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Cripping Time: The Complex Present of Post-ADA Narratology

By

Ariel Baker-Gibbs

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

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University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Namwali Serpell, Co-Chair
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Professor Mark Goble
Professor Abigail De Kosnik

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Abstract

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In the entwined history of the teenager and the disabled person, both are trapped in uncertain temporalities, framed as figures of rehabilitation: sighs of relief come only when the disabled person "becomes normal" or when the teenager "grows up." This history is present in the popularity of the young adult as conceived by young adult (YA) literature. The discomfort around the liminal figures of the teen and the disabled person manifests in the self-contradictory concept of the "young" "adult" which has expanded beyond the teenager alone, appearing across many genres of literature, film, TV, social media, and Internet culture.

Much like the disabled person, the young adult is a figure simultaneously born of the market and resistant to it. Since the 1990 signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the millennial young adult represents a cultural shift from the linear rhetoric of child-to-adult growth to a complex superimposition of time, body, and space in reaction to the failures of twenty-first century neoliberalism. This form of the "young adult" reorients us from the traditional teleologies of reproduction and productivity interrogated by queer theorists to a new fixation on the *present*, most simply exemplified by the present tense narration popularly used by YA novels. The formulations of the present that the young adult brings into focus are not only queer, but also versions of "crip time."

Crip time originates in the nonlinear unpredictability and "unproductivity" of chronic pain. It has since been generalized to describe the times through which disabled people's bodies move. The common act of "bending the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds" is disavowed in mainstream culture, even as crip time exemplifies how people's bodies are incommensurable with the temporal demands of neoliberal capitalism. I identify and historicize four crip modes of "bending the clock" that the narrative form of the "young adult" brings to light—*procrastinating, confounding, swapping*, and *dwelling*.

Using a narratological and historicist approach, *Cripping Time* names those temporal strategies that demonstrate the struggle between the entertaining, engrossing figure of the young adult and the ways in which they move through the often bleak realities they inhabit. In turn, I illustrate how disability or cripness, has become the predominant lens for the popular literature and culture of the new millennium.

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# Introduction: Bending the Clock, or Narrating Ability

What do you do when you cannot do something, when you struggle to do it, but you *have* to do it? Feminist queer crip theorist Alison Kafer says, in a much-quoted line: "Rather than bend disabled bodies and minds to meet the clock, crip time bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds."[1] So how do you react under the clock? How do you trick yourself; how do you trick everyone else? How do you bend the clock?

These questions are especially urgent in the period following the national codification and assimilation of disability into the workforce and into social life to a degree never before achieved. This historical fact undergirds the larger picture of both how people move through time and how they choose to represent those movements on a massively popular scale. This manipulation of time is recognizable in Elizabeth Freeman's reading of Foucault's biopolitics as "less on the organization *of* time that the timetable seems to represent than on the regulation and instrumentalization of human capacity *through* time."[2] Freeman's concept of "sense-methods" focuses on how this Foucauldian framework leads to different forms of queer relation and physicality across time, and I would add, different relationships with "human capacity." So, what kind of movements of and through time might we find within a neoliberal framework in which the interaction between "time" and "capacity" is increasingly monitored?

Crip scholars Merri Lisa Johnson and Robert McRuer contend that "thought and knowledge in twenty-first-century Western culture as a whole is structured—indeed, fractured—by an endemic crisis of ability and disability."[3] Disability and accessibility discourse has been a staple of institutional spaces under the neoliberal terms of legal and economic inclusion since the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. The resentment that institutions hold against their "expensive" or "less productive" constituents reigns over anyone that has to interact with these threatening notions of ability or disability. Disability and disabled behaviour also have their own affects, their own logics, their own distinct relationships, and their own temporality when it comes to the systems that work to control them.

This emerges most vividly in theoretical discourse through the concept of *crip time*, which has been theorized in the work of Kafer, Ellen Samuels, Jina B. Kim, Margaret Price, and Jasbir Puar. As these scholars establish, crip time takes its place in a strange corner of critical theory, nestled between feminist and queer theory, affect theory, disability studies, postcolonial studies, Black studies, aesthetics and poetics, and Marxist and Foucauldian critique. One reason that crip theory developed among these different areas of criticism is that it interrogates the body's relationship with time and with the notion of life. As all these fields theorize the past and the future, they rely on value judgments about what constitutes a "good" life, and consequently, also rely on incomplete paradigms of bodily integrity in and through time. Crip theorists wrestle over definitions of crip time such as "time travel," "grief time," "flex time exploded," or "vampire time" in their efforts to describe the intimacy between the outlines and limitations of one's body and the dizzying reality of being alive in time.

One premise of crip time is that our political relationship with our bodies is ever shifting, inflected by economic and political systems, the development of technology and virtual spaces, disconnection from our physical spaces and entities. This relationship with our bodies has transformed over the past few decades in striking ways. As I work to answer the questions emerging from the theorizations of crip time since the ADA, I develop a formal analysis of temporality that accounts for historical, political, generic, and embodied contexts.

*

In *Cripping Time: The Complex Present of Post-ADA Narratology*, I use the study of narrative to explore this contemporary conversation between the body and time. Narration and narrative forms are some of the most important means we have to manipulate time. They are also uniquely able to reflect and reenact the experience of living in otherwise manipulated time. In other words, narration itself naturally bends the clock. I see narrative theory as a way to explore what crip time might do or be. Conversely, how we move through time influences how we relate to our bodies, and how we narrate. I measure these changes by analyzing how popular narratives—novels, films, television shows, and celebrity fictions—shape time itself in reaction to the discomfort around bodies and dependency under the paradoxical values of neoliberal independence, inclusion, and productivity.

I focus on four different narrative approaches to time: *procrastinating*, *confounding*, *swapping*, and *dwelling*. I contend that these ways of maneuvering time are couched in the rhetorics and realities of ability and disability. Following McRuer's "compulsory ablebodiedness," Toni Morrison's model of reading for "the Africanist presence" in *Playing in the Dark*, and queer and crip theorizations of shame, I argue that these eruptions of figures of disability can signal disavowal, exploitation, or recuperation. How do we recognize the multiplicity of the present we inhabit under the troubling paradigms of ability and disability? What kind of temporality is required, or makes it possible, to disavow disability or ability? To exploit it? To recover it? I see procrastinating, confounding, swapping, and dwelling as different ways of formulating and navigating what I call a *complex present* in reaction to the pressures of post-1990 ADA neoliberalism.

I theorize this "complex present" as a response to the "simple present" tense narration that has become increasingly popular into the twenty-first century, most recognizably in the "simple" conventions, media adaptability, and immediacy of young adult, or YA, literature. YA has become a category broader than the teenager alone, appearing across all genres of literature, film, TV, social media, and Internet culture. The texts I study in this dissertation include YA novels (Meg Cabot's *The Princess Diaries*), chick lit (Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary*), high literature (Sheila Heti's *How Should A Person Be?*), Disney shows (*Hannah Montana*), Hollywood films (Penny Marshall's *Big* and Tina Gordon's *Little*), Hulu TV shows (Maya Erskine and Anna Konkle's *Pen15*), science fiction (Kiese Laymon's *Long Division*), and fantasy series (N.K. Jemisin's *The Broken Earth* trilogy). As staples of different types of genre fiction, none of these texts really fall under a clear category of canonical American (or Anglophone) literature, though some fall closer than others to a realm of high culture.

What ties them together, I argue, is the popular form of the *young adult*. Even as a term, the young adult is discomfiting in its self-contradictory definition—how can one be a "young" "adult"? (Why don't we call it "old" "child"?) The answer to these questions only become less clear as the category of the "young adult" can refer both to the subject of the YA novel and to its much older consumers; thus divided between the young and the adult, the genre itself becomes strangely ageless. A disruptive figure, the "incompetent" or stagnant young adult also represents a cultural shift from the linear rhetoric of child-to-adult growth to a complex superimposition of time, body, and space in reaction to the failures of twenty-first century neoliberalism.

All of the texts I consider feature "young adult" protagonists whose ambiguous agency is disruptive to narrative itself. These protagonists seem immature, powerless, incapable, and

dependent, yet also intrepid and independent. They exercise incomplete agency while trapped within certain temporal strictures, still fixated on the past or on what could happen or what is supposed to happen in the future. They are in this sense "underdeveloped," insofar as they are expected to develop in a way that they currently cannot or that they struggle to achieve. And these struggles force their narratives to take odd formal stances toward time. All of the chapters of this project thus deal in various ways with the prospect or experience of "failure" in a social context; they all perform or demonstrate a lacking "ability" or an "inability" to, or an exclusion from, doing the things they are supposed to do.

The self-contradictory "young" "adult" disrupts the narratives they appear in, provoking the same rhetorical discomfort as the liminal figures of the teen and the disabled person do. But the agency of "young adult" protagonists is ambiguous in a way that the disabled figure in literature traditionally is not. Disability is in fact much more ambiguous in real life than we would like to believe. As simple examples, Deaf people might have some hearing, blind people might have some vision, people who use wheelchairs might also be able to stand sometimes, chronically ill people might be able to do things sometimes that they cannot do other times. But this means that the disabled figure is often more immediately fitted into some kind of trope and expected to perform a narrative function, as David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder ably argue. The young adult, however, remains a de facto liminal figure, one we are still unsure what to do with.

The young adult in fact represents the kind of liminality that teenagers and disabled people also share: an uncertainty about their labour value. Their uncertain labour value is tied to the uncertainties of their social position, their relationship to time and the future, and the perpetual hope of rehabilitation. Julie Passanante Elman gives an excellent account of the historical connection between teenagers and disabled people, who were often housed together in asylums for the feeble-minded even well into the twentieth century. The rhetoric of rehabilitation codified by the ADA is applied to both: the teenager will grow up if they work hard enough; the disabled person will become normal if they work hard enough.

Much like the disabled person, then, the young adult is a figure simultaneously born of the market and resistant to it. This project thus also tracks the development of neoliberal temporality in the first place, given that it increasingly fixates on the present as the only place where productivity can happen. The passage of the ADA is the most obvious historical milestone in this context as it codified the relationship between time and the body as one that can be measured and economically assessed. The period that this project covers is best described as post-ADA literature, then, as these different temporal behaviours emerge in response to a certain political and social understanding of disability.

It is no coincidence that this period also heralded the rise of the young adult genre and marketing category. As the disability population is assimilated to expand the workforce, the overall "inability" of the "young adult" to move up in the working world, make the same kind of money their parents did, or to "be competent" as they work more hours (and buy more YA books), falls under the spotlight of the "light" entertainment of mass media. These texts experiment with the notion of such recalcitrant and seemingly "unemployable" figures. The form of the "young adult" thus reorients us away from the traditional teleologies and ontologies of reproduction, productivity, and citizenship—which have been interrogated by queer theorists, crip theorists, Marxist critics, Black theorists, and theorists of colour—and toward a new fixation on the present that I think is best described as a form of crip time, or "bending the clock."

*

While I am greatly indebted to foundational works in narratology by Gérard Genette and Peter Brooks among others, this dissertation grounds narratology in theorizations of embodiment and in its historico-political contexts. My methodology recenters narratology around political theories of embodiment and marginalized identity: disability, feminist, queer, Black, ethnic, feminist-of-color, queer-of-color, crip-of-color studies. The modes of manipulating time that interest me demonstrate a set of distinctive responses to the expectations of narrative as such, and to how it gets used as a tool to prescribe overarching social systems. I see this in overt ways every day in the intersectional Deaf and disabled lives that overlay mine, but I also recognize this behaviour in more subtle ways every day as people, "abled" or not, struggle through time under these expectations.

Lauren Berlant's work in affect theory has been deeply influential on my project as a starting place for drawing connections between time and feeling under late capitalism and neoliberalism. How does feeling shape time? How might we recognize the patterns in narrative that are caused by time in the form of feelings? I chose all of the texts that I discuss because they feel or are *funny* in some way: as works of popular genre fiction, they are both juicy and recalcitrant as they "move funny" through time. I identify the vulnerabilities of the temporal movements I consider through the humour and disorder of these popular texts. Sianne Ngai's theorization of the zany, as well as her forays into the concepts of anxiety and disgust, also contextualize my approach to what we can observe in a literal, if not physical, way when it comes to how feeling impacts our sense, our experience, of both narrative and time.

Time has also been discussed in remarkable ways in narrative theory and criticism in Black Studies and Queer Studies, in the rich work of Saidiya Hartman, Tavia Nyong'o, and Christina Sharpe, along with Eve Sedgwick, Elizabeth Freeman, and Heather Love, among others. I draw inspiration and imagined criticism from these scholars as I identify how one experiences and manipulates time in response to the fact that we all have one imperfect body here, now. In a sense, we could call this a narratologically somatic project. I suggest that in the popular, public texts I consider in this dissertation, we as readers and viewers are inhabiting manipulated time along with the characters, and learning an especially designed way of life.

These popular texts of the neoliberal era are connected with disability to varying degrees in their content, but they all fixate on "ability" and "inability," and as they refract these fears through the overactive, underperforming figure of the young adult, they all develop certain behaviours around time. The authors and designers of these texts are sometimes actively, sometimes unconsciously reflecting on what shapes time through their replications, contortions, revisions, and interpretations of how to live in our complex present. Procrastinating, confounding, swapping, and dwelling can seem like frivolous and privileged ways of moving through time during a social, historical, and economic period of exhaustion and overwhelm.

They can also seem obvious or ubiquitous. We all procrastinate; we all narrate and surveil ourselves in the age of reality television and social media; we all muse on and thereby relive our childhoods; we all dwell within the immediate reactivity of our phones, within infrastructural and technological networks, within our present and physical surroundings. These forms of temporal manipulation appear both in narrative and everyday life, provoking complex reactions—displeasure, laughter, despair, regret, joy, anger. They reveal different degrees of ability and willingness to engage with the "crisis" of ability and disability, even as it co-occurs with the pressing crises of race, gender, sexuality, or the environment. But my narratological analysis demonstrates how deeply they depend on crip time and crip relation in their form. And I

suggest that these often seemingly facile texts all demand intimate interdependence—among characters and with readers and viewers—and in this sense, they raise ethically dense questions.

Partly because these texts are primarily genre fiction, they in fact share a certain form of relationality. The diary form, the performance of stand up and reality television, the dramatic reenactment of childhood, the present-tense narration of dystopian fiction: these genre forms and narrative types all depend on *being heard*, for lack of a better way to put it. They all rely on quasi-apostrophic address, a form of deixis. "Being heard," "listened to," "perceived," "seen," or "held" is a central returning point in disability discourse, even as we work to describe that profound relation of recognition without privileging particular senses. As the paradoxical demands of neoliberalism in self-inflicted productivity and burn-out are documented in the popular literature of the 1990s through the 2020s, they showcase specific contortions or convolutions in their temporal forms *as they narrate them to a listener* (us).

So, the not-quite second person address of the diary form allows the reader to watch and participate in procrastination at work as a sympathetic if nosy armchair psychologist; the almost second-person address of the audience-oriented performance of reality television and stand up comedy encloses the transfixed audience in a confounded—dumbfounded—sense of time; the dislocation of body swapping requires a self-referential, defamiliarized process of "talking to oneself" that we eavesdrop on; the constant movement of dwelling's deictic repetition constitutes an insistent mode of relationality that addresses either to a specific, yet unclear, person or the Internet at large. These formal relations, I argue, are fundamentally crip as they operate on a premise of unavoidable interdependence, and rely on confessions and disclosures of ability.

In sum, this project contributes to a number of different fields. It offers a critical engagement with crip time as narrative theory, demonstrating where and how it might fit. It tracks behaviour through narration and through time. It historicizes narratology as a critical practice and broadens its political scope and stakes. It discusses and theorizes the understudied "young adult," offering different ways to understand embodiment and citizenship that are increasingly disputed under unreliable paradigms of age, ability, and agency. And it develops a theory of the neoliberal era as a fluid, complex present, and of the everyday tools we use to manage it as a continuous and malleable experience rather than something elusive and unattainable.

*

My first chapter, "Procrastinating," begins with the most familiar neoliberal discourses of work and productivity. It discusses *The Princess Diaries* (2000–2015) and *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996–2016) as both novels and film series. As millennial reinterpretations of the 19th-century marriage plot, these diary texts narratologically perform procrastination as they enact the time-blindness and time dilation of ADHD and anxiety, and as they meet the external demands of endless serialization. I discuss this in the economic context established by Berlant and Ngai's formulations of affect theory and feminized sentiment as these young (and not so young) white women workers leverage their "incompetence" to generate narrative. The resistant alternate reality of procrastination, where the task to be done simply does not exist for a time, both operates as a crip strategy for confronting the impossibility of ever-increasing productivity and performance, and—in the publishing and production context—as a way of making money. This chapter tracks the publication seriality of these verbal and visual texts as they rely on narratives of anxiety and incompetence to *procrastinate*, to self-consciously fail to complete their moment.

The second chapter, "Confounding," considers Sheila Heti's 2012 novel *How Should A Person Be?* and the 2006–2011 Disney TV show and film *Hannah Montana.* These contemporary Kunstlerromane exemplify the self-entrapping, present-oriented style of performance popularized by reality television. I argue that each author-protagonist's self-conscious performance of a double identity acts as a narrative of disavowal, appropriating the rhetoric of the queer closet and the crip closet precisely in order to reject queerness and cripness. I revisit the intersections of queer and crip theory in the work of Sedgwick and Jillian Weise, as these confounding texts construct a "closeted" present tense reality that allows the paradox of assimilation. A crip queer temporality of shame constructs the simultaneity through which the double consciousness that separates oneself from one's body can operate. Rather than leveraging incompetence to create narrative, these extremely competent artist narratives rely instead on the false disavowal of both ability and intimate relation to develop their artistic identities. These narratives thus are temporally and morally *confounding* as they formulate both the possibility and impossibility of living multiple realities at the same time.

The third chapter, "Swapping," I explore how narratives grapple with the intersectionally crip experience of enforced temporality through body-swapping and time travel. I consider Penny Marshall's film *Big* (1988) and Tina Gordon's responding *Little* (2019), Maya Erskine and Anna Konkle's semi-autobiographical TV show *Pen15* (2019), and the novel *Long Division* by Kiese Laymon (2013/2021). I read those texts through Samuels' definition of crip time as time travel in conjunction with Kim's 2021 crip-of-color critique framework as it focuses on infrastructural interdependency. These texts confront young adult figures with displacements in age and agency and collapses in time caused by unstable and dystopian environments—be they adults rendered into their tween selves in the dystopias of the workplace and middle school, or young adults burdened with responsibilities beyond their age in the landscapes of climate crisis. These time-swapping narratives respond to the pervasive logic of the financial swapping that led to the 2008 Great Recession, as they *swap* the body in different ways beyond any individual's control, highlighting a vulnerability particularly predicated on crip experience under neoliberalism.

The temporal strategy of the fourth and final chapter, "Dwelling" relies on insistent, localized temporal movement. Through a deictic second-person address, N.K. Jemisin's *The Broken Earth* trilogy (2015–2017) insistently inhabits the present moment by repeatedly reframing its narration, which is eventually revealed to be occurring in real time—both the narration and its reading. I reframe the aesthetic relationship with "dwelling" proposed in Martin Heidegger's philosophical work, emphasizing how dwelling develops mechanically in narrative as it constantly contextualizes and re-contextualizes itself. Jemisin's present-tense structuring of a young woman coming of age, the onset of her disability, and the embrace of her transformation is radically crip in its accretive narratology, even as it relies on the initial structure of the YA novel. The chronic condition of the entire series does not simply dwell by staying put. Rather, it *dwells* through constant narrative movement in relation to its narratees, reclaiming a communal politics of belonging and care work in the traditions of Audre Lorde, Mia Mingus, and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha.

The cultural forms produced since the signing of the ADA offer different ways to bend the clock. *Procrastinating, confounding, swapping*, and *dwelling* are all manipulations of time that center a troubled relationship with the body as it is supposed to work, supposed to behave, supposed to do, supposed to be. The splintering and bloating of the complex present that takes place in these narratives—sometimes as acts of resistance, other times as acts of compliance to

these expectations—make it clear that whatever this existential system is, it's not quite *working*. The "young adult" reiterates the labour recalcitrance and debility narrative recognizable in Freeman's reading of the 1856 Herman Melville short story, "Bartleby the Scrivener." Through its ambiguous "funniness," I see the development and particularization of the "tenselessness" that Freeman reads in Bartleby's "would prefer not to," into the complex present of late twentieth and early twenty-first century popular fictions. In pervasive, every day ways, the "young adult" demands that we put away the distracting questions of what we have to, should, or would do, and that we turn to the more fundamental one: what is it to live in time?

# Chapter 1: Procrastinating, or Narrating Work

**Annoying and Illogical**

In one iconic entry in her diary, Bridget Jones writes down every step between waking up and making it to work on April 4th. It takes her three hours and thirty-five minutes. The steps include weighing herself, going back to bed to recover from the weighing, eating breakfast, looking out the window, looking for the right clothes, realizing she's out of clean clothes, de-linting and ironing clothes, finding a stain on clothes, looking for a pair of tights free of runs, recalling that her preferred miniskirt is stuck in the couch from her last date, drying her hair, fixing her dried hair, finding the right brush, looking for her handbag, getting distracted by the mail, looking for her keys which are in her handbag, leaving the house, returning to retrieve her hairbrush, then finally leaving, intermittently smoking cigarettes throughout the stressful process.

These steps are time-stamped in irregular intervals—we can see that it takes Bridget twenty-seven minutes in bed to recover from her encounter with the weight scale and seven minutes to be distracted by her mail in the middle of her quest for her handbag. Time-stamps feature throughout *Bridget Jones's Diary* to contextualize her late-night musings or her accelerating anxious thoughts. The unevenness they highlight in the timeline of Bridget's struggles to leave her house suggests that time just does not work for her in the way it should. Bridget's perceived incompetence in efficient movement is of course used to great comic effect. But resistance to efficiency and effective management is also one of Bridget's many different strategies to put off her arrival at the office, which is to say, to resist the oncoming future.

In this April 4th entry, Fielding puts Bridget's anxious and unproductive moments on display in her failed attempts at self-correction or self-improvement:

> Determined, now, to tackle constant lateness for work and failure to address in-tray bulging with threats from bailiffs, etc. Resolve to begin self-improvement program with time-and-motion study.[4]

The prefatory framing of Bridget's self-description as "determined" and currently resolving "to begin self-improvement program" as she embarks on her "study" simultaneously subscribes to and mocks the concept of workplace productivity as it plays out in the home. The location of the "in-tray bulging with threats from bailiffs, etc" is ambiguous: is it the in-tray at work, where she is always too late to answer? Or her home mail in-tray that she never pays full attention to? Whose bailiffs are these? It takes a long time for bailiff's threats to come for unpaid debts: they've been overdue for quite some time. The vagueness of the bailiffs to whom Bridget refers denotes a hovering threat of responsibility—whether it actually falls to Bridget to respond to them, she still has them on her mind.

The contrast between the immediacy of Bridget's "determined, now" and the long game of bailiff's notices also makes it clear that this is not the first time that Bridget has "determined, now"; any actual response to these notices is almost immaterial. If it's not this notice, it'll be another one. These extremities of the immediate and irregularly marked present, the ever-accumulating long-gone deadlines, and the vague threat of coming due, all delivered in such parodic pseudo-productive business-speak and with such ironic impracticality, reveal a heavily manipulated temporality. Bridget's situation of unsatisfied or ducked responsibility is the source of simultaneous humour and anxiety, and drives the narrative to procrastination in more ways than just one.

This specific mode of putting off the future is why Helen Fielding expresses relief at her initial anonymity as the author of the column that eventually turned into the 1996 novel *Bridget*

*Jones's Diary*: "I didn't let anyone except the section editor know it was me. All the journalists on my desk were frightfully serious and writing about New Labour and global warming— I didn't want them to know that I was writing about why it takes three hours between waking up in the morning and leaving the house."[5] It seems that to Fielding, while these minutiae are hilarious, they are also revelatory and embarrassing. They're an indication of some kind of failure. But this protracted failure, with the Sisyphean longing to correct it, actually belongs right next to her colleagues' elevated, yet ineffective discourses of global warming and the ostensible attempts of New Labour to resurrect social equity in British politics.

It seems clear that the pushes for corporate power, globalization, and reduced government that were such elevated debate topics in the mid-1990s have become the reigning paradigms of the twenty-first century. Indeed, Fielding provides a subject study of neoliberal temporality in her stumbling accounts, in the interview and in the novels, of how to leave the house when so many things must be found and repaired, so many small expectations met, so many choices made. In this chapter, I'll argue that the genres of chick lit and young adult literature, and their particular representations of the immature, obsessive woman writer, dramatize the sense of ongoing time and the anxious avoidance, or *procrastination*, that imposed expectation provokes in the neoliberal era.

Etymologically speaking, procrastination is centered around the idea of tomorrow. It comes from the combination of the Latin prefix *pro,* and the word for 'tomorrow,' *cras*, into the classical Latin verb, *procrastinare*, which means to put off to tomorrow, to postpone, to delay. While it was evidently used in classical Latin to denote the postponement of meetings to the next day or a delay in the arrival of military reinforcements, for example, it appears in modern languages with modest frequency starting in the mid-sixteenth century and reaches a height of representation at the turn of the nineteenth century, both as the now obsolete transitive noun ("the procrastination *of* the coronation") and in its more familiar dilatory context.

The latter appears chiefly in discourses of morality: procrastination is regarded a vice, even sinful. In his late eighteenth-century sermons, Scottish Enlightenment thinker Hugh Blair warns of the ruin of the procrastinator: "they cannot so properly be said to live, as to be always about to live; and the future has ever been the gulf in which the present is swallowed up and lost."[6] The future is an abyss awaiting the present; the threat of procrastination, as Blair goes on to say, is death. The danger of wasting time and malingering is cast as a moral and existential problem.

The popularity of procrastination decreased and its censure fell quiet toward the end of the nineteenth century. The word appeared relatively infrequently for a good hundred years thereafter. Only in 1985 did it emerge in a slow resurgence of usage that boomed in the year 2000, trending upward into the twenty-first century. Procrastination's resurrection coincided with the rise of the city office job, the proliferation of the home computer, and the explosion of the Internet. Procrastination is easy to do when you are working alone, virtually, without any immediate oversight or the pressure of creating physical objects; it is enabled by abstraction, alienation, remote work, busy work, deadlines, and email. (It wouldn't have been able to exist on the assembly line but for the presence of Charlie Chaplin.)

Procrastination moved from a spiritual discourse in the nineteenth century (coincident with the industrial revolution) to a related discourse at the turn of the twenty-first century: psychology and self-help. There is a wealth of studies focusing on task avoidance, the pleasure principle, and procrastination. Many of these focus on "academic procrastination" in college students, who are said to take up about seventy percent of the world's chief procrastinating

demographic, and perhaps, we might acknowledge, a similarly large portion of the most accessible psychology study subjects. There have also been discussions of the meaning of procrastination across different cultural conceptions of time—people everywhere do delay or avoid certain tasks or confrontations, but for different reasons, in different ways, and to different effects.

In the West, a certain embarrassment floats around procrastination: the 1995 psychology textbook *Procrastination and Task Avoidance* starts with the concession that "[a]dmittedly, one reason that procrastination generally has not been the focus of serious theoretical and empirical inquiry is because it seems… too flippant a topic to be granted much scientific credence."[7] Procrastination is an inherently silly topic that yet requires earnest, against-the-grain justification of its research. Through the knowing chuckles, there is a struggle to concede that it actually *is* a real concept. The chief author of the textbook and reputed scholar of procrastination, Joseph Ferrari, goes on to say that it's difficult to talk about seriously about procrastination in a scholarly context without falling into personal anecdotes, and it's difficult for behavioural scientists to appreciate or find procrastination worthy of research, as they find it to be highly "annoying and illogical," and therefore not a sympathetic cause.[8]

Just so. The institutional silliness of procrastination designates it perfectly as a way of understanding the temporality of the young adult across YA literature and chick lit, which have provoked the same seat-shifting discomfort in academic literary discourse. "Annoying and illogical" marks a certain refusal to accommodate in the procrastinator; it indicates a different kind of possibly willed movement. It is precisely this annoyance and illogic that it generates that make procrastination such a useful and necessary attitude for the young adult.

In what follows, I diagnose procrastination—one of the temporal attitudes toward the present that the category of "the young adult" draws out for us—in Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* series and *The Princess Diaries* series by Meg Cabot. I approach this discussion across a few different registers, perhaps best described as readings of the *production history* of procrastination: 1. the long history of neoliberal capitalism and productivity in economic, scientific, and affective terms, as exhibited by the publishing industry's promotion and the public's consumption of chick lit and YA fiction; 2. the narratological understanding of how these two series develop over their respective fifteen- and twenty-year production spans; 3. the literal stylistic, affective, and narrative production of procrastination in these "diary" texts; 4. procrastination as failed or not-yet-happened rehabilitation of disability, perceived incompetence, or resistance that we read in these novels; and 5. the structuring of time that procrastination demonstrates as it appears across those arena.

**The Work of Not Working**

As a form of task avoidance and time management, procrastination falls into a category of workplace behaviour. The "time-and-motion study" Bridget refers to in her April 4th entry is a staple of the field of scientific management, also known as Taylorism, which developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and the concepts of which continue to dominate workplace discourse today. Scientific management is essentially the study of how to squeeze as much value out of as little time as possible. Motion studies scientists such as the renowned Gilbreth husband-wife duo of *Cheaper by the Dozen* fame studied workers in factories, schools, hospitals, and other institutional spaces in order to save time by reducing the movements it took a worker to complete a task. The husband, Frank Bunker Gilbreth, is the origin of the quote

popularized by Bill Gates: “Always choose a lazy person to do a difficult job, because a lazy person will find an easy way to do it.”[9]

But this is not the case with Bridget, or with Mia Thermopolis of *The Princess Diaries*, published in 2000. Both protagonists seem lazy—they are slow to catch on, distracted, repetitive, and inefficient—and their diaries are quick reading. Yet they still provoke a sense of uneasiness. Their accounts are chatty, yet protracted, difficult, and uncertain. They do not find easy ways to do their jobs. Though the diary form of narrative is conducive to expressing the experience and anxiety of procrastination, conducting a “time-and-motion study” remains disruptive to the writing process itself.

The “time-and-motion” study as enacted in a diary poses logistical difficulties concerning the time it takes to write down the activity while, or as well as, doing it. While there is a meta-joke about the impracticality of Bridget’s step-by-step time-and-motion study, Mia writes things down *as* they happen, and often registers in her entries others’ annoyance with her lack of attention to them: she is in the bathroom, in class, at dinner, or shopping with her friends, and scribbling away all the while. How her writing interferes in her life becomes increasingly important to the plot as the series progresses. These two serial diaries both challenge the physicality of indexing the progression of time and highlight the amount of effort it requires to describe and produce procrastination through the process of writing itself.

This double awareness—of the failure as even more time is taken to write it down, and of the success in recording these failures—is a technical problem unique to writing in the immediate present tense, which is by no means a new innovation. For instance, Hannah Chaskin reads in Samuel Richardson’s 1740 epistolary novel *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* a narrative queerness in protagonist Pamela’s intentional protraction and inhabitation of the present through her prolific letter-writing, as she avoids the imposition of a heterosexual marriage plot.[10] This same resistance inherent in real-time narration plays out as procrastination in millennial social, economic, and political contexts as it develops over both the *Bridget Jones’s Diary* and *The Princess Diaries* series.

There is a certain frenetic energy dedicated to productive activity and to avoiding it—and to analyzing that avoidance. Procrastination can be seen as the far side of zaniness, which Sianne Ngai describes as a ruling aesthetic and affect of twentieth-century postmodern capitalism that addresses the desperate comedy of work—performance both as entertainment and frantic production. As the field of psychology, despite its original reluctance, has given itself to the study of procrastination, there has simultaneously been an increase in self-help books to avoid procrastination—to procrastinate procrastination itself, or worse, to create a predictable cycle of procrastinating by reading about how not to procrastinate. Such titles suggest a huge disciplinary variety of approach: *The Procrastination Equation*, *The Now Habit*, *The Science of Overcoming Procrastination*, *The Art of Procrastination*, *The Willpower Instinct*… There are countless others.

The proliferation of such self-help books exemplify the zaniness that Ngai locates in the affective life of a “productive” worker in the current “exhausting and precarious” conditions of post-Fordist late capitalism, where labour is both increasingly casualized and intensified; workdays grow longer; and wages shrink against the cost of living.[11]

> For all their playfulness and commitment to fun, the zany’s characters give the impression of needing to labor excessively hard to produce our laughter, straining themselves to the point of endangering not just themselves but also those around them.[12]

To elicit manic labour for less pay, late capitalism has leaned on the emotionalization and subjectivization of work. In this way and others, affect has infiltrated labour beyond the traditionally undervalued affective and feminine-coded realms of the household or service sectors.

The pressure and anxiety around performance, livelihood, and entertainment that the zany figure evokes infects the spectators even while they laugh loudly, and as, Ngai argues, that laughter works to suppress their uneasiness at the threat of identification. It is not hard to see Bridget Jones or Mia Thermopolis thus falling in line behind Ngai's chief icon of the zany, Lucille Ball. As Bridget and Mia zanily procrastinate their happy endings well into the 2010s, they continue to produce text, money, and relationships in a way that highlights the ambivalence of the "success" they strive for—satisfaction, contentment, romantic partnership, workplace accomplishment, reproduction. Even as they ultimately claim in each installment of their series the foregone conclusion of required accomplishment, they still do not seem convinced of their own success—and even attempt to demur.

This *refusal to complete* marks chick lit's transition from the telos of the romance novel to the unending cycle of consumerism that is discussed in depth in postfeminist scholarship. Stephanie Harzewski, among several others, argues that the rise of chick lit in the 1990s chronicles the unique overlap of neoliberal capitalism, the glass-ceilinged yet emancipated single young woman worker of second wave feminism, and traditional problems of marriage and employment. The 1990s marked an exaggerated economic merging of the spaces of the home and the workplace, displacing the labour value of the young woman into her consumerist lifestyle and her narratively consumerized life. Classic chick lit texts such as *Sex and the City*, *Confessions of a Shopaholic*, and *The Devil Wears Prada* all herald the rise of the young white woman consumer, Harzewski observes. Their writing skills are conflated with their skills of consumption; they are journalists and shoppers. Their romances are mostly on-again-off-again, small cycles made subordinate to the ever-broadening sweeps of ravenous consumerism and workplace competition. Starry-eyed romantic conventions are shaded by the cynicism of relentless capitalism, often represented by metonymic objects of purchase much like the sunglasses that so often feature on these book covers.

The diaries of Bridget Jones and Mia Thermopolis are key texts in this postfeminist neoliberal chick lit canon, and its evolution in YA literature. They are informed by the same literary traditions, the same socioeconomic and political concerns, the same market demands—and so they demonstrate the same narrative and temporal reactions to this environment but across different scales—that is, generationally. A high school girl simply does not face the same kind of pressure to get married or have a baby as a thirty-something single woman does. But the 1990s through the 2010s mark a blurring of these two age groups in terms of their positions and expectations in society, and this merged positionality contributes to the formation of the figure of "the young adult."

The problems of the expected teloi—sex, marriage, and children—as framed in these diary novels also comes from the identity of their protagonists as specifically white, heterosexual, able-bodied, liberal young women of a chimerical upper-middle class. Procrastination is easily exemplified in this context of immature white women in chick lit and its YA cousins because it is predicated on such narrow expectations of success—these protagonists can suffer by the rules as often or for as long as they want, they can squirm around and self-sabotage as much as they want, but they'll always ultimately "win" in certain material ways. Procrastination demonstrates the ambivalence of that win even as it situates it as a given. *Bridget*

*Jones's Diary* and *The Princess Diaries* also suggest other directions, other forms of resistance and complicity, than the wholesale ethos of "lean in" feminism or "you can have it all" neoliberalism.

**To Do: Self-Actualization**

Procrastination is a temporal attitude, which means it is premised on a specific configuration of time and reacts to a number of different temporal factors—economic, psychological, historical, affective, political. In novels, procrastination often indexes an anxious or repressed form of narrative, where digression, minimization, infinite particularization, repetition, and prevarication become fuel for a story's engine. Procrastination is hard work. It is the *activity* of avoiding any kind of conclusive action, and the *act* of procrastination cannot be completed until the task is complete. Once the task is done, the effect of the procrastination is nullified. In other words, it is a continuous, ongoing activity that takes place only because another activity hasn't happened yet—the *cras* of tomorrow. It is contingent on an expectation to be met.

In this sense, procrastination delineates a clear conceptual temporal frame, enclosing an empty space between me and the marker of what stands before me in the future, what *must* be done in order for my current activity to be accepted as procrastination. That ever-prolonged empty space is the present tense of avoidance, and I fill it with all sorts of things other than the task to be completed. If I choose never to complete the task, however, whatever else I'm doing is no longer procrastination. The expectation is gone: it's no longer failing to be, or "about to be," what it's supposed to be.

In short, procrastination is built on expectation. Narratologically, procrastination speaks to Peter Brooks's Freudian reading of narrative as the meeting of two opposing urges: to delay and to conclude. Without the promise of an ending or a solution of some kind, we have no reason to dawdle, to "work through" these problems.[13] Even constant repetition of attempted tasks is also a way of struggling with the "temporality of desire," shifting focus from the desired object (to be something, to possess, to grow up) to the process of desiring (to write, to try, to fail, to grow).[14] We might recall that Sigmund Freud, Søren Kirkegaard, and John Limon also offer some insights on how expectation works in humour, which is also often explained as the surprise of unmet or thwarted expectation. That would explain why these novels are so funny. By the same token, they also run the risk of becoming merely "annoying and illogical," if they carry on the same joke of unmet expectation for too long.

The concept of unmet expectation is set immediately as Mia describes herself as a liar from the first sentence of *The Princess Diaries* ("Sometimes it seems like all I ever do is lie"[15]), and most of her troubles throughout the series stem from her conflict-avoidant behaviours—one of them being compulsive journaling. While both *Princess Diaries* and *Bridget Jones's Diary* are based on the conceit of starting a journal, Cabot chooses to illustrate throughout the series Mia's growing dependence on the journal that she is given because she will not share her feelings with her mother. Of course, this makes us, the readers, Mia's spectators and confidantes with an extended awareness of the authority figures who preside over Mia's journal—her mother and Grandmère. Valerie Bherer reads Mia's compulsion to write as a way of making her life real, having to be "represented 'exactly the way it happened.'"[16]

The incantatory power Mia grows to rely on in her diary is certainly related to writing but it also is related to being read. Mia's availability to be read is beneficial to us but not necessarily to her. She diagnoses herself through her best friend, Lilly Moscovitz, the daughter of two

psychiatrists: “Lilly says I have an overactive imagination and a pathological need to invent drama in my life.”[17] This psychological self-awareness flows freely throughout the novels but does little to change Mia’s narration. As the novels progress, and her anxiety heightens, each potential encounter results in increasingly intense time dilation. The “pathological need to invent drama” manifests throughout the series: minor encounters cause Mia to spiral into worst-case scenarios, replete with capitalized writing, italics, and excessive punctuation marks.

In the seventh book, *Party Princess*, for instance, Mia’s nemesis Lana Weinberger finds out that Mia has overspent the student council budget on state-of-the-art recycling compactors and wants to meet with her:

> So that CAN’T be what Lana wants. She must want something else from me.
>
> But what? I have NOTHING. She’s got to know that. Nothing except the throne of Genovia awaiting me at some date in the future…
>
> Could THAT be what she wants? Not my throne but, like, my CROWN?
>
> I can’t give my tiara away. My dad would kill me. It’s worth, like, a million bucks or something. That’s why Grandmère has to keep it in the vault at the Plaza.
>
> WAIT—WHAT IF SHE WANTS MICHAEL???
>
> But why would she? She never wanted him when he was here at AEHS. In fact, for some reason, she seemed to find him completely dorky and unappealing (has anyone ever BEEN as blind?).
>
> Besides, I heard that lately she’s been dating the Dalton basketball team.
>
> She BETTER not want Michael, that’s all I can say. I mean, she can have my throne.
>
> BUT NEVER MY BOYFRIEND.[18]

Of course, Lana doesn’t want to steal Michael or the crown of Genovia; she just wants tickets to the fancy royal party everybody’s been asking Mia about. But we can see in this small moment Mia’s exaggerated turns of thought and the catastrophizing digressions they lead to—the crown, the Plaza, the boyfriend, the Dalton basketball team. This is procrastination on the page: Cabot transcribes Mia’s *expenditure* of time as she indulges in every possible terrible consequence and uses every step of her anxiety spiral to focus on her own desirability. At one level, this is amusing; at another, it’s exhausting. The regular emphases and the gasping question marks have a sort of jerking whiplash effect on the reader, to the point of giddiness—or nausea.[19]

It reads as a kind of helplessness, a shrinking away from consequences even as Mia entertains what they could all be. On one hand, Cabot writes Mia as a caricature of the anxious teenage girl, and the centrality of anxiety to the narrative style is pronounced and prolonged—because without anxiety, there is no reason for Mia to write. This is further confirmed in the last two books, when Mia’s friends and family members notice she is writing again after two lengthy hiatuses and immediately start worrying for her mental health. On the other hand, we know Mia will be just fine: she’s a princess—white, thin, blonde, cis, abled, rich, and living in Manhattan.

The vague threats that Mia constantly imagines and introduces into her own life are reminiscent of the bailiff’s notices for Bridget—the same vague hovering threat that Bridget mentions seemingly out of the blue, but clearly still assumes responsibility for. In both cases, these are threats of *coming due*: Mia feels (and is) responsible for the overspent student council budget, Bridget feels responsible for the bailiff’s notices. Mia spends narrative time in her anxiety spiral effectively to put off the moment where she will be held responsible, while Bridget alludes through her offhand remark to a sense of perpetual responsibility of one kind or another.

These moments of prolongation or off-handedness might be considered forms of narrative digression.[20] They distract our attention from the present matters at hand (Bridget is late for work; Mia has to have a meeting with Lana) and they proceed by touching on seemingly unrelated topics. In the eighteenth century, digression in *Pamela, Tristram Shandy*, and their contemporaries, was often seen as a tacky way of dragging out a tale, or distracting us from it being a "shaggy-dog story." The authorial indulgence it fed into was offensive to readers and critics then because of how it broke the integrity of the fiction; here it functions to burrow further into these characters' psychological mindset.

Procrastination sometimes plays out as digression in this way, but mostly it plays out as dilatory, ambivalent, and obsessive writing. The ongoing premise of *The Princess Diaries* is for Mia to use her diary to stop lying and to "achieve self-actualization," which often appears on her end-of-day homework and to-do lists:

> TO DO BEFORE LEAVING FOR GENOVIA
>
> 1. Get cat food, litter for Fat Louie
> 2. Stop biting fingernails
> 3. Achieve self-actualization
> 4. Find inner harmony between conscious and sub-conscious
> 5. Break up with Kenny—but not until after finals/Nondenominational Winter Dance.[21]

"Self-actualization" is at the top of the hierarchy of human needs that psychologist Abraham Maslow first introduced in 1943, then edited several times over the years to counteract the perceived rigidity of his theory.[22] Maslow offered historical figures such as Albert Einstein, Henry Thoreau, and Max Wertheimer as examples of fully self-actualized beings. His own biases are satirized in the lists Mia and her friends draw up: "LILLY MOSCOVITZ'S LIST OF HOTTEST GUYS (compiled during World Civ, with commentary by Mia Thermopolis)";[23] "THE TEN WOMEN I ADMIRE MOST IN THE WHOLE WORLD," including Madonna, Joan of Arc, Leola Mae Harmon of the Lifetime movie *Why Me?*, and "The Lady Cop I Once Saw" for giving a ticket to a catcaller.[24]

These lists and notions raise questions about time. It's hard to imagine what the process of writing out the former three-page list during class would look like: How much time does it take for Lilly to handwrite the verdicts? How much space is there for Mia to insert her comments? Mia works hard on the second list, which we don't know until Grandmère tears it up in a face-off about acceptable icons of feminism (Grandmère says Coco Chanel). Enraged, Mia prints it out again to leave in her diary. This argument about feminism that plays out in the paratext of the *Princess Diaries* also embraces the perceived illogic around Mia's own thoughts, which usually appears in rhetorical attacks on other teenage girls and the inculcated insecurity of their "like-" and "um-" peppered forms of expression.

Such unreasonably high expectations, lived out in list form, are inherited from *Bridget Jones's Diary*, as Bridget determines every so often to cook an elaborate meal for her friends or to become instantaneously healthy. Fielding is noted and enjoyed for her intentional lack of pronouns and articles, and frequent use of the self-directed imperative: "Resolve to begin self-improvement program." This style satirizes the speed at which Bridget moves and also conflates the reader with the implied "you" who is in fact Bridget, talking to herself. Bridget's diary

functions for her as a place to make lists, to daydream, or to be distracted by her thoughts, only to realize how late she is for wherever she is supposed to be going.

The disconnect between making a practical list and putting on that list goals like "stopping lying" or "resolve to begin self-improvement" further confuses our sense of temporal progression. How does one check off stopping something or resolving something? And since the gerund in "lying," for instance, makes it a continuous or repeated action, or even an adjectival condition that Mia is perpetually in, how does she stop being what she is? This goal activity of non-activity fits on a "*not* to do" list rather than a "to do" list; here the principle of procrastination rules again. The most stressful moments are in what is *not* written down in Bridget's diary—what happens off-page, the recorded-after-the-fact failures to get the lint off her clothes or cook a perfect birthday dinner. Alternatively, how does one achieve the state of "self-actualization" or "self-improvement" as written on a to-do list, when they are accomplished through several activities and a system of growth based on the progression of time? Can we imagine Mia or Bridget checking these kinds of "tasks" off a list?

Because they do. Mia declares at the end of *Princess in Love*, that she feels good, feels taller, not because of a beautiful dress or having gotten together with her crush, Michael Moscovitz. No, she says: "It's self-actualization. Well, that and the fact that it turns out I'm really a princess, after all. I must be, because guess what? I'm living happily ever after."[25] But how can she satisfy the expectations she sets for herself? These accomplishments (e.g. "living happily forever after") are so impractical that they are easy for her to pursue in complicity with readers, who watch her fail at what she says she's meant to do. Or else, they watch her declare herself successful at the end of each book, knowing that those successes will be exposed as fallacies at the start of the next.

The circularity of Mia's logic as she finds validation for her identity through the vague criteria of "living happily ever after" is a sign of cruel optimism, to use Lauren Berlant's term to describe the late capitalist phenomenon of a desire for something persisting even though that thing and its pursuit are both harmful. Berlant's project on national sentimentality describes the affective mechanisms of late capitalism and frames them as a complex addiction that reigns over the turn of the millennium, emphasizing the continuous cycle of the chase and the harm. While Mia's story resolves perfectly every time, the final logical leap toward conclusion is always flawed. Her claims to conclusion are based on affect: she must really be a princess because she *feels* like one. She checks off the box of "living happily ever after" even though that is impossible to check off—temporally, conditionally, grammatically. This kind of disjunction between the checking off of lists and the affective expectations is addictive—while *Bridget Jones's Diary* originally keeps its distance through parody, the series eventually follows *Princess Diaries*' suit and falls into this habit as it progresses.

Dependence on the circular logic of affect is in itself harmful, leading Mia to a nervous breakdown and a new therapist, Dr. Knutz. One way to understand these series appears in Berlant's framing of "the female complaint" as the pairing of love and disappointment at the heart of anxiety: "Each is central to the absorbing anxiety that gets animated by having an object of desire—anxiety being, after all, the affective copy of ambivalence, where we work out conflicting inclinations toward what kinds of closeness and distance we want, think we want, and bear our object to have."[26] Bridget and Mia both live out this ambivalence in their diaries. Neither the result nor even the temporary failure matter. After all, temporary failure in the face of permanent dissatisfaction is a foregone conclusion in this genre. The very mismatch of expectation and action, and the anxious period spent between the setting of an expectation and its

ambivalent or thwarted achievement, is what encourages and constitutes procrastination and its deformation of time.

**Serial Procrastinator**

If procrastination is constructed toward an expectation that it avoids, the serial form is the perfect stage for its performance. While modern seriality and intertextuality have been around since *Don Quixote*, the *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *Princess Diaries* series both serve as specimens of the rise of the chick-lit or YA multimedia franchise of millennial late capitalism. Following the colossal successes of the YA fantasy series *Harry Potter* (1997) and *Twilight* (2005), the publishing and film industries saw adaptations of YA novels, its bordering chick lit and romance genres, and their inherent seriality all as potential goldmines. The interests and dollars of children, teenagers, their families, and a growing population of 18-35 year old women led to the development of the book/film series deal as the desirable norm in these genres.[27]

Looking back, there are actually only a few seamlessly complete franchises that emerged from this period relative to the number of incomplete series adaptations or low-performing novel adaptations.[28] All the same, the publishing industry is now indelibly marked by the expectation of translation to the television screen. Such bloated expectations and disappointments around the young adult are a result of the market's clutches at a generation decreasingly interested in going to the movies and a heightening anxiety around ballooning and competing economies of attention. It is impossible to ignore these external factors as the author of such a series, and in fact, to be such an author requires a lot of market savviness. In *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *The Princess Diaries*, Fielding and Cabot display their awareness of the market they are writing in and about—and sometimes fumble around and capitulate to.

For instance, both these *Diary* series, as do the gold standards of *Twilight* and *The Hunger Games* (2008), build their final installments around the transformation of the protagonist into a mother. The historical discourse (as we see in *Pamela*, as an example) weighing the woman writer's authorial creativity against her traditionally assigned telos of producing human offspring is often unimaginatively resolved: the baby is born, the author stops writing. However, procrastination reshapes the advent of Bridget Jones and Mia Thermopolis's babies, which arrive thrice, and not at all, respectively. These series are particularly illuminating because of their fundamental narratological and stylistic difficulties (their "annoying and illogical" qualities) as early-then-late versions of the contemporary multimedia young adult franchise.

The troublesome teleology of a series often lies in its relationship with the market and publishing schedule: it is not exactly in the interest of a series to end, even if it must. The young adult in some senses allows the ambiguity of serial continuation at varying paces—of procrastination. The epistolary Bildungsroman promises that the protagonist is still young or immature and allows time dilation and slowed growth. The development of both these franchises over fifteen to twenty years is lengthy, transmedia, allusive, literary, lucrative, complex, and somehow always running in the same spot.

The development of *The Princess Diaries* has a highly regulated if prolonged serial structure and a simultaneously high-energy and heel-dragging literary style. The series comprises fifteen books and two movie adaptations, spanning 2000 through 2015. Ten full-length novels and four novellas cover Mia's tenure at Albert Einstein High School (AEHS) from her freshman year discovery that she is a princess of Genovia, a small European principality, through her subsequent struggles in high school, princess lessons with her challenging Grandmère, and her romantic mishaps, to her graduation. Two films were released in 2001 and 2004 that deviate

further from the series, and are alluded to in the novels. A final eleventh volume revisiting twenty-five-year-old Mia as she takes the crown, rescues a long-lost biracial half-sister (now the note-keeper of a spin-off series, *From the Notebooks of a Middle School Princess*), and announces her pregnancy with twins, seems to have concluded her personal saga.

The production details of this serial publication reveal a lot about the temporality that it formulates. The duration, chronology, and content of each book range widely, and they come in different beats—some books cluster together as reportage of events across a semester, while others skip the in-between of term-time to moments of crisis such as Mia's birthday, prom, or the first college party she attends as a high schooler. Figure 1 in the appendix shows in more detail the calendar coverage, publication date, duration, and page count of each book. The writing and publishing schedule is rigorous: a book a year, sometimes a book and a half or three-quarters—the halves and quarters are novellas.

The first few installments are all the same page count then they increase rapidly in page length.[29] However, the duration of each book shortens across the series. The first *Princess Diary* novel, published in 2000, covers the events of 26 days. The second covers 12 days. The eighth, four days. In other words, each book covers less time, which results in the number of pages per day going up. The notable elongation of the diaries to fill more pages of less narrative time is very clear in its motivation to drag time out, to procrastinate by verbiage, and Cabot with a great deal of irony marks this as narratively unsustainable.[30]

The *Princess* series takes a temporal configuration that allows irregular shifts around or within the recent past and imminent future, without claiming a definitive timeline. The whole series starts as a projection three years into the future, just misses becoming its own contemporary, surpasses it, starts to catch up again, then projects itself again almost three weeks into the future in the final epilogue. While the years are never actually recorded in the novels, they can be deduced from real calendar dates and events. Cabot closes in on contemporaneity with her final novel installments, her "Princess Corona" blog, and her occasional tweets citing "Mia's" opinions on world events (a congratulation to Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, for example), indicating that the *Princess Diaries* canon is intended to remain in our shared historical present, but only approximately. There is a certain shiftiness, a careless elongation of narrative, that allows us to linger in the temporal miasma of these diaries and ignore literal questions about how time is supposed to work: What period of time are we all supposed to be in? When is this due?

Nowhere is this more evident than in Cabot's representation of Mia Thermopolis as an incipient mother. (When is *she* due?) Her pregnancy is introduced as a joking hypothetical in the eleventh and final volume, *Royal Wedding*. Throughout the majority of the original 10-book series, high schooler Mia is completely unprepared for sexual contact. Rather, the romance novel she secretly writes as her senior thesis can be read as a surrogate offspring (in the cliché binary of creative vs reproductive production). Only after she writes it does she have sex for the first time after graduation, in the potently titled tenth book, *Forever Princess*. Eight narrative years later, the tabloids' constant speculation that Mia is pregnant with twins becomes a running joke, only to be proven true within the last few pages of the novel.

This kind of gotcha humour around expectations of romance functions in *Royal Wedding* to nudge motherhood toward the form of a punchline rather than some kind of sentimental revelation. While *The Princess Diaries* does not procrastinate to avoid the reproductive telos (of offspring), the story of Mia's pregnancy—jokes, rumors, delay, and revelation—still prolongs the series itself. As we see in Mia's compulsive and dilatory journalling, procrastination is

"solved" only by multiplication, splitting off like a cell into a wholly new novel published in the real world under the byline of "Princess Mia Thermopolis" that readers can enjoy—or else, the duplicative promise of twins.

Procrastination leads us to doubt these happy endings. If something is drawn out for long enough, we start to ask questions. Chronically putting off, then painfully arriving at, what should be a happy ending makes it clear to us that the ending is not that happy, nor that reliable, an ending. This is a deeply anxious experience. Anxiety is a yet-unanswered desire, according to Berlant. The realization of the desire itself is what causes the anxiety: Now what? The desire will never be wholly good for me; I am caught in a bind. Berlant refers to a long history of women's struggle with femininity and the "work of love," citing Jacqueline Rose's consideration of anxiety as a particularly feminine affect "under an imperative never to stop working on itself."[31]

Ngai also writes a history of anxiety spanning Kant, Freud, and Heidegger, predicated on the spatial models of Freudian, and then film, projection; separations of the self and the perceived self; and the Heidegerrian *Dasein*, which plays out in the masculine self and the perceived masculine self. In these specifically state-determined, gendered descriptions of anxiety, it seems the common thread is the tension between the expectation of what one is supposed to be versus who they actually are.

**What to Expect When You're Procrastinating**

"At heart *Bridget Jones* is about the gap between how we all feel we're expected to be and how we actually are and, as Bridget discovers with her somewhat bumpy pregnancy, how we expect life to turn out and how it actually does."[32] Fielding has said versions of this in a few interviews and the first part of this quote also appears in the opening letter addressed to Bridget's son in *Bridget Jones's Baby*. Fielding calls upon the rhetoric of procrastination, of a gap between present reality and future expectations. The shuffling around of narrative to enable a heightening of sentiment stretches and heightens that gap: this is how procrastination functions serially and through style.

The *Bridget Jones's Diary* series is devoted to the political and socioeconomic zeitgeist of its several moments, read through the lens of a 30-something professional single woman. Its temporal flaccidity manifests in unclear and multiple timelines, visible aging (across films), invisible maturation (across books), and the sustained failure of its conceived plot—and conception plot. The literary traditions that Fielding picks up then drops have deep roots: *Bridget Jones's Diary*'s franchise could serve as a microcosmic GIF of how mass publication has evolved from the 1800s through to the 2000s. Fielding went from compiling a novel from a weekly column (reminiscent of the Victorian periodical) to writing movie scripts that retconned her own sprawling diary novels about off-screen break-ups, deaths, and hastily drawn "outcomes."

In the column where Bridget Jones originated from 1995 through 1998, the commentary ranged over topics such as self-improvement, an ill-advised fling with her womanizing boss Daniel Cleaver, her subsequent career transition from publishing to television, her mortifying encounters with eligible lawyer Mark Darcy, merry nights out with her friends, dealing with her aging parents' existential malaise, and the occasional vaguely self-righteous reference to international events and liberal politics. These columns were compiled into the novel *Bridget Jones's Diary* in 1996 in the form of a New Year's resolution diary loosely based on the plot of Jane Austen's 1813 *Pride and Prejudice*. The extreme popularity of this novel participated in the 1990s cultural renaissance of Jane Austen, uniquely shaped by the 1995 Andrew Davies BBC

adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, and prompted a complex intertextual relationship with Colin Firth, who played Mr. Darcy in the BBC adaptation and then played Mark Darcy in the 2001 film adaptation of *Bridget Jones's Diary*.

*Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (1999) took up the remaining material from the columns to continue a second New Year's resolution diary, revisiting Bridget after six blissful weeks with Mark. However, Bridget's haplessly strict observance of her constructed philosophical canon, derived from self-help books and relationship advice from her single friends, leads to the relationship's quick demise. After a number of outlandish misadventures, a botched interview with Colin Firth (which Fielding did in persona), home renovation scams, and encounters with the police both domestically and abroad, Mark finally swoops in to save her and they reunite.

The third and fourth books were published fourteen years (*Mad About the Boy* in 2013) and seventeen years (*Bridget Jones's Baby* in 2016) later, respectively, and differ wildly from the first two books.[33] *Mad About the Boy*, the only novel not compiled from earlier source material, came as a shock to many of its readers. Taking place eighteen years after the events of *Edge of Reason*, it chronicles Bridget's return to the world of dating as a "born again virgin," a 51-year-old mother of two after Mark Darcy's death. The novel drops in on Bridget on the fifth anniversary of his death, as she shares her diary from the previous year; her current diary recording her life as a widowed mother negotiating her children's schooling and her career as a sometime screenwriter; her steamy and satisfying relationship with Roxster, twenty years her junior; and ultimately her union with similarly-aged ex-military primary school gym teacher, Mr. Wallaker, who strongly resembles the then-James Bond actor, Daniel Craig.[34]

The holy trinity of Colin Firth/Mr. Darcy/Mark Darcy had, for better or for worse, become an institution, and so Fielding's choice to kill Mark Darcy off by Sudanese landmine—off page, no less—exactly two hundred years after his first incarnation in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* was rather devastating. Fielding's decision to dispose of Darcy in such an arbitrary manner seems intentionally comical in the sense of thwarted expectations. It could be seen as characteristic of her not-so-edgy satire of British neoliberal imperialism, except for the truly jarring shift in tone as Bridget sinks into grief. The mood is impressively mournful, but the subject of grief is oddly diffuse: it manifests chiefly through dwelled-upon images such as an empty kitchen late at night, trying on clothes without someone to give advice, tear-jerking self-talk of "Keep Buggering On," cuddling with the children, and marveling at their beauty.

It was savvy, if late, on Fielding's part to present Bridget-as-widow. In 2011, Harzewski described the uptick in widow lit following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in relation to the fallout of Fielding's poorly received 2003 novel *Olivia Joules and the Overactive Imagination*, about an airhead journalist's attraction to a potential terrorist. The atmospheric melancholy of *Mad About the Boy* reads as an invitation to mourn the end of Mr. Darcy as a concept, as much as the death of Mark Darcy as a character. While his death seems to have been prompted by market trends as much as his inception, it also suggests a reaction of millennial disillusionment with the Austenian romance of propriety and economic stability, and, perhaps, the imperious goodwill of human rights interventionism. The domesticity of Fielding's chosen conclusion—a blended family in a mansion on Hampstead Heath with the embodiment of nationalist masculinity for a new boyfriend ("He was so masterful, he was such a MAN!"[35]) during the rise of Brexit—is hugely ironic from one angle and from another, historically overdetermined.

Bridget rejects a strong relationship with a man younger than her in favor of a slapdash happy ending with an (ever-replaceable) James Bond figure, a choice that reflects persistent questions about how aging and ageism work in a postfeminist narrative. Lucinda Rasmussen notes that many critics were disappointed with the lack of apparent change in Bridget's character as she aged.[36] This exposes a fundamentally unarticulated expectation of some kind of character-based achievement, or what we might simply call growth, after a certain amount or quality of experience (read: age or motherhood). *New York Times* reviewer Molly Young takes this stance too: "Mentally, Jones is a teenager. Or maybe a tween. This has always been the case; her diaries come packed with capital letters for emphasis and italics for the same—*gah!*—reason."[37]

But in some ways, Bridget's static character is a resistance to the prolific self-improvement narrative, as Harzewski argues regarding the first two books in the series.[38] Even if Bridget is a mother now, her conditions have not changed; the restrictive, never-ending expectations of postfeminist existence under late capitalism remain the same. She might as well be a teenager. What would a seasoned, mature 51-year-old Bridget Jones even look like? What would she do? Would she keep a diary? The answers are circular. Her static, immature, over-emotional, "aging teenager" identity is precisely what allows her to function, to keep buggering on. Otherwise she would blink out of existence. What this means is that while the whole *Bridget Jones* series is on some level satirical, the inherent ambivalence—parody, even—of Bridget's stance as a future-oriented feminist starts to take the form of untimely sentimentality.

The increase of chronological disorder and reorganization in the latter half of the series highlights this affective shift. The later novels lean more on affective but logically unconvincing conclusions. The fourth novel, *Bridget Jones's Baby: The Diaries* was published basically as an addendum to the film *Bridget Jones's Baby*—almost a reverse adaptation—and revisits Bridget in her coyly described "late 30s" (she is accurately 43 years old in the film) as she discovers she is pregnant and has to deal with the twin possibilities that the child is Mark's or Daniel's (in the book) or Mark's or American dating app developer Jack's (in the film). Both film and novel breathlessly record the gestation and birth of Bridget's first child. But rather than conclude in a long-awaited marriage to Mark, as the film does, the novel concludes more ambivalently with Bridget's simultaneous acceptance of Mark's proposal and Daniel's offer of a shag. As a response to the problem raised in *Mad About the Boy* of Bridget's distinct aging (and impending menopause; she rejects Roxster so that he may one day be a biological father) and her indistinct maturation, she is rewound back ten years to a more palatably reproductive and arguably wiser version of herself for the movies.

*Bridget Jones's Baby* in its film incarnation was much more successful than the novel, which was described as "phoned in," demonstrating "a fundamental lack of interest in details on the granular level," and with big moments that "are written like notes for scenes the author intends to fill in later."[39] This narrative "laziness" indexes procrastinatory thinking, as the writing becomes shorthand for affect—how it should feel to read is more important than the actual scenes that construct those feelings. The novel also felt woefully after the fact—Bridget had already went through the process of motherhood twice, in 2006 and 2013. Why should she do it for the first time all over again in 2016? Especially considering that in 2006 and 2013, Fielding wrote Bridget's motherhood to preclude the marriage plot that she has to concede to, however indifferently, in the 2016 rendition.

We can see these scars of recalibrated narrative time as *Bridget Jones*'s response to the market's demands. As the novels continued to come out, the narrative time that passes between the installments becomes more problematic to the plots of each novels. Fielding's increasing

dependence on narratological devices (semi-montages, flashbacks, flashforwards, and off-page events) to explain the lack of progress in Bridget's life and relationships is notable: flashbacks show she cheated on Mark with Daniel at their engagement party (*Bridget Jones's Baby*), or that Mark has died (*Mad About the Boy*), for example.[40] The struggle is how to account for the disappointed present. The aim of all these flashforwards and back is always to justify Bridget Jones still not having yet done what she's supposed to have done, even though she might have already done it.

Each medium renders this boomerang movement with varying degrees of force. The film adaptations push for more ostensibly conclusive moments. While the second book opts to conclude with Mark's maladroit suggestion of a trip to Thailand, where he just rescued Bridget from jail, the second movie ends with a marriage proposal (which we learn has failed in the next movie). The second movie was released three years after the first and it is amusing to see exactly how much actors Renée Zellweger, Colin Firth, and Hugh Grant have all aged from events that were supposed to have happened only weeks earlier. This visual clash is covered up with the resurrection of the romantic triangle between Bridget, Mark, and Daniel, with mournful allusions to vague eons of elapsed time and regrets that literally never happened. The zaniness of repetition is masked by melancholy: it is sadder if we visit the same anniversary of Mark Darcy's death twice; it is more poignant if we see a montage of ten years of failed relationship after a one-night-stand; it is more touching if the baby diaries are addressed to the baby.

Procrastination still concedes the eventual completion of the task at hand, and so we have to accept that both series end up in the same place, as we might expect. But *Bridget Jones's Diary* not only takes an uncommonly long time to get there, it gets there, and seems to pass it, multiple times. *The Princess Diaries*, on the other hand, tosses the maternal conclusion off as almost irrelevant, a parodic laugh. Both approaches begin the work of not only deferring the telos, but also devaluing it. The avoidance of the traditional telos takes the form of what I would call an affective present: a sense of time is replaced with the evocation of feeling. To see these books as not just *about* that gap between reality and expectation, but *as* themselves that gap, and then, as the reader, to identify *with* that gap also creates a sense of collective procrastination, a dilation of the vicarious enjoyment, repulsion, and anxiety of the zany.[41]

**Taking the Time to Procrastinate**

Anxiety is not just rhetorical. It has its own pathologized context and its own embodied temporal experience. The affective present, or time as feeling, is often described as a way of distracting citizens from civic action and obscuring the political reality of the moment. Yet it is central to the physical experience of anxiety, and importantly, of ADHD, autism, and other neurominorities, alongside which anxiety often manifests. The destabilization of time and the fluctuating emotional scales that ADHD, autism, and anxiety highlight all offer insights about these young adult series.

While anxiety has been discussed extensively, particularly since Freud's interventions in the early twentieth century, and reveled in during the psychotherapy movements of the 1950s and '60s, ADHD and autism diagnoses first became notably common throughout the 1990s. This increase occurred during what Julie Passanante Elman describes as "the decade of the brain," in which leaps in neuroscience research and imaging technology informed a discourse of adolescent brain "underdevelopment" and the neurological pathologization of teens as "crazy" and less than fully human.[42] This larger framing of teenagers as fundamentally disabled and unruly rehabilitation projects—resolved only by reaching the conformity of adulthood—has been a part

of U.S. culture, especially since the post-war appearance of the anxiety-inducing leather-jacketed "rebel."

But the developments of the late twentieth century also overlay and complicate how we understand actual diagnoses of neurodiversity and insubordinate brains and bodies as willfully annoying and immature. Following the bestselling pop psychology book *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* by Mary D. Pipher in 1994, for instance, anxiety was tut-tutted over as an externalized social condition that affects disproportionate numbers of girls and young women. And yet, girls and women still struggle in 2021 to be properly recognized as having ADHD or autism.[43] ADHD and anxiety in particular often present very similarly, and often occur together, precisely because of how people with ADHD (or other disabilities, for that matter) learn to anticipate the institutional and social annoyance they will cause. But the neurochemical foundations of these conditions are different.[44]

What they do have in common, to different degrees, is a non-normative relationship with time. The central quality of ADHD, which also appears in autism, is a neurological, fundamental irrelevance of time. Time agnosia, or "time blindness" (both terms have been criticized), means that people with ADHD have a much looser relationship with time. The lingering past and the impending future do not prompt the same kind of reward-punishment chemical reactions as they do in neurotypical people; the present is by far the most real, immediate experience.

ADHD is censured by society as chronic lateness, distractibility, laziness, poor planning, inattentiveness, and a lack of self-control. Suggested management techniques, which are aimed at maintaining an external sense of time to replace its internal irrelevance, lean on the ideas of "seeing" time and "feeling" time—surrounding oneself with analog clocks to spatialize hours, time-keepers to feel or hear vibrations, and self-reminders and alarms to supply a consistent metronome of time passing. On one hand, people with ADHD are criticized for not sensing time as they should; on the other hand, they are described with some envy as feeling the present even more intensely—it can lead to creativity, charisma, adventure.

In a world where the dexterous facilitation of time dictates livelihood, relationships, commitments, and through all those, one's value as a productive member of society, any kind of temporal divergence—or illogic—still has a steep price. In ADHD, one small moment suddenly turns enormous in emotional and temporal scale; another monumentally important commitment is forgotten. In a person with chronic or long-standing anxiety, their brain is so used to reacting neurochemically as if they are under threat even when there is none, that they can at a heightened moment lose their sense of the time they are in. This is a temporary loss of temporality, as opposed to a permanent non-registration of time, but both take time, actively disrupting normative time.[45]

Elizabeth Freeman defines chrononormativity as "the use of time to organize individual human bodies towards maximum productivity."[46] Chrononormativity also operates in collective, unisonant movement (e.g. standing for the national anthem or on the subway for the daily commute) and as a larger system of biopolitics, in which "populations—masses of bodies—are created and managed through temporal techniques that change the arrival time, order, and length of life and life events."[47]

These biopolitics are the same structured teleologies that the diaries of Bridget and Mia play tag with. The disregard of time, on one hand, and its obstinate consumption, on the other, manifests through daily routines and distractions and in bursts of hyperfocus. Hyperfocus is often rehabilitatively cited as a "superpower" of ADHD and autism in that it lends itself to intense productivity and lack of awareness of time's passing. It is seen as a sort of compensation for the

failure to behave chrononormatively (getting to work on time, remembering all the things needed, maintaining social commitments), and we can most easily connect it with Mia and Bridget's journalling habits.

Just consider the quality of Mia's meltdown at the prospect of a confrontation with Lana, or Bridget's inability to estimate time in her "time-and-motion study," or both characters' high-energy struggle to remember things, complete tasks, attend to the world around them, or feel confident in their ability to maintain relationships. Neurodivergent readers and readers who have had experiences with mental health diagnoses have identified with these traits in both characters: images of Renée Zellweger as Bridget Jones head up articles about women with ADD;[48] autistic fans actively consider whether Mia has it (the jury is still out in the forums); many readers recognize and connect with Mia's anxiety.[49]

The authors of each series have responded to these identifications quite differently. Cabot openly connects Mia's nervous breakdown in the ninth book, *Princess Mia*, with her own experiences with situational depression, also known as adjustment disorder. In a post on her mostly *Princess*-concerned blog, Cabot talks about her experiences of dealing with suicide and mental health crises, both in her personal life and as a student life dorm assistant director at NYU. She discusses the importance of maintaining a sense of scale, of not being overwhelmed by the despair of one moment; we see Mia struggle with this in the novels.[50] By contrast, Fielding has shied away from conversations about the possibility of Bridget having ADHD, possibly because of how often these conversations lead to questions about her own similarity to her protagonist.[51]

Even so, disability journalist Anna Rosevear identifies Fielding's rhetoric of that gap between what a woman is supposed to be and who she really is with ADD:

> Identifying with one or two traits is not the same as actually being Bridget Jones with all her characteristics. And with ADD it *is* the same. People with Attention Deficit Disorder—even while they can look much like Bridget—are usually putting enormous effort into dealing with just the gap that Fielding mentions: the seemingly insurmountable gap between what other people achieve so effortlessly, and the inevitable chaos and confusion that ensues when we try to do the same.[52]

The gap in which feeling and time occur—the gap of procrastination—becomes more than just a metaphor, as the struggle with time we see in Bridget's diary can be illustrated by the physical reality of bodies as much as it plays with intangible ideals.

The adjacency of procrastination with disability time, or crip time, thus depends on the privileges of self-identification: Fielding, distinctly uncomfortable with the popular perception of Bridget as someone with ADHD, prefers to register her as a humorously incompetent wealthy white woman saved by her man, while Cabot renovates the fantasy of millennial princesshood to include the all-important, expensive psychiatric intervention of mental health and wellness discourse. And of course, it works to these narratives' benefit to deny the stigma of what might apply to them, or else, to subsume it in the reigning cultural discourse of self-care and individualism.

I am not giving here an armchair diagnosis of the protagonists of two massively popular best-selling series, nor of their authors. Rather than pathologizing Bridget and Mia in the same way they dismiss themselves with diagnoses or hilarious declarations of wholesale incompetence, I mention these public discussions because disability is integral to the historical context of procrastination. In the years after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, the open secret of disability was the most recognized it had ever been. While the ADA

applied only in the U.S., it heightened the international discourse around disabled people and disability. Disability was finally institutionally visible, but still only under the guise of eventual assimilation.

The ADA codified the long-awaited inclusion and legal protection of disabled people in society according to their work potential, the economic "costs" they presented, and how much time they took—while simultaneously hiding them away under the terms of the same neoliberalism that uses the labour rhetoric of Taylorism, the individualized responsibility of self-help discourses, and the "immature" or "adolescent" behaviour identified in these diary novels. All this led to an embedment of disability within neoliberal work rhetoric, with little thought toward how disability in fact contradicts the driving principles of capitalism.

We assume that procrastination is willful, but it is not always so. As we've seen, procrastination can stem from a repressed desire not to do the task; it can be overt resistance to doing the task; it can reveal the untenability or the irrelevance of the expectation and the perceived urgency around it; or it can be the result of a simple oblivion to time itself. Any or all of these conditions can coincide. Anxiety is symptomatic of those conditions and sometimes creates them. The temporal alterity of ADHD and autism, along with other disabilities, highlights and challenges them.

The chronic nature of Bridget and Mia's obsessive journalling also recalls the longer history of the term "chronic," which developed its negative, illness-related connotations in the eighteenth century, and continues to complicate the bounds of capitalist or Taylorist time in the form of disability. Chronic conditions are ongoing, not terminal, and occur unpredictably and arrhythmically. We could consider the uneasiness or difficulty of Bridget and Mia's diaries as a form of chronicity, as a Bartleby-esque refusal to do what is expected of them.

Elizabeth Freeman suggests that we read the 1853 Herman Melville story, "Bartleby, the Scrivener," not as a disability narrative per se but as what Jasbir Puar calls a *debility* narrative: "stories of attrition, erosion, exhaustion, and decline that are also stories of endurance, protraction, persistence, and dilation in spite of it all."[53] Such chronicity rejects any superseding hierarchy of values. Freeman reads Bartleby as chronic not simply because of his physical pain and illness, but also because of "his refusal of vitality and especially of its temporal regimes of prevention, conservation, and efficiency in the name of a greater good."[54] The turn of the nineteenth century marked a surging interest in public health and eugenics, specifically in the interest of cultivating and controlling good workers. For Bartleby, those temporal logics are irrelevant.

We might wonder if they are for Bridget or Mia at the analogous turn of the twenty-first century, either. These diaries, spanning the course of the neoliberal era thus far, depict debility and disability both rhetorically and literally. Both series formulate the young adult as a specific configuration that allows characters otherwise pigeonholed by consumerism-based and heteronormative chick lit, a sneaky, subversive leaning *away* from the despairing rhetoric of productivity and task completion. In the disability community, one way to disclose disability is, rather than saying that you "can't" do something, you say you "don't" do something—obviating the whole conceit of ability and adequacy altogether. Procrastination functions in a similar way: it works to assume alternate realities where the task yet to be completed simply doesn't exist. In this sense, it's not that Bridget Jones and Mia Thermopolis either "prefer not to" or "have it all"; perhaps, they achieve another possibility: they just "don't."

The mechanism of procrastination does not merely avoid conclusion, increase revenue, delay growth, shirk responsibility, assume inability, or maintain immaturity. We can see how it is

framed in the neoliberal era as a pathological Weberian habit, but also how it demonstrates a much wilder, polysemous temporal reality contingent on physical and lived experience—one that plays out encoded in popular culture. While disability is historically marked as useless, unproductive, or enigmatic noncompliance, as in "Bartleby the Scrivener," now it is institutionally marked as a procrastination of rehabilitation.

This procrastination is ambivalent. The state's unquestioned, arrogantly ableist, and impossible objective of rendering people "less disabled" or "less burdensome" remains oppressively painful.[55] Affectively, however, we are granted the duplicitous hope and promise of acceptance in society through some form of teleological success *and* the sharp, pleasurable slashes of satire and transgressive refusal. And since true resolution will never come within this procrastinatory/rehabilitative framework, the only thing to do is to linger within it, to reclaim and recreate one's time.

# Chapter 2: Confounding, or Narrating Reality

**Closeting the Closet**

In the first episode of the 2006–2011 Disney Channel TV show, *Hannah Montana*, middle-schooler Miley Stewart (played by the incipient pop star Miley Cyrus) has to divulge to her best friend Lilly that she is in fact the wildly famous rock star, Hannah Montana. She does this by inviting Lilly into her bedroom, and asking her to accompany her to her closet. Bemused, Lilly does. Miley reaches into the closet and behold! There is another closet! An unbelievably large salon of a closet opens up before them. They step further into the closet-inside-a-closet, which is Hannah Montana's closet, Lilly's mouth agape in wonder. The camera pans lovingly over the rainbow assortments of clothes, rows of sparkly shoes, glittered and sequined accessories: it is the most incredible and exciting thing Lilly has ever seen. This pilot episode opens with an act of self-disclosure, or coming out, by going into a closet inside a closet. The fantastic camp and irony of this moment is just the beginning: the four seasons of the TV show and the interspersed feature-length film that follow all chronicle this ongoing struggle between coming out and diving deeper into the glamorous closet.

The threat of Miley's "outing" as her fabulous alter-ego Hannah Montana is a source of tension and frisson throughout the series until its conclusion in 2011, when she orchestrates her own "coming-out" on the Jay Leno show as she graduates from high school. At the same time, the pop star Miley Cyrus was drawing pursed lips and snide chuckles from the media for an almost-topless photoshoot with Annie Liebovitz in 2008, and for leaked compromising photos the same year. Cyrus went on post-*Hannah Montana* to more intensive media brouhahas with her unabashedly raunchy, queer, and sometimes culturally appropriative performances. In the 2009 film *Hannah Montana: The Movie*, the impetus for all the previous secrecy is described by Miley's father (played by Cyrus's real father, Billy Ray Cyrus) was to maintain a normal life and slake her too-brilliant creative thirst at the same time. It's no accident that Cyrus's "regular" life provides material for Montana's songs, including the theme song, "Best of Both Worlds": "You get the best of both worlds/ Without the shades and the hair/ You can go anywhere/ You get the best of both girls/ Mix it all together, oh yeah."

The fabricated identity of Hannah Montana both feeds off and into Miley's narrative, mirroring the fabrication of a larger closet inside a closet—it's lavish and liberating, but also an even more closed-off space. This closet isn't quite the same as Narnia—a holy realm to escape to—nor is it quite the same as the spatiotemporal paradox of *Doctor Who*'s TARDIS—classically "bigger on the inside"—although Hannah Montana's closet does possess both of these qualities. Rather, the closet inside a closet is presented as a *solution*: upon its first uncovering, as Miley shares this closet with Lilly to make up for her deception; as it is a reward for keeping this secret; and as it is an answer for the much larger conundrum of how to imagine growth, freedom, or self-expression as a young girl under neoliberalism. The uncertainty and everyday conflicts of maintaining life as Miley Stewart and Hannah Montana would suggest that it is not a smooth or easy life—yet the secret must be preserved at all costs in order to achieve some greater good. The inner, better closet shows us that the whole narrative of empowerment and liberation is contingent on an ongoing act of closeting.

Sheila Heti's art-world autofiction novel *How Should a Person Be?* (Canada 2010, US 2012) might seem markedly different but it is asking the same questions: how to be famous? How to be a young woman in the millennial era? And Heti comes up with a similar solution in conflating reality and fiction: she "mixes it all together," compiling prose, recorded

conversations, archived emails, and verse-like letters from her real life into a novel. Heti's protagonist, also named Sheila, is recently divorced, and struggling to write a play about feminism. In her search for inspiration, she latches onto her new friendship with rising star visual artist Margaux, to whom she is drawn at a party shortly before the divorce: "She looked like a little girl, a sexy woman, and a man."[56] She finds a tape recorder, described in a chiasmically titled chapter "Fate Arrives, Despite the Machinations of Fate," which she uses to record conversations with Margaux and their other artist friends. However, Sheila also mixes life and fabrication together a bit too much: her fascination with Margaux, Margaux's reluctance about being recorded, and Sheila's own struggle to understand how to evaluate herself and the people around her all challenge the boundaries of their friendship. As part of their rapprochement, Sheila promises Margaux to write the play she has been agonizing over. Margaux is lenient: the play doesn't have to be a play—which leads to another neatly chiasmic hint that the play is the novel we have just read.

During this period of reality television's advent, both texts grapple with anxieties around power, privilege, artistic creativity, and agency. Rather than put off the unknown endpoint of linear time (visually, spatially, able-bodied, heteronormatively straight) as the repressive work ethic of procrastination does, these narratives take that linearity and bend it, so that it becomes framed, encircled, or closeted. Reality television introduces a new paradigm of present tense narratology in its splicing together of live footage and cast members' narrations of the events into one large collation of multiple degrees of present-tense narrations—or what I would describe as proximate representational presents. This inspires a new development in the traditional Bildungsroman or the Kunstlerroman, which tends to narrate in linear retrospection from the time of the story's end. Instead, *Hannah Montana* and *How Should A Person Be?* disrupt their own presents and reconstruct them as they occur, playing between immediate and proximate presents. Multiple present-oriented temporalities appear in the development of the young adult form in autofiction and celebrity narratives, as the narrator's authorial role in the Bildungs- or Kunstlerroman is flipped back into a chiasmic knot when the author turns out to be the protagonist, as in the case of Heti's novel and Cyrus's public persona.

In both texts then, we find one entity ensconced, even wedged, uncomfortably inside another, in such a way that the outside is partially exposed as the inside, and the inside as the outside like a Möbius strip: a person and a persona, a text and another text, reality and fiction. Both *Hannah Montana* and *How Should A Person Be?* thus exemplify a kind of narrative closed-circuitry in the rise of autofiction and celebrity narratives centering the young adult in the 2000s. The sustained, locked-in "reality" of Cyrus/Hannah or Heti/Sheila becomes a mode of intentional temporal and narrative manipulation, which requires a static narrative arena within which to move around and squirrel things away in: a sitcom set within the world, a closet inside a closet, a costume-and-wig suitcase, or a play within a novel. These texts enclose the entire project of linear time by appropriating it as a subordinate narrative created by their "protagonists," which mixes together a number of different temporalities: the narrative's present, the present of its writing, the time of its reception, the conceived future present within the narrative, the conceived future present of its being read, and the hopes of the author articulated within and by the narrative.

I have already highlighted the ambivalence around the teloi of employment, marriage, procreation, and postfeminist empowerment in the 1990s and 2000s. That ambivalence about agency and power as it plays out in narrative is inherently and suggestively queer in its reluctance and hesitation.[57] While this ambivalence can be seen in terms of Freudian repression

and quietly queer refusal, it also leads to seemingly odd or impulsive choices, to rhetorical contortions and conflations, and to claims for large-scale, all-encompassing solutions and the logics of denial or disavowal. These ambiguous renditions of proximate presents are historically shaped by contemporaneous reality television and its rhetorics of manufacturing immediate realities, but they are also temporal approaches that, as I'll discuss, can be identified as reactive to and appropriative of queer and/or crip presence. That is, the ambiguities frantically generated around the present temporality in these contexts appropriate and imitate the alterity of queer temporality and the immediacy and fluctuations of crip time. From this closeting of "the closet," then, another temporal strategy concocted by the young adult to negotiate the neoliberal millennial era emerges. I call it confounding.

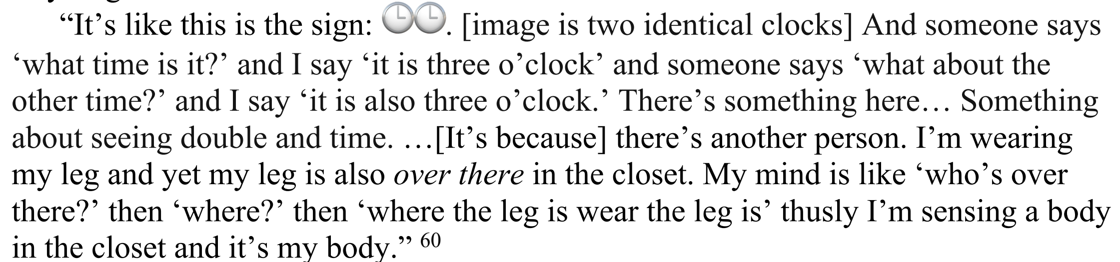
"Confound" comes from the Latin *confundere*, "to pour or mingle together, mix up, confuse" and has a long history of definitions ranging across "overthrow," "corrupt," "consume," "waste," "damn," "put to shame," "silence in argument," "throw into confusion of mind or feelings," "cause surprise and confusion, especially by acting contrary to expectations," "to confuse in the brain with liquor," "to mix or mingle so that the elements become difficult to distinguish or impossible to separate," and "to mix up in idea, erroneously regard or treat as identical, fail to distinguish."[58] In the field of statistics, this latter definition is a key term to explain why an experiment might yield misleading results. Confounding factors most frequently occur in experiments with human subjects, and interactions in the social sciences or medical sciences. A confounding factor, also known as a "confounding variable," "extraneous determinant," or, most fascinatingly, a "lurking variable," affects multiple variables in the experiment in a way that makes it impossible to claim any kind of causal relation between any of them. A study is confounded and its discoveries nullified when a scientist assumes that they have narrowed down the experiment to exclude external influences or unseen commonalities, but in fact has not been able to parse out the lurking truths of their own position or realm of knowledge.

In other words, confounding is not only a failure to distinguish between concepts on one scale, but also is the rhetorical move of operating at a level too abstract or distanced to comprehend the true relations between separate concepts and the true relation between the scientist and their subjects. Indeed, the very concept of experimentation as understood through the Western scientific and philosophical disciplines mandates a separation between the scientist/philosopher and the object of their contemplation, even if it be themselves. Confounding is the puncturing of this seeming objectivity; it is the double failure, first to isolate or control, then of the very concept of control. Applied to cultural artifacts, this double function in these genres of experimentation demonstrates not just an ambivalence toward a conceptual telos in a plot, but also an ethical ambivalence in the very act of narration as it simultaneously performs and denies change. I use the term *confounding narrative* with the understanding that this splits into three conjugated valences. These are narratives of confounding in the statistical sense, as a subtle and total undermining of authoritarian and authorial hubris. They are confounded narratologically in their sprawling constructions and reconstructions of the present tense. And the narratives themselves confound us. They are clearly not difficult to understand but are notoriously difficult to approach, thus attracting much marveling scrutiny—in which this chapter ruefully but necessarily partakes.

The process of gaining some distance only to be further confounded feels very young adult, in keeping with the idea that "the older you get, the more confused you get." However, growth in a confounding narrative is genuinely stymied because the narrative encirclement or sequestration, which conflates various presents ostensibly under the author's control, forecloses

movement or change in understanding. To be confounded is to feel stupid, or perhaps a little too drunk, and to feel stuck and unable to move or protest much against the varying pushes and pulls of the spun logics of “can”s and “can’t”s, “do”s and “don’t”s, “will”s and “won’t”s. In the twenty-first century narrative, surveillance and discipline of the young adult—especially when the young adult is assumed to be female—are everywhere, in all public, private, and personal sectors, seen and unseen. What happens when that internalized surveillance goes haywire? This is exemplified by Heti’s homonymous protagonist Sheila’s obsession with the titular question, “How should a person be?” and by Hannah Montana telling Miley in the mirror, “I’m in your head! I can talk as loud as I want to!”[59]

The obvious presence of an internalized dialogue with the “self” suggests the split, confused consciousness that appears in the rhetorics of the closet and the closet-in-the-closet in queer and crip ways. In Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s epistemology of the closet, which picks up on D.A. Miller’s theory of the “open secret,” the problems of the known/unknown and the confirmed/suspected figure largely. Physically speaking, a closet has an inside and an outside. The doors open and close. You can see the closet itself, but the person has to come out of it. But a crip reading of this closet suggests a different perspective. Disabled poet, professor, and activist The Cyborg Jillian Weise writes:



> “It’s like this is the sign: 🕒🕒. [image is two identical clocks] And someone says ‘what time is it?’ and I say ‘it is three o’clock’ and someone says ‘what about the other time?’ and I say ‘it is also three o’clock.’ There’s something here… Something about seeing double and time. …[It’s because] there’s another person. I’m wearing my leg and yet my leg is also *over there* in the closet. My mind is like ‘who’s over there?’ then ‘where?’ then ‘where the leg is wear the leg is’ thusly I’m sensing a body in the closet and it’s my body.” [60]

The crip closet depends on a physical self-perception where the sense of the body and the body itself are somehow existing on both sides of the closet door—perhaps within a second closet. As with sexuality, there is tremendous pressure to hide or mask one’s disability as much as possible, to “pass” as “normate,” to use Rosemarie Garland-Thomson’s term. This work of not existing either to society or to oneself as disabled, or passing as abled, takes a huge physical and psychological toll. This experience of passing, or being forced to hide oneself from oneself is experienced across race, ethnicity, disability, gender, sexuality, immigration status, diasporic identity, and more—and across multiple identities. But the deadly silent and total distaste for disability that the world offers disabled people, at the same time it offers the nominal inclusion and championing of diversity of the millennial era is a truly bewildering and existentially violent experience.

The neoliberal project of assimilation—especially post the ADA—weakly encourages the naming of disability but says nothing about the living of it. Instead, its goal works toward the disabled person’s isolation and the self-delusion of their success at erasing their disability. But even in this “success” it remains obvious that this person is still disabled, that their life is still undesirable in the eyes of everyone else. In this sense, the crip closet is doubled and inverted: it’s not simply that everyone sees that there is a secret, it’s that everyone’s collective actions (and inaction) teach a person to keep a secret from themselves. The stigmatized reality persists for the normate, but their silence allows the crip to closet themselves. Another way to talk about the closet-in-the-closet, passing, hiding from oneself, or more simply, the separation from oneself, is thus through the concept of shame. Sedgwick and Adam Frank’s reading of shame in Silvan Tomkins’ work introduces a complex diagram of subjectivity within networks of interpersonal

relations. Shame is a deep-digging, self-reflexive concept—it can only be recorded between oneself and oneself.

Young adult narratives, especially when they're predicated on privileged self-reflexive artistic individualism like Heti's or Cyrus's work, attempt to establish a vantage point of power from which to sustain an ironic distance from shame, from closeting. Essentially, they construct a meta-closet. The neoliberal economic, political, and social contexts of these seemingly internal, subjective, individual narratives of power are already confounding factors for this reason. But these narratives also intentionally and gleefully corrupt themselves through this distance: the intellectual and critical pleasures that irony and camp offer also suggest that we're no longer expected to take them too seriously. They're easily self-diagnosed yet inescapable in their effect. Confounding thus exposes the failures of a position of power, and it is a powerfully destructive move in its own right: it overthrows, it silences, it corrupts, and it wastes. As a protagonist, an author is suddenly relegated to a position overpowered by narrative logics at the same time as the protagonist claims the authority of an author whose primary instrument of control is narrative. Thus an author in the position of a protagonist reuses the same narrative logics that they are attempting to resist both as a tool to resist them, and as the excuse for their own maladroit attempts to overcome them, feeding into a circular exertion of power as its own resistance. The author/protagonist thus simultaneously enacts and disavows larger structural narratives.

So, for instance, in response to the January 6, 2021 white supremacist insurrection at the U.S. White House, Cornell undergraduate Lotoya Francis, Twitter handle @lotoysrus, sent a tweet that went viral: "Why y'all keep asking where the police at? Y'all ask where Miley's at when Hannah's on stage?"[61] The open secret of Hannah as Miley's alter-ego is equated with the open secret of the rioters' everyday lives as members of the police force. The systems of power represented by the police register as the controlled and controlling Miley; the rioters as the transgressive Hannah. The metaphor highlights the self-reflexive whiteness of both the police and *Hannah Montana*.[62] The police's surveillance is turned into the self-reflexive surveillance of Hannah/Miley, and then turned into a puncturing of the complicit dumbness required of the audience as the straight man to this farce. Who is asking where the police are when they can see the rioters; who is asking where Miley is when they can see Hannah? How dumb do you have to be? The immediacy of the tweet, which was sent at 11:34 am that day, also taps into the same problematic present tense of Miley/Hannah, otherwise usually dealt with in farcical manner. Francis invites us to see how the police and rioters not only overlap but literally confound their projects by being in the same structure that they are enlisted both to protect and to destroy. It suggests those ostensibly opposed goals are actually not so different. These narratives' temporal structures are, in a sense, repeatedly threatened by, then stabilized against the prospects of outing or narrative disruption. One way to put it is that they engage in a kind of husbandry of the present tense.

**Presenting Reality**

Indeed, the maintenance of the present tense, or present reality as a whole, is the central project of both texts. As confounding narratives, they form in reaction to real cultural shifts and indeed, lurking variables, and insistently perpetuate their fiction as reality. In a 2012 *New Inquiry* interview-cum-autofiction piece with Heti, Emily Keeler dubs *How Should a Person Be?* as "reality fiction." Keeler picks up on the essentially phenomenological problems that Heti sees in reality television and in "reality" at large: "The thing that is truest about *How Should a Person Be?* is that Heti's framing, reimagining, and reinterpretation of the events she describes, of the

conversations she's had with the people she loves, explode what happened or didn't happen onto a higher plane; what's true is that the book is real and unreal. It's reality fiction."[63] Keeler's interpretation focuses on that logical overleap—the "explosion" of what happened or didn't happen onto a "higher plane"—by attributing the entirety of the novel to a re-imagination and reinterpretation of Heti's life and encounters. The indistinguishability of real and not real, Keeler argues, is irrelevant as the whole project is elevated to a "higher" and more distant level of abstraction. But this indistinguishability also suggests a confounded, self-defeating response to the cultural demands of fame and self-expression in reality television that Heti alludes to throughout her novel, and that also operate in *Hannah Montana* and Cyrus's career. This is crucial for both metafictional projects, as it suggests that they rely on collective belief in their audiences.

*Hannah Montana*, which had the accidentally salacious working title of *Alexis Texas*, originally had "Chloe or Zoey" as its protagonist, but as soon as Cyrus signed on, they changed the name to Miley. The reason was that it was "easiest."[64] As the daughter of a family of country musicians, a Disney Channel powerhouse show was one way for Cyrus to develop a career beyond *Hannah Montana*, and in many ways Cyrus was positioned to live the same life as her protagonist. The buffer zone of Miley Stewart as Hannah Montana's everyday alter-ego basically evaporated throughout the run of the show as Cyrus went on tour *as* Hannah Montana multiple times; released albums, clothing lines, and books starring herself as Hannah Montana; and referred to herself as well as the show as Hannah Montana. *Hannah Montana* works to publicize and preserve the experience and fantasy of child stardom as it ushers a new iteration through. At the same time *Hannah Montana* views Miley/Cyrus as something more than a child as the franchise exploits the unstable potentiality of the "young adult" with the persistent threat of the fiction's collapse and Miley's final outing. The pressure of constantly producing that narrative is addressed frequently throughout the series, most notably in the film, and even in interviews Cyrus has given to the press.

The film focuses on these problems of an ongoing fantasy. As Miley attempts to abdicate in the film, she murmurs, "Thank you for letting me have my Hannah." The literal idiomatic equation of "Hannah" and "dream" echoes throughout the entire Disney franchise: "Miley, all you want to do was sing. Hannah let you do that and still have a normal life. That was the dream, remember? That's why we created her in the first place."[65] Hannah is often addressed in the third person, which makes her a real, invisible entity in the room—or perhaps just gone around the corner. She functions specifically as the "dream" which everyone goes to great lengths to preserve ("You're not going to destroy their dreams, are you? Because that's what Hannah's all about."[66]) We might even wonder how Miley Stewart is taking it: if she wants to quit the dream, something is off. The heavy-handed proselytization of the dream, or mythos, of Hannah is intra-diegetically crucial for the maintenance of the plot, and extra-diegetically a powerful investment in brand marketing. There is plenty of scholarship on how Disney, Disney princesses, the Disney Channel star mill, and Disney's principles of marketing to young girls are all pages taken out of the postfeminist, post-racial, oddly queer, all-American ideology handbook. What I'll note here, though, is the multi-directional, simultaneous forces happening as Hannah is equated to the American dream—is it the hidden but famous Hannah Montana whom the audience is intended to envy, or is it the everyday girl Miley Stewart, or is it the performer Miley Cyrus?

The complex present temporality of *How Should A Person Be?* similarly appears in a medial confounding: the novel takes the form of a play in five acts, with a prologue and interlude. In this novel written by Heti as a play scripted by Sheila, the present temporalities of a

scripted performance are enfolded into the narrative encirclement of the novel as ostensibly complete. However, the project is also a compilation of transcribed conversations and emails that Heti took from her real life with her best friend, painter Margaux Williamson, to whom the novel is dedicated, and Margaux's boyfriend and Sheila's friend, performer Misha Glouberman, and their friend, painter Sholem Krishtalka. The live recordings and documentation that occur in the present reality are rearranged into a performative present of the scripted, formal reality of the play. The play thus splices the present into a new present tense: the recordings are no longer simply a record of an immediate present, they also forecast a new repeated present tense of their performance and reenactment. The totality of the novel holds several degrees of present tense—the live recordings, the sent emails (both composed and read), the prose meditations, the phone conversations—in a curation of multiple presents. These presents were then rearranged again within the documentary discourse around the novel's production and reception, as Heti and her friends went on in interviews to revisit, or shy away from, the reconstruction of that time in their lives. We could regard the overall novel as retrospective, as Heti does, a snapshot of a certain time and personality in her life. But it's also a snapshot of the functioning narratology of that period: a specific "present-oriented" attitude toward time and reality.

Autofiction, the genre in which Heti's novel finds itself squarely placed, situates *How Should A Person Be?* as a prime example of a confounding narrative. Not only does autofiction emphasize the problem of critical distance from the self, as Heti's homonymous protagonist, Sheila, asks in the first line "How a person should be?", it also arrives at the confounding conclusion that this critical distance is irrelevant yet must be maintained all the same. Heti, who cites both the Marquis de Sade and Henry Miller as influences, prompts a revisitation of questions of power. The novelty of her project at the time was to simultaneously leverage and embrace the performance of the "dumb" white girl navigating the world. This textual performance was very much influenced by the late 2000s celebrity culture during which Heti wrote the novel. These are the years of the public, Internet-fueled excoriations of Paris Hilton (leaked sex tape in 2004), Britney Spears (nervous breakdown in 2007), and Miley Cyrus (hacked nude photos in 2008)—not to mention the scorn cast upon the largely female fanbases of wildly popular, ostensibly unscripted reality television shows, such as MTV's *The Hills*.

Heti has said many times that *The Hills*, which ran 2006–2010, was hugely influential on the inception of the novel: "What I liked about it was the fact that it was confusing… in that show, *The Hills*, you have this fiction being embodied in these human beings who are not fictions. Whenever a person was saying these words, you couldn't be sure if they were speaking as themselves or as this fictional being. And I knew I wanted to have that same type of confusion in the novel I was writing."[67] *The Hills* was the much more famous spin-off of *Laguna Beach: The Real Orange County* (2004–2006); it followed a group of young, wealthy, white Orange County women post-high school graduation, as they navigated their early careers and relationships in Los Angeles. It was new and arresting in its straight-faced investment in its characters' vacuous everyday lives, the ambiguous narrative agency that it modeled, and its delegation of the ironic mode to the viewer.[68] (Research has shown that most spectators of reality TV at large watch to critique the show and judge the authenticity of the cast and production, rather than out of any belief in the genuineness of the show.) The narratological and social modes of reality television inform Heti's specifically feminine and ironically feminist incarnation of the autofiction and fiction genres that sprouted from the television culture which David Foster Wallace found so appalling.

Reality TV did not only influence Heti's representation of herself and her characters; it also informs the multiple present tense temporality of the novel as a whole. In reality TV shows like *The Hills*, where "nothing" happens, cast members are frequently conscripted as narrators: in interviews with producers, they describe the situations they are in and their feelings about them in a calm setting with neutral background. These side interviews are edited in later, interspersed with the documentary footage of the immediate present of those situations. In real time, cast members are required to wait around for a long time as producers take people aside to collect narrative interview footage. It also puts crushing pressure on the cast when they actually are asked to be *in* the recorded present rather than feigning it or talking about it. The participants are required to speak on their own subjective experiences as though they are still in the immediate present as it was happening, when the finished product makes it clear that they are not. They are in the *proximate* present, or a *representational* present, at best. In this sense, the narratological format of reality TV allows a certain expansion and splicing together of the present, creating a murky, boggy sense of now-ness. The narrative never has a distinct documented present, just a sustained encapsulating, elisional present experience.

Following this model, Heti essentially produces *How Should a Person Be?* with herself and her friends as cast members ("What if we cast ourselves?" she says).[69] The pliable membrane of the novel contains the momentum of the play, which contains the uncertain truths of documented conversation. Throughout the wealth of interviews with Heti alone, with Williamson alone, and with Heti and Glouberman together regarding Heti's projects of writing down her friends, it is clear that, like a reality TV show, writing *How Should A Person Be*? put intense pressure on their relationships.[70] While Heti as the author of this novel is bound to talk about her friendships, Williamson is eager to move away from those topics to focus on her own art: striking oil paintings where furniture and objects are flattened or elongated in ways that makes space two-dimensional.[71] These paradiegetic conversations contain a plethora of information about everyone's opinions and experiences of fictionalizing, non-fictionalizing, or being fictionalized or non-fictionalized, but they also emphasize the temporal and logical coerciveness of the novel as it is both frozen in time and continues to appear as a manifestation of the present. The recordings and emails that form the novel documented an immediate present; the novel constructs more "present"s around that immediate present that subsume it, render it indistinguishable, or confound it. This is how the book can be simultaneously "real" and "unreal" in exactly the same way that Heti describes the confusion she attempts to reproduce—the uncertainty of whether she and her friends speak as themselves or as fictional beings.

**The Squash Court**

Over a brunch debate, Sheila, Margaux, Misha, and their friends Sholem and Jon agree to host an Ugly Painting Contest. Only at the very end of the novel are the two painting submissions from Margaux and Sholem remembered, judged, and deemed to be equally ugly; arbitrarily, a winner will be determined in a squash match. After a while, they realize that nobody knows the rules of squash or has been keeping score. This conclusion predicted the reception of the novel at large. James Wood of the *New Yorker*, already taking umbrage with the acquisitive, vapid L.A. aesthetics of reality television that Heti replicates, famously complains that the prose is "basic," "ungainly," and "sloppy, pert formlessness."[72] Other critics have argued, through both their own observations, and Heti's interviews, that the novel is intended to be ugly in this sense—a contribution to the debate about aesthetics within the novel as well as outside it. This novel is obviously lampooning a certain kind of elite criticism, but the throwing

up of hands at the squash court ultimately casts uncertainty on Heti's own valuation of the novel and the art that is so central to it. Why have we been positioned to care about paintings, or even aesthetics at all, only to be told it doesn't matter? We might conclude that simply "slamming the ball around" in a communal act of creation is the ethical telos, but the exclusivity and voyeurism implied by a squash court still replicates the same privilege as we see in reality television shows. Squash is generally known to be a wealthy person's sport, which of course reifies the elitism marked in the lives of publicly-funded white heterosexual Jewish artists in Toronto.

The court itself is also an extremely apt location to end the novel, narratologically speaking. While Sheila and her friends claim ignorance about the rules of the game, how they map onto the space of the court is surprisingly similar to the way Heti mediates the novel. The court is a closed space in which a ball must continue to bounce off the walls and floor in a specific pattern. The ball can touch any of the walls, but it must touch the front wall before it touches the floor. The two players share the whole court, as if someone took the usual two halves of a sports court and superimposed them, giving each player a sense of their own court as they essentially play on two planes at the same time. Spectators watch from behind a glass wall at the rear of the court, easily imagining themselves as the players as they watch their backs.

The incredibly active closed space of the court, the tight delineations of how the players and the ball can interact with one another, the relative freedom of the ball through this space, and the audience appended to this room all seem an accurate representation of how Heti's novel is supposed to operate. The front wall and the floor rapidly mediate the ball in the same way that Sheila the character and Heti the author mediate the narrative. The erratic trajectory of the ball and the high energy of the players can only occur in this compressed space, like a novel that contains many presents. And like Williamson's paintings, walls become surfaces, while floors become meaningless. The antagonistic collaboration between the two squash players, who must weave around each other, shouting "let" to indicate how they want to hit the ball, evokes the same prickly partnerships that Sheila finds with her fellow "cast members." It feels amusingly disingenuous to shrug that Sheila and her friends don't know how to play squash; it certainly seems like Heti has more than an inkling.

The distortions of perspective and distinct overlaying of domains that the squash court constructs as a concluding chronotope thus respond to the thread of inquiry with which Sheila opens. While the novel is full of many casually pithy bon mots on art, ethics, sex, genius, heterosexual femininity, and the greatness achievable in the twentieth century as a "blow job artist," the mundane, babbling voice of reality television narrative present-after-the-fact constructs these thoughts as a performance from an empirical vantage point.

> How should a person be?
>
> For years and years I asked it of everyone I met. I was always watching to see what they were going to do in any situation, so I could do it too. I was always listening to their answers, so if I liked them, I could make them my answers too. …You can admire anyone for being themselves. It's hard not to, when everyone's so good at it. But when you think of them all together like that, how can you choose? How can you say, *I'd rather be responsible like Misha than irresponsible like Margaux*? Responsibility looks so good on Misha, and irresponsibility looks so good on Margaux. How could I know which would look best on me?

These problems appear on the very first page of the novel as the observations of a scientist, or philosopher, or stand-up comedian. Sheila observes and appraises subjects while trapped in a conundrum of self-reflexivity. The initial problem is "thinking of them all together like that."

Sheila's individuality corrupts her ability to draw any conclusions from her many subjects of study ("You can admire anyone for being themselves"). No matter how much data she collects from people around her, she still cannot achieve the proper distance from herself as an aesthetic object ("It's hard not to, when everyone's so good at it"). Indeed, the presence of other individuals, seemingly complete in themselves, makes it even more overwhelming to understand how to relate to herself—it's not just how could she *know* what looks best on her, it's how could she *see* what would look best on her? How could she separate herself from herself? Existential mirrors do not exist here, only unseen audiences. Sheila can only imitate, become the image of others, as she goes on to contemplate geniuses and "great souls" like Andy Warhol or Oscar Wilde—both occupied with replication and reflection—before cutting herself off with "but that is just a lot of vanity." Perhaps if it were possible for her to regard only one person, then she would be able to solve this. But there are "a lot" of people.

At the same time, Sheila's rhetorical positioning is already suspicious. After all, she is mirroring herself, proliferating herself as both character-narrator and author in the doubled space of the novel. She performs again this dubious doubleness by restarting her train of thought in the next section of the prologue:

> How should a person be? I sometimes wonder about it, and I can't help answering like this: a celebrity. But for all that I love celebrities, I would never move somewhere that celebrities actually exist. My hope is to live a simple life, in a simple place, where there's only one example of everything.
>
> By *a simple life*, I mean a life of undying fame that I don't have to participate in. I don't want anything to change, except to be as famous as one can be, but without that changing anything. Everyone would know in their hearts that *I* am the most famous person alive—but not talk about it too much. And for no one to be too interested in taking my picture, for they'd all carry around in their heads an image of me that was unchanging, startling, and magnetic. No one has to know what I think, for I don't really think anything at all, and no one has to know the details of my life, for there are no good details to know. It is the quality of fame one is after here, without any of its qualities.[73]

Heti describes a conservative yearning not just for simplicity but for a scientific world where everything is taxonomized—where "there's only one example of everything"—and where everyone lives their lives with her "unchanging, startling, and magnetic" image in their heads. The problem of too many "all together" is answered by Sheila's fixation on a static "one," ironically echoed in "one example," "no one," and the repeated third person impersonal pronoun "one." The emphasis on accumulative singularity and on the centripetal force of celebrity and fame, despite the contained counterfactual of places where celebrities "actually exist" in the plural, presents the overarching solution to this experiential conundrum.[74] In this fantasy, Sheila imagines herself as a reigning paradigm for everyone in the world, an omniscient, omnipresent fixed image that shapes everyone else: this is not just fame. This is control.

Temporally speaking, the fame that Sheila wants is already being famous, or the feeling of being famous—or a kind of "post-famous." She wants the concept of fame without the details, even without geographic location (which we might quickly hazard to be Los Angeles or New York—among other things, the novel struggles with the choice to be an artist in Toronto). She wants to be recognized for her thoughts that she "doesn't really think;" she wants to be "unchanging." This expressed desire for the possession of a "quality" without its "qualities" is another appearance of the affective present, or time as feeling, that I describe in "Procrastinating" as a rhetorical move that both totalizes and voids. Even as Sheila distances

herself from the thoughts she doesn't think, but rather that she wants to be perceived to think, or that she performs the thinking of, the "already" or the "post" implied by her ideal absence of detail indexes an elision of both the future and past within the present. Contrary to her stipulations, the distance Sheila maintains from herself as a potentially famous, or endlessly perceived entity, is inseparable from the commingled presents and futures of that desired perception and that desired power. As proof of these confounded axes of fame, Sheila's desire to inhabit everyone's head with a fixed image of herself is also one that she already satisfies through her authorial position.[75]

A closed space indeed: both Sheila and Heti are firmly established in the arena of the novel that they write. But Sheila also presents a counterfactual—an exit plan—shortly thereafter on page 3:

> In an hour Margaux's going to come over and we're going to have our usual conversation. Before I was twenty-five, I never had any friends, but the friends I have now interest me nonstop. Margaux complements me in interesting ways. She paints my picture, and I record what she is saying. We do whatever we can to make the other one feel famous.

It's not just the doubleness of Sheila's role as author and character that catch together into a central "one." The pair, Margaux and Sheila, radiate fame—or soak it up—for one another as well. Heti chooses to situate "both" as "the other one" rather than "each other." While "the other one" suggests the same competition and sense of inadequacy in face of the too bountiful "thems" that appear in the start, it also reveals Sheila's perspective in her love story with Margaux. The novel is a declaration of love, but at times it is an overbearing, crushing sort of love. Her project to make Margaux feel famous, both inside the novel and outside of it, is the manifestation of a pressing desire to be at one with her—it serves to make Sheila famous, too.

This makes for the central conflict and resolution of the novel. Sheila goes on a weekend trip with Margaux to Miami to deliver her art to a show and commits the dire faux pas of buying the same yellow dress as her—described by Joanna Biggs in the *London Review of Books* as "silly like something to fill five minutes of an episode of *Made in Chelsea*[76], yet iconic like a turn of the plot in Hitchcock's *Vertigo*."[77] After Margaux expresses the need for boundaries in their friendship, Sheila fears she has corrupted Margaux and runs away to try to be a writer in New York City. Eventually, upon her return, Margaux says, in a dialogue recorded by the contentious tape recorder, "…it's like in life—you have the variables and you have the invariables, and you want to use them all, but you work around the invariables… I thought you were an invariable—and then you left without saying a word."[78] Sheila narrates, "Then, very deep inside, something began to vibrate. I was an invariable. An invariable. No word had ever sounded to me more like love."[79] Sheila's realization that there is only one Margaux in the world, and her representation of that epiphany about her own role in Margaux's life (as a regular cast member, we might say) is a climactic resolution for the novel. Sheila transitions from viewing Margaux as "the other one" potentially to be subsumed into the large, famous, and overpowering "one" of Sheila to understanding herself as "an invariable," or another form of unchanging entity in Margaux's life. We might see this as a solution to the problems of critical distance and self-perception that Sheila introduces in the prologue. It's even potentially a redemption from the hermetic spaces of the double realities of the novel and the violations inherent to novelizing one's best friends.

Not so fast, though. There are still tensions at play that make any traditionally novelistic resolution, including the love story between Sheila and Margaux, a closet-within-a-closet type of

solution. It's clear both from scenes within the novel and interviews outside of the novel that Sheila and Margaux (and Heti and Williamson) are committed to one another as artists and as individuals worthy of intense attention. But the pressure on Heti and Williamson in the media to claim again and again that the time of the novel *How Should A Person Be?* is over, that their friendship is now best left alone, only proves that the conglomeration of these proximate presents in the novel has confused its audiences as well. The indistinguishability still thrives; the delusion of that encompassing present persists. The squash court as a diagram of twofold realities shared by two players, threefold by the unseen audience watching the game, attempts to push back against the solipsistic concentration of fame and power that Sheila originally seeks. But this confounding structure interferes with its own project. The proposed solution of the squash court still superimposes planes of reality and renders them indistinguishable.

**The Revolving Door**

When Hannah Montana comes to town back home in Tennessee, Miley finds herself having to race back and forth between a first date with local cute boy Travis as herself and dinner with the mayor as Hannah, going through a revolving door each time. This revolving door is a site of farce: Miley's father steps out looking for her, steps in looking for her; Miley's brother gets stuck in the door several times; Miley goes in as Miley and comes out as Hannah; she goes in as Hannah and comes out as Miley. Finally at her breaking point, Miley pulls off her wig and starts wiping off her make-up in exhaustion on her way out before she realizes that a little girl is opposite her in the revolving door, watching her. There are thirty seconds of slow motion as the two look at each other while they spin in the revolving door. Implausibly, Miley remains in the revolving door as it spins several times, during which the girl leaves and Travis enters. When he looks through the glass and sees her holding the Hannah wig, disgust suffuses his face and he exits, Miley in pursuit. This scene is what leads Miley to attempt to abdicate the Hannah role. However, the same little girl from the revolving door is the first to plead with Miley to stay Hannah. Eventually, Travis gives his blessing as well amidst the choruses of approval.

The chronotope of the revolving door offers something slightly different than the squash court. It is a kind of optical illusion. If a revolving door spins fast enough, it becomes the animation technology of a zoetrope, blurring the figures inside into sequentially moving shapes. Alternatively, it it is a kind of centrifuge. The spinning is deceptive in its suggestion of smooth movement and animation, but a zoetrope unifies discrete elements and a centrifuge separates them. Miley and Hannah spinning in the revolving door seemingly merge into one because they already *are* one, and this is emphasized by Miley's/Hannah's opposition to the little girl, clearly an audience surrogate. The unnamed girl's glimpse into the secret moment of transition between Hannah and Miley is also a glimpse into a centrifugal moment for herself: she too might see herself, as we too might see ourselves, merge as two people into one. This girlish young-adult secret is held between them, through the transparent spinning glass of the revolving door.

By the same token, anyone can see into a revolving door from the outside: it is another kind of closet-within-a-closet with its self-reflection, enclosure/disclosure movement, and internally directed relationality. The compounded interiority, the transparency, and even the logical silliness of Miley staying in the revolving door for several rotations all operate by the same principles as a confounding narrative. The present tense is manipulated through many different images of organized enclosure. But centrifugal energy is not a true Newtonian law of motion: rather, it's a law of inertia that operates only within a rotating frame. From outside of the frame, the centrifugal force does not exist. It's the sensed impact of inertial forces on the subjects

inside the rotating frame, wanting to fly out into space, but held into place and forced into orbit by the frame. The formulations of the present tense as framing, enclosed, nested, blurred to itself, all suggest a certain kind of inertia on the part of the author/protagonist.

This inertia is another way to talk about shame—less in terms of being closeted or passing than in terms of *hiding from oneself*. When one is inert, one allows the forces of the external world to just move one along without any exerted effort. It works well if the world is spinning in your favour. This lack of exertion is a loaded idea in a crip context (so what if you can't exert your body?), but when one can do something and yet doesn't, it's very recognizable to people who are used to bearing the consequences of that choice. Shame's physical markers are hunched shoulders and cast-down eyes, but it can also manifest in a blank stare, a reactive smile, a forced chuckle, a shift to another topic, a sense of dissociation. The diffused shame of straight, or abled, or white people is a familiar quotient in the experiences of queerness, disability, and Blackness. We could even chalk up the whole project of a confounding narrative to hiding one's shame from oneself, or avoiding the experience of shame altogether through uncomfortable laughter or obstinate faith in the convolutions of rationality.

But the ways the present tense begins to fan out, to disambiguate, like phyllo or a waterlogged book, in reaction to these rhetorical and paradigmatic realities is more powerful and narratologically suggestive. The author/protagonist is flung into this narrative mill, attempting to figure out who they are, why there are many but only one of them at the same time. Curiously, both *Hannah Montana* and *How Should A Person Be?* end in pretty much the same way. The forces of growth are confounded by the confused self-distancing techniques of autofiction and reality fiction, as Sheila barely develops a better sense of how she should be, and as Miley goes the very short distance from the closet-inside-the-closet to the stage. Any growth represented in these narratives is rendered suspect. It's confusing for everyone, but from a certain angle it brings our many presents into sharp relief.

**Post-Present and the Punchline**

Both *How Should A Person Be?* and *Hannah Montana* arose during a specific historical moment: the era of post-irony, new sincerity, post-racial, and post-truth discourses, all heavily informed by the rise of television and Internet cultures. These "post"s defray the marginal identities that postmodernism invited forth into backlash movements: consider the development of postfeminist "lean-in" capitalism in reaction to second-wave feminism in the 1990s and early 2000s, or the delusional claims of a post-racial era following the election of Barack Obama as the U.S. president in 2008. Both Heti's and Cyrus's texts were also generated before an uptick in the mainstreaming of twenty-first century racial and social justice discourse, arguably indexed by the 2013 genesis of the Black Lives Matter movement. "Post" seems to express the desire to claim something to be already in the past, to elide it as an issue of the present—which, in its use, confounds its intended meaning. It's no accident that the urge for the elision of the present we see in the *post* occurs at the same time as the large scale introduction of the concept of *privilege*—specifically in terms of racism, but also in relation to ableism, transphobia, homophobia, and misogyny.

Another way to consider the privileges of discomfort is through the function of humor particular to this period. Humor is a way of structuring time and expectations. Dena Fehrenbacher identifies a phenomenon in the early two thousands of "punchline aesthetics": a particularly white and privileged mode of anxious, self-deprecating humour and self-conscious failure that coerces an audience's exculpation of the comic narrator through understanding

laughter or through the assumption of catharsis of any kind.[80] This operates on similarly elisional principles as the use of "post"—the very use of punchlines is, as Fehrenbacher agrees, what exposes white discomfort and its inability to reckon with its own whiteness. The premise of neutral objectivity and of indistinguishability between narrator, author, and audiences is no longer, and never was, viable; yet much of humor in this context is solipsistic—encircling and sequestering its trajectory into a closed loop. In Fehrenbacher's examples, authors like Sheila Heti and Ben Lerner assume (subsume) the audience's understanding as they watch the narrator appropriate the discomfort of failure; the very audacity of that subsumption is supposed to be humorous.

The un-self-aware self-consciousness of punchline aesthetics follows from the coinage of post-irony. Irony, in Socratic terms, refers to the simulation of ignorance, the feigning of dumbness to prove an abstracted point. It requires a divided or doubled self: a self that is playing stupid, and a self that shares this knowledge with an interlocutor. This performance of opposition is, again, a traditional source of humour in its contravention of expectation, but also easily dysfunctions as rhetorical obstruction in punchline aesthetics. Post-irony illustrates a fatigue with this ironic distance, which, David Foster Wallace argued in the early 1990s, only demonstrates a despairing disaffectedness and stasis in American culture following the rise of television culture. At the same time, post-irony also implies the need for more degrees of ironic distance—simple irony is no longer ironic enough. So, at the turn of the twenty-first century, the ambiguity of whether something should be perceived seriously yields post-irony. This bandying about of post-irony and new sincerity terminology through the 1990s and 2000s heralded and even made room for the resurgence of the post-truth era in the few years following the emergence of Heti and Cyrus's projects.[81]

Post-irony and the new sincerity movement are extremely influential in the development of autofiction, celebrity narratives, and reality television. These generic debates engage with power dynamics both, as their plots suggest, between characters, and between author and audience. For instance, some have said *How Should A Person Be?* is a feminist interpretation of a specific lineage of high literature novels where distinctions between author and narrator are blurred: the typically white, masculine, and self-conscious tomes of authors such as Wallace, Philip Roth, or Bret Easton Ellis. All of those authors have written works at one time or another categorized as autofiction, a genre originally coined in 1977 by the French author Serge Doubrovsky to answer increasing anxieties about perceived cross-contaminations between autobiography and fiction. This genre has since developed as an arena of intense philosophical discourse around neutrality, subjectivity, and the claim of accuracy as an autobiographer on the one hand, and on the other, revelry in the ineluctable complexity of self-narration. Whether or not these dilemmas are actually fruitful, "autofiction" now describes a distinct thread of mainstream "alternative" high literature since the 2000s, including authors such as Ben Lerner, Sally Rooney, or Ocean Vuong.[82] The emergence of autofiction and its attendant conundrums of subjectivity and truth seem an organic development from its historical and political context of uncertain realities, testimonial truths, and social reckonings. The temporal and narratological approaches of Heti's novel reflect the power dynamics that autofiction often explores in word, but also reveal to us in deed the techniques and vantage points from which that power is exercised.

The self-conscious failure of one's power in the humor of these narratives is a form of "self-reflexive dumbness": "how silly or dumb it is that I am doing this dumb thing." Dumbness in this situation denotes the failure of speech, as it yields ostensibly meaningless language but

also enacts the failure of the act of speaking.[83] This form of punchline aesthetics also functions in the distinctive brand of humor delivered by the Disney Channel. *Hannah Montana*, along with a number of other contemporaneous Disney Channel shows, has been taken to task for teaching a whole generation of aspiring actors to act badly.[84] Almost every line is a punchline. They are delivered with extreme intonation, hideous frozen moues, and exaggerated pauses, presumably to allow for the uproarious laughter that is expected, then supplied by the laugh track. This style is uniform across the shows, which indicates that overacting is actually no fault of the child actors, but rather part of the Disney Channel brand. The physical comedy of the shows naturally has a long lineage of physical failure, exaggerated physical movement, or socially unsanctioned physical behaviour, including the zany action of commedia dell'arte that I mentioned earlier, or the secretive, gossipy Pulcinella.[85] Beyond the slapstick B-plot misadventures of Miley's buffoon brother Jackson, or of Miley's A-plot awkward comedies, which both intentionally push the limits of belief, there are more subtle moments and dynamics where Miley or Lilly strategically act dumb. This strategic dumbness relies specifically on a conceived gullibility—the very idea that someone might believe this incredible reason for not doing homework or that Hannah is rendered unrecognizable by a pie on her face, for example, is compounded by the secret comic relief that we in the audience are not *that* dumb. But either way, we are helped along by the laugh track to recognize the hilarious implausibility of such situations.

Dumbness—by which I mean passive, stunned silence, the loaded inability or unwillingness to speak, the inarticulateness of an animal—is most often used to dismiss and dehumanize disabled people who don't use their voices to communicate. This includes signing Deaf people, autistic people, psychologically mute people, people with aphasia or other neurological disorders, people with intellectual disabilities, and people who have had strokes, cancer, or other kinds of illnesses. "Dumb" is a profoundly offensive word, so why do I use it?[86] Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha's "abled panic" aptly describes the "stiffness," "frozenness," constant apology, and "freaking out" of abled and hearing people when communication fails (because in Piepzna-Samarasinha's example, it is CART captioning and ASL interpreters over Zoom).[87]

But I choose "dumbness" because it immediately spotlights the role of speech and "intelligence" in ableist notions of agency; it summons shame; and it serves as a conceptual doorway for abled people into crip reality, precisely because it operates within the same mechanism of privilege that uses it against other people. The truth is that there is no really good word in English for what I am referring to, because every word is already loaded, ableist, or taps into taboo (silent, dumb, stupid, unresponsive, paralyzed, etc… they're all already ruined.) The socially transgressive, physical, real presence of disabled people and the undeniable embodiment of their communication in how they move, how they look, and how they react is no dumb silence. There are in fact many, many ways in ASL to describe how people react to disability: the linguistic reproduction of an ableist person's facial expression or body language is powerful and vindicating in its accuracy. Instead of the passivity of "dumbness" in English as it is something that happens *to* people (as in "struck dumb"), there is an *active* dumbness easily captured in the behaviour of a person who encounters something they deeply, deeply do not want to deal with, do not want to consider, and refuse to register.

With these literary and political backdrops of loosening certainty, Heti and Cyrus's narratives negotiate confounding questions of self-awareness and agency. The paradigmatic forces of "straightness," traditional irony exercised through critical "dumbness," and the white-centered notions of objectivity and neutrality all contribute to the confounding approach best

exemplified by autofiction, reality narratives, and celebrity narratives. Not only do texts such as Cyrus's and Heti's function ironically, and not simply are Cyrus and Heti both white women performing themselves, but the insistent manipulation of critical distance, straight compliance, and performed helplessness also reshapes the linear present tense into a self-proliferating, self-entrapping narrative. These millennial elisions—of the "post" and of punchline aesthetics — result in a confounded narrative. To be precise, they are all symptomatic of a failure to distinguish multiple critical realities happening at the same time, and the failure to take the time to perceive them.

**Playing Straight, Playing Dumb**

We begin with the premise that there are multiple personas, or consciousnesses, or in ASL parlance, role-shifts. How can they be there at the same time? Formally, this means these confounding narratives must bend time back onto itself, sequester it somehow, and create vantage points for reflexivity—as in Weise's two clocks side by side. Role-shifts in ASL refers to how the signer turns their body to the left or the right to narrate a story with multiple characters; the only thing that indicates who is talking is how the signer angles their shoulders inside their signing space. These vantage points seem to allow the narrator to look at and respond to "themselves." The embodied multiplicity of the single narrator is already accurate as they move between perspectives. But to narrate an author/protagonist like Sheila Heti/"Sheila" or Miley Cyrus/"Hannah" in ASL, I wonder if I would raise my eyes to my interlocutor, raise my shoulders as though I were going to shift perspective, but then plop down in the same spot, and move my eyes back down into the middle distance near my talking hands. This would further demonstrate self-reflexively nested role-shifts between myself and myself, echoing through my present-time space.

Heti's and Cyrus's narratives resort to this sort of maneuver to represent the shared self of author/protagonist, and this appears in their relationship with time as well: they contort themselves around time as in *Hannah Montana*, and they contort time around themselves in *How Should A Person Be?* These temporal contortions correspond with established formulations of queer time or crip time, but they occur specifically in the context of performatively "straight and dumb" narrations. That is, as the author/ protagonists of *How Should A Person Be?* and *Hannah Montana* narrate against themselves, they demonstrate self-awareness of what they are intentionally *not* being. They use multiple-present-oriented narratological techniques that are obliquely queer or crip *in response* to the presence of queerness and cripness. That is, through their literal imagery and narratology *How Should A Person Be?* and *Hannah Montana* tap into the closet-inside-the-closet, which showcases the fissions that occur in the present tense as these texts attempt to negotiate queer and crip temporality without talking about it.

The wild successes of Sheila Heti's *How Should a Person Be?* and Miley Cyrus in and as *Hannah Montana* rely on their formulation of the traditional conundra of the young adult, girl-woman attempting to realize their full potential in the neoliberal era. As I demonstrated in my chapter on procrastination, this is a narrative about straight people struggling with straight time, by which I mean heteronormative teloi of gender and sexuality but also, in a crip context, the sense of continuity, uninterrupted movement, or fast linearity. Upon a closer look, however, both these texts are narratively—and narratologically—not really that straight. Rather, they perform "straightness," or simply are the scare-quoted "straight." The emphasized *performance* of straightness also introduces the possibility of, and indeed, implies a latent queerness, which that performance elides even as it responds to it. It's no new claim among queer and disabled

scholars and some straight and able-bodied ones that sexuality and disability are not the fixed categories that they're purported to be. As Alexander Doty put it in 1993, "basically heterocentrist texts can contain queer elements, and basically heterosexual, straight-identifying people can experience queer moments."[88] These queer elements often fall by the wayside, troped away as moments of confusion, illegitimacy, lapses of judgement, even sin, or simply as immaturity; the crip elements often go unnoticed altogether.

On the face of it, *How Should A Person Be?* and *Hannah Montana* participate in these tropes of queer and crip disavowal, as ostentatiously straight narratives that yet prioritize passionate, even erotic, best-friendships over any other kind of heterosexual romantic affiliation. Sheila of *How Should A Person Be?* signals her heterosexuality in her announced desire to "perfect the art of the blow job," and her brutal "Interlude for Fucking" garnered much grinning media attention when it was excerpted in the *New Yorker*.[89] But most of the novel chronicles how Sheila falls in love with the artist Margaux, as they enter into an intense, passionate friendship, initiated by Margaux confessing that she has never "had a woman before," and Sheila agreeing, having always been desired by men, who are "easier to control."[90] As they spend more time together, Heti stages some suggestive moments—the two women appear in a scene notedly wearing a zeugmatic pair of "dirty sneakers and underwear," or, on another occasion, gigglingly sleep commando in the same bed ("Hehe. You have no underpants on").[91] Put together, these moments register a smoothly advantageous white femininity, as well as a sense of internalized misogyny. Neither Margaux nor Sheila find it easy to have female friends: men are easier to attract; women are not "as serious."[92] The flirtation with some risqué girl-on-girl action, with its little-girl "hehe," does not seem to be for Margaux's benefit as much as for the titillation of the audience. Yet the suggestion is there, whether as an erotic possibility or as an anxiety.

Similarly, Miley's inflexible commitment to her life as Hannah Montana compromises her relationships with boys, but she invites Lilly to participate in that life under an alter-ego of her own, then asks her to move in with her, and eventually, climactically, turns down a starring film role to continue their life together in college. As characters in a G-rated show, Miley and Lilly obviously cannot demonstrate the same level of physical intimacy as Heti's characters. However, in Morgan Genevieve Blue's account of the more feminine Miley's attempts to make the tomboyish skater chick Lilly acceptably girly, she suggests a discourse against queer presentation, or a presentation that threatens to be queer.[93] Lilly's alter-ego, the loud and colourfully bewigged Lola Lufnagle, conjured so that she can accompany Hannah Montana onto the celebrity circuits, contributes to this less than perfectly feminine presentation. Rather than viewing this as drag, or an interrogation of gender per se, Blue sees in Lola's over-earnest uncoolness and flamboyant looks a representation of "failed femininity."[94] While Lilly becomes more conventionally feminized in her appearance as the show progresses, the questions that this drag, or half-drag, raise remain and become more instrumental, particularly through the wigs that represent these shifts in persona.

The foundational premise of the entire series is the highly suspect notion that brown-haired Miley becomes unrecognizable when she wears the blond Hannah Montana wig, even to people close to her. The blond wig even gets its own role. The 2009 feature film *Hannah Montana: The Movie* opens on a shot of the disembodied, abject Hannah Montana wig sitting on a stand because Miley, who is starting to get careless and arrogant, is late to her own concert. Shortly thereafter, Miley is sent home to Tennessee to reconnect with her roots, but when her hometown is threatened by a new development project, she "invites" Hannah Montana to give a benefit concert—thus unpacking the Hannah wig. But she still has to keep it hidden. The

presence of both personas and their attendant responsibilities threatens to jeopardize a new boyfriend for Miley as well as a new relationship for her father. Her wig is discovered in a shameful moment and later, Miley announces a farewell in an onstage denouement at the benefit by removing this wig, to gasps. She performs an original song, "The Climb," thanking the audience for "letting her live her Hannah."[95] The audience members then exhort her to "not let Hannah go" because "she'll never have a normal life if she does."[96] They promise that everyone will keep the secret. This convinces Miley to put the Hannah wig back on for a triumphant concluding number. The agreement not to talk about the wig expands to include not just Miley's family and friends, but a whole town, a whole concert's worth of fans.

The blond wig of the Hannah Montana/Miley Stewart double life reads as queer in a few ways. The wig has been attributed to Cyrus's godmother, the country singer, philanthropist, and queer icon Dolly Parton, who has also made cameo appearances on the show in the same role to Cyrus's character. This, along with a shared home state of Tennessee and country music roots, overdetermines the 2020 viral TikTok theory that the character Hannah Montana is based on Dolly Parton.[97] Parton's wig is central to this theory—she's often said to be unrecognizable without it in public. The exaggerated qualities of Parton's wig and other physical features serve as key points for drag performances and queer embraces of her persona. In crip terms, wigs are also meaningful. They can be viewed as symptomatic of a pathologized queerness, but they also are directly utilitarian in their frequent, open, and sometimes unrecognizable use to mask illness.[98] The wig works both to reveal and to hide at the same time, in terms of its external appraisal and its secret use. The co-existence of two explicitly sustained personas is in one sense an appropriation of the erstwhile enforced closetedness of sexual orientation, gender presentation, or stigmatized disability.

The closet also presents terms of knowledge and feigned ignorance, precisely because of the incorporeal, illusory nature of the status quo. The farce of maintaining Miley's secret puts her family and friends through many ridiculous situations—hanging upside down from the rafters, being bitten by alligators, outlandish claims that Hannah went around the corner just a second ago. In the film, Miley attempts to convince a family friend that Hannah is not available due to jetlag: because she doesn't want to get old, she always flies west no matter where she's going. The convolutions of spatiotemporal reason to explain away why two figures can exist in the same place and time relies on the gullibility of the comedic straight man to Miley's fabulations. In this sense, straightness misses the point—the inability to shift or turn in rhetoric makes the straight person inflexible and clumsy, not dexterous and smooth. Heti owns this gullibility, too, saying in an interview with Emily Keeler that she often "feels very stupid," as someone who "really believes in all the myths of culture" ("It's like what do you mean relationships aren't like in the movies?"), and this stupidity is reproduced in Sheila's contemplations.[99] Stupidity works in both texts to reinforce straightness—for Sheila, it's to armor herself as a straight white woman through the minefields of self-surveillance. For Disney's Miley/Hannah project, it's to assume a straight, as in gullible, audience's acceptance of the outrageous logics of her emancipatory closet-inside-the-closet. In other words, the dumbness or stupidity of straightness is precisely the communal silence closetedness needs in order to function.

The physical body indeed does not make an appearance in the recovery of the ideologies held in place by the pretenses of excessive complexity which activate "dumbness," a smoothly abstract obtuseness. Sheila as a character, however much she feigns it, is not "dumb" in any literal sense of the word, but Heti depends on acts of "playing dumb" in her text. Sheila and Margaux discuss Margaux's excitement about autism as a potential way to relieve herself of the

burden of empathy, for she "sometimes feel pretty paralyzed by [her] own feelings of empathy."[100] Apart from the misunderstanding that autistic people don't have empathy—affectively, they often have overwhelming sensitivity to other people's feelings which, also not dumb, is what results in their social censure—Margaux essentially is yearning for a form of dumbness, a form of disengagement, the same that is forcefully read onto disabled people.

The artistic virtuosity so praised by Sheila is therefore also inflected by the traditional appropriation, fetishization, and exaggeration of inability or disability by abled white women to minimize their own power. At the climactic moment of Sheila and Margaux's creative rapprochement, Margaux describes herself sitting in front of her computer stumped by her new art projects asking, "Am I retarded? Am I retarded? Am I retarded?"[101] This mantra of feminized self-doubt may lead to a Faulknerian stroke of genius, transporting Margaux into the trope of the primitive mental state in which pure art can be formed. But, of course, we know that Margaux is not "retarded," and that working herself into a "simple" mental state isn't really leading her to any new artistic revelation. Rather her communication with Sheila and Sheila's unwillingness to look away from her is what affirms her artistic purpose: "All this time you've been recording me… you have been *looking* at me, really *looking*!… Well a person wouldn't spend all her time looking at something that doesn't have value, right?"[102]

This taps into the most pressing aspect of crip reality, which is the universally desperate need for communication, to be really looked at, to understand what is happening. This need falls solely on the disabled person to remedy. They cannot afford to be dumb like everyone else. They cannot be silent through everyone else's unwillingness and discomfort around even acknowledging that shared vulnerability. This "dumbness," the active unresponsiveness around disability—both when the disabled person passes, and when they don't—and the offloading of the work of disclosure/non-disclosure and communication onto the disabled person not only activates that shame in the disabled person, but also offloads shame from the abled person onto the disabled person. Straight dumbness thus makes the closet-inside-the-closet particularly crip. While coming out as queer is a perpetual task and has its own heaviness, the very doing of the disclosure isn't as taxing as the unknown social consequence of that disclosure, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick notes. Temporally speaking, queer temporality focuses on what the future holds, and the hidden truths of the past. But in any present moment, it's very hard to disregard someone's disabled body or behaviour, or even the dysfunction of communication and physical settings that impacts everyone. It requires a multiple present.

The power of straight dumbness makes this possible. Its solipsistic rhetorics of self-conscious failure indicate a corrupted sense of change. The very least we can say in service of a recuperative project is that such confounding is not linear. The confounding narrative develops all its internal torsions by shying away from even as they lean toward queer, crip, and non-white discourses that bend the linearity of heteronormative, chrononormative time onto itself into an orbit, that make it splinter into multiple presents. The closet-within-the-closet functions in these narratives of privileged women—Sheila and Miley, Heti and Cyrus—as an investment in reconstructing and maintaining a present tense temporal structure that keeps the author safely inside the narrative, even as she carelessly experiments with queer and crip time.

# Chapter 3: Swapping, or Narrating Futures

**Swapping as the Fallout of Financial Time Travel**

This chapter makes a structural argument about the temporal form of swapping instantiated in specific creative trends of the 2010s focusing on the young adult: body-swapping movies, autofictional "traumedies," and time travel narratives. Markers of this generic history include the 1988 and 2019 body-swapping movies, *Big* directed by Penny Marshall and *Little* directed by Tina Gordon; the 2019–2021 middle school "traumedy" TV series *Pen15* by Maya Erskine and Anna Konkle; and the 2013 and 2021 revisions of the time-travel double novel *Long Division* by Kiese Laymon. In these texts we see how the figure of the young adult responds to the dystopia-obsessed financial and political climate of the 2010s—the 2008 recession, Occupy Wall Street, millennial unemployment, the Dodd-Frank Act, ever-increasing police militarization and state violence, massively popular YA dystopian blockbusters, and the increasingly individualized therapeutic processing of aging millennials. *Swapping*, which cites both financial and literary contexts, describes the temporal dynamic across these genres of the young adult narrative.

Swapping formulates the present as a collision of past and future times. It therefore illustrates a unique paradigm of what constitutes "beginning" and "ending," or "start" and "close." Points in time—starts and closes—collapse as bodies are swapped in and out of places, and as settings abruptly determine or transform the bodies they contain. These instants occur when there is a switch, a sudden change or reorientation, where one thing is replaced by another, when something is suddenly a different size and shape, or when something is *not* when or where it used to *be*. The blink-of-an-eye temporality of these swaps also require a place holder in time during which the inexplicable occurs, and a place of lingering where both things might exist, however marginal.

Swapping is also an economic concept in how it formulates time and in its introduction of putative equivalency. The original definition of "swap" is simply an exchange of one thing for another, with no stipulations about the equivalency of the trade made. Even its etymology focuses on the physical striking (*swop*) of hands as two people agree to a deal, rather than the deal itself.[103] So what if the thing being swapped is as small as possible? And what if it is being traded for something that is as big as possible? This ambiguity of size or quantity, and of the justness of the measurement, evolves across the literature and media of this millennial period. The present agreement to exchange two things of presumably equal utility is contingent on the fruits of the past and predicated on the expectations of the future.

The financial history of swapping is particularly suggestive in a literary context because it invites different understandings of time as it quantifies age, lifespan, and agency. The financial context complicates the apparent instantaneity of the swap because it becomes a type of financial derivative. A derivative is based on economic transactions that require time to pass between their open and close, and the subsequent contingencies of this duration or elliptical moment.[104] Mathematically, derivatives rely not on the direct measurement of a unit, but on projections based on the unit's *rate of change over time*. Derivatives were and are still useful in the context of agriculture, for example; they help to maintain economic stability year-round while the goods are still being planted or grown and not yet ready for sale. However, the legal definition of "commodity," originally limited to a list of 16 agricultural goods in post-Great Depression 1936, was expanded in an amendment to the Commodity Exchange Act in 1974 to include any type of variable quantity that would occur in the future, which made derivatives self-referential to the

market "in one fell swoop."[105] This made a landmark shift from *perishable* goods, focused on the physical realities and seasonal contingencies of agriculture, to *variable* goods which moved into an even more abstractly speculative realm of projected value and numbers, the infinite possibilities of which invited a culture of high-risk, high-reward trading.

This development in derivatives trading occurred during the extremely turbulent financial era of the 1970s. The elimination of the Bretton-Woods gold standard in favor of a credit economy in 1971 led to unprecedented "gyrating" currencies, surging inflation, and unemployment, ostensibly reined in only by the conservatism represented by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan in the 1980s.[106] Swaps emerged in 1981 to allow firms and financial institutions to be responsible for equivalent loans with partners in their target country of business without having to pay tax on moving money across borders. This kind of "vanilla swap" amounted to a simple substitution, demonstrating a tit-for-tat mentality. The milieu of financial swaps historicizes the body swapping films that abounded in the 1980s, such as the 1988 *Big*. The newly popular conception of swapping reshaped the present and the future in light of newly codified speculation. David Wittenberg identifies this "interchangeability of nostalgia and futurism"—and their purported simplicity—in the fixation with body-swapping and generational time travel in 1980s film and television.[107]

Credit default swapping, the swap of the twenty-first century, is much more complex. It takes a different asymmetrical formulation, functioning more like third-party insurance between banks rather than lateral swaps. Banks agree to insure for each other (and sometimes for themselves, without realizing it) large bundles of loans that have been given out, in the case these loans are defaulted. The first credit default swap was done in 1994 and they became extremely popular among large banks over the next thirteen years in predatory mortgage loaning practices, which became a chief cause of the 2008 recession when the real estate market bubble burst.[108] Rather than holding a balance between two consistent parties on either side of a border, credit default swapping swaps against itself, between the present and the future, between nothing bad happening and everything bad happening.

When swapping balances on the likelihood of defaulting, it becomes even clearer that swaps aren't just for *things*, they're for liability—the exchange of liability for no liability. Swapping becomes a transitive verb as liability swaps *onto* or *away from* a party; it is more about displacement than about exchange. Just as the simplicity of "vanilla swaps" conditioned the depiction of body-swapping and time travel in the 1980s, the lopsided and inverted temporal logic of credit default swapping echoes through the rise of dystopian science fiction and in realist fiction following the Great Recession in texts such as *Little*, *Pen15*, and *Long Division*. The trope question of time travel is: if you could change one thing in the past, how would that change the present? In millennial swapping narratives, that question shifts: if you could change one thing in the present, how would that change the future, or the past, or both? The economic panic of the early twenty-first century about an unwanted return to the 1970s is then not simply a generational anxiety about history repeating itself; it is also the anxiety around greeting the "other end" of a deal. Self-referentiality and projection are crucial to both, as financial swapping and textual swapping in the decade following the 2008 recession both grapple with the problem of the time between the open and the close.

Swapping cites a history of speculation and the destabilizing of time that it requires, as it relies on a calculus of the past, present, and future that always results in different values at different times. It is not a new proposition that financial time constructs a temporality of time travel.[109] I contend that swapping is the counterpart of this time travel temporality; it is the

experience of a world where everyone time travels, of the person who stays as others disappear or change, and sometimes of the person who travels as others also travel. One does not have to time travel themselves to experience swapping: to experience a body's relationship with its surroundings change in an instant, to see them be there one moment and gone the next, small one moment and big the next, old one moment and young the next. Swapping is the actual temporal behaviour within the milieu of time travel, where things are no longer reliably valued nor themselves.

**Swapping as Queer and Crip Temporality**

Finance's roundabout ways of referring to the realities of physical uncertainty—things that might change, yields that might occur, weather that might happen—thus become increasingly overt as these texts focus on the perishable or variable body upon which all of these speculations are based. The long history of speculation and debt into the early twenty-first century has been well established in literary studies: Annie McClanahan writes about debt in credit crisis era novels; Ian Baucom writes about the roots of Wall Street finance capitalism in the speculation of the trans-Atlantic slave trade; Kara Keeling explores how queer, Black, and Afrofuturist speculative fiction and its alternative imagination of futurity, technology, and the present might relate to and appropriate this same history of financial speculation. Similarly, disability scholars such as Nirmala Erevelles, Lezlie Frye, and Jina B. Kim unearth disability's inextricability from racial capitalism and financial speculation, proposing alternate genealogies of disability studies as they explore "the presence and potential of disability in decolonial, Marxist, and feminist-of-color theories."[110] Thus they illustrate a crip mode of reading texts which at first glance may not appear to be about disability within the larger context of financial speculation and twenty-first century capitalism.

This lays the ground for understanding swapping as a temporality shaped both by the paradigms of speculation that define disability, and the paradigms of disability that define capitalist speculation. Ellen Samuels' description of crip time as time travel is built on the collapses, intervals, acceleration, and sudden stops dictated by the body itself. Crip time as time travel seems to be reactive to external expectations of linearity; aware of the existence of a "sheltered space of normative time":

> *Crip time is time travel*. Disability and illness have the power to extract us from linear, progressive time with its normative life stages and cast us into a wormhole of backward and forward acceleration, jerky stops and starts, tedious intervals and abrupt endings. Some of us contend with the impairments of old age while still young; some of us are treated like children no matter how old we get. The medical language of illness tries to reimpose the linear, speaking in terms of the chronic, the progressive, and the terminal, of relapses and stages. But we who occupy the bodies of crip time know that we are never linear, and we rage silently—or not so silently—at the calm straightforwardness of those who live in the sheltered space of normative time.[111]

This is the journeying of crip time travel: the "wormhole of backward and forward acceleration" and collapses of youth and age, all simply existing in face of the struggle to "reimpose the linear." This is framed with the same wry ambivalence of post-Great Recession protest in its evocation of "occupy"—those who "occupy" the "bodies of crip time" have no other recourse but not to be linear, regardless of their own preferences, much in the same way that the Occupy

movement reflected an existential problem. What do you do when you are simply here? Or there? In this reality?

Swapping happens when people *relate* through time-travelling temporality with each other or with themselves. They experience the swap more than they experience the journey; the perpetual displacement of the swap and the crip energy and rage that comes with it becomes the leading ontology responding to financial temporality. The self-referentiality of the market codified in the 1970s and proliferated in the 1980s thus re-emerges in the 2010s as swapping texts all encounter that surprising "second" projected self or the "then" referred to at the deal's close. Reckoning with this "second self" or this temporally alternate version of oneself is the result of a setting shaped by the world of finance: a catalytic dystopia that literally causes a person to become young or old in a world where who gets to be young and who gets to be old is inherently a question of privilege. The "perishable" body becomes a "variable" body in these texts, which resonates with crip scholarship such as Jasbir Puar's analysis of the "debility narrative" and Samuels' theorizations of crip time through the unreliability and invisibility of chronic illness.

There is an enforced calculus between the very real body and its very real surroundings within the fantastical yet profoundly influential mechanisms of economics. Attempts to metabolize this calculus appear in the development of dystopian fiction in the same decade as the development of crip-of-color critique as Kim describes it: "operating primarily through an infrastructural hermeneutic: a reading practice that underscores the often unnoticed networks of assistance—roads, pipes, wires, and labor networks—that coordinate contemporary life, as well as the aesthetics of support and inter/dependency unfolding across feminist-of-color literary and cultural production."[112] The rise of YA dystopian fiction and its fixation on world-building, infrastructure, certain societal forms and valuations of bodies, and certain types of displacements of age and responsibility effected by the young adult all lay the ground for the texts of this chapter. The infrastructural logics of dystopian reality, and the epistemological problems they raise, emerge in these high-profile texts of the twenty-first century through swapping as an instrument of finance and as a temporal strategy.

That is, swapping texts illustrate capitalist, state, and corporate manipulation of bodies as the protagonist has their agency swapped in and away in unpredictable ways. Swapping texts also demonstrate the intersectional stakes of a complex present as swaps enforce a relationship between a setting and the bodies in it, and further, between the body and itself across time. In this literary context, swaps originate as a neoliberal capitalist temporality that works to separate the body from its time but also is able to reflect specifically crip-of-color ontologies in the twenty-first century that work to reinstall the body into time.

Samuels talks about this in terms of chronic pain: "I wish to be both myself and not-myself, a state of paradoxical longing that every person with chronic pain occupies at some point or another. I wish for time to split and allow two paths for my life and that I could move back and forth between them at will."[113] Chronic pain is identified by its temporality—in the same way it is identified by the wish and speculation of splitting this time into the two paths of paradoxical self and not-self. If only one could swap back and forth and keep both, understand both. While the pain of chronic pain is distinctly embodied, the pain of the chronic is also something that increasingly comes to the fore within the post-Great Recession era of financialization within the texts of this chapter.

This is because they all trace a certain response to a temporally alternate version of themselves: *Big* and *Little* as remakes; *Pen15* overlaying two temporalities; and *Long Division* as

two editions of a speculative time travel novel containing a novel. As 2019 and 2021 texts, *Little*, *Pen15*, and *Long Division* all contain realist settings of middle school, the workplace, the Mississippi backwoods, and represent them as alienating dystopias of their own kind because of how they represent bodies in time. Swapping tethers the problems of quantification and exchange across time to the uncertainties of environmental, geographical, and physical conditions. On a plot level, each of these texts operates on the premise of some kind of exchange, or swap, in terms of material reality and speculative liability, and in each case, these swaps are contingent on their environmental contexts.

*Big, Little*, and *Pen15* all rely on an analogy between the workplace and middle school as spaces that make possible sudden changes, substitutions, or collapses of size. The entities being swapped are visibly the bodies of the actors: David Moscow is swapped in for Tom Hanks and Marsai Martin is swapped in for Regina Hall. Anna Konkle and Maya Erskine of *Pen15* render swapping logic "invisible" as their large adult actor selves play their middle-school-aged character selves. These workplace comedies play between the two distinct temporal versions of a single body: point A in the classroom, point B in the boardroom. They resolve with the ultimate separation of A and B and the settling on one or the other as an "accurate" or "appropriate" point of origin. This resolution emphasizes the clear split between temporal versions of oneself as well as the essential equivalency between settings—middle school is just another type of workplace; work is just another type of middle school. However, in the 2010s and 2020s, these plots' commitment to temporal linearity fades. The concept of the "young" "adult" enables more narrative experimentation with a cripping conflation of A and B into a hybrid "AB" young adult body. This ambiguous body more frequently reflects and temporalizes the setting into a swapping present, as in *Pen15* and *Long Division*, they use certain types of metafiction to split time, to swap through it.

**The Body Swapped from 1988 to 2019**

The most evident swap at work in the overall history of young adult body swapping narratives is the parent-child body swap. The body swap narrative exists in the very old fascination with doppelgängers, in musings on class and economic positioning (as in Twain's 1881 *The Prince and the Pauper*), and in intergenerational discord (as in the putative source material for *Freaky Friday*, the 1882 novel *Vice Versa: A Lesson to Fathers* by F. Anstey). The parent-child swap hovers over queer crip discussions of futurity, as it operates within the traditionally abled and heteronormative questions about whether and how a child will grow up to be a version of their parent. What is the value of each life? How do you weigh between a child's life and an adult's life? The anti-queer, anti-crip projects of reproduction aside, what use is a child in its indeterminacy, weakness, and dependence? The swap balances the promise of immaturity against the determinism of aging, especially when there seems to be nothing to measure these potential changes against. The mechanisms of speculation appear in the excitement around the genetic intimacy yet clear distinction between daughter and mother, father and son.

The first contemporary instance of the parent-child body swap that comes to most people's minds is *Freaky Friday* by Mary Rodgers, written in 1972, turned into a Disney film in 1976, and remade in 2003 and 2018. The title *Freaky Friday* echoes the sobriquets denoting days of financial catastrophe, "Black Friday" or "Bloody Friday" (October 24, 2008). The story relates the body swapping of tomboyish Annabel Andrews and her mother Mrs. Andrews, played respectively by Jodie Foster and Barbara Harris in the 1976 film, one unexpected morning. Mrs.

Andrews is largely absent from the story, as Annabel struggles her way through the day in her mother's body, only to reappear as an unrecognizably made-over, well-dressed, de-braced Annabel, fully recuperated and ready to face the world as a promising young white woman. Mrs. Andrews mysteriously undoes the switch, depositing Annabel back into her improved body, much like a conventional swap deal or an ideal encounter with the stock market. *Freaky Friday*, a cornerstone for the twentieth-century body swap narrative, launched a spate of body swap movies and intergenerational time travel films in the 1980s, including a fourth film adaptation of the selfsame *Vice Versa* and the 1988 film *Big*.

Particularly in the 1980s, and in the following years, these films venture beyond the parent-child swap, touching on teacher-student, man-dog, girl-boy gender swaps. Televisual versions of the plot in the 2010s go on to swap between a present self and future self, or between the-self-that-is, the self-that-should-have-been, and the self-that-could-have-been.[114] *Big* (1988) was one of four films released in the same year all about teens waking up in adult bodies, the others being *14 Going On 30* (remade as *13 Going On 30* in 2004); *18 Again!* (remade as *17 Again!* in 2009); and *Vice Versa* (itself a remake several times over). The 1988 *New York Times* review of *Big* notes that body-swapping and generational time travel formed a significant obsession during the 1980s.[115] As noted in this catalogue, there is an echo of this trend in the 2000s and 2010s as these films have been cyclically remade, which lays the ground for the 2019 response to *Big* in the form of Tina Gordon's *Little*.

Both *Big* and *Little* take place in the financial workplace and emphasize the value of timing. *Big* was released during the boom of financial derivatives trading and the swap market, exemplified by its setting, a New York City full of real estate wealth and a playground for bankers. Scrawny middle-schooler Josh Baskin travels from the greenery of commuter suburbia Cliffside Park, New Jersey to the adult financial arenas of Times Square, Fifth Avenue, the Flatiron District, and the General Motors building (home of F.A.O. Schwartz). In Tom Hanks' body, he gets his vice-president position by pointing out in a board meeting that a Transformer vaguely shaped like the Chrysler building is not "fun": "I don't get it. I don't get it. …What's fun about playing with a building? …What if it were a bug?" The boardroom explodes. "A building is inert. A bug, it moves, it's got all kinds of possibilities!"[116]

But the movie itself has a lot of fun playing with buildings. *Big* is primarily set in the boardrooms of McMillan, modeled on and located at the Hasbro Toy Company headquarters (the American manufacturer of Transformer toys)—now a Home Depot, incidentally.[117] The playful financial atmosphere invoked by all of these buildings comes to a head as Josh acquires an large empty loft apartment in SoHo and kits it out with a Pepsi vending machine, trampoline, bunkbeds, pinball machine, huge dinosaur plushies, skateboards, and so on. At that time, however, Josh would have had to skirt the certification requirement from the Department of Cultural Affairs affirming that he was an artist before being allowed to buy that apartment, which would've cost somewhere between $500,000 and $2.3 million.[118] Instead, he is exculpated by being literally a kid at heart, playing with toys in his corner office.

*Big* is about growing up too quickly but it also pushes an argument for the optimization of this strange elapse of time. This amounts to a simple conclusion: the young person in the adult body discovers the true value of being young, and it's very valuable indeed. As discontented adult Josh decides to swap back into his boyish body, his adult lover Susan agrees to drop him off back at his home, driving away down the suburban street smiling wistfully. In the next and final frame, the two middle schoolers Josh and Billy amble down the same street discussing the odds of Josh making the ball team. The vanishing point of the street remains the same across the

two scenes, setting it up as a question of pace: the meandering of the two boys is the slower pace of childhood that will eventually arrive at the same place that the adult Susan has already reached by the mature means of the car. The ending place is the same; it is the rate of progress that is significant. Swapping is about learning some kind of lesson, making some kind of gain, that could not be achieved in the original body, size, or quantity.

The conventions of these body-swapping/time travel narratives usually focus on distinguishing between the youth and the adult in terms of responsibility (which the youth does not have) and hope (which the adult does not have). They resolve only when each party adopts an aspect of what they previously found incredible in the other—swapping not only bodies but also beliefs, worldview, or position. While swapping narratives from the 1980s explore a wide range of body-swapping and time travel logistics, they focus more on the child rendered into the adult body. The narratives of the 2010s and 2020s instead focus on adult bodies rendered into child bodies, or, more abstractly, the appearance of a "wrong" body within the contemporaneous moment. If, as Wittenberg suggests, the nostalgia and futurism of the 1980s are looking back to the 1950s, the 2010s and 2020s in turn heralded a wave of 1980s nostalgia. *Stranger Things* revisited *Dungeons and Dragons* (also now a Hasbro product), and films such as *Mad Max*, *Full House*, *Ghostbusters*, and *Karate Kid* received remakes. This nostalgia/futurism trade arises from generational wistfulness and frustration, which fades as a more pressing sense of disorientation takes over: are we in the wrong body? Or are we in the wrong place? Or are we in the wrong time for our bodies?

The transitions from *Freaky Friday* to *Big* to *Little* demonstrate the evolution of the anxieties revealed in parent-child body swapping narratives. As the films move into the contemporary, they exhibit more complex formulations of swapping, which no longer take place just across discrete bodies, but also across time, between different versions of oneself. The social mechanisms around the question of age become an issue in these swapping narratives, interrogating "the rate of change" central to the logic of derivatives. The breezily elastic concept of "growing up too fast" no longer adequately expresses the problems of age and agency, and maybe never did. In 2014, the APA published a psychological study titled "The Essence of Innocence: Consequences of Dehumanizing Black Children" that introduced the concept of adultification, which is the implicit bias experienced by Black children of being viewed as being older than they actually are, especially in the context of the criminal justice system.[119] Recalling the literary history of a racist imperialist agenda very invested in equating childhood and innocence, the study also indicates that Black children are explicitly viewed as mature at the age of ten, and that their dehumanization excludes them from being viewed essentially as children or even within the realm of maturity or immaturity.

Working in the opposite direction to the same result, infantilization takes agency away from Black, indigenous people of colour, disabled people, and other marginalized groups. The manipulation of the passage of time—or age, and its perception—is a way to ascribe value. The young child's potentiality poses a conjectured threat that is eliminated by immediately placing them in their future adulthood, squashing their future into their present. Disabled, racialized, or otherwise oppressed adults' present existence and full agency poses an equivalent threat, so their present is squashed into their past, rendering them infantile. The ascription of excessive agency to young children and the withholding of agency from mature adults requires the same type of temporal collapse or double vision enacted by a swap. This process obviates potential, eliding the present.

*Little* responds to the 1980s from within the same rhetorical framework that produced *Big*. The film opens with a flashback narrated by the 39-year-old Jordan Sanders (Regina Hall), in which she recalls the pivotal 1993 middle school talent show performance that led her to become a bully: a science presentation demonstrating the conservation of mechanical energy. 13-year-old Jordan (Marsai Martin) releases a yoga ball suspended onstage as a pendulum and shows that it will not hit her again because it won't swing quite as far on its return. However, as she stands there, eyes closed, basking in her success, a white girl grabs the ball and shoves it back at her, knocking her off her feet and breaking her arm. The laws of science are on Jordan's side. She should naturally be outside the reach of harm, but a bully makes the pendulum swing back and hit her. The concept of equal—or at least, legal or natural—exchange is suddenly thwarted. This moment of foreshadowing also functions as the opening of a swap: "Something changed. *Little* did I know that something would be me."[120] (Emphasis added). Young Jordan says plainly, "Being me sucks. I want to be someone else."[121] And that "something," that "someone else" is herself. We watch as her 13-year-old face staring out onto the stage rapidly swaps back and forth with magazine covers featuring her 39-year-old face.

The 2019 *Little* came in the aftermath of the 2008 recession and is set in Atlanta. Rather than using real estate as its major financial vernacular, Jordan instead values "smartness" most of all: her tech start up, her BMW i8 hybrid car, and her Hermès purse. The focus on "smartness" emphasizes the culture of venture capitalism, eschewing real estate finance, which was by then considered an ignominious site of recklessness and debt.[122] This is not to say that Jordan's apartment in Buckhead, an affluent area of Atlanta, isn't meaningful but it doesn't advertise wealth as Josh's SoHo loft apartment or the GM building do; it seems to criticize it, given its contrast with her assistant April's apartment.[123] Rather, the pressure is on Jordan's tech incubator firm to pitch apps to venture capitalists (distinctly whiny, white, and male). *Little*'s resolution is not that April's app "DiscoverEyes," or "Discoverize," depending on how it's spelled, is wildly successful, but that it is even pitched in the first place. The concluding scene of the film is a party to celebrate the rebranding of Jordan's company to include "and associates," complete with pop-up donut food truck and Jordan's middle school friends, who show up to dance.

In the 2010s of *Little*, Jordan Sanders has to go back to her young self to relearn the lessons she mislearned. Neither the economic promise of youth nor the all's-well-that-ends-well recuperation in *Big* work the same way. As a Black girl, Jordan is afforded very different imaginaries and paces for her life, and *Little* works hard to represent this even within the financial settings that work against it. While the protagonists of the two films share a degree of affluence and social positioning, *Little* was touted as an "intergenerational Black girl magic" narrative, emphasizing the struggles to believe in oneself and to value community across generations, while *Big* concerned itself much less with larger questions of social ethics.[124] Jordan gives a lecture, in her 13-year-old body, to her new nerdy middle school friends:

> "You guys might be too young to understand this, but I bailed on being my true self because people told me I didn't count or fit in."
>
> "You're only six months older than us, Jordan."
>
> "Everyone thinks you have to grow up to figure out who you are, but they're wrong. When we're kids, we know who we are. It's just the world that beats it out of us."[125]

"We know who we are but the world beats it out of us" is an interpretation of childhood and growing up entirely different from the one exhibited by the tale of white Josh who simply wants to be big, but not responsible—and never actually has to be. While Jordan is a wealthy,

nerdy Black girl unshadowed by the criminal justice system, her precocious "smartness" drives her sense of self-worth in the same capitalist system, and her experiences of being bullied and her desire to share that advice with her peers have a different weight. The joke of Jordan preaching to her friends as "too young to understand" when she is only six months older than them highlights a temporality that skews in only one direction. As in the lopsided credit default swap, there is a one-way force of responsibility being pushed back onto the protagonist. Jordan must ultimately agree to have suffered as a child, or to make good on her defaulted childhood, to understand how to be an adult who was, against all odds, formerly a child. This representation of the therapeutic process of reliving the suffering of one's child-self concludes in a metabolization of the 13-year-old self into the 39-year-old self, as an ostensibly happy ending.

This is reflected but also compromised by the closing images of the film, which take place at Jordan's corporate party, which is reminiscent of a middle school dance. Jordan has learned how to make friends like her middle school self couldn't and the workplace itself is cast as a recuperated middle school utopia. Like *Big*, *Little* does very little to question the premises of total inequity inherent to the worlds of finance, tech, or business. It instead exhorts the adult values of being "smart," perseverant, "working hard," along with the infantilizing admonishment to "see the magic in the world," as illustrated by April's proposed app. However, in the new millennium, *Little* perhaps unintentionally shows us that swapping has become a problem of *setting*, requiring a constant recalibration of temporality between the body and its context. *Big* represents the potential of the life journey mapped onto a literal road going from the suburbs of childhood to the city of adulthood. In *Little*, Jordan returns to the same position in the same body, but the setting has changed, has regressed: in the language of the millennial body swapping film, only the setting can really represent the change undergone by the people in it.

**The Body as Its Own Setting, Swapped with Itself**

This relationship between the setting and the people in it is extended even further in the 2019 Hulu television show, *Pen15*, created by comedians Maya Erskine and Anna Konkle. Picking up on the existential horrors hinted at in *Big* and *Little*, *Pen15* also delves into the chronotope of middle school. Erskine and Konkle play themselves as thirteen-year-olds navigating middle school in 2001, surrounded by an age- appropriate cast playing middle-schoolers. The two thirty-year-old actors/writers embody their young selves in what is clearly a therapeutic reliving of a disfiguring, disorienting time. Konkle says, "That was always the goal, so that you felt like you were watching a memory."[126] Maya and Anna attempt to navigate the strange and alienating constrictions of socioeconomics, racism, parental divorce, and the evolving politics of middle school society. *Pen15* cites the history of conventional body-swapping and time-travel comedies in its choice of setting, and in its motivation to enforce a meeting of the past-as-present and the present-as-future. In other words, its different attempts to stitch together the interstices of time bring together the starts and closes of a swap deal.

The literal "swaps" delineated by *Big* and *Little* in the substitution of actors are dispensed with as Anna and Maya use their 30-year-old-bodies to reenact their 13-year-old selves, rendering their bodies into its own setting. The swap goes noticed but unspoken: the fact of their fully matured, adult bodies is never addressed diegetically. Even as the sight gag is a fundamental premise of the show, the struggles with binary notions of being "too old" or "too young" center on the instabilities of the middle-school-aged body rather than on the comic mismatch between age and context. Anna and Maya live out the uncanniness of thirteen-year-oldness as they still enjoy playing make-believe and with dolls and toys, but also discover the

draw of sexy underwear and uncontrollable masturbatory itches. Even as the swap itself is in some ways invisible, the results are viscerally physical and chronically painful as the two reenact the tween tics of the early 2000s: the hunched shoulders, the smiles carefully shaped around wire braces, the gasps and leers of middle school drama ("no *way*!"), the dysfunctional hair, the horrifyingly/comically over-sexualized clothing, and the lacerating formative moments of conflict and rejection.

Rhetorically, *Pen15* thus undoes what *Little* ties up in its felicitous middle-schoolifying of the tech start-up workplace. Jordan has her 39-year-old revelation while inhabiting her young self, which she promptly projects onto her peers; Konkle and Erskine also have their revelations while inhabiting their younger selves. The difference is that these actor-screenwriters' bodies themselves are the locus of the swap, and in a certain sense, do the *work* of the swap both economically and temporally. The middle school chronotope is inherently unstable; bodies themselves become volatile and unpredictable, slipping between different temporal ranges. This transforms middle school into a double "workplace" both for the emotional and temporal labour of this involuted body swap or time travel, and for Konkle and Erskine to do the physical and creative labour of writing, directing, and acting. The narratively unarticulated but hypervisible labour of this swap as it's centered in Erskine and Konkle's bodies leverages the same kind of time travel that is central to crip time—an immediate, temporal invisibility of the way the same body experiences multiple temporalities, sometimes in very real, physical ways.

The physicality of these bodies at work in this TV series oscillates between functioning as a sight gag and as a completely serious visual reality. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, Erskine and Konkle released one animated episode, "Jacuzzi," which aired August 27, 2021, in which Maya and Anna go on a vacation to Florida, where they are deeply disturbed by a boardwalk caricaturist's drawing of them. As they struggle with what to do with that drawing, they themselves become the caricatures in the animation: Maya's head becomes huge and moustachioed and Anna's nose becomes unnaturally large and long. Konkle explains that they originally planned to do the same thing in live action with prosthetics.[127] So what seems like a fortuitous offering of animation, where these insecurities about the body are easily literalized, was in fact more broadly a natural (or unnatural) consequence of the increasingly frequent environmental events that throw the life of the human body into uncertainty.

The young adult body, as a complex layering of underdeveloped, overdeveloped, immature and mature selves, is extremely reactive to its setting in just this way. This happens in the regular adolescent neuroses of self-perception, but also in how, in "Jacuzzi," the surreal space of the Floridian vacation allows for monstrous uncertainty. This world, expanded by the road trip, the motels, the bars, the seedy and simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar boardwalks, destabilizes Anna and Maya's understanding of their own size and relation to the world around them. This is the real affordance of "Jacuzzi" as an animated episode: it was able to contain something like 230 backgrounds, which would have been impossible on *Pen15*'s live action budget.[128] Erskine and Konkle thus demonstrate how the uncanny "swappiness" or instability of the body contained and enabled by middle school persists in the dystopian bleakness of overly constructed landscapes that determine this very instability.

*Pen15* finds a way out of the confounding tendencies of semi-autofictional inter-, intra-, and extra-diegetic present tense narration and narrative organization through a distinct relationship with metafiction. Anna and Maya are essentially overlaid with Konkle and Erskine, but the distinction between the two different temporalities draws attention to the rate of change that occurs through their bodies, rather than attempting to elide them. In the concluding scene of

the series, the two imagine their future together taking a turn into melancholy: they might get tired of each other and one day they won't be friends any more. *Or* they'll take care of each other forever! Before they sink into full depression, they fly into frantic fantasies of living among clouds and angels—when they pause for a breath, they are relieved to be distracted by a home video of when they first met as small children.

Emilia Yu describes *Pen15* in terms of comedy as "tragedy plus time, in this case tragedy being the experience of American middle school."[129] But it's not just the tragedy, it's also the grief that is central to *Pen15*. Erskine and Konkle talks about the experience of filming that final scene as a "step out of reality"[130]:

> A.K.: There is sort of a departure from being 13. There's a moment of letting in our 30-year-old perspective. Then it drops away and you get back to the child's fantasy of what life will be like. That was the emotional part.
>
> M.E.: You're talking about when we're actually kids again and then talking about things that will never happen, but what our fantasies are. That is heartbreaking.
>
> A.K.: That was the heartbreaking part, yeah, leaving the 34-year-old self in there for a minute and then going back to the innocence in the scene of saying, "We'll take care of each other always, and we'll live together." Then it gets even more extreme: "There'll be clouds around the houses." It gets clearly into fantasy. That was where it got really, really sad. I think we were going through the same loss of innocence, or at least I was, in the scene. I'm the 34-year-old woman playing a 13-year-old, feeling the loss of a 13-year-old perspective as I play the character.[131]

This process of departing and returning to being 13, even in the loss of that 13-year-old self, that Konkle and Erskine talk about is extremely similar to the grief time of crip time that Samuels describes in her "paradoxical longing." Erskine and Konkle "drop away" from their 34-year-old bodies they inhabit as they revisit the fantasies that can only be lived by their childhood selves. The movement back and forth between the split paths of life that Samuel so longs for is imagined and performed here in the localized swaps of *Pen15*, in what can only be a response to the pain of the chronic, where the constantly pushing fantasies of speculation are contained by the body's temporal reality.

This scene encapsulates the simultaneous processes of growth that the show highlights: the characters Maya and Anna live "for the first time" the experiences the actors Erskine and Konkle relive, making parallel circumstances as they inhabit both fiction and reality, swapping between them. Either the *Pen15* Maya and Anna are the young characters in a "present tense" represented by the adults that they (may) become, which essentially folds the future into the present. Or, Erskine and Konkle are existing in the "present" as their current adult selves, reliving the past, which works to fold the past into the present. We are invited to stand in different versions of the present at the same time: the double vision of the simple body swapping narrative is ramified by this doubled or swapped present, which in turn emphasizes the sense of always being out of place.

**Out of Time, Out of Place: The Space in Between Swaps**

Kiese Laymon's novel *Long Division* extends this problem of being out of place as it navigates numerous swapped presents. It begins in 2013, with 14-year-old Citoyen 'City' Coldson being sent home to his grandmother's in Melahatchie, Mississippi, after a spectacular Internet-famous meltdown at a racially loaded state-wide "Can You Use That Word In A Sentence" competition. Around the same time, he finds a time-travel novel also called *Long*

*Division*, featuring a main character also named City Coldson, but set in 1985. In this second *Long Division*, 1985 City finds a time travel portal that can bring him forward to 2013 or back to 1964. The multiplicity of similar-but-different stories across the two *Long Divisions* and across the three time periods operates on a certain type of temporal conditionality foreshadowed by the opening sentence of the 1985 novel: "The last time Shalaya Crump and I really talked, she told me, 'City, I could love you if you helped me change the future dot-dot-dot in a special way." The ambiguity between the conditional and subjunctive moods, the "dot-dot-dot" that it contains, the concept of revision, and the difficulty of understanding reality on such slippery scales of measurement is essentially the project of *Long Division* as a novel. Notably, the conditional operates here as a kind of transaction. "I could love you" is traded with "if you helped me change the future," literally measuring out time in an ellipsis: "dot-dot-dot in a special way."

This transactional conditionality was part of the publication process of the novel itself, which changed in its narrative organization across renditions. It was published first in 2013 by Agate Bolden, and then by Simon and Schuster in 2021. In the 2013 edition, the two *Long Division* narrations are told concurrently in two different fonts as a novel-within-a-novel, going back and forth between the "original" 2013 story and sharing the contents of the 1985 novel as 2013 City reads it. In the 2021 edition, as Laymon had originally envisioned it, the two novels are separated into Book One and Book Two and are read from either cover toward the middle. At the center are a few blank pages with some illustrated leaves (leaves among the leaves), before one flips the book to start reading again from the opposite cover—it doesn't matter much which end begins the reading experience. Both editions (and the novels within the novels) conclude with some kind of narrative vanishing point in the form of ellipsed sentences or sentences without periods. City and his friends continue on into unknown tomorrows or reread themselves into the dark present in-between of the time travel portal, a hole in the woods (hence the leaves among the leaves). As a time travel novel, *Long Division* looks for new ways to represent the experience of existing within the uncertain present and within a larger swath of the imagined past and future.

*Long Division* is also by necessity a *swapping* novel, one that demonstrates the problems of interchangeability and change in a speculative context. As both Citys travel through time either by reading or through literal time travel, things are different yet remain the same. Each time City emerges from the hole in the ground, he can identify when he is by whether it's a dirt road or a paved one, by how big or green the trees are. The ever-shifting physical setting foregrounds the consistent emotional complexity of living in Mississippi across the decades. The physical structure of the 2021 edition highlights this more literally than the novel-within-a-novel structure of the 2013 edition. Rather than behaving like a single streamlined text, the Books One and Two of the 2021 edition suggest that the two novels are distinct and essentially but not totally interchangeable. The physical motion of this reading progression recalls a Möbius strip, as the reader can continue flipping and flipping the book, emphasizing the book's "swappiness." The imperfection of this interchangeability is crucial to the recording of history: it emphasizes the small, ellipsed moments that we have no idea about, moments that are swapped in and swapped away. *Long Division*'s Möbius strip conditionality and swapping of appearance and disappearance, all centering around the time-traveling hole in the ground of the Mississippi woods, responds to the same rhetoric of swapping that I argue has shaped the development of young adult literature.

In 2021, along with other high profile Black writers, Laymon shared his experiences of trying to get published by New York editors who refused to believe that a story about a Black

boy in Mississippi had an audience.[132] Instead, upon their suggestion that *Long Division* be set in upstate New York with a white girl for a protagonist, Laymon took his manuscripts to Agate Bolden, a small press in Illinois, and sold it to them for a few thousand dollars. *Long Division* then sold sixty thousand copies. During the 2020 pandemic lockdown, Laymon approached Agate about revising and republishing *Long Division* as well as his book of essays, *How to Slowly Kill Yourself and Others in America*. They refused. So he bought back his rights for $50,000, about ten times the amount that he sold it to them for.[133] In many different interviews, podcasts, and independent articles, Laymon describes *Long Division* as being about the power of education and revision: long division requires "showing the work" and correcting if the answer is wrong.[134] This complex layering of work, labour, writing, and revision requires a complex understanding of time, which is reflected not only in the narrative choices that Laymon makes in his novel, but also in the structural paradigms that mandate such convolutions.

Publishers struggled to understand the potential of *Long Division* because it featured young adult protagonists, but they didn't behave or experience life in the ways established by the YA novel, as exemplified by the 2008–2010 blockbuster series *The Hunger Games*. The "Percy Jackson audience" "would not believe" in a "post-Katrina, Afrofuturist, time-travel-ish, black southern love story filled with adventure, meta-fiction, and mystery."[135] Since then, *The Hunger Games* and its early 2010s YA dystopian successors have met scholarly and public criticism as being a whitewashed representation of state oppression that is already experienced in real life primarily by Black and indigenous people of colour.[136] In this critical light, the popular novels and films that are the backdrop to *Long Division* function as neoliberal colorblind white saviour fantasies of abled young adults rebelling against totalitarian or autocratic state rule. The YA dystopian genre tropes adultification and infantilization, making these concepts available for popular consumption as protagonists' political agency is paradoxically represented to be simultaneously nonexistent and super powerful.

*Long Division* therefore shows up the fundamental confusion around what a "young adult" can be as it riffs on a range of characteristics attributed to the "young adult," which is largely assumed to be white, cis, thin, abled, and straight. It also shows how these assumptions shape the "swapping narrative" genre we have outlined above. Beyond the simple comedic problem of the middle-schooler in the place of the adult worker or vice versa, swapping also relies on the *work* that is expected of this young adult body that must hold simultaneously infantile and aged positions in an unstable world. The cruel manipulation of people's age and agency creates a dystopian reality for the people experiencing it, though swapping narratives tend to use these discrepancies for tragicomic effect. In *Long Division*, racism forces City and his friends to face moments of disillusionment, defiance, world-weariness, glee, anger, rashness, and grief, putting them through experiences that according to some, are not age appropriate, but are in fact a part of the experience of being young Black kids. For this reason *Long Division* is less interested in manipulating its characters' ages as much as it is in manipulating the times that they inhabit.

The transactional realm of publishing thus situates the questions explored in *Long Division* about "how to change the future dot dot dot in a special way": the speculation on the book's value and on who will read it, the essential bet on what will happen to it. Laymon's project to navigate that problem of past valuations and future projections by seeking that space in between is best represented by the ellipsis, or the "dot dot dot," in *Long Division*. The precocious orphaned Internet-famous rapper Baize Shephard, the only character other than City who appears in both of the *Long Divisions* in the novel, explains: "The ellipsis always knows something more

came before it and something more is coming after it. It connects sentences, but it holds space for itself, too."[137] Baize appears in the 2013 *Long Division* as a recent unexplained disappearance that haunts City and his friends, and appears in the 1985 *Long Division* as a fellow time traveller who turns out to be the future child of the 1985 City and Shalaya Crump. We begin to sense a hypothesis for 2013 Baize's disappearance as 1985 City realizes he has to choose between her existence and his own future survival of Hurricane Katrina.

*Long Division* thus cites the same obsession with parent-child relations that *Freaky Friday* kickstarted in body-swapping narratives in the film industry, but demonstrates how it becomes a discomfiting premise in the twenty-first century. The genetic or procreative futurity that lends body-swapping films of the 1980s their frisson no longer feels promising as young adults of childbearing age increasingly opt out of making families for financial reasons or because it seems unimaginable in a world of climate crisis. Where *Freaky Friday, Big,* and *Little* tame unruly childhood into seemly young adulthood, City looks at Baize, his future daughter, in wonder and grief as they huddle up in the time-traveling hole:

> "City?"
>
> "Yeah, Baize."
>
> "I love you."
>
> "Don't say that. Not now. Please don't say that."
>
> "Why? We took care of each other today, like a father and daughter goon squad are supposed to," she told me with her voice hollowing out. "I'm just keeping it one hundred. I knew y'all wouldn't disappear forever."
>
> "I love you, Baize."
>
> I turned my face from Baize, closed my eyes, counted to ten by twos, and pushed the door open. Then I climbed all the way out of the hole and, *slowly*, *slowly*, *slowly*, I turned back toward the hole in the ground.
>
> *Long Division* was in the bottom of the hole, but Baize Shephard was gone. Forever. I made my daughter disappear.[138]

The cruelty of the swap is clear—the choice lies under the shadow of Hurricane Katrina, between making the 1985 City disappear, or the 2013 Baize disappear. The present wins out over the future; the conditionality of the present is mandatory. Yet the triple "*slowly*, *slowly*, *slowly*" functions as its own ellipses or "dot dot dot," both as it's written and as it's read out loud. *Long Division* literalizes these abstract temporal problems; each starting place has a different ending place, and there is always something between the two ends of a swap. The tragically paradoxical statement, "I knew y'all wouldn't disappear forever," expresses the hope that the absence of disappearance is not forever, even as it argues that the act of continuously disappear*ing* does not last forever. The swap is not just between two conditional possibilities, between father and daughter—who are not exactly father and daughter as much as a "goon squad" of liminal time-traveling teenagers. It is also between the two bodies left in the hole: the possibility of Baize and the novel *Long Division*. This is a three-party swap, with *Long Division* serving as insurance for the defaulted past and future child that all the Citys across the different time strands both might and will never have.

The simultaneity and interchangeability of the imaginable/unimaginable future is central to the argument in *Long Division*, to swapping as a concept, and to crip futurity. Following queer theorists who explore the tangled knots of queer futurity through the oppressive paradigms of ableist, cisgenderist, and heteronormative conceits of reproduction, Alison Kafer argues that the difficulty of crip futurity rather lies in convincing everyone to imagine an utopian future where

disability continues to exist.[139] What sorts of lives are worth living? Worth making possible? Kafer traces multiple realities as she accounts for crip desire, community, and joy in simply being alive as well as bluntly accepting her own preference to be no more disabled than she already is. The conditional and the absolute moods exist simultaneously in questions of crip futurity—"might" and "will," "might" and "will not." These are also interchangeable, or at least, rendered equivalent in a swap deal. *Long Division* literalizes the infrastructure and the epistemology of crip-of-color critique with its hole in the ground that remains the same but leads to all the impossibilities of 2013, 1985, and 1964.

Because of the simultaneous potential and impossibility of City and Baize's shared survival within the actual timelines, City both refuses to and cannot lay that burden on Baize of being "the future," however much he might wish to. Baize is not "the future" nor is she "the past"—she is, as she says herself, the ellipsis: "I'd have two front covers with the words 'Long Division' in the middle and below 'Long Division' would be an ellipsis. That ellipsis is me if it's my book. It's our book, though. We'd all be inside the book, too, with those other characters already in the book and we'd all fall in love with each other."[140] The novel uses a mode of intradiegetic meta-textuality to hold the space of the swap open as *Long Division* itself maintains the balance between the disappeared Baize and the text of "Long Division" that remain in the time traveling hole after 1985 City leaves it.

The ellipsis that Baize proposes therefore both represents a fracture in time, and is the very thing that fractures it. As Samuels wishes for that split timeline of self and not-self and for the freedom to move between them, she defines crip time as broken time:

> It requires us to break in our bodies and minds to new rhythms, new patterns of thinking and feeling and moving through the world. It forces us to take breaks, even when we don't want to, even when we want to keep going, to move ahead. It insists that we listen to our bodyminds *so* closely, *so* attentively, in a culture that tells us to divide the two and push the body away from us while also pushing it beyond its limits. Crip time means listening to the broken languages of our bodies, translating them, honoring their words.[141]

The ellipsis "forces us to take breaks," to "listen," "translate"—or accept the impossibility of translation—and "honor the words" of our bodies, as they are defined by our settings in swapping narratives. The troubling concept of boundless speculative potential in the popular literature of body swapping, as well as in the world of financial swapping, is displaced into the leafy void at the heart of *Long Division* itself. Each of the conclusions either use many periods or no periods, as they attempt to articulate or *dis*articulate the void space of imagination, of ultimate present-ness. Each of the *Long Division*s within both editions also bring the readers back into the hole with City with different people, each time:

> 2013 edition, 1985:
>
> I had one more match left from the book I'd taken from the 1960s, so I went in my pocket and struck the match.
>
> "*You!?*"
>
> Slowly, we opened our red eyes in the dark and taught each other how to love. Hand in hand, deep in the underground of Mississippi, we all ran away to tomorrow because we finally could…[142]
>
> 2021 edition, 1985:

> I had one more match left from the book I'd taken from the 1960s, so I went in my pocket and struck the match.
> "You?"
> "…"
> "Y'all?"
> "…"
> "This feel like love to you?"
> "…"
> Hand in hand in hand in hands, deep in the Mississippi underground, we opened our eyes in that lavender darkness and taught each other how to revise until all of our characters were free[143]

This revision, or this swap, reveals a new understanding of what a swapping narrative can offer. In the 1985 timeline in both editions, City reunites with unknown people in the hole—in the 2013 edition, it's one person; in the 2021 edition, it's multiple people. The conclusion changes from "running away to tomorrow because we finally could…" to staying inside that hole to "teach each other how to revise until all of our characters are free". The changes in the 2021 edition clarify the problem of the ellipse, or the dot-dot-dot, that suggests that there will always come something else that ends the pause, to effect a close at the end. Rather, it displaces the complicit ellipse of the 2013 edition, replacing it with the lack of punctuation to reject the idea of a close. Instead, the different type of ellipse that Baize argues for, that represents people's existence *in-between*, appears in each "…" response to City's questions. Rather than the "could…" that opens up another conditional agreement, "…" illustrates a space of absence, redefining it as the disruptive elliptical space of memory and potential that can equally be a whole idea, a person, a real body.

The speculative ending in 2013's running away to tomorrow "because we finally could" suggests a desire to escape the present into the future specifically, and like Samuels' crip awareness and envy of a "sheltered space" experienced by others, it suggests an awareness of an *ability* to run away to tomorrow that is now "finally" available to City and his friends. This "running away to tomorrow" evokes the same kind of future-oriented speculation of the financial market, the same kind of future that is available to Josh Baskin of *Big*, but not to Jordan Sanders of *Little*, nor Anna and Maya of *Pen15*, nor either of the Citys. The 2013 Laymon attempts to describe the "deep underground" as "the future," but in the 2021 edition, it becomes even clearer that the "future" is not complex enough. The possibility of that self-conscious comparison invited by "finally" is firmly obviated by the collectivist "teaching each other… until all of our characters were free." Instead, in 2021, the temporality of the deep underground is revision, which is repeated and multiple movements from the present to the past and re-cascading to a future present—a constant process of swapping in and out, as exhibited by the revised editions of *Long Division* themselves.

This is reinforced by the simple, final difference between the conclusions of the two editions in the 2013 storylines:

> In that hole, right in that second, I felt as far away from Melahatchie and I felt as close to a real character as I had ever felt. And the craziest thing is that I wasn't sure if that was a good, bad, or sad thing. With LaVander Peeler's head on my shoulder, we started rereading *Long Division* from the beginning, knowing that all we needed to

> know about how to survive, how to live, and how to love in Mississippi was in our hands. Baize was right. The sentences had always been there[144]

"Baize was right" is added in the 2021 edition. Rather than a continued disappearance as in the 2013 edition, City refers to the Baize of the 1985 *Long Division* that he has been reading throughout this 2013 timeline, which has been haunted by Baize's disappearance. In the 2021 edition, Laymon stitches together the absence of Baize in 2013 and her second eventual disappearance in 1985 by recalling that 2013 City read the novel in which she did exist and is remembered across different swaths of time. The swap, however unjust, still is held together—or held apart—by the novel *Long Division* itself. Despite Baize's disappearance, the certainty that "the sentences had always been there" rebuffs the speculation of the unknown, the positing of infinite potential. It returns to the elliptical imaginary that Baize offers of an identity that takes root between the unarticulated something that came before and the indeterminate something that comes after. This is the affordance of a swapping narrative, where we are consistently presented with the disquieting "…"s or "dot dot dots" in between that *makes* bodies real.

# Chapter 4: Dwelling, or Narrating Care

> I have brought you here, reassembled the raw arcanic substance of your being, and reactivated the lattice that should have preserved the critical essence of who you were. You'll lose some memory. There is always loss, with change. But I have told you this story, primed what remains of you, to retain as much as possible of who you were.
>
> Not to force you into a particular shape, mind you. From here on, you may become whomever you wish. It's just that you need to know where you've come from to know where you're going. Do you understand?[145]

> **to dwell on, upon (†in)**: to spend time upon or linger over (a thing) in action or thought; to remain with the attention fixed on; now, *esp.* to treat at length or with insistence, in speech or writing; also, to sustain (a note) in music. (The most frequent current use in speech.)[146]
>
> *Mechanics*. A slight pause in the motion of a part of a machine to give time for the completion of the operation effected by the particular part.[147]

**Beginning with Deixis**

"Let's start with the end of the world, why don't we?" is the much quoted the first line of the 2015–2017 *The Broken Earth* trilogy by N.K. Jemisin. But the first words of the book are in fact the title of the prologue itself: "you are here."[148] The disorienting deictic address of "you are here" invites three different questions. Who is you? Where is here? And who is saying this? The trick of deixis is that we may know what words such as "you" or "here" mean semantically, but we cannot know the actual referents until they are indicated in other terms. In the summoning quality of "you are here," we immediately understand that we don't know where or who we are—besides being readers, here, with the book in our hands, being directly addressed by a narrator. This disorientation situates us in the present physical reality at the same time as we prepare for a fictional world to be constructed around us—except that it's immediately destroyed. We begins with the end of the world.

So when are we? We can't know when the end is until it's described. To be situated "here" and at the "end" thus brings up questions about narrative time—is it proleptic? Are we at a different time in the series? Are "here" and the "end" the same thing or different? This is the first step that Jemisin takes to pull narrative space into real time in the present. This disorientation persists even as we receive some answers: the large pangaea-like tectonic plate home to humanity, called The Stillness, has been broken in two, precipitating a climate catastrophe that will take thousands of years for the Earth to return to inhabitable conditions. This has been done by an orogene, someone who has power to manipulate energy through the earth and air. Thus the world has actually ended, "writ continentally," as well as "personally"—Essun, another orogene, comes home and discovers her dead infant son, murdered by her husband.[149]

The first chapter, titled "you, at the end," answers the first question of the prologue: "you" is not just us, not us at all. "You" is Essun, "whose son is dead." The chiasmic insistence of "You are she. She is you" establishes complex relationships of affinity and exclusion between the reader, the addressee, and the narrator.[150] While we are assured that the "you" is another fictional character, it's hard to be sure. The intentional exclusion establishes us as an interloping

listener on the same plane as the novel; the actual practice of reading establishes us as the intended audience. We're no longer confident that we're not also a complicit character; we have to deduce for ourselves that this is not being narrated for our benefit, exactly, yet here we are. We—whether or not we're individual, collective, real, fictional, or metafictional entities—are all at the end of something, and now we and our protagonist, Essun—who is not us—need to learn what it's the end of.

We not only feel uncertain about our narrative position, we remain unclear on our location in time and place. Only the toil of the present tense helps us to gather clues here and there throughout the next three books about the structure of the narrative and who is talking to us. At the end of the final book of the trilogy, *The Stone Sky*, we realize that the entirety of the series we have been reading is addressed to an unconscious, incubating Essun in the same immediate present of the reader's reading. In a combination of programming, "priming," and vigil-keeping, the trilogy has been narrated to the protagonist in real time at the same time as it has been narrated to the reader as a process of formation: "you need to know where you've come from to know where you're going." We have been in the present all along. Have we been comatose all along, too?

This leads to perhaps the most important question: so what body are we in? The narrative process of *The Broken Earth* is one of gradual embodiment. We begin in a state of total disembodiment and disorientation and then gradually develop our senses of relation to everything else. The "here" of the first prologue turns out to be the "here" of the final few pages of the series and the "end" referred to in chapter 1 is not proleptic as implied, but an "end" that occurred before any of the narration took place, or perhaps has been occurring as we read the entire trilogy. It's a narration that firmly situates us within a body that both dies and survives. It survives by dying, dies by surviving. This novel series is gestational, comatose. It *dwells*.

**Dwelling in History**

To *dwell*, as the Oxford English Dictionary has it, covers the acts of inhabiting, fixating or obsessing, remaining, living, and pausing.[151] The word "dwell" is a key term recognizable from phenomenological hermeneutics of the influential German philosopher Martin Heidegger. In a disagreement with the ontological organization of the world according to an objective order of things, Heidegger instead proposes "dwelling" to articulate mankind's existence as it defines the process of making and inhabiting space through time. His theoretical thickening of the term "dwell" has stuck in the field of architectural theory, and has been crucial to other disciplines that focus on the human relationship with space, such as geography, design, anthropology, or environmental sciences. He has also been critiqued substantially through lenses of race, gender, and disability, as scholars have worked to parse the role of the body in his schema of time and space and "Being."[152] Such critique is unavoidably intertwined with the twenty-first century reckonings with Heidegger's own complicity in and later-career philosophical endorsements of the Nazi regime. Even before this historical revelation, the Heideggerean formulation of dwelling has been viewed with some discomfort because of the nostalgia with which he imagines the times of yore, in which man's natural impulses laid the way for humanity unimpeded by unarticulated disruptions.[153] In the context of Jemisin's expansive science fiction saga of brutal oppression and recurring climate disaster—illustrating a history of what dwelling might really look like amidst real disruptions—and in the context of crip time that brings together space, time, and the body, "dwelling" is particularly ripe for reuse.

While in this philosophical tradition "dwelling" expands the concept of building and inhabiting, it is first a poetic problem: as Heidegger puzzles out a close reading of a Hölderlin poem, he argues that "Poetry is what first brings man onto the earth, making him belong to it, and thus brings him into dwelling."[154] But what does this mean? The idea that emerges is as follows: poetry is the truth within language that people are inherently drawn to.[155] Essentially, the "freer," more imaginative, and "poetic" a poet is and the more "pure" their submission of their message to their listeners, the listeners will listen even more "painstakingly."[156] Whether something is "correct," acceptable, or literal will fall by the wayside when faced with the purity of the poet's meaning. This proposition that man's "dwelling… rests in the poetic" could be interpreted as boiling down to that man only lives on through poetry. This apparent simplicity connotes the problems of mass media in Heidegger's particular context of fascism's rise in Germany, and again in the political confusion of twenty-first century America. Such broad sweeping emotions and swaths of historical time, of which Heidegger was fond, both obfuscate the political moments and lived bodies that more often than not suffer in these tsunamis of cultural feeling. But poetry itself is what makes us "belong" to the earth, and becomes the measure-taking of what is true in a person's being:

> To write poetry is measure-taking, understood in the strict sense of the word, by which man first receives the measure for the breadth of his being. …Only man dies—and indeed continually, so long as he stays on this earth, so long as he dwells. His dwelling, however, rests in the poetic.[157]

Heidegger does not highlight the act of living as much as he does the idea of dying—living is rather represented as an act of "taking of measure" for "being" itself, and it is done only within the poetic realm, or through poetic action toward death.

In this triage of meanings, to be is to dwell; to be is to build and create space and dwell in it; to be is to write and be poetic and dwell within the poetic. The questions are expansive: What is home? What is existence? What is building, what is living? How does one live and create and connect with others through time? Heidegger and Jemisin both work to establish this existential relationship between space and time with the concept of "dwelling," which respectively requires their own theoretical world-building and specialized glossaries—the fourfold, Being, orogeny, the Stillness, etc. They both formulate a host of ontological, phenomenological, epistemological, aesthetic, and ethical questions.[158] Heidegger's work is indeed particularly aligned with the genre of science fiction at large, with its primary concerns of space and time, human identity, interaction, and development across these vast continuums, and even in its generic historical compatibility with fascism.

Jemisin's science fiction responds to this history both in terms of plot and in terms of its theoretical intervention: poetic dwelling can be easily seen, in these words, as the project of *The Broken Earth*, as it demonstrates the painstaking labour of such dwelling. The trilogy is quite literally a process of "measure-taking" of Essun's life as her life history is narrated back to her. She "stays on this earth," "belonging" to it, in fact, as she incubates in a subterranean geode for what we realize is the entirety of the series: "But I have told you this story, primed what remains of you, to retain as much as possible of who you were… It's just that you need to know where you've come from to know where you're going."[159] As Essun incubates in the deep earth, dwelling through this process of narration, we receive a "measure for the breadth of [her] being," and indeed, she "dies continually" so long as she stays on this earth, so long as she dwells. The narrator tells her, "Already I plot your death. It's necessary. But I can at least try my damndest to give your life a meaning that will last until the world ends."[160] And in its fixation on the details,

its post-apocalyptic obsessive temporality, the trilogy moves in a distinctive way that can only be described as dwelling. It offers an answer—and a revision—as to what it means to "die continually" so long as one dwells, particularly if the world in which one dwells seems to have already ended.

Because dwelling establishes an ongoing and dynamic relationship between space and time, it is especially apt as a way to understand a formulation of the complex present that I see at work in the young adult form in the early twenty-first century. Citing the narrative "turn" in the social sciences toward understanding narrative as a condition of social life, Laura Bieger explains how Heideggerean dwelling has entered the realm of narrative theory, acting as another door onto the conversations of theorists such as Georges Poulet, Wolfgang Iser, or Peter Brooks.[161] Bieger suggests that dwelling might be recuperated as an anthropological phenomenology of narrative: "the productive conjunction of narrative and place-making… must conceive narrative's building capacities as an inherently progressive, forward-moving response to spatio-temporal contingency."[162] While Jemisin's work would query the notion of building as "inherently forward-moving," I agree that the concept of narrative dwelling constructs the present as a space. I argue that when narrative dwells, it inhabits by "remaining with attention fixed," "treating with insistence," and "lingering" on thought and/or action.

Dwelling also has a meaning in mechanics, and narratives also dwell mechanically. Dwell time is the length of time that a thing or a person remains in a given state in order to be able to perform the next task. A machine's part dwells, or requires a slight pause, in the midst of its operation to allow the effect of its movement before it continues. A dwell mechanism is an intermittent motion mechanism that alternates between forward and return motion in a holding position, which relies on a constantly rotating schematic (forward-dwell-back-dwell-forward, etc). This means that there is at least one fixed point that acts as an axis around which moving parts, usually eccentric wheels or irregular cylinders called cams, rotate in order to keep this crucial mechanical point in a holding position for certain lengths of time. There are many beautiful gifs online of dwelling mechanisms illustrating the paths inscribed by the moving parts: an automated sewing needle must pause for just a moment as the feed dogs pass the cloth beneath it; an oil drill must pause at the top of its oscillation as the drill clears out of the hole before plumbing again; ignition coils must pause to charge fully before starting an engine.[163] All of these rely on the consistent rotation of these carefully misshapen cams, even as the overall machinery moves back and forth between positions A to B to A. These A and B points invite their own type of deixis, as we literally have to point to the points between which we oscillate.

As dwelling establishes the chronotope of a narrative in mechanical or Taylorist terms, it also refutes the notion of the present as a narrow point of time. Rather, the complex present is ever expandable, ever manipulable. In a crip sense, it will never be possible to remove the dwell from narrative, that misshapenness. Dwell time is physics time; it is body time. Narrative may consume time, as it does in procrastination; it may splice times together, as it does in confounding; it may collapse times, as it does in swapping; but here, as a fixed point around which we rotate, narrative *contains* time, allowing it to swell and contract. This moves beyond the narratological features of elongated or elapsed story lines to function as the purpose of the narrative itself, as I will argue that Jemisin demonstrates, and records a deeper and inherently crip process of resting, recovery, *dwelling*, as it engages with the temporality of care work.

Even as "care" does figure largely in Heidegger's schema as one of the central forces that prompt our investment in "being" and in "truth," care work also forms the backdrop to *The Broken Earth*, as it was both written during and prolonged by Jemisin's own mother's illness and

death. In the space between these philosophical and biographical backdrops, I see a particularly crip mode of understanding time and narrative that the young adult figure makes possible. In a process of dwelling, *The Broken Earth* trilogy moves back and forth between first, second, and third person address and between multiple present-tense narrations across nested levels. This complex present coopts and implicates the reader in a combination of an indirectly inclusive, indirectly exclusive "not you, I'm talking to her" kind of address. I see disability here, in the words of Alison Kafer, "not through identity but relation."[164] It requires a certain type of listening and understanding that occurs in the process of dwelling—one simultaneously inhabitant and captive, and one that relies on constant movement.

**The Deictic Genre: Time and Space in *The Broken Earth***

Much of the critical work regarding *The Broken Earth* trilogy focuses on its literary excellence and biopolitical complexity, as it explores the catastrophe and trauma of extraction capitalism, social systems of oppression, and climate carelessness. It is often cited as the only trilogy to have won Hugo Awards for each installment and it has sold over two million copies worldwide. This chapter is not so much drawn to *The Broken Earth*'s discussion of the anthropocene, however, nor its utopian arguments for posthumanism.[165] Instead, its narrative structure and how it formulates time, particularly the complex present, answers the questions that the young adult form provokes about embodiment, disability, and ongoing change or growth. The dwelling process of narration at its heart exposes and complicates the flesh of its argument.

I cite *The Broken Earth* trilogy as a theorization of dwelling, not from the point of view of philosophy or narrative theory, but because dwelling is both what the books are about and what they do. The trilogy is organized as a series of questions: the first book asks what the problem is, the second how to solve it, and the third book why we should. The scope is vast. This series falls into an area between science fiction and fantasy that has become increasingly popular in the twenty-first century alongside young adult fiction. *The Broken Earth* responds to YA dystopian and fantasy genres as they pose specific notions of "apocalypse," and to the tendency of science fiction to settle on the ostensibly innocent vacuum of space to run societal and scientific hypotheticals. How does one dwell on the Earth? The answer seems to be that one typically doesn't. Space may be the final frontier and *Broken Earth* may be "writ continentally," even "planetarily." But it remains on earth.

In Jerome Winter's excellent account, *Science Fiction, New Space Opera, and Neoliberal Globalism*, he argues that space operas originate in the earlier roots of the pulpy space operas of the 1920s and 1930s, mostly quasi-fascist and bigoted militaristic wish fulfillment fantasies, but then take a left turn in the 1980s through the 2000s to "systematically rehabilitate the ideological presumptions of space opera."[166] In this project of rehabilitation, the new space opera is generally recognized as the locus of, for example, political self-examination and the critique of the military industrial complex, the increasingly inchoate abuse of technology, and the repercussions of colonial and imperial violence. The acclaimed 2013 *Ancillary Justice* by Ann Leckie, "the book series that brought space opera into the 21st century," is a good marker of the mainstreaming of the SFF subgenre, even as space operas are also recognizable in relation to franchises such as *Star Wars* or *Star Trek*.[167] In the midst of the resurgent popularity of the "new space opera" science fiction subgenre, then, Jemisin writes an earth opera.

Taking place in a speculated future forty thousand years from now, the world's supercontinent, ironically named the Stillness, periodically undergoes climate catastrophes called Fifth Seasons. Because of this repeated interruption of human development, there is little

archival knowledge except for the consistent identification of people's movements through different lands by their skin colour (mostly shades of brown), hair texture (mostly "ashblow," evolved to protect against ash), and body type. The body thus replaces historical narrative as the repository of past events. Within the Stillness, orogenes, or reviled "roggas"—people who can sense ("sess") and control energy through the earth and air— are persecuted or killed for their power by fearful non-orogenes or "stills," or sent to the Fulcrum, the large centralized training center for orogenes run by mysterious Guardians. The two main conflicts to be resolved are the brutal exploitation of orogenes to manage the restless Earth and the hatred the Earth has for its inhabitants. Along with the Guardians as secret agents of the Earth, the remnants from a former civilization responsible for the Earth's rage, the eerie Stone Eaters, take a role in this conflict as they maintain ominous, even predatory, relationships with their favourite orogenes. We confirm at the end of the first book, *The Fifth Season*, that one such Stone Eater is the narrator of the series.

Even as *The Broken Earth* innovates on the space opera, it cannot succeed without the structure of *The Fifth Season* as it responds to the stereotypical form of the young adult novel. Jemisin's novel moves between three narratives: the one addressed to "you," Essun, a middle-aged orogene; one in the third person about young Syenite; and one, again in the third person, about the even younger Damaya. All are narrated in the present tense. After the end of the world as we have been taught to recognize it, Essun realizes that her husband has abducted her nine-year-old daughter Nassun, also an orogene. In the midst of climate disaster, Essun sets out in pursuit. On the road away from her old town of Tirimo, she meets a strange young boy named Hoa. Syenite, a young woman, is sent by the Fulcrum—more asylum than Hogwarts—with the powerful orogene Alabaster ostensibly on a job, but in practice to mate and reproduce. Along the way, Alabaster shows Syenite how orogenes are exploited, lobotomized, and used to quell the restless Earth as "node-maintainers," and they both abscond to form a triad with a "feral" untrained orogene pirate and have a orogene child in a remote island community. And upon her discovery as a feral orogene, the child Damaya is collected by the Guardian Schaffa and taken to the Fulcrum, where she is trained to control her orogenic powers for the good of the state. In a gradual reveal, we realize that Damaya, Syenite, and Essun are all the same person at different stages of her life. Such a dawning denouement serves to deflate the concepts of age, growth, and change so troublesome in figure of the young adult. The writing on the wall that the three are the same person demonstrates how dwelling is an ongoing process that doesn't mandate a shocking leap of reason or the surprise appearance of a new idea so much as it is a process of realizing, of understanding and contextualizing.

*The Broken Earth* trilogy is regarded as science fiction/fantasy but it relies upon the power of the YA category, which appeals to an overlapping age group of 18-35. It runs on the fresh-eyed curiosity, the appealing present-tense action, and the incipient power and chosenness of the young adult—the thrill as Damaya, or Syenite, or Essun prove their exceptional orogenic prowess, for example. The YA novel and the young adult figure are both important to *The Fifth Season* as a deconstructed Bildungsroman focusing on the formation of the series' addressee. This first installment's narrative trick is that the typical "coming-of-age" story is made non-linear, peeled away into different versions of Essun. Further, each narrative chunk of Essun's life responds to a popular young adult fiction or fantasy structure. Damaya's discovery that she is an orogene and her being whisked off to the Fulcrum cites the *Harry Potter* magic school narrative of discovered innate powers and an escape to a haven where these powers are cultivated, but for exploitation. Syenite's narrative jumps off a YA romance trope of the opposites-attract or hate-

at-first-sight love as she and Alabaster snipe at one another, before it transforms into a much more complex queer relationship.

In this sense, the trilogy does not deploy the "young adult" of YA literature so much as it critiques it. This is probably why *The Fifth Season* is the most well-liked novel of the series, as it deals with the most familiar narrative tropes. Jemisin blogged about her decision to "trick readers into caring about [Essun]" by building "empathic capital" through her younger selves and "cashing in" by transferring it to the statistically less likeable middle-aged Essun.[168] The young adult genre—distinct from the YA protagonist, however cash-rich—makes it possible for the later narrative fracture to take place because of the rhetorical and temporal paradox the young adult represents. The age-related generic conceits (Bildungsroman, YA first love) that are the starting place for *The Fifth Season* take a turn as the Syenite narrative ends in an echo of the 1856 Margaret Garner incident that inspired Toni Morrison's 1987 novel *Beloved*, in which escaped enslaved Garner opted to kill her children than return them to a life of slavery. In the final moments of the novel, Syenite kills her and Alabaster's own child, Hoa reveals himself as the narrator, and a dying Alabaster calls Essun by all her three names, confirming our suspicions that they are all the same person—then drops the final bombshell: the Earth no longer has a moon and is raging at humanity for the loss of *his* child.

The facets of the young adult that the Damaya and Syenite narratives offer us fully dismantle any notion of receiving a familiarly controlled and comfortable account of being a young person. Jemisin explores further in the following two novels the brutal childhood and adultification this world offers as she expands her narrative focus to include Essun's daughter Nassun between the ages of eight and twelve. Nassun is desperate, confused, helpless, angry, whiny, impulsive, stubborn, warm-hearted, and manipulative in order to survive.[169] The bleak context of violence, discrimination, child abuse, slavery, cannibalism, forced breeding, and climate disaster in the Stillness therefore renders these initial "YA" or "young adult" tropes uncanny, as Jemisin rewrites them into a world of normal and implacable cruelty—a world she creates partly in response to the 2014 protests following the murder of Michael Brown by the police in Ferguson.[170] In this sense, the young adult novel becomes a crucial foil and context for the full trilogy. In an interview with *NPR*, Jemisin says,

> What I wanted to play with was the concept of, "When do we consider an apocalypse to have begun and ended?" Because in a lot of cases, what's considered an apocalypse for some people is what other people have been living every day. It's not the apocalypse, it's just, it's an apocalypse for you. And so when people say the world has ended, her world has been ending for most of her life—this is nothing new.[171]

Instead of purchasing the questions about temporality shaped around an apocalyptic moment as a generic critique of utopia, dystopia, or futurity, in accordance with the contemporary neoliberal fixation with post-apocalyptic fiction, Jemisin makes the notion of apocalypse itself deictic: it's relative, particularized and drawn back into the present. Jemisin's conclusion of her own novel series demonstrates her lack of interest in foregoing the "sense of an ending" that is, as Diletta De Cristofaro argues, often critiqued or obviated by neoliberal post-apocalyptic narratives.[172] Rather, Jemisin likes her endings, so much that they are always happening, or maybe so much that we don't know when they are, until we're actually at the ending when it becomes really clear that *this*, *now*, is the conclusion. The formal intervention of the series is rather in its investment in the present, and that's the only way the series really ends—in its final orientation within the present.

The second and third installments of the trilogy, *The Obelisk Gate* and *The Stone Sky*, are part of this process of orientation and care. *The Obelisk Gate* tracks in tandem the continued narrative of Essun in the second person as she gets involved with a radical orogene-run commune, Castrima, and in the the third person, the experiences of Nassun as her father takes her to a satellite Fulcrum in hopes that she can be healed of her orogeny. We learn that orogeny comes with a price—once a certain equilibrium has been reached, any orogenic act will result in the draining of vitality from the orogene's body, turning them into stone in increments. The Stone Eater's desire is to eat the stone portions of the orogene's body, and eventually once the orogene is completely petrified, the Stone Eater may reassemble them into an eternally post-human Stone Eater. This portion of the saga explores the germination of networks of care that are possible: the commune of Castrima in which Essun finally autocratically forbids a vote on whether orogenes can stay in the community; the furtive cultivation of Nassun's orogeny in the satellite Fulcrum; the uneasy triangle of Alabaster's care-takers as he gradually turns into stone; Nassun's choice to care for the now "corrupted" or disabled Guardian who we recognize as the same one who brutalized Damaya years earlier.

As the final installment of the trilogy, *The Stone Sky* moves between the narrator Hoa's first-person memories of the ancient empire of Syl Anagist and how his people, precursors to orogenes, incurred the Earth's wrath by flinging the Earth's Moon out of orbit, and the continued travels of both Essun (in the second person) and Nassun (in the third person) as they race to Syl Anagist's ancient subterranean center to bring the Moon back—either into orbit or to crash into the Earth and end all of humanity. The individual memories of the narrator himself help us understand better the large-scale relationship that this one-on-one narration is encapsulating. Ultimately, this struggle of how and whether to form a truce with the Earth to make the survival of humanity possible pits mother against daughter—Essun is for, the disillusioned and embittered Nassun against. Only when Essun uses all her orogeny, willingly petrifying herself to prevent Nassun from ending the world, does Nassun change her mind. The narrative revelation comes then that we have been accompanying and listening to Hoa for the entirety of the series as he waits for Essun to wake again as the Stone Eater she will be, hoping that through his narration that she will retain her personality through her transmutation. She wakes determined to "make the world better," and the series ends.[173]

In this intersection of genre fiction, Jemisin thus eschews the tabulae rasae of youth and of space, where authorial imagination still too easily relies on unexamined paradigms from the real world. She focuses instead on what we already have on Earth through a systematic metaphor of geology.[174] The problems of humanity are literally grounded in this series. In an extreme extension of Jina B. Kim's crip-of-color critique, which foregrounds infrastructure and climate disaster, Jemisin makes environment, location, and place themselves the enemy even as she imagines a truce with them. *The Broken Earth* is an argument for Earth as a space where history is alive but one that still contains the capacity for change. The geological conceit means that the present as a temporality takes on an edge: it evidences a situation containing history (like strata of a mountain exposed by an earthquake, for example), rather than narrating it as it is moved through (like a minute-by-minute diary account). This allows for the sense of time throughout the trilogy to be more expansive, malleable, and physical.

Jemisin's extensive world-building is one way to dwell by "treating with insistence," but there is not much by way of dwelling in literal geographical terms. The Earth is not a place to build and dwell; the ironically named Stillness cancels out whatever might constitute a home. Rather it is a key non-human character in this melodrama. The living planet has agency. The

hefty fantasy series establishes an extensive history of living systems, biological evolutions, and geological formations that inform our physical understanding of the Stillness: the communities or "comms," the social structures for seven different use-castes, the role of history and Lorists, along with the secrets of the Fulcrum and the Guardians, are all established in order to be prepared for geological Seasons of upheaval. These details don't lay the scene in which things happen; they draw the battle plans to negotiate a hostile figure, in its hatred, inconsistency, and unreliability. Rather than focusing on creating a setting or a "new" set of paradigms that illustrate the conceptual problems of humanity, the series argues that real dwelling has to take place in a process of narration.

The deictic questions of apocalyptic "endings" that I identify in Jemisin's novels are thus analogous to the deictic uncertainty of the young adult itself: both are ambiguous, relative, powerful, and immediate in their temporality. *The Broken Earth* is indeed an Afrofuturist science fiction/fantasy trilogy by a Black author with almost all Black or brown-skinned characters that we can understand through the historical context of Black life in America and climate change and the varying disabling factors those entail, and the infrastructural and social critique of crip-of-color thinkers. What *The Broken Earth* trilogy offers in the context of this project is a remarkable heuristic of the relativity of time, which would not be possible without the young adult formulation—in terms of how to understand "apocalypse," in terms of how to grow nonlinearly. I see this as an answer to Kafer's musing that "maybe we should think less of what crip time is and more of what crip time does."[175] What does it mean for time itself, how to understand the *present*, if the world has been ending for most of someone's life, as it often does? Rather than relying on the fortunes of the promising future? How do you write *down* and *here* instead of "forward" and "there"?

**What Crip Time Does Formally and Relationally**

The physicality of this question—how do we get *down*, *here*, and *now*?—requires a heightened intimacy with the body itself and how it orients in time, with how it dwells. These deictic spaces cannot be purely abstract. Crip theory is uniquely able to draw these questions together. In her essay, "After Crip, Crip Afters," Kafer follows the same line of thinking as Jemisin does: what happens when "it's just, it's an apocalypse for you"? So easily in the history of disability narratives does the vital "before" weigh against the disabled "after":

> But perhaps we need to pay as much attention to the way the before is narrated in these stories as to the after. Aren't these stories all ways of insisting that one's disability be read a certain way, a more positive way, because of what came before, because of who one was before?
>
> Or because of how one was injured?
>
> How do these kinds of stories rely on the straightness of linear time, the belief that becoming disabled is a single moment, tangible, identifiable, turning life into a solid, singular, static before-and-after? Can we tell crip tales, crip time tales, with multiple befores and afters, proliferating befores and afters, all making more crip presents possible?[176]

This responds to the same point that Jemisin critiques—essentially, the fixation on an isolated moment of lost power that is often a hallmark of white thinking. Kafer refers to a relationship with disability that disability studies and crip theory has been working to account for: the whiteness of its field, of its scholars, and of even the concept of identifying as disabled or claiming it as a point of pride. As scholars such as Jasbir Puar, Nirmala Erevelles, Sami Schalk,

or Jina B. Kim readily point out, disability precipitates on a disproportionate scale to people already targeted by the system through exposure, violence, or neglect. What kind of privileges can we really claim through crip identification, then? In 1979, Audre Lorde recorded in her *Cancer Journals* this mourning for the loss of the "luxury of false power"[177] upon her mastectomy, which Jemisin also cites through the loss of Essun's petrified breast in *The Obelisk Gate.* Rather, both the luxury and the falseness need to be transformed narratively—both from the idea of a past that was, in fact, not better, and from the singularity of that moment within which the better past became the cruel present or hopeless future, to a rendition of a complex present.

Formally speaking, dwelling in crip terms occurs through *The Broken Earth* trilogy in two primary ways: the present tense narration and second person narration. Present tense narration appears to be inherently a dwelling tense, as experiences are "lived" as they are related, ongoing and incomplete. It's easy to stay in the present, to be embodied, especially while dealing with traumatic material. As Essun searches for her abducted daughter, Hoa recounts different formulations of community, kinship, and belonging through her past and her present in what turns out to be a life of sustained apocalypse—that is, a series of extreme presents. In Essun's several PTSD episodes, she is overruled by her sense of the present, which is crushed together with her past. In one such episode the otherwise consistent second-person narration spirals out into "…NOT ONE MORE RUSTING CHILD. *Everyone* is Jija, the whole damned world is Schaffa, Castrima is Tirimo is the Fulcrum NOT ONE MORE…"[178] As Marìa Elena Cepeda argues, PTSD constitutes time "travel to the past, to a world where [one] is not safe… to a world… prematurely pushed into the future."[179] Dwelling is a form of fixation, obsession, in that we keep returning to the things we cannot let go of.

These moments are literally misshapen as Jemisin uses all caps, italics, and irregular punctuation to intensify and accelerate the experience of time. Margaret Price reminds us that crip time is not simply the slowing or expansion of time: "if you've ever had a 'psychotic break' or been around someone having one, you know that action in such moments tends to unfold *fast*… to a terrifying cadence."[180] This collapse of the past, present, and future functions in *The Broken Earth* through the present tense copular "is" or "to be." "Is" draws everything onto the same present plane, the same present place, just as Castrima "is" Tirimo "is" the Fulcrum. The present tense is not just cinematic, it's also conducive to the relaying of traumatized mindsets: it essentially reformulates time to isolate it, or to draw it all together into one thickening holding position. This may explain the prevalence of the present tense in dystopian, apocalyptic, and trauma narratives. The structure of *The Broken Earth* series at large goes beyond the relating of a traumatic experience, however; it constitutes a sustained presence that clarifies everything around those traumatic moments. We cannot understand how "is" is working unless we have moved through all of these places first. This structural dwelling enacts the process of contextualizing and locating, performing the constant turning of the cam.

Is it possible to have multiple, proliferating, more crip presents like this? As Jemisin passes over the universalizing, shot-heard-round-the-world concept of the "apocalypse" and turns instead to the individual devastations of everyday life, when it really is "just for you" and not really for anyone else, she returns us to a framework based on the idea that only the people who care will attend to these kinds of apocalypse. The dispersal of care within a community oppressed by the state is familiar to any marginalized community (i.e., "Who keeps us safe? We keep us safe") but in the disability justice movement the value of a person's life often has to be justified within their own homes, in their own community, or to their own family members.

Amanda Apgar discusses the complexity of memoirs written by parents of disabled children, as these parents both narrate their process of recognizing that their child does not meet their expectations or the expectations of the world around them—reconciling with their own inclination to care about their child, about whom ostensibly nobody else can be said to care—and then more often than not, developing an argument or justification for their child's inclusion in the familiar spaces of the world—or why other people should care also.[181] Indeed, this project of justification has its own complicity in its evaluation of "worth caring about." Beyond this, disability activist Mia Mingus writes of access intimacy, of how hard it is to find and how crucial it is to have relationships where care is not transactional or negotiated, of "knowing that [one] will not be alone in the stealth, insidious poison that is ableism."[182] The sense of collectivism, value, and communal support is hard-won and often cannot take place within the community in which one grows up—in that sense the disability community has something in common with the queer experience. Even as race, sexuality, and disability overlap and intersect in extremely potent ways in these examples, the point I make here is that finding people who *care* is very difficult and the degree of vulnerability is exceptional for disabled people as they depend materially on others.[183] This mode of insistent relationality and caring, and its relationship with constant narration, is what makes dwelling crip.

The process of "caring" and "proving" that one deserves to live just as they are feels like it's done only by the people who have immediate reason to, who exist in relation—parents, children, friends, loved ones, or disabled people themselves. In this sense, *The Broken Earth* is one such project of caring, "attending," and dwelling.[184] Jemisin seems to begin her series large with the recognizable apocalyptic moment of breaking the Stillness but ends it particular all along by revealing an ongoing relation of intense intimacy and care between the narrator and the narratee. "Proliferating crip presents" in this sense feels the most aligned with the constant movement of a dwell mechanism. As in Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha's theorization of care work, care work is ongoing, even though the things to do are mostly a matter of routine and there remains time in between. It cannot be narrated as an example of one day—the constant nature of care requires it be narrated over time, but this time is still bounded by the care. Often conversation around care is about how to do the simple but vital tasks: how to eat, drink, relieve one, clean one, take care of one, and these conversations happen every day. Care work is a combination of doing the actual work of taking care and living in an expanse of time during which one still must care, a complex present. As Hoa waits for Essun to wake from her coma, it becomes increasingly clear that this whole narration, every moment, is a process of caring.

**Crip Relationality through the Second Person Narration**

The form of this care is complex as well as it establishes relationships that are not comfortable for the reader. *The Fifth Season* has two interludes, both of which drop huge hints, one about the missing moon, and the other, directly before a time jump to the precipitating events of Syenite's terrible conclusion. This second interlude presents the narrator's first use of the first person: "Perhaps you think it wrong that I dwell so much on the horrors, the pain, but pain is what shapes us, after all. We are creatures born of heat and pressure and grinding, ceaseless movement. To be still is to be… not alive."[185] To "dwell so much" is literally how the narrator describes their project, then, and this "grinding" and "ceaseless movement" also evokes, again, a dwelling mechanism. The narrator defends himself for dwelling on pain, but also implies that a certain invasiveness or manipulation is inherent to dwelling. In other words, these troubling aspects of dwelling could be couched in terms of postcolonial critique or analyses of political

power. But Jemisin suggests that dwelling as a narrative infrastructural process of inhabitation is crip in its attention to the pain, the "ceaseless movement," of living. As the narrator dwells on "what shapes us," we are also working to figure out what we're being shaped into.

In this sense, the whole *Broken Earth* trilogy is a project of intimacy carried by its second person narration, which complicates the question of agency so central to the series, to the young adult form, and to a crip narrative theory. There has always been discussion around Jemisin's choice to use the second person. She has explained in multiple interviews, articles, and AMAs that this choice felt the best of a number of test chapters written from different perspectives: "I used second person because it felt right for the story. The impact I hoped for was simultaneously a sense of detachment that would replicate Essun's level of disassociation [*sic*] (I was trying to convey her PTSD) and a level of intimacy that second seems to handle well."[186] This standing psychiatric explanation for the second person narration ruffled some hardline SFF fan feathers as it became apparent that it was not simply a dissociative narration, presumably occurring between Essun and herself, but one occurring in real time with an interlocutor, and with readers coopted as listeners. It's interesting that some readers felt irritated to realize that they were not a privileged audience listening to someone's internal dialogue, nor part of an external collective welcomed by a narrator, but rather in a private space of suspension—of nowhereness—that forced them to confront the deictic reality of themselves. In this way, the readers are conscripted into a certain "level of intimacy"—so some of us want to care, but maybe we don't want to care that much.

The desire to feel like "a part of you" that we find squeamish is forthrightly addressed throughout *The Broken Earth* at different points:

> I want to keep telling this as I have: in your mind, in your voice, telling you what to think and know. Do you find this rude? It is, I admit. Selfish. When I speak as just myself, it's difficult to feel like part of you. It is lonelier. Please; let me continue a bit longer.[187]

This is both parasitic and an act of love, resonating in a crip sense beyond the parent-child relationship of Apgar's work to the complex, sometimes symbiotic, sometimes manipulative relationship between a caretaker and a disabled person that Mia Mingus describes as "forced intimacy," in opposition to "access intimacy." It's "rude," "selfish," and overbearing. The ventriloquism of the choice to narrate by speaking for and to feels inherently violating. But when he "speaks as just himself," it's lonelier. The relationship between Hoa and Essun encompasses many facets throughout the narration process: he first appears to her as a boy, less to excite her maternal instincts than to present himself as harmless and likable. As his nonhumanness becomes more apparent, he becomes more of an eerie threat: a protector, a caregiver, someone who can't die, someone who will never leave her, someone who loves her, someone who will consume her, and someone who "attends" to her.[188] The kind of intimacy that such a second person narration claims is necessarily invasive if it's going to be the kind of intimacy that keeps someone alive.

Second person narration is an area of much contention in narrative theory because of how deictic it is. Genette treats it as a problem of voice as a narratological category (the "sense of detachment"), and Derrida as a postmodern critique of overbearing claims of narrative harmony (the "level of intimacy"). Other scholars like Matt DelConte have argued that existing narratological categorizations do not fully comprehend the formulations of the second person, as it exceeds the limitations of voice.[189] Essentially, the problem is that there are too many possibilities for an unmarked address: what type of addressee, what kind of addresser, on or across which levels of narrative? The second person address is inherently objectifying and

Jemisin herself notes that it's easy for readers get "hinky" about it.[190] As readers we are sometimes aligned with the narrator toward the second person addressee, but at other times feel like we are the ones being addressed. The confusion about the type of agency we can expect to claim is one that complicates the satisfying archetypes and power dynamics between the one who cares and the one who is cared for.

The desire to inhabit another being through narration is inherent to authorship and will always provoke ethical problems, which we might characterize as revolving around resonance: of sensing differences and similarities between oneself and the rest of the world, and a desire to articulate them and thereby possess them.[191] The structure of *The Broken Earth* coopts us into a strangely incapacitated role along with the captivated Essun, and it forces us into a listening position. The tabula rasa of space that Jemisin rejects instead becomes the tabula rasa of the technically post-human Essun as it is filled in by insistent, dwelling narration, and by association, the tabula rasa of the reader as anonymous eavesdropping audience. It is very hard to ignore Hoa's narration of Essun's resurrection at the conclusion of the series: "You watch me. I watch you back."[192] This kind of direct inscription, however much we might understand that it's not directed toward *us*, is affronting to some, enchanting to others, and functions as a call to action.

Other contemporaneous space opera texts also rely on this dwelling process of contextualizing and orientating within narrative. We might consider Ann Leckie's *Imperial Radch* series (2013–2015), Arkady Martine's *A Memory Called Empire* (2019) and *A Desolation Called Peace* (2021), and Tamsyn Muir's *The Locked Tomb* series (2019, 2020, 2022). Most of these are written in the past tense, as it happens, even as they all deal with different tropes of space colonization and postcolonial melancholy through complex nesting narrative structures. They are almost disorientatingly focused on the epistemological presence of the narrator, who very much dwells on or in confusion. That is, all these series have crucial narrative turns on the concept of minds inhabiting minds, making the narration a painstaking process that must be learned and located. All of these texts also handle different forms of trauma. In Leckie's *Ancillary Justice*, which moves between before and after narratives in a suspense thriller where the emperor AI is discovered to be at war with itself, an AI protagonist used to inhabiting many bodies at once is suddenly reduced to one body. In Martine's duology, the consciousness of former officials of a not-quite-colonized space outpost are implanted into their successors to ensure a smooth amalgamation of generational knowledge as they send one such ambassador to the empire's center. In Muir's space Gothic series, certain people are able to bond then share bodies even after death, in a quasi-zombie, quasi-possession narrative of mind-body dualism—its complex and disorienting second-person present tense narration is eventually revealed to be such a possessed/shared body.

**Three Turns of the Cam: Dwelling**

This process of locating a narrator living in one's head or in one's body is central to these dwelling texts and is a *lumpy* experience, for lack of a better word, because the experience of time is so granular. The only way to work one's way through the obstructive narrator's voice is to gather enough narrative data points in which a pattern can be identified, and in which we can orient ourselves. In *The Broken Earth* series, Hoa introduces himself in the third person long before he identifies himself as the narrator. The anonymous voice we encounter has a distinctly chatty, ironic, real-time style. It's conspiratorial ("why don't we?"), full of snarky side comments and puns ("None of these places or people matter, by the way. I simply point them out for

context"[193]), and feels oral, or at least embodied, as it punctuates itself with line breaks or ventriloquized "Oh"s in moments of realization. Even in *The Stone Sky*, the narrator narrates each step of Essun's understanding as it develops:

> In this moment I remind myself of why I continue to tell this story through your eyes rather than my own: because, outwardly, you're too good at hiding yourself. Your face has gone blank, your gaze hooded. But I know you. *I know you*. Here is what's inside you.[194]

This feels like stalling, but it is actually a dwelling moment as it forces a narrative pause. It's pulled out into many small sections, moving through different degrees of subject and narrative/meta-narrative, including repetition and shifting emphasis. The temporal marker of "in this moment" indicates a departure from the narrative even as the narrator asserts their authority, not through their own perspective, but through the perspective they claim in their narrated object. This requires a series of momentous delays: the colon in the first sentence; the self-interruption to emphasize "outwardly"; the repeated meaning of "blank face" and "hooded gaze"; the actual repetition of "I know you"; then finally a return to the "here" of the narratee—"here is what's inside you." The actual progression through time is misshapen: such a beginning in "this moment" in time, moving through these repetitions, and landing in a deictic space of "here inside you," exemplifies a formal turn of the cam that I call dwelling, as we move from an A point in time to a B point in space.

Jemisin enforces such pauses through narration, and this functions on a larger scale as well. It's a temporally granular style, beyond its use of the present tense; events, and even conversations, actions, and scenes, take a while to unfold fully. It's also self-conscious in its storytelling, a meticulous design retroactively explained by the programmatic project of the whole narration to "reboot" Essun, and these turns occur on multiple levels through the narration. To dwell on this even further, the narration doesn't just dwell in these singular asides, but on the level of its narrative structure. The centrally "young adult" Syenite's narrative in the first novel, *The Fifth Season*, is (perhaps actively) concluded by Hoa's official introduction of himself to her (and us) as the narrator:

> Her fellow survivors will find her and take her to the mainland. There she will wander, lost and losing herself, for two long years.
>
> But not alone—for that is when I found her, you see. The moment of the obelisk's pulse was the moment in which her presence sang across the world: a promise, a demand, an invitation too enticing to resist. Many of us converged on her then, but I am the one who found her first. I fought off the others and trailed her, watched her, guarded her. I was glad when she found the little town named Tirimo, and comfort if not happiness, for a time.
>
> I introduced myself to her eventually, finally, ten years later, as she left Tirimo. It's not the way we usually do these things, of course; it is not the relationship with her kind that we normally seek. But she is—was—special. *You* were, are, special.
>
> I told her that I was called Hoa.[195]

This eerie grooming relationship then develops diegetically between the narrating Stone Eater and the orogene characters, intradiegetically as Hoa narrates these events to Essun, and extradiegetically with our ambiguous inclusion. This progression both entails and complicates the concept of dwelling.

The tense shifts from the future tense—narrated from Hoa's own omniscient historical perspective to Essun who does not know what happened to herself next—to the past tense, which

is within Hoa's own present understanding of his own place in time. As he brings all the temporalities together, he seemingly trips over them: "It's not the way we usually do things, of course; it is not the relationship with her kind that we normally seek" falls into the present tense, pushing his second person address into a third person realm. Then he collapses the present into the past in a third person "is—was—", then as he brings the past into the present "*You* were, are, special" he shifts to the second person and back to the present tense, only returning back to a past tense ("I told her that I was called Hoa") to introduce himself now, here, in the narrative to his narratee and to the readers. This is a dense project of couching narrative into a complex present, and each turn of phrase requires a new configuration of tense and address. It is cyclical, gathering, and expansive, forcing us to understand on multiple levels the relationality that anchors the larger frame of one-on-one present tense narration, of the cam that operates the dwelling mechanism.

This is a crucial turning point in the series as we are introduced to our narrator for the first time, even though we have met the character already. This foreshadows the conclusive revelation in *The Stone Sky* that we have been here all along, within the present. These turns are perhaps not best represented by the word, "revelation," though—maybe it's better to say, these lumpy turns of the misshapen cam help us understand better. They give us the time to. We have had much of the information all along, it just requires a shift of perspective, a movement from vantage point A to vantage point B to view the same thing. Jemisin constructs in *The Broken Earth* a heuristic where we are constantly reorienting, turning, pausing to understand better, through insistent attention and relationality. Once again to turn to the conclusion of the series:

> And then one day, deep in the fissure where I have put you, the geode splits and hisses open. You rise from its spent halves, the matter of you slowing and cooling to its natural state.
>
> Beautiful, I think. Locs of roped jasper. Skin of striated ocher marble that suggests laugh lines at eyes and mouth, and stratified layers to your clothing. You watch me, and I watch you back.
>
> You say, in an echo of the voice you once had, "What is it that you want?"
>
> "Only to be with you," I say.
>
> "Why?"
>
> I adjust myself to a posture of humility, with head bowed and one hand over my chest. "Because that is how one survives eternity," I say, "or even a few years. Friends. Family. Moving with them. Moving forward."
>
> Do you remember when I first told you this, back when you despaired of ever repairing the harm you'd done? Perhaps. Your position adjusts, too. Arms folded, expression skeptical. Familiar. I try not to hope and fail utterly.
>
> "Friends, family," you say. "Which am I, to you?"
>
> "Both and more. We are beyond such things."
>
> "Hmm."
>
> I am not anxious. "What do *you* want?"
>
> You consider. I listen to the slow ongoing roar of the volcano, down here in the deep. Then you say, "I want the world to be better."
>
> I have never regretted more my inability to leap into the air and whoop for joy.
>
> Instead, I transit to you, with one hand proffered. "Then let's go make it better."
>
> You look amused. It's you. It's truly you. "Just like that?"
>
> "It might take some time."

> "I don't think I'm very patient." But you take my hand.
> Don't be patient. Don't ever be. This is the way a new world begins.
> "Neither am I," I say. "So let's get to it."[196]

This messianic conclusion is romantic, epic, and considering the twelve hundred-odd pages we've traversed to get to this point, total emotional catharsis. A number of recognizable melodramatic story lines all come to fruition: a mother's sacrifice; a bedside/geodeside coma vigil; preventing a large object from crashing into the earth; the eternal not-quite-lovers' reunion; etc. While Jemisin critiques the singularity of the apocalypse, the projections of the young adult, or the indifferent so-called objectivity of science fiction, we can still see the love of juicy genre fiction where a sweeping conclusion is king. The importance of the series is precisely in how these different plots and critiques—each entailing the production of complex world systems integral to the SFF genre—are assembled, while still taking pleasure in the poetic. This experience necessitates dwelling at length on multiple levels, across the granularity of the one-sided dialogue, every paused moment of observation, the intimacy of the second person narration, and the repeated reframing of the narrative relationship that is being built.

Given that this series originates in the deconstruction of a YA novel, in which the apparent distinctions between periods of life—pre-teen, adult, middle-aged—are devalued, this conclusion's apparent shift to an eternal future is either slightly disappointing or deceptive. The epic nature of the conclusion—"This is the way a new world begins"—illustrates how *The Broken Earth* reinscribes the coming-of-age into a coming-into-awareness or a coming-into-agency, or, to use Heidegger's favourite verb, a coming-into-being. But this coda, titled "me, and you," is in fact just one stopping place of a dwelling narrative. It contains the notion of the future ("surviving eternity"); it searches for vestiges of the past ("Do you remember when I first told you this," "familiar"); it expands the sense of time and repeats itself to expand the moment ("Don't be patient. Don't ever be"), all narrated in the present tense. The relation is what matters, the presence in the moment is what matters—there is no difference between "eternity… or even a few years," as long as there is "being with" ("me, and you") in a project to have "the world be better." This is different than the "making the world better" that appears later in the passage, which indicates a future tense. The first desire that the posthuman Essun expresses is for the world to "be" better. This "be" recalls the same copular "is" in the narration of her PTSD as different places and moments are crushed together into one "is"; instead, here it demands for a different world to surround that "be."

This conversation thus contains deixis, suggestively creating a space—maybe for the reader's inclusion, maybe for other kinds of referents. The deictic is about pointing, sharing an understanding of space. Here we understand that this is where Essun has been hidden away inside a geode along with us, we might think, throughout the three novels. She resurrects as in a Christ narrative, awakens as from a deathly coma, or simply dwells to the point where the narration has rotated enough to move her holding position, and our own. *The Broken Earth* formalizes this process of nesting, expanding, and dwelling within the present. We have to learn this nuanced stratification of time and space as we work our way through the different degrees and levels of narration. The novel insists on repetition, revisiting, and dwelling for readers as well. The series is stratified temporally, narratologically, and physically as the literal tectonics of the earth are required to reform our protagonist.

In this sense, a crip lens allows us to see how Jemisin recasts dwelling as form of the complex present, away from the "measure-taking" of Heideggerean poetics. The gradually revealed location and embodiment of the narrator in the immediate present is not just an

evidence of dwelling in the present as a durational experience—having built, then dwelling—but also a constant "sessing" of geological and seismic change, an insistent narration of care, a fixation on pain, an inhabitation of the "ceaseless movement" of living. The intentional ambiguity of *The Broken Earth*'s address and the intimacy it claims makes it impossible to conceive of a solitary, stable formation of the self—for good and for ill—as Jemisin shows us in the ever-moving, ever-changing and ever-present narration that the form of the young adult makes possible. It takes a while but by now, we've all learned something more than we knew before, we know better where and who we are, and it's always time to "get to it." Dwell time continues.

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17. *Princess Diaries*, 13.

18. Meg Cabot, *Party Princess*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 89.

19. The rhythm of Mia's writing reminds me of the slightly queer connection between writing and autoeroticism in the context of girls writing outlined in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's 1991 essay "Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl."

20. Digression exists in the history of novels in several different forms, but they all have in common a departure from the story. Sometimes it entails the intrusion of an extra-diegetic narrator or the author themselves; other times it involves a pause in the story to tell a completely unrelated story or to wax forth on a new topic.

21. Meg Cabot, *Princess in Love*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 72.

22. Maslow's hierarchy of needs demonstrates the theory that certain needs can be met only once prior basic needs are satisfied: for instance, physiological needs such as food and shelter come before the ability to satisfy the need for safety and security. After safety, it's love

and belonging. After love and belonging, it's esteem and confidence. After esteem and confidence, it's self-actualization: the coming into our own as people, to meet our own creative and personal goals.

23. *Princess Diaries,* 12.

24. *Princess Diaries,* 117, 120.

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26. Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint*: *The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 13.

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28. Successful franchises originating from literary adaptations recognized from this period of late 1990s through 2010s: *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, *Hunger Games*, James Bond, *Batman* and other superheros, MCU. Also mentioned in the classic canon are *Jurassic Park*, *Planet of the Apes*, *Silence of the Lambs*. Many YA novels have been adapted since 2008 to varying degrees of success. This doesn't seem to be a dying trend, however uncertain the future of the young adult franchise is.

29. A trend most easily landmarked in *Harry Potter*'s general increases in length as the series progresses.

30. We might see in Figure 2 in the appendix one notable exception to this trend: following the height of the writing panic in the eighth book (4 days long), Mia has a relatively lengthy nervous breakdown in the ninth (16 days long), and gets therapist Dr. Knutz who advises her to take a break from journalling. In the following break of a narrative year and a half, she abandons the journal to write, she explains in the tenth book, a romance novel for her senior thesis—*Ransom My Heart*, which Cabot also released in 2009 under the byline of Princess Mia Thermopolis.

31. Berlant, *Female Complaint*, 16.

32. Helen Fielding, ""No One Can Have it All": Bridget Jones's Author on Life, Love, and the Importance of Friendship," interview by Sarah Biddlecombe, *Stylist*, 2016. https://www.stylist.co.uk/books/bridget-jones-helen-fielding-women-have-it-all-books-reading-love-romance-diary-career-advice/129054

33. While there was a long gap between the second and third books, very committed readers actually were able to learn more about Bridget's mishaps during an unplanned pregnancy with Daniel Cleaver's baby during a 2006-2007 return to the column at *The Independent*. While that material ended up being fodder for *Bridget Jones's Baby* (with a change of father), Fielding had made clear early on her disinterest in further pursuing an Austenian utopia.

34. *Mad About the Boy,* 8. For more detail, Sarah Lyall, "Will Have Small Glass of Wine," *New York Times*, Oct. 18, 2013.

35. *Mad About the Boy,* 467.

36. Lucinda Rasmussen, ""She Says She's Thirty-Five but She's Really Fifty-One": Rebranding the Middle-Aged Postfeminist Protagonist in Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones: Mad about The Boy*.," in *Ageing Women in Literature and Visual Culture: Reflections, Refractions, Reimaginings,* eds. Cathy McGlynn, Margaret O'Neill, Michaela Schrage-Früh (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

37. Molly Young, "Bridget Jones's Latest Movie, Now a Novel," *New York Times*, Oct. 17, 2016.

38. Ironically, the same conversation occurred around Renée Zellweger's appearance in the 2016 film of *Bridget Jones's Baby*, after clearly having undergone cosmetic procedures. As Bridget might refuse to age, Zellweger is not *allowed* to age.

39. Zoe Williams, "*Bridget Jones's Baby: The Diaries* by Helen Fielding—review," *The Guardian*, Oct. 12, 2016.

40. See Appendix, Figure 6.

41. Ngai describes the affects of late capitalism as "ugly feelings," but I would add that the other side of this coin would be disability feelings—feelings about, toward, and by people with disabilities.

42. Julie Passanante Elman, *Chronic Youth: Disability, Sexuality, and U.S. Media Cultures of Rehabilitation*. (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 131–132.

43. The same privileges as I note earlier also play out in the securing of these diagnoses: economic and social access to psychiatric care, implicit bias in the medical professions, the amount of research and training already done in those areas—are all much more likely to come by as a wealthy white woman. The politicization and leverage of disability in white patients in the late twentieth century as a way of claiming innocence of their own complicity in the discrimination and injustices experienced by black patients and patients of colour is well outlined in Julie Passanante Elman's *Chronic Youth*.

44. ADHD is a dopamine deficiency in the frontal lobe, the decision-making part of the brain, undermotivating the brain to consider future or past rewards/punishments in decision making. Anxiety occurs in the amygdala at the back of the head. Cortisol rushes from there through the brain, activating the fight and flight response. It basically shuts down the frontal lobe's slower decision-making center to fall back on the more impulsive, instinctive back of the brain. If someone is anxious often or long enough (in formative years, or in long stressful environments), these fight/flight responses will start kicking in as a matter of habit at every perceived threat. This is because nerves and chemical pathways start to etch their way into a person's brain and change it permanently.

45. Anxiety still remains in a gray area between neurodivergence and strained neurotypicality. Neurodivergence is such a new area of disability identity that there continues to be extensive discourse around what qualifies as neurodivergence and what doesn't. Neurodivergence can be acquired, it does not have to be a permanent diagnosis, it can come and go—much like chronic illness or chronic pain. The issue with calling anxiety a form of neurodivergence off the bat is that anxiety is ubiquitous, overused in pop discourse, and vague. Some people experience debilitating anxiety, others experience low-grade chronic anxiety, yet others feel anxious often. For instance, people who have ADHD or other disabilities also often have anxiety because of the tolls living in this society takes on a disabled person. To claim anxiety alone as a neurodivergent life in an ableist society focused on productivity would probably require more elaboration. Everyone's brain changes a lot as they grow, and anxiety-inducing conditions are endemic to life in the twenty-first century.

46. Freeman, *Time Binds*, 3.

47. Freeman, *Beside You in Time*, 6.

48. Naomi Darom, "Why Some Women Can't Get Their House in Order," *Ha'Aretz*, Nov. 12, 2016, updated April 24, 2018. ADD, Attention Deficit Disorder, is now obsolete, and covered by the umbrella term of ADHD.

49. For example: Autistic Headcanons Tumblr, https://autisticheadcanons.tumblr.com/post/186254500413/mia-thermopolis-from-princess-diaries-movies-is. Posted 2020.

50. Meg Cabot, "It's Going to Get Better," *Meg's Blog*, June 13, 2018. https://www.megcabot.com/2018/06/its-going-to-get-better/

51. In many articles and interviews over the years, the points of resemblance between Bridget and Fielding is noted, winked at, recounted with glee.

52. Anna Rosevear, "Bridget Jones: a classic ADD case," in "*Ouch! It's a Disability Thing"* series, BBC, March 14, 2005. http://www.bbc.co.uk/ouch/features/bridget_jones_a_classic_add_case.shtml

53. Freeman, *Beside You in Time*, 127.

54. Ibid., 133.

55. "Abled arrogance" is a term coined by Octavian Robinson.

56. Sheila Heti, *How Should A Person Be?: A Novel* (New York: Picador, 2013), 28.

57. Queer reluctance and queer hesitation are relatively new terms addressing older ideas around queer narratives often manifesting as delay or temporal prolongation as resistance to normative narrative arcs. I have in mind *A Proximate Remove* by Reginald Jackson (UC Press, 2021) which is an intensively queer reading of the 11th century Japanese text *The Tale of Genji*.

58. Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "confound (v.)," March 2024, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/3413920204.

Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "confound," accessed May 7, 2024, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/confound.

59. *Hannah Montana*, season 4, episode 10, "I'll Always Remember You (Part 2)," written by Maria Brown-Gallenberg and Andrew Green, starring Miley Cyrus, aired on November 7, 2010 on Disney Channel, accessed via Disney+ web service, 00:07:59.

60. The Cyborg Jillian Weise, "My Brain is Already Cyborg," *WIRED*, Dec. 21, 2021.

61. Lotoya Francis (@lotoysrus),"Why y'all keep asking where the police at? Y'all ask where Miley's at when Hannah's on stage?", Twitter post, January 6, 2021, 11:34 AM. https://twitter.com/lotoysrus/status/1346903101723320322

62. The whiteness of *Hannah Montana* as a Disney product has been marked over the years in the media, and by scholars of media. Miley Cyrus also has met much critique as she first embraced the style and culture of hip-hop to huge success then spoke pejoratively of it. She has also been known to appropriate different cultures for her work, particularly black culture. Sociologist Tressie McMillan Cottom also writes an excellent long piece on the history of Dolly Parton and whiteness: "The Dolly Moment: Why We Stan a Post-Racism Queen," e*ssaying*, February 24, 2021. https://tressie.substack.com/p/the-dolly-moment

63. Emily Keeler, "Reality Fiction," *The New Inquiry*. May 28, 2012.

64. Hilary Liftin, *Miles To Go*. (Bath, UK: Parragon, 2008), 59.

65. *Hannah Montana: The Movie*, directed by Peter Chelsom (2009; Burbank, California: Walt Disney Motion Pictures.) Accessed on Disney+ web service. 00:19:55.

66. *Hannah Montana: The Movie*, 1:34:08.

67. James D. Watts Jr., "Books: 'How Should A Person Be' by Sheila Heti is experimental prose," *Tulsa World*, Oklahoma, June 30, 2013 (updated February 20, 2019). Quotes excerpted.

68. *The Hills* is arguably a kind of flashpoint in reality television in the 2000s—it was extremely successful, as was *Jersey Shore* (2009–2012). Both seemed to represent a specific

subculture (white people from Orange County living in Los Angeles; Italian Americans in New Jersey) of attractive, wealthy, non-celebrity, and somewhat boring people that just made for really good television and garnered a lot of media discourse.

69. Joanna Biggs, "It Could Be Me," *London Review of Books* 35, No. 2, (January 24, 2013).

70. Heti's non-fiction book of transcribed essays from Misha Glouberman, *The Chairs Are Where People Go* (2011) was released in the year between the Canadian and American editions of *How Should A Person Be?*.

71. Ben Lerner, "Margaux Williamson's Hard-Earned Magic," *Frieze*, September 11, 2020.

Mark Mann, "'I Think I'm Really Enjoying Painting': Margaux Williamson's New Work," *Momus*, May 12, 2021.

72. James Wood, "True Lives," *The New Yorker*, June 18, 2012.

73. Heti, 2–3.

74. The italicized emphasis on "a simple life" also reads as a sly citation of the Paris Hilton and Nicole Ritchie reality TV show, *The Simple Life*, running on Fox 2003–2007. Hilton's 2004 sex tape also makes an allusive appearance later on in the novel, excerpted below. Heti has also spoken publicly in defense of "dumb girls" who are not as dumb as the media makes them out to be, citing Paris Hilton as one such instance:

"Margaux and I lay in one of our beds and watched as, on my computer, an heiress gave her boyfriend a hand job. She seemed really into it; there was no reason to doubt it. Then her cell phone rang , and she let go of his dick and threw her body across the bed and answered with a far more convincing show of enthusiasm than she had shown while jiggling his cock." Heti, 105.

75. The axes of fame to my mind are first the axis of perception (perception by many others, to perception by one or few others, to self-perception) and the axis of time (the immediate present, to the proximate, fabricated, or representational present, to the imagined future).

76. A British reality TV show equivalent to *The Hills*, running 2011 through 2021 with renewals pending.

77. Joanna Biggs, "It Could Be Me," *London Review of Books* 35, No. 2, (January 24, 2013).

78. Heti, 265.

79. Heti, 266.

80. Dena Fehrenbacher, "Punchline Aesthetics: Recuperated Failure in the Novels of Ben Lerner and Sheila Heti," *Post45*, July 20, 2021.

81. Christina Pazzanese, "Politics in a "Post-Truth" Age," *Harvard Gazette*, July 14, 2016. "Post-truth" refers to the development of a dangerous vacuum between facts and their perception and the frenzied sharing of polemic as true fact. Such post-truth eras have been recognized in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century pamphlet wars in England and the U.S. leading up to the English Civil War or the American Revolution, for example, and are recognizable in the manufactured, polarized media realities in the U.S. leading up to the 2016 election and the January 6, 2021 insurrection.

82. Fehrenbacher also points out that autofiction has afforded the opportunity to narrate underrepresented experiences in urgent and striking ways.

83. Speech registers a specific kind of hegemonic utterance: phonocentric, sighted, distantist, able-bodied.

84. Matthew Edwards, "Disney Acting vs. Real Acting," *The College Audition Blog*, March 15, 2013. It is notoriously difficult to find sources on decisions made inside the Disney studios, which are very well-protected legally.

85. An open secret can also be known as Pulcinella's secret. Pulcinella as a figure in commedia dell'arte is the busybody who either tells everyone the secret he is supposed to keep, or pretends he knows a secret that he doesn't know.

86. This is an ASL sentence structure.

87. Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, "How Disabled Mutual Aid is Different Than Abled Mutual Aid," *Disability Visibility Project*, Oct. 3, 2021.

88. Alexander Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 3.

89. Heti, 3, 117.

90. Heti, 31, 32.

91. Heti, 113.

92. Heti, 157.

93. Morgan Genevieve Blue, "The Best of Both Worlds?: Youth, Gender, and a Post-Feminist Sensibility in Disney's *Hannah Montana,*" *Feminist Media Studies* 13, No. 4 (2017): 660–675.

94. Blue, 670.

95. *Hannah Montana: The Movie*, 1:32:24.

96. Ibid, 1:32:53.

97. Angelica Martinez, "There's a Theory That Dolly Parton Is the IRL Version of Hannah Montana, and Sweet Niblets, My Mind Is Blown," *Buzzfeed*, Dec. 2, 2020.

98. It's also interesting to consider Parton's long-standing commitment to medicine and huge philanthropic efforts to different terminal illnesses as well as public health. In her 2017 song, "Chemo Hero," she talks about losing hair but doesn't mention any wigs. "Lost my hair, but I don't care/ Lots of scarves and hats to wear/…you know, old fuzzy wuzzy was a bear/ and fuzzy wuzzy had no hair/ He was a chemo hero."

99. Emily Keeler, "Reality Fiction," *The New Inquiry*, May 28, 2012.

100. Heti, 107.

101. Heti, 266.

102. Heti, 298.

103. Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "swap (v.)," March 2024, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/7856967055.

104. Originally designed for trading perishable goods hundreds, if not thousands of years ago, they allow farmers and traders to stabilize prices for harvest-dependent, transported, or perishable commodities that are not necessarily available year-round. Simply put, they're bets placed on a commodity's estimated yield, estimated demand, or estimated price at a certain time in the future, and how any of these estimations may be changing at that time. This type of derivative, called futures trading, was integral to the trade of slaves, olives, rice, and grain among other "agricultural" commodities over the centuries. The more common forms of derivatives also include options and forward contracts, along with swaps. Each take different forms of agreement or bet, but all operate on similar premises of potential and uncertain future fluctuations.

105. Chris Mullerleile, "Chicago and the regulatory history of US financial derivative markets.," *Environment and Planning A* 47, (2015): 1816. doi:10.1068/a130343p

106. Adam Tooze, "The 1970s Weren't What You Think," *Foreign Policy*, July 1, 2022.

107. David Wittenberg, *Time Travel: The Popular Philosophy of Narrative* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 182.

108. In the 2007–2010 subprime mortgage crisis it came to light how banks had preyed on lower income and first generation homeowners, pocketing down payments and premiums in large credit default swap package deals amongst themselves, loaning out money from thin air. Once the bubble burst, many homeowners went bankrupt, and the banks who had done the credit default swaps were on the hook for all of the loans they had promised to insure. Worse, some very large banks had been giving out these loans in one branch and doing credit default swap deals on these loans from another branch, completely losing track of how many loans were being given out and who was insuring them. In the end, a number of these banks could not afford to pay them all out—Lehman Brothers alone went bankrupt with $619 billion of debt—and so also crashed, leading to the 2008 recession, Wall Street bailouts, and the Occupy movement.

109. For example, David Blake and John Pickles, "Mental time travel and the valuation of financial investments," Journal of Behavioral Finance, 14 no. 3, (2022): 327–344.

110. Jina B. Kim, "Disability in an Age of Fascism," *American Quarterly*, 72, no. 1 (2020): 269.

111. Ellen Samuels, "Six Ways of Looking at Crip Time," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (2017).

112. Jina B. Kim, "Cripping the Welfare Queen: The Radical Potential of Disability Politics," *Social Text 148* 39, no. 3 (2021): 85.

113. Ellen Samuels, "Six Ways of Looking at Crip Time," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (2017).

114. Examples of other body-swapping or time-travel films from the 1980s include the 1985 cult classic *Back to the Future*; *Peggy Sue Got Married*; *Like Father, Like Son*; *Dream a Little Dream*; *Oh! Heavenly Dog*, etc. Contemporary TV shows include *Russian Doll*.

115. Janet Maslin, "Review/Film; Tom Hanks as a 13-Year-Old in *Big*." *The New York Times*, June 3, 1988.

116. *Big*, directed by Penny Marshall. (1988; Los Angeles: Gracie Films, 20th Century Fox, 2023), purchased download, 44:36.

117. John Holusha, "Commercial Real Estate: Regional Market—Manhattan; Home Depot Project Passes Detailed Course in History," *The New York Times*, August 11, 2004.

118. Mark McCain, "If You're Thinking of Living In: SoHo," *The New York Times*, June 12, 1988.

119. Phillip Atiba Goff, Matthew Christian Jackson, Brooke Allison Lewis Di Leone, Carmen Marie Culotta, and Natalie Ann DiTomasso, "The Essence of Innocence: Consequences of Dehumanizing Black Children," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 106, no. 4 (2014): 526–545. Adultification was first established as a concept in this 2014 study at UCLA that looked at the experience of Black boys as they are commonly viewed as being more mature than they actually are, particularly within the criminal justice system; a 2017 study from Georgetown found similar if not worse experiences for Black girls.

120. *Little*, directed by Tina Gordon (2019; Los Angeles: Universal Pictures, 2023), purchased download, 02:39.

121. *Little,* 02:50.

122. Karen Ho, *Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 60. In her ethnography of Wall Street, Ho outlines how "smartness" is a code in Wall Street investment banking recruitment, which boomed in the corporate climate of the

1980s. Large banking firms like Goldman Sachs or Lehman developed unbelievably aggressive recruiting campaigns to elite and "smart" institutions, particularly Princeton and Harvard, that persisted from the 1990s through the 2020s.

123. Stephanie Chan, "Peek Inside the Big Differences Between the Homes from '*Little*,'" *Apartment Therapy*, May 3, 2019.

124. Sesali Bowen, "'Little' Is an Intergenerational Take On Black Girl Magic," *Nylon*, April 16, 2019.

125. *Little*, 1:24:15–1:24:34.

126. Maya Erskine and Anna Konkle, *Pen15: Acting Your Age FYC Featurette*, 2021, on Hulu. https://www.hulu.com/watch/40465b41-c256-4512-99f3-bad782c32a11. 0:58

127. Danielle Turchiano, "Why *Pen15* Turned to Animation for a Pivotal Florida Vacation Episode," *Variety Magazine*, August 27, 2021.

128. Turchiano, ibid.

129. Emilia Yu, "Interview: *Pen15* Director Sam Zvibleman Talks Honesty, Hard Work, and the Magic Behind the Scenes," *Awards Radar*, June 13, 2021.

130. Maya Erskine and Anna Konkle, "*Pen15* Creators Discuss Why They Wanted to End the Show Now (and that Bl—job Scene)," by Samantha Highfill, *Entertainment Weekly*, Dec. 8, 2021.

131. Maya Erskine and Anna Konkle, "'I'm Feeling the Loss of a 13-Year-Old Perspective': Maya Erskine and Anna Konkle Kill Their *Pen15* Counterparts' Innocence," by Jen Chaney, *Vulture*, Dec. 15, 2021.

132. Kiese Laymon, "Why I Paid Tenfold to Buy Back the Rights for Two of My Books," *Literary Hub*, Nov. 10, 2020.

133. Kiese Laymon, "Why America's Story Requires Revision," by Jamil Smith, *Vox*, July 15, 2021.

134. Kiese Laymon, "Revision, with Kiese," by Blair Hodges, *Fireside Podcast*, Sept. 27, 2021.

135. Kiese Laymon, "You Are the Second Person," *Guernica Magazine*, June 17, 2013.

136. Meghan Gilbert-Hickey and Miranda A. Green-Barteet, eds. *Race in Young Adult Speculative Fiction* (Oxford, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2021). As the protagonist of *The Hunger Games*, Katniss Everdeen may have been written to have "dark eyes" and "olive skin"—not particularly represented in the films—but there was enough racist hue and cry over the casting of Amandla Stenberg as a minor character who dies heroically in the film to make it clear that the series is still defaulted to white "racelessness." Successors to this fad include titles such as *Divergent*, *The Maze Runner*, *Uglies*, *Red Rising*, *Breaking Sky*, *Birth Marked*, *Cinder*, and many others.

137. Kiese Laymon, *Long Division* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2021), 124.

138. Ibid., 127.

139. Alison Kafer, *Feminist Queer Crip* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 3.

140. Kiese Laymon, *Long Division*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2021), 124.

141. Ellen Samuels, "Six Ways of Looking at Crip Time," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (2017).

142. Kiese Laymon, *Long Division*, (Evanston: Agate Bolden, 2013), 263.

143. Kiese Laymon, *Long Division*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2021), 135.

144. Kiese Laymon, *Long Division*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2021), 153.

145. N.K. Jemisin, *The Stone Sky* (New York: Orbit, 2017), 396–7.

146. Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "dwell (v.)," March 2024, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/3366380788.

147. Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "dwell (n.)," September 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1776333516.

148. N.K. Jemisin, *The Fifth Season* (New York: Orbit, 2015), 1.

149. Ibid.

150. Ibid., 15.

151. Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "dwell (v.)," March 2024, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/3366380788.

152. Reynolds, Joel Michael. "Heidegger, Embodiment, and Disability." *Epoché: A Journal for the History of Philosophy* 26, no. 1 (2021): 183-201.

As immediately relevant examples in a discussion of Black poetics in response to the Kantian/Hegelian divide, Fred Moten, Kevin Quashie, and Audre Lorde all contribute to understanding a different direction of poetic development. For one, that Heidegger's worldview does not recognize its reliance on antiblackness (Moten); or that poetry, rather than "taking measure," may give shape and action to thought through articulated feeling (Lorde); or for yet another, that "aliveness" rather than "being" or "dwelling" may emerge through poetry (Quashie). I bring up black poetics specifically because it is the most substantial critical conversation that points out that a Heideggerean framework remains exclusive. However, crip poetics has much to offer as well and finds its footing in modernist and performance poetry for the most part: Rebecca Sanchez's *Deafening Modernism* (2015) and Petra Kuppers' "Performing Determinism" (2007) as examples. In a more straightforward engagement with disability in Heidegger's work, Joel Michael Reynolds writes about embodiment. This collation of poetics discourse is easily the material of another project.

153. Federico De Matteis, "Dwelling," *International Lexicon of Aesthetics,* Mimesis Journals, May 31, 2020.

154. Martin Heidegger, "…Poetically, Man Dwells…", *Poetry, Language, Thought*. trans. Albert Hofstadter. (New York: Harper, 1971), 216.

155. Heidegger, 214.

156. Ibid.

157. Ibid., 219.

158. As Heidegger struggled to articulate this existential process of dwelling, he also found himself coming up against the limitations of language. So he used words differently than they were usually used, spelled them differently, and came up with certain terminologies that make his philosophy notoriously difficult to decipher.

159. Jemisin, *The Stone Sky*, 396–7.

160. Jemisin, *The Obelisk Gate*, 76.

161. The discussion of narrative as a dwelling space, which Bieger is careful to separate from postcolonial or otherwise identity-based critiques of space and relationships therein, is addressed in a more hermeneutic fashion. I am personally not sure if I agree that narrative needs to be addressed only on a disembodied philosophical plane to arrive at the offerings of Heideggerean dwelling.

162. Laura Bieger, "No Place Like Home; or, Dwelling in Narrative," *New Literary History* 46, no. 1 (2015): 33.

163. In older ignition coils dependent on mechanical switches the dwell time would actually decrease as the engine speed increased, and the engine would fail the faster it was supposed to go as the coil didn't have the time to charge fully. This is remedied in contemporary technology which electronically enforces an uniform dwell time.

164. Alison Kafer, "After Crip, Crip Afters," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 120, no. 2 (2021): 416.

165. Mark A. Tabone, "Insistent Hope as Anti-Anti-Utopian Politics in N. K. Jemisin's *Broken Earth* Trilogy," *Utopian Studies* 33, no. 1 (2022): 18–35.

166. Jerome Winter, *Science Fiction, New Space Opera, and Neoliberal Globalism: Nostalgia for Infinity* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2016), 2.

167. Annalee Newitz, "The Book Series That Brought Space Opera into the 21st Century," *Ars Technica*, Jan. 29, 2016.

168. N.K. Jemisin, "Tricking Readers into Acceptance," *N.K. Jemisin—Blog,* Aug. 25, 2015. https://nkjemisin.com/2015/08/tricking-readers-into-acceptance/

169. Jemisin, *The Obelisk Gate*, 84.

"Something of her is warped out of true by this moment, and from now on all her acts of affection toward her father will be calculated, performative. Her childhood dies, for all intents and purposes. but that is better than *all* of her dying, she knows."

170. N.K. Jemisin, "At the End of the Year, N.K. Jemisin Ponders the End of the World," by Ari Shapiro, *NPR*, Dec. 26, 2018.

171. N.K. Jemisin, "At the End of the Year, N.K. Jemisin Ponders the End of the World," by Ari Shapiro, *NPR*, Dec. 26, 2018.

172. Diletta De Cristofaro, *The Contemporary Post-Apocalyptic Novel: Critical Temporalities and the End Times* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).

Apocalyptic temporality has been described as a "thick" present in the context of biblical studies (Jonathan Ben-Dov, *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel*); "thick present" has also appeared in the context of climate change and "weathering" (Astrida Neimanis, Rachel Loewen Walker, *Hypatia*).

173. Jemisin, *The Stone Sky*, 398.

174. Jemisin wrote a response to Ursula K. LeGuin's famous short story "Those Who Walk Away from Omelas," titled "Those Who Stay and Fight."

175. Alison Kafer, "After Crip, Crip Afters." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 120, no. 2 (2021): 421.

176. Alison Kafer, "After Crip, Crip Afters." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 120, no. 2 (2021): 417–418.

177. Audre Lorde, *Cancer Journals* (Argyle, NY: Aunt Lute Books, 1980), 4.

178. Jemisin, *The Obelisk Gate*, 329.

179. María Elena Cepeda, "Thrice Unseen, Forever on Borrowed Time: Latina Feminist Reflections on Mental Disability and the Neoliberal Academy," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 120, no. 2 (2021): 312.

180. Margaret Price, "The Bodymind Problem and the Possibilities of Pain," *Hypatia* 30, no. 1 (2015): 273.

181. Amanda Apgar, *The Disabled Child: Memoirs of a Normal Future* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2023).

Apgar outlines in clear terms the relationship between these memoirs and their neoliberal context of disability assimilation along vectors of white supremacy, heteronormativity, and economic privilege.

182. Mia Mingus, "Access Intimacy, Interdependence, and Disability Justice." Paul K. Longmore Lecture on Disability Studies, given April 11, 2017.

183. For instance, disability justice activist Stacey Milbern had to carefully negotiate moving out of her conservative family's home when she came out as queer.

184. Jemisin, *The Stone Sky*, 396.

185. Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, 361.

186. Jemisin, Reddit AMA. August 30, 2017. https://publish.reddit.com/embed?url=https://www.reddit.com/r/books/comments/6x0n1e/comment/dmc9u61?snippet=1_0_417

187. Jemisin, *The Obelisk Gate*, 280.

188. Jemisin, *The Stone Sky*, 396.

189. Matt DelConte, "Why You Can't Speak: Second-Person Narration, Voice, and a New Model for Understanding Narrative," *Style* 37, no. 2 (2003): 204–219.

190. N.K. Jemisin, "They Are Living Their Own Myths: An Interview with N.K. Jemisin, Author of *The Fifth Season*" by Tobias Carroll, *Electric Literature*, Aug. 31, 2015.

191. I touch on this kind of confusion of subjectivity in the autofiction and performative texts of "confounding," which offer an immediate and disorganized sense of the present and the self in relation to it. The crip issue I saw in "confounding" was the problem of listening effectively, rather than simply following the lines of convoluted reason into a knot of uncritical and helpless acceptance of an exploitative subjectivity. Margaret Price puts it quite simply: "the next time someone tells you they need something—anything…—*believe them*." Margaret Price, "Time Harms: Disabled Faculty Navigating the Accommodations Loop," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 120, no. 2 (2021): 273.

192. Jemisin, *The Stone Sky*, 397.

193. Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, 3.

194. Jemisin, *The Stone Sky*, 156.

195. Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, 443.

196. Jemisin, *The Stone Sky,* 397–8.

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Berlant, Lauren. *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.

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# Appendix: Procrastinating

Figure 1. *Princess Diaries* publication and narrative chronologies

| Volume | Pub year | Title | Duration | Page count | Calendar |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2000 | *Princess Diaries* | 26 days | 240 | Tuesday, September 23, 2003—Sunday, October 19, 2003 |
| 2 | 2001 | *Princess in the Spotlight* | 12 days | 240 | Monday, October 20, 2003—Saturday, November 1, 2003 |
| 3 | 2002 | *Princess in Love* | 14 days | 240 | Saturday, December 6, 2003—Saturday, December 20, 2003<br><br>contains details from Thursday, November 27, 2003 |
| 4 | 2003 | *Princess in Waiting* | 24 days | 240 | Thursday, January 1, 2004—Saturday, January 24, 2004<br><br>contains details as far back as Sunday, December 21, 2003 |
| 4.25 (published as 7.75) | 2006 | *Valentine Princess* | 4 days | 96 | June 5, 2005.<br><br>Reading a diary containing events of Tuesday, February 11, 2004—Friday, February 14, 2004 |
| 4.5 | 2003 | *Project Princess* | 7 days | 64 | Thursday, March 10, 2004—Wednesday, March 16, 2004 |
| 5 | 2004 | *Princess in Pink* | 12 days | 272 | Wednesday, April 30, 2004—Sunday, May 11, 2004 |
| 6 | 2005 | *Princess in Training* | 8 days | 288 | Monday, September 7, 2004—Monday, September 14, 2004 |
| 6.5 | 2005 | *Princess Present* | 4 days | 96 | Tuesday, December 22, 2004—Friday, December 25, 2004 |
| 7 | 2006 | *Party Princess* | 9 days | 306 | Tuesday, March 2, 2005—Wednesday, March 10, 2005 |
| 7.5 | 2006 | *Sweet Sixteen Princess* | 4 days | 82 | Wednesday, April 28, 2005—Saturday, May 1, 2005 |
| 8 | 2007 | *Princess on the Brink* | 4 days | 238 | Tuesday, September 7, 2005—Friday, September 10, 2005 |
| 9 | 2007 | *Princess Mia* | 16 days | 274 | Friday, September 10, 2005—Saturday, September 25, 2005 |
| 10 | 2009 | *Forever Princess* | 11 days | 383 | Thursday, April 27, 2007—Sunday, May 7, 2007 |
| 11 | June 2, 2015 | *Royal Wedding* | 11 days | 448 | Tuesday, April 28, 2015—Friday, May 8, 2015 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | epilogue on Saturday, June 20, 2015[1] |

Figure 2. *Princess Diaries* duration and pages-per-day count

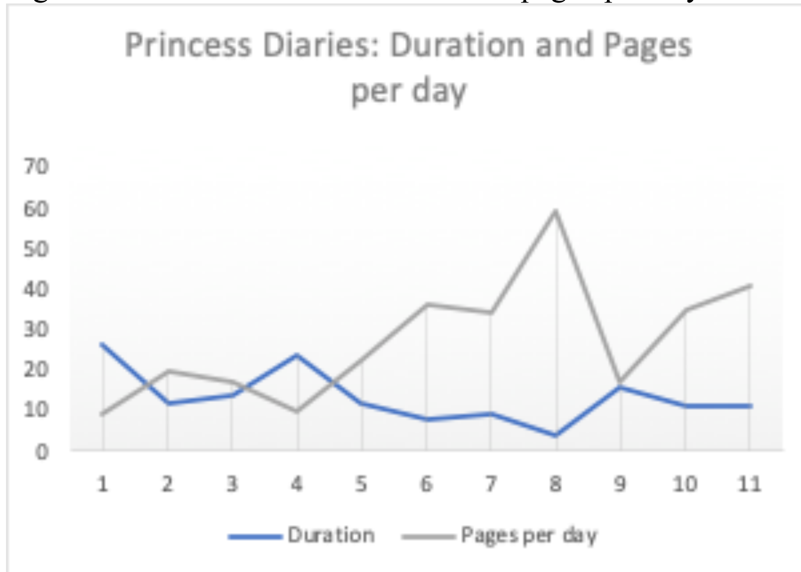


Figure 3. *Princess Diaries* page count

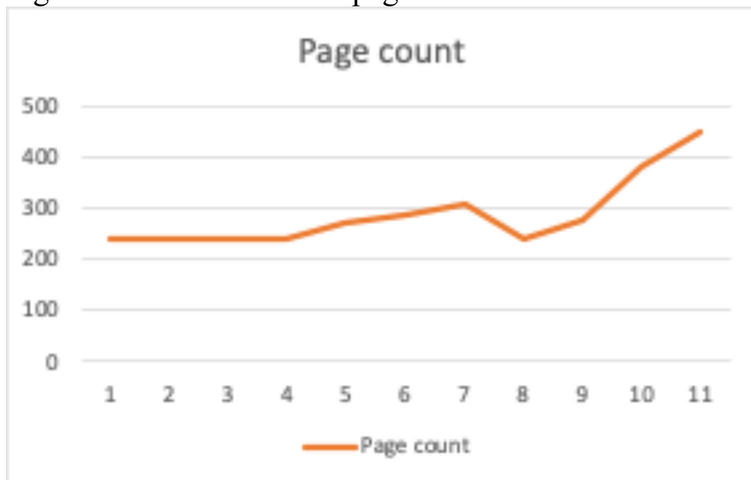


Figure 4. *Bridget Jones's Diary* publication and adaptation chronology

| Order of release | Pub date | Title | Original material for adaptation |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1996 | *Bridget Jones's Diary* (book) | Columns from *The Independent* 1995-1997 |

| 2 | 1999 | *Bridget Jones: Edge of Reason* (book) | Columns from *The Daily Telegraph* 1997-1998 |
|---|---|---|---|
| 3 | 2001 | *Bridget Jones's Diary* (film) | (book) |
| 4 | 2004 | *Bridget Jones: Edge of Reason* (film) | (book) |
| 5 | 2013 | *Bridget Jones: Mad About the Boy* (book) | |
| 6 | September 2016 | *Bridget Jones's Baby* (film) | Columns from *The Independent* 2006-2007 |
| 7 | October 2016 | *Bridget Jones's Baby: The Diaries* (book) | Columns from *The Independent* 2006-2007 |

Figure 5. *Bridget Jones's Diary* publication and narrative chronology

| Order of publication | Pub year | Book title | Bridget's age | Page count | Time covered | Series chronology |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1996 | *Bridget Jones's Diary* | 32 | 267 | 360 days | 1 |
| 2 | 1999 | *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* | 33 | 338 | 326 days | 2 |
| 3 | 2013 | *Bridget Jones: Mad About the Boy* | 51 | 474 | 1 year, 8 months, 11 days | 4 |
| 4 | 2016 | *Bridget Jones's Baby: The Diaries* | Late 30s | 217 | 9 months | 3 |

Figure 6. *Bridget Jones's Diary* narratological chronology.

| Text[2] | Narrative event[3] | Publication | Calendar/Timeline | Bridget's age |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *BJD* (book) | ending | 1996 | December 26 | 32 |
| *EoR* (book) | beginning | 1999 | January 27 | 32 |
| *EoR* (book) | ending (invitation to go on a work trip to Thailand) | | December 19 | 33 |
| *BJD* (film) | ending | 2001 | End of December | 32 |
| *EoR* (film) | beginning | 2004 | Six weeks later | 32 |
| *EoR* (film) | ending (proposal) | | not dated | 33 |
| *BJB* (book) | introductory letter to the baby, Billy, and concluding remark | 2016 | Sometime after the events of the diary | unknown |
| *BJB* (book) | beginning of diary records | | June 24 | Late 30s |
| *BJB* (book) | analeptic account in the first chapter: Mark catches Bridget drunkenly messing | | 5 years earlier than events of diary | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | around with Daniel at their engagement party, leading to their break up | | | |
| *BJB* (book) | ending of diary records (Bridget shouts "Yes!" on her birthing bed to both Mark's proposal and Daniel's offer of a shag) | | March 23 | |
| *BJB* (film) | beginning (at Daniel's funeral after a plane crash) | 2016 | Bridget's birthday (noted as March 21 in *BJD*) | 43 |
| *BJB* (film) | Bridget's one-night stand in which she conceives a baby with Mark | | Flashback revisiting 10 years of inadequate/failed relationship with Mark, explaining why this is a one-night stand | 33-43 |
| *BJB* (film) | ending (Bridget has Billy, marries Mark; Daniel is said to be found alive) | | summer | |
| *MAtB* | proleptic prologue concluding in the "Dark Night of the Soul" section, 5-year anniversary of Mark Darcy's death | 2013 | 19 April 2013 | 51 |
| *MAtB* | beginning of diary records | | 19 April 2012 | 50 |
| *MAtB* | Second part titled "Back to the Present" opens in a second "Dark Night of the Soul" section | | 20 April 2013 | 51 |
| *MAtB* | Ending of diary records (final tally) | | 31 December 2013 | 51 |
| *MAtB* | epilogue (titled "Outcome") | | not dated | 51 |

1. Pink shaded denotes short novellas written as inserts.
2. First two books/films and last two books/films grouped together.
3. Narrative event, after Genette, marks shifts in narrative temporality, given in order of sequence within the text.