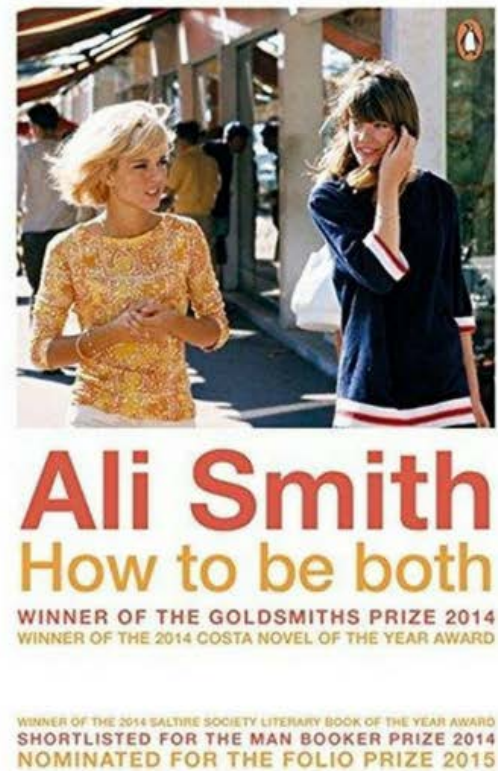
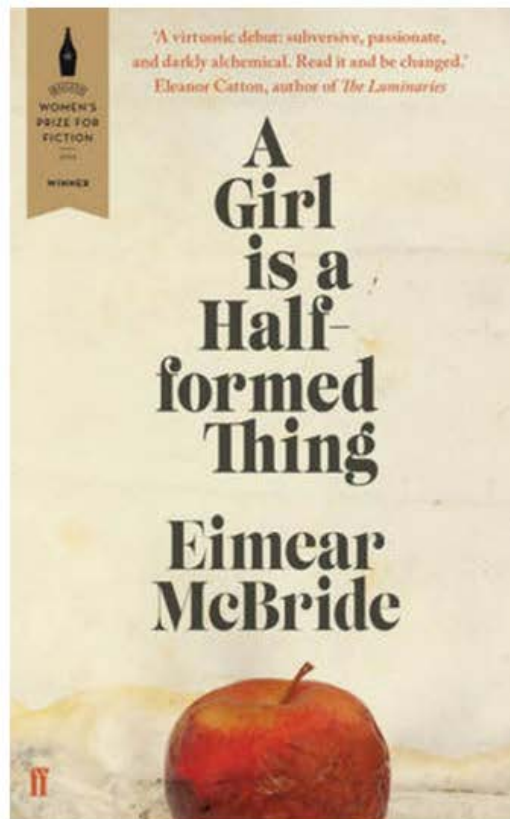
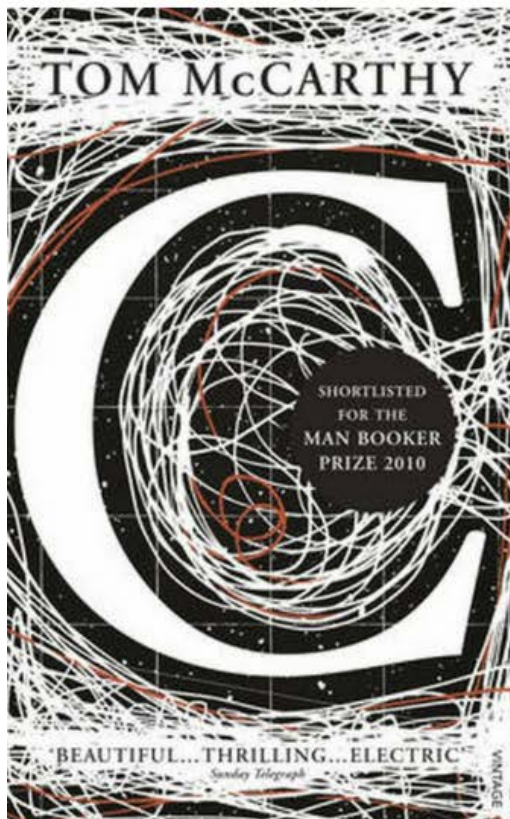


METAMODERNISM

MODERNIST ELEMENTS IN CONTEMPORARY BRITISH AND IRISH FICTION



Master Thesis Letterkunde

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Images on the title page of this thesis are the covers of the following editions of the pictured novels:

McBride, Eimear. *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing*. 2013. Faber and Faber, 2014.

McCarthy, Tom. *C*. 2010. Vintage Books, 2011.

Smith, Ali. *How to Be Both*. 2014. Penguin Books, 2015.

Abstract

This thesis aims at exploring in what way three contemporary novels, *C* by Tom McCarthy (2010), *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* by Eimear McBride (2013), and *How to Be Both* by Ali Smith (2014), can be seen as “Metamodernist”. The theoretical framework that will be applied to this thesis is that of literary modernism and Metamodernism, which is a recently emerged concept used to describe what is currently happening in the British literary field. This research is guided by the following question: How does modernism manifest itself in Tom McCarthy’s *C*, Eimear McBride’s *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing*, and Ali Smith’s *How to Be Both*, and what does this say about the novels’ relation to Metamodernism? This question will be answered by charting which modernist narrative techniques and modernist themes are used in the novels through textual analysis, as well as connecting these to David James and Urmila Seshagiri’s definition of Metamodernism. This thesis argues that the three novels return to modernism in different ways, but that they can all be related to Metamodernism. Literary modernism can thus be seen as a cultural archive that is used by contemporary novelists as a source of inspiration.

Key words: contemporary fiction; literary field; Metamodernism; modernism; *C* by Tom McCarthy; *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* by Eimear McBride; *How to Be Both* by Ali Smith

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Introduction

It has been argued by Bentley et al. that it is possible “to think of the 2000s as a decade in which novelists and cultural critics examine the end [...] of postmodernism” (14), and that the events of 9/11 can be seen as a representative historic marker (14). The question of what follows the era of postmodernism has been dealt with by several academics with various terms that refer to modernism, for example Bauman’s ‘liquid modernity’, Lipovetsky’s ‘hypermodernism’, and Vermeulen and Van den Akker’s ‘metamodernism’ (Bentley et al. 9); or referring to postmodernism, like Nealon’s ‘post-postmodernism’ and Stierstorfer’s ‘beyond postmodernism’ (Bentley et al. 16)¹. This great variety of terms, and even opposing ones, used to describe what movement comes after postmodernism, shows that there is not one answer yet. Rather, these terms are various interpretations used to describe what is currently happening in the contemporary British literary field.

This research will focus on literary modernism as well as “Metamodernism”. The latter is one of these many interpretations and is used by Timotheus Vermeulen, Robin van den Akker, David James, and Urmila Seshagiri, amongst others. Vermeulen and Van den Akker, who were the first to use this term to describe the current structure of feeling, define Metamodernism in their article “Notes on Metamodernism” (2010) as “oscillating between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony” (1). Bentley et al. also mention Metamodernism, but they do not seem to specifically refer to *just* Metamodernism, since they also discuss many other interpretations by other scholars in a list of what they call “sub-terms” that are used to name and analyse “our current state” (Bentley et al. 9). Authors and works that have been received as returning to modernism are, for example, Eimear McBride’s *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing*, Tom McCarthy’s *Remainder* and *C*, Ali Smith’s *Hotel World*, *The Accidental*, and *How to Be Both*, Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth*, *On Beauty*, and *NW*, Will Self’s *Umbrella* and *Shark*, David Mitchell’s *Number9Dream* and *Cloud Atlas*, Ian McEwan’s *Atonement* and *Saturday*, works by Julian Barnes, J. M. Coetzee, Cynthia Ozick, and many more. This renewed interest in modernism is also visible in popular culture; many of the aforementioned novels are received by academics as returning to modernism, as well as by ‘the general public’ that writes reviews on sites like Amazon or Goodreads. Furthermore, there are many series, films, and books that are set in the modernist period, or even have a modernist writer or modernist work as their main character or subject; for example *The*

¹ For a more elaborate discussion of these terms, see Chapter One.

Hours, 1998 novel by Michael Cunningham which revolves around Virginia Woolf and *Mrs. Dalloway*, which was also adapted to film in 2002, directed by Stephen Daldry.

The aim of this research is to examine how modernism manifests itself in three contemporary works, Tom McCarthy's *C* (2010), Eimear McBride's *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* (2013), and Ali Smith's *How to Be Both* (2014), by researching what modernist characteristics manifest themselves in these novels. An additional question is whether these novels can thus be argued to be "Meta"modernist. This thesis aims to chart which modernist narrative techniques and themes are used in the novels. Examples of modernist narrative techniques are stream of consciousness, focus on the inner self and consciousness (e.g. focus on the characters' thoughts instead of on the outside world; a narrative that is set during only one day of a character's life), a subjective perspective, or usage of *in medias res*. Examples of modernist themes are alienation or dislocation from society and the focus on people's identity (e.g. gender; imperialism). The novels could also refer to the modernist era in content through their setting or allusions to works from the modernist period. These modernist elements will be discussed more elaborately in Chapter One.

This research is guided by the following question: How does modernism manifest itself in Tom McCarthy's *C*, Eimear McBride's *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing*, and Ali Smith's *How to Be Both*, and what does this say about the novels' relation to Metamodernism? The reason that these novels will be researched is that the three authors have all been placed in the modernist tradition, by others or by themselves. Tom McCarthy has said that "[t]he task for contemporary literature is to deal with the legacy of modernism" (qtd in James and Seshagiri 87), Eimear McBride has stated that she was inspired by James Joyce (McBride, "Eimear"), and Ali Smith is seen as Virginia Woolf's "inheritor" (Flanery).

I expect that each of the three novels contain modernist elements and can thus be related to the concept of Metamodernism. The works have often been received as experimental and/or avant-garde by academics as well as an online public, suggesting that these novels contain modernist characteristics². Additionally, two of the authors whose novels will be researched (Tom McCarthy and Ali Smith) have been described in articles and books as writers who return to modernism (James and Seshagiri, Bentley et al.), which also suggests that their novels feature modernist elements. Although these novels have been received as returning to modernism, there is little to no research that supports these views. Furthermore,

² As discussed in the master's course "The Imitation Game: The Reception of Contemporary British Fiction as Modernist" at Radboud University Nijmegen.

discussion of these novels in the aforementioned master's course revealed that the writing style in Eimear McBride's *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* is rather experimental and uses the technique of stream of consciousness, which can thus be compared to the styles of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. *How to Be Both* uses stream of consciousness and comments on subjective perspective, elements that are often associated with modernism (P. Lewis 157-158). Additionally, its content alludes to Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928). Tom McCarthy's *C*, lastly, does not seem experimental at all in its style, but the narrative is set between 1898 and 1922, which marks the emergence and climax of modernism. It also focuses on the rapid technological changes and the future, and Futurism, a modernist art movement, is an important aspect of the novel.

When addressing the subject of Metamodernism, it is useful to realise that the developments within this area are very recent and ongoing. Since Metamodernism itself only now begins to develop, there is only a limited body of research available on this topic. Moreover, there is little research available on *C*, *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing*, and *How to Be Both*, as they have only very recently been published (between 2010 and 2014), and there are no articles that discuss novels in the light of (Meta)modernism. On the other hand, there are many books and articles to be found on modernism; a field that is closely connected to Metamodernism and is thus also important for this research. These works all describe the context, emergence, climax, and decline of modernism extensively, and often offer a section on modernism in literature, prose, or novels, discussing modernist writers and their works and their characteristics. This study will thus contribute to a limited, but growing body of research on both Metamodernism (see ³) and the three novels, and it will add to our understanding of contemporary fiction and the concept of Metamodernism.

As Peter Child states, modernism is variously argued to be “a period, style, genre or combination of the above” (12). Many authors of books or articles on modernism decide not to provide one definition of the subject, since it is often discussed that there is not one ‘modernism’, rather there are several ‘modernisms’, but one that is quite comprehensive is the following:

In English [modernism] refers primarily to the tendency of experimental literature of the early twentieth century to break away from traditional

³ For example the ‘Metamodernism’ Research Network that started in January 2018, a collaboration of Manchester Metropolitan University and Radboud University Nijmegen with Professor Antony Rowland as its Principal Investigator, funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council.

verse forms, narrative techniques, and generic conventions in order to seek new methods of representation appropriate to life in an urban, industrial, mass-oriented age. (P. Lewis xvii)

Although ground-breaking work had already been produced before the beginning of the First World War, the war is seen as the predominant reason for change. The destructive effect of the war resulted in pessimism, violence, and loss, which are now seen as relating to modernist writers, such as Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot (L. Wilson 5). Apart from the war, there were other historical and social matters that influenced modernist writers, such as the emergence of the New Woman, the peak and decline of the British Empire, technological change and the appearance of factory-line mass production, and the rise of the Labour Party. Modernism has thus been considered a literature of not just change but crisis (Childs 16). It could be argued that we currently also live in times of crisis and change: the recession, the War on Terror and IS, and technological changes such as social media all have a great impact on our lives. This ‘return to crisis’ could thus be one explanation of literature’s return to modernism.

Modernist writing has a wide variety of characteristics, but it is particularly known for the way it crossed many conventional boundaries of nation as well as of discipline, and its rejection of familiar unifying conventions regarding character, plot, linear chronology, and traditional verse forms (L. Wilson 3-6). This rejection is expressed by attempts to depict human subjectivity and reality in ways “more real than realism” through style: by representing consciousness, emotion, and meaning through, for example, interior monologue or stream of consciousness, tunnelling and rhythm (Childs 3).

The next chapter will include a more extensive discussion of classic modernism and modernist elements, and the ones that will be focused on in this thesis, and it will also discuss the Metamodernism debate more extensively. In the second chapter, a textual analysis of Tom McCarthy’s *C* will be carried out, exploring what modernist elements are present how this relates to Metamodernism. Chapter Three and Four will be similar to the second one, but these will discuss Eimear McBride’s *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* and Ali Smith’s *How to Be Both* respectively. There are many different interpretations of what is currently happening in the literary field, and this thesis will contribute to the interpretation of “Metamodernism”, recently and currently researched by Vermeulen and Van den Akker, James and Seshagiri, and the ‘Metamodernism’ Research Network of Manchester Metropolitan University and Radboud University Nijmegen.

Chapter 1: (Meta)modernism

As argued in the introduction of this thesis, academics and critics agree that the years of postmodernism are over (Vermeulen and van den Akker 2-3), and that the events of 9/11 are sometimes used as a representative historic marker (Bentley et al. 14). Although 2001 is seen as the year that the postmodernist era definitively came to an end, its decline had been discussed long before the new millennium; its “deathwatch” began in the mid-1980s and writing about the end of postmodernism grew more popular in the 1990s (Toth 2). Robin Vermeulen and Timotheus van den Akker list a number of reasons for the demise of postmodernism in their article “Notes on Metamodernism” (2010):

Some argue the postmodern has been put to an abrupt end by material events like climate change, financial crises, terror attacks, and digital revolutions. Others find that it has come to a more gradual halt by merit of less tangible developments, such as the appropriation of critique by the market and the integration of *différance* into mass culture. And yet others point to diverging models of identity politics, ranging from global postcolonialism to queer theory. (2-3)

Slavoj Žižek argues in *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (2002) that the postmodern mantra that tells us that ‘reality’ is merely a symbolic, misperceived fiction, is the exact opposite of the ultimate lesson concerning representation to be learnt from 9/11, which is that “*we should not mistake reality for fiction*” (19, emphasis in original; Bentley et al. 7). According to Žižek,

it was before the WTC collapse that we lived in our reality, perceiving Third World horrors as something which was not actually part of our social reality; as something which existed (for us) as a spectral apparition on the TV screen – and what happened on September 11 was that this fantastic screen apparition entered our reality. It is not that reality entered our image: the image entered and shattered our reality (i.e. the symbolic co-ordinates which determine what we experience as reality). (16)

In other words, we chose to ignore certain parts of reality, but the events of 9/11 forced us to face the complete reality, which had an enormous impact on our way of thinking, and thus also influenced contemporary art. The huge impact of 9/11 on our structure of feeling, the way it changed human character, and the suggestion that the collapse of the twin towers

represented “both a culmination and moment of breaking with a certain way of thinking about contemporary society and politics” is probably why it is sometimes seen as a historic marker of the end of postmodernism (Bentley et al. 14). Furthermore, Žižek says that “we should be able to discern, in what we experience as fiction, the hard kernel of the Real which we are able to sustain only if we fictionalise it” (19), which means that he believes it is important to incorporate crises like 9/11 in art because it helps us to grasp some sense of the otherwise “hidden realities” that are shaping our social experience (Bentley et al. 7). Of course, the decline of postmodernism had already been felt long before the attacks of 9/11, and other events such as climate change, digital revolutions, and diverging models of identity politics also played important roles in its demise (Vermeulen and van den Akker 2-3), but the shift in people's way of thinking that followed the attacks resulted in a new style of literature that stepped away from the postmodern aesthetic mode and its irony even more, which could also be why the events of 9/11 are seen as the definitive end of the era of postmodernism.

Although academics and critics do recognise that postmodernism has been abandoned, they do not appear to agree on what to make of the state it has been abandoned for (Vermeulen and van den Akker 3). There are many different interpretations of what is currently happening in the contemporary British and Irish literary field. Interestingly, it seems like academics even differ on what literary movement “our current state” would relate to most: modernism or postmodernism? Nick Bentley et al., for example, describe this new trend in contemporary literature as a “desire to interrogate the legacies of postmodernism” (17), and they mention novelists that self-consciously return to modernist techniques “as a way of return to a pre-postmodernist aesthetics” (17), implying that returning to modernist techniques is a rejection of postmodernism rather than an extension of or a renewed interest in modernism itself. In opposition, David James and Urmila Seshagiri, in an article called “Metamodernism: Narratives of Continuity and Revolution” (2014), only speak of Metamodernism, which is one of the interpretations of the current literary state, as returning to modernism, and do not even mention postmodernism in relation to Metamodernism, which suggests that they feel that Metamodernism is mostly related to modernism rather than to postmodernism.

Additionally, there is a great variety of terms used in the literary and critical field to describe this new literary trend, which again shows that there many different interpretations of it, and that there is clearly not yet one answer to the question of what exactly is happening in contemporary literature. Several of these, what Bentley et al. call “sub-terms” (9), attempt to register either an extension or rejection of the postmodern, such as Bauman’s ‘liquid

modernity', Lipovetsky's 'hypermodernism', Vermeulen and Van den Akker's 'Metamodernism', Nealon's 'post-postmodernism', Stierstorfer's 'beyond postmodernism', Potter and López' 'after postmodernism', Bourriaud's 'altermodernism', Kirby's 'digimodernism', Blincoe and Thorne's 'the new puritans', and Kelly's 'the new sincerity' (Bentley et al. 9, 16). Most of these terms discuss the broad desire in literary and cultural criticism to move beyond postmodernism, while still recognising that the postmodern has a continuing importance as a "critical shadow" cast over the first decade of the twenty-first century (Bentley et al. 17).

Even though there are many different interpretations of the current literary state, this thesis will use only one of the aforementioned explanations: Metamodernism. Vermeulen and Van den Akker were the first to use this term to describe the current "structure of feeling", and although this term is quite similar to the other ones mentioned before, they explain why some of these other labels are flawed in their article "Notes on Metamodernism" (2010). According to them, Lipovetsky's 'hypermodernism' and Kirby's 'digimodernism' are imperfect because they appear to radicalise the postmodern rather than restructure it (Vermeulen and van den Akker 3). Another label, Bourriaud's 'altermodernism', does seem to go into the right direction, but his argument is eventually also problematic: Bourriaud assumes that experience and explanation are one and the same, i.e. the expressions of a structure of feeling become the structures of feelings themselves, which results in his conception of altermodernism "never becom[ing] wholly comprehensible let alone convincing" (Vermeulen and van den Akker 4).

It has been almost a century since the era of high modernism in the 1920s, the decade of modernism's greatest achievements (P. Lewis 125), which saw the publication pivotal works such as T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927). Although many years have passed since the era of modernism and even though the world has witnessed the emergence of a new literary movement called postmodernism, modernism has shown its surprisingly persistent legacy in twenty-first-century arts and letters (James and Seshagiri 87). James and Seshagiri state that a growing number of contemporary novelists "place a conception of modernism as revolution at the heart of their fictions, styling their twenty-first-century literary innovations as explicit engagements with the innovations of early-twentieth-century writing" (87). In other words, they argue that these writers return to modernism and incorporate modernism in their contemporary works. Modernist culture and its works have acquired new

relevance regarding contemporary literature, since postmodernism no longer dominates critical discourse or art (James and Seshagiri 88). These contemporary fictions with “inventive, self-conscious relationships with modernist literature” are what James and Seshagiri think of as “Metamodernist”. This is somewhat different from the definition that is used by Vermeulen and Van den Akker. They describe Metamodernism as “negotiate[ing] between the modern and the postmodern” (6), and as being “characterized by the oscillation between a typically modern commitment and a markedly postmodern detachment” (2), clearly indicating that postmodernism is still a part of this new concept. Although they do state that the postmodern has been abandoned for the Metamodern, they also argue that not all postmodernism tendencies are over and done with, but that many of them are “taking another shape, and, more importantly, a new *sens*, a new meaning and direction” (Vermeulen and van den Akker 4). James and Seshagiri, however, only refer to Metamodernism as relating to modernism and specifically note that Metamodernist narratives “distinguish themselves from an earlier postmodernism through self-conscious, consistent visions of dissent and defamiliarization as novelistic inventions specific to the early twentieth century” (93).

There is another difference between the interpretation of what Metamodernism exactly is by Vermeulen and Van den Akker and James and Seshagiri: the former refer to Metamodernism as a “structure of feeling” and an “emergent sensibility” (2), so they consider it to be something rather philosophical and abstract, like a mental state that affects the mood or sense of a work of art or architecture, while James and Seshagiri interpret it as a practical concept that can clearly be identified in, in this case, literature. According to James and Seshagiri, Metamodernist novelists “extend, reanimate, and repudiate twentieth-century modernist literature”, and they say that Metamodernism’s ambition is “to reassess and remobilize narratives of modernism” (89). These “narratives of modernism” are used in a dual sense: it refers to experimental fiction that is shaped by an aesthetics of discontinuity, nonlinearity, interiority, and chronological play, and additionally it describes fictions that are plotted around the very creation and reception of modern art (James and Seshagiri 89). In other words, Metamodernist works either refer to modernism by incorporating modernist elements such as its experimental style, or they return to modernism by having contents or settings that refer to modernist times. This research will use and contribute to James and Seshagiri’s interpretation of Metamodernism, since Vermeulen and Van den Akker view Metamodernism as a philosophical “structure of feeling” and because they discuss it in relation to architecture, art, and film rather than to literature, whereas this thesis is based on a more practical understanding of Metamodernism and aims at charting modernist elements in

contemporary literature, which is more similar to James and Seshagiri's idea of Metamodernism, which does in fact concern literature.

Like James and Seshagiri do in their article, this thesis uses modernism in its traditional sense, location, and timeframe. This clashes with the more recent academic view of modernism as a "temporally and spatially complex global impulse" (James and Seshagiri 88), which can, for example, be seen in Douglass Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz's article "The New Modernist Studies" (2008). This article describes in what ways modernist literary scholarship has transformed in roughly the past two decades, identifying "'*expansion*' as the guiding principle of modernist scholarship" (737, emphasis in original), and discusses modernism in the light of postcolonial theory, claiming it was a transnational literary movement rather than just Eurocentric (James and Seshagiri 89). This research will thus use characteristics that are associated with the classic modernism of the early to mid-twentieth century in Europe and North-America, and since this thesis studies British and Irish contemporary fiction, it will also mainly focus on British and Irish modernist writers and works.

As addressed in the introduction of this thesis, literary modernism emerged as a response to rapidly changing times (P. Lewis 247). Examples of these changes are industrialisation, urbanisation, and secularisation, and more specifically the emergence of the New Woman, the peak and decline of the British Empire, technological change and the appearance of factory-line mass production, and the rise of the Labour Party (Childs 16). Although many things influenced the emergence of modernism, the central event for Anglo-American modernism was without doubt the First World War (L. Wilson 39). As a result of these mostly innovative changes on the one hand and the destruction of the Great War on the other (L. Wilson 40), artists were seeking new methods of representation that were appropriate to life in an urban, industrial, mass-oriented age, which resulted in a tendency of experimental literature "to break away from traditional verse forms, narrative techniques, and generic conventions" (P. Lewis xvii).

This tendency to break with traditional literature is also modernism's most major characteristic. Leigh Wilson states that "[t]he sense that the novel needed to be renewed and transformed is *the* unifying element of modernist fiction; writers ... self-consciously worked on stretching the limits of the form" (75, emphasis in original). Modernist literature is therefore mostly noted for how experimental it is, since it crossed many conventional boundaries and it rejected familiar unifying conventions regarding character, plot, linear

chronology, and traditional verse forms (L. Wilson 4-6). Modernism also has a wide variety of other characteristics that will be discussed in this thesis, but it could be argued that all those characteristics and techniques originate from the rejection of conventional literature.

Pericles Lewis argues in *The Cambridge Introduction to Modernism* (2007) that “[m]odernism in the novel is best described as the convergence of all these factors ... and their prevalence among a wide range of writers, not just a radical few” (154); “these factors” being subject matter, plot, formal qualities, and the social content linked to the period in which it was written (153-154). Lewis considers these aspects in the rest of his chapter on modernist prose fiction and divides them over several sections: ‘Consciousness’, ‘Time’, ‘Narrative’, and ‘Fiction’ (154). The sections used in the following chapters of this thesis are inspired by these sections, but they have been altered somewhat; the final two sections are titled ‘Narrative Style’ and ‘Metamodernism’. These sections will chart modernist characteristics in Tom McCarthy’s *C*, Eimear McBride’s *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing*, and Ali Smith’s *How to Be Both*, and will discuss the novels’ relation to Metamodernism..

The first section, ‘Consciousness’, will focus on people’s consciousness, thoughts, and the mind, and it discusses techniques and themes that try to reinvent the representation of consciousness, showing “not necessarily how things really are, but how things are experienced, what it feels like to be alive” (P. Lewis 158). It will discuss narrative techniques like stream of consciousness or free indirect speech; focus on the inner self and consciousness instead of the outside world; and avoiding using an omniscient narrator by replacing it with a subjective perspective or an unreliable (first person) narrator. Themes such as the protagonist’s identity will also be included in this section.

Lewis explains that “[o]ne medium through which the mind relates to external life is time” (161). The modernists were fascinated with time and our understanding of it, and it became a dominant theme in their works (P. Lewis 161). Peter Childs adds that there was a “modernist preoccupation with repetitive, cyclical rather than chronological, teleological time” (10). Examples of this fascination with time are novels that take place on a single day (such as *Ulysses* and *Mrs Dalloway*); unannounced shifts in time; the disjunction between external and internal time; and moments of “radical temporal instability” (P. Lewis 162). ‘Time’ will also deal with the theme of resurrection of the dead, for example the vision of late parents, to show how the past inhabits the present (P. Lewis 163).

The way the text is presented in the novels will be discussed under ‘Narrative Style’. As mentioned before, modernist stepped away from conventional literature, which resulted in experimental literature that broke with “traditional verse forms, narrative techniques, and

generic conventions” (P. Lewis xvii). This can be expressed through stream of consciousness, free indirect speech, fragmentation, exploring the limits of syntax and spelling, which can make the novel inaccessible and intimidating. Another playful literary devices is *in medias res*, which ‘plunges’ the reader into the narrative. This section will also deal with the layout of the text, and if the words put on paper in a conventional or experimental manner.

The following chapters consist of the analysis of how modernism is manifested in the respective novels, as well as discussing how they can be related to Metamodernism. The aforementioned three sections will give an analysis of one of the novels, which will then be combined in the final section, ‘Metamodernism’. This final section will discuss if and how the novels relate to the new concept of Metamodernism, as discussed by James and Seshagiri in their article “Metamodernism: Narratives of Continuity and Revolution” (2014). It will add to the question how modernism is manifested in the novels, and will explore how these novels can then be connected to Metamodernism; do the authors “extend, reanimate, and repudiate” modernist literature (James and Seshagiri 89)?

Chapter 2: Tom McCarthy's *C*

C (2010) is written by the English writer and conceptual artist Tom McCarthy and was first published by Jonathan Cape. McCarthy was born and raised in London and studied English Literature at the University of Oxford. The novel narrates the short life of Serge Carrefax, from the doctor present at his birth, to the people at his deathbed, and everything in between. *C* is McCarthy's third novel and has been very successful: it was shortlisted for both the Man Booker Prize (2010) and the Walter Scott Prize (2011) and it helped McCarthy win the Windham-Campbell Prize in 2013. His first novel, *Remainder* (2005), won the Believer Book Award in 2008, was extensively praised by acclaimed author Zadie Smith, who described it as "one of the great English novels of the past ten years", and has been adapted to film in 2015. His latest novel, *Satin Island*, was shortlisted for both the Man Booker Prize (2015) and the Goldsmith Prize (2015). Besides these novels, he has written essays, a book of literary criticism and other non-fiction works, and he also regularly writes on literature and art for publications including the *New York Times*, the *London Review of Books*, and *Artforum*.

Although *C* has won and has been shortlisted for such prestigious prizes, it has also divided critics; it has been received with both praise and critique. Academic reviewers have described it as "formidably well assembled" and "admirable for an unashamed literary ambition" (Carty). A critic has even argued that McCarthy is "revealing himself as a master craftsman who is steering the contemporary novel towards exciting territories" (Rourke), and *Time Out* called him "English fiction's new laureate of disappointment" ("These Silences"). On the other hand, it has been argued that the novel "has its boring stretches" (Tayler), and that certain passages "drain the reader's will to live" (Robson). Apart from academic reviewers, the general public also seems divided by *C*. On amazon.co.uk, for example, 19% of the reviewers awarded the novel five stars, but 19% also gave it only one single star ("C", *Amazon*). *C*'s average rating is 2.8 stars, and most readers (32%) rated it two stars ("C", *Amazon*). The reviewers on goodreads.com appear to appreciate the novel, awarding it an average rating of 3.15 stars ("C", *Goodreads*). 39% of the readers rated the novel four or five stars, and 27% only gave it one or two stars ("C", *Goodreads*). The reviews themselves also show how divided the public is. A reviewer on Amazon argued *C* is "flawlessly written" and "like most demanding work, immensely rewarding" (Leyla Sanai). A reviewer on Goodreads has said that it is "beautiful", and that, even after a year, they "still think about this all of the time" (Mark Kozac). Others are less enthusiastic, calling it an "utterly pointless book"

(Bramley66), and saying that although they think McCarthy has talent, *C* is “bloated twaddle” (MJ Nicholls).

Not only do academic and online reviewers seem to disagree on whether the novel should be appreciated, they also do not seem to agree on what genre the novel belongs to and if it returns to modernism or not. Many academics argue that the novel is modernist, experimental, or avant-garde (e.g. Moseley; Nieland). Additionally, academics often connect the novel to major modernist writers and thinkers, such as James Joyce, T. S. Elliot, and Sigmund Freud. Jonathan Dee, for instance, has called it “an avant-garde epic” and compared it to Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922) (69), and Jenny Turner points out its connections with Freud and his case history “The Wolf Man” (7). However, a few academics also name Thomas Pynchon, a postmodernist writer (e.g. Evers; Kirsch) and others comment on how it looks like a realist Bildungsroman (e.g. Jones; Turner 8). Some combine several of these labels in their reviews, like Merritt Moseley, who states that “[a]s an experimental novel *C* is oddly conventional in its form” (513), and Amanda Claybaugh, who says that the novel is “a strange mix” of realism and modernism (180).

Overall, the online reviewers have had a different interpretation of the novel. Although some do indeed describe *C* as modernist (e.g. TomCat), most of the reviewers think the novel is rather conventional, saying that “there is nothing ‘avant-garde’ about it” (Adam Florida), and that although it “has been described as ‘experimental’, ‘modernist’ and even an ‘anti-novel’”, they “don’t believe it is any of these at all” (Genome). The name Pynchon appears again in several of these reviews (e.g. Paul Bowes; Thropplenoggin), as does the term postmodernist (e.g. Paul Bowes). One reviewer even describes Serge as a “postmodern anti-hero *par excellence*” (Stinson, emphasis in original). The difference in reception between the academic reviewers, who mostly describe the novel as modernist, and the online reviewers, who mainly describe it as conventional, may be explained through the dual nature of the novel: it contains both conventional and avant-garde characteristics. McCarthy himself has commented on this, saying that the novel is like a Trojan horse (Armesto): it reads like a nineteenth-century realist novel, but there are modernist and avant-garde preoccupations hidden in there. This statement, the modernist and/or realist style and content of the novel, and its relation to modernist authors will be discussed in more detail later on in this chapter, which will explore how modernism is manifested in Tom McCarthy’s *C*. As explained in the previous chapter, the discussion of the novel will be divided into four sections: Consciousness, Time, Narrative Style, and Metamodernism. The first three will present an

analysis of modernist elements in the novel regarding these respective topics, and the final section will be a discussion of how the novel relates to Metamodernism.

Consciousness

C narrates the short life of Serge Carrefax between 1898 and 1922. The novel opens with Serge's birth at the Versoie Day School for the Deaf, which is headed by Serge's father and deaf mother. Although the novel is narrated by an third person narrator, the story is focalised through Serge, except for the very beginning and the very end of the novel, where the narrative is focalised through the doctor that is present at his birth and the one who is with him as he is dying. Only very little use is made of free indirect discourse, and the story is presented from the outside by a very eloquent narrator, that does not seem affected by what is happening. When he looks down on a battlefield, the horrors he sees are described in a calm manner and from a distance:

As they sink through the smoke-cloud, Serge sounds his klaxon again, then looks down. The battlefield's now strewn with fragments: of machine parts, mirrors, men. Legs, wedged in by earth, stand upright in athletic postures, crooked at the knee as though to sprint or straightened into sprightly leaps but, lacking bodies to direct and complement their action, remain still; detached arms semaphore quite randomly across the ground; torsos, cut off at the waist, mimic the statues of antiquity.⁴

The reader closely follows Serge, but because the story is told from an outside narrator, the protagonist remains an opaque and somewhat undeveloped character. Apart from this, the reader is not often provided with Serge's feelings or how he experiences life. There are elaborate descriptions of nature and external events, but the inner world or the mind are not described except for very few instances. In fact, it seems like Serge has no emotions at all, and his character seems rather apathetic and detached from the world: he is not mourning his sister; he does not have a close relationship with his parents; he is disconnected when having intercourse and only wants to enter from behind, not watching his partner's face; he is not afraid of dying in the war, but instead "the idea that his flesh could melt and fuse with the machine parts pleases him" (164), and he feels "ecstatic" when he is about to be executed (189). Moreover, he has an erection during the most unsettling moments, for example at his

⁴ McCarthy, Tom. *C*. 2010. Vintage Books, 2011, 172. All subsequent references will be to this edition and will be given parenthetically in the text.

sister's funeral and when his plane has just crashed and he is surrounded by two corpses, which implies that his relation to and interpretation of his surroundings are fairly unusual.

The novel's first part, 'Caul' already shows a foreshadowing of Serge's disconnection from the world. He is born with a caul, an "amniotic bag [that] envelops the entire head, a silky hood" (9), which quite literally disconnects one from their environment since their face is covered. Later in the novel, Serge suffers from constipation, which also affects his sight. It is like "one of his mother's silks – the really fine, dark ones – held right up to his eyeballs and stretched out in front of them, making the world gauzed: dark-gauzed, covered in fleck-film" (91). Again, his detachment is reflected in a literal sense: not only is there a mental distance between him and the world, he cannot even physically see the world properly. Although the caul is removed and he is eventually cured, Serge remains disconnected from his surroundings throughout the entire novel. These elements thus merely predict and emphasise this sense of detachment, rather than providing a solution for it.

McCarthy also refers to an important person from the modernist period: Sigmund Freud. This neurologist and the founder of psychoanalysis played a big role in the modernist era. He and his psychoanalysis did not just influence individuals in the early twentieth century, but it contributed to the very construction of the period (L. Wilson 29). Modernists were interested in the workings of the mind and in human subjectivity (Childs 3; 8), and there was a widespread contemporary interest in psychological states and psychological motivations (Childs 62). Both Freud and modernist writers were part of this interest, so these two are closely connected (Childs 62). McCarthy refers to this connection in his novel, and he uses one of Freud's most well-known patients to do it. The historical Sergei Pankejeff, also known as 'The Wolf Man', and Serge have many things in common. Their names are very similar, they both suffered from constipation, and both their sisters committed suicide (Turner 7). Furthermore, Pankejeff was sexually abused by a family member during his childhood (Masson xvii), which can be linked to Serge's somewhat incestuous relationship with his sister Sophie, who pretends to tap out a message in Morse code on Serge's penis (22). Finally, Pankejeff has witnessed his parents making love (Freud, qtd. in Lougy 408), and Serge also sees two people having sex behind a screen, although these are not his parents. It is implied that it is Widsun, a friend of Serge's father, but it remains unclear if he is with Serge's mother or with Sophie (60). This big overlap between the two men indicates that McCarthy has put a lot of thought in the life of his protagonist, and that he wants the reader to connect Serge to Pankejeff and Freud, and thus to the modernist era.

Although there is not much focus on the consciousness and minds of the characters, McCarthy does make a distinction between the body and the mind. When Serge is treated for his constipation, he is asked to provide a sample of his stool. When he says that he is not able to do that because “it doesn’t want to”, his doctor interrupts him, saying “You speak of what *it* wants? (91, emphasis in original). Dr Filip accuses Serge of letting his body take over his mind, whereas it should be the other way around. The illness “needs a host to nurture it, and you are willing” (95). Because his mind accepts and serves its needs, and thus the body’s needs, the condition stays with him. Dr Filip has a simple solution: “This we must change” (95). He can only provide medication and a diet, but Serge has to do the rest and discover a way to change his mentality. This suggests that the mind is more powerful than the body; the only reason he is still suffering from his condition is because he allows it and the body to take over. The mind, however, is superior and the illness can be treated if Serge changes his mindset. Indeed, he eventually finds a way to cure himself, but it is debatable if it is his mind or his body that had the most impact. When he opens his eyes after losing his virginity, Serge finds that “the gauzy crêpe that’s furred his vision for so long is gone – completely gone” (114). Having sex might seem like a mostly bodily experience, but also the mind plays an important role. His climax is described as an out-of-body experience:

The burning’s spreading outwards too, just like the wine; it’s spreading beyond his body, moving out to fill the hollow, and beyond that too, across the fire-break to the woods on either side. A scream, or the echo of a scream, erupts from neither him nor Tania but, it seems, the night itself; and with it comes a tearing sound, as though a fabric were being ripped. (114)

It could be argued that Serge also suffered from mental constipation that arose after Sophie’s death. Although he said he felt no grief, only discomfort (82), the fact that he did not deal with this loss and that his physical illness started developing during Sophie’s funeral implies that these issues are connected. Serge and Sophie had a somewhat incestuous relationship, so perhaps losing his virginity solved his mental constipation, and treated his physical constipation as a result. Additionally, this experience might have broken the daily rhythm Serge was stuck in, which was exactly what was needed to break “the whole rhythm of intoxication” (105). Even though it is dubious whether only the mind did indeed treat his illness, it is strongly suggested that bodily experiences are closely connected to the mind, and it could be argued that the sexual encounter with Tania helped his mental state, which in turn also had a positive effect on his physical condition. However, it could also be the case that

neither Serge's mind, nor his body consciously provided the solution to his illness. Sigmund Freud, a neurologist and the founder of psychoanalysis, had a particular understanding of the human will. His concept of the 'unconscious' presents a different interpretation of the human mind: "Freud's 'will' was not something that could be utilized by an individual; it was outside of consciousness, unknowable and alien to what is conventionally understood to be the 'self'" (L. Wilson 29). In other words, humans do not have influence on everything they think or do. The unconscious is a part of the mind, though, so this interpretation would still add to the idea of the mind as superior to the body.

As established in this section, *C* is told from an outside narrator but is focalised through its protagonist, Serge. McCarthy only makes very little use of free indirect discourse, and there is almost no focus on Serge's mind or how he experiences life. However, the protagonist is a rather apathetic person and seems disconnected from the world, so this way of narrating the story emphasises his personality. Although the novel does not at all focus on the inner self or consciousness, McCarthy does draw a line between his protagonist and Freud, who came up with the concept of the unconscious and was an important figure in the modernist era. McCarthy also makes a distinction between the mind and the body and seems to argue that the mind is superior to the body, while arguably also including Freud's idea of the unconscious.

Time

Time was an important aspect of modernist works; apart from playing with the concept of time, authors used it as a dominant theme in their works (P. Lewis 161). Time is also an integral part of *C*, and it is essential regarding the novel's setting, which very directly refers to the modernist era. The narrative is set between 1898 and 1922, which is not accidental. This is a period that not only saw the emergence of wireless communication, radio, and the BBC, but also the development and climax of literary modernism. 1922 became known as the *annus mirabilis* (marvellous year) of modernism because it saw the publications of Elliot's *The Waste Land*, Joyce's *Ulysses*, and Woolf's *Jacob's Room* (Levenson; P. Lewis 124). McCarthy gives a thoroughly researched description of the world during these years, which gives the reader a realistic impression of what the world was like when some of the most famous modernist writers were writing their masterpieces. This way, the reader gets an idea of what might have inspired these writers, which again makes the novel relatable to modernism.

As addressed in the introduction and in Chapter One of this thesis, literary modernism emerges as a response to rapidly changing times (P. Lewis 247). Many of these changes are

also present in McCarthy's novel, since it is set in this period. Rapid advancements in (communication) technology, the destruction of the First World War, and the decline of the British Empire all play a major role in the novel and are explored in depth through the character of Serge. Serge, and especially his father, are both interested in communication technology. His father is an inventor and has many innovative ideas regarding wireless communication. He dreams of a global communications network and there are many references to the web or webs (whether made of copper wires, newspaper clippings, or silk worms), which seems to be a foreshadowing to the internet that we know now. However, Serge's father is not a very successful inventor. He mentions that he is competing with "[t]hat Italian" (12), a reference to Guglielmo Marconi, the inventor of the wireless (McCarthy). He is also beaten by "[t]hat bastard Korn" (45), who invented the telephotography which allowed one to send pictures by telegraph. Even their surname "Carrefax" refers to technological changes: the car and the fax machine, the latter being an advancement on the (photo)telegraph that Serge's father was working on. Throughout the novel, the reader is also introduced to other innovative concepts, such as gramophones, planes, and motor cars, and globalization also starts to play a role, for example when Serge borrows his father's car and is able to leave his house in the country to party in the city, where people from all over the country meet each other. Towards the end of the novel, there is a new focus on technological advancements regarding communication when Serge goes to Egypt with Widsun, who is "working in Communications now, with special responsibilities for North Africa" (237). In 1922, Britain was erecting the first long-distance pylons of its proposed Imperial Wireless Chain in Egypt, one of its colonies (McCarthy). While doing this, they also lost Egypt, which gained independence in February 1922, which is around the same time the novel's narrative ends. McCarthy also found a way to give a detailed portrayal of the First World War by having Serge join the Royal Flying Corps as an observer, who sees the horrors and the destruction of the war from up close. Additionally, since Serge is captured by the Germans twice, the reader is provided with life as a prisoner of war: how they are treated, how the many nationalities live together, how there is a difference in what they get to eat, and what the procedure of an execution is like.

Although these technological developments and changes in society are omnipresent in the novel, they are not at all described as negative developments. In fact, it could be argued that *C*'s attitude towards them is associated with Futurism, which emerged in 1909. Futurists embraced the modern world, including its technology and speed (P. Lewis 65). Filippo

Tomasso Marinetti, the leader of the Italian Futurists, wrote the following in “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism” (1909):

We say that the world’s magnificence has been enriched by a new beauty:
the beauty of speed. A racing car whose hood is adorned with great pipes,
like serpents of explosive breath – a roaring car that seems to ride on grapeshot –
is more beautiful than the *Victory of Samothrace*. (qtd. in Childs 22)

The fact that Marinetti mentions cars twice in this excerpt is not coincidental: he was in a car crash himself, and this is cast as the actual scene of Futurism’s birth (Schnapp 2). After this accident, he is reborn and transformed from a pre-modern to a modern man (Schnapp 2-3). In *C*, this car accident is echoed at the ending of its third part, called ‘Crash’, when Serge also has a car accident (235-236). This crash, however, is not as minor as Marinetti’s was, and Serge is in a coma for a while, which underlines the idea of being reborn when he wakes up. As mentioned before, Futurism celebrated the possibilities of modernity; the automobile, the airplane, the gramophone, and even the machine gun were seen as “keys to the human future” (P. Lewis 65). Moreover, Marinetti proposed to “glorify war – the sole hygiene of the world – militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for” (qtd. in P. Lewis 79). In *C*, this idea is also present. Although McCarthy does not necessarily glorify the war, his protagonist does not seem to have a problem with it either. Serge does not feel any guilt when he shoots people; in fact, he does not think of it as deadening, but as “a quickening, a bringing to life [...] it’s an awakening, a setting into motion” (159). Additionally, he has a rather unusual response when someone tries to emphasise with him after living through the war and all its horror: “But I liked the war” (214). The main idea of Futurism as well as a clear reference to its leader Marinetti are thus embedded in *C*, which again connects the novel to modernism.

As discussed in Chapter One, modernists were preoccupied with repetitive, cyclical time rather than chronological, teleological time (Childs 10). However, the timeline in *C* is strongly reminiscent of a Victorian Bildungsroman, since its narrative is chronological and there are no flashbacks or flash-forwards within chapters. The novel starts even before Serge is born, with a doctor arriving at Versoie to deliver him, and ends with Serge on his deathbed and a doctor looking after him. Nevertheless, McCarthy is somewhat playful in his portrayal of time. Although time is presented in a linear manner, each chapter jumps forward in time, giving the novel a sense of unpredictability. Each of the four parts focuses on a different time

in Serge's life, but the reader has to find out when the story is taking place, and how old Serge is in this new setting.

Apart from this, there are several moments where the pace of the narration changes. When the doctor arrives at Versoie he cannot find his way, and his walk through the gardens and between the buildings there is stretched out endlessly, like it took him hours. This is similar to the scene where Serge is just a boy, and he is walking through the silk factory looking for his mother, which is also described in such great detail that it becomes an almost dreamlike scenery.

There are even moments when time seems to stand still. After Sophie has died, he is playing discs that he used to listen to with her while looking out the window:

He looks out over the flat, motionless landscape as he listens. The sheep never seem to move: they just stand still, bubbly flecks on Arcady Field's face. The curving stream also seems completely still, arrested in a deathly rictus grin. Only the trees in the Crypt Park seem to have any movement in them: they contract and expand slowly. (78)

This could be an expression of his mourning. Not only time stands still, but also the world seems to stop moving. The image of contracting and expanding trees reminds one of breathing, which is perhaps the only thing that Serge can do after losing the most important person in his life. When Serge is in a coma after his car crash, it seems like time does not even exist. It feels like he is watching a film he likes, "its drawn-out timelessness that has no borders, no beginning and no end" (237). Here, he is asleep, which is indeed a moment of timelessness. The pace is greatly accelerated, though, when Widsun arrives and Serge is "yanked back into time" (237). These instances demonstrate the instability of time, which was something modernist writers were also interested in (P. Lewis 162).

Even though the novel's timeline is linear, time is also implied to be circular. Serge seems to be trapped in certain rhythms of daily life. At the sanatorium where he is treated for his constipation, Serge likes this rhythm of doing the same thing every day: he drinks special water, he meets with his doctor and later with a nurse, he gets a massage and he takes walks with a friend. His doctor says that this is exactly why the treatment does not work; because there is only repetition instead of transformation (105). Later, when he is in a prisoner-of-war camp, every day has the same routine, which Serge enjoys. When the war ends seconds before Serge is supposed to be executed, he gets scared and shouts "you can't do that!" at the German soldiers who are walking away (190), which implies that he might feel abandoned

and pulled out of a pleasant routine that he relied on, leaving him unsure of what to do next. Looking at the novel as a whole, it can also be observed that, in a way, Serge's life ends the same way as it began: surrounded by technology and communication. He was born to a father who was obsessed with wireless communication in a house filled with wires; he is interested in wireless communication as well and improvised his own equipment to pick up signals; he spent his last days near the first long-distance pylons in Egypt; and the last sentence he speaks is: "*The call: I'm being called*" (309, emphasis in original), again relating to communication.

Apart from the images of communication and technology being repeated throughout the novel, the image of insects also comes back countless times. Serge did not only begin and end his life surrounded by technology and communication, but also by insects. He grows up with a silk factory at his house, Sophie is interested in biology and dissects many insects and the shroud over her coffin shows an insect feeding on a flower, Serge himself is a radio "bug", and he is eventually killed after supposedly being bitten or stung by an insect. He also relates other things to insects, for example when he sees people wrapped in blankets and he thinks they "look like insects, like pupating larvae" (93), or when he sees "some kind of moving thing made of articulated parts" moving behind a screen, which are actually two people making love: "[t]he thing pulses like an insect's thorax" (60). This omnipresence of insects is reminiscent of Franz Kafka, who is often named as one of the major writers of the modernist period (qtd. in Childs 2). Especially his "Metamorphosis" (1915), where its protagonist wakes up one day to find himself transformed into a huge insect, connects to the imagery of insects in *C*.

In his novel, McCarthy combines both conventional and modernist concepts of time. The narrative is told in a chronological and linear way, but there are some scenes that demonstrate the instability of time, as well as suggestions that time is cyclical and repetitive, like the repetition of certain tropes and images. Furthermore, the setting of *C* directly links to modernism because it is set in the modernist era, and it repeatedly refers to influential modernist figures and Futurism, a modernist art movement. Additionally, time is an essential theme that the narrative revolves around. Modernism emerged as a response to rapidly changing times (P. Lewis 247), and McCarthy gives a detailed representation of what these times were like by elaborately discussing many of these changes in *C*.

Narrative Style

As discussed in Chapter One, modernists had a tendency to break away from traditional verse forms and narrative techniques (P. Lewis xvii). In *C*, however, this does not appear to be the

case. Its form and layout are very conventional, and reminds one of Victorian realist novels and the Bildungsroman. The novel is narrated from a third person, outside narrator, and it does not use the modernist techniques of stream of consciousness, free indirect speech, or interior monologue that can make modernist works inaccessible and intimidating (P. Lewis 158-159). Furthermore, its style is not challenging at all, the narrative is not fragmented, and it is highly structured: not only is it divided in four parts that each deal with a different time in Serge's life, these parts are divided into chapters, which in turn are divided into several numbered sections. This might reflect Serge's character, since he is a rather contained and calm person who likes patterns and relies on structure, as established in the previous section "Time". Especially the novel's opening is reminiscent of Victorian fiction: "Dr. Learmont, newly appointed general practitioner for the districts of West Masedown and New Eliry, rocks and jilts on the front seat of a trap as it descends the lightly sloping path of Versoie House" (3). The reader is introduced to Versoie through the character of Dr Learmont, who has also never visited it before. This way, the reader is eased into the story, gets a tour around the house, and is introduced to all the characters. The elaborate descriptions of nature and the outer world, and the lack of focus on the inner world, add to this sense of lyrical realism:

Beside it, to its right, a narrow, still stream lies in front of a tall garden wall over which, from the far side, ferns and wisteria are spilling. To the trap's left a veined set of rose-bush stems and branches, flowers gone, clings to another wall. The wood-smoke pall comes from beyond this. [...] Inside the garden are chrysanthemums, irises, tulips and anemones, all stacked and tumbling over one another on both sides of a path of uneven mosaic paving stones. Learmont follows the path towards a passageway formed by hedges and a roof of trellis stung with poisonberries and some kind of wiry, light-brown vine whose strands lead off to what look like stables. (4-5)

Although the style of *C* appears to be conventional, and it does not use high modernist techniques such as stream of consciousness, interior monologue, an unreliable narrator, or a fragmented narrative (Childs 3; P. Lewis 158-159), McCarthy does include playful stylistic elements in his novel. One of these is the usage of *in medias res*. Whereas the book opens in a rather realist and Victorian manner, taking the reader by the hand, this changes when as the novel continues. There are many different sections and chapters in the book, and the space and time where the story is set repeatedly changes between them. However, the reader is not introduced to this new scenery but is rather 'plunged' into it, having to find out themselves

when and where the narrative is taking place. The second part, 'Chute', starts with the following lines:

Circumferenced by first brass and then mahogany, the steel minute hand of the large wall clock jumps forwards, its point lodging in the gap between the *X* and the first *I* of *XII*. The invigilator announces: 'You may now begin.' Like so many extensions of spring, fuse and escapement, thirty-eight left forearms and two rights reach across desktops and turn back the covering page of the School of Military Aeronautics' General Knowledge Paper. (117)

An element of the narrative's setting is clarified fairly quickly, when it is revealed that Serge is taking a test to join the Royal Flying Corps, but it takes a moment to establish that the First World War has broken out. Only twenty pages later, though, the reader finds out that the war has actually been going on for quite a while: "rows of empty trenches – last month's, or last year's, the year before's" (139). It seems strange, then, that Serge is only now joining the air force, but it becomes clear as the novel continues: he was born in 1898 (203), which means he was only sixteen years old when the war started. The novel's final part, 'Call', opens in a similar way. Serge and Petrou, a completely new character who is not introduced here, are walking through a town and they mention riots, the '19 revolt, the 'eighty-two bombardment, and the Persians (241). Then, Petrou reveals that they are in Alexandria, but this is still somewhat ambiguous, since there are several cities with the same name. However, it can be easily deducted that they are speaking of Egypt, since Widsun offered Serge a job in Egypt at the end of the previous chapter. After this revelation, it is described who Petrou is and what he does (241). Again, the setting is explained not that far into the chapter, but the reader is initially 'plunged' into the story without any information regarding its setting, which could be argued to be an adapted version of *in medias res*.

There are also some stylistic literary devices present in the novel that play with the words themselves. One of these is alliteration, for example in the lines "Serge, seven and splenetic: (30), and "[...] sent, sisterless, to solitary for two weeks. / The first few days are dreadful, full of fits and fever" (186). These instances of alliteration do not occur that often, but when they do, it gives the line an emphasis and a rhythm. The most obvious form of "alliteration", or rather, repetition, since these words are scattered around the novel and are therefore not an alliteration, can be found in the novel's title: *C*. This letter is repeated constantly, which can be seen in the titles of the four parts, 'Caul', 'Chute', 'Crash', and 'Call', which all refer to an important element of that respective part. *C* is also the first letter

of many other words that appear to have a significant meaning in the novel: Carrefax, communication, copper wires, codes, cryptography, cyanide, cocaine, cartography, colony, crypts, connection, Ceres, carbon (which is called “the basic element of life” (292)), and many more. It is even literally mentioned that “the C is everywhere” (292). It could also refer to the fact that this is McCarthy’s third novel, since the letter C is the third letter of the alphabet. Another example of McCarthy’s playfulness regarding language is demonstrated through the use of puns. The estate Serge grows up in is called Versoie, which sounds like the French Versaille. Additionally, Serge’s mother is French, and *ver à soie* is French for “silkworm” (Ehrenreich), creating a dual wordplay with the name of the house. There are also plays on the words insect and incest, which are both present in the novel, which in turn echoes *Finnegans Wake*, where Joyce uses the word “insect” as a play on “incest” (Tayler). There is another pun based on Serge and Sophie’s incestuous relationship when Serge is a prisoner. A man asks him: “You like your sister, huh?” (185), and Serge is confused by this question. “Sister, dope, Big H: heroin. You don’t call it that here?” (185), the man explains, revealing that Serge is still addicted to heroin. This fact was unknown to the reader, so one immediately thinks of Sophie, which reinforces the impact of the joke. These puns show how McCarthy plays with the possibilities and boundaries of language and embeds some experimental use of language in his novel, while also connecting the novel to a great modernist writer: this type of language play is strongly associated with Joyce, whose *Finnegans Wake* (1939) is filled with puns (Costanzo 175).

The narrative style of *C* is highly conventional and traditional. It has a third person narrator, the speech is calm and contained without fragmentation, and it does not include interior monologue or stream of consciousness. McCarthy does, however, include some experimental and playful elements. He uses alliteration, repetition, and puns, as well as an somewhat altered version of *in medias res* which initially ‘plunges’ the reader into a new part of the novel, but guiding them by providing hints and explanations after a short while. *C* fits many genres: Bildungsroman; war memoir; Freudian case study, while also containing realist, modernist, and postmodernist elements. It could be argued that this overlap between genres is experimental in itself: McCarthy combines several genres and techniques, making *C* a melting pot of literary phenomena, which is quite unconventional and adds a complexity to understanding and interpreting the novel.

Metamodernism

James and Seshagiri define Metamodernist fiction as “contemporary fictions distinguished by inventive, self-conscious relationships with modernist literature” (88). As discussed in Chapter One, they distinguish two groups of “narratives of modernism”: contemporary works that refer to modernism by incorporating modernist elements such as its experimental style, and works that return to modernism because they are plotted around the creation and reception of modernist art and literature (James and Seshagiri 89). The former category definitely does not apply to Tom McCarthy’s stylistically conventional and not very experimental *C*, but the second category seems to fit, since the narrative is set during the modernist era. McCarthy is described by James and Seshagiri themselves as an author whose fiction captures the logic of “innovation through retrospection” (94). As established in the sections above, the style applied in *C* does not return to an experimental modernist style, and McCarthy’s fiction steps away from interiority and the mind, emphasising matter over streams of consciousness, and repetition over emotions. This is reminiscent of the externalism advocated by Wyndham Lewis, an artist strongly associated with the modernist movements Vorticism and Futurism (Childs 122-123), who also paid more attention to “*the outside of people*” (W. Lewis 46, emphasis in original; James and Seshagiri 94).

As discussed in this chapter, McCarthy explicitly refers to the modernist era through its setting and discussion of themes and tropes that were important during this period. Additionally, he alludes to Futurism, Marinetti, Korn, Marconi, Freud’s psychoanalysis and the unconscious, directly placing himself in relation to modernist inventions, neurology, and art. Furthermore, some playful and stylistic elements that are typically modernist are incorporated in the novel, like Joycean puns, but McCarthy slightly adapts some of these: instead of using *in medias res* at the opening of *C*, the reader is gently introduced to the novel. However, when the reader reaches the second part of the novel, they are ‘plunged’ into the chapter without any guidance. McCarthy does provide guidance quite soon though, only leaving the reader confused and challenged for a short moment. He also plays with the concepts of alliteration and repetition, and it could be argued that he combines the two. There are several instances of alliteration, but words starting with the letter C can be found anywhere in the novel. Because these words do not follow each other, it cannot be called an alliteration, but this focus on one single letter certainly reminds one of this literary device. These adaptations of modernist stylistic devices follows James and Seshagiri’s description of Metamodernist fiction, which should “extend, reanimate, and repudiate” modernist literature (89).

McCarthy has also commented himself on the role of modernism in his novel: “The task for contemporary literature is to deal with the legacy of modernism. I’m not trying to be modernist, but to navigate the wreckage of that project” (qtd. in Purdon). He implies that it is impossible for writers *not* to incorporate modernism in their works, because it was such an influential and important literary movement. This means that he is aware of the modernist elements in his novel, which indicates that he is conscious of *C*’s relationship with modernism.

It has been established above how *C* fits in with what James and Seshagiri think of as Metamodernist fiction. McCarthy combines conventional and experimental literature, merging various genres from decades ago to create a new, innovative novel, which shows “innovation through retrospection” (James and Seshagiri 94). He also extends and reanimates modernist literature by adapting certain modernist stylistic elements, and his interview in *The Observer* reveals that he is self-conscious of his relationship with modernism.

Chapter 3: Eimear McBride's *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing*

Eimear McBride's debut novel, *A Girl Is a Half-Formed Thing* tells the story of a "half-formed" Irish girl growing up in a vicious cycle of illness, religion, and abuse, and explores the protagonist's troubled relationships with her family and her own sexuality. McBride's first novel, which took her 9 years to get published, was released in 2013 by Galley Beggar, a small independent publisher run from a bookshop in Norwich. McBride's critically acclaimed novel has won many prizes, including the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize (2013), the Goldsmiths Prize for Fiction (2013), Kerry Group Irish Novel of the Year Award (2014), the Desmond Elliott Prize (2014), and the Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction (2014), and was shortlisted for the Folio Prize (2014) and the Dylan Thomas Prize (2014). Her second novel *The Lesser Bohemians*, published by Faber and Faber in 2016, won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize (2017) and was shortlisted for the Goldsmiths Prize (2016), the Bord Gáis Irish Book Awards (2016) and the RSL Encore Awards (2017), which confirmed McBride's new-found status as a major contemporary Irish novelist.

McBride has been received by critics and contemporaries as a literary sensation; they have argued she is "an extraordinary new voice" (Fraser, qtd. in Roddy), "a fully-formed talent" (Collard), and "a genius easily missed" (Jordison), and her use of language has been described as "so unique, so instantly inimitable that McBridean deserves to be an adjective" (Lichtig). Even though *A Girl* has won many literary awards and scholars seem to unanimously appreciate it (although Ron Charles in the Washington Post warned readers that they may find it "a migraine in print" (qtd. in McCallum-Smith)), the novel has greatly divided the general public. On amazon.co.uk, for example, 31% of the reviewers awarded the book a five star rating, while 30% only rated it a single star ("Girl", *Amazon*). However, 54% of the reviewers on goodreads.com granted the novel a four or five star rating, and only 21% gave it one or two stars ("Girl", *Goodreads*). A reviewer on Goodreads said they "hated almost every minute" and that the book is "a waste of money" (Rhiannon); someone else said "this book became more about trying to PUNISH me for reading it than anything else" and that the "overly-stylised writing" became exhausting (Cara), whereas another reviewer called it "the most interesting, impressive and accomplished new novel [they have] read in a very long time" although it is "often a difficult read" (Patrick).

Although *A Girl* has received a wide variety of positive as well as negative comments, both the academic and the online reviewers seem to agree that the novel returns to modernism in a way, and they often discuss *A Girl* in relation to modernism or modernist characteristics.

It has, for example, repeatedly been described as having a “modernist style” (Sattris; Kaye), as being “neomodernist” (Gorra; McAlpin, “Challenging”), as using “the tools of modernism and stream of consciousness” (Bell), and even as being tougher than or going further than the stream of consciousness used by Joyce (Sutherland; McCallum-Smith). The novel has also been described as “a radical experiment” (Rustin); “experimental in the same way that some modern art is experimental” (The Cats Mother); and “incomprehensible and pompous modernism” (Bryan). These final comments are mainly regarding the novel’s greatly unconventional style and use of language. Additionally, the author has been linked to famous modernist writers: McBride “[picked up] the experimental modernist baton from James Joyce and Samuel Beckett” (O’Keeffe); she is said to apply “the experimental innovations of Joyce, Woolf, Beckett, and others” (Donovan), and a critic has even said the following: “Critics compared it to Marcel Proust or Samuel Beckett, but I don’t think there was a single review that didn’t mention James Joyce” (Beausang). The fact that Joyce is brought up in all those reviews is probably a result of what McBride herself has stated in several interviews and in a piece that she wrote for *The Guardian*: she repeatedly says that she has been influenced greatly by *Ulysses* (Cochrane; McBride, “My Hero”). This statement, its experimental style and stream of consciousness, and its relation to modernist authors will all be discussed more elaborately later on in this chapter. This chapter will explore how modernism is manifested in Eimear McBride’s *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* in a similar way as has been done in the previous chapter, and finally it will be discussed how this novel relates to Metamodernism.

Consciousness

The main focus of McBride’s novel is the life of its protagonist, which the reader experiences through her eyes. The blurb of the book stresses this by saying “[i]t is a shocking and intimate insight into the thoughts, feelings and chaotic sexuality of a vulnerable and isolated protagonist. To read *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* is to plunge inside its narrator’s head, experiencing her world at first hand” (Faber and Faber, 2014). The novel is not narrated by an omniscient narrator but by the protagonist herself and the reader is indeed plunged into the narrator’s mind which is strongly expressed through McBride’s use of stream of consciousness (see “Narrative Style”). This way, they are close to the narrator and know exactly how she feels and how she experiences life, instead of merely knowing what is happening in general. As mentioned before, the reader views the world only from her perspective, solely getting information on other characters when the girl talks about or quotes them. For example, we do not know the girl’s or any other character’s names because she

refers to people as “brother”, “mother”, “uncle”, “friend”, etc., or calls them by their pronouns, and we do not even know what they look like, since she does not describe their appearances apart from small things, like her brother’s blue eyes⁵, which are only named towards the end of the book; her uncle’s curly hair and her aunt’s bob-cut (45); herself dyeing her hair (90), wearing black clothes often (98), and wearing mascara (103), heels (125), and lipstick (184). As a result, there is more emphasis on what people do or say than on what they look like, which again shows the novel’s preoccupation with people’s minds and consciousness as well as suggesting that appearances are inferior to the mind.

McBride also makes a great distinction between the body and the mind, especially regarding the body of the girl’s brother. He tries to get out of bed to go to the toilet despite being severely ill, but “melt[s] like water”, because all his muscles are “[g]one to hell” (179). “Strapped up in your body. You don’t live there” (179), the girl says, thinking of her brother as a healthy spirit trapped inside a sick body, although he has brain cancer which also greatly affects his memory and personality. When her brother has passed away and she is sitting next to his corpse, she is thinking “You’re not here. Not like that empty face” (191), again not accepting the body as her brother’s because his soul has left it. The body does play an important role in some of the scenes, but in this case it is the girl’s body that is discussed. The girl describes her reaction when she hears that her brother’s cancer is back as a mostly bodily experience: “And the blender go off inside me suck my heart lungs my brains in. Rip my stomach out” (126). It could be that this news gives her so much psychological pain it is expressed through physical ache. Later, the girl says “I am tired. Too full of stuff I’ve done. Where my legs hurt where my scalp hurts. I’ll not fight the thing inside me anymore. Let it eat me up. Please God. I want it to” (135). It does not become clear what “the thing” inside her is, but it could be depression. Although depression is a mental illness, it is described here as hurting her body and eating her up. These two instances actually seem to make a connection between the body and mind as opposed to the girl’s idea of her brother’s body and mind as disconnected. Perhaps this indicates that a physical illness, like the brother’s brain cancer, cannot affect the mind or spirit, but a mental illness or the mind in itself can influence the body, which again implies that the mind is superior to the body.

Additionally, the last sentence of the novel is a very interesting one: “My name is gone” (203). At the beginning of the book it is revealed that her brother named her (3), and

⁵ McBride, Eimear. *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing*. 2013. Faber and Faber, 2014, 153. All subsequent references will be to this edition and will be given parenthetically in the text.

while the girl is drowning, she thinks of her name, a name that is not known to the reader. Something similar happens earlier in the novel when the brother has just passed away. The girl has been addressing her story to a “you”, which is her brother, and after he dies the girl wonders “[w]ho am I talking to? Who am I talking to now?” (189), not knowing who to tell her story to now that her brother is not here to listen to it anymore. It could perhaps be argued that the girl feels like she has no name (or consciousness or identity) anymore, because her brother, the one who gave her her name and the one who her story is addressed to, is gone, taking her name and her purpose with him, which would add to the importance that consciousness and the inner self have in the novel.

Because *A Girl* is written from the protagonist’s perspective, the reader gets to know the girl on a deeply emotional level, which makes her identity an important aspect of the novel. McBride focuses on the girl’s personality and clearly shows how one’s identity is shaped by experiences that they go through, which are in this novel rather dramatic: the protagonist and her brother’s childhood are marked by his brain tumour, their father has left them, and the girl is sexually abused by her uncle when she is thirteen. All these things have turned her into a troubled and traumatised girl, which greatly influences her actions and relationships later in life.

An example of the girl’s identity playing a big role in her life is her relationship with her mother. Her mother is a devout Catholic, but the girl despises this, which results in her growing up with an aversion towards religion. When she is younger, she draws cuts and blood on a figure of Jesus and is intrigued by his pain; she wants to “hear him crying, screaming most of all” (20). It even seems like she wants to be a sinner, just to be unlike her mother. However, religion is omnipresent in *A Girl* and the girl thinks about it often. On the one hand she is aware of the fact that she is a sinner and she almost seems proud of being “impious” (97). When she is a teenager, a friend stops coming over and makes other friends, and the girl believes that this is because of her immorality, saying her friend “[q]uietly made a getaway from me and my many sins” (72). Later, when she is a student and lives in the city, her roommate tells the girl she cannot have sex with her uncle in their apartment because of its violent nature and she refuses to help her “get fucked-up more” (145). Although she loses people in her life because of her behaviour, she cannot stop living a sinful existence. The girl even washes her brother’s face of Holy Sacrament after the priest has visited him, to “[l]et sin to sinner return. Like me – for I know it very well” (183), although she knows that this was very important to her mother. On the other hand, she wants the rain to wash her sin away (152), and she repeatedly gets into a lake as a way to clean herself or purify herself, putting

her head in the water “for discreet baptise” (55; 201). In the end she commits suicide by drowning herself in the same lake, perhaps also as a way to purify herself before she goes to the afterlife. Religion has thus not only influenced her life through her mother’s actions, but it has also become an integral part of her identity that she cannot ignore.

Another experience that has left a great impact on the protagonist’s identity is the abusive relationship with her uncle. They have sex for the first time when she is thirteen, which hurts her and leaves her bleeding for many days (58). As a result, she comes to associate sex with “masochistic debasement and defilement” (McAlpin, “Challenging”), which affects her future sexual encounters. When she grows older, she seeks increasingly dangerous and violent meetings with both strangers and her uncle to relieve her pain: “Does that hurt? Yes. A lot. A lot and relieves me for a while” (137); “I want that. Hurt me. Until I am outside pain” (148). The girl even says she is “almost best” when she is having sex after being hit so hard she falls over and her nose is bleeding (144). These encounters happen quite often in the novel, and it could be argued that sex and violence are like an addiction for the girl.

Even though this section deals with the concept of consciousness and identity, I will nevertheless briefly discuss the theme of alienation and dislocation, a theme that one might think of as typically modernist (Kalaidjian 78). This does not seem to fit in perfectly in this section, but it could be argued that this has a great impact on one’s identity as well. Alienation, especially alienation from society, is an integral theme in *A Girl*. The girl’s brother is pushed to the margins of society due to his brain tumour, which left him unable to function properly mentally as well as physically. He has a “little limp” (49), his left arm is bad, and he has trouble keeping up at school because of his brain damage. His mother threatens to send him to “handicapped school” (17), but eventually lets him go to a regular school, where they make fun of the scar on his head and he is bullied because he cannot keep up with the others. It becomes painfully clear that he will never be able to fulfil his dreams when he fails his exams and is rejected from joining the army (76). Instead, he is stuck stacking shelves in a shop near to his mother’s house with people he hates (79). His illness also increasingly alienates him from society quite literally. As his condition worsens, he has to quit his job; later he cannot sleep in his room upstairs any longer because the doctors say it is “a hazard” (160), and eventually he cannot even leave his bed anymore, forcing him to wear nappies (178). He also completely loses touch with society because he sleeps all day and heavily suffers from memory loss, which leaves him forgetting things that happened mere seconds ago (175).

In her novel, McBride focuses on her protagonist's consciousness, identity, and her inner self, and on how they are influenced by experiences as well as how the inner self impacts their actions. This emphasis on consciousness and identity again shows how important the inner self is in relation to the body as well as the outside world, which connects to modernism's greater interest "in the workings of the mind rather than the body" (Childs 8). Moreover, the topic of alienation from society is explored thoroughly in the novel through the character of the girl's brother, adding a recognised modernist theme to the novel's narrative.

Time

As established in Chapter One, time plays an important role many modernist works, and it does as well in *A Girl*. Its timeline might, similar to Tom McCarthy's *C*, initially remind one of a Bildungsroman, since it follows the protagonist's whole life chronologically. The novel ends with her death and even starts before she is actually born, where she is narrating from her mother's womb: "Poke belly of baby that's kicking is me" (5). Upon closer examination, however, time is not represented in a conventional way at all.

First of all, there is no indication of time apart from the mentioning of the girl's and her brother's ages and the occasional references to the Star Wars characters Han, Luke, and Chewbacca (91; 163) and a Walkman (35; 111), which strongly reminds one of the 1980s. The reader learns that the story is set in Ireland because of the use of the Irish language in some instances, varying from words such as "a ghrá" (21), or "eejit" (122; 138; 163; 187), to phrases like "[a] haon, a dó, a haon, dó trí" (115), and even prayers: "I bless and cross him in ainm an Athar agus an Mhic agus Spioriaid Naimh. Amen. Amen" (147). Moreover, there are references to *The Irish Times* (94; 178) and to Irish mythology, such as the banshee (10) and the Children of Lir (202).

A Girl also contains big shifts in time, but they do not always remain unannounced. Instead, many chapters that follow a jump in time are introduced by the girl revealing her and her brother's age; "Two me. Four you five or so" (7), or "Fifteen sixteen" (63), so the reader knows when there has been shift in time and how much time has passed. However, this stops when the girl is fifteen and her brother is eighteen, a few pages before the girl suspects that her brother is ill again, and the only time age is mentioned again is on the very last page, where the girl says "For I'm twenty now when you were gone" (203). There are other indications of time, though, for example when the girl goes off to college, or when it is said that years, months, weeks, days, or hours pass.

Not only the reader is left in the dark regarding time, but the characters themselves also deal with what Pericles Lewis calls “radical temporal instability” as the condition of the protagonist’s brother worsens (P. Lewis 162). When he is asked what day and date it is, he “didn’t know those things at all” (173), and the girl herself also has trouble remembering how much time has passed: “For aaApril this. Or May? I don’t. What? Day going. Days go. And I’ve been here a long long time. Weeks or years or” (157), indicating that the concept of time has also become confusing for the characters themselves. This could, then, be related to another modernist characteristic: the idea that time is cyclical and repetitive rather than chronological and teleological (Childs 10).

When the girl goes back home to help her mother take care of her brother, every day is the same; the images of the girl making her brother breakfast, doctors visiting, and people from her mother’s prayer group visiting return often. This gets even worse when they have to watch her brother at night as well, which results in days and nights almost merging. Another scene that comes back several times is the girl going to the lake, where also the language used appears to be echoed. The first time the girl goes into the lake, she describes the water as “[c]ool and cold and colder” (55), and the last time she says it is “[t]he coldest water” (202). The water is also described as “going to the centre of the earth” (55) and going “down into the middle of the earth” (67). When the girl is in the water, her emotions are also repeated. Being in the water makes her “want to, feel like laugh” (55), and she is “[c]rying laughing” (202). Images of water and drowning, moreover, are also presented in the novel when the girl is not at the lake, for instance in the following scenes: she once dreams about drowning (29); she is afraid she will “live and drown” in her hometown (98); when she is having sex, “[w]ords drown like water” (136); she wishes to drown, “[f]ace into the water” (173); and there is a moment when she is so sad it feels like she is drowning: “i’m drowned i’m awake i’m drowned. [...] Water take all” (198). Finally, there is one scene in the novel that is filled with repetition, where the girl summarises with what men she has had sex with. Every man is introduced with the same phrase: “I met a man” (96-97). In the 21 lines that this sequence counts, this phrase is used twenty times, and according to the girl, she “met a man and many more” (97). This repetition of language and imagery repeats the round of some action, and the echoing underlines the idea of time as repetitive and cyclical, as well as demonstrating the instability of time.

Apart from being significant regarding the style of the novel, time itself is also an essential theme in *A Girl*, especially in relation to how much time the girl’s brother has left. At the very beginning of the novel, the mother is crying because her son only has six months

left to live, but her father tells her she should “show some gratitude for what you’ve got. A lot my girl. A lot”, because “he’d not had as much himself” (13). The tumour shrinks, but a doctor warns her that they will never completely get rid of it (4), implying it is only a matter of time before the cancer will come back. When the cancer ‘wakes’ again the countdown begins, starting with the brother having about a year left (121; 126). The girl wishes she could go back in time, and she thinks about how little time is left repeatedly (121). When she is told that her brother only has two to three months left, she replies: “No you. God. That’s not enough. Not. For him” (146), and when they are “going into the end” (179), she think about how “[t]here is so little time” (182). Even the imagery of clocks is present, which emphasises the idea that the novel is counting down to the brother’s death: the girl wants her uncle to “stop all of the clocks” and “[g]ive me time” (131), and later in the novel it almost seems like she is thinking of time and the clock as a time bomb: “Time’s going onwards. See it in my clock head. Ticking until you are run down” (153).

As discussed in Chapter One, the resurrection of the dead is also a modernist characteristic, employed by Joyce and Proust, that is used to show how the past inhabits the present (P. Lewis 163). Several people pass away in *A Girl*, such as the girl’s father and grandfather. Although these two characters do not necessarily come back as a vision to the protagonist, there is an interesting scene at her grandfather’s house where she directly faces death for the first time. The girl goes upstairs to sit next to her grandfather’s dead body, the first dead body she has ever seen, and although she says she does not “talk to the dead” (101), she is addressing him in her head when she thinks about how no one is praying for his soul and how no one will sit next to his body that night (102). The most important death in the novel is, of course, her brother’s. Although the spirits of her father and grandfather do not return to the girl, her brother’s does. Before she goes to the lake to drown herself, she visits her brother’s body and tells him not to forget about her, because she “won’t be long” (200), implying that she is about to take her own life. When she is in the water, her brother’s spirit comes to her and seems to guide her towards death: “Come on you say. Come with. Come down. [...] Dive with me. [...] There now. There now. Take my hand” (202). The girl believes he will also help her in the afterlife: “I’ll take your hand. You’ll show. You’ll show me all my lands and evil heart as you know it. Brother me. Clean here. Show me all the places of a soul. Where I will calm” (203). In this case, a very recent past inhabits the present, since her brother has passed away not long before she decides to follow him.

As explored above, time plays a dominant role in *A Girl*. Not only does McBride play with the instability of time which affects the style of the novel and emphasises the modernist

idea of time as cyclical and repetitive, but it is also an important theme that the narrative revolves around, which is also the case in many modernist works (P. Lewis 161). Lastly, even the modernist theme of the resurrection of the dead is present in the novel, which demonstrates how the past inhabits the present.

Narrative Style

As discussed in Chapter One, modernists step away from conventional literature. However, the themes that *A Girl* deals with are greatly traditional and have been explored often, especially in Irish literature, such as an unforgiving religion, damaged families, disease and death, abuse, and alcoholism. The reader is, moreover, introduced to a set of stereotypical Irish characters, such as the pious mother, absent father, immoral daughter, abusive uncle, and the intrusive Roman-Catholic priest. It has also been stated in Chapter One that in many modernist works, minor events overshadow or disguise the major ones. This is not the case in *A Girl*, where the brother's illness is, rather traditionally, the single most important event, and which influences the thoughts and actions of everyone else. Although its plot, themes, and characters are rather conventional within traditional Irish fiction, the style and language of the novel are not conventional at all. The use of language strongly reminds one of a stream of consciousness, and has even been described as “manag[ing] to convey pre-verbal experience” (McAlpin, “Challenging”). The opening lines of *A Girl* set the tone for the rest of the novel and reveal its highly experimental style:

For you. You'll soon. You'll give her name. In the stitches of her skin she'll
wear your say. Mammy me? Yes you. Bounce the bed, I'd say. I'd say that's
what you did. Then lay you down. They cut you round. Wait and hour and day. (3)

McBride's use of language can be described as fragmented, scattered, and disruptive, and she frequently plays with syntactical structures and punctuation. She stretches the possibilities of the English language, which results in a challenging and unique style that resembles the modernist stream of consciousness. McBride herself, however, has stated that she sees this style as a “stream of pre-consciousness, because it's about gut reaction rather than processed thought, about before language has begun to form. The reader is right in at the very beginning of every experience the girl is having” (qtd. in McCallum-Smith). The passage from the novel quoted above is narrated by the girl when she is still in her mother's womb, so it could be expected that the girl's language is fragmented and resembles the mind and speech of an infant. Indeed, the sentences and phrases become more coherent as she ages, but the text is

still very fragmented and broken. This suggests that the use of language is not solely a reflection of the girl's age, but of something else as well: the dramatic experiences she witnesses at a young age, such as the illness of her brother, their father leaving them, a verbally and sometimes physically abusive mother, and the sexual relationship with her uncle, have turned her into a troubled and traumatised girl, which does not only influence her actions and relationships later in life as discussed in the previous sections, but also her use of language.

The style and the way words, phrases, and sentences are put to paper directly reflect how the girl is feeling. When she just wakes up, for example, the text is very fragmented, suggesting that she feels confused and is not fully awake yet:

Today what's that? Today. Say. Play. May. There's coming up out of my heads. A. Ssssssomeone's coming. Wwwwwho's a dddddoctor. Who'ssss going to. Llllllook at mmmmy love. That is. Yyyyyyyou. I'll wash my. Clean my. Hide. Honour or the privilege of. Fuck-up. By my side. Your side. I know. Go down. (172)

There are many other instances that show how the girl's mental state and emotions affect her speech and thoughts, but the most striking scene that does this is the one where the girl is raped by a man she went to school with. Not only is this passage even more fragmented than the rest of the novel, but McBride also plays with spelling and the use of spaces as well as capital letters, which helps the scene build up towards a painful climax. When the man is pushing her to the ground and takes off her clothes, the girl's thoughts are still somewhat coherent, but a sense of panic is noticeable; "Fuck. Not. Fuck not. Help. Grab me. Fingers of my skin. With his filth hands I hear. All the sounds tonight. Raddle fuck in my head. Tonight I hands up my. Knickers up my. Hurt. Not me Jesus" (193). When he is raping her, the sentences become increasingly more experimental, including missing spaces and words that are written phonologically or spelled with their letter order mixed up:

Done fuk me open he dine done on me. Done done Til he hye happy fucky shoves upo comes ui. Kom shitting ut h mith fking kmg. I'm fking cmin up you. Retch I. Retch I. Dinneradntea I choke mny. Up my. Throat I. He come hecomehe (193).

As the man reaches his climax, the scene itself also seems to reach its climax, presenting the girl's thoughts with an unconventional use of capitals, reflecting the pain and shock she is in:

“Soon I’n dead I’m sre. Loose. Ver the aIrWays. Here. mY nose my mOuth I. VOMit. Clear. Clear. He stopS up Gets. Stands uP. Look. And I breath” (194). Afterwards, when the man is finished and walks away, extra spaces are used between some of sentences:

I. Hear his zip. Thanks for the fuck you thanks for that I. hear his
walking crunching. Foot foot. Go. Him Away. (194)

This suggests that the girl is slowly calming down and is regaining her breath, as opposed to the very hurried and breathless impression the missing spaces from the passages before gave. It feels like this scene could be an exact transcription of what the girl is thinking throughout this traumatising scene, clearly being a stream of thoughts or consciousness that went through the girl’s head during the action, which consequently makes the reader closely experience this moment with her. These lines are raw and unconventional, and they directly represent the protagonist’s state of mind.

The technique to emphasise certain episodes by having them contrast with other parts of the novel is not only used in the scene described above, but had been used on a bigger scale before this one. The pages and lines in *A Girl* are usually quite filled and there are not many white lines, except for two crucial moments in the novel: when a doctor tells the girl’s brother that he will die soon and when he dies (174; 188). In these scenes, almost every sentence starts on a new line, which gives the reader the feeling that the protagonist stops thinking or breathing for a moment and adds a dramatic pause between the sentences. These two scenes are even more ‘broken’ than the rest of the text, and this way of positioning the words on paper, which also strongly contrasts with the rest of the novel, has the result that it almost feels like a poem:

Please don’t leave. There’s the. Air flying out. Your eyes on me. They. You are.
Silent.
Breath.
Lungs go out. See the world out.
You finish that breath. Song breath.
You are gone out tide. And you close. Drift. Silent eyes. Goodbye.
My. lllllllllllllllllll. Love my. Brother no.
Silent.
He’s gone. He’s gone. Goodbye.
No. Oh please. My.
Done. And quiet.

And.

Gone. (188)

Besides these striking passages, it can also be argued that even the novel itself is written in a style that reminds one of verse form, because of its style. It has been said that McBride “tends to flirt with rather than embrace conventional grammar, choosing rhythm and internal rhyme [...] over straightforward exposition” (Hendrix). Phrases and sentences like “[a] right hook of a look in his eye all the time” (12); “the slither of one glob of snot or spit” (56); “Phone pissing money coins p’s away. [...] Pip by pip pip. [...] Ten p’s to p’s pounds” (127); and “Spite and spit and sick” (198), are only a few examples of the novel’s many internal rhymes, alliterations and assonances, which in combination with its short and confusing sentences indeed reminds one of verse form.

Although most of the themes presented in *A Girl* seem rather traditional, the way the novel is executed is highly experimental and stylistic. Its stream of (pre-)consciousness, fragmentation, syntax, and spelling directly reflect how the protagonist experiences life, which results in an interesting text that does not follow conventions of language or prose at all. The layout of two scenes in the novel is very distinct from the rest of the text, which does not only emphasise these episodes, but also interweaves verse form and prose.

Metamodernism

It has been mentioned in the introduction of this chapter that *A Girl* has repeatedly been compared to modernist writers and works, especially James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922) and *Finnegans Wake* (1939), due to its stream of consciousness and experimental style. McBride’s work can be seen as an ode to *Ulysses*, or even as an updated version of (the last chapter of) this famous modernist novel (Carpentier xv). There is a constant leap back to classic modernist writers like Joyce and Virginia Woolf, where a character’s inner thoughts are explored and the novel’s plot is guided by the protagonist’s stream of consciousness. This strongly connects with James and Seshagiri’s observation that a growing number of contemporary novelists “place a conception of modernism as revolution at the heart of their fictions, styling their twenty-first-century literary innovations as explicit engagements with the innovations of early-twentieth-century writing” (87).

Although the writing in *A Girl* resembles a Joycean stream-of-consciousness style, it is somewhat different. This style differs from Joyce’s, since it depicts the girl’s troubled life in a much more brutal and immediate way than Joyce’s stream of consciousness does. The reader

is introduced to a voice from a baby that is still in her mother's womb, and the style seems to connect to this throughout the entire book. McBride herself has stated that she wanted to take Joyce's stream of consciousness further by taking it back a step, developing a technique that she has named

a stream of pre-consciousness, because it's about gut reaction rather than processed thought, about before language has begun to form. The reader is right in at the very beginning of every experience the girl is having.

(qtd. in McCallum-Smith)

This meets another 'criterion' of James and Seshagiri's take on Metamodernism, which discusses how they group together novelists that "extend, reanimate, and repudiate twentieth-century modernist literature" (89). McBride does not simply use Joyce's stream of consciousness, but she adapts it, creating a new and innovative stream-of-pre-consciousness style.

Additionally, McBride has consciously placed herself in a modernist tradition in interviews and articles she has written for newspapers. In an interview with the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, she has stated that her beginning was "James Joyce, of course, and his quote about how 'wideawake language' and 'cutanddry grammar' is insufficient to cover all aspects of human existence" (McCallum-Smith). She has also written an article for *The Guardian* on how Joyce changed her life, where she states that reading *Ulysses* "changed everything I thought about language, and everything I understood about what a book could do" ("My Hero").

This does not only show that she has been influenced by modernism and that she feels closely connected to it, but she also quite directly says that she tried to pick up modernism and continue its legacy in her own way, which explains why her style resembles Joyce's writing on the one hand, but also differs from it on the other.

A Girl closely relates to what James and Seshagiri define as Metamodernist fiction. McBride has been placed in the modernist literary tradition reviewers and academics as well as by herself; she has repeatedly commented on her connection to modernism and on Joyce as an inspiration, although her stream of pre-consciousness style is different from his original stream of consciousness. McBride thus takes elements from modernist writers such as Joyce and Woolf, and alters them to fit a contemporary novel, which proves that she is innovative "through retrospection" (James and Seshagiri 94). This also shows that she has a self-

conscious relationship with modernist literature, a Metamodernist quality that is also discussed by James and Seshagiri (88).

Chapter 4: Ali Smith's *How to Be Both*

How to Be Both is a novel by the Scottish author Ali Smith and was first published by Hamish Hamilton in 2014. It tells the story of a teenaged girl living in contemporary society, George, who has recently lost her mother, and the story of Francesco del Cossa, a renaissance artist of the 1490s, whose fresco fascinated George's mother. Smith has built an extensive oeuvre, having written six novels, four short story collections, seven plays, and works of non-fiction before writing *How to Be Both*, having published two novels since then, and working on another novel which is expected to be published in 2019. Her work has been critically acclaimed and has been awarded and shortlisted many times, and a total of four of her novels have been shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize. *How to Be Both* has been one of Smith's most successful works, winning the Costa Novel of the Year Award (2014), the Goldsmiths Prize (2014), the Saltire Society Literary Book of the Year Award (2014), the Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction (2015), and having been shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize (2014) and the Folio Prize (2015).

Smith's novel has been received with much praise by scholars and critics, who have argued it is an "exceptional novel" (Wood), "tender, brilliant, and witty" (Chakrabarti, qtd. in Flood), and "dizzily good and so clever that it makes you want to dance" (F. Wilson), and Smith herself has been described as "a literary genius" (Chakrabarti, qtd. in Flood), as "dazzling in her daring" (Day), and even as "one of the most intelligent, inventive, downright impressive writers working anywhere in the world today" (Barley, qtd. in "Leading Scots"). Not only has *How to Be Both* been lauded by juries, academics, and reviewers, but the general public, overall, also seems to appreciate the novel. On goodreads.com, for example, 59% of the reviewers gave the book a four or five star rating, and only 15% rated it one or two stars ("How", *Goodreads*). The positive ratings on amazon.com are similar, with 58% of the reviewers awarding the novel a four or five star rating, but there are significantly more people who only granted it a single star, namely 23% ("How", *Amazon.com*). Moreover, reviewers on amazon.co.uk are even more divided, giving the novel an average rating of precisely 3 stars, with 29% awarding it five stars and 29% rating it one single star ("How", *Amazon*). The reviews written by the general public also reflect this division: a reviewer on Amazon said they "hated this book, and I can't say I've ever said that before. Tedious, hard to follow and trying to be too clever" (Mrs S A Summers), and another reviewer on Goodreads thought it was "a bit too creative/incentive for [them]" and that the "character development was lacking and much of the intentional edgy style was lost on [them]" (Lexi), whereas other reviewers

are more positive, calling it “one of the best books [they have] read in a while” (Douglas), and an “experimental” novel that is “challenging, but if you can give it your attention, it is wondrous” (Diane).

How to Be Both has, like Eimear McBride’s *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing*, often been discussed in relation to modernism or modernist characteristics by both the academic and the online reviewers. It has, for instance, been described as inventive (Flanery; Jowett; McAlpin, “Playful”), experimental (Miller; Gentry, although Gentry discusses how the novel is both experimental and traditional), and as “expand[ing] the boundaries of the novel” (Flanery). Also the word “modernist” itself is used in two professional reviews (Flanery; Miller), and in several online reviews (e.g. Mal Smith; Amy). Additionally, there are several online reviewers who think of the novel as postmodernist (e.g. Christine; Susan), and there was one professional reviewer who described it as “postmodern” and as including “postmodern gimmicks” (Charles). The same reviewer also remarks that the part with Francesco del Cossa’s narrative is written as “a stream-of-consciousness monologue” (Charles), linking *How to Be Both* to one of the most well-known modernist characteristics, and another professional reviewer partially agrees with him, stating that this part of the novel “starts with a stream-of-consciousness whoosh”, but adding that it “settles into a somewhat more traditional format” (Ogle). There are, however, significantly less online reviewers than academic reviewers that describe the novel as modernist or experimental, and many of the online reviewers discuss it like it is any other conventional novel, which could be due to the fact that although the novel’s style is somewhat experimental and unconventional, it is not nearly as fragmented and hard to follow as *Ulysses* (or as *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing*), for example. Moreover, Smith has been linked to famous modernist writers. Shami Chakrabarti, chair of judges of the Baileys Women’s Prize for Fiction, has said that *How to Be Both* reminded her “of what it felt like reading Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, all of the greats” (qtd. in Flood), and she is not the only one to associate the novel with Woolf: Patrick Flanery writes in his review for *The Telegraph* that “[o]ne might reasonably argue that Ali Smith is among Virginia Woolf’s most gifted inheritors”, and Amy Gentry compares the novel to Woolf’s novel *Orlando: A Biography* (1928) in her review for *Chicago Tribune*. It is not surprising that Woolf’s name is mentioned in these reviews, since the narrative of *How to Be Both* indeed strongly reminds one of *Orlando*, and plays with Woolf’s idea of the androgynous mind, meaning that one must be womanly-manly or man-womanly. The text’s relation to Woolf and *Orlando*, its style and form, and the way time and gender are represented will all be discussed more elaborately in this chapter, which will explore how

modernism is manifested in Ali Smith's *How to Be Both* in the same way this has been done in the previous chapters, and it will eventually be discussed in what way this novel can be related to Metamodernism.

Consciousness

How to Be Both focuses on two protagonists, George and Francesco, in two seemingly unrelated narratives with different settings. Both parts are narrated by their protagonists rather than by an omniscient narrator. The reader is provided with their subjective views of the world, since the stories are told solely from the protagonists' perspectives. An example of this is how Helena, George's classmate and later friend, is addressed. At first, her full name, Helena Fisker, is used, because George has only spoken to her once and she does not know her well. Later, Helena visits George's house and she introduces herself as "H" to George's brother, mentioning that only people who do not know her well call her Helena⁶. From this moment on, she is not referred to as Helena Fisker anymore: "George and H lean as far over the top deck wall as they can (they make them this high so it'll be less inviting to suicided, H says)" (84). She is addressed as "H" in the novel as if this is her real name, because the story is narrated from George's perspective, and she calls her "H" since they have become friends.

George's and Francesco's perspectives are expressed through the use of stream of consciousness, and, as a result, there is a strong focus on their inner selves, minds, and feelings, and on how they experience the world around them, rather than on the action itself that is occurring in the narrative. The reader gets to see their versions of reality and what is happening in the protagonists' minds, observing the mind of a teenage girl dealing with loss and mourning, as well as the mind of a renaissance artist who hides her true identity from the public so she could follow her dream. Because of these insights, the reader gets to feel close to the narrators. Another way the narrators and the reader connect is through their speech and thoughts, especially Francesco's, which make them human: the use of stream of consciousness shows George and Francesco rambling, interrupting themselves, and correcting themselves, as if they are actually people talking rather than being characters in a novel. This stylistic element will be discussed more elaborately in the section "Narrative Style".

Having the reader view the world from solely George's and Francesco's perspectives is not only used to emphasise the role of the inner self and to focus on the mind rather than the

⁶ Smith, Ali. *How to Be Both*. 2014. Penguin Books, 2015, 78. All subsequent references will be to this edition and will be given parenthetically in the text.

outside world, but it also underlines the notion that everyone has their own version of reality and experiences are subjective. This concern with subjective experience is often associated with modernist novelists like Dostoevsky, Flaubert, and James, who wanted to represent the way reality appears to different characters (P. Lewis 157-158). This idea of a subjective reality is also depicted throughout *How to Be Both*, where the reader is presented with both George's and Francesco's versions of reality. In Francesco's part, George is at a museum to look at one of Francesco's paintings, when a woman enters the room. George knows this woman; she is Lisa Goliard, and George and her mother suspected that she was spying on George's mother. George follows her through the museum and calls her name to check if it is really her, and even follows her to her home, coming back there every day to watch her and take pictures of her, to "let whoever's watching know she's watching" (185). Francesco, who sees all of this happening as a ghost, understand this very differently because she does not know anything about George. When Francesco sees her face, she notices "the blackness of sadness" round her eyes and thinks that George is "lovelorn" (235; 244), not knowing that her sadness is related to mourning rather than love. After several days of going to Lisa's house, Francesco is not sure if it is love, because George was "staring with a face full of hostility, almost so that I believed she might spit like a snake", and when Lisa approached her, she did not say anything, "though her face was all irony", and took pictures of her with her tablet (324). Although Francesco realises that her first interpretation of the relationship between George and Lisa was wrong, she never finds out why George keeps visiting Lisa's house, because she does not know what has happened to her. This shows that experiences are subjective, and that there is not one universal reality.

Furthermore, Smith makes a distinction between the body and the mind, where the mind or consciousness is seen as being separate from the body, which is similar to what McBride does in *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing*. Although George's mother has passed away, she lives on in George's mind through George's memories. It does not matter that her body is not there anymore, because she is kept alive in the consciousness of others. George herself is also interested in how the mind relates to the body, asking people around her "Do you think, when we die, that we still have memories?" (13), hoping that the consciousness and soul will stay the same after the body has passed away. Francesco herself is the embodiment of the answer to this question: she is a ghost, merely a consciousness or soul without a body, that appears in the museum and talks about her life, implying that one does keep their memories after they die and that the consciousness is indeed distinct from the body. Additionally, Francesco is still alive in a way, although she has been dead for several centuries, because her

mind is the same as when she was alive. This suggests that the consciousness is not only superior to the body, which decomposes after a period of time, but that it stays intact for the rest of eternity.

There is another instance in the novel where Smith underlines the importance of consciousness. In this scene, it seems like the novel (or Smith herself), rather than the narrator, is talking directly to the reader, breaking the fourth wall: “This is the point in this story at which, according to its structure so far, a friend enters or a door opens or some kind of plot surfaces” (182). This is followed by some side thoughts between brackets, where this ‘new’ narrator is even questioning what is going to happen next:

(but which kind? the one that means the place where a dead person’s buried?
the one that means the place where a building’s to be built? the one that means
a secret stratagem?); this is the place in this book where a spirit of twist in the
tale has tented, in the past, to provide a friendly nudge forward to whatever’s
coming next. (182)

After this, a description of what will happen half an hour later is given, like a flash-forward, introduced by a phrase which also strongly implies a sense of dramatic irony: “What [George] doesn’t know yet is that [...]” (182), indicating that the reader now knows something that George does not. Since the rest of George’s narrative has been written in a free indirect discourse from her perspective, this part stands out. It feels like the novel, or a omniscient narrator who suddenly appeared, directly addresses the reader, implying that the novel has its own consciousness and is aware of it being a novel and having an audience. This breaking down of the fourth wall is also connected to the modernist era, but not necessarily to the modernist novel. In theatre, playwrights broke down the fourth wall and “allowed their characters to discuss their own status as characters in a play”, illustrating the crisis of representation that modernist artists were dealing with (P. Lewis 3). In *How to Be Both*, the novel discusses its own status as a novel, commenting on its structure and on the expectations the reader might have on how the novel will continue.

Not only does the novel manage to be ‘both’ by providing two stories in one book, but also its two narrators, who are born as girls, are ‘both’ in a way: they break the gender barriers by being both male and female, or androgynous. This androgyny is mainly visible in the character of Francesco, whose public identity is male, whereas she is a female biologically. This disguise is needed because it would be impossible for her to get trainings and jobs as a female artist in the fifteenth century. She keeps this a secret, and she does not even tell her

best friend that she is actually a girl until he finds out himself (278). George is a girl and does not hide it at all, but when Francesco appears as a ghost and sees her, she initially thinks George is a boy for about a third of her narrative, until she realises that “[t]his boy is a girl. I knew it”, because she hears George talk “in the unbroken undisguised voice of what can only be girl” (251). Their appearances can indeed be described as androgynous; when Francesco sees George’s face she thinks it looks very girly, which is normal at this age according to her (235), and also Francesco’s own body was slim and boy like, making it not too difficult for her to bind her chest (237-238).

Androgyny is not only present in the two main characters, but this theme comes back more often. One of the figures on Francesco’s fresco also seems to be both, and neither George nor her mother can decide whether it is an “effeminate boy” or “a boyish girl” (111). The fact that the figure is holding an arrow and a hoop, “male and female symbols one in each hand” (111), makes it a perfectly balanced and ambiguous character. The angels in another one of Francesco’s works “could all be either male or female” (155), and there is a reference to William Shakespeare’s play *As You Like It*, in which the main character, Rosalind, disguises herself as a boy for much of the play, and a male character, Orlando, falls in love with her. This character relates to Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando*, a novel about a person of ambiguous gender that Smith pays homage to in *How to Be Both*, which will be discussed more elaborately below in the section “Metamodernism”.

As discussed above, Smith uses George and Francesco as unreliable narrators and their consciousness, androgynous identities, and inner selves are an integral part of the novel. Having the reader only view the world from their perspectives underlines the idea of reality as subjective. Additionally, there is more emphasis on what happens in their minds and how they experience life than on the outside world, which is expressed through the use of stream of consciousness, which reminds one of the modernist attempts “to render human subjectivity in ways more real than realism” by using, amongst others, interior monologue and stream of consciousness (Childs 3). Lastly, Smith explores the role of consciousness even further by breaking down the fourth wall and giving the novel itself a consciousness, which relates to modernist theatre and stresses the importance of consciousness in *How to Be Both*.

Time

Smith constantly plays with the conception of time in her novel; flashbacks, flash-forwards, or even flashbacks and flash-forwards in flashbacks appear frequently. The blurb of the book emphasises this playfulness regarding time by stating the novel deals with “[t]wo tales of love

and injustice [that] twist into a singular yarn where time gets timeless [...]" (Penguin Books, 2015). Indeed, the story shifts between the past, present, and future so often, that it almost does become timeless. Not only are the two stories set almost six centuries apart, but it is also a matter of pure chance which of the two narratives the reader is presented with first: since half of the copies are printed with George's narrative first, and half are printed with Francesco's part first, some of the readers start reading a novel that is set in the 1460s while others start in 2013. The fact that the two parts can be read in either order underlines the modernist idea of time as cyclical and repetitive (Childs 10), as well as adding to a point George's mother makes about time. She also appears to think of time as cyclical and repetitive, since she talks about "the layering and simultaneity of experiences that seem to be separated by time" (Miller). When she and George are in Italy, she tells George that if they had been there seventy years earlier, they might have been "watching people being lined up and shot against that wall" (103). George, however, sees time as chronological and linear and is appalled by history, "its only redeeming feature being that it tends to be well and truly over" (104). Her response to her mother's comment on what might have happened years ago is that it does not matter, "[b]ecause that was then. This is now. That's what time *is*" (104, emphasis in original). Her mother asks "Do things just go away? [...] Do things that happened not exist, or stop existing, just because we can't see them happening in front of us?" (104), questioning if time is indeed as chronological as George thinks, and wanting George to realise how history has shaped the world they live in today, emphasising the idea that history is never 'over' and that time does not really 'pass', but that the past inhabits the present and that "nothing's not connected" (106), thus implying that time is indeed cyclical.

Smith is also playful regarding the chronology of the narrative itself, since Francesco's part technically takes place after George's, but the story she tells does not. Francesco is a ghost who appears right after George's narrative is finished, in the museum where George is looking at one of her paintings. Most of Francesco's story, however, consists of her reminiscing about her life as a painter in the early Renaissance, so it could be said that her story takes place both before and after George's story. This does not only link back to the repetitive and cyclical nature of time, but it is also highly reminiscent of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. In this modernist classic, the external events of the plot proceed in chronological order, while the characters' minds continually flash back into the past, thus demonstrating "the disjunction between external and internal time" (P. Lewis 162). This is also the case in *How to Be Both*, although only in the editions that have George's narrative printed as the first

part, since the external plot of Francesco's narrative is set after George's, but the memories she shares are from centuries before.

The modernist characteristic of the resurrection of the dead, used to show how the past inhabits the present (P. Lewis 163), is also explored in *How to Be Both*. Because of the many flashbacks and memories about George's mother, she is a greatly developed character and the reader does, in fact, learn more about her than about George's father, who is still alive. She is not only present in George's flashbacks, but her words also seem to unconsciously appear in George's mind in the present, and there is even an instance of George replying to her: "The cloud of unknowing, her mother said in her ear. / Meets the cloud of knowing, George thought back" (172). Another character who is resurrected from death is Francesco. She is not resurrected by someone else through memories or flashbacks, but she arises as a ghost who is telling her own narrative. Half of the novel is thus narrated from the perspective of a deceased person who is, according to herself, "*reborn into a place of coldness and mystery*" (227, emphasis in original). Francesco's 'rebirth' is a quite literal example of the past inhabiting the present, since this character from the past witnesses and comments on the present.

On several occasions, the importance of time is emphasised by stressing the tense that is used, for instance when it is mentioned that George has laughed three times since September "in an undeniable present tense" (80), when George realises she had used "the future tense, like there might be such a thing as a future" (173), and after the novel gives a flash-forward of what is about to happen in the future tense, the reader is brought back to the present with the following line: "For now, in the present tense, George sits in the gallery [...]" (186). George herself also switches between tenses regularly, but only when she is talking about her mother. She does this on the first page of her narrative, where she immediately explains why she does this as well. She is talking about how her mother says something, but then realises that the tense she used is incorrect: "Not says. Said. George's mother is dead" (3). Here, it seems like this shift in tense is not because of a shift in time or to emphasise the present, but it feels more like an afterthought, almost like the mind forgot that it needs to put anything related to her mother in the past tense, since she has passed away.

In addition to being a stylistic element or a topic of discussion, time is an important theme in *How to Be Both*. As addressed in the introduction and in Chapter One of this thesis, literary modernism emerges as a response to rapidly changing times (P. Lewis 247). The new, innovative technology was one of these changes (Childs 16, see also Chapter Two), and it seems like Smith is commenting on contemporary technological changes in her novel. *How to Be Both* deals with how time has changed over the centuries, but also on how it is still the

same. Smith uses the character of Francesco as a way to address these differences and similarities. Because Francesco lived in the fifteenth century, she has a hard time interpreting technology from the twenty-first century: “*What kind of a world, though, that has no horses?*” (231, emphasis in original). She does not know what phones, tablets, or photographs are, so she is impressed when she sees these things and tries to understand them, which results in interesting thoughts. When she sees a picture, she comments that it “is by a great artist surely in its patchwork of light, dark determination, gentleness” (287-288), and when she sees people taking photos with their phones, she questions if “all the people of this place are painters going about their world with the painting tools of their time? (230). She also has an interpretation of the purpose of phones and tablets that clearly stems from a fifteenth-century worldview:

[S]ome the size of a hand, some the size of a face or a whole head, dedicated to saints perhaps or holy folk, and they look or talk to or pray to these tablets or icons all the while by holding them next to their heads or stroking them with fingers and staring only at them, signifying they must be heavy in their despairs to be so consistently looking away from their world and so devoted to their icons. (230)

The last phrase adds to something Francesco has said before: “this place is full of people who have eyes and choose to see nothing” (229), criticising modern people for being obsessed with their phones. This, then, ties in with the titles Smith gave to the two parts of the novel, which also seem to comment on our new, digital age. Francesco’s story is titled ‘Eye’, the original way people used to see or watch others, but George’s story, set in contemporary England, is called ‘Camera’. Not only are people today being watched all the time by surveillance cameras, but people themselves also seem to view the world through their phones, connecting with others through social media and taking pictures of everything around them. As a result, everyone is watched by everyone, and everything is documented. Moreover, the characters of George and Francesco show how the meaning of words changes over time. Both women use the word “picture” in their narratives, but they have a different definition of the word. When George uses the word, she is talking about photographs taken with a camera or a phone, whereas Francesco uses the word to describe paintings or drawings made by people by using their eyes and hands, which again can be connected to the titles of their respective parts.

Although many things have changed over time, there are also elements of life that are still the same. Nature, for instance, has not changed. Francesco wonders if God send her to purgatory, but as she sees blackbird, she doubts this, saying “can it really be purgatorium and not the old earth when it is so *like* the earth in the song of the bird, its everlasting unchanging fineness?” (231, emphasis in original). Human character, too, is still similar, since Francesco effortlessly recognises certain emotions and manners. As discussed before, the first thing Francesco notices when she sees George’s face is sorrow: “Most I see is that round his eyes is the blackness of sadness (burnt peachstone smudged in the curve of the bone at both sides of the top of the nose” (235). Later, she watches George dancing in her room and her brother joining her. When George realises her brother is also in her room, she “roared like a furious African cat, hit him over the head with her hand and chased him from the room”, by which Francesco “gauged them sister and brother” (252). Francesco immediately identifies the look on George’s face as a look of sadness and recognises the way George and her brother interact with each other as behaviour of siblings. This indicates that not only nature, but also emotions and behaviour are timeless, which in turn relates to the modernist idea of time as cyclical and repetitive (Childs 10).

As established, time plays an integral role in *How to Be Both*. It is not only an essential theme of the novel to illustrate how times and technology have changed, but it also affects the novel’s style. Smith plays with time by constantly switching between the past, present, and future, which demonstrates the instability of time, something that modernist writers were also interested in (P. Lewis 162). This playfulness regarding time, the fact that the two narratives can be read in either order, the comment George’s mother makes on simultaneity of experiences separated by time, and the timelessness of nature and human emotions and behaviour all add to the modernist idea of time as cyclical and repetitive rather than chronological. Smith also focuses on what Lewis calls “the disjunction between external and internal time” (162), by making a clear distinction in chronology between external events of the plot and thoughts of the mind. Furthermore, the element of the resurrection of the dead is used to show how the past inhabits the present, and complements George’s mother argument that history has had influence on our lives today.

Narrative Style

As mentioned before, the novel consists of two parts which are narrated by two different protagonists. These two narratives stand on their own and can be read without the other, which is used in the way the novel is published: half of the copies are printed with George’s

narrative first, and half are printed with Francesco's part first, which means some of the readers have a very different reading experience than others. Every single reader, however, is 'plunged' into the story, since both parts begin *in medias res*. George's narrative starts with the following sentence: "Consider this moral conundrum for a moment, George's mother says to George who's sitting in the front passenger seat" (3). This is part of a conversation between her and her mother, but it is quite quickly explained that this is a flashback from last May, when her mother was still alive (3). The start of Francesco's story is more complicated, because it features a rather poetic narration with little punctuation that goes on for two pages:

Ho this is a **mighty twisting thing** *fast* as a
fish being pulled by its mouth on a hook
 if a *fish* could be *fished* through a
 6 **foot thick** wall made of **bricks** or an
 arrow if an arrow could fly in a leisurely
curl like the **coil** of a **snail** or a
 star with a **tail** if the *star* was *shot* [...] (189, emphasis added to indicate **assonance**
 and *alliteration*)

Not only the reader is left in the dark about what exactly is happening, but it becomes clear that Francesco herself is also confused about what is going on, which results in a fragmented text with an unusual layout. According to Childs, modernist writing "'plunges' the reader into a confusing and difficult mental landscape which cannot be immediately understood" (6), which is exactly what happens in both the narratives of *How to Be Both*, but mostly in Francesco's, whose section only starts to be somewhat coherent after she understands what is happening herself, which takes her almost ten pages. The abovementioned verse form at the beginning of Francesco's narrative is also used at the end of her part. Here, she starts forgetting things again and the text becomes less coherent. This is similar to the way she was introduced, and it indicates that she will be leaving again. These two sequences, as can be seen in the excerpt quoted above, are filled with internal rhyme and assonances, alliterations, they lack capitals and punctuation, and their layout is unconventional. These parts directly reflect Francesco's mind and how puzzled she is through an advanced stream of consciousness, and they show Smith's experimental writing style.

Apart from beginning *in medias res*, the two parts are written from George's and Francesco's perspectives and as a stream of consciousness. Although both parts are written in a stream-of-consciousness style, the way they are narrated are not at all similar. Smith gave

both narrators their own voices; their use of language and tone are different, and so is their use of punctuation. Moreover, George's part is written from a third person limited point of view and has an indirect style, whereas Francesco's narrative is written in first person and in free indirect discourse. As a result, Francesco's part has a stronger sense of interior monologue. Although both narratives do not use inverted commas to represent speech or thoughts, George's narrative does use 'tags', such as "he said" or "she thought", to clarify who said what and to make a distinction between speech and thoughts. These tags are not used in Francesco's narrative, but they are also not completely omitted, since Francesco sometimes uses these tags when she is telling stories of her life. These memories are more coherent than her own thoughts, which can be rather chaotic.

Smith's use of interior monologue can be seen, for example, when George is looking up a word in a dictionary and the reader is included in the process:

Plonk piazza pelmet pathway partake pastiche pathetic see under pathos.

The quality that arouses pity. Pathetic. Affecting the emotions of pity, grief or sorrow. Sadly inadequate. (Interesting: inadequate *and* sad.) Contemptible.

Derisory. (30, emphasis in original)

Although Smith uses stream of consciousness in George's part, its style is not as experimental or difficult as in, for instance, *Ulysses* or *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing*. Moreover, moments that might be more difficult to understand are often marked, so the reader is informed that they should pay attention. In the excerpt above, George's thoughts are put between brackets, so it is easy to see the difference between George's thoughts and the dictionary's text. A more challenging excerpt that very directly includes George's feelings is the following:

This is the third time H has come to the house.

I thought you weren't talking to me / what if I will never love / never want / never desire / I think I might not be a very /

Hi, George says. (134, emphasis in original)

The unfinished sentences in italics are clearly part of a train of thought that races through George's mind as soon as she sees Helena. The fact that it is printed in italics notifies the reader that something unusual is happening here, and helps them find out that these are thoughts instead of speech. The slashes between the phrases also guide the reader because they keep the lines somewhat grammatically correct and make it easier to distinguish the phrases.

Francesco's narrative is more challenging and experimental than George's. This might be the case because it is told from a first person perspective, which makes it possible for Smith to record Francesco's thoughts directly from her mind without adding a narrator like in George's narrative. This results in sequences like this:

And, just saying, but whose saint is it anyway that that boy with his
back to me's spending all his time
torch bearer, Ferrara, seen from the back, he was a boy who ran past
me in the street : it was when they were calling for painters for painting the
palace of not being bored and I was up for the job, I'd worked on the panels
of the muses at the palace of beautiful flowers with Cosmo and the rest and
was now well known in Ferrara and even more well known in Bologna, I didn't
need the court, no one in Bologna gave a toss about the court (anyway the
court didn't need me, the court had *Cosmo*) no, wait, start at the
cause it truly began with the man they called the Falcon cause of his first
name being Pellegrin : he was Borse's adviser, a professor and scholar [...]
(196, emphasis in original)

First, Francesco is commenting on George, whom she thinks is a boy, and wonders whose painting George is looking at. In the middle of narrating this sentence, she is reminded of someone else she saw from the back: a torch bearer. This, in turn, reminds her of her role as a painter and her rivalry with Cosmo, and finally she stops telling this part of her story and wants to start at the beginning. In this excerpt, Francesco is still somewhat confused by her resurrected presence and has trouble ordering her memories. This is expressed by interior monologue and shows Francesco switch stories and leave sentences unfinished to start new ones, which is reminiscent of Virginia Woolf's stream-of-consciousness technique. Francesco's use of punctuation is also quite unconventional, as can be seen in the excerpt above. She often puts afterthoughts or personal comments on a situation between brackets, but most striking is her use of full stops and commas. She does not use these often, and sometimes pages pass without them. Instead, Francesco uses colons. Towards the end of the novel, it is revealed why she does this. Her mother had a "habit of putting these 2 dots between clauses where a breath should come. It's my habit too, I said" (337). This revelation underlines how close the reader gets to Francesco's mind and how 'pure' her narration is.

Also repetition is used as a stylistic device. George and Francesco both lose their mothers at a young age, and *How to Be Both* illustrates how they deal with their loss. Both

girls try to keep the memory of their mothers alive by honouring her habits or things. George keeps pictures of her mother in her room which her brother is not allowed to touch, and she dances the twist every day because her mother used to do this; even the lyrics to a specific song she dances to are repeated numerous times. Francesco also memorised her mother by going through her clothes and smelling them. She falls asleep in a trunk with her mother's clothes and tries on one of her dresses, wearing "nothing but her clothes from then on" (214), until her father asks her to stop wearing them because he cannot bear it (215). This repetition of mourning connects the two stories, which are not very closely related on other levels. Apart from this repetition of theme, there is also a repetition of language in Francesco's narrative. The phrase "I forgive" suddenly appears on the third page of her narrative without any explanation or context. This phrase is repeated over 6 times throughout the story, but they are never accompanied by a clarification. One time, the sentence reads "(Cosmo. / I forgive.)" (300), indicating that Francesco might forgive Cosmo for something he did. The reader does learn that a talented painter visits Francesco to look at a painting and tells her it is worthless and meaningless (361). Two days later, Francesco's workshop is wrecked and the painting is gone (362). It is not stated that Cosmo was the painter and that he was the one who wrecked her workshop, but it is certainly implied. The repeated phrases might thus show that Francesco forgives Cosmo for stealing her painting, and the fact that they are repeated so often and also appear in her less coherent trains of thought, might indicate that she has thought about it a lot.

In her novel, Smith uses many narrative techniques that are associated with modernism, such as *in medias res* and stream of consciousness. These techniques reflect how George and Francesco experience life, but not in a similar style, since both women have their own voice. Mainly Francesco's narrative features experimental writing because of its unconventional punctuation, its free indirect speech which sometimes results in fragmented and incoherent writing, and because of the way verse form is interweaved into prose at the beginning and end of her part.

Metamodernism

In the previous chapters, it has been established that Tom McCarthy's *C* mostly alludes to literary modernism in its content, whereas Eimear McBride's *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* refers to modernism through its experimental style. *How to Be Both* does both. Smith focuses on her protagonists' subjective perspective and the workings of their minds, and she uses typically modernist narrative techniques like stream of consciousness, free indirect discourse,

in medias res. The novel also explores the possibilities of syntax and punctuation, as well as prose itself. Smith does not seem to adapt these techniques like McBride and, to some extent, McCarthy did, so James and Seshagiri's description of Metamodernist fiction, which, according to them, should "extend, reanimate, and repudiate" modernist literature, does not apply to Smith's writing style (89).

However, it does apply to the novel's content, which is also related to modernism. As mentioned in the introduction and the section 'Consciousness' of this chapter, Smith pays homage to Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928). Both *Orlando* and *Francesco* are artists; both novels extensively deal with travelling through time; and the theme of androgyny is explored in both works, since *Orlando* actually changes from a man into a woman and George's and *Francesco*'s genders are also described as ambiguous. Although *How to Be Both* uses themes that were integral to Woolf's works, it is not a pure rewriting of *Orlando*. Whereas the main themes of *Orlando* are how men and women are treated differently and have very different lives gender barriers, the main focus of *How to Be Both* concerns the twenty-first century, focusing on the digital age and on how everyone is constantly being watched. There is a strong connection between the two novels, but *How to Be Both* is mostly concerned with the contemporary world and technology instead of gender related issues, although these also appear several times throughout the novel in a more subtle manner.

Smith herself has not commented on her stance on modernism, the return of modernism, or on her novel being received as alluding to modernism. There are no interviews available where she discusses these things, and this topic is never brought up by the interviewers either. She does say the following in an interview for the website of the Man Booker Prize: "'Practise anonymity', that's Virginia Woolf's good advice. Self-consciousness of the writer-self is of no real use, ever, to any book" (qtd. in Leah). This might explain why she never discusses the topic of modernism, in relation to her novel or not: she believes it will not do the novel any good. She does thus not accept this modernist label, but she does not reject it either. Nevertheless, the incredibly strong link between *How to Be Both* and *Orlando* implies that Smith has consciously placed herself in the modernist tradition.

How to Be Both fits in with what James and Seshagiri define as Metamodernist fiction. Smith's novel connects to both groups that James and Seshagiri call "narratives of modernism"; it is shaped by "aesthetics of discontinuity, nonlinearity, interiority, and chronological play", and it is "plotted around the very creation and reception of modern art and letters" (89). Although Smith's narrative style is not very innovative and stays true to traditional modernist techniques, the author does demonstrate "innovation through

retrospection”: she takes themes from Woolf, and alters them to fit a contemporary novel. Lastly, Smith does not comment on her or her novel’s relationship with modernism, but it could be argued that the undeniable link between *How to Be Both* and *Orlando* show that she has been inspired by Woolf’s work, thus consciously connecting herself and her work to literary modernism.

Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to explore how modernism manifests itself in *C* by Tom McCarthy (2010), *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* by Eimear McBride (2013), and *How to Be Both* by Ali Smith (2014), and how these novels can thus be seen as “Metamodernist”. This has been researched through textual analysis by charting which modernist techniques and themes are used in the novels, as well as connecting these to James and Seshagiri’s interpretation of Metamodernism. It has been established that modernism manifests itself in all three novels, but they all do this in different manners. Additionally, it has been observed that these novels can also be related to David James and Urmila Seshagiri’s definition of Metamodernism.

Regarding consciousness and the reflection of the mind, particularly McBride and Smith employ modernist characteristics in *A Girl* and *How to Be Both*. In these novels, they both emphasise their protagonists’ consciousness, identities, subjective realities, and inner selves by using first person, unreliable narrators and streams of consciousness. This connects to the modernist attempts “to render human subjectivity in ways more real than realism” (Childs 3). *C*, on the other hand, does quite the opposite. The novel is told from an outside narrator, and McCarthy does not use stream of consciousness. In fact, there is hardly any focus on his protagonist’s mind or on how he experiences life. McCarthy connects to consciousness in a different way: he draws a line between Serge and Freud’s psychoanalysis and the unconscious. All three authors make a distinction between the mind and the body, each of them arguing that the mind is superior to the body, which reminds one of modernism’s greater interest “in the workings of the mind rather than the body” (Childs 8).

Time also plays an integral role in the three novels, which is the case in many modernist works as well (P. Lewis 161). McCarthy combines conventional and modernist concepts of time in *C*, narrating the story in a chronological and linear fashion, but also suggesting that time is cyclical and repetitive and incorporating scenes that demonstrate the instability of time. *C* also directly links to modernism because of its setting and through allusions to influential modernist figures and movements. This is similar to *A Girl*, which is narrated chronologically as well, but where McBride also plays with the instability of time and the modernist idea of time as circular and repetitive. Smith is more experimental in her portrayal of time in *How to Be Both*, which greatly affects the novel’s style. She constantly switches between the past, the present, and the future, making the novel almost timeless, emphasising the instability of time. She also shows how nature and emotions are timeless, again underlining the idea of time as repetitive and cyclical, which is in sharp contrast with

the rapidly developing nature of technology. Lastly, both *A Girl* and *How to Be Both* include the modernist theme of the resurrection of the dead in their novels, which demonstrates how the past inhabits the present.

The narrative styles of the novels are very distinct from each other. McCarthy's style in *C* is highly conventional and traditional, without interior monologue or fragmentation, and the novel reads more like a realist work than a modernist one. The fact that it fits many different genres and combines several techniques, resulting in a melting pot of literary phenomena, could be argued to be innovative in itself. Additionally, there are some experimental and playful elements included, such as repetition, alliteration, and puns. McCarthy is also creative with these elements, slightly altering the traditional literary devices of alliteration and *in medias res*. Smith's style in *How to Be Both* is reminiscent of modernism because of its use of stream of consciousness and *in medias res*. Mostly Francesco's part features experimental writing through its free indirect speech, its unconventional punctuation, and its interweaving of verse form and prose. The style of *A Girl* is the most unconventional out of the three novels analysed in this thesis. Not only does McBride test the possibilities of language, syntax, and spelling, creating sentences that are challenging to understand, she also uses free indirect discourse and stream of consciousness in a new way: she turns it into an innovative stream of pre-consciousness, which is about "gut reaction rather than processed thought, about before language has begun to form" (qtd. in McCallum-Smith).

As established in the previous chapters, James and Seshagiri discuss several elements that, according to them, are a part of Metamodernist fiction. First of all, their definition of Metamodernist fiction seems to be the following: "contemporary fictions distinguished by inventive, self-conscious relationships with modernist literature" (88). They also discuss two types of "narratives of modernism": it refers to experimental fiction that is shaped by an aesthetics of discontinuity, nonlinearity, interiority, and chronological play; and additionally it describes fictions that are plotted around the very creation and reception of modern art (James and Seshagiri 89). Lastly, they state that the metamodernist novelists they group together "extend, reanimate, and repudiate twentieth-century modernist literature" (89), and that these novelists should capture the "logic of innovation through retrospection" (94). McCarthy's *C* falls into the second category of "narratives of modernism", and is innovative by merging various genres from decades ago to create a new, innovative novel, as well as extending modernist literature by adapting certain stylistic elements. Additionally, McCarthy has self-consciously placed himself in the modernist tradition by commenting on the legacy of modernism, saying that "the task for contemporary literature is to deal with the legacy of

modernism” (qtd. in Purdon). McBride has also self-consciously placed herself in the modernist tradition by stating how she was inspired by Joyce. *A Girl* seems to fit in the first category of “narratives of modernism” because of its highly experimental style that is inspired by modernist literature. McBride is also innovative by taking Joyce’s stream of consciousness a step further in *A Girl*, extending this modernist technique and creating a new one that fits her contemporary novel. Lastly, Smith’s novel seems to fall into both categories of “narratives of modernism”. Smith’s style in *How to Be Both* is rather traditionally modernist and does not show innovation, but the author is innovative by writing a novel inspired by *Orlando*, taking themes from Woolf, and altering them to fit a contemporary novel. Although Smith does not comment on her novel’s relationship with modernism, the undeniable connection between her novel and Woolf’s *Orlando* reveal that she has been inspired by this modernist author, so it could be argued that she does consciously place herself in the modernist tradition. The three novels by McCarthy, McBride, and Smith all meet the aforementioned ‘criteria’ that James and Seshagiri list, and it could thus be concluded that they strongly connect to their definition of Metamodernism.

Overall, this thesis has argued that *C*, *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing*, and *How to Be Both* all return to modernism in different ways, but that they can all be related to Metamodernism. The Metamodernist novel discusses contemporary themes using traditional modernist techniques. Literary modernism can thus be seen as a cultural archive that is used by contemporary novelists as a source of inspiration, who reuse the elements they think are interesting, and alter them to fit their contemporary works.

As noted in the introduction and in Chapter One of this thesis, the concept of Metamodernism only recently emerged, and the developments within this area are very recent and ongoing. With regard to possibilities for future research, it would be interesting to look at more contemporary novels and see whether they can be analysed as Metamodernist, or look at more novels by these same authors and explore if they also employ (Meta)modernist elements in these novels. Additionally, further research might pay attention to the differences between British and Irish contemporary fiction regarding this topic; it has been observed that McBride mostly places herself in the Irish modernist tradition by stating that Joyce was an inspiration and by using Joycean modernist characteristics, so it could be studied whether other Irish novelists do the same. Most importantly, however, this thesis has not elaborately discussed the philosophy behind Metamodernism and has not commented on this in relation to the novels, which would be an interesting next step.

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