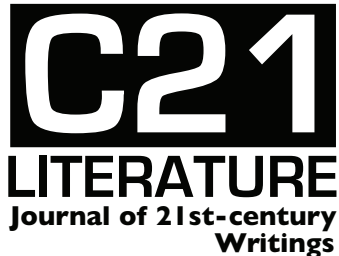




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ARTICLE

## The Politics of 21st-century Modernism in *Malarky* and *Martin John* by Anakana Schofield

Aran Ward Sell

Department of English Literature, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, Scotland, UK  
[a.ward.sell@ed.ac.uk](mailto:a.ward.sell@ed.ac.uk)

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This paper examines the novels *Malarky* (2012) and *Martin John* (2015), by the Irish-Canadian author Anakana Schofield, which portray the internal states of damaged subjects of modernity: in *Malarky*, the text is overwhelmed by the grief of its central character, a bereaved wife and mother. In *Martin John*, the text is subordinated to more sinister mental damage; the impulses and obsessions of a sexual predator. In both novels, Schofield explores her central characters' damaged consciousnesses using narratological techniques descended from the 'high modernist' literature of the 1920s. I argue that Schofield's novels are themselves twenty-first century modernist novels: drawing upon Marshall Berman's analysis that modernism aims 'to make men and women the subjects as well as the objects of modernization', this paper demonstrates the continued political efficacy of this aim in Schofield's narratology, and locates Schofield's work within a wider argument that contemporary modernism takes representations of damaged or a-normative consciousnesses as a key tenet.

After first demonstrating how *Malarky*'s central character's mental a-normativity is represented using a combination of Free Indirect Discourse with subjectivist focalisation, this paper then investigates Schofield's more radically experimental work, *Martin John*, in terms of two prior arguments concerning the politics of modernism: György Lukács' polemic against the perceived immorality of modernist 'psycho-pathology', and the later argument by Catherine Belsey and Colin MacCabe that modernism refuses the 'meta-language' which governs realist texts, creating an 'interrogative text' which demands active interpretation, thus querying the normative boundaries by which damaged consciousnesses are excluded from cultural discourse.

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**Keywords:** Anakana Schofield; *Malarky*; *Martin John*; Modernism; Contemporary Literature; Irish Literature

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## Introduction

Irish-Canadian author Anakana Schofield's two published novels to date, *Malarky* (2012) and *Martin John* (2015), portray the internal states of damaged subjects of modernity: in *Malarky*, the text is overwhelmed by the grief of its central character, a bereaved wife and mother. In *Martin John*, the text is subordinated to a far more sinister form of mental damage; the impulses and obsessions of a sexual predator. In both novels, Schofield explores her central characters' damaged consciousnesses using narratological techniques descended from the 'high modernist' literature of the 1920s. In this paper, I read these texts alongside criticism contemporaneous to such 'high modernism', and also through the lens of more recent critiques which pursue an 'interrogative' reading of non-realist prose styles. These accounts construct modernism simultaneously as a potent artistic element of, and resistance to, a modernity which does not allow all of its subjects' minds to function according to the normative principles which it, and its attendant realisms, would seek to impose.

Before examining *Malarky*, Schofield's first novel, I will expand upon definitions of 'modernity' and 'modernism', to locate Schofield's work within a wider argument that contemporary modernism takes representations of damaged or a-normative consciousnesses as a key tenet. This argument will then be evidenced by the structural importance of these damaged minds to *Malarky* and, subsequently, the more radical narrative experimentation of *Martin John*. It will explore how grief and perversion disturb the modernist text, using a politicised definition of 'modernism' which draws upon the work of American Marxist Humanist Marshall Berman, and for this reason, I begin with an analysis of Berman's argument.

## Updating Modernity

For Berman, modernity is defined by dynamism, in opposition to stasis. As Perry Anderson summarises, Berman treats 'modernity' as the mediating term between *modernization* and *modernism*: modernity is 'neither economic process [modernization] nor cultural vision [modernism] but the *historical experience* mediating the one to the other. What constitutes the nature of the linkage between them [...] is *development*' (1984: 97, emphasises Anderson's). Berman sees modernity as 'capable

of everything except solidity and stability' (1983: 19), and as dialectically tragic *and* enervating: it is 'a unity of disunity [...] a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal' (1983: 15).

Modernism is for Berman the very act of forging (in the true Joycean double-sense: *manufacturing* and/but also *faking*) that public and community which both suffers the exigencies of modernity, and demands agency from them: Modernism is 'an amazing variety of visions and ideas that aim to make men and women *the subjects as well as the objects* of modernization' (Berman 1983: 16. emphasis mine). Susan Stanford Friedman claims that modernism constitutes the 'expressive dimension of modernity' (2006: 432): this could infer that modernism is a *passive* symptom, automatically created by modernity without agentive action from autonomous or semi-autonomous artists. Berman closes this possibility except where it is dialectically intertwined with a culture of resistance within the modernist text: 'all forms of modernist art [...] are at once expressions of and protests against the process of modernization' (1983: 235).

Modernism is a product of modernity, but it turns to face its producer. Berman notes realism's failing grasp of its unstable context: 'realism in literature and thought must develop into modernism, in order to grasp the unfolding, fragmenting, decomposing and increasingly shadowy realities of modern life' (1983: 257). As Anderson states, 'modernism is profoundly revolutionary, for Berman' (1984: 100).<sup>1</sup>

A particular strand of these 'shadowy realities' has become a recurrent, even generic, theme of the 21st century modernist novel: mental a-normativity, or damaged consciousness. The subjectivist impulse of the early twentieth-century 'High Modernist' novel has been inherited, and re-focused upon the subjective experience of minds which, through inflicted or innate damage, are subordinate to social norms. Such characters were certainly present in High Modernism: Woolf's Septimus Smith

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<sup>1</sup> Anderson himself believes that 'Modernism is the emptiest of all cultural categories' (1984: 112), and opposes Berman's work as incompatible with utopian Marxism; Berman is justified in retorting that Anderson 'is so appreciative and generous at the beginning, so dismissive and scornful at the end—not merely toward my book, but toward contemporary life itself. What happens in the middle? I can't figure it out' (1984: 114).

(*Mrs Dalloway*), Beckett's Molloy/Moran (*Molloy*) and Faulkner's Benjy Compson (*The Sound and the Fury*) are all notable examples of such damaged High Modernist minds. However there appears to have been a crystallization of this theme in the contemporary modernist resurgence, with texts such as Schofield's novels, Eimear McBride *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* (2013) and Jon McGregor's *Even the Dogs* (2010) all turning to non-realist prose to give voice to marginalised, mentally a-normative subjects.

In sum, the twenty-first century modernist novel seeks to characterise those men and women, in Berman's terms, who are most clearly *objects* of twenty-first century modernity: 'modernism is preoccupied with the dangerous impulses that go by the name of "sensation of the abyss" [...] modernism seeks a way into the abyss, but also a way out, or rather a way through' (1983: 266).

In a characteristic fusillade of imagery, Berman writes that modernist protest must 'open up our society's inner wounds, to show that they were still there, that they were spreading and festering, that unless they were faced fast they would get worse' (1983: 328). I will attempt a meta-diagnosis, one step removed, of those societal wounds as perceived by Anakana Schofield in *Malarky* and *Martin John*; showing *how* contemporary authors such as Schofield use modernist aesthetics to perceive and 'open up' these wounds: in the case of *Malarky*, the text is intermittently disrupted by modernist prose styles expressing the protagonist's grief. In *Martin John*, the entire text is a disruption, expressing the mental disruptions, in the form of dangerous perversions, of its central character.

### ***Malarky***

Schofield is an 'English born author, who identifies as Irish-Canadian' (Quill and Quire 2012), but her first novel, *Malarky*, is firmly Irish in setting, and to some extent in stylistic lineage: press reviews invoke Irish forebears Joyce and Beckett (Shilling 2013) and Schofield's Irish contemporaries such as Kevin Barry and Donal Ryan (Ní Dhuibhne 2013), although one Canadian article also notes the influence of Vancouver 'social-realist writing [of] the 1960s and 70s' (Quill and Quire 2012).

*Malarky's* narrative perspective inhabits the mind of Our Woman, a farmer's wife in the West of Ireland, whose securely conventional rural/small-town existence is

first shaken by her son Jimmy's homosexuality and the apparent discovery of her husband's infidelity, then dismantled entirely by her husband's death on his way (as she believes) to meet his lover, and finally Jimmy's death while serving with the US military. The order of these events can be difficult to track, as the novel is ordered as a series of fragmented segments, separated by asterisks and ranging from a couple of words – 'All incidental' (2012: 135) – to several pages (2012: e.g. p20–p25) in length. These fragments are compiled into 20 'episodes' – chapters – of approximate thematic coherence, but the ordering of the fragments themselves is chronologically non-linear. Our Woman's grief, rather than strict linear chronology, dictates the novel's ordering: in Virginia Woolf's terminology, *Malarky* runs according to 'time in the mind' rather than 'time on the clock' (1928: 95).

Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan identifies 'three aspects of narrative fiction' (1983: 2), translating '[Gerard] Genette's distinction between "*histoire*", "*récit*" and "*narration*"' (1983: 3) into the English terms 'story', 'text' and 'narration' (1983: 3). In this schema, 'story' is the narrated events themselves, an abstracted succession of (in a fictional text) imagined incidents, conversations and internal states. 'Text' is what we read – the book, essay, or film. Finally, 'narration' is the 'act or process of production'. To summarise: reading the *text*, the reader acquires knowledge of the *story* via the *narration*. The mental damage – specifically, grief – which Our Woman experiences manifests itself formally in *Malarky* as a damaged poetics: the chronological ordering of the *story* is disrupted at the level of *narration* by the focalising character's mental a-normativity: in the first episode Our Woman speaks to her counsellor after Jimmy's death (2012: 1), in the second she speaks to Jimmy some time previously (2012: 10), and so on. Rimmon-Kenan notes that of her three 'aspects', 'the text is the only one directly available to the reader. It is through the text that he or she acquires knowledge of the story [...] and of the narration' (1983: 4). In *Malarky*, this knowledge is acquired in a fashion non-compliant with the norms of realist fiction (such as chronological linearity and reliable external narration): the distance between the text and these two other aspects, or 'metonymies of the text', is exacerbated. This exacerbation creates a novel which, like a Brechtian performance, involves an act of imaginative creation by its reader/audience, who must actively interpret the

relationship between text and story to make sense of the fractured narration. A reader of *Malarky* must divine for themselves the 'trick' of reading the narration as ordered by the focalising character(s) grief, if they are to coherently translate the text into story.

The 'fragments' of *Malarky's* narration are internally consistent in narrative perspective and chronology. The 'episodes' are not: some episodes consist only of fragments from a single narrative event, while other episodes contain fragments from multiple events. Our Woman's perspective is either first-person retrospective narration, as in 'I wondered amid all this clutter how long he'd be staying?' (2012: 66), or a focalised, third-person free indirect style: 'Every few days Jimmy asked her for money and she obliged him out the housekeeping money her husband gave her. She'd tell him the prices have gone up and see would he give her more' (2012: 66). As the identical page references suggest, these two different narrative events, from separate fragments, are from a single episode, demonstrating *Malarky's* refusal to cohere into an intuitive realist narrative.

The terminology used here – of focalisation and free indirect style – is vital to the analyses which follow. Thus, before undertaking a close reading of *Malarky*, I will digress to elucidate these terms, and where such definitions are contentious (as they often are), to identify which variations this paper employs.

### ***Free Indirect Discourse and Uncle Charles***

Brian McHale defines Free Indirect Discourse in comparison to 'direct discourse' and 'indirect discourse', 'though whether it can be derived in any rigorous way from these other forms is controversial' (188). As the term 'discourse' suggests, this originates from a taxonomy of speech representation, although it is often seamlessly transposed onto thought representation simply by treating thought as an uncomplicated monovocalic 'inner speech'. 'Direct discourse' here refers to the mimetic quotation of characters' speech. *Indirect* (but unfree) discourse is a summary of that speech using the governing narratorial voice. McHale illustrates these differentiations using variations on a para-quotation from Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916):

1. Direct Discourse: He said, 'I will retire to the outhouse'.
2. Indirect Discourse: He said that he would retire to the outhouse.
3. FID: He would retire to the outhouse. (189)

For McHale, 'FID is "indirect" because it conforms in person and tense to the template of indirect discourse, but "free" because it is not subordinated grammatically to a verb of saying or thinking' (2008: 189). The third-person quotation from *Malarky*, 'She'd tell him the prices have gone up', meets these criteria for FID: if it were Direct Discourse, it might read "'I'll tell him the prices have gone up," she thought.' In (unfree) Indirect Discourse, it could read: '*She thought* that he would tell him the prices have gone up.' The first-person statement also quoted, by contrast, is standard indirect discourse: '*I wondered* amid all this clutter how long he'd be staying'.

McHale's exemplar sentence references a critical intervention by Hugh Kenner, known as the 'Uncle Charles Principle', which outlines how modernist prose uses focalisation to reject fixed hierarchies of narrative framing. Kenner, in his 1978 work *Joyce's Voices*, quotes the phrase 'uncle Charles repaired to his outhouse' from Joyce's *A Portrait*. Wyndham Lewis cited this phrase to exemplify Joyce's incompetence: Lewis wrote that 'People *repair* to places in works of fiction of the humblest order' (qtd. In Kenner 1978: 17) – as Kenner puts it, 'He was characterizing Joyce as a humble scrivener' prone to lapses into cliché. Kenner's insight is to realise that uncle Charles' 'notions of semantic elegance' (1978: 17) in fact inform the word choice: the pretension is not Joyce's, but his character's: "'Repaired" wears invisible quotation marks' (1978: 17). This is the Uncle Charles Principle: '*the narrative idiom need not be the narrator's*' (Kenner 1978: 18, emphasis Kenner's). The prose is focalised through the character's perspective, not only epistemologically (so that the narrator knows no more than the character, as in standard first-person narration), but also *idiomatically*: 'The narrative idiom [is] bent by a person's proximity as a star defined by Einstein will bend passing light' (Kenner 1978: 71).

In a more recent intervention into this narratological discourse, Luke Gibbons has noted that the deployment of Free Indirect Discourse is not in itself either modernist or political: 'there is nothing inherently emancipatory in the deployment of [FID] [...] it was often used to put down marginal or dissident voices [...] In these cases, the authority of the master narrative(s) eventually prevails' (101). However, the modernist deployment of FID, as practiced by Joyce, politicises it. Observing that modernism is not about subjectivity *per se* but about 'socially contested linguistic domains' (83), Gibbons describes Joycean FID in explicitly political, egalitarian



terms: '[Joyce's] uses of the technique set out not to denigrate demotic speech, but to enable previously silenced voices to break into, or upstage, dominant or consensual narrative forms' (101) – clearly aligning the narratological taxonomy of modernist technique presented by McHale and Kenner with the political project of modernism outlined by Berman. As Gibbons makes clear, subversion and style are combined in Joyce to political effect: 'it is this rejection of due deference [...] that is worked back into Joyce's politics of style' (101).

The Uncle Charles Principle is present in this politicised form in *Malarky*, in both first- and third-person fragments: Our Woman's grief silences and marginalises her social position, and Schofield's Free Indirect Discourse enables this silenced voice to 'upstage' the dominant realist prose of the 21<sup>st</sup> century novel. The influence of Our Woman's idiolect on the seemingly 'narrated' prose of *Malarky*, and the way the *damaged* nature of her inner speech causes 'damage' to the narration (forcing the reader into an act of creative reconstitution – one might even say healing – in order to understand the story), are demonstrated in the following analysis.

### ***Our Woman's mind***

Late in the text of *Malarky* – in the 15<sup>th</sup> episode of 20 – Our Woman visits a shopping mall in Dublin. She has recently learned of her son Jimmy's death in the American military, her second bereavement in quick succession after her husband's car accident: 'What did surprise her was how angry she became at her husband, who by virtue of his own inconvenient death had absented himself from this final chapter' (2012: 152). She is also still affected by her spell in a psychiatric hospital: 'In her mind [Jimmy's death] was all old news [...] she'd known all this since that time Himself had taken her to the hospital' (2012: 151). Understandably destabilised by this relentless litany of mentally traumatising events, she travels to Dublin. At the novel's beginning, 'Himself' exhorted her to 'go in to the town, have a look at the shops'. She then considered this an unsympathetic dismissal: 'The shops, to the male, ever the solution to the glowering female'. Now, with the two males in her family deceased, she self-medicates with her husband's prescription: 'a day's shopping, the solution her dead husband prescribed. She smiles to think she's begun listening to him now he's passed on.' (2012: 157).

While dully browsing a department store, Our Woman becomes disoriented. A rambling train of thought leads to an attempt to reconstruct the geography of the Middle East, where Jimmy died, in her mind: 'Maybe it was at the vests, the packets of two vests she became confused about Iran – what language do they speak there? Iranian?' (2012: 159). Her mind thus 'confused', she accidentally shoplifts some tea towels and is apprehended by security guards. They are kind and let her go, but the experience humiliates her, and she starts to cry: 'She tries to imagine saying it's my son, my son's been killed but it doesn't sound right, my son's been killed and you are all out shopping she wants to say, but corrects herself, she too, is out shopping' (2012: 160). Though a partial discourse marker is offered by the initial statement 'she tries to imagine saying', the absence of any subsequent quotation marks obscures which sentences transcribe Our Woman's inner speech (the words she tries to imagine saying), and which are external narration. It is not so much Schofield's word choice which performs the Uncle Charles Principle here, as her punctuation: the lack of a comma after 'killed', the missing full stop (or colon) after 'sound right', and the disorienting use of a comma after 'corrects herself' contribute to a distortion of the normal (realist) rules governing thought transcription. Both external narration ('she tries') and inner speech transcription ('it's my son, my son's been killed') are used, but the elision of clear punctuation to delineate the transition between these modes allows Our Woman's fragmented, repetitive internal monologue to disrupt any clear hierarchy of narrative framing. As Our Woman's distress mounts, this fragmentation and repetition both intensify. Seeing 'the two brass statues of the women shopping' (2012: 160) on Lower Liffey Street, she feels an overwhelming resentment towards her psychological state:

[...] she longs to be a woman who sits and talks to another like her about shopping instead of this flustering that's taken her over and has her eyes evacuating themselves in public. She cannot be certain if the grief is worse than the fear of humiliation. She's let herself go, she's let herself go, in public, continuously roil around her head like the belt of a generator. Beirut, Beirut and you've let yourself go, you daft woman, eventually meet on a loop of Beirut and let go, Beirut and let go. (2012: 161)

This passage again opens with a direct discourse marker which is *not* characteristic of FID: 'she longs'. This sentence, and the next, describe Our Woman's condition with a lucidity of which one might expect her to be incapable: while 'eyes evacuating themselves' is consistent with Our Woman's usual articulate, idiosyncratic idiom, the diagnostic precision of 'she cannot be certain if the grief is worse than the fear of humiliation' seems more like a summary offered by a detached observer, suggesting the intervention of a 'reliable' external narrator. This sentence does not betray any evidence of the Uncle Charles Principle. However, without an overt marker, the next sentence suddenly shifts into a narrative idiom which clearly is *not* that detached narrator's: if it were, one would expect either quotation marks (in direct discourse) or (in unfree indirect discourse) a discourse marker such as '*this phrase* continuously roiled'. The lack of a tense marking *-s* or *-ed* suffix to the words 'roil' likewise disrupts any attempt to schematise the passage: if it read *roiled*, then one could assert simply that the phrases which are obviously Our Woman's own 'wear invisible quotation marks': 'She's let herself go', 'she's let herself go, in public', 'Beirut, Beirut', 'you've let yourself go, you daft woman' and 'Beirut and let go, Beirut and let go'. But the insertion of these quotation marks is discordant with the word *roil*, which imparts both a tense (present) and number (plural) onto Our Woman's inner speech that sit at odds with the past-tense narrative prose of the previous sentence, and with the singularity of her mantra-like thoughts implied by the word 'continuously'. The Uncle Charles Principle is in effect through both vocabulary and grammar here, projecting the grieving character's disorientation onto the text itself.

Simultaneously, the repetition in this passage, like the repetition of 'my son's been killed', uses FID to communicate the deadening obstinacy of these repetitions in Our Woman's mind. The passage opens with lucid interjections from the governing narration, but is taken over by phrases which thrum 'like the belt of a generator' until the paragraph, like Our Woman's thoughts, coheres into a single ostinato repetition: 'Beirut and let go, Beirut and let go'. Schofield's use of the Uncle Charles Principle and FID, particularly in sentence structure, communicates Our Woman's mental distress directly, without subordinating it to the 'sanity' of a grammatically conventional narrator.

This is not to claim that *Malarky* is a particularly startling break in literary form; its use of modernist techniques is intermittent, and their purpose can be deduced and taxonomised. Analysing these techniques in *Malarky* provides a foundation upon which analyses of trickier texts, such as Schofield's own *Martin John*, may be built. What *Malarky* does evidence capably is the importance of a-normative consciousnesses to the contemporary modernist text. It is the intensification of Our Woman's distress, in response to the trauma of her grief, that catalyses Schofield's need for the modernist intensification of *Malarky's* prose style. The use of FID to portray grief has a rich existing heritage in high modernism, notably in the shell-shocked veteran Septimus Smith in Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*. However *Mrs Dalloway* deploys FID throughout. The everyday experiences of Woolf's Clarissa Dalloway and Joyce's Leopold Bloom are expressed using a modernist textual aesthetic; conversely, in *Malarky*, the use of 'modernist' techniques is restricted to grieving. When Our Woman feels in control of a situation, *Malarky* proceeds using standard realist grammar: for example, in a scene where she is conducting a tryst with a stranger (in an effort to understand her husband's own alleged infidelity), Our Woman becomes frustrated at his sexual indirectness: 'She counted thirty seconds of his faffing and then undid her neat cardigan in a practical and deliberate manner, opened her blouse, removed it and laid it out, so it would not sustain wrinkles' (49). Although the Uncle Charles Principle is still deployed – the fussiness of the terms 'faffing' and 'neat' reflect Our Woman's fastidious detachment from a sexual encounter she regards as a necessary chore – there is no further troubling of narrative hierarchy in this context, as Our Woman's subjective experience of this situation is assured, even dominant. Similarly, the novel's very last sentence, 'Occasionally it makes sense, just for a moment' (2012: 217), has an aphoristic quality surprisingly redolent of Catherine Belsey's definition of 'that form of closure which in classic realism is also disclosure' (1980: 84). When the world 'makes sense' to Our Woman's troubled mind, *Malarky* is very close to a conventional, realist novel. *Malarky becomes* modernist when the text is taken over by mourning. This recalls Gibbons' observation regarding Joyce, that it is not FID itself which is modernist (similarly, as we have just seen, *Malarky* uses the Uncle Charles Principle even in its non-modernist passages),

but its use 'to enable previously silenced voices to break into, or upstage, dominant or consensual narrative forms' (101).

The more damaged Our Woman's mind, the more she is reduced to 'object' status (as evidenced by her intermittent commitment to a psychiatric ward), and the more the narration expresses a modernist aesthetic: grief disturbs the text. *Malarky* thus affirms Berman's claim that modernism constitutes an attempt 'to make men and women the subjects as well as the objects of modernization'. An additional implication might be assumed: that contemporary modernism's representations of damaged consciousnesses offers emancipatory representation for virtuous subjects who are victimised by circumstance. While this holds true in *Malarky*, it is not a necessary corollary of either Berman's claims, or Gibbons', or this paper's: silenced voices are not necessarily deserving, and modernist subjectivism can portray minds objectified by modernity *without* considering them to be needful of emancipation. If modernism shows us society's festering 'inner wounds', it would be curious if those wounds were entirely free of infection. Acknowledging this does complicate a simplistic Marxist defence of the avant-garde. These complications are evident in reading Schofield's second novel, *Martin John*, in which the relationship between damaging modernity and the psychologically damaged protagonist is less straightforward than with the grief-stricken character of Our Woman.

### ***Martin John***

György Lukács (whose account, although no longer recent, still holds remarkable sway over analyses, particularly Left analyses, of the politics of modernist aesthetics) opposed modernist 'distortion' because of realism's supposed pre-eminent ability to access a knowable social totality. In his account *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, he characterises modernism as espousing an 'obsession with morbidity' (1962: 29), and claims that 'modernist writing [...] leads straight to a glorification of the abnormal' (1962: 32). *Malarky* can oppose these claims, despite the a-normativity of both Our Woman's mental states and sexual actions (which, including both infidelity and attempts to recreate her son's homosexual relationships, would certainly be 'perverse' according to a monogamist and/or heteronormative culture), by assert-

ing *Our Woman* as innately a good citizen, unfortunately destabilised by trauma. *Martin John* might seem more vulnerable to Lukács' accusations. The eponymous protagonist lives on the margins of normative society, and perpetrates a range of sexual crimes: Martin is a flasher and a frotteur, who has committed at least one violent sexual assault. He is not only a marginalised individual, but one whose actions marginalise others – mainly vulnerable young women. While *Malarky* might evidence the position that the 'abnormal' are victims, rendered 'objects' rather than 'subjects' by violent trauma, Martin's reprehensible actions cannot be thus affirmed, and therefore necessitate a more thorough questioning of Lukács' implied premise: that a portrayal of the 'overtly perverse' (as Lukács finds in Beckett (1962: 31, 32)) is necessarily a 'glorification' of the perverse individual.

### ***Aggression and transgression***

*Martin John's* protagonist appears in *Malarky* as *Our Woman's* fellow patient in the psychiatric hospital. *Our Woman*, who names her ward-mate 'Beirut' after his sole topic of conversation (this is the origin of the words 'Beirut, Beirut' in *Our Woman's* thoughts quoted above), is surprised when 'Beirut' receives a visitor: 'A squat woman, wearing a headscarf [...] she calls him Martin John\*' (2012: 175). The asterisk leads to a footnote which reads: 'See *Martin John*: a footnote novel' (2012: 175).

The resultant 320-page 'footnote' is *Martin John*: a disconnected, dissociative novel which operates (mostly) from Martin John Gaffney's (Beirut's) focalised third-person perspective. Martin's mother (his visitor in *Malarky*, called 'mam') has sent him to live alone in London after his deviant conduct, culminating in a violent sexual assault in a dentist's waiting room, began to attract attention in his Irish hometown. Just as *Malarky* follows the rhythmical structures of *Our Woman's* grief, *Martin John* operates according to Martin's own internal states, not the normative grammars of the social apparatuses to which he is external. Those internal states, however, are far more troubling in *Martin John*. Martin, as described earlier, is an agent of sexual violence: an *Irish Examiner* review glibly diagnoses Martin as 'a man with psycho-sexual problems and obsessive compulsive disorder' (Sheridan 2016: par. 11). As Eimear McBride writes in the *New York Times*:

Schofield's frequently hilarious, and distinctly modernist, linguistic games are always gainfully employed in the uneasy, indelicate task of placing her reader nose to nose with the humanity of a sex offender. (2015: par. 4)

Jon Day, writing for the *Irish Times*, also notes the difficult moral position into which Schofield triangulates her readers, calling *Martin John* 'a novel which extends our notion of empathy without ever asking us to condone or even to understand Martin John's behaviour' (2016: par. 5) – although Day's additional claim that Martin emerges 'if not as a sympathetic character, [then] as a person you want to spend time with' (2016: par. 5) seems an extravagant reaction to Martin's occasional fleeting exhibition of more endearing idiosyncrasies.<sup>2</sup>

As Martin John's mind is undoubtedly more damaged than *Our Woman's*, it makes sense within Schofield's narratology that his depiction is still further displaced from realist norms. Lukács recognises that such 'exaggerated concern with formal criteria' (1962: 17) is fundamental to modernist literature. Faux-generously putting aside the 'striking difference in intellectual quality' (1962: 18) which he observes between the modernist Joyce and the 'true realist' Thomas Mann, Lukács perceives that:

With Joyce the stream-of-consciousness technique is no mere stylistic device; it is itself the formative principle governing the narrative pattern and the presentation of character. Technique here is something absolute; it is part and parcel of the aesthetic ambition informing *Ulysses*. With Thomas Mann, on the other hand, the *monologue intérieur* is simply a technical device, allowing the author to explore aspects of Goethe's work which would not have been otherwise available. (1962: 18)

Theodor Adorno wryly observes of this comparison that Lukács 'plays [Mann] off against Joyce with a fulsome flattery that would have nauseated the great chronicler

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<sup>2</sup> Full disclosure: this highly positive Jon Day review is to some extent a self-selected critique, as it was recommended to me by Schofield via her Twitter account on 4 December 2016: <https://twitter.com/AnakanaSchofield/status/805439096147492864>.

of decay' (1961: 171). Nonetheless, taking this excerpt on its own merits, Lukács' insights are sound. Lukács' evaluation is, almost tautologically, that modernist texts are those which take modernist technique as a 'formative principle'. Lukács then transforms his taxonomy into a polemic: to demonstrate realism's political superiority to modernism, he categorises this 'formative principle' as a 'dogma' involving 'a measure of sophistry' to 'belittle historicity' and promote the 'negation of history' (1962: 21), ignoring the obvious counter-argument that realist styles, too, take their *own* contingent formal and stylistic techniques as a formative principle of *realist* aesthetics.

Lukács moves to considering modernist depiction of troubled subjectivities, and his distaste escalates into invective. He identifies 'the problem, central to all modernist literature, of the significance of psycho-pathology' (1962: 28) in the work of Robert Musil. At this stage, he allows that with Musil and his naturalist forebears this 'interest in psychopathology sprang from an aesthetic need', enacting 'a moral protest against capitalism' (1962: 29) – a compatible observation with Berman's remarks that modernism seeks a way through the 'abyss' of modernity. However for Lukács this protest is a psycho-pathology in itself: an 'obsession with morbidity' (1962: 29), an 'obsession with the pathological' (30), and a 'fascination with morbid eccentricity' (1962: 31) (Lukács himself begins to sound obsessed). His point is cruelly normative; that by foregrounding 'eccentricity' (1962: 31), 'sexual perversity' (1962: 32) or, in the case of Beckett's *Molloy*, 'an idiot's vegetative existence' (1962: 32), Modernism reduces itself to perversion: to 'a glorification of the abnormal and to an undisguised anti-humanism' (1962: 32).

Adorno again rebuts Lukács' position, approaching a more emancipatory political understanding of modernism which subsequent critics, including Berman and Gibbons, and Catherine Belsey and Colin MacCabe (explored below), have been able to build upon. When Lukács claims that modernism's recurrent theme of loneliness (and Martin John is certainly lonely) represents a turn away from social totality towards a 'negation of history', Adorno replies that acknowledging loneliness under modernity *is* a social diagnosis. 'As someone who claims to think in radically historical terms', Adorno notes, 'Lukács of all people ought to know that in



an individualistic society loneliness is socially mediated and so possesses a significant historical content' (1961: 158). Considering Lukács' remarks on psychopathology, Adorno notes that such direct condemnation of all aesthetic representations of the mentally a-normative can only depend on a repressively normative argumentation. Lukács, Adorno writes, operates:

With a truly "immediate", wholly uncritical concept of normality, complementing it with the idea of pathological disturbance that naturally accompanies it. [...] Any form of social criticism which does not blush to go on talking about the normal and the perverted, is itself still under the spell of the very ideas it claims to have superseded. (1961: 170)

Adorno's comments, like Lukács' own concerning Musil's 'moral protest against capitalism', here point beyond simply the *fitness* of a-normative consciousnesses as subjects for modernist writing, and towards the stronger claim that such consciousnesses are a *vital* subject for modernist writing. An 'aesthetic ambition' of 'distortion' is not a disavowal of social totality, it is a necessary form of literary engagement with modernity. Lukács, however, is excited to 'a plainly over-generalized notion of "decadence"' (Anderson 1983: 104) by 'the moralism that colours all of Lukács' critical concepts' (Adorno 1961: 169), and rejects all portrayals of immoral subjects, and all modes of portrayal which (according to a fairly tortured definition of complicity) are non-complicit with ethical norms.

It is at this extreme of Lukács' distaste, at a modernist juncture of 'psychopathology', 'the adoption of perversion and idiocy' and an 'aesthetic ambition' of 'distortion', that we can locate *Martin John*. Like *Malarky*, the novel's structure is fragmented, however in *Martin John* the fragmentation is not neatly ordered by 'episodes', but disordered into several structural frameworks, which all fail to cohere as a single ordering device – just as Martin unsuccessfully attempts to delimit his own predatory tendencies. He fails, as McBride writes in her review:

To keep himself out of trouble while remaining at liberty to pursue his private passions, namely collating information on the Eurovision Song Contest

and fulfilling the many onerous requirements of his chronic obsessive-compulsive disorder: walking circuits of Euston Station, avoiding words beginning with “P” (like “pervert”) and trying to touch up women surreptitiously on the Tube. (2015: par. 3)

These ‘failed’ structural frameworks are, firstly, five ‘refrains’ introduced in an ‘index’ at the novel’s beginning:

1. Martin John has made many mistakes.
2. Check my card.
3. Rain will fall.
4. Harm was done.
5. *It* put me in the Chair. (2015: 9)

And, secondly, the bold-type phrases ‘**WHAT THEY KNOW**’ and ‘**WHAT THEY DON’T KNOW**’, which recur throughout the novel, either isolated as on page 13 which simply reads ‘**WHAT THEY KNOW**’, or (more frequently) used as a heading for a single concept such as ‘**WHAT THEY DON’T KNOW**: Martin John wants to touch your leg’ (2015: 143). As Day writes: ‘The rhythms of the novel – broken and disordered, yet possessed of a deep internal logic – are those of Martin John’s own mind: his refrains become the circuits of the novel’ (2016: par. 6).

Day further observes that ‘The fragmentary nature of the narrative isn’t really mimetic, in that it doesn’t seem to aspire to present us with a vision of what it might be like to think like Martin John’ (2016: par. 7). This is accurate: *Martin John* is ordered according to Martin’s mind but it is not a facsimile of it. The transcription of Martin’s thoughts is persistently interrupted by other perspectives: by his timid, neurotic man (2015: e.g., 290–293), by his victim in the dentist’s waiting room (2015: 182–186) and by a woman who intervenes when Martin climbs onto the train tracks at Euston Station (2015: 296–307); or by a knowing, extra-diegetic authorial tone which remarks on the structure of the novel itself. These remarks are either simple explanations of this structure like ‘The index tells us there will be five refrains’ (2015: 32); acknowledgements of that structure’s limitation such as ‘there are simply going to be things we don’t know. It’s how it is. As it is in life must it be unto the

page' (2015: 32); or straightforward disavowals of Martin's (and therefore the novel's) attempts to impose order through arbitrary schematics of behaviour or narratology: 'Rules have already been broken in this book' (2015: 58); 'the Index does not tell us' (2015: 124); 'There's no refrain called I have no clue. This is an interruption. Martin John does not like interruptions' (2015: 33).

### ***The interrogative text***

Day takes such departures from mimesis to mean that *Martin John* is *not* a modernist text. For Day, 'Modernism has become something of a classical mode', consisting of a fixed set of 'conventions' which 'depended [...] on the idea that consciousness can be transcribed' (2016: par. 7). My position, on the contrary, is that if *Martin John* were entirely mimetic, it could be considered a straightforward work of psychological realism. Its formal innovation upon its modernist forebears is a necessary component of *Martin John's* modernism: consider again Berman's characterisation of modernity as 'a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal' (1983: 15). Day's remarks also summarise Schofield's 'apparent [modernist] predecessors' (2016: par. 6) inaccurately. He writes as though high modernist writers wrote only unremitting mimetic verisimilitude: 'The narrative techniques often associated with modernist fiction – the stream of consciousness, free indirect discourse, interior monologue – presupposed a stable world and stable minds to behold it' (2016: par. 7). In fact, it is entirely in keeping with the example of Joyce, Woolf and Beckett that *Martin John's* 'distinct power' should come 'from the way form and content come together to alienate and fascinate in equal measure' (Day 2016: par. 6). What Day describes – and Lukács ignores – is the 'distinct power' of modernist writing, through a combination of the subjectivist portrayal of damaged consciousnesses and a discontinuous narrative style which continually highlights the narrative's textuality, to create and maintain a critical distance from the reality it emanates from and depicts. This creates what Catherine Belsey refers to as the 'interrogative text':

The world represented in the interrogative text includes what Althusser calls 'an internal distance' from the ideology in which it is held, which permits the reader to construct from within the text a critique of this ideology [...] it

therefore refuses the hierarchy of voices of classic realism, and no authorial or authoritative voice points to a single position which is the place of the coherence of meaning. (1980: 85)

An ideal example of this interrogative text is the 'archetypical modernist book' (Berman 1983: 31) itself, *Ulysses*, as already touched upon with reference to Luke Gibbons' exposition of the political dimension of Free Indirect Discourse. Colin MacCabe writes that 'Joyce's texts refuse the very category of meta-language' (2002: 14). By meta-language, MacCabe means the narration outside the inverted commas denoting speech and thought in direct discourse: 'A meta-language regards its object discourses [those in quotation marks] as material but itself as transparent' (2002: 14). Like Belsey, MacCabe treats 'classic realism' as the mode which most fully capitulates to this deceit of neutrality: he writes that 'the meta-language within a realist text refuses to acknowledge its own status as writing [...] the narrative discourse functions simply as a window on reality' (2002: 15). Realism perceives itself as an *abandonment* of form – 'the narrative as pure representation' (2002: 19). The interrogative writing of Joyce, however, 'involves ever greater attempts to abolish this distance' between text and reader, and therefore offers no 'point of insertion for our own discourses within an agreed hierarchy of dominance' (2002: 28). The difference between a 'classic realist' novel and a modernist one is the 'contrast between a text which determines its own reading and a text which demands an *activity* of reading' (MacCabe 2002: 28).

As with Joyce – in this specific regard – so with *Martin John*. *Malarky* offers a gradation between realist meta-language and modernist 'textual materiality', suggesting that in *Our Woman's* more disoriented moments her psyche cannot be adequately represented by a meta-language. It does, however, return to the meta-language as a governing or at least preferable mode, as indicated by the cadence of closure in that final sentence: 'Occasionally it makes sense, just for a moment' (2012: 218). *Martin John* has no such safety-net of meta-language; in stark contrast to *Malarky*, its last sentence, on a page by itself, fervently rejects closure: '*It* is never defined' (2015: 320), it tells us. This is a reminder that Martin's final refrain, '*It* put me in the chair', has been a cipher throughout. 'The chair' is a chair into which Martin's

mam straps him to control his impulses: 'in the Chair not much can go wrong' (2015: 317). *It*, however, is indeed 'never defined'. *It* occurs in recurrences of the 'It put me in the chair' refrain (2015: 221), and in intermittent FID sentences from Martin's perspective. Sometimes, *it* appears to be a compulsive action, such as 'I had it in my mind to do *it* and I did it' (2015: 123), 'mam said he hadn't done *it*, right?' (2015: 85), or 'he knows he cannot stop it. Stop doing *it*' (2015: 281). Elsewhere, *it* is a noun: 'the many times he does the thing to the women's legs and feet or has his trousers undone and *it* out he will be seen'. Elsewhere, *it* is an occurrence rather than an action: '[he was] on his way home from visiting her when *it* happened' (2015: 242).

These quotations clearly link the term *it* to Martin's deviant sexuality, but Schofield never allows the referent of *it* to settle into any more settled definition than this: *it* in *Martin John* indicates a site of enquiry rather than a precise referent. The closest we come to a definition is a fragment headed '(From the doctor's notes:)', which reads: 'The patient believes external forces are putting him in the chair' (2015: 124), recasting the refrain 'It put me in the chair': however even the vague summary of 'external forces' sits imperfectly with the internal nature of 'I had it in my mind to do *it*'.

The italicisation of *it* makes it obvious when this specific use of the word is being employed, and the refusal of *it* to fulfil a consistent grammatical role (pronoun or pro-verb; object, internal urge or 'external forces') means that reading *Martin John* is repeatedly interrupted by necessary acts of interpretation. The reader may determine a specific term which *it* is replacing, but only for any given instance – in the third sentence quoted above, *it* seems to refer explicitly to Martin's penis, whereas in others it seems to refer more vaguely to the onset of Martin's sexual urges, or to one of his specific sexual aggressions, such as rubbing himself against women on public transport. By asserting that '*It* is never defined' as the novel ends, Schofield reminds us of these hermeneutic acts, and ensures that reading *Martin John* itself concludes with a hermeneutic act, as the reader puzzles again on whether *it* is a simple substitution for a given term or concept. In direct contrast to *Malarky's* late gesture towards closure, *Martin John's* conclusion reaffirms its refutation of any consistent meta-language, and thus reasserts its own textuality. Martin John's perversions render *Martin John* a perverted text.

*Martin John* thus provides a polysemous 'interrogative' perspective, which investigates the internal states of a disturbed modern subject such as Martin John in a manner reminiscent of Lukács' comments that modernist representations of psychopathology attempt a moral protest against capitalism. While *Ulysses'* Leopold Bloom can certainly be examined in terms of 'perversion', in the sexual proclivities that he displays, Martin John is a pervert in the vernacular, pejorative sense: his sexual activities are ethically abhorrent. In this sense *Martin John* provides a stern test for this thesis' rebuttal of Lukács' moral conservatism, as one could hardly engineer a text better to fit Lukács' linkage of modernism with immorality. However the text's irreducibility to a position of sympathy with Martin's deviance ultimately disproves Lukács' concomitant insistence that representations such as Schofield's representation of Martin John Gaffney are a 'glorification', or evidence of an innate moral sickness in all modernist literature.

### **Locating Schofield as a Contemporary Modernist**

*Malarky's* negotiated interpolation of normal realist prose with FID exemplifies the attraction of modernist techniques to contemporary authors who wish to portray damaged consciousnesses, but find straightforward realism inadequate for this purpose. *Martin John* goes much further, creating a genuine 'interrogative text' which demonstrates the importance of portrayals of a-normative consciousnesses for contemporary modernism. The figure of Martin, and the text's decentering of any hierarchy of narrative authority in his portrayal, 'looks into the abyss' of sexual violence and mental illness in twenty-first century Western modernity, exploring that modernity's condition. As Berman writes, 'the modernist imaginative vision [...] is vitally concerned to explore the human contexts – the psychological, ethical and political contexts – from which sensations of the abyss arise' (1983: 266).

Taken as a body of work (in progress; a third linked novel is forthcoming) Schofield's work evidences the continuing existence, and relevance, of the modernist novel in the twenty-first century. The debates surrounding realism and modernism, both those contemporaneous with high modernism (Lukács, Adorno) and those subsequent to it (MacCabe, Belsey, Berman, Gibbons), are apposite to, and furthered by, the formal politics of Schofield's representations of damaged consciousnesses in *Malarky* and *Martin John*.

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The author has no competing interests to declare.

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