenwich Observatory as a political representation of power.

Avrom Fleishman provides a rationale of just such a usage in his assessment of time in *The Secret Agent*. Fleishman attempts to move criticism of Conrad beyond attachment to any particular political ideology (ix). Instead, he identifies *The Secret Agent* as an early image of the Modernist world. For Fleishman, the social state of the world at the turn of the twentieth century was one of fragmentation, and the status of mankind was one of "isolation from each other, alienation from the social whole, and, in consequence, loneliness and self-destruction" (188-9). He links this isolation to time by noting that, "In the present world, time is of the essence; almost everyone complains of lack of time, and all are perpetually conscious of the presence of time and their dependence on it. In the absence of community, a common time standard is a mechanical substitute to create social order" (205). Thus, Fleishman aligns Conrad's presentation of time in *The Secret Agent* with the fragmentation of modern (and Modern) life as a means of creating an artificial bond in an attempt to compensate for those that have dissolved or been broken.

Yet another interpretation of Conrad's usage of time in *The Secret Agent* comes from Stephen Kern, who places Conrad at the forefront of the battle between public and private notions of time at the turn of the twentieth century (34). According to Kern,

> Of all the assaults on the authority of uniform public time that appeared in the imaginative literature of this period, the most direct was the one assigned to the Russian anarchist in Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907). His task as an

> *agent provocateur* in England was to blow up the Greenwich Observatory. Conrad could not have picked a more appropriate anarchist objective, a more graphic symbol of centralized political authority. (16, italics in original)

More than just a political analysis, Kern's assessment of the novel identifies it as a significant marker in the cultural history of perceptions of time and space during the early stages of Modernism.

There are, of course, many other readings of time's purpose in *The Secret Agent* as well.[10] In spite of the variety of approaches, though, there is a clear gap in existing criticism when it comes to discerning Conrad's treatment of time in this novel within the larger context of his concern with heroic action. In addition to the various political and socio-historical readings already mentioned, one can also view *The Secret Agent* as both an exploration of humanity's mental, "internal" interactions with "external" notions of time, such as *chronos* and *kairos*, and an analysis of how the movement between the two affects readiness for action.

Conrad's motivation for this exploration and analysis within his larger examination of heroism stems from the introduction of characters' personal interactions with time in previous novels. Through events such as Marlow's confusion on his steamboat, Jim's paralysis aboard the *Patna*, and Nostromo's perceived movement through time at his rebirth, Conrad has already established that time "feels" different to people according to what they are thinking, how hard they are concentrating, how much stress they are under, and so on. These individual, subjective interactions with time are natural, but they are inevitably followed by a return to seeing time according to its "external" models, such as the linear, quantitative *chronos* or the experiential,

[10] See for example Mark Hama's "Time as Power: The Politics of Social Time in Conrad's *The Secret Agent*" for a useful summary of critical approaches to the novel, including Hama's own refutation of Kern's "public versus private" approach in favor of seeing time not "as a harshly repressive authoritarian force, but rather [as] the will of a society to organize its time in a particular way at a particular historical moment" (140).

qualitative *kairos*. Frank Kermode sees this as humanity's "need in the moment of existence to belong, to be related to a beginning and to an end" (4). Kermode goes on to argue that the essentiality of human experience being divided into differentiated moments is shown through the description of the sounds a clock makes as "*tick-tock*" (44, italics in original):

> The fact that we call the second of the two related sounds *tock* is evidence that we use fictions to enable the end to confer organization and form on the temporal structure. The interval between the two sounds, between *tick* and *tock* is now charged with significant duration. The clock's *tick-tock* I take to be a model of what we call a plot, an organization that humanizes time by giving it form; and the interval between *tock* and *tick* represents purely successive, disorganized time of the sort that we need to humanize. (45)

For all their differences, *chronos* and *kairos* share the trait Kermode describes: the next moment is different from this one, whether that difference is quantitative or qualitative. Thus, while time may *seem* to be moving differently during an individual's perception of a significant event, in the reality of the external world time continues to march on as it always does.

Because reality moves on while one is thinking, the perception of time as being different during important moments is essential to Conrad's search for conscious heroism, and he gives examples of two different kinds of individual, subjective interactions with time in *The Secret Agent* to emphasize the importance of that phenomenon. The first of these is the sensation Watt terms "delayed decoding" (175), which Conrad has already shown in *Heart of Darkness* to be a moment where time seems to slow down. In *The Secret Agent*, Conrad elaborates on the consequences of delayed decoding much more thoroughly, though, when he describes Chief

Inspector Heat's troubled thoughts about the possibility of a violent death *not* being instantaneous to the mind of the person dying:

> No physiologist, and still less of a metaphysician, Chief Inspector Heat rose by the force of sympathy, which is a form of fear, above the vulgar conception of time. Instantaneous! He remembered all that he had ever read in popular publications of long and terrifying dreams dreamed in the instant of waking; of the whole past life lived with frightful intensity by a drowning man as his doomed head bobs up, streaming, for the last time. The inexplicable mysteries of conscious existence beset Chief Inspector Heat till he evolved a horrible notion that ages of atrocious pain and mental torture could be contained between two successive winks of an eye. (65)

Thus, the measurable time in seconds between when an explosion starts and when a victim of that explosion dies might seem very brief to an observer but excruciatingly long to the victim.

The other example of individual, subjective interaction with time in *The Secret Agent* is the opposite effect—time seems to have sped up while one is thinking. I call this perception "charmed processing," and it is a phenomenon that has not been thoroughly explored in criticism of this novel even though it is no less important than delayed decoding.[11] Charmed processing occurs as a result of intense focus on one thought or impression—as if one were mesmerized—to the extent that one's ability to notice the passing of physical time is suppressed so that what mentally seems like a few moments might, in reality, have been much longer. An example of this process can be seen early on in *The Secret Agent* when Verloc returns home after being

[11] Fleishman identifies a process similar to charmed processing when he mentions that "Winnie experiences what existential psychoanalysts have called the 'flight of time,' its apparent acceleration after the subjective congealment that had occurred just after the murder, when time seemed to stand still" (209). He does not analyze its effects, however, or attempt to place it within his other definitions of time.

informed of his new mission by Mr. Vladimir. Verloc, walking home "as if in a dream," finds himself "at the shop door all at once, as if borne from west to east on the wings of a great wind" (28). For Conrad, the key to both of these subjective interactions with time—just as it was with both Marlow and Jim—is navigating out of them and back into "reality" in time to act heroically within a *kairic* moment.

The Secret Agent differs from Conrad's previous exploration of this problem in that it presents a new kind of interference that makes the navigation from thought to action that much harder. That interference comes in the form of Global Standard Time. Interestingly, Conrad does not show how synchronized public time impacts the potential for heroic action in the expected place—the plot to blow up the Observatory. Instead, he shows this new form of chronometric time to be an unnatural obstruction to heroism by contrasting it with another chronometer that is "external" to humanity's mental interactions with time—the human heart.

This contrast occurs during Verloc's murder scene when Conrad uses Winnie's stabbing of her husband to emphasize the *wrongness* of a human attitude that sees time as being wholly contained within and controlled by the Greenwich Observatory. Conrad first introduces that scene's importance by including instances of both delayed decoding and charmed processing. These two concepts appear simultaneously just prior to Verloc's being stabbed—in a moment that exemplifies the extreme fluidity and heterogeneity of mental perceptions of time. On the one hand, Verloc's recognition of the "leisurely" movements of the shadow of his wife's knife-wielding arm seems to be an instance of delayed decoding (192), one in which he should have an eternity of mental time "between two successive winks of an eye" in order to work out a plan for defending himself (65). On the other hand, Verloc's intense focus on the shadow, what it means, and what he should do serves as an example of charmed processing. While he is caught up in

those thoughts, "external" time (i.e., the sequential time of reality as humans experience it) progresses normally, and he ends up with less time to act than he realizes. When both of these mental perceptions of time combine to keep Verloc from acting in time to save himself, Conrad seems to be setting up all forms of external time as antithetical to the subjective sensations of time that are a natural consequence of deep, contemplative thought. As it happens, this is not actually the case, as Conrad establishes moments later through Winnie's confusion.

Just after she kills Verloc, Winnie hears a sound that she initially and mistakenly believes to be the ticking of a clock (193). Eventually, she realizes that what she hears are drops of Verloc's blood hitting the floor "with a sound of ticking growing fast and furious like the pulse of an insane clock" (194). Winnie's confusion of the sound of the dripping blood with that of a clock serves as a reminder that all humans carry a physical timepiece within them from the moment they are born. Thus, the tension surrounding time, which Conrad carefully builds throughout the novel, is not simply a matter of conflict between internal perceptions of and external modes of time. To read it as such, one would have to think of one's own body as external to one's self, which the text does not call for since the heart—as a representative of external time that measures out life moment to moment as well as any chronometer—does not interfere with the multitude of subjective time experiences that every person has in a given day. Rather, Conrad uses the moment of Winnie's realization to split external time into two definitive categories. On one side is asynchronous, natural time, represented by elements such as the beating of a human heart or the rising and setting of the sun or even the arrival of a *kairic* moment. On the other is synchronized bureaucratic time, represented by the Greenwich Observatory. Rather than a simple dichotomy of internal versus external time, then, Conrad provides a reminder that, though they seem worlds apart, both subjective interactions with and an

objective measurer of time coexist within one locale—the human body. The only kind of time present in the novel that cannot be found in the human body is the standard public time represented at Greenwich, which Conrad establishes as a potential threat to the private interactions with and notions of time that humans have always inherently had and which are necessary for the fulfillment of conscious heroism.

This threat is implied through the description of Verloc's falling blood as being "like the pulse of an insane clock" (194). The only "insane" clock present in *The Secret Agent* is housed at the Observatory—the one that dictates how all other chronometers in the world should be set. Conrad establishes the insanity of globally synchronized time by emphasizing two of the major effects it has on how people interact with the world around them. The first of these is through public time's ability to gather attention by means of distraction, a characteristic supported by Crary's notion of the specifically Modern movement in which the two "flow" into and out of one another constantly (51). This is the implementation of time that, because of its pervasiveness (Kern 14), has the potential to interfere with all private notions of and interactions with time whatsoever.

The second effect that global synchronized time has on people is that it can lead to a false sense of security during *kairic* moments due to a belief that *all* time can be controlled simply because *chronos* is both measurable and meticulously measured. Conrad addresses this effect in *The Secret Agent* indirectly,[12] but the general belief that time is controllable is reinforced by the fact that the plot centers on an Anarchist attempt to blow up the Greenwich Observatory as a means of attacking the powers that "control" time. One might think, given the challenges synchronized public time presents to *kairic* action, that Conrad would use the idea of blowing up

[12] See Chapter 3 for an analysis of T. S. Eliot's more thorough examination of this idea in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock."

the Observatory positively, as a symbolic means of attacking the problem he raises. He does not do this, though, for such an attack, even if successful, would do nothing to change the prevailing ideology behind public time, just as wishing for a return to the psychological simplicity of monistic heroism does nothing to solve the problems of identifying heroism in a pluralistic world. The absurd nature of the attempted attack on "time" instead serves as an example of *akairic* desire, of a longing for something to be *kairically* appropriate when it is not. The *akairic* nature of the attack on the Observatory is further emphasized by the fact that Conrad sends Stevie—who is a perfect example of one of Conrad's instinctive models of heroism, the "fool"—to complete the task. No truly heroic deed in Conrad's writing can be completed by a fool; thus, there is no *kairic* opportunity in *The Secret Agent* to attack the newest threat to the recovery of heroism for the twentieth century. Instead, Conrad leaves his readers and himself with the realization that finding a hero who can recognize the "right" time to do something in a world where a chronometric model of time dominates the landscape is unlikely.

In all, *The Secret Agent* stands as yet another novel in which Conrad identifies problems that interfere with the successful completion of heroic action without discovering a solution to them. Over the course of several novels, Conrad exposes many obstructions to being consciously able to do the "right" thing, for the "right" reason, and at the "right" time, but his identification of the cultural dominance of *chronos* and its damaging effect on heroic opportunity is his most influential contribution to the literature that followed in his footsteps. Unfortunately, rather than continuing Conrad's search for a solution to the problems facing Aristotelian heroism in the twentieth century, the majority of the hero-seeking authors that came behind him instead focused on the antithetical nature of heroism and *akairos*.

CHAPTER 3

AKAIRIC DESIRE IN ELIOT AND FAULKNER

Through the absurdity of Verloc's plot to "blow up time" in *The Secret Agent*, Joseph Conrad establishes that, if the action one wants to take is either impossible or cannot in any circumstances be the "right" thing to do, there will be no *kairically* appropriate moment in which a heroic completion of that action could occur. While this element of the novel is useful for understanding the fundamental differences between *kairic* and *akairic* actions, the debilitating effects of *akairic* desire on an individual mind are more fully explored in other Modernist works. *Akairic* desire most often manifests in Modernism as a wish to control heroic opportunities, or, more specifically, how a lack of control over such moments is so frustrating as to be maddening, so awful that the characters dealing with those circumstances often prefer Hell, or at least the idea of Hell, to being unable to determine both the course and the outcome of their own lives. While certain elements of a heroic action can sometimes be controlled, such as how one reacts when presented with a *kairic* opportunity, one cannot determine or influence when one's *kairoi* will occur. Thus, the root of the frustration that leads to *akairic* desire comes from the contrast between modern thinkers' expectations about time as a "thing" that can be manipulated and organized and the very different experience of life (i.e., time *experienced*) being unresponsive to human attempts to "schedule" it. *Akairic* desire interferes with heroic action in many early twentieth-century works, but none encapsulate the concept as thoroughly as T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*. Both works proffer the confession of a failed hero whose very desire for control prevents him from being

ready to act during any *kairoi* that come his way, which ultimately results in an overwhelming sense of paralysis that is prevalent among Modernist protagonists.

While Cary Nelson identifies "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" as one of "a tiny handful of poems that define Eliot's career" (77), most criticism about Eliot's body of work praises the poem as an auspicious beginning but focuses more attention on *The Waste Land*. This discrepancy is hardly a surprise considering how dominant *The Waste Land* was, and continues to be, in Modernist studies. Nelson, for example, calls it "the pre-eminent poem of [M]odernism," a work so influential that its "shadow" prevented other kinds of Modernist works from even being recognized as such for many years (77). Within the context of hero studies, however, "Prufrock" carries equal weight with *The Waste Land* in terms of its importance to the period. While *The Waste Land* remains essential for understanding the frustration of a world in which heroic opportunities do not exist, it is J. Alfred Prufrock who serves as the model for what Dominic Manganiello calls the "modern *unheroic* hero" (19, italics in original). Manganiello makes the common mistake of substituting protagonist for hero in his analysis, but one would be hard pressed to find a more unheroic character than Prufrock, whose fear of rejection and *akairic* desires—both to delay the inevitable and to know whether he will be successful before he will risk action—lead him to the "safety" of doing nothing at all. This overarching feeling of paralysis pervades both the poem and much of the literature from the time period in which it was written.

Both the extent and the power of Prufrock's *akairic* desires are made known through the confessional nature of the poem itself. The poem has more than just a confessional *feel* about it, what Jill Franks calls a "dramatic monologue situation" (21), as is made clear in the epigraph. Eliot's epigraph, taken from Dante's *Inferno*, invokes Guido da Montefeltro, explaining why he

feels safe confessing his sin to Dante as the latter passes through on his guided tour of Hell. Hugh Kenner translates the passage as follows: "If I thought that my response would be addressed to one who might go back alive, this flame would shake no more; but since no one ever goes back alive out of these deeps (if what I hear be true), without fear of infamy I answer you" (*Invisible Poet* 10). Two elements of the epigraph establish its importance to the overall poem. First, readers familiar with Eliot's affinity for Dante would know these lines had not been chosen lightly. Eliot himself said that he regarded Dante's poetry as "the most persistent and deepest influence upon [his] own verse" ("Dante" 125). Still, the epigraph serves as more than simple evidence of Eliot's respect for Dante; more importantly, it serves as a mirror against which all of Prufrock's "decisions and revisions" can be judged (48). The passage is so well suited to the poem that Elisabeth Schneider introduces it by saying, "Perhaps never again did Eliot find an epigraph quite so happily suited to his use as the passage from the *Inferno* which sets the underlying serious tone for *Prufrock* and conveys more than one level of its meaning" (1104). Montefeltro's justification for his confession is the component that best aligns with Prufrock's own thoughts, for he answers Dante's inquiries "without fear of infamy," implying both that such fear would otherwise be the primary reason for not confessing anything and that he feels safe enough to risk honesty in that moment. For Prufrock, too, fear is a clear motivator for why he does what he does, or, rather, why he does not do what he does not do.

Prufrock's fear is present throughout the poem, but it is brought into focus when he makes a brief attempt to explain the root of the need to ask his question. In surmising how he could "presume" and "begin" to ask it (68-9), Prufrock describes "lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows" (72), implying that a fear of loneliness is a motivating factor in his decision to attempt a connection with one of these women in the first place. When the poem

shifts tenses in line eighty-six and moves from a telling of how he could still ask the overwhelming question to an account of the reasons why he did not do so, Prufrock remarks singularly that he "was afraid." In the end, Prufrock reveals his paralyzing fear of rejection when he admits that asking the question is not worth the risk of having the woman he would ask it of claim that he misinterpreted whatever she did that encouraged him in the first place (97-8, 109-110).

In actuality, it is not fear alone that would keep Montefeltro from confessing to Dante in the epigraph but, more importantly, a "fear of infamy," of the disrepute that would accompany others' knowing of his shame. Similarly, in each of the situations in which Prufrock hints at fear, the possibility of other people finding out he is lonely or has been rejected looms as the worst risk of all. In the case of the tense shift and the open admission of his fear in line eighty-six, the very last reason given for why a question that, only a moment ago, would have "disturb[ed] the universe" is now "no great matter" is that he "has seen the eternal Footman hold [his] coat, and snicker" (46, 83, 85). He imagines that even a messenger of Death, who ought to release him from his personal hell on Earth, would see and judge him. When Prufrock attempts to describe his fear of loneliness, he commiserates not just with "lonely men" but "lonely men . . . leaning out of windows" where others (such as Prufrock himself) can see and deride them (72). Most of all, Prufrock's fear of rejection by the woman to whom he might put his question is compounded by the fact that his opportunity to ask it of her will come at a party filled with women who are sophisticated enough to talk of Michelangelo yet cold enough to pin him with their eyes as if he were a collectible insect (36, 56-8). While the possibilities of loneliness and rejection are terrifying in Prufrock's mind, having an audience while he experiences either of those painful sensations would be worse than anything else he can imagine.

Prufrock's fear of an audience manifests in other parts of the poem as well. In a dramatic allusion meant to prove that his decision not to act was the appropriate one, Prufrock points out that he is "not Prince Hamlet" but "an attendant lord, one that will do / To swell a progress, start a scene or two. . ." (111-13). In other words, if he is to be compared to an actor at all, then he should be thought of as someone who fills out a cast or someone who is simply out of the spotlight altogether rather than as a protagonist. Even more telling than the allusion to *Hamlet*, however, is Prufrock's self-degrading statement that he "should have been a pair of ragged claws / Scuttling across the floors of silent seas" (73-4). On the one hand, this statement is a clear indicator of Prufrock's low self-esteem and lack of confidence, but it can also be read another way. For Prufrock, there could be *nothing better* than to be a clawed creature at the bottom of the sea. Between the darkness and the probability of a shell that he could crawl into, it would be extremely difficult for anyone to see him at all. Thus, for Prufrock, the combined fear of being rejected and potentially having witnesses to his moment of failure leads him to develop a pair of *akairic* desires that interfere with the possibility of his completing the heroic task of asking his question.

The more obvious of these two desires is Prufrock's wish to delay the inevitable arrival of the moment in which he will have to choose whether or not to ask his question. Though he later attempts to dismiss his trouble as "no great matter" (83), Prufrock's original description of the question as "overwhelming" is more truthful (10). Once the journey toward the room full of women begins in full at the end of the first stanza, Prufrock's desperation rapidly escalates as the reality of his approaching moment sinks in, a section of the poem Kenner describes as being full of "portentousness" (11). Prufrock attempts to defuse his rising panic by convincing himself

(and presumably he wants to convince the visitor travelling along with him and, by extension, the reader, too) that there is plenty of time for him to be distracted:

> And indeed there will be time
> For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,
> Rubbing its back upon the window-panes;
> There will be time, there will be time
> To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;
> There will be time to murder and create,
> And time for all the works and days of hands
> That lift and drop a question on your plate;
> Time for you and time for me,
> And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
> And for a hundred visions and revisions,
> Before the taking of a toast and tea. (23-34)

In spite of his best efforts, however, such creative thinking does nothing either to prepare him for or to prevent the arrival of the "time" during which he could ask his question.

Prufrock attempts to control time in this stanza by breaking it up into smaller and smaller increments that he can pile up between himself and the arrival of his *kairic* moment, as if he were stacking sandbags before a flood. What he wants is to shape time into a perpetual experience of delayed decoding, where seconds can feel like hours and the dreaded question, along with the hellish possibility of public rejection, could be pushed farther and farther away. The unfortunate effect of his musings over time is much more like charmed processing, though, and the more effort he wastes on trying to avoid thinking about the question, the closer the

moment in which it can be asked looms. While he does not give readers a description of the instant in which he decides *not* to ask his question, one can easily imagine Prufrock coming out of his reverie just in time to realize that he is at the door of "the room" with no time "to turn back and descend the stair" (35, 39), that he is completely unprepared for his task, so he abandons the attempt. Prufrock's efforts at diversion as the time for his question approaches verify an *akairic* desire. His feelings about the malleability of time-experienced are as illusory as those of Jim's aboard the *Patna* when his dreams of heroism fail to align with the reality of his current heroic opportunity (*Lord Jim* 54-8), and both are equally unprepared when their respective tests arrive.

There is yet another example of *akairic* desire in Prufrock's thoughts that is more subtle than his efforts to alter time, and, even though he is not as clear in expressing this wish, its presence is just as debilitating to any chance of heroism he might have. Immediately after his extensive ruminations about time (23-48), a series of stanzas occurs in which Prufrock elaborates on the way his world is entirely too familiar to him, describing everything he "knows" about it. Over the next three stanzas the words "known" and "know" appear eight different times (49-69), serving as a backdrop against Prufrock's hopeless certainty that he "knows" the task of breaking through the monotony of his daily life is more than he is prepared to do. While Prufrock's concern over what he "knows" is made very clear in this section, the repetition serves a further purpose that becomes clear following several of the allusions that Prufrock makes in the final third of the poem. That purpose is to highlight the relative worthlessness, in Prufrock's mind, of what he *does* know when contrasted with what he most desires to know but does not—certainty of how his question will be answered. Prufrock does not consider that such foreknowledge would effectively empty his task of all meaning, for heroism can only occur in the face of risk. What Prufrock *akairically* desires would remove all risk from his endeavor and let him act, or

not, in safety. This desire for safety is consistent with the preconditions under which both Montefeltro and Prufrock offer their confessions in the first place (Manganiello 18-9), but it prevents Prufrock from being prepared for his *kairic* moment as surely as his attempts to manipulate time do.

The first hint of Prufrock's desire to know the answer to his question before he will risk asking it occurs when he compares himself to John the Baptist, a Biblical prophet who foretold of the coming of Jesus and who was later executed by the order of King Herod (*The ESV Study Bible*, Matthew 3:11 and 14:1-12). Prufrock states, "Though I have seen my head [grown slightly bald] brought in upon a platter, / I am no prophet—and here's no great matter" (82-3, brackets in original). In the first line, he admits to having "seen himself" as John the Baptist, whose head is brought on a platter to Herod's niece as a gift (*ESV*, Matthew 3:10-1), indicating that he has imagined himself as a prophet, whose gift of foresight would, in Prufrock's mind, be able to get him out of his current state of paralysis over whether to ask his question or not. Prufrock follows this up with the announcement that he is "no prophet," and, interestingly, connects his next claim, that this entire endeavor is "no great matter" directly to it, as if he is saying that precisely because he cannot see the future, the question of whether to ask the question becomes irrelevant. Prufrock has already given away too many of his true feelings over the question's weight to dismiss it now, though, and his attempt to do so only underscores the unheroic notion that he would rather do nothing at all than risk the possibility of a negative answer that would subject him to ridicule.

Were the reference to John the Baptist the only indication of Prufrock's interest in foreknowledge, it would be difficult to make the claim that his obsession over the idea equals the intensity of his desire to delay the arrival of his *kairic* moment. In the stanza immediately

following the allusion to John the Baptist, however, Prufrock makes another Biblical allusion by comparing himself to Lazarus. Lazarus is a well-known figure from the Bible who dies but is restored to life afterward by Jesus (*ESV* John 11:1-45). While Lazarus is not a prophet in the sense that John the Baptist is, he does represent a figure who could speak from direct experience about one of the most pressing questions in the history of humanity, that is: "What happens to us when we die?" In that sense, Lazarus, too, is someone who can see "the future," for nothing is as certain as the fact that all people will eventually die. Ironically, Lazarus's experience is not a part of his story, for he never speaks in the Bible following his resurrection. Prufrock, on the other hand, indicates that he would make use of Lazarus's gift to speak, announcing that he would say, "I am Lazarus, come from the dead, / Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all" (94-5). What Prufrock/Lazarus would tell everyone is unknown because Prufrock does not know himself. Just as he is "no prophet" (83), he is also no Lazarus and does not have the benefit of that figure's foreknowledge.

Prufrock's final allusion to a character who knows things in a way he cannot is his aforementioned reference to Hamlet. When Prufrock asserts that asking his question would not have been worth the risk of failure with a resounding "No!" he follows up his proclamation by stating that the reason he cannot take such chances is because he is "not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be" (111). Hamlet, in addition to serving as the Prufrockian model for everything a hero is supposed to be, is yet another character who has knowledge that others do not, and, while he does not know the future with the absolute confidence that John the Baptist or Lazarus can be said to, he does have the decided advantage of knowing that he is targeting the right person before he seeks revenge for his father's murder. In the first act of the play, Hamlet is visited by his father's ghost, who tells him how he died and who killed him, thereby offering both

justification for Hamlet's future actions and a clarity of purpose that Prufrock sorely lacks but longs for (1.5.39-41 and 60-80). In the end, Prufrock can only wish that he could *know* what to do in the same way that John the Baptist, Lazarus, and Hamlet can, but he fails to recognize that such knowledge would empty his actions of all meaning anyway. Risk is an inherent component of heroism, and Prufrock's *akairic* desire to avoid taking a chance contributes to his lack of preparedness as much as his wish to delay the arrival of his *kairic* moment does.

Ironically, Prufrock wishes to have Hamlet's certainty of knowing even though the latter does not benefit from that knowledge. Rather, Hamlet's notorious delays in taking action are one of the primary reasons that he is such a well-known tragic figure and why the play ends with such a tremendous loss of life. If any moment within the entirety of Shakespeare's play could be said to be *kairically* appropriate for Hamlet to carry out his revenge-murder, it would be when he sneaks up behind Claudius alone in 3.3. This opportunity is not good enough for Hamlet, though, as he fears the possibility that Claudius could end up in heaven were he killed during an act of prayer (3.3.73-96). By choosing *not* to act in this moment, Hamlet compounds the loss of life at the end of the play, a consequence that is far from heroic. Prufrock fails to see how poor a model for heroism Hamlet is, which proves just how far he is from understanding what it will take to be successful himself.

The end of the poem sees both Prufrock and the reader in a bleak place. Prufrock is convinced that he is forever trapped in Hell, and scholarly criticism of the poem tends to agree. Kenner asserts that there is no heroic opportunity for Prufrock, that no question could free him from the finely socialized Hell he inhabits (*Invisible Poet* 12). It is possible, however, that such thinking is a trap, much like the one into which Prufrock believes he has pulled his listener so that they can forever "drown" together (131). There is no doubt that Prufrock is convinced that

his Hell is inescapable, yet the poem itself gives two examples of people who returned from trips to the afterlife: Dante and Lazarus. So, what would it take for Prufrock to escape his Hell? Manganiello says that Prufrock's Hell is "a state of mind which constitutes its own place" (19), a description that is very appropriate because states of mind are not of necessity permanent. Can a fear as immobilizing as Prufrock's ever be overcome, though? Perhaps not, but current research on the nature of fear in the human mind indicates that debilitating fears can be managed well enough for one to act in spite of them if one prepares for them and maintains the appropriate mental perspective.

In *Nerve*, Taylor Clark posits that physiologist Walter Cannon's "fight or flight" model, developed at Harvard University in 1915, is missing an important component—a "freezing" mechanism which is often a human's first instinctual response upon sensing danger or suddenly becoming afraid (25-6). This behavior is usually very brief and serves as a precursor to the more commonly known "fight or flight" decision, but sometimes it can be prolonged into what biologists call "tonic immobility[13]," otherwise known as "playing dead" (Clark 27-8). Prufrock seems to be stuck in this latter "frozen" position; rather than a momentary pause before the equally rapid decision either to move forward or backward, his immobility is drawn out to the point that it dominates his life, that it *becomes* his life. That he is trapped in the Hell of his own mind fits with this notion of tonic immobility, for one does not *usually* enter Hell until after death, an idea that perhaps explains why he sees his current situation as inescapable. Such freezing makes sense as a defense mechanism when a person is "literally in the jaws of a predator" (Clark 28), but when this paralytic instinct is triggered by something as amorphous and

[13] This notion of "tonic immobility" is very similar to Yannick Le Boulicaut's "immobilism," which he uses to describe Jim's temporary paralysis aboard the *Patna*. Clark's description does not include the loss of the power to speak that Le Boulicaut's does, however.

ambiguous as a fear of rejection, then how one moves beyond the freeze, fight, or flight instincts becomes a tricky problem.

Clark sees this as a particularly modern issue, one that contributes greatly to the overabundance of anxiety Americans experience in spite of the relative safety in which we live (10-11). Fear, according to Clark, serves as the "body's onboard security system":

> In this context, fear is our best friend; it makes all of the major decisions for us, keeps the personage as free of tiger claws as possible, and then dissipates once the threat has subsided. The problem, though, is that the fear system wasn't designed for modern life. When our world's comparatively tame hazards and worries present themselves—*Does my boss hate me? Will my flight be delayed? Did the waiter hear me say "No chipotle mayo"?*—our bodies still react as though we're staring down that ravenous tiger; we're working with the same neural technology as our hunter-gatherer ancestors. This technology wasn't engineered to help us do calculus, perform a flawless piano sonata, or throw a pinpoint fastball under pressure, yet that's what we often ask of ourselves. (12, italics in original)

A large part of the problem, then, is that the social and psychological fears Clark mentions do not dissipate with the same rapidity or in the same way that physiological fears of a predator do; thus, the constant fear of rejection that Prufrock lives in terror of morphs into a kind of living hell where he is frozen in inaction and from which he can see no escape.

While such fears cannot be removed from the brain, Clark argues that they can be overcome through mental training (250). According to Clark, one way to use fear effectively is to redirect focus away from what might happen to what is happening in the given moment, noting that "the culprit in cases of meltdown under pressure isn't *fear* but misdirected focus: we

turn our attention inward and grow preoccupied with worries about results, which undercuts our true abilities. Clutch athletes and cool-headed heroes concentrate on the *present moment* and on *the task at hand*, a habit we can all develop through practice" (274-5, italics in original). Such behavior might also be described as focusing on the *kairic* moment rather than attempting to avoid the arrival of such a moment through an ineffective mental tap-dance around it—as Prufrock does when he tries to divide chronometric time into small enough increments that it seems as if infinity lies between him and the impending moment (23-34)—or obsessing over what will happen after the moment—as Prufrock does at the conclusion of each "would it have been worth it" stanza, where he imagines the embarrassing moment of rejection should he have had the courage to ask his question (97-8, 109-10).

Prufrock ultimately lacks the *kairic* focus to risk action within his moment, a fact brought home to the reader when the poem shifts to past tense in line eighty-six and he spends the majority of the rest of the poem attempting to justify his inaction. Because Prufrock chooses not to act in his moment, the possibility still exists that, like his "hero" Hamlet, delayed action could still occur. Whether Prufrock's own delay should prove as costly as Hamlet's should he decide to ask his question at a later time is unknowable, for the singularity of this particular *kairic* opportunity is unknown. Was this afternoon tea party really the *only* time he could ever ask the question, or is the scene the reader witnesses one of a long line of similar days where he could break out of his Hell if only he had the courage to risk rejection? Given Prufrock's emphasis on the repetitive nature of his entire existence, the latter certainly seems possible. If he does not act soon, though, Prufrock could find himself obsessing over the possibility of an event that has long since passed him by. One thing is certain—Prufrock will remain paralyzed and unable to act in his heroic moment so long as he continues to ignore the fact that he has no control over the

qualitative aspects of that moment and so long as he remains focused on the necessity of knowing the outcome of his question before he dares to ask rather than turning his full attention to the actual task of asking it.

Prufrock's dilemma, while exemplary, is not unique in Modernist literature. The problems of *akairic* desire and paralysis were prevalent throughout works from that period, but the most clear pairing to make alongside Prufrock in order to establish that those problems were a pattern comes from another would-be hero who is obsessed with a desire to change his life by controlling time—Quentin Compson. Whereas Prufrock's confessions are laid out so that the reader can see them and decipher the reasons for them even if he does not, Quentin's section of *The Sound and the Fury* reads more like a murder mystery, and what, exactly, Quentin is confessing to is difficult to pin down. The reader knows from Benjy's section that Quentin has died (8), and a reread of Quentin's section can help one see clues pointing toward his suicide, so the "what" and the "who" are not too difficult to figure out. The "why" of Quentin's suicide is another matter. That mystery has intrigued readers of the novel for decades, and no clear resolution to the question seems possible. For many scholars, as Margaret Bauer notes, "Quentin's discovery of Caddy's sexual relationship with Dalton Ames" is the key factor in his decision to kill himself (70). Thus, the three memories that are called up when Quentin is rendered unconscious during the fight with Gerald must be the climax of the section since they all revolve around the loss of Caddy's virginity—first Quentin recalls his and Benjy's discovery of that loss, then his confrontation with Dalton, and, finally, the scene where Caddy rushes to make sure Quentin hasn't been killed (94-104). If one pushes beyond this cluster of recollections, however, and instead focuses on the end of the section, as Quentin—in his final moments—finally allows himself to relive his confrontation with his father, then new

possibilities open up to explain both the root of Quentin's guilt and why he sees suicide as his only option. In that scene, both Quentin's botched attempt to confess an incestual act that did not in fact occur and his failure to confess his desire to commit such an act illustrate the *akairic* nature of his dream to escape from time and reality with Caddy into the "clean" flames of hell and how the loss of that dream leads him to kill himself.

Clearly, Quentin is overwhelmed by feelings of guilt, which seal his decision to end his own life, but what he feels guilty about is much harder to determine. While Prufrock's presentation of his problems to the ambiguous "you" of his poem creates a sense of one-on-one conversation that provides the reader with a comfortable framework for receiving his confession (Eliot, "Prufrock" 1), *The Sound and the Fury* offers no such framework and instead thrusts the reader directly into Quentin's tortured thoughts as he alternates between reliving his most powerful memories and halfheartedly paying attention to his surroundings as he walks around the Harvard campus and the outskirts of the city. Without a direct confession as a guide to understanding his thoughts, Bauer asserts that Quentin's feelings of guilt over his interference with Caddy's only "*chance*, however slight it may have been, of leading a 'normal' life" are not only *a* reason for his suicide but perhaps the "deciding reason" (71). This premise rests on two specific factors. First, she follows in Noel Polk's footsteps in arguing that Quentin's memories increase in painfulness as the day progresses. Second, since Bauer believes that the climax of the section must come during one of the three memories that occur while Quentin is unconscious, her argument follows the necessary logic that the last of those three, when Caddy rushes to Quentin's aid, would be the most painful and thus the most important (Bauer 76).

From there, Bauer faces the challenge of explaining why that particular memory drives Quentin to suicide, and she latches on to the only explanation the scene offers, that Quentin

believes he destroyed Caddy's last opportunity for happiness by running off Dalton Ames. Two significant problems exist with this assessment. First, Bauer's argument never mentions that Ames tells Quentin that all women "are bitches" (Faulkner 102). This statement alone makes it unlikely that Quentin would ever feel guilty about keeping Caddy from such a man, no matter how quickly her pulse raced when his name was spoken (104). More importantly, however, Bauer's stance dismisses the larger issue that Quentin feels guilty not about wanting to keep Caddy away from Ames but about wanting to keep her away from all men, or, rather, all men save one.

For Quentin does have a legitimate reason to feel guilty about his own contributions to Caddy's downfall, as Mark Spilka notes. For Spilka, "Incest is Quentin's chief internal problem. Like Benjy he loves his sister Caddy, but unlike Benjy he knows that his love is mixed with sexual feeling" (459). Again and again, Quentin's recollections of his sister are dominated by his intense sexual desire for her and his overwhelming jealousy at the thought of her being with anyone else, from the paralyzing imagery of the scent of honeysuckle to his failed attempt to penetrate her skin with his knife (107-8, 96). Quentin knows that his desire is morally wrong, evidenced by his difficulty admitting it even to himself much less to his father, but it is not the only source of his guilty feelings about his sister. Quentin's incestual desire for his sister is all the more damaging to his psyche because it is coupled with his image of her as a pure, virginal being, a role that Nathaniel Miller calls an "anchoring signifier" for Quentin that dominates how he sees his sister in all things regardless of what her actual behavior might be (42). Given the importance of this image, then, Quentin's belief that he contributed to Caddy's downfall through his own sexual desires for her, that he "dirtied" her with his own sin, is enough to paralyze him

with guilt, and he bends his mind completely toward rationalizing a way out of this Hell on Earth for both of them.

The problem, of course, is that there is no quick-fix solution to his problem. Quentin does not see this right away. Instead, he begins by seeking to create an incident so monumental that the Universe itself would have no choice but to take notice and immediately confine him and his sister to the "protective" fires of hell, where they could be "walled by the clean flame" away from the infamy that Quentin so fears (74). Such extraordinary events do not happen in everyday life, but they do happen for heroes according to Quentin's expectations. What he seeks, then, is heroic opportunity, but, rather than waiting in readiness for a chance potentially to improve his sister's life at some point in the future, he wants to control both the circumstances and outcome of his wished-for heroism. Whereas Prufrock wanted to delay the inevitability of the arrival of his *kairic* moment by slowing down time, Quentin wants to stop time altogether. The *akairic* nature of this desire is made clear through Quentin's obsession with time throughout his section of the novel.

Quentin's thoughts about time vary throughout his narration. He wonders about its nature, purposes, and effects, and he spends a great deal of energy wishing he could escape from it. While his thoughts about it are not always the same, the one constant in his musings about time is that he never strays far from thinking about it in some form or another. For example, time is the first thing Quentin thinks about when he wakes at the beginning of the day. He begins his story by saying, "When the shadow of the sash appeared on the curtains it was between seven and eight oclock and then I was in time again, hearing the watch" (48). Being "in time again" the moment he awakes implies that it is his thinking self that is trapped by time and that the only escape from it comes when he is not conscious. That he hears his watch as soon as

he arrives "in time" is also significant, for the watch serves as a symbol both for Quentin's desire to escape from time and from time's inescapability. After waking and finding himself "in time" once again, Quentin thinks briefly about when his father gave him the watch before returning to the timepiece itself. He then says, "It was propped against the collar box and I lay listening to it. Hearing it that is. I dont[14] suppose anybody ever deliberately listens to a watch or a clock. You dont have to. You can be oblivious to the sound for a long while, then in a second of ticking it can create in the mind unbroken the long diminishing parade of time you didn't hear" (49). He soon gets up and turns the watch over, hoping perhaps that not being able to see it will help him get it out of his mind, but it is no use (49). Once he is "in time," he is "in time" for as long as his mind is active, with no release.

When Jason Sr. gave Quentin the watch, he told him (according to Quentin's memory of the event), "I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire" (48), squeezing time into a monistic concept with no qualitative component. Gregory Mason describes such a model as a "time dimension" that is cut off from "truly significant experience" (199), and this viewpoint dominates Quentin's father's perception of time. It is why he tells Quentin that time is "dead as long as it is being clicked off by little wheels; only when the clock stops does time come to life" (Faulkner 54). But the clock never stops—one of the undeniable truths about modern chronometricism is its indestructible regularity, a truth echoed by Quentin's inability to stop or destroy his pocket watch. After another painful memory of his last conversation with his father, Quentin decides to break his watch, describing the scene as follows:

> I went to the dresser and took up the watch, with the face still down. I tapped the crystal on the corner of the dresser and caught the fragments of glass in my hand and put them into the ashtray and twisted the hands off and put them in the tray.

[14] Faulkner's punctuation, or lack of, and style will be kept throughout all quotes from *The Sound and the Fury*.

> The watch ticked on. I turned the face up, the blank dial with little wheels clicking and clicking behind it, not knowing any better. (Faulkner 51)

Quentin's delicate "tapping" is as ineffective a means of destroying clock-time as its conceptual opposite, Verloc's planned explosion of "time" in *The Secret Agent*, but the gesture shows that Quentin, even in this late moment, is still seeking a way out.

Quentin's father gives him the watch because, for him, time will forever more be a "dead" thing, and he is resigned to living out his days without access to anything approaching a meaningful moment. This is why Jason Sr. does nothing to help Caddy and why he is so callous in his explanation to Quentin about why neither her adulterous relationship with Dalton Ames nor Quentin's desire to stop it matters. In one memory of his failed confession to his father, after Quentin says he wishes he could do "something so dreadful" (the memory stops there but he is describing his wish to pull himself and Caddy into Hell), Quentin recalls Jason Sr. saying, "That's sad too people cannot do anything that dreadful they cannot do anything very dreadful at all they cannot even remember tomorrow what seemed dreadful today" (51). This fatalistic view of the meaninglessness of time and experience is not shared by Quentin at least until the moment of his suicide and possibly not even then, as his constant antagonism toward time throughout this section indicates.

Quentin believes in *kairos* even if he does not understand it, but his greatest mistake is thinking that he can somehow call a *kairic* moment into being through the intensity of his own desire for one. For what he seeks—pulling himself and his sister out of time and out of the world itself—there is no opportunity; thus, his desire best fits in the category of the *akairic*. Furthermore, Quentin wants to control the outcome of his *kairic* opportunity. If all he wanted was to protect Caddy from Dalton, then he had the opportunity to remove Dalton from the

equation when Dalton offers him his gun (102). Quentin, long before the reader gets the full picture from him of what the Ames confrontation was like, says that he did not kill Dalton because he did not want him to be in Hell with him and Caddy: "When he put the pistol in my hand I didn't. That's why I didn't. He would be there and she would and I would" (51). Quentin's desire to control the outcome of his actions here is *akairic* in the same way that Hamlet's is when he refuses to kill Claudius in the midst of an attempt at prayer because he wants to ensure that his father's murderer is sent to Hell (3.3.73-96). Quentin's desire in this instance also shows that he wants more than to protect Caddy by bringing her to Hell; he wants her to himself. What *kairic* opportunities might have existed during which Quentin or any other Compson could have "saved" Caddy are most likely long gone, but Quentin does not see this until after his last conversation with his father, perhaps not even until the day of his death, when he works so doggedly to put together the pieces of his memory to try and understand what happened to him and Caddy and why it did.

This is why that final talk with his father, during which Quentin attempts and fails to confess to committing actual incest with Caddy, is such a crucial scene in Quentin's section of the novel. If Polk's and Bauer's claims hold true—if Quentin's memories have been building in pain and intensity throughout the day—then it stands to reason that this last scene, where Quentin takes his own risk of "everything on a single blind turn of a card" (Faulkner 112), is the most intense recollection of the day. The significance of this confession has, of course, been noted by other scholars. Michial Farmer, for example, describes an interesting connection between Quentin and Augustine, but he sees Quentin as a "failed" version of the saint because he believes that the sins Quentin wants to confess are Caddy's and not his own (60). In reality, although he may be replaying Caddy's promiscuous behavior in the forefront of his mind,

wishing that he had found a way to stop her before she went too far, in the depths of his conscience Quentin is wrestling with his own sexual desire for his sister. His rigid sense of right and wrong incessantly demands that he confess this mental sin. However, when Jason Sr. begins to downplay Quentin's confession, to deem it inconsequential, Quentin is ultimately too afraid to admit the depth of his incestuous desire. Thus, his attempt to make his confession into a *kairic* moment is doomed before it even begins. His father has misunderstood him entirely. Quentin does not want to be absolved of his sin; he wants to ensure his sentence to Hell.

Thinking of Hell as a place for either protection or salvation is certainly unusual, but Quentin's position can be more easily understood if one sees the connections between his desires and those expressed in "Prufrock." The repeated mentions of the "clean flame" that Quentin wants to escape to also contain references to "pointing" that he and Caddy would be in the midst of but "walled" away from by the fire (74). Thinking of the fires of Hell as a place where one can be protected from the scrutiny of an audience is very similar to the justification offered by Guido da Montefeltro in the epigraph to "Prufrock," where Hell offers a protection from "infamy" that the living world does not.

Even though their confidence is misplaced, both Montefeltro and Prufrock *believe* they are protected; thus, they give honest confessions. Quentin has no such feelings of security. In Quentin's scenario, he would have to confess publicly the depth of his incestuous desire in order to be sent to Hell and receive the protection from infamy that he hopes but is afraid his true confession will bring. He tries to get around this paradox by falsely confessing to something even worse, actual incest, but, in doing so, he exposes the real reason why his plan to create a *kairic* moment through confession will never work—no matter what he says or does, nothing that has happened either to him or to Caddy will erase the problems within his own family. In spite

of his dreams of a heroic trip to Hell, the only chance his confession could actually do any good for Caddy would be if it inspired his father to take an active role in addressing the problems within his household, and that seems about as likely as Caddy having a happy life with Dalton Ames. Quentin is trapped; Caddy is trapped; there is nothing either of them can do about it. As Jean Paul Sartre observes, "In *The Sound and the Fury* everything has already happened" (267).

Quentin realizes his failure, too, because when exaggerating his confession to consummation rather than just desire, he gets no reaction at all from his father, who does not believe him anyway, other than an admonishment to remember that all his feelings are "temporary" and that none of his emotional upheavals are "particularly important to the dark diceman" (112). Life's events are neither preordained nor changeable. Thus, Quentin believes that there is nothing he can say or do to help Caddy now, that there is no *kairic* opportunity available to him. This epiphany is made apparent to the reader in some of his few lucid thoughts during his final day, as he observes the young boys who are dreaming of what they will do with the prize money they will never collect for the fish they cannot catch. He describes their promises as "making of unreality a possibility, then a probability, then an incontrovertible fact, as people will when their desires become words" (75), but he is talking as much about himself as he is about them. With this realization, he is broken, for he has put *everything* into his *akairic* desire to repair the damage he believes he did to Caddy and to assuage his guilt for having done it.

The only truth that remains for Quentin is the one he least wants: that he will eventually feel differently about all of this than he does now. He has been promised this by Herbert, by Dalton, and even by his own father, who has said, "You cannot bear to think that someday it will no longer hurt you like this" (212). As long as Quentin remains locked within time, what they

promise will come true—"attenuation" is the term Sartre uses to describe this phenomenon (271). So long as there is a future, then the exaltations and disasters of the present will be diminished in our memories by time. This is an outcome that Quentin cannot accept, for the constant, immediate, and unbearable feelings of guilt associated with his presently ever-present memories of Caddy are all he has left of her. Jason Sr. is right to say that Quentin "cannot bear" to lose that intensity of feeling, and he does not. Instead, he chooses the only escape from time that is certain to any human being: death.

While suicide is often viewed as a flight from a problem—a desperate attempt to get out of a situation from which one sees no escape—Quentin's drowning himself can be seen in another light when one thinks about it in relation to Clark's research on the nature of fear. Retreat from his sister Caddy's pregnancy, likely odds of an unhappy life, and his own confusing desire for his sister—in other words choosing "flight"—would mean ignoring his heroic problems and going on with his own life. "Fighting" these problems would involve something completely different, and more practical, than his *akairic* desire to pull himself and Caddy into a "protective" Hell, and his inability throughout his section to contemplate a single proactive solution to either Caddy's or his own problems that might actually be helpful to either of them proves how unprepared he is for this option. Therefore, with "fight" being something he is unready and/or unable to do—a failure echoed by the pummeling he takes from Gerald and the memory of the utter failure of his confrontation with Dalton Ames (102-4)—and "flight" being an option that to his mind is untenable, Quentin finds a third path. He avoids the inevitability of having to choose one or the other by perpetually "freezing" himself in a kind of tonic immobility through death. Seen in this light, Quentin's choice to "play dead" in the face of his fear might make more sense, but the permanence of his solution—to make himself *actually* dead so that he

can avoid the choice between “fight” and “flight”—demonstrates a desire for control that echoes his wish to dictate the terms under which he and his sister could have been “protected” in Hell. Much like Prufrock before him, Quentin has an *akairic* desire to control any possible heroic moments that come his way, and so long as such intent is maintained, heroic action is not possible.

CHAPTER 4

MODERNISM AND THE *AKAIRIC* ENVIRONMENT

Not all instances of *kairic* failure in Modernism occur because of *akairic* desire on the part of a would-be hero. In some cases, the desire of the individual is irrelevant because no heroic opportunities arise during which he or she could act appropriately. The most extreme manifestation of this opportunity vacuum—the *akairic* environment—makes its presence felt just as forcefully as *akairic* desire does, but its negative effects on heroism are even more drastic. The best known representation of the *akairic* environment, of course, is T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, a work that illuminates the heroic struggles of the time so thoroughly that it has become the model against which all other examples of *akairos* in literature of the time period are compared. Despite its dominance in terms of both the time period and the concept, though, *The Waste Land* is only one version of the *akairic* environment. Other key Modernist works, especially Franz Kafka's *The Trial* and Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, explore alternate frameworks that mirror the tone of despair that Eliot captures so well while simultaneously stretching the boundaries of the idea. When examined side-by-side, these three works—each of which offers a distinctly different vision of a world without heroic opportunities for its characters—suggest the far reaching aspects of the *akairic* environment and the extreme difficulty of heroism ever escaping its vortex once the concept is introduced.

In spite of the seemingly gradational relationship between the two most common manifestations of *akairos* in Modernist literature, it would be a mistake to think of the *akairic* environment as something that necessarily follows or is built upon *akairic* desire. Rather, these

concepts appear concurrently throughout the period and display *kairic* problems in fundamentally different ways. For example, while the connections between the failures of Quentin Compson and J. Alfred Prufrock are made clear through an analysis of *akairic* desire, Mary McGann argues that Faulkner, in writing *The Sound and the Fury*, was also strongly influenced by *The Waste Land*, claiming that the "repetitions and associations of events and images in a disjointed time pattern which characterize the vision of *The Waste Land* are echoed seven years later" in Faulkner's novel (14). Specifically, McGann notes that the "respective visions of the two works are variations on the theme of time and death as concurrent tensions in the human process" (14), and, while she is not discussing the differences between *akairic* desire and the *akairic* environment, her point remains valid when considering the different approaches to the question of meaningful action that are put forward in each work. In *Sound*, Quentin wants to manipulate time in order to remove Caddy and himself from the realm of the living, imagining that the two of them will be safe from calumny in Hell and that it is his heroic duty to protect her by sending them there. *The Waste Land* takes a darker view of McGann's "concurrent tensions" between time and death, however, in that it removes the possibility of heroic action altogether and asks the question: "If humanity is closed off from *kairos*, then are we all, in a sense, already dead?" In many ways, an author's depiction of the *akairic* environment can be seen as an expression of the tremendous anxiety elicited by this question.

So what is it about *The Waste Land* that makes it the quintessential example of a world where no heroic opportunities exist? Cary Nelson remarks that the poem's importance to and influence over Modernism was established almost from its inception, noting that it "became the pre-eminent poem" of the era in a "surprisingly short period of time" (77). Part of the reason for its immediate recognition was that it captured the essence of the period, "articulat[ing] a

profound sense of the sterility, fragmentation, and disillusion of its time," as Nancy Gish puts it (4). The case for the poem's dominance of the literary scene has already been made dozens of times over, but it is worth mentioning here because, just as it serves as a model for Modernist literature, *The Waste Land* also typifies the *akairic* environment through its presentation of three specific elements that make up its core: 1) an overall feeling of sterility or uselessness that implies there is no possibility for meaningful human action; 2) the presence of games or performances which attempt, but inevitably fail, to satiate the desire for meaningful action amidst that sterility; and 3) an ending that highlights the strength of that desire without offering a clear solution to the problem, ultimately leaving the characters in the *akairic* environment as bad or worse off than they were at the beginning of the work.

The notion of sterility begins immediately with the title of the poem. The "*Waste Land*" in question is not so much a physical place as it is a representation of the dearth of opportunity for humanity to fulfill its potential, a loss that suffuses the entire work. Yes, the poem is stuffed with imagery of actual desert wasteland, a "dead land" from whose "stony rubbish" branches struggle to grow (2, 20). The poem also locates itself in that uniquely modern wasteland that Hugh Kenner identifies as the "urban apocalypse" ("Urban" 46), a place dominated by "brown fog" (61, 208) and "rats' alley / Where the dead men lost their bones" (115-16). Kenner describes this place as "the great City dissolved into a desert where voices [sing] from exhausted wells" (46), and the images he recalls are dominant within the poem. While they are certainly important in establishing tone, however, the physical wastelands of the poem also serve a larger purpose of underscoring the more dangerous spiritual Waste Land that has infected humanity, the one that leads people to see "fear in a handful of dust" (30).

No phrase in the poem sums up the anxiety brought on by the *akairic* environment better than this one, which threatens with the notion that the "dust to dust" lives of humans (the reference being from Genesis 3:19 but also from the English Burial Service for which that section of the poem is named) no longer hold meaning because they can "connect / Nothing with nothing" (*TWL* 301-2). The "handful of dust" takes the reader back to the epilogue of the poem and its reference to the Sibyl of Cumae from Petronius's *Satiricon*. Nancy Gish offers the following translation of the epilogue: "For once I saw with my very own eyes the Sibyl at Cumae hanging in a cage, and when the boys said to her, 'Sibyl, what do you want?' she answered, 'I want to die'" (41). The Sibyl wants to die, Gish explains, because she foolishly neglected to wish for eternal youth along with immortality. Thus, when Apollo granted her "as many years as she had grains of sand in her hand" (41), she was left with an "eternal" life devoid of hope. Gish further elaborates on the effects of this curse in the guise of a blessing: "While this specific passage points to a longing for death, what underlies it is a weary continuation of mere existence when health, activity, joy, and sensation have gone. For the Sibyl, life is a horror because it can never regain meaning" (41). Such "life" is sterile, indeed.

The motif of sterility is also carried through the social interactions and sexual encounters of *The Waste Land*'s characters, none more so than the typist from "The Fire Sermon." The question of whether the characters in the poem are incapable of procreation is not directly addressed though Lil's physical reaction to the pills she takes to abort her baby certainly hints that there will be no more children in her future (159). Instead, the sterility here is more of an emotional one. The connection that Prufrock so longs for in "Love Song" is equally unavailable here, and when the typist finishes her loveless tryst with the clerk, all she can say to herself is, "Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over" (252). The emptiness of this encounter echoes

the meaninglessness of all actions in *The Waste Land*. There is certainly a desire for human actions to count for something, for them to be "fertile," as it were; the undercurrent of the grail mythology throughout the poem[15], for example, serves as evidence that humans have a basic need for their deeds to have meaning. Such desire simply cannot be fulfilled in the *akairic* environment. Because the need stubbornly remains, it must find an outlet, and one way that is accomplished is through the presence of activities that simulate a reality in which *kairic* opportunity exists.

The tension that builds between the desire for meaningful action and the lack of opportunity for it leads to the emergence of the second core element that makes up the *akairic* environment: the presence of games and/or performances. Such activities are critical within the *akairic* setting because they offer an outlet for activities that *seem* real, are *almost* real, but are not. According to Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens*[16], one of the fundamental components of play, of which games and performances make up a significant part, is that it is not "real" life (8). Still, the fact that play is not real does not mean it is not important. Games can, and often do, have tremendous social and political significance (for a contemporary example, one need look no further than the surge of patriotism that takes place every four years during the Olympics). Huizinga laments the "tendency to over-seriousness" found in modern manifestations of human play such as sporting competitions (199). He distinctly notes, though, that sport is *not* reality: "However important it may be for the players or spectators, it remains *sterile*" (198, italics added for emphasis). In other words, just because their outcomes can impact reality, the fundamental

[15] The connections between *The Waste Land* and Grail mythology are well established. Eliot, for instance, begins his own explanatory notes on the poem by crediting Jessie Weston's "book on the Grail legend: *From Ritual to Romance*" as a particularly important influence on the work ("Notes" 50).

[16] Huizinga's theories have been challenged and modified in the decades since he released *Homo Ludens*, but the basic premise that play in the forms of games and performances is not "real" still holds. See *Man, Play, and Games*, by Roger Caillois, for a response to and complication of Huizinga's theories and "Serious Play: Games in Twentieth-Century Modernism," by Claudia Mesch, for a detailed and helpful summary of the differences between Huizinga's and Caillois' theses.

artificiality of games and performances does not change. When fulfillment of the quest one most wants to complete is unattainable, however, smaller victories—even if they are artificial—can hold great appeal.

The "over-seriousness" about play that Huizinga disparages is definitely present in the *akairic* environment although the justification for it seems understandable there. Games, in the absence of *kairic* opportunity, have tremendous appeal because they provide a chance for an individual to control the rules and thereby impact the outcome of an action. Thus, games can serve as an outlet for the tension between a world without *kairos* and the constant desire for heroic action on the part of the people stuck in that world. While a temporary release from pressure can certainly be a positive, there is an added risk for participants who attempt to make "play" as meaningful as "reality," a desperate gesture that is doomed to fail and which might be considered, when pushed too far, as a kind of *akairic* desire present within the *akairic* environment. Ultimately, such risk has minimal consequences, though, because whether or not one desires to complete a "wrong" action, there can be no real impact from that wish if no *kairic* actions are possible anyway. Therefore, the benefits of "play" outweigh the potential risks for those who are stuck in the various Waste Lands of Modernist literature, which is one reason why games and performances so effectively underscore the overall frustration engendered by those environments.

"Play" is introduced in *The Waste Land* in the second section of the poem, "A Game of Chess," where the game is displayed metaphorically rather than physically as a representation of both the proscriptive nature and ultimate meaninglessness of relationships where people cannot communicate with one another. Huizinga's label of "over-seriousness" is apt right from the beginning of the section, for this "play" is far from light-hearted or fun. The "queen" of the

board, the most powerful piece, is able to achieve nothing in conversation with her "king." Her questions mostly go unanswered, save through an echo that offers nothing, "'What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?'" (113). When these questions are answered, "nothing" is gained: "'What is that noise?' / The wind under the door. / 'What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?' / Nothing again nothing" (117-20). While games in *The Waste Land* are played among people who wish to participate, they lead nowhere in terms of anything that could be called *kairic* resolution.

Similarly, there is a performative aspect to the typist's behavior in "The Fire Sermon." When the clerk leaves, she "looks a moment in the glass" before speaking to herself about being "glad it's over" (249, 252), as though a part of her has been in audience for her deeds, watching them from afar as if they were not her own. Tiresias, moreover, adds to the "audience" for her actions by narrating the scene and announcing that he acted as a sort of voyeur during the original encounter: "I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs / Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest— / I too awaited the expected guest" (228-30). Much like the "game of chess" that takes place between the previous couple, the performance offered here leads to nowhere but despair. Performance, like a game, is a controlled environment in which one's actions are witnessed, but, again, the presence of "control" nullifies the value of those actions. They are not "real," and, consequently, they have no bearing on heroic action. While games and performances can help to relieve some of the pressure between desire and capability in the *akairic* environment, these modes of play ultimately only reinforce the feelings of helplessness that dominate the characters who are stuck there.

The strength of the desire that leads to the creation of artificial scenarios and actions when real opportunities are unavailable is echoed throughout all parts of works that illustrate

akairic environments. This is why the third component of the model, an ending that refuses to offer a clear resolution to the problem, carries the most weight in establishing the power of the *akairic* environment. The ending of *The Waste Land* conveys a strong desire to find *kairos* again, but there is no guarantee that the "peace" offered in the final line is accessible. Kenner argues for a somewhat optimistic ending, noting that the languages present in the last forty lines of the poem offer a glimpse into the past of Europe, fragments from which meaning can be gathered: "Like the Knight in the Chapel Perilous, we are to ask what these relics mean; and the answers will lead us into the far reaches of tradition" (*Invisible Poet* 178). More specifically, he claims that the final words of the poem, which Eliot tells us make up the "formal ending to an Upanishad" (*TWL* 55), represent a language that will carry us all the way back to the roots of civilization itself, a language that is introduced some forty lines earlier:

> There the activity of the protagonist ends. Some forty remaining lines in the past tense recapitulate the poem in terms of the oldest wisdom accessible to the West. The thunder's DA is one of those primordial Indo-European roots that recue in the *Oxford Dictionary*, a random leaf of the Sibyl's to which a thousand derivative words, now automatic currency, were in their origins so many explicit glosses. If the race's most permanent wisdom is its oldest, then DA, the voice of the thunder and of the Hindu sages, is the cosmic voice not yet dissociated into echoes. (*Invisible Poet* 174)

Problematically, this solution is presented in a language so old that any meaning it might convey to those who are trapped in the Waste Land would likely be lost due to the words' inscrutability. The words' being there does not ensure that they are received and comprehended. Moreover, what would be the purpose of providing such a pat solution, thereby nullifying the power of the

"Waste Land" that has been so vividly depicted, the place where "all of the characters live in a world without love, relationship, action, or religion, where nothing fulfills and desire fails" (Gish 37)?

Nancy Gish, who offers an alternate reading to Kenner's, addresses this question and claims that the *applicability* of the solution provided at the end of the poem remains uncertain: "Only the story of the thunder is completed in the form of a solution, and we do not know if it can be applied. The poem ends not in a resolution but in a kind of redefinition of the questions and possible meanings implicit in all its scenes" (102). Gish's analysis is more consistent with the overall tone of the poem, as it allows for the possibility of *The Waste Land* being a place that cannot be escaped. While Kenner argues that the language of the blessing resonates to listeners from the West at an almost instinctual level, if that connection from the past has been severed, and if the "fragments" that have been "shored against [their] ruins" are not enough to retie it (*TWL* 431), then the words of the "solution" have as much meaning for the characters in the poem as the onomatopoeia of the nightingale in lines 104 and 203-4. Thus, while the repeated "shantih" (434) at the end of the poem might offer a "Peace which passeth understanding" (*TWL* 55), the blessing is lost on ears that cannot comprehend it. Who, in the poem, could garner meaning from these words? This is the final blow of the *akairic* environment. While there might be a means somewhere of breaking free of the kind of inertia present in Eliot's poem, there is no way out for these characters; they are trapped in the end just as they are in the beginning, stuck in a world with no hope for them.

While *The Waste Land* may be the most widely recognized example of an *akairic* environment in literature, it is certainly not the only one worth noting. Kafka's *The Trial*, for instance, presents a world that has been vacuumed so thoroughly of opportunity that its

protagonist, Josef K., regularly suffocates and/or becomes paralyzed whenever he tries to force some kind of *kairic* resolution to his problems into being (74-7, 164). Much like *The Waste Land*, the *akairic* environment in *The Trial* is characterized by an overall lack of *kairic* activity, the presence of a performance that underscores the "real-dream" nature of the world, and a rejection of hope at the end.

The sense of sterility in *The Trial* is similar in some ways to *The Waste Land* and results from the total lack of *kairic* opportunities for its protagonist. The presentation of that sterility is very different, however, and it is made apparent in two ways: (1) through a depiction of time in K.'s world that renders perpetual motion as ineffective as stillness and (2) through the unending process of the trial itself. Time in *The Trial* is very unusual because the things that happen can make it seem as if K. is living in an alternate universe where the standard progression of experiential time does not exist (i.e., "reality" is a place where if something happens to you, it cannot happen again; something extremely similar to the first thing could happen, but it cannot be the same exact thing—this is *not* how the environment of *The Trial* works). These odd happenings have led Margaret Church to claim that Kafka's novel takes place in a dream world where "the time experience is almost entirely on the level of the parable, the symbol, and the dream in which experience exists without relation to time or to simultaneity" (110). Church's description is not meant to be derogatory, yet there is an undercurrent of dismissal to labeling something as dreamlike, a problem that Roberto Calasso addresses by contrasting the world created by Kafka with the typical environment of an Edgar Allan Poe work: "Nothing is further from *The Trial* than the sense of the fantastic, the visionary, the 'extraordinary' that we might associate with Poe. Indeed for the reader the ever present suspicion is that it's a kind of verism" (9). That "truth," Calasso goes on to argue, allows the novel to "unfold on the threshold of a

hidden world that one suspects is implicit in this world" (10). Although these two readings may seem worlds apart, both are necessary for an understanding of how Kafka uses time in *The Trial* to create a world that is at once "real" and "dream."

How, then, is this mixture of two seemingly disparate concepts accomplished? Much as it was helpful in explaining elements of Conrad's search for conscious heroism, Frank Kermode's "tick tock" theory is useful for bridging the gap between the two sides of Kafka's "real-dream" presentation. Kermode, as was mentioned in Chapter 2, believes that humanity's need "to be related to a beginning and to an end" is a fundamental aspect of its existence (4), and he constructs an example using the English version of the sounds a clock makes—*tick-tock*—to show how we "humaniz[e] time by giving it form" (45). Humans' need to live lives of differentiated, significant moments leads to the creation of temporal models that initiate an expectation that such moments will inevitably arrive, and, for most people in most places, this model works very well. One of the most important questions that *The Trial* asks, however, is "What if there is no tock?" *The Trial* contains a world where time progresses as a series of "ticks," and the longed for "tock" that would indicate a *kairic* moment never arrives. It is as if K. is continually running down a hallway to open a door only to discover that he is back at the beginning of the same hallway he has just traversed—no matter how much or which way he moves, he never can get anywhere; thus, he may as well have done nothing at all. The dreamlike portion of this model, as Church argues for it, is clear; the things that happen to K. hardly seem possible. And yet he is *not* dreaming. As a result, Calasso's opinion also applies: K. is not participating in the fantastic but delving into a deeper reality that is hidden within the one to which people are ordinarily accustomed. Through the application of these two paradoxical

concepts, the tension of the novel is ratcheted up dramatically, emphasizing both the power of the *akairic* environment and Josef K.'s desperate need to escape it.

While there are many examples from the novel that illustrate how the world of *The Trial* can be seen as a place of unending "ticks," two instances, the repetition of Franz and Willem's beating and the duplication of the paintings that Titorelli gifts to K., stand out in particular. The first scene, where Franz and Willem are punished by the court for their behavior during K.'s initial encounter with them, shocks K. deeply both because it takes place in a "junk room" at his bank and because of its severity (81). When K. enters the room, he notices that the man in charge is "got up in some sort of dark leather garment that [leaves] his neck and upper chest, as well as his entire arms, bare" (81). This sadistic figure proceeds to beat Franz and Willem with a rod while K., in spite of his efforts to intervene, is forced to watch until he can flee the premises (81-86). Even more shocking is what happens when K. passes by the same room on his way home the next night: "As he passed by the junk room again on his way home, he opened the door as if by habit. What he saw, in place of the expected darkness, bewildered him completely. *Everything was unchanged*, just as he had found it in the previous evening when he opened the door" (86-7, italics added for emphasis). What K. experiences in this instance is not merely a repetition of the same kind of event that took place on the previous night; it is a recurrence of the same event *exactly*, down to the first word of dialogue—"Sir!"—that leaps out of the guards' mouths as they beg for mercy (87). This very scene is part of the evidence Church lists for why the novel exists in the world of the "dream" (110), yet it also serves as the most "real" kind of example that can exist of what a world of repeated, unending "ticks" might look like.

The vertiginous effect of this repetition is again displayed later in the novel when K. visits the painter Titorelli. After a lengthy discussion in which the painter describes the two

equally inefficient means (since an actual acquittal is not possible) of addressing his trial (148-62), K. agrees to purchase some of his artwork to repay him for his efforts. The scene that follows has an eerily similar temporal effect as the "junk room" scene from earlier in the novel:

> "I'll buy it." K. had spoken curtly without thinking, so he was glad when, instead of taking it badly, the painter picked up another painting from the floor. "Here's a companion piece to that picture," said the painter. It may have been intended as a companion piece, but not the slightest difference could be seen between it and the first one: here were the trees, here was the grass, and there the sunset. . . . "You seem to like the subject," said the painter, and pulled out a third painting, "luckily enough, I have a similar one right here." It was not merely similar, however, it was *exactly the same* landscape. (163, italics added for emphasis)

Much like his remark that "everything was unchanged" the second time he went into the junk room, K.'s comment here that the paintings are "exactly the same" serves as a clue that he has entered a perpetual loop of "ticks" once again. One gets the impression that, in either case, if K. had repeated the same gestures (opening the door on his way home or accepting a painting from Titorelli), the results could continue into infinity. Both instances serve as a metaphor for K.'s ineffectual attempts at heroic action throughout the novel; within his trial, K. learns that both stillness and continual motion result in his not having gotten anywhere.

Obviously, the "loop effect" of time is not the only means by which attempts at heroic action are made to seem pointless in this novel. The eternal nature of the trial itself is just as devastating to K.'s hopes. K. never discovers what charges have been brought against him, and, in spite of continual efforts, he has no real opportunity to defend himself because he cannot locate the ultimate authority behind the process. One of the "defenses" he tries to mount is the

creation of an initial petition to the court to state his case and proclaim his innocence. K.'s inability to understand the nature of his trial (i.e., as judgment alone) prevents him from abandoning such an effort as futile. Thinking to himself about the difficulty of drafting such a document, K. states:

> Admittedly, the petition meant an almost endless task. One needn't be particularly faint of heart to be easily persuaded of the impossibility of ever finishing the petition. Not because of laziness or deceit . . . but because without knowing the nature of the charge and all its possible ramifications, his entire life, down to the smallest actions and events, would have to be called to mind, described, and examined from all sides. And what a sad job that was. (127)

Even if K. were capable of creating such a document, it would do nothing to prevent the continuation of his trial. The only options K. has, as the artist and employee of the court Titorelli tells him, are to accept the illusion of acquittal, in which the trial would seem to cease for a short while but then begin again in perpetuity, or to protract the trial by a continual effort that would keep a verdict from ever being reached (156-62). Thus, the trial that K. seeks, one in which his innocence or guilt will be decided, cannot begin or be found because it does not exist. The trial he is undergoing, the one where "the court, once it brings a charge, is convinced of the guilt of the accused…[and] can never be swayed from it" (149), begins before the novel starts and ceases only with his death at its close; the law cares nothing for him or his concerns. As the priest/court employee tells K. near the end of the novel, "The court wants nothing from you. It receives you when you come and dismisses you when you go" (224). Ultimately, between the loop effect of time in the novel and the infinite process of his trial, there are no *kairic* opportunities for K. to escape his trap.

In addition to its overwhelming sterility in terms of meaningful action, *The Trial* also contains an emphasis on performance that is typical of the "play" that frequently inhabits the *akairic* environment. The notion that K. is being watched by an "audience" (making him an "actor" giving a performance) is introduced immediately in the novel before he even gets out of bed: "K. waited a while longer, watching from his pillow the old woman who lived across the way, who was peering at him with a curiosity quite unusual for her" (3). When he moves into the next room to try and find out why his home has been invaded by strangers, he sees her again: "Through the open window the old woman was visible again, having moved with truly senile curiosity to the window directly opposite, so she could keep an eye on everything" (5). The audience soon grows; "an ancient man far older" than the woman and a large man, "with his shirt open at the chest, pinching and twisting his reddish goatee" soon join her at the window to watch K.'s "performance" (9, 12-3). Later, that very word is used to describe K.'s behavior when he reenacts his "arrest" for Fräulein Bürstner. K. wants to rearrange the furniture in her room to set the scene, and, after initially resisting the idea, she replies, "Well, if you need it for your performance, then go ahead and move the stand" (30). This motif of K. having an audience for his trial is carried all the way to the end of the novel, where, just before he dies, the following event is narrated:

> His gaze fell upon the top story of the building adjoining the quarry. Like a light flicking on, the casements of a window flew open, a human figure, faint and insubstantial at that distance and height, leaned far out abruptly, and stretched both arms out even further. Who was it? A friend? A good person? Someone who cared? Someone who wanted to help? Was it just one person? Was it everyone? (230)

Unlike his initial encounter with his audience, when he understood their role as solely passive observers of his arrest, K. finishes the work seeking assistance from his one remaining viewer. Not only would his behavior here, if he were actually in a play, be a violation of the "fourth wall" that separates actors from audience, it also blurs the line between fantasy and reality by seeking interference with the "play" from someone who exists outside of it. K.'s confusion is certainly understandable, for his "performance" in the story lacks some fundamental components that would allow it to serve as the kind of distraction that can sometimes alleviate pressure in an *akairic* environment, namely that he never agreed to be in a play, nor does he ever consider any of his circumstances to be anything other than real, a perspective that is verified shortly after his appeal to his audience when he suffers the very real consequence of being stabbed to death by officials of his trial (231).

Roger Caillois argues that free choice is essential in any instance of play; any activity that occurs outside of this constraint is something else:

> There is no doubt that play must be defined as a free and voluntary activity, a source of joy and amusement. . . . As an obligation or simply an order, it would lose one of its basic characteristics: the fact that the player devotes himself spontaneously to the game, of his free will and for his pleasure, each time completely free to choose retreat, silence, meditation, idle solitude, or creative activity. (6)

None of these choices is available to K.; his trial was thrust upon him without his consent for reasons he never fully understands. As a result, his "performances" in *The Trial* merely add more stress to an already overwhelming situation and serve instead as an example of the "corruption" of that form of play that Caillois argues leads to alienation (49). All of his actions

have led to nothing, as his desperate attempt to seek help from his audience affirms. In the end, Block's advice to K. from earlier in the novel proves prophetic: "Waiting isn't pointless…the only thing that's pointless is independent action" (176). Block is right, as K. soon learns.

The final "performance" given by K. at his execution also serves to establish *The Trial*'s third component of the *akairic* environment—an ending that fails to provide hope of any escape for the would-be-hero. Certainly his death covers that requirement, but, more importantly, the idea that K. dies "like a dog" (231), completing the cycle of dehumanization that he undergoes throughout the entire process, really drives home the inescapable power of this *akairic* environment. K. is not transformed into a dog at the end of the story; rather, he exhibits dog-like behavior at times throughout the novel, the repetition of which indicates that the removal of his humanity began at the inception of the trial. One scene in particular from early in the novel stands out, when he leaves the room of Fräulein Bürstner: "'I'm coming,' said K., rushed out, seized her, kissed her on the mouth, then all over her face, like a thirsty animal lapping greedily at a spring it has found at last" (33). The description here is shocking not only for its animalistic nature but also because, prior to it, other than the fact that he had overstayed his welcome, K. and Fräulein Bürstner had been having a relatively normal conversation. Bookending K.'s dog-like behavior here with his death "like a dog" at the end of the novel serves to highlight the importance of both events.

It is significant that K. is not transformed *into* an animal, a practice that is relatively common in Kafka's works. Rather, K. maintains his human form (and potential) but behaves *like* an animal, something that seems to be an inevitable side-effect of undergoing a trial, a nightmare driven home for him when he witnesses the dehumanization of Block as he finally gains an audience with their lawyer, Huld:

> So the lawyer's methods, to which K., fortunately, had not been long enough exposed, resulted in this: that the client finally forgot the entire world, desiring only to trudge along this mistaken path to the end of his trial. He was no longer a client, he was the lawyer's dog. If the lawyer had ordered him to crawl under the bed, as into a kennel, and bark, he would have done so gladly. (195)

Again, the power of the *akairic* environment in *The Trial* is shown through this behavioral transformation. If humans live in bodies that are meant to possess the potential for heroic action, but that potential is removed, then the result is something that resembles Calasso's notion of "commixture," which he identifies as a combination of the profane and the mundane that leaves participants in Kafka's writing unable to know which will be which (22). He elaborates by noting that "there is no sordid corner that can't be treated as a vast abstraction, and no vast abstraction that can't be treated as a sordid corner" (22). While Calasso is here specifically referencing behaviors and actions, the "mixing" he implies can also be applied to his thoughts on more abstract concepts, such as what he identifies as the "sacred" and the "alien" (22). This is the context in which "commixture" can be applied to *The Trial*, for in removing K.'s capacity for human action, Kafka mixes the "alien" of animalistic behavior with the "sacred" form of the human being. By combining K.'s death with prior removal of his humanity, and thus his potential for heroic action, Kafka at once reaffirms the power of the *akairic* environment and crushes—with much more force than Eliot is willing or able to do in *The Waste Land*—the possibility of hope for escape.

Not all examples of the *akairic* environment are as transparent as those provided by Eliot and Kafka. In *The Sun Also Rises*, Ernest Hemingway offers a different version of the model, one that at first appears to be more in line with the *akairic* desires of Prufrock and Quentin.

Much like theirs, Jake's story is a confessional text. Upon closer inspection, though, Jake's difficulty in pursuing a particular heroic path does not stem from an improper desire on his part (as is the case for Prufrock and Quentin) but instead from a lack of opportunity altogether.

Because Jake controls all of the information imparted within the work (it is "written" by him shortly after he returns from Spain), any attempt to understand the novel must begin with an attempt to understand him. This is no easy task, for Hemingway's "iceberg theory" is in full effect, and Jake leaves much unsaid that must be dug out and interpreted in order to grasp both his character and his story. Still, one thing quickly becomes clear: Jake's vilification of Robert Cohn[17] is the key to understanding his confession. Once the reasons behind that decision are unraveled, then the depth of Jake's despair and the full impact of the novel's *akairic* environment can be understood.

The text of *The Sun Also Rises* offers possibilities for understanding both Jake and Cohn that are very different from the typically biographical stances taken by scholars toward them. James Nagel, for example, provides an illustration of how the novel changes when Jake's role as narrator is made a matter of focus:

> *The Sun Also Rises* is a first-person, retrospective novel told by Jake Barnes shortly after the conclusion of the festival of San Fermín in Pamplona. As such it has an inherent temporal duality (the time of the action rendered from the time of the telling) and a corresponding thematic doubling, for things have a different significance in each of the time schemes. Jake is not the same person after the

[17] Much of the scholarship on *The Sun Also Rises* is devoted to biographical approaches that try to map out connections between Harold Loeb, a one-time friend of Hemingway, and Robert Cohn. Such analyses are a mistake, in spite of the real-life events that informed early drafts of the novel, for they cheapen the artistic accomplishment of the work. *The Sun Also Rises* is not a *roman à clef*, and Cohn is a character whose importance as part of a work of fiction far outweighs any biographical connection between him and Loeb that can be dug up. In spite of this, the biographical reading remains an important part of the history of criticism of the novel. Examples of this approach can be found in Bertram Sarason's *Hemingway and the Sun Set*, Harold Loeb's *The Way It Was*, and Robert Meyerson's "Why Robert Cohn? An Analysis of Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*."

> fiesta as before, and his assessments of himself and his friends have altered, in varying degrees, as have the values he places on even common events and observations. Indeed, Jake, one of the most vulnerable figures in American literature, has lost much that is important to him during his holiday in Spain, and his recounting of it seems motivated by a need to come to terms with his altered circumstances, with his diminution of self-esteem, and with his sense of guilt. (129)

Nagel's emphasis on the retrospective telling and the motivational power of Jake's feelings of guilt helps to classify *The Sun Also Rises* as a confessional text, which raises questions about what he might be confessing and why he feels the need to confess at all.

For Nagel, the need for confession arises out of the resurfacing of old trauma: "In the nine years between London and Paris, Jake has struggled to live with his condition [his impotence as a result of a war wound], finding meaning in work . . . in friendships, and in sports. . . . It has not been easy for him, however; he has dealt not only with his physical wound but with its implications for his life as well, the loss of romance and family" (129-30). That loss has come back to the forefront of Jake's consciousness with Brett's reentrance into his life, though, for "everywhere around him there are reminders of what he and Brett can never have" (Nagel 130). The importance of Jake's wounding within the overall context of the *akairic* environment of the novel cannot be overstated. Not only is he physically rendered sterile by the war, but also his injury is directly responsible for his complete lack of *kairic* opportunities in terms of pursuing the life he wants and needs, a different kind of sterility but one that has an equally tremendous impact on his life. Jake's inability to find a *kairic* opportunity, to act in any way that will meet his needs, is not as obvious as it is in *The Waste Land* or *The Trial*, and his frustrations

over that sterility are not made clear as quickly or as thoroughly, either. Ultimately, though, Jake is as unable to do anything to improve his situation as any of the characters in other *akairic* environments because there are no *kairic* opportunities for him to do so. Jake's realization of his plight and the overall catastrophe of the fiesta leave him feeling isolated and guilty about his role in the events, and his confession, in the form of this novel, is the result.

Doris Helbig sees the particular combination of isolation and guilt in Jake as the key elements that lead to his confession. She also identifies isolation as one of the major dilemmas of Modernism and sees confession as a means of dealing with that problem. She notes that all of the major characters in *The Sun Also Rises* "move in and out of various stages of isolation, searching for acceptance and a sense of community" (85). Confession, Helbig continues, becomes a tool for combating the sense of loss that isolation brings, and it "emerges as a major theme in a novel whose characters look for salvation in a predominantly Godless world and who find it, ultimately, in the community of other lost souls" (85). Because she focuses on confessions among the characters within the story, though, Helbig misses the opportunity to explore the text itself as a confession. She does recognize that as "a first person narrator, Jake speaks to the reader, enabling the reader to become his confessor" (87), but she neither explores the reasons for nor the consequences of this relationship. The keys to understanding the need for such exploration lie in Nagel's recognition of the temporal duality of the text and the confessional nature of that telling. Why does Jake sit down to tell this story, and what is he really telling readers about himself by doing so?

Nagel's stance that the confession centers on Jake's tragic love for Brett and how much being around her again has hurt him is certainly plausible. It is the most obvious reason why Jake would tell his story, and it fits with an earlier version of the novel in which he begins by

indicating that it is going to be "a novel about a lady" (Baker 198). There's something more to this particular confession, however. For Jake, his physical wounds from World War I and his emotional wounds from the destruction of his relationship with Brett are overwhelming, but he has been attempting to adjust to them for nearly a decade when he writes his story. Why, then, does he feel compelled to sit down and work out his "confession" related to these two wounds so soon after the fiesta when he had never done so before? Certainly the pain of being around Brett again hurts him deeply, but Jake would have been surrounded by "reminders of what he and Brett can never have" from the moment his physical wound occurred (Nagel 130). Why talk—why *confess*—now? A close examination of what is actually being confessed reveals new, different reasons for Jake's strong desire to purge his feelings of guilt—wounds that are fresh enough to require immediate attention upon Jake's return from Spain.

Two possibilities for such wounds come to light when one considers the systems Jake constructs in order to cope with the loss of "romance and family" (Nagel 130). When Jake is injured, he can no longer look forward to the prospect of happiness from either physical love or children. In this forced isolation, Jake's only option for a meaningful human existence is to attempt to elevate something else to that level of importance. Otherwise, he is doomed to a life dominated by the sterility of the *akairic* environment in which he finds himself. The substitute communities that Jake relies on are the *aficionados* of bullfighting and his male friendships. The evidence of his dependence on these groups can be found in the text, and, just prior to the action of *The Sun Also Rises* (as it occurred the first time, not in Jake's retelling), the bullfight and his male friends could be said to be more important to Jake than anything else in the world.

The significance of bullfighting for Jake is implicit in his status as an *aficionado*, a term he defines in the novel:

> Aficion means passion. An aficionado is one who is passionate about the bull-fights. All the good bull-fighters stayed at Montoya's hotel; that is, those with aficion stayed there. The commercial bull-fighters stayed once, perhaps, and then did not come back. The good ones came each year. . . . We often talked about bulls and bull-fighters. I had stopped at the Montoya for several years. We never talked for very long at a time. It was simply the pleasure of discovering what we each felt. Men would come in from distant towns and before they left Pamplona stop and talk for a few minutes with Montoya about bulls. These men were aficionados. (123)

For Jake, *aficion* goes beyond the normal bounds of passion and instead borders on the spiritual, as Kenneth Kinnamon notes: "The almost mystical, certainly spiritual, fellowship of *afición* for the bullfight was the bond which cemented Jake's relationship with Spain. . ." (128). This connection to bullfighting is a vital part of Jake's attempt to cope with life after his injury.

Even more than for the joy it gives him through the bullfight itself, *afición* is essential to Jake because it provides a community with which he can connect in an effort to compensate for the family he will never have. Jake describes the connection that exists among men who share his passion for the bullfight:

> Montoya introduced me to some of them. They were always very polite at first, and it amused them very much that I should be an American. Somehow it was taken for granted that an American could not have aficion. He might simulate it or confuse it with excitement, but he could not really have it. When they saw that I had aficion, and there was no password, no set questions that could bring it out, rather it was a sort of oral spiritual examination with the questions always a little

> on the defensive and never apparent, there was this same embarrassed putting the hand on the shoulder, or a "Buen hombre." But nearly always there was the actual touching. It seemed as though they wanted to touch you to make it certain. (123)

This connection is cemented by touch, and Jake's position within this surrogate extended family is established in the novel beyond doubt.

There is, of course, one significant and unavoidable problem with Jake's reliance on the bullfight and its supporters as a substitution for the *kairic* opportunities for love and family that he so desperately needs: bullfighting is a *game*. Even though the consequences of participating are often severe, and activities that lead to death often feel as if they are the ultimate form of reality, bullfighting is not "real" according to criteria established by play theorists such as Huizinga and Caillois. Rather, it is a contest that is rigged—there are no natural circumstances in which a man would fight, to the death and before a screaming audience, a dangerous animal that had been systematically tortured beforehand in order to give him the maximum advantage possible within the rules of the event. Seen within the context of how games are used in other examples of *akairic* environments, Jake's reliance on being an *aficionado* as a means of replacing the heroic possibility that was stripped from him is doomed to fail. Any notion of Jake's that his love of the bullfight, no matter how spiritual it seems to him, could lead to lasting happiness is illusory. He did not realize this as the events of the novel originally unfolded, but he certainly does by the time he writes his confession.

In addition to the substitution of his fellow *aficionados* for family, Jake also places much greater value on his friendships with other men. Jake's goal in this endeavor is to replace the personal connection with a lover that he can no longer have and thereby open himself up to

potential *kairic* opportunities in a way he has been unable to do since his injury. His problem is that, while he cannot consummate a physical relationship, he still has an intense desire for one with Brett, which only serves as a painful reminder of all he has lost. Thus, Jake's only viable option, as his actions indicate, is to seek companionship where there is no chance of physical involvement. Therefore, he seeks out platonic friendships with other men as his best hope for meaningful relationships.

Jake's fishing trip with Bill emphasizes the value a deep bond with another man can have for him. In fact, the tone of this scene is so positive that, at first, it seems to offer a threat to the novel's overall *akairic* environment. This brief jaunt before the fiesta represents the only time in the novel that Jake feels truly happy and at peace, feelings that Jake expresses indirectly through his concrete description of how good things were:

> We stayed five days at Burguete and had good fishing. The nights were cold and the days were hot, and there was always a breeze even in the heat of the day. It was hot enough to that it felt good to wade in a cold stream, and the sun dried you when you came out and sat on the bank. We found a stream with a pool deep enough to swim in. In the evenings we played three-handed bridge with an Englishman named Harris, who had walked over from Saint Jean Pied de Port and was stopping at the inn for the fishing. He was very pleasant and went with us twice to the Irati River. There was no word from Robert Cohn nor from Brett and Mike. (117)

Jake and Bill's peaceful, harmonious isolation from the rest of the group is essential for understanding the tremendous value of their friendship. Moreover, the tone of this scene is more positive than anything present in the *akairic* environments of either Eliot or Kafka. While they

are alone, Bill is able to make Jake laugh, something he rarely does, and he even recognizes that there is something going on between Jake and Brett:

> "Say," Bill said, "what about this Brett business?"
>
> "What about it?"
>
> "Were you ever in love with her?"
>
> "Sure."
>
> "For how long?"
>
> "Off and on for a hell of a long time."
>
> "Oh, hell!" Bill said. "I'm sorry, fella." (116)

Bill, aware of Jake's injury, is not asking so that he can gauge whether it would be okay for him to make a move on Brett—something that Cohn might have done had he even had the decency to consider Jake's feelings before making his own move. Rather, Bill asks because he cares about his friend, he knows that something is wrong, and his loyalty is to Jake first. This is exactly the kind of relationship that Jake believes he needs most, but his actions throughout the rest of the novel indicate that, despite his best intentions, even an ideal platonic friendship could never be enough to satisfy him. In this, the power of the *akairic* environment is upheld. No matter how much energy Jake pours into being an *aficionado* or being a good friend, neither option compares to what he has lost and what he needs from Brett. That relationship is forever closed to him, and Jake's realization of the finality of that loss leads him to destroy his connection both to the game and to one of the friends that he had tried to elevate in its place.

Given the importance of both the community of *aficionados* and platonic friendship to Jake, his betrayal of the ethics of bullfight lovers within the action of the story is almost incomprehensible when it happens. Any claim Jake has to *afición* is permanently revoked when

he contributes to Romero's corruption by introducing him to Brett. Montoya illustrates the severity of Jake's decision through his reaction the first time he sees Romero and Brett together: "Just then Montoya came into the room. He started to smile at me, then he saw Pedro Romero with a big glass of cognac in his hand, sitting between me and a woman with bare shoulders, at a table full of drunks. He did not even nod" (161). Michael Reynolds recognizes the importance of this scene when he notes that "Montoya's brief appearance should remind the reader that Jake is sacrificing much more than his personal dignity by acting as Brett's procurer; he is also giving up his special status in Montoya's club of insiders" (31). There are two problems with Reynolds' assessment of this moment, though. First, by equating *afición* to membership in a "club," Reynolds severely undervalues its importance to Jake. A better comparison, by far, would have been to liken it to a religion, for Jake's connection to bullfighting is deeply spiritual. Second, Reynolds' analysis of the scene elides the most important question of all: Why would Jake betray something that means so much to him? Given how important *afición* and bullfighting are to him, the question of why he would ever do such a thing hangs over the entire work.

Nagel explains Jake's decision by attributing it to a combination of his love for Brett and his annoyance with Cohn: "It is Robert's incessant pursuit of Brett that inspires Jake to introduce her to Pedro. . ." (134). Given the spiritual value of bullfighting to Jake, this reason does not seem to be enough to justify his actions. Instead, Jake's decision to ruin something that means so much to him seems more like a reaction, like something one would choose not to do upon reflection—the kind of thing one does in response to a new injury rather than as a way of dealing with an old one.

The only thing that could hurt Jake so much would be the loss of a friend, someone to whom he is close in the same way he is close to Bill. The only friend he loses during the action of the novel is Robert Cohn. That Jake and Robert were close friends before the story begins is undeniable. During the time the novel is set, there are tens of thousands of Americans living in Paris; Jake could have played tennis with, eaten with, been friends with any of them, but he chooses companionship with Cohn. As Nagel points out, "The friendship between Jake and Robert is implicit from the beginning, when Robert drops by Jake's office unannounced to go to lunch, and later naps in Jake's office, implying that they are so close he feels free to do so" (131). Given this account, it is not only possible but likely that Robert was Jake's *best* friend in Paris before the novel begins.

If this is true, then the loss of Robert as a close friend would have been a devastating blow to Jake because it would have completely undercut, and shown the uselessness of, one of the two systems he had constructed in order to cope with life after his injury. Not only that but the fact that Robert never even recognizes Jake's love for Brett in his pursuit of her—Bill saw it; why not Robert?—stresses the disparity in their views of the relationship and the danger for Jake in having to rely on a bond that is clearly inferior to the one he desires with Brett. To Robert, Jake may have been a very good friend, but that connection cannot stand up to the possibility of a life with the woman that he loves. Jake understands this well because he feels the same way about Brett, only all *kairic* opportunities related to his relationship with her have disappeared due to his injury. Ultimately, Jake and Robert's friendship is not balanced, and Robert's affair with Brett forces Jake to recognize that Cohn meant more to him than he ever meant to Cohn. This realization forces Jake to face up to his own futility. His *afición* means nothing. His friendship with Robert means nothing. Since his injury, his life has never been, nor will it ever be, as

meaningful as the one that he might have had. Jake's complete disillusionment results in a need for revenge that is more instinctual than rational.

Once Jake and Robert's relationship is seen in this light, all of the former's actions and thoughts in the novel become clear. His decision to abandon *afición* is made out of a need for revenge because Pedro is the only means Jake has of hurting Robert. Clearly, Mike is not a rival who can make Cohn understand the disparity in his own "relationship" with Brett, so Jake has to construct a situation that will make Robert recognize that Brett means everything to him while he means almost nothing to her—a situation that mirrors Jake's own recognition of the disparity in his relationship with his former friend. That Pedro is the only tool at Jake's disposal is unfortunate, for it means he must choose between his love of the bullfight and his need for revenge. He chooses revenge, and his focus on that option is far from heroic and helps explain why *The Sun Also Rises* can, at times, display strong characteristics of *akairic* desire. Overall, though, Jake's primary longing for a relationship with Brett outweighs all other considerations, and there is nothing wrong with his desire in that regard; thus, the novel fits best as an example of an *akairic* environment.

That fit is driven home by the work's ending, which, like *The Waste Land* and *The Trial*, refuses to offer any clear hope that any *kairic* opportunities for escaping his situation will be forthcoming for Jake. The guilt Jake feels over his abandonment of *afición* becomes the impetus for his confession, and his negative portrayal of Cohn throughout the work is his attempt to justify his own betrayal of something he once held so dear. It is as if he wants to convince both the reader and himself, through his evisceration of Cohn, that he had no choice but to hurt him, as if Cohn's betrayal created a new wound—one that caused Jake to lash out in a vengeful reaction that not only did nothing to restore what he had lost but also led to the destruction of the

only other thing for which he cared deeply. The confession is also a recognition, however, that bullfighting could never have truly replaced the love he felt for Brett, a realization that was inevitable given the *corrida*'s presence as a game within the *akairic* environment of the novel. In the end, all Jake has left is his relationship with Bill, and, while it means a great deal to him, it will not be enough. Jake's response to Brett at the end of the novel affirms this negativity. Lamenting what they have lost, Brett says, "'Oh Jake…we could have had such a damned good time together" (222). Jake's sarcastic response, "Isn't it pretty to think so?" (222), confirms he understands that dreaming of happiness is all he has left in the midst of his *akairic* environment.

Clearly, *The Sun Also Rises*, *The Trial*, and *The Waste Land* all illustrate the ways in which *akairic* environment is the low-point for heroic action in twentieth century fiction. These works are saturated with an overall sense of sterility. The characters resort to games and performances that only increase their desire for real, meaningful action. Hammer-blow endings reaffirm the ultimate powerlessness of any would-be-hero. By itself, the impact of *The Waste Land* was so great that it seemed for a while as if the desired-for but unavailable kairically appropriate heroic act might have been irrecoverable from its depths. Fortunately, the feelings of despair elicited by the dominance of *akairos* throughout the first three decades of the twentieth century were not universal. While the majority of authors were stuck, wallowing in the heroic problems of the age, a solution was found by an unlikely author in an even more unlikely protagonist.

CHAPTER 5

CLARISSA DALLOWAY, MODERNIST HERO

Both the futility of *akairic* desire and the sterility of the *akairic* environment dominated the heyday of Modernism to the extent that the possibility of ethical heroic action in literature (i.e., of a character doing the "right" thing, for the "right" reason, and at the "right" time) seemed all but extinguished. Fortunately, such seeming was not reality. Through Clarissa, the heroine of her 1925 novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf offered a way out of the mazes of *akairic* desire and environment that others did not have the vision, flexibility of mind, or desire to see. The intricate interplay between Clarissa's exploratory musings and her ultimately very decisive actions proves that the heroic can be found in any act, even the throwing of a party. Thus, Woolf defied both Tolstoy's fear—that connection with others was an insurmountable obstacle to heroism due to external influence on individual will (*War* 1224)—and Ortega's doubt—that anything beyond heroic will was impossible in Modernity (*Meditations* 164). While Clarissa's efforts do not succeed without challenges, her direct confrontations with cynicism and doubt, agents of *akairic* desire, and distraction (a path that can lead to the *akairic* environment) empower her to find the balance necessary to complete a heroic act in a Modernist work.

The first step in analyzing Clarissa's effectiveness as a hero is to examine both the heroic nature of her goal and her own heroic potential within the guidelines of the Aristotelian ethical model. Her task—to give a party—is one that, outside the circumstances of the novel, seems far from heroic. There is much more to Clarissa's party than its status as a social event, though, a depth made clear from some of her earliest thoughts in the novel. Shortly after she makes her

initial "plunge" into her day (3), Clarissa's confidence is very high. She knows what her purpose is and believes in its value—amidst the cacophony of Modernity, to do something that captures and reflects all of the energy of "life" (*Dalloway* 4), something that she sees all around her:

> In people's eyes, in the swing, tramp, and trudge; in the bellow and the uproar, the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging brass bands; barrel organs; in the triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved; life; London; this moment of June. (4)

The presence of such energy demands, according to Clarissa's perspective, some sort of active response even if one does not understand how the different components of life can possibly create such feelings: "Such fools we are, she thought, crossing Victoria Street. For Heaven only knows why one loves [life] so, how one sees it so, *making* it up, *building* it round one, *tumbling* it, *creating* it every moment afresh" (4, italics added for emphasis). In Clarissa's case, her choice is to "kindle and illuminate; to give her party" (5). The fact that it is "her party" here and not just *a* party is significant, for the heroic nature of such an event is not immediately clear. Once one understands what the party is meant to represent for Clarissa, though, its potential as a heroic event is revealed.

Later in the day, Clarissa reflects more deeply upon her party's importance to her. Just after Richard's visit at three o'clock, Clarissa realizes that she feels "desperately unhappy," but she cannot initially pin down the reason (120). Eventually she realizes that her frustration is due to the fact that neither Richard nor Peter understands what she is trying to do, that "both of them criticised her very unfairly, laughed at her unjustly, for her parties. That was it! That was it!" (121). She then begins a long, introspective succession of thoughts that substantiate her goal:

> They thought, or Peter at any rate thought, that she enjoyed imposing herself; liked to have famous people about her; great names; was simply a snob in short. Well, Peter might think so. Richard merely thought it foolish of her to like excitement when she knew it was bad for her heart. It was childish, he thought. And both were quite wrong. What she liked was simply life….
>
> But suppose Peter said to her, "Yes, yes, but your parties—what's the sense of your parties?" all she could say was (and nobody could be expected to understand): They're an offering; which sounded horribly vague….
>
> But to go deeper, beneath what people said (and these judgments, how superficial, how fragmentary they are!) in her own mind now, what did it mean to her, this thing she called life? Oh, it was very queer. Here was So-and-so in South Kensington; some one up in Bayswater; and somebody else, say in Mayfair. And she felt quite continuously a sense of their own existence; and she felt what a waste; and she felt what a pity; and she felt if only they could be brought together; so she did it. And it was an offering; to combine, to create; but to whom?
>
> An offering for the sake of offering, perhaps. Anyhow, it was her gift. (121-2)

Clarissa is more than a socialite, and her parties are more than mere social events for her; they are her art, the outward expression of her inner self.

Recognizing Clarissa as an artist is beyond the novel's supporting characters, but there are examples in scholarly criticism of *Mrs. Dalloway* that make just such a claim. Jacob Littleton, for instance, argues, "If the nature of the artist is to transmute personal experience and feeling into a public act, Clarissa Dalloway is certainly an artist" (36), and he goes on to note that "Clarissa's artistry is the essential key to understanding her character, and the depiction of that

character is the novel's key event" (36). Her parties are "a way for her to act to strengthen collective being" (42), Littleton continues, and she should be considered an artist because of the control she exerts over them: "Without some intentionality and control, Clarissa ceases to be an artist and is a hostess simply. But Clarissa does have control. First she controls the party's physical aspect: when it is to occur (has she seen people as feeling isolated lately?), who will come (what combination will be successful?), what the scene will look like" (43). All of these factors are critical to the success of Clarissa's effort, but they are not the only elements that make her endeavors artistic.

Geneviève Sanchis Morgan is another scholar who sees Clarissa as an artist although she identifies Clarissa more specifically than Littleton by claiming that the party is "performance art" due to its "dramatic associations":

> By carefully selecting flowers, moving chairs and pillows, arranging the props on the mantle, and having the room's doors removed, Clarissa treats her drawing room as a stage set for a performance; indeed, removing the doors creates a proscenium arch through which the interactive audience will view the impending event. (269)

Even the beating back of the curtain (Woolf, *Dalloway* 170), which signals the assurance against failure that Clarissa has been seeking, has dramatic implications, as if the gesture is like "the raising of the curtain" at the onset of a play (Sanchis Morgan 269). Regardless of what Peter and Richard might think, Clarissa's reflective thoughts about her party are correct—it is an attempt "to combine, to create," not to escape (121).

Obviously, being an artist does not automatically make one a hero. While Clarissa's event can certainly be supported as being artistic, having a gift for giving parties is not enough to

define such a gesture as heroic. Clarissa does recognize and own her gift, which indicates that, from her point of view, this party meets the qualification of being the "right" thing as a potential heroic act, but the concurrent requirements of "right" reason and "right" time must also be met. Clarissa's reason for giving her party is to make an "offering" to life (121-2), and determining whether this can be considered a "right" reason can be difficult. Such a conclusion is attainable, however, if one contrasts Clarissa's party with that of another famous party giver in Woolf's fiction, Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*.

Mrs. Ramsay's dinner party begins fitfully, with doubts on her part—"But what have I done with my life?" (Woolf, *Lighthouse* 82)—that echo Clarissa's—"Why after all did she do these things? Why seek pinnacles and stand drenched in fire?" (*Dalloway* 167)—about whether any of her efforts will be worthwhile. Eventually, just as Clarissa's do, Mrs. Ramsay's feelings change, and she recognizes both the success and worth of the event:

> Nothing need be said; nothing could be said. There it was, all around them. It partook, she felt, of eternity; as she had already felt about something different once before that afternoon; there is a coherence in things, a stability; something, she meant, is immune from change, and shines out (she glanced at the window with its ripple of reflected lights) in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral, like a ruby; so that again tonight she had the feeling she had had once today, already, of peace, of rest. Of such moments, she thought, the thing is made that endures. (*Lighthouse* 105)

Mrs. Ramsay's feeling of deep satisfaction after this realization is verified through her description of the moment as "the still space that lies about the heart of things" (105), and what started off as a simple dinner party becomes much more.

Just as she did with Clarissa's party, Sanchis Morgan argues that Mrs. Ramsay's party is art, specifically that it is an example of "tableau vivant," full of "momentarily static, paintable scenes … [that have a] quality of giving shape, of bracketing or framing the experience or scene, that designates art" (270). The result of this living still-life is what Eudora Welty describes as "the very texture of human happiness" and "Mrs. Ramsay's triumph" (x). Certainly Mrs. Ramsay feels "flattered" by this success, "to think how, wound about in their hearts, however long they lived she would be woven" (Woolf, *Lighthouse* 113). In spite of all this, though, there is something about Mrs. Ramsay's party that makes it seem as if its success is less deep, more fleeting than that of Clarissa's.

Part of the reason for this difference is the way Mrs. Ramsay undercuts the joy of her party almost as soon as it is finished, thinking, "Yes, that was done then, accomplished; and as with all things done, became solemn" (113). This solemnity derives from more than just disappointment at the ending of an event that could never have been more than temporary anyway. Mrs. Ramsay's mixed emotions stem from the fact that she is not free to create her art as an "offering," as Clarissa does, due to other obligations that drain away the energy she might otherwise devote to her own interests. While Clarissa is free, comparatively speaking, to find "an answer to the malaise of existence" in her parties (Littleton 41), Mrs. Ramsay's most pressing role is to sacrifice herself fully for any and every need of her family—but especially that of her husband.

For Woolf, Mrs. Ramsay's sacrificial role represents what she describes elsewhere as the "Angel in the House," a name "borrowed" from a famous Victorian poem by Coventry Patmore (Rose 157). Woolf, in a 1931 speech "to the London/National Society for Women's Service"

(Blodgett 6), had the following to say about this powerful representation of idealized Victorian femininity:

> And while I was writing this review, I discovered that if I were going to review books I should need to do battle with a certain phantom. And the phantom was a woman, and when I came to know her better I called her after the heroine of a famous poem, The Angel in the House. It was she who used to come between me and my paper when I was writing reviews. It was she who bothered me and wasted my time and so tormented me that at last I killed her…. She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught, she sat in it—in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. ("Professions for Women" 285)

The aspect of this figure that is so problematic for both the artist and the potential hero is the notion of a sacrifice of self that is so thorough that the Angel is left without a "mind or a wish of her own," a condition that threatens the foundational notions of selfhood and agency that are essential for models of ethical heroism. It is not that self-sacrifice is in and of itself anti-heroic; rather, there are many instances where a giving of one's self could be the "right" thing and reason and occur at the "right" time. What happens with Mrs. Ramsay is far from heroic, however, a truth shown through the descriptions of her feelings whenever she is forced to take up the role.

No situation in *To the Lighthouse* exemplifies the perverse nature of the Angel in the House function better than the moment when, as Mrs. Ramsay is reading a book to their youngest son James, Mr. Ramsay interrupts by looming over them both with a wordless demand for "sympathy" (37), one that she immediately feels and has no choice but to accede to:

> Mrs. Ramsay, who had been sitting loosely, folding her son in her arm, braced herself with an effort, and at once to pour erect into the air a rain of energy, a column of spray, looking at the same time animated and alive as if all her energies were being fused into force, burning and illuminating (quietly though she sat, taking up her stocking again), and into this delicious fecundity, this fountain and spray of life, the fatal sterility of the male plunged itself, like a beak of brass, barren and bare. He wanted sympathy…. (37)

Even this outpouring is not enough, though, and Mr. Ramsay demands more, leaving his wife with "scarcely a shell of herself left for her to know herself by; all was so lavished and spent" (38). Even worse, after the transaction is finished, Mrs. Ramsay is filled with "the rapture of successful creation" although her task has not been to make something new but instead to replenish something that was empty and could not refill itself (38). These positive feelings, coupled with other instances of subservience such as feeling that "of the two he was infinitely more important" (39), lead Tonya Krouse to identify Mrs. Ramsay as "a collaborator in the patriarchal oppression of her sex" (296). Such positivity is not the only emotional response that Mrs. Ramsay has to her unbalanced marital relationship, though.

After each instance where her husband's need drains her so, "also there tinge[s] her physical fatigue some faintly disagreeable sensation with another origin" (Woolf, *Lighthouse* 39). Mrs. Ramsay has trouble locating the cause of this disappointment, but Lily does not, and

when he turns his vampiric need upon her at the end of the novel, Lily offers the following damning description of Mr. Ramsay: "That man, she thought, her anger rising in her, never gave; that man took. She, on the other hand, would be forced to give. Mrs. Ramsay had given. Giving, giving, giving, she had died—and had left all this" (149). While Mrs. Ramsay might not have ever been able to think such thoughts about her husband when she was alive, their relationship certainly took a negative toll on her outlook toward life, which she expresses when she thinks that "for the most part, oddly enough, she must admit that she felt this thing that she called life terrible, hostile, and quick to pounce on you if you gave it a chance" (60). Mrs. Ramsey's constant defensive posture against negativity is all that is necessary to prove that her role as Angel in the House is antithetical to heroism.

A forced sacrifice, even if the pressure is passive in nature and mixed with feelings of pleasure, is not the same thing as one given openly and freely. Rather than serving as a model for sacrificial heroism, then, Mrs. Ramsay's position as the "battery" for her husband serves to emphasize, by way of contrast with her brief success at the dinner party, what heroic potential is lost in her due to the consuming nature of her position as Angel in the House. So, while Mrs. Ramsay's dinner party is successful as an artistic endeavor, it does not meet the highly selective criteria of being an ethical heroic action because it is not given for a "right" reason—it is not an "offering" to life, freely given (Woolf, *Dalloway* 121); it is a brief attempt to escape.

Returning to Clarissa, then, one can see how both her situation and her party are much different than those of Mrs. Ramsay. She is not forced to give the party because she is a politician's wife, an "Angel in the House" assignment that would drain away the individualistic and creative aspects of her art form. Neither does she throw the party out of a desperate need to find some artistic escape from a relationship that empties her of all energy and personal interests.

Rather, her relationship with her husband is a boon to her artistic endeavors—in spite of the fact that he does not understand her need for them—because Richard and Clarissa provide each other with the space they need to have and make use of their own individual, creative pursuits.[18] Clarissa realizes this strength when Richard comes home to visit with her and bring her flowers in the middle of the day. Just as he leaves, she thinks:

> And there is a dignity in people; a solitude; even between husband and wife a gulf; and that one must respect, thought Clarissa, watching him open the door; for one would not part with it oneself, or take it, against his will, from one's husband, without losing one's independence, one's self-respect—something, after all, priceless. (Woolf, *Dalloway* 120)

Clarissa's independence allows her to make her "offering" to life fully and freely (121), without ulterior motive or need, and these qualities help her party meet the heroic requirement of being undertaken for the "right" reason.

The final part of assessing Clarissa's heroic potential is determining whether her action (giving her party) can be said to happen at the "right" time. Such an effort can be a bit confusing because a portion of the "good timing" of her effort is met by her requirements of getting certain people together for her "offering," so the "right" time, in a physical sense, is when all those people can meet. As Littleton argues, while Clarissa does not control her product as much as other artists might, she does manage some aspects including the physical timing of the event:

> Clarissa's control is in the physical scene of the party, from which arise the actions of the guests which constitute the beginnings of the hum of Life which is

[18] In some ways, the freedom Clarissa enjoys within her relationship with Richard prefigures the conditions for a woman writer to be successful that Woolf outlines in a pair of speeches given by her in 1928 (later collected and revised as *A Room of One's Own*): "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (13). While he may not be a perfect partner for her (And what human could ever achieve such perfection anyway?), Richard does help Clarissa to have both the money and the "room" she needs to create her art and meet her heroic potential.

> Clarissa's real goal. If she has judged the moment correctly, laid the scene correctly, she will be rewarded with what she wants from her guests without coercion or persuasion. In the end this is not very different from the writer or painter, who must also succeed technically for the reader to comprehend his or her message. (43)

Control over this kind of timing does not fully explain whether or not the party ends up being a moment filled with the *kairic* potential for heroism, though. In order to reach such a conclusion, one must first understand and analyze all of the challenges that Clarissa faces and either conquers or avoids simply to reach her "moment" at the party in a frame of mind that will allow her to fulfill her heroic potential.

Such challenges do serve as threats to Clarissa's heroism, but they also validate the heroic nature of her task by adding a degree of difficulty that gives it weight. One example of a problem she must overcome is cynicism from others about what she is trying to do. The most prominent instances of this dismissive summation come from Peter Walsh, the man whom Clarissa rejected in favor of Richard. When Peter arrives unannounced at Clarissa's house, he notices what she is doing and immediately thinks he knows all there is to know about her even though he has been away for years:

> Here she is mending her dress; mending her dress as usual, he thought; here she's been sitting all the time I've been in India; mending her dress; playing about; going to parties; running to the House and back and all that, he thought, growing more and more irritated, more and more agitated, for there's nothing in the world so bad for some women as marriage, he thought; and politics; and having a

> Conservative husband, like the admirable Richard. So it is, so it is, he thought, shutting his knife with a snap. (Woolf, *Dalloway* 41)

Peter could not be more wrong in this moment about Clarissa or her artistic and heroic purpose. He does come close, later in the day, to understanding what she is capable of accomplishing, noting that she has a gift for "making a world of her own wherever she happened to be" (76), and he describes her as follows: "She came into a room; she stood, as he had often seen her, in a doorway with lots of people round her. But it was Clarissa one remembered. Not that she was striking; not beautiful at all; there was nothing picturesque about her; she never said anything specially clever; there she was, however; there she was" (76). This refrain is as close as Peter comes to understanding Clarissa's heroic potential, yet he still misses the mark, thinking moments later that "the obvious thing to say about her was that she was worldly; cared too much for rank and society and getting on in the world" (76). This is too simple an explanation of her, though, and it ignores Clarissa's emphasis on action.

Clarissa believes that people have "no right to slouch about with their hands in their pockets; must do something; be something" (76). People who make such attempts in the world are the ones who have "a kind of courage which the older she grew the more she respected" (76). Because Peter cannot quite grasp this, he insists on dismissing her (perhaps for his own comfort since he still loves her but cannot have her) as merely interested in propping up the political ideals of the Empire—someone like Lady Bruton, perhaps, who has England "in her blood (without reading Shakespeare)" (180) and who believes that Clarissa has not done enough to help Richard further his career (as a good Angel in the House should) (179). Through his mistaken, cynical bias against Clarissa, Peter ultimately reveals his own flaws. He has the capability of seeing the energy in life that Clarissa does, noting as he walks out of Regent's Park that "life

itself, every moment of it, every drop of it, here, this instant, now, in the sun, in Regent's Park, was enough" (79). What he lacks, though, is Clarissa's courage—to face life anew each day and try to *make* something of it, to "assemble" (38) it into something recognizable from its disparate parts just as she does with her own personality, "collecting the whole of her at one point" (37). More importantly, even though he is wrong about her, Peter's criticism of Clarissa is a threat to her heroism that she must overcome.

Otherwise, her heroic endeavor—throwing "her party" (5)—may fail. Because the party is a communal act that Clarissa has only partial control over, she must have cooperation and participation, rather than cynicism, from her guests in order to make it a success. In Peter's case, Clarissa overcomes his skeptical inclination toward her through her charisma and the consistency in and sincerity of her purpose. Even if Peter never understands what her parties mean to her, he does recognize her power before the day is out, thinking in a rare moment of honest self-reflection before the party that Clarissa "had influenced him more than any person he had ever known" (153) and that, within her, there is "a thread of life which for toughness, endurance, power to overcome obstacles, and carry her triumphantly through he had never known the like of" (155). Then, at the end of the novel, Clarissa's final victory over the challenge of Peter's cynicism is complete when he is filled with "ecstasy" and "extraordinary excitement" by her mere presence (194). In that moment, Peter's final thoughts hold no room for skepticism or any negativity; all he can do is echo the summation he offered earlier in the day: "For there she was" (194).

Cynicism is not the only challenge Clarissa faces, however. Another problem she must overcome on her way to success in her *kairic* moment is her own recurring feelings of doubt about whether her attempt to create an offering to life could ever be successful and whether she

made the best choices in her life overall. In the case of the former, such doubt could be considered a natural outgrowth of "performance anxiety" as the enormity of her approaching *kairic* moment bears down on her. Clarissa expresses just such feelings of inadequacy, very akin to Mrs. Ramsay's, as her party is ready to begin, but once the event is underway, she is quickly able to overcome them (Woolf, *Dalloway* 167). Clarissa's heroic potential is actually in much more danger when she begins to doubt the "rightness" of her decisions in life, which have led her to where she is. This challenge can be seen, in some ways, as an outgrowth of the need to overcome others' cynicism—one that, if not handled properly, could leave Clarissa trapped within a cycle of *akairic* desire.

Even though Peter's assumptions about Clarissa and her party never fully align with her own, she is very aware of his skepticism toward her. For example, just after she expresses her initial fear about the party being a failure, Clarissa connects her doubts to Peter's influence: "It was extraordinary how Peter put her into these states just by coming and standing in a corner. He made her see herself; exaggerate. It was idiotic. But why did he come then, merely to criticize? Why always take, never give?" (168). Thus, others' feelings can amplify Clarissa's own feelings of doubt which creep up on her whenever she dwells too long upon her past, specifically the events of her childhood at Bourton. In those memories lies a temptation to sink and dwell that could cause Clarissa either to be unprepared for or to miss her *kairic* moment altogether.

Clarissa's doubts about her life choices center on two events: her rejection of Peter and the kiss she shared with Sally. In the case of Peter, her difficulty lies in the fact that she loved him deeply but recognized, almost instinctively, that marrying him would have meant disaster. Like Mr. Ramsay did with Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*, if Peter had married Clarissa his

needs would have drained her of all the vitality necessary for the creation of her "offering" to life (121). She sums up this aspect of his personality in her frustrated thoughts about him at the party with her assessment that he "always take[s], never give[s]" (*Dalloway* 168), but she also recognizes this problem much sooner in the novel:

> So she would find herself arguing in St. James's Park, still making out that she had been right—and she had too—not to marry him. For in marriage a little license, a little independence there must be between people living together day in and day out in the same house; which Richard gave her, and she him…. But with Peter everything had to be shared; everything gone into. And it was intolerable, and when it came to that scene in the little garden by the fountain, she had to break with him or they would have been destroyed, both of them ruined, she was convinced…. (7-8)

The fact that she still argues with herself about that decision years later as she walks through a park shows that her confidence in the matter is not quite as strong as she would like to believe. She is right, though, and her conscious resistance to the temptation of dwelling on what might have been with Peter is essential to her ability to have a meaningful impact on the world around her, for if she were to focus incessantly on that past decision, then she would end up as ineffective in action as both Prufrock and Quentin are.

More difficult than letting go of worries over her past with Peter, though, are Clarissa's memories of her time with Sally, "who made her feel, for the first time, how sheltered the life at Bourton was" (33). Specifically, Clarissa remembers, "coming down to dinner in a white frock to meet Sally Seton" (35), as the happiest evening of her life, centered on the single kiss they shared on a walk after dinner:

> Then came the most exquisite moment of her whole life passing a stone urn with flowers in it. Sally stopped; picked a flower; kissed her on the lips. The whole world might have turned upside down! The others disappeared; there she was alone with Sally. And she felt that she had been given a present, wrapped up, and told just to keep it, not to look at it—a diamond, something infinitely precious, wrapped up, which, as they walked (up and down, up and down), she uncovered, or the radiance burnt through, the revelation, the religious feeling! (35-6)

Given the passion of this moment and its power in her memory, dwelling on whether she could have been happy had she tried to make a life with Sally is tempting for Clarissa (even if she never does so fully because of the scandalous nature of such a relationship), but doing so for too long would, again, be counterproductive because it would prevent her from fully participating in the present life around her. While her moment with Sally was one of extreme happiness, she has moved on from that event (in spite of her fears about it being the pinnacle of her life) to make new moments. The joy she feels as the novel opens, as she begins her "plunge" into the day (3), is not a mere shadow of the happiness she felt with Sally; rather, it is a new and different happiness, filled with "exquisite moments" that leave her feeling "blessed and purified" (29), emotions she could never reach if she were to obsess over doubts about her past.

Much like her memories of Peter, then, Clarissa must face her thoughts about Sally and return to her task. Perseverance and strength are among her most important heroic qualities—Maureen Howard claims that "endurance" is Clarissa's "heroic mode" (xiv)—for they render her able to withstand both the highs and lows of life, its crests and its troughs, to use the wave imagery that is a pervasive motif throughout the novel. In terms of human experience, for example, several characters in the book either have or recall moments of pure happiness:

Richard, in bringing Clarissa flowers, "Happiness is this, he thought" (119); Rezia laughing over a too-small hat with Septimus, "Never had she felt so happy! Never in her life!" (143); and Clarissa recalling coming down the stairs at Bourton and quoting *Othello*, "'if it were now to die 'twere now to be most happy'" (35). Such "crests" inevitably follow or precede "troughs": Richard feels "the worthlessness of this life" after his visit with Lady Bruton (114); Rezia, after Sir Bradshaw's diagnosis of Septimus, thinks, "Never had [she] felt such agony in her life! She had asked for help and been deserted!" (98); and Clarissa wonders why she is "desperately unhappy" after Richard has brought her flowers (120). In each case, the peaks and valleys of these emotions show the range of human experience, movement that Clarissa recognizes is inevitable as her mind drifts while she begins the work of repairing her dress:

> Quiet descended on her, calm, content, as her needle, drawing the silk smoothly to its gentle pause, collected the green folds together and attached them, very lightly, to the belt. So on a summer's day waves collect, overbalance, and fall; collect and fall; and the whole world seems to be saying "that is all" more and more ponderously, until even the heart in the body which lies in the sun on the beach says too, That is all. Fear no more, says the heart. Fear no more, says the heart, committing its burden to some sea, which sighs collectively for all sorrows, and renews, begins, collects, lets fall. (39-40)

Clarissa's recognition of the natural movement of life is a wisdom that is unique within the novel, and it allows her to continue to ride the waves of her life and have an active presence in it without trying to control it, a quality that is key for *kairic* readiness.

Thus, the "rightness" of Clarissa's decision to seek out new meaningful moments in life, to avoid the temptation of trying to ride forever the crest of the "kiss" (35), is confirmed when

Sally shows up unexpectedly at Clarissa's party. If Clarissa had been *akairically* dwelling on her doubts related to Sally, then seeing her would have had an effect on Clarissa similar to the emotions felt by Peter earlier in the day. Peter is wrecked by his initial encounter with Clarissa because he has never gotten past his break-up with her, "the terrible scene which he believed had mattered more than anything in the whole of this life" (63). Clarissa has doubts about the past, but Peter is stuck there. Clarissa has no such upheaval upon seeing Sally, for she understands that their moment at Bourton was a "crest" in her life, one of many. When she sees Sally, Clarissa is happy, but no doubts arise in her mind about her life, for she is in the middle of her heroic moment:

> The luster had gone out of her. Yet it was extraordinary to see her again, older, happier, less lovely. They kissed each other, first this cheek then that, by the drawing-room door, and Clarissa turned, with Sally's hand in hers, and saw her rooms full, heard the roar of voices, saw the candlesticks, the blowing curtains, and the roses which Richard had given her. (171)

Though her final challenge has not yet begun, this moment of ease shows that no doubt about her past will cause the ruin of Clarissa's party.

It is especially important that Clarissa move beyond these moments of doubt on the day of her party because beneath them lies a deeper fear that rises within her when Lady Bruton invites Peter, but not Clarissa, to lunch. When Clarissa recognizes this snub, it bothers her not because of any social implications but because it makes her feel her mortality:

> Millicent Bruton, whose lunch parties were said to be extraordinarily amusing, had not asked her. No vulgar jealousy could separate her from Richard. But she feared time itself, and read on Lady Bruton's face, as if it had been a dial cut in

> impassive stone, the dwindling of life; how year by year her share was sliced; how little the margin that remained was capable any longer of stretching, of absorbing, as in the youthful years, the colours, salts, tones of existence, so that she filled the room she entered, and felt often as she stood hesitating one moment on the threshold of her drawing-room, an exquisite suspense, such as might stay a diver before plunging while the sea darkens and brightens beneath him, and the waves which threaten to break, but only gently split their surface, roll and conceal and encrust as they just turn over the weeds with pearl. (30)

The unknown future of youth, of which Clarissa laments the loss, is filled with promise. Now, however, in late middle-age, the mystery that threatens to consume Clarissa's thoughts is what happens *after* life: "After that, how unbelievable death was!—that it must end; and no one in the whole world would know how she had loved it all…" (122). There is much danger in such thoughts for Clarissa; were she to dwell on them for too long, they could develop into a permanent distraction that could prevent her from recognizing any *kairic* opportunities that might come her way.

Distraction plays an important role in *Mrs. Dalloway*, serving as the background through which any heroic effort must pass. Lotus Snow describes this effect: "The novel is a presentation of the pattern to which all human beings belong. Time and space, clocks chiming and airplanes skywriting, are not merely the framework of the novel; they are the conditions of human existence" (82). The key, then, is discovering a way to navigate one's way through these distracting conditions while maintaining enough focus for the successful completion of a *kairic* action, a task that Clarissa Dalloway is singularly skilled at completing. As was mentioned in the Introduction, Jonathan Crary's research on the relationship between distraction and attention

is essential for understanding why the threat of distraction is particularly powerful in Woolf's novel. Crary's argument for the inseparability of attention and distraction in Modernity, "the two ceaselessly flow into one another" (51), confirms that such navigation is a particularly Modernist task because of the ways that distraction works to garner and hold attention in the London that surrounds Clarissa.

While Clarissa's fear of death looms as a potential distraction that can lure her off of her heroic path, there are other examples of distraction in the novel that are far more severe, forming a motif that amplifies the danger of this particular threat for any would-be Modernist hero. These distractions come in two forms: internal ones, similar to the threat posed by Clarissa's fear of death, and external ones, which represent public forces that attempt to use distraction as a means of gathering and controlling the attention of individuals. Of the internal forms, there are also two types: one in which a character is distracted by being too open (Septimus Smith is the prime example here) and another in which the same problem occurs as a result of being closed off (as is shown through Sir William Bradshaw and Doris Kilman).

Septimus, as Woolf herself noted, serves as Clarissa's "double" in *Mrs. Dalloway* (Introduction vi). One of the effects of this mirroring is that, through him, one can see what Clarissa's own perceptiveness about life could turn into were she to let it develop into the kind of distraction that takes up all of one's attention. Harold Bloom notes that the "doubling of Clarissa and Septimus implies that there is only a difference in degree, not in kind, between Clarissa's sensibility and the naked consciousness or 'madness' of Septimus" (4), but that difference is much more significant than Bloom implies. As Howard Harper points out, "Unlike her, [Septimus] becomes wholly dominated by an inner reality" (125). Clarissa's openness to "life," her ability to see the beauty and feel the energy in "the uproar" to which Snow alludes (Woolf,

Dalloway 4), allows her to perceive the need to attempt her heroic task in the first place. Her effectiveness lies in the fact that she can pull herself out of such reveries in time to act in the "real" world. Doing so allows her to maintain a connection with others that gives her offering meaning beyond her own perception of it. Septimus, on the other hand, is so open to "life" that he is completely fixated by, and trapped within, his musings upon it. His body, he thinks at one point, "was macerated until only the nerve fibres were left. It was spread like a veil upon a rock" (68), and that susceptibility proves to be his undoing. He discovers in his thoughts a "new religion" (23), yet they only lead him "down, down … into the flames!" of his own *akairic* Hell (66).

That Hell takes the form of a complete isolation from humanity—he believes his punishment for not "feeling anything" (86-8) when his best friend died in WWI is "to be alone forever" (145)—which is cemented through his inability to escape his permanently distracted mind. He claims that he has discovered truths that can transform humanity, thinking that "all of this, calm and reasonable as it was, made out of ordinary things as it was, was the truth now; beauty, that was the truth now. Beauty was everywhere" (69), but those truths are useless because he cannot communicate them. He understands the need, muttering, "Communication is health; communication is happiness" just before one of Dr. Holmes' visits (93), but he cannot make a connection that will allow him to deliver his message, to make his own "offering" to life (121). The best he can do is dictate "his papers" to Rezia, who keeps them for him although they can hold no meaning for anyone else:

> Diagrams, designs, little men and women brandishing sticks for arms, with wings—were they?—on their backs; circles traced round shillings and sixpences—the suns and stars; zigzagging precipices with mountaineers

> ascending roped together, exactly like knives and forks; sea pieces with little faces laughing out of what might perhaps be waves: the map of the world. Burn them! he cried. Now for his writings; how the dead sing behind rhododendron bushes; odes to Time; conversations with Shakespeare; Evans, Evans, Evans—his messages from the dead; do not cut down trees; tell the Prime Minister. Universal love: the meaning of the world. Burn them! he cried. (147-8)

The consequences of his inability to communicate are much like those at the end of *The Waste Land*, where a message that might save the world is only shown to be useful if it is capable of being understood.

Thus, Septimus's experience in the novel is akin to an *akairic* environment in that he has no opportunities to escape from the trap of mental horrors his shell-shock has initiated. The contrast of his lack of *kairic* opportunities serves to heighten the importance of Clarissa's own, however, and helps readers understand, even when her loved ones cannot, why her parties mean so much to her and why so much is at stake when it initially seems that this party will be a failure. For Clarissa, the means of avoiding being distracted like Septimus can be found in seeking balance between contemplating what makes life worthy of her love and going out and living it. Ironically, Septimus's fear of being thrown "down" into Hell is misguided, for it is *ascension* that should worry him, as the subtle allusion to the Daedalus/Icarus myth in his diagrams suggests. The combination of "sticks," "arms," wings" (147), and "the sun growing hotter" (69) indicate that Septimus, like Icarus before him, has flown too close to the "heat o' the sun" (9), which is *life*, and is consumed by it. Clarissa/Daedalus, on the other hand, is able to find the middle way between fire above and water below, navigating her way toward a successful conclusion to her heroic mission.

Septimus's inability to communicate has direct and awful consequences for him because it leads him to be diagnosed as insane and, subsequently, to commit suicide. The diagnosis is handed down by Sir William Bradshaw, who, though he is unaware of it, is just as trapped within an *akairic* environment as Septimus. The difference, notably, is that while Septimus is paralyzed by his complete openness, Bradshaw is frozen in a closed state, representing the second form of internal distraction depicted in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Bradshaw believes that he has found a middle ground, like Clarissa, through his notion of "Proportion" (100), but what he does not realize is that his *akairic* desire for control has mutated his worship of that concept into a faith based upon a much more sinister idea:

> But Proportion has a sister, less smiling, more formidable, a Goddess even now engaged—in the heat and sands of India, the mud and swamp of Africa, the purlieus of London, wherever in short the climate or the devil tempts men to fall from the true belief which is her own—is even now engaged in dashing down shrines, smashing idols, and setting up in their place her own stern countenance. Conversion is her name, and she feasts on the wills of the weakly, loving to impress, to impose, adoring her own features stamped on the face of the populace. (100)

In Bradshaw's case, Conversion offers him the opportunity "to impose" his will on others, allowing him to believe that he knows all there is to know about everything that enters into his life. This false sense of perfection allows him the "safety" of closing himself off so that he does not have to be exposed to the dangers of life by opening himself up to it, but it also means that he can never approach any of the *real* truths of life, which can only be accessed if one risks approaching the sun. If Septimus is Icarus, soaring to dangerous heights, then Bradshaw is a

clam at the bottom of the sea, clutching his "pearl" of knowledge in darkness as if it is the only treasure in the world.

Bradshaw is not the only acolyte of Conversion in the novel, either; Doris Kilman is another. In Miss Kilman's case, her means of "feast[ing] on the wills of the weakly" is religion as opposed to science (100). Just after she makes her first appearance in the novel, Miss Kilman looks at Clarissa and wants to crush her:

> Fool! Simpleton! You who have known neither sorrow nor pleasure; who have trifled your life away! And there rose in her an overmastering desire to overcome her; to unmask her. If she could have felled her it would have eased her. But it was not the body; it was the soul and its mockery that she wished to subdue; make feel her mastery. If only she could make her weep; could ruin her; humiliate her; bring her to her knees crying, You are right! But this was God's will, not Miss Kilman's. It was to be a religious victory. So she glared; so she glowered. (125)

These characters are trapped by a philosophy they cannot escape. Where Septimus's *akairic* environment was brought on by his being too "open" to life, then Bradshaw and Kilman are closed to such an extreme degree that any heroic potential they might have had has collapsed into a black hole—one that not only prevents their escape but also seeks to drag others down into it.

Clarissa is not a Conversionist—"Had she ever tried to convert any one herself? Did she not wish everybody merely to be themselves?" she thinks after Miss Kilman leaves (126). She does recognize the threat of the idea's power, though, an awareness made clear when she sees Bradshaw at her party and thinks, "One wouldn't like Sir William to see one unhappy. No; not that man" (182). More threatening to Clarissa's particular heroic mission than falling victim to a Conversionist such as Bradshaw is the possibility of her falling under Conversion's spell, for,

while she is not currently a practitioner of that method, she is as susceptible to its temptations as anyone, especially when operating under fearful or stressful conditions.

Such conditions apply at her party following the moment that initially appears as if it is confirmation of her heroic success. When the Prime Minister arrives, Clarissa is described as follows:

> And now Clarissa escorted her Prime Minister down the room, prancing, sparkling, with the stateliness of her grey hair. She wore ear-rings, and a silver-green mermaid's dress. Lolloping on the waves and braiding her tresses she seemed, having that gift still; to be; to exist; to sum it all up in the moment as she passed. (174)

What might be her *kairic* moment is cut short and ruined, though, by her impression that these things "had a hollowness; at arm's length they were, not in the heart; and it might be that she was growing old but they satisfied her no longer as they used" (174). The admission to "growing old" is evidence that this is Clarissa's fear of death raising its head once more, something that she will have to confront before she can fulfill her heroic potential. Moreover, the "wrongness" of this moment as a triumph is underscored just afterward, when her thoughts turn to Kilman, "her enemy. That was satisfying; that was real. Ah, how she hated her—hot, hypocritical, corrupt; with all that power; Elizabeth's seducer; the woman who had crept in to steal and defile (Richard would say, What nonsense!). She hated her: she loved her. It was enemies one wanted, not friends…" (174). Clarissa is more vulnerable to the threat of becoming a Conversionist at this moment than at any other point in the novel, for Conversion seeks to destroy what it cannot conquer or win over. She is saved by the party itself—an external distraction that comes in the form of seeing other guests, reminding her that "She was for the party!" (175).

The arrival of an external distraction that pulls Clarissa out of her negative thoughts is no accident; such occurrences happen during significant moments throughout the novel. Additionally, unlike the internal distractions, not all external ones are negative. In this case, the interruption that saves Clarissa is a visual one, but the vast majority of such instances in the work arrive in the form of auditory distractions. This is no coincidence, either, for Woolf deliberately uses imagery related to sound waves in the novel to show how people can be distracted by and connected through auditory events. As Ann Banfield notes, Woolf's approach in this instance is scientific: "Far from wishing to 'tell stories,' she thought of her art in quasi-scientific terms, perhaps marked, like Clarissa Dalloway, by her early reading of the Victorian physicist John Tyndall, friend of Woolf's father" (888). Specifically, Woolf builds her metaphor about the inevitability of distraction in Modernity around a concept with which both she and Tyndall were familiar, one that was among the most widespread scientific ideas in her lifetime: wave theory.

Gillian Beer comments on the ubiquitous nature of wave theory near the turn of the twentieth century: "The idea of the universe as waves, of the parallels between light, heat, and sound, and the single process expressed through them, enters late-nineteenth-century writing with a fresh urgency" (209) .[19] That this idea, once introduced, took such a strong hold on the imaginations of scientists and artists alike is not surprising. According to physicist Winston Kock, human interest in wave motion is practically instinctual:

> Wave motion must figure in the earliest memories of us all. Who among us, from the time he was first able to stagger about on his own legs, did not toss a pebble or

[19] Surprisingly, despite the prevalence of wave imagery in *Mrs. Dalloway*, scholarship linking Woolf and wave theory does not often mention the novel. Both Beer and Sue Sun Yom, for example, have written articles on Woolf and wave theory, but in each case the focus of their arguments is on later works such as *Orlando* and *The Waves*. Part of their reasoning for this is due to the fact that public interest in wave-particle theory did not increase until the late 1920s, after the publication of *Mrs. Dalloway* (Beer, "Physics" 113). If one expands Woolf's interest in wave formation beyond light to include sound, however, then the connections in the novel are striking. See "Physics, Sound, and Substance: Later Woolf," by Beer, and "Bio-graphy and the Quantum Leap: Waves, Particles, and Light as a Theory of Writing the Human Life," by Yom for more information on Woolf and light-wave theory.

> heave a rock into every body of water he passed? Or splash in the bathtub? The peculiarly satisfying 'ker-plonk!' sound probably was the original attraction, but watching the waves created by the pebble or rock quickly became the main pleasure. The symmetrical patterns appeal to something basic in the human mind. The waves roll outward from the splash of the rock in ever widening circles, traveling at constant speed across the water, eventually to die out. . . ." (1)

Any reader of *Mrs. Dalloway* should be able to feel an instant connection between Kock's description of "ever widening circles" that eventually "die out" and Woolf's refrain describing Big Ben's striking of the hour: "The leaden circles dissolved in the air" (48). The latter, as Melba Cuddy-Keane notes, describes "the pattern of sound waves, not a human construction of their meaning" (70). Thus, Woolf's use of wave imagery in the novel is about more than providing a metaphor for the "crests" and "troughs" of life; she is also using a thorough knowledge of the physics of sound waves to show how Modernity is interacting with and intruding upon the private lives of individuals.

The most prominent influence on Woolf's understanding of sound waves is undoubtedly Tyndall's book, *Sound*, a work that Robert Beyer claims had "a profound effect on the knowledge of the subject of sound among English-speaking people, and on the teaching of acoustics in the colleges during and after his lifetime" (70). While the work is not mentioned by name in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf hints, as Banfield notes (888), that Tyndall's theories have been important to her own writing when Peter recalls to himself that Tyndall was among Clarissa's favorite authors when she was young (*Dalloway* 77). Moreover, Woolf's treatment of sound in the novel mirrors Tyndall's explanations of acoustical concepts. The following long passage from *Sound* summarizes the elements of which Woolf makes use within *Mrs. Dalloway*:

> Different nerves are appropriated to the transmission of different kinds of molecular motion. The nerves of taste, for example, are not competent to transmit the tremors of light, nor is the optic nerve competent to transmit sonorous vibrations. For these a special nerve is necessary, which passes from the brain into one of the cavities of the ear, and there divides into a multitude of filaments. It is the motion imparted to this, the *auditory nerve*, which, in the brain, is translated into sound.
>
> Applying a flame to a small collodion balloon which contains a mixture of oxygen and hydrogen, the gases explode, and every ear in this room is conscious of a shock, which we name a sound. How was this shock transmitted from the balloon to our organs of hearing? . . . The process was this: When the flame touched the mixed gases they combined chemically, and their union was accompanied by the development of intense heat. The heated air expanded suddenly, forcing the surrounding air violently away on all sides. This motion of the air close to the balloon was rapidly imparted to that a little farther off. . . .Thus each shell of air, if I may use the term, surrounding the balloon took up the motion of the shell next preceding, and transmitted it to the next succeeding shell, the motion being thus propagated as a *pulse* or *wave* through the air. (32-3, italics in original)

The most important elements from this passage, for Woolf's purposes, are the notion of penetration—sound waves entering the body, passing into "one of the cavities of the ear," in order to be interpreted by the brain—and shock, a word Tyndall uses both to describe the force necessary to create a sound wave and the effect of hearing one (38, 33).

Woolf's repeated use of sound in *Mrs. Dalloway* as an external distraction that can impact the attention of individuals can, once again, be linked to Crary's work on perception and attention at the turn of the twentieth century. Crary argues that "in the second half of the nineteenth century, attention becomes a fundamentally new object within the modernization of subjectivity" (17) and that it "is not just one of the many topics examined experimentally by late nineteenth-century psychology but is the fundamental condition of its knowledge" (25). His study focuses exclusively on vision, but the ideas he puts forward can easily be transferred to Woolf's focus on sound in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Kate Flint, for example, connects Crary's thoughts on vision's impact on concentration with sound's effects on the same, noting that he "has recently elaborated on fragmentation and interruption of vision as a key element in the visual aspects of modernity: the same claim can be made in relation to sound, that an awareness of its dislocating and disruptive effects was crucial to perceptual relationships in the modern environment" (183). In actuality, Flint identifies sound as a more potent distractor to concentration than vision due to the facts that (1) eyes can be closed, but ears remain forever open and (2) sound creates a stronger sensation that one's personal space is being invaded because it "quite literally invades the body" (184). Thus, when sound is used as a distraction in *Mrs. Dalloway*, it is no small thing, and, in some cases, it can be a detriment to both individual freedom and will.

One such instance of a negative usage of sound occurs when it is used to try to gather and hold attention as a means of controlling what people think. There are three prominent examples in the novel of sound being applied in this way. The first is when the "motor car" backfires while Clarissa is picking out the flowers for her party, a "violent explosion which made Mrs. Dalloway jump" (14). While this sound is not an intentional distraction, it does serve to

penetrate the consciousnesses of everyone within hearing distance and gather collective attention on the car, which all assume to be occupied by someone "of the very greatest importance" (14) in the government. This leads to prideful thoughts about their country, notions to which even Clarissa is not immune as the car disappears and she thinks of her party, "stiffen[ing] a little; so she would stand at the top of her stairs" (17). Clarissa is not distracted for long, however, and, much sooner than most of the other distracted pedestrians, she is back to preparing for her party.

The next instance of sound serving as an external distraction is even more powerful than the first. While most people's attention is still fixated on the car, a new distraction arrives in the form of an airplane, and the sound of its engine "bore[s] ominously into the ears of the crowd" (20). In this case, the power that wants to hold the attention of the public is commercialism rather than government, and the distraction offered is intentional because the plane is skywriting an advertisement for toffee. The effect is much more powerful than the one achieved by the backfire, and the "audience" is mesmerized with its attention fixed on the process:

> Then suddenly, as a train comes out of a tunnel, the aeroplane rushed out of the clouds again, the sound boring into the ears of all people in the Mall, in the Green Park, in Piccadilly, in Regent Street, in Regent's Park, and the bar of smoke curved behind and it dropped down, and it soared up and wrote one letter after another—but what word was it writing? (21)

The only person who is able to avoid wondering about the message is Clarissa, whose newly renewed focus on her mission leads her to miss the plane altogether, asking, "What are they looking at?" of her maid as she arrives back home (29). Much like she did with the distraction of the car, Clarissa shows in this case a resiliency for returning her attention to *her* object of focus.

The third example of sound as a means of garnering attention is a bit trickier because it comes in the form of a distraction that no thinking person can avoid altogether: time. Specifically, the sound involved here is the striking of a clock to denote the passing of the hours, and it comes in two competing forms: one with a negative effect, like the sounds of the car and plane that are meant to grab and hold a listener's attention, and another that has a positive effect, acting in support of the individual will as a means of smoothing the transition between mental reveries and the inevitable return to the physical world. The negative effect is another example of a singular instance in the novel, just as the car and plane are, and it takes place after Rezia and Septimus have their encounter with Conversion in the form of Sir William Bradshaw. As Rezia walks up Harley Street, thinking how much she does not "like that man" (102), the following description of the "announcement" of the time is given:

> Shredding and slicing, dividing and subdividing, the clocks of Harley Street nibbled at the June day, counselled submission, upheld authority, and pointed out in chorus the supreme advantages of a sense of proportion, until the mound of time was so far diminished that a commercial clock, suspended above a shop in Oxford Street, announced, genially and fraternally, as if it were a pleasure to Messrs. Rigby and Lowndes to give the information gratis, that it was half-past one. (102)

This time is "ratified by Greenwich" (102), and it serves both as an external distraction to any who hear it and as the "public" voice of Conversion, one that announces that time is firmly under the control of chronocentric Authority, whose goal is to control both time itself and people's interactions with it (the same concept targeted for attack in *The Secret Agent*).

It is fitting, then, that Clarissa is not even aware of this particular external distraction, for her own approach toward time is far from chronocentric, and her ignorance of the noise of the clocks on Harley Street indicates just how limited and ineffective this approach toward controlling time is. Clarissa does have regular interactions with *chronos* and time-keeping, but, in each case, she encounters the positive effect of clock sounds working as a distraction. These sounds come from Big Ben and St. Margaret's, each of which serves the beneficial purpose of reminding hearers to return to the importance of *doing* something, not just thinking about it.

The refrain of Big Ben, repeated throughout the day as the hours pass, is described as follows: "the leaden circles dissolved in the air" (4). In this case, the "leaden" circles of the sound waves give them weight, and the net they cast sinks down to envelop all who hear it; there is no attempt to *control*, though, for the circles "dissolve," allowing listeners to maintain their own wishes and decisions about when to act. Again and again in the novel, Big Ben's strikes mark transitions into and out of thought—a move that is necessary for heroism because one must be contemplative yet ready to act in "real" time in order to achieve heroic success.

Moreover, the possibility of Big Ben being threatening in the way that the Harley Street clocks are is further reduced by the presence of St. Margaret's, whose announcing of the hour always follows Ben's, as if to say that there is always more than one opinion about what time it is: "Ah, said St. Margaret's, like a hostess who comes into her drawing-room on the very stroke of the hour and finds her guests there already. I am not late. No, it is precisely half-past eleven, she says" (49). Her gentle reminders to "act" at a different time than Ben's show that his is not "the" voice, not authoritarian or controlling like Greenwich Mean Time. Rather, they are each "a" voice, a reminder that one must successfully balance between mental and physical aspects of time in order to achieve *kairic* readiness. For *chronos* and *kairos* are not antagonistic; rather,

their relationship, as they relate to human experience, is symbiotic. In order to be successful in a *kairic* moment, one must have put in the necessary thought to be mentally ready to act in an ethically appropriate manner, but one must also be ready to be active within the physical world, within the experiential time of life that humans measure through *chronos*, in order to be a hero. Not all examples of sound-wave imagery in the novel are negative, then, and the means by which Big Ben and St. Margaret's support balance between mental and physical interactions with time emphasize the value of Clarissa's own skill in that area.

All of the challenges that Clarissa faces throughout the day serve to accentuate both her skill at achieving and need for balance. Clarissa's heroic act is to be open to life and create offerings to it amidst all the distractions of Modernity and the paralyzing fear of the enormity and brevity of life itself, yet all could be for naught if she cannot pass one final test: she must face her own fear of death and acknowledge it, and she must also choose instead to embrace life once more rather than succumb to death's temptations. All of these possibilities become available to her when she hears of Septimus's suicide at her party. In that moment, Clarissa is so shocked that she must retreat to a quiet room so that she can be alone to think about what it might mean (183-4). She begins by imagining what it would have felt like for Septimus, "Up had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes" (184). Then she moves on to doubt her own heroic offering and wonder whether Septimus had arrived at a better method:

> A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate; people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded

> them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded, one was alone. There was an embrace in death. (184)

Thinking that she may have been wrong all along in trying "to combine, to create" (122), she refers to a sort of tonic immobility, much like Prufrock's, that she undergoes in moments when the enormous weight and responsibility of "making [life] up, building it round one" (4) threatens to overwhelm her:

> Then (she had felt it only this morning) there was the terror; the overwhelming incapacity, one's parents giving it into one's hands, this life, to be lived to the end, to be walked with serenely; there was in the depths of her heart an awful fear. Even now, quite often if Richard had not been there reading the *Times*, so that she could crouch like a bird and gradually revive, send roaring up that immeasurable delight, rubbing stick to stick, one thing with another, she must have perished. But that young man had killed himself. (185)

Here is the final trough of Clarissa's heroic journey—one final dip that she must ride out before she can shoot upward to the crest of her *kairic* moment, finding her balance once more.

Her means of enduring are present in the very memory of her incapacitating fear, for it is an emphasis on physicality, on participating in the "real" world by "rubbing stick to stick, one thing with another" that allows her to escape this final trap that could lead to internal distraction (185). Soon after these thoughts about doing something, *anything*, "real," Clarissa begins to move about the room, "straightening the chairs, pushing in one book on the shelf" (185), and her spirits rally. Her final turn toward life is confirmed through her last thoughts in the novel:

> The clock began striking. The young man had killed himself; but she did not pity him; with the clock striking the hour, one, two, three, she did not pity him, with

> all this going on … Fear no more the heat of the sun. She must go back to them. But what an extraordinary night! She felt somehow very like him—the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away. The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. He made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun. But she must go back. She must assemble. She must find Sally and Peter. And she came in from the little room. (186)

Just as she confirms life once again, Big Ben strikes, providing another gentle, "dissolving" reminder to return to the world once more and ushering Clarissa out to the culmination of her *kairic* moment.

The positivity in this moment is not easy for all to see. J. Hillis Miller, for example, claims that the novel is based on two movements that are in opposition: on the one hand is the "fall into death," represented by Septimus's suicide, and on the other is "the rising motion of 'building it up,' of constructive action in the moment, fulfilled in Clarissa Dalloway's party" (183). Miller stops short of labeling such constructive action as successful, however, and instead argues that Septimus's death and Clarissa's thoughts about it reveal "all speech, all social action, all building it up, all forms of communication [to be] lies" (197). He supports this reading by linking the text biographically to its author: "Septimus Smith's suicide anticipates Virginia Woolf's own death. Both deaths are a defiance, an attempt to communicate, a recognition that self-annihilation is the only possible way to embrace that center which evades one as long as one is alive" (197). Aside from the obvious problems of trying to intertwine biography and fiction, Miller's analysis here that "self-annihilation" is the only way to get to the "center" of existence also suffers from a significant elision of some of Clarissa's final thoughts in the work.

To support his claim that "Clarissa and Septimus seek the same thing: communication, wholeness, the oneness of reality, but only Septimus takes the sure way to reach it" (198), Miller uses Clarissa's thought that "She felt glad that [Septimus] had done it; thrown it away" (qtd. in Miller 198). What he fails to mention is that the reason she is glad is because his death "made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun" of life once more (186), thoughts that serve as a final validation of her constructive efforts to create an offering to life through her party. This turn toward life cannot be ignored; rather than evidence that death is "reality" while life is at best its "illusory" reflection, as Miller argues (198), Clarissa's awareness and contemplation of Septimus's suicide instead serves to validate the importance of taking advantage of *kairic* opportunities while they are available, for death, while unavoidable, offers only the destruction of life, not a means of controlling it.

The ultimate confirmation of Clarissa as a Modernist hero, then, does not occur when Ralph Lyon "beat[s] back the curtain" (170) or when the Prime Minister arrives and Clarissa is able to "sum it all up in the moment as she passed" (174). Rather, it is when she is forced to face death and the *timing* of the party is shown to be perfect. Death has arrived, and the only thing that can turn it away is a perfectly timed "offering" to life (121), the "right" thing for the "right" reason. This final, *kairic* validation allows Clarissa to achieve all of the elements of the Aristotelian heroic formula, and her success is confirmed in Peter's final thoughts of her. After she returns to the party, Peter *feels* Clarissa before he sees her; before he can say, "For there she was," he is filled with "terror," "ecstasy," and "extraordinary excitement" that are caused by her mere presence in the room (194). Clarissa has risked herself by exposing her soul to death, but in doing so she has reconfirmed the value and beauty of life. She can "assemble" once more (186), but she does not lose her connection to life in doing so, achieving yet another type of

balance that echoes the wave and flight imagery presented earlier in the novel. As Clarissa stands at the top of the stairs, she is both particle and wave. Clarissa the individual, the particle, is indeed "there" before Peter's eyes at the close of the book. She is also "there" everywhere else at the party, though. She is present in her wavelike form in every person and every object, all of whom and which are inextricably connected to her. Because Woolf envisions Clarissa as being both drawn together to a point and spread into a wave simultaneously in time and space, this version of Clarissa-in-balance anticipates elements of particle/wave duality related to the physics of light waves that was suggested in 1923 by Louis de Broglie but not firmly theorized until 1927 when "Werner Heisenberg proposed his now famous indeterminacy principle" (Yom 146). Thus, Clarissa closes out the novel as light personified, cementing her position as a new type of hero for Modernism.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf does not propose that parties are the key to solving the problems of heroic action. Rather, Clarissa's particular gift is giving parties, in bringing people together, and what the novel offers is the possibility that *any* action, if it is freely and honestly given for the purpose of supporting life, can be heroic. Moreover, Woolf shows that both Tolstoy's fears that communal influence inevitably invalidates the meaningfulness of individual action and Ortega's despair that significant human action is no longer possible are moot. It *is* possible to do the "right" thing, for the "right" reason, and at the "right" time, and it always will be so long as people are capable of thinking and acting for themselves. In some instances, however—especially in ages filled with doubt and uncertainty—one must be willing to search for those "rights" in places where one might least expect to see them. Such is the case with *Mrs. Dalloway*, a work that rescues the heroic from the depths of Modernism's solipsistic despair.

CHAPTER 6

EPILOGUE

If Clarissa Dalloway represents a new model for heroism, why then are the decades following the release of Woolf's novel not stuffed with similar iterations of this particular positive, constructive form? Any answers to this question lie beyond the scope of this study, but their pursuit could provide interesting research into the nature of heroism in the West throughout the remainder of the twentieth and into the twenty-first century. Unfortunately, Woolf's proposition to rescue the heroic by shifting it into the everyday realm, reconceptualizing the kinds of things that people *do* on a regular basis, proved to be too radical to change the general perception of what heroism is. Perhaps this is because the heroic and the quotidian are antithetical by nature, or perhaps it is because her insertion of the feminine into a world previously dominated by the masculine was too uncomfortable. Another possibility is that, as feelings of crisis related to *kairic* time recessed due to the inevitable increase in familiarity and comfort with globally synchronized bureaucratic time, so did the desire to "search" for heroic models that could work in a pluralistic world where the "right" thing, reason, and time are hard to locate. Whatever the combination of reasons, Woolf's model failed to take hold; the one certainty is that it did not fall short because the public concern over heroes disappeared altogether.

Following the 1920s—the decade that saw the most desperate examples of both *akairic* desires and environments—the 1930s saw a revival of interest in heroism that split in two different directions, both of which, at least initially, lessened the disillusionment felt in previous

decades due to a lack of effective heroic models. On the one hand, social and economic difficulties led to a brief revival in the "Great Man" model of heroism that had been denounced by authors such as Tolstoy in the nineteenth century. One of the consequences of this renewed interest, as Nina Baym notes, was "the rise of fascist dictatorships in Europe, among which were those of Generalissimo Francisco Franco in Spain, Benito Mussolini in Italy, and Adolf Hitler in Germany" (1077). Such self-proclaimed, would-be heroes were ultimately responsible for some of the most horrific acts in the history of humanity, including millions of deaths, but the failures of "Great Men" were not limited to the far right of the political spectrum. Ironically, the far left in the 1930s also saw a greatly increased interest in Communism (1073), a political system that is meant to eschew individual needs in favor of the good of the collective, but that ended up producing, again and again, oligarchies run by "Great Men" such as Joseph Stalin, who was also responsible for the deaths of millions. Thus, on both sides, although the "Great Man" model returned out of a desire to find systems that could improve humanity, the actions of men like Hitler and Stalin quashed any idealistic dreams about either political solution's ability to resurrect that old model of the hero. The resulting disillusionment, felt by adherents on both sides, is captured brilliantly in Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, a work that would be essential reading in any study focusing on the interplay between political idealism and heroism in the 1930s.

The repetition of the collapse of the "Great Man" model, in combination with the general anxiety over the viability of heroic action in the preceding decades, pushed heroism in a second direction during the 1930s: planting the hero firmly in the realm of imagination. This generification of the hero occurred across many platforms, but, no matter the medium, a similar effect was achieved. Audiences now had a way to satiate an interest in heroism from a safer

distance; they could "believe" in heroes but not have to defend how such perfection could ever be attained in the "reality" of the modern world. This is not to say that heroes and imagination had been antithetical before this point—Beowulf fought monsters and a dragon, for instance (703-836, 2540-753)—just that this application of those concepts was different because of readers' self-awareness and viewers' knowledge that such things were only "pretend."

One of the best known examples of how the concepts of the imaginary hero were newly applied in the 1930s can be found in the arrival of the comic book superhero. Jeffrey Kripal notes that the first appearance of a superhero was "Superman in *Action Comics #1* … in the summer of 1938" (24). This initiated what is commonly known as the Golden Age of superhero comics, a period that introduces "a set of tropes or story lines about the metamorphosis of the human form that are deeply indebted to the history of the religious imagination but have now taken on new scientific or parascientific forms in order to give shape to innumerable works of pulp fiction, science fiction, superhero comics, and metaphysical film" (1-2). The appearance of Superman, then, was part of a larger cultural movement to bring back the fundamental, psychological need for "larger than life" heroes, but these figures were now placed in the very Modern context of being *exclusively* imaginary and set apart from daily human experience.

Comic books were not the only venue for imaginary heroes, though, for the 1930s also included the genesis of the modern fantasy genre, yet another mode that relied on older myths and romantic notions for source material but, by situating them in fictional worlds, put them at the safe distance of being strictly "make-believe." Thus, the hero's actions could take place in invented realms where magic exists as a means of allowing humans (and other creatures) to do extraordinary things. Much as the comic book hero was launched by the arrival of Superman,

modern fantasy had a similar genesis in the 1930s with the publication of *The Hobbit*, by J. R. R. Tolkien, in 1937.

According to David Day, Tolkien, a "professor of Anglo-Saxon and a philologist" at Oxford University (115), began *The Hobbit* as an experiment for determining the imaginary origins of his protagonist, Bilbo Baggins, who was a hobbit—a member of "an elusive, curlyheaded folk most easily distinguished by their diminutive size - between two and four feet in height - and their large, hairy feet" (118-19). Bilbo, though he does not appear so initially, turns out to be a hero who has the knack, again and again, to find ways to do the "right" thing for the "right" reasons and at the "right" time, proving that "in the chronicles of Middle-earth . . . the acts of greatest courage are achieved by its smallest protagonists" (Day 129). Tolkien may have initially only wanted to "find out what hobbits were like" (qtd. in Day 115), but, in spite of his humble intentions, his efforts had an immense impact, launching the formation of a genre that, as the century progressed, became more and more defined and that is now more popular than ever, as evidenced by the frenzy over HBO's currently running series *Game of Thrones*.

Not all examples of imaginary heroes from the 1930s involved solar-powered aliens or magical worlds, however. Some, such as the cowboy-hero in film, involved the application of an idealized figure against a backdrop of "verisimilitude" that was in fact no more realistic than anything found in either comic books or fantasy novels. While the American West was certainly a real place, Hollywood's presentation of it was cleaned up enough to allow the same feelings of safe-distance and comfort that viewers and readers of comics and fantasy works appreciated. Westerns had been around in movies long before the 1930s, but that decade saw a reinvigoration of such films that culminated with the 1939 release of John Ford's *Stagecoach*, which Rita Parks describes as a "cinematic watershed" for the genre (93). Parks notes that "many film critics,

particularly the French, have considered *Stagecoach* the epitome of the Western genre and tend to measure all others against it," but she also notes that the film does not really do anything brand new so much as combine elements of the genre that had been missing for a long time (93). Even Ford had not directed a Western since 1926 (Vermilye 263), but, with his return to the genre, he created an epic that Jerry Vermilye calls "a landmark Western" that "set the pattern for Westerns to come, not only establishing John Ford as a great director of the genre … but also making a star out of John Wayne" (262-3), who would go on to become one of the biggest stars and most widely recognized heroes of twentieth-century cinema.

Superman, Bilbo Baggins, and John Wayne's "cowboy-hero" are certainly not the only examples of imaginary heroes that surfaced in the 1930s, but they offer enough of a sample size to show one of the directions in which interest in heroism headed during that decade, and that course continues today. Not all such courses are positive, though. From popular culture's platform, heroism is better able to feed a key human need: to dream of being more than one seems while remaining safely lodged in a realm of "make believe," where there is no actual threat to one's understanding of real-world moral or ethical actions. Today, however, the moral relativism that makes fully heroic action all but impossible to conceive is so prevalent that the ethical questions about whether a character is doing the "right" thing for the "right" reason are ignored completely in many portrayals of "heroes," leaving *kairic* timing as the only factor that determines whether a character is considered to be heroic or not and very little chance of the full Aristotelian formula being completed.[20]

[20] These would-be heroes being treated as actual ones is similar to the practice, discussed in the Introduction, of treating "tragic heroes" as if they are merely another version of hero rather than something different altogether. In both cases, such labeling makes it more difficult to find and define true heroism, yet the practice persists and will undoubtedly continue to do so.

One of the more common manifestations of this "hero" whose morality is rarely questioned by, or at least does not overly trouble, contemporary viewers and readers is the phenomenon of the "good badman as hero," a role that Parks notes was popularized in Western films by the actor/producer Gilbert M. Anderson in the first two decades of the twentieth century (82). Like the other early popular Western concepts in film, however, the "good badman" fell off in popularity in the 1920s and was not revived again until after the appearance of *Stagecoach* (93-4). While *Stagecoach* did touch on this phenomenon through Wayne's portrayal of the Ringo Kid (a criminal with a noble heart), its real contribution to this character type, according to Parks, was that it sparked a new trend in Westerns, both inspiring "interest in historical and biographical subjects" and promoting "Outlaws treated as heroes and portrayed by stars" (94), as is evidenced in other blockbuster films from the era like *Jessie James* in 1939 and *Billy the Kid* in 1941 (94). The idea of villains *as* heroes so captivated twentieth-century audiences that it remains one of the most popular forms of the "hero" found in popular culture today. In television, especially, the "good badman as hero" model has seen a strong resurgence since the turn of the twenty-first century through characters such as Tony Soprano, from HBO's *The Sopranos*, Omar Little, from HBO's *The Wire*, Walter White, from AMC's *Breaking Bad*, and Dexter Morgan, from Showtime's *Dexter*—all individuals who could easily be portrayed as villains due to their illegal and immoral actions but who, instead, are presented as "heroes" within their respective series. This shift raises some interesting questions about morality and heroism and how much the two are linked in current public perception.

Dexter, for example, is about a man who has an insatiable, pathological need to murder people as an avenging, twenty-first century "hero" who metes out justice as jury, judge, and executioner all in one, and viewers love him for it. One might reasonably expect that, with a

show about a serial killer, the question of whether Dexter is doing the "right" thing for the "right" reasons would be the focal point of the plot's tension. More often than not, however, Dexter's status as a hero hinges on whether he acts at the "right" time, not on whether what he is doing could ever be considered "right" in the first place.

Notably, *Dexter* does not dismiss the moral quandaries of murder altogether. In fact, it faces them head on in the first season by offering two significant justifications for Dexter's compulsive homicidal behavior: a psychologically traumatic event in his past that explains his need to kill and a "code" instilled by his adoptive father, Harry, which is meant to prevent him from killing people who are not murderers themselves. Dexter does develop emotionally in the show. He goes from being someone who has to fake emotions to appear "human" to his friends and colleagues to being a husband and father who cares deeply about his family. The series has not pushed the envelope as far in terms of Dexter's moral development, however. The storyline never dwells on Dexter's moral problems for long; instead, the vast majority of the show's dramatic tension arises from Dexter's failures related to timing. Even when the Code fails him in Season Four, and he mistakenly kills a man who was not, in actuality, a murderer, the show gives more attention to Dexter's *kairic* failures than his moralistic ones.

What, then, does it mean when a wildly popular show says a serial killer can be a hero as long as he can justify his actions and get the timing right? From the opening credits on, viewers are intentionally made uncomfortable, but the producers, writers, cast, and crew do not push this discomfort as far as they might, settling instead for the more familiar tension caused by bad timing that so often determines the difference between a tragic and an actual hero. Perhaps developing Dexter's conscience too much might lead to the series ending sooner than its creators would like. This is a good decision for those who want to watch more seasons of *Dexter*, but it

does result in a missed opportunity to determine how far an audience is willing to go in support of a "hero" whose actions so frequently challenge traditional notions of "rightness."

Thus, the twenty-first century has begun perhaps no closer to seeing a prominent return of the Aristotelian ethical hero in art than was seen at the beginning of the twentieth. The crisis related to the dominance of *chronos* has, perhaps, lessened, but while a sense of *kairic* timing may be a regular component of would-be-heroes today, artists are no closer to resolving the dilemmas of finding or even identifying the "right" thing to do or the "right" reasons to do it, not even when the scope is broadened to include the imaginary and wide-open genres that dominate popular culture. There is hope, however—Woolf's solution remains a possibility, though it would mean tearing everything down and starting anew, rebuilding the hero from the ground up by first rediscovering what it means to be heroic in the everyday before daring to be heroic in ways that are extraordinary.

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