

Archived thesis/research paper/faculty publication from the University of North Carolina at Asheville's NC DOCKS Institutional Repository: <http://libres.uncg.edu/ir/unca/>

“Woooo- hooooo I have a message for you!”
Narrative Empathy and the Deconstruction of Convention in Ali
Smith’s *Hotel World*

Senior Paper

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For a Degree Bachelor of Arts with
A Major in English at
The University of North Carolina at Asheville
Fall 2017

By **Margaret Benfield**

Thesis Director
Dr. Kirk Boyle

Thesis Advisor
Dr. Lorena Russell

Scottish author Ali Smith explores the complexities of life and people in her second novel *Hotel World* (2001). Smith writes in a style that can be described as unconventional and experimental, and she uses a myriad of modern and postmodern techniques in her narrative and thematic construction to critique contemporary culture in the novel's questioning of life, love, time, and memory. *Hotel World* navigates the lives of five different women whose lives all intersect at the Global Hotel, a symbol of the transient and often uncaring nature of a commercialized society.

The novel is split into six sections, the first five of which focus on a specific main character. Sara inexplicably lingers in the world as a ghost after falling to her death in the hotel's dumbwaiter. As she begs for spare change (or "spr chng" in Smith's rendering) outside the hotel, Else is greeted with cruelty in response to her homelessness. The hotel's former receptionist, Lise, sits in bed, struggling to fill out her disability paperwork. Penny writes reviews for up-scale hotels and has a lot to say about the Global when she meets several of its interesting inhabitants. Sara's little sister, Clare, obsesses over Sara's death and tries to break into the hotel to see the location where her sister died. These women have identities and experiences that are often rarely explored in fiction, and if they are represented, it is treated in a topical, generalized, or stereotypical way. By allowing ample time in the novel for the reader to become familiar with each character and writing each section using different narrative techniques, Smith reinforces the idea that readers should be treating the characters as individuals, not as representatives of their identities.

Each section of the novel is written in a unique way with styles and perspectives befitting the central character. Some sections utilize first person narration, while others use third. The diction also widely varies, as some sections reflect conventional use of grammar, spelling, and

sentence structure, while others capitalize on the lack of convention to construct meaning. Many critics, such as Hadyn Ingram and Jeannette Winterson, interpret Smith's use of unconventional modes of narration and diction as contributing to her work's main thematic elements like its critique of capitalism or its exploration of same-sex desires. A more central and less frequently explored topic in Smith's work, however, is the connection between her use of narrative discourse and how it invokes readers' empathy towards a given character. Nearly every character in *Hotel World* experiences marginalization either due to their gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or ability. Smith's decision to write primarily marginalized identities in such an evocative and distinctive way makes clear the connection between the literary techniques used in each chapter and the way readers are meant to relate to or interpret each character.

Smith promotes empathic responses towards the marginalized characters in *Hotel World* through the unconventional use of common literary techniques, thus simultaneously subverting common tropes in narrative construction and deconstructing stereotypes of marginalized people often upheld in fiction. My purpose in researching narrative empathy is to understand how the differences in techniques in each chapter create meaning for the reader, and what the implications are for the main characters in the novel. Suzanne Keen is one of the leading voices in literary empathy studies; and here I rely on her research and writing as the primary point of entry into the definition and exploration of empathy theories, which informs my understanding of how narrative perspectives in modern experimental fiction can impact reader response with particular attention to *Hotel World*.

Empathy is a vicarious sharing of affect, which can be used to analyze reader reaction to narratives and storytelling. Empathy is notably different from sympathy: the latter entails a showing of concern towards another person, and therefore, is wholly one-sided. An empathetic

response towards a character, on the other hand, would be the reader feeling as the character, as opposed to feeling for the character. Before Keen's contributions to the field, reader response was thought of primarily in the context of sympathy. Sympathy, in the literary world, meant that readers could feel remorse or concern towards a character in a work of fiction, but that was a one-way interaction. Keen introduced the idea that there is a reciprocal nature of interaction between the reader and the characters, so empathy is a more apt term for application in literary studies. It is now understood that prior essays concerning sympathy are early renderings of the same concept of narrative empathy, as explored by Keen.

Smith intentionally uses distinct narrative perspectives to invite readers to empathize with specific characters while distancing other characters, a technique allowing for increased empathetic responses from readers according to Keen's own research. Smith employs modes of narrative discourse in *Hotel World* in a different way for each character. Keen claims that readers will react to characters differently depending on their own identity and background, but the characters' own identities and background complicate the reader-character context. As readers, we all have our own complex identities which are constructed by our experience, culture, background, gender identity, and sexual orientation, all of which would influence our response to a work of fiction and its characters.

In part because of the complexity of reader response, Keen asserts in her essay, "Intersectional Narratology," that there are no universals in experience or impact, which applies to both readers and characters. By writing characters of marginalized identities in a way that highlights their individuality, Smith challenges readers to approach the text in a way that resists idea that we should universalize experiences. Therefore, I am analyzing *Hotel World* using

narrative empathy studies to examine the differences in experiences and responses to experience among marginalized people as written and portrayed by Smith.

Hotel World starts with a fast-paced account of Sara's death. The first paragraph begins with an unforgettable, "Wooooooooo- hooooooooo what a fall what a soar what a plummet what a dash into dark into light what a plunge what a glide thud crash what a drop what a rush what a swoop what a fright what a mad hushed skirl what a smash mush mash-up broke and gashed what a heart in my mouth what an end" (3). The reader is forced to fall through the jumble of rhyming and repeating words that mimic the fall that we can assume Sara is also experiencing as she dies. The surreal fragmentation and ambiguity immediately draw in the reader as it is unclear at this point what the narrator is describing. As quickly as the story begins, Sara slows down and starts her more coherent telling of the story, noting that it begins at the end. She rambles about the day she fell, and after several digressions, all of which are reflected in the first few pages reading similarly to the first "sentence" of the novel, Sara then begins to describe the day she died, and it becomes clear she fell to her death.

A major theme in the novel is the link between life and death and how people live their lives in knowing they will inevitably die. Since Sara died before the novel begins, she has already come to terms with her own death. So instead of beginning the story by questioning why she died, Sara questions why she lived and how she died, since she progressively forgets her life and language as time passes. Despite the large gaps in her now failing memory, Sara is desperate for answers. Sara's ghost goes to her rotting corpse for answers, and Smith writes, "Silence. (But I knew she could hear me.) I won't leave, I said, until you tell me. I won't go till I get it. Silence. So I waited" (15). The corpse, wanting to spend death in eternal peace, will not initially speak to Sara's ghost whatsoever, but the ghost is persistent. As Sara's ghost waits for answers, the

sentences are short and nothing like the jumbled run-on sentences that are present at the beginning and end of the chapter that tends to indicate Sara's fading memory.

In addition to using sentence structure to reflect the action of the narrative, Smith also uses irregular wording to capture the ghost's specific experience. Sara's ghost and Sara's corpse each have their own individual consciousnesses. Sara's ghost narrates with odd punctuation and numerous run-ons, but Sara's corpse uses conventional syntax. The back and forth between the two different sides of Sara allows the reader to experience both the confusion and desperation of the ghost and the sadness and loss of the corpse in relation to the story of Sara's life and death. The corpse begins the tale after it becomes clear the ghost will not give in: "No interrupting, she said. It's my story, this is it: are you listening? I fell in love. I fell pretty hard. It caught me out. It made me happy, then it made me miserable. What to do? I had expected all my life to fall for some boy, or some man or other, and I had been waiting and watching for him. Then one day my watch stopped" (17). Sara's corpse uses short, choppy though conventionally correct sentences to tell her story since she has a fully functioning memory and is not pressed for time. Sara's ghost, on the other hand, is fading from the earth and forgetting her former life, so she has very little memory of being a person other than a few words and feelings. Therefore, the irregular diction of Sara's ghost also indicates her state of being. In addition to Smith writing Sara using a particular narrative perspective, she also uses a variety of other literary techniques to portray Sara. Keen speaks to narrative techniques by saying, "Matters of identity, experience, and context combine with the possibilities enabled by readers' and viewers' embodied minds to condition potential responses to the invitations of narrative technique... a range of techniques might be operating at once to produce the likelihood of empathy" (Keen, "Intersectional" 137). If we view the narrative construction as an invitation for empathy, we can assume that Smith uses the

onomatopoeias, parentheses, repetition, spacing, and other strategies in this chapter to achieve an easily accessible and highly individualized portrayal of the ghost's scattered and disorganized consciousness to serve as an immersive experience for the reader to better relate to Sara.

What the corpse reveals is that the living Sara became enamored with a woman working in a watch shop just before she died. In the days before her accidental death, Sara was faced with coming to terms with her newly emerging sexual identity. Upon dying, Sara was robbed of a chance to become comfortable with an identity that was incompatible with the people and the world around her. Sara reveals, "I knew what my sister would think. I thought about what my parents would think; I could hear them through the wall, breathing... What people who knew me would think. What people who hardly knew me or didn't know me at all would think. My heart thumped" (22). The corpse recalls these moments in which the living Sara grapples with her feelings regarding the watch shop girl. The repetition speaks to the anxieties Sara felt as she realized no one in her life would attempt to understand her. While here Sara explores the complexities of the relationship she has with her lesbian identity, the intrusive, repetitive anxieties about other peoples' perceptions is something that a reader of any background would be able to understand in some capacity.

Keen asserts there are no universals in experience, however, authors can use points of similarity to invite a reader to empathize with a character they otherwise have little in common with. Keen explains, "Character identification often invites empathy, even when the character and reader differ from each other in all sorts of practical and obvious ways. Indeed, the opportunity to share feelings underwrites character identification that transcends difference" ("Reader's" 70). Using the example of Sara, few readers would be able to identify with her sexual orientation and even fewer would relate to her experience as a ghost. Nonetheless, Smith

invites reader's empathy by allowing us a close vantage point in Sara's mind using first person narration.

Sara is given the opportunity to tell her story from beyond the grave, therefore giving her some agency in the retelling of her experience, but it is marred by her lack of memory and words. It creates literal and figurative gaps on the page for readers who can now see the spectral, fragmented experience of one young woman grappling with her newfound attraction to other women. In her article "Lesbian Gothic," Paulina Palmer writes, "Lesbian identification and desire... exceeds and is surplus to the conventional roles of object of exchange and specular other of man that hetero-patriarchal culture conventionally assigns to women" (Palmer 3). *Hotel World* has a distinct lack of male characters, only one of which named, and yet the idea of lesbian invisibility is apparent in Sara's story.

As the only ghost and only non-heterosexual character, Sara serves as the reader's gateway into unraveling the complex experience of internally struggling with the confines of heteronormativity. Smith capitalizes on defamiliarizing aspects of the story, such as Sara being a ghost, in order to force readers into identifying with the more general sentiments that Sara expresses. "She was beautiful," Smith writes, "and she looked straight through me as she passed me as if I simply wasn't there. Falling for her had made me invisible" (23). The invisibility mentioned is in clear reference to Sara's manifestation as a ghost, but the concept of being invisible to one's object of affection is a more universally identifiable experience. All readers cannot relate to the lesbian experience, nor the state of spectrality, but by emulating thought processes through unconventional diction and sentence structure, Smith can pull readers of varying backgrounds into the act of storytelling so that by the end of the chapter, Sara's ghost begins to address the readers directly.

When Sara's memory goes, there is still one aspect of her inexplicable existence she does not cease to forget; she remembers who she is addressing throughout her narration. Sara first addresses the audience after dictating Sara's corpse's full story of the death. She says, "It has tired me out telling you [Sara's] story, all you pavement-pressing see-hearing people passing so blandly back and fore in front of the front door of the hotel" (Smith 26). She spends time near the end of her ghostly existence telling her story that she recently learned from the corpse to unnamed people on the street. The first "you," or direct address, could be interpreted as addressing the common person. Sara refers to "you" several other times, in reference to the watch shop girl and a crow, but her last "you" reference is unmistakable. Smith writes, "I am hanging falling breaking between this word and the next. Time me, would you? You. Yes, you. It's you I'm talking to" (Smith 31). The final words of Sara's section affirm the reader's place in Sara's story—"Yes, you"—as she calls the audience to a direct action in listening to her message and her story. Sara's unambiguous message to the readers highlights Smith's intention to invite readers closer to the text. By ending the first chapter with "It's you I'm talking to," we are challenged to read the next four characters in a way in which we are actively listening for their messages as well.

Smith makes use of the creative and experimental function of language in Sara's section in order to immerse the audience in the experience of Sara's ghost and to capture Sara's complex relationship with her memory and sexuality in an intimate and accessible way. Sara's chapter is largely about her post-death journey in pursuing the facts and truth about her life, trying to communicate her story while she progressively forgets it. The next character, however, provides a completely different framework for telling her own story. Else provides the facts of her life upfront, and there is no confusion as to what Else is experiencing or what she is going through.

Sara actively searches for the memories she has forgotten, but Else's memories are always on the surface as the readers jump back and forth between the past and present in Else's life.

Beginning Else's chapter is jarring after experiencing Sara's dizzyingly fragmented account of life after death, as the second section is written using primarily conventional syntax. The chapter begins: "Else is outside. Small change is all she's made, mostly coppers, fives, tens. The occasional coin is still shining like straight out of a Marks and Spencer till, but most of them are dulled from all the handling and the cold. Nobody ever misses it, do they, a penny, that's fallen out of the hand or the pocket on to the street? There's one there, just to the side of Else's foot" (35). While the first paragraph requires some inference regarding what Else is doing, it is not made complicated or unclear through phrasing. It is clear from the beginning that Else is homeless and sick, so she begs for money outside the Global Hotel. Else is practical and does very little to try to garner sympathy from passersby, and instead simply finds coins when she can. Her life seems very centered on simple, concrete facts, and therefore, it is telling that Smith writes Else using conventional third person narration.

Modes of narration have an immense effect on the reader in terms of empathy responses. First person narration puts the reader in a position of immediate intimacy with the focalizer character, which allows the reader to have experiences as that character. However, the author must sacrifice reliability when choosing to write in first person, since there is a notion of bias and gaps in knowledge when a character is able to relay only their experiences from their point of view. Readers cannot trust a character who has no illusion of objectivity. Third person narration offers a more reliable account of the events and actions of the focalizer character, but often at the expense of relatability. Smith circumvents this issue in Else's section by utilizing free indirect discourse throughout the chapter. Else is characterized by her dedication to reality and facts, so

third person limited works as the main mode of narration; through the use of free indirect discourse, though, readers can see how Else thinks and rationalizes every situation she is faced with.

Free indirect discourse allows the reader to experience the focalizer character's consciousness in third person narration. In his essay "Narrated Monologues," Dorrit Cohn describes the technique by saying, "Narrative language appears in [the passage] as a kind of mask, from behind which sounds the voice of a figural mind... In short, neither the content nor the style of these sentences can be plausibly attributed to their narrators. But both their content and their style become entirely plausible if we understand them as transposed thought-quotations" (Cohn 495). In the context of *Hotel World*, Smith usually begins with a description of what is happening in the moment for Else just before the reader is allowed access into Else's mind through use of "narrated consciousness." Smith writes:

Someone is passing, and is acting like she's noticed Else but decided to ignore her; most people don't see Else there at all, so it's a reasonable bet with one like this that if Else asks, she'll get. (Cn y spr sm chn? Thnk y.) Two ten pence pieces. Put a ten pence piece in your mouth and bite down and if your teeth are soft they'll break on it. Which metal is harder, silver or copper? It is not real silver. It is an alloy. (36)

As an avid reader, Else often comments on random facts she has learned from using public library resources. In this example, Else is pondering her relationship with money and her access to it, but then the narration switches to indirect discourse as she cites facts about coins. There are parenthetical interjections when the narration leaves out certain letters, as illustrated in the previous example. In "Ali Smith and the Philosophy of Grammar," Mark Currie comments,

“Else’s literalization is a kind of graphic metaphor, making visible in writing something that can only be heard, the dropping of vowels, or perhaps finding in shorthand the written equivalent of something spoken” (Currie 59). The literalization speaks to the way in which Smith intertwines internal and external discourse in Else’s chapter, often through free indirect style. When using indirect discourse, Smith focuses on Else’s memories or pain which becomes clearer as we get to know Else better over the course of the text.

One of the Global Hotel employees finds Else outside the hotel and offers her a night for free at the hotel. The employee informs Else that there are “no strings” (57) and that phrase triggers a series of memories. The memories include a mixture of positive and negative experiences, “no strings” experiences that mean pain or happiness. Else questions:

No strings. Who knows what it means? It could mean money. It could mean something foul. It could mean something good. It could even be a disguise, a shorthand, for something that might make her happy. Or it could mean something she doesn’t know, can’t know yet, something else. Something, Else. (68)

Smith uses the anaphora “It could mean...” to emphasize Else’s indecision regarding what “no strings” could mean using free indirect discourse. Based on the experiences Else reflects on when she recounts her memories, “no strings” could mean sleeping peacefully with a man she loved, or it could mean being raped by her father’s friend. Cohn writes, “By leaving the relationship between words and thoughts latent, the narrated monologue casts a peculiarly penumbral light on the figural consciousness, suspending it on the threshold of verbalization in a manner that cannot be achieved by direct quotation” (Cohn 495). We explore Else’s indecision here in a way that would not be as powerful if spoken. A reader who does not have Else’s experience with homelessness would originally believe the receptionist’s offer to be immensely

kind, but as we experience Else's memories and hesitations, the offer becomes much more complicated.

Else is used to cruelty from others outside of her situation. Not only is there a lack of a stable source of food or income, but everyone else is in a position of power over Else. Based on the reactions of people who pass her on the street, they can either help her to live for another few days, or they destroy a chance for her to get ahead monetarily. Some are sympathetic to her situation and will give her a few coins, while others treat her with disgust or malice. Else recalls many of the reactions to her begging in front of the hotel:

Some of the other things policemen and policewomen have said to Else over time:

Is that your stuff? Move it. Or we'll bin it. Move it. Move. (a man) ... You've got a home. Everybody's got somewhere. Go home now, there's a good girl. (a man) ... Ever thought of working for a living? The rest of us have to. We can't all just loaf around like you. (a woman) ... You're scum of the earth. You spoil it for the rest of us. The scum of the fucking earth. (a woman, at the station). (43)

Smith writes most of Else's memories in lists, and the italics give the context for what is to come after, while the parentheticals are Else's interjections. The way in which she lists the oftentimes awful remarks she has received is very detached and emotionless. Else's factual, dispassionate recounting of what people say to her on the streets along with her many associations with "no strings" reveals the level of distrust she has formulated to stay safe in a world that does not want her to be seen. All the examples above show the police uprooting Else from her place at the hotel, and while some are kinder than others, each is asserting power over her and denying her the right to exist in public as a homeless woman.

The receptionist who offers Else the night at the hotel wields a similar power over her. Else enters the hotel and accepts the offer, deciding that the benefits outweigh the risks. The hotel makes Else feel like an outsider, and she remembers another circumstance in which she had been given an opportunity. The narrator recalls, “She has been important before now.... Else emptied her pockets on to the pavement and the man photographed the things. The photograph was for the Sunday paper. The insides of Else’s pocket have maybe been seen by thousands of people” (74). It is notable that none of the photographs that were taken were of Else herself, but instead centered on her possessions. The article and photograph were based on interest and othering: what does a homeless person keep in their pockets? The article and photograph ignore the actual problems and barriers that homeless people face.

This list of items represented by the paper contrasts with all the other lists that Else compiles. The list of demands and insults Else receives from people on the street would make a much more socially and politically relevant article, but that is not the story of homelessness that non-homeless people want to hear. Else’s experiences are largely about being taken advantage of by others. When she had been given the opportunity to be in the paper, it was mostly about exploiting her homelessness for the benefit or entertainment of others. In every other situation, she is denied her existence, but it seems to be only when others can benefit that it is acceptable for her to be seen in public.

One of the other focalizer characters in *Hotel World*, Penny, spends a significant amount of time with Else when the two women venture out at night together. When Penny learns Else is homeless, her attitude shifts drastically. Penny writes Else a check, then cancels it once she gets back to the hotel. Penny justifies her behavior: “If you were poor, you were poor. You couldn’t handle money. Money was nothing but a problem if you weren’t used to it. It must be a relief, to

have none. It was no accident that the words poor and pure were so alike” (178). After experiencing Else’s homelessness through her eyes in the second chapter, Penny’s comment is an obvious affront to the readers. Smith writes Penny is such a way that she is entirely unsympathetic; as an upper-class, able, straight woman, Penny has experienced very little suffering in her life regarding marginalization. Penny’s chapter comes near the end of the novel, and helps readers to reflect on our own misconceptions and biases towards the marginalized identities that are represented in the novel. Since she spends the most time with Else, the critique of the romanticizing or infantilizing of homelessness is most apparent.

As it is portrayed through free indirect discourse, Else’s story conflicts with the mainstream narrative of homelessness. Instead of explaining why the readers should feel sympathy for Else, or feeding into stereotypes about homelessness, Smith highlights the ways in which others have treated Else from the intimate perspective of third person limited. Readers then experience the hostility and violence enacted against her, and can empathize with the resulting indecision and mistrust Else experiences. People tend to lack faith in the motivations of the homeless, but through her shared memories and reflections, Else reveals instead every reason why she should not trust us.

Trust and reliability serve as a main point of comparison in the next chapter of the novel. Else struggles to trust those around her, which we understand through the contextual evidence she provided in her chapter. We also trust the narrator in giving us an accurate depiction of her situation as she has been shown to be an extremely intelligent and rational person, yet another way in which Smith combats common stereotypes of homelessness. When Else makes the decision to trust the offer of the receptionist, the readers have a better understanding of how meaningful that decision is. In the next chapter of the novel, we learn more about the person Else

chose to trust: Lise, the nice receptionist who tries to live her life in a way that betters the world. As Lise recalls the day she allowed a homeless woman to stay in the most expensive room at the Global Hotel, we are inclined to feel that we can trust her. However, her memory is failing due to a debilitating illness that raises the question of character reliability and agency.

All of the characters in *Hotel World*, excluding Lise, tell their story in the present as their lives intersect all on the same day. Lise, however, lives and tells her story several months in the future, ill and bed-ridden, trying to remember insignificant details of her life from a time before she was sick. Lise's chapter begins with the disability paperwork she is filling out for her illness: "About you – continued. If you need help filling in this form, or any part of it, phone 0800 88 22 00. Tell us about yourself. Well. I am a nice person. It was some time in the future. Lise was lying in bed. That was practically all the story there was" (81). Lise continues to think about what qualifies her as a "nice person" which, most significantly, involves her interactions with Else. Since Lise is several months ahead in the narrative, in order to recall the details of that interaction, she must think back to that time, all the while struggling with her current illness. With the notion of time and memory being complicated through situational positioning in the narrative, character reliability becomes an issue.

As previously discussed, point of view impacts the reader's interpretation of character reliability. Lise's chapter uses several different types of point of view. At the beginning of the chapter, Lise switches between first and third person limited interchangeably. In both modes of narration, Lise is the one narrating the text. When Lise describes her illness and the few memories she has of working at the Global Hotel, it is common for the narration to be first person, then third person limited supplemented by free indirect discourse. By doing so, Smith allows us entry into Lise's consciousness that would otherwise not be accessible. We can

experience Lise's illness along with her as she experiences the pain and exhaustion that influences her every thought and action. She is a different person from when she was well—a point that is made clear later in the text when the narrators change. As Lise tries to concentrate, she thinks, "Outside, the sun was shining. It was irrelevant. There was something Lise had to write down, again. What was it? I am a () person" (85). The excerpt begins with Lise's direct thoughts which we see through indirect discourse. Then the narration switches to third person limited, then ends with first person as Lise attempts to describe herself for the disability paperwork. In her essay "Communication and the Representation of Thought," Diane Blakemore states, "The effect of free indirect style is an unmediated view not only of a character's thoughts but also of his through processes. Thus the reader comes to know not only what a character thinks, but also how they came to have a thought and what role it plays in the development of new thoughts or the modification of old ones" (Blakemore 592). The first-person narration and free indirect discourse allows the reader to empathize more closely with Lise since we experience not only what she is thinking, but how she is thinking through the situation she is in. She struggles with memory and clear articulation which Smith shows readers through relevant narration and the inclusion of blank space on the page.

When it becomes clear that Lise cannot recall the details of the night she met Else, the story is interrupted, and Lise is replaced with a new omniscient narrator that provides us with a detailed description of the moments following Else's check-in. For the rest of Lise's chapter, the narrative is no longer her own. The omniscient narrator fills in all the information of Lise's time at the hotel flawlessly, providing details that even Lise would not have remembered or noticed during the time when she was well. The omniscient narrator serves as an objective bystander who we can trust to deliver information without bias or misinformation. The narrator even goes

so far as to reference parts of their narration again and describe what they meant in further detail. For example, Smith writes, “***Takes the pen out of her mouth:*** In the course of the evening Lise’s saliva on the end of the pen slowly evaporates into the conditioned air of the lobby. It will be an hour and forty-five minutes before the pen is completely dry” (111). Smith uses the bolded and italicized sections to show what the narrator has already stated but now is referencing again in order to provide additional information. The new information ranges from irrelevant details like drying saliva to interesting insights into Lise’s knowledge of Sara, the deceased chambermaid.

The descriptions function as a meta-analysis of the text that came prior. It interrupts the flow of the narrative and forces the reader to understand the current narrator in a way that removes them from the text. What the narrator knows and conveys is not something that Lise, or anyone else, would know, which enhances the reliability, but empathy is ultimately sacrificed. When a reader is made aware that the text is fictional, often through metafictional references, it pulls attention away from the character, and therefore, the empathetic response decreases. In giving the readers a reliable narrator who instead tells Lise’s story, the empathetic link with Lise is lost, since she has essentially been removed from the narrative process. We now know Lise’s place in the story, but she has lost all agency in her own narrative. Since we previously read the story from an intimate perspective with Lise, the shift feels disruptive. Smith models the way in which Lise’s agency is appropriated by others in her life by making the abrupt change in narration for the readers, so we feel the loss of power as well. We continue to empathize with Lise, not the narrator who has forcibly taken her perspective from us.

A third narrator is introduced at the end of the chapter, which reinforces the idea that Lise has been falsely deemed unable to express her own experiences. Lise’s mother, Diedre, visits Lise every day to help attend to her needs. As she is confined to her bed and must rely on her

mother for additional assistance with daily tasks, Lise has very little control over the world around her. In her life, she loses the agency to get out of bed or to engage in activities that make her happy. As it is stated in the first paragraph of her chapter, Lise no longer has the ability to even describe her disability for the paperwork. The way in which Smith constructs Lise's chapter reveals the lack of agency as well. The other characters are allowed to live in the moment and they are able to tell their own stories using their own words. Lise, however, is given a mere fourth of the chapter to struggle through finding the words to describe her situation before the story is hijacked and returns to the period of time where the rest of the characters exist.

The third narrator focuses on Lise's mother, narrating in third person limited. Smith writes, "Everything in Lise's mother's body hurt, because it hurt just to be near her daughter. Lines were edging themselves into her face as she looked at her. She looked at the bed instead. There were papers on it. Without disturbing Lise, she picked the booklet up off the bedcover. About you – continued" (121). That is how Lise's chapter ends: not with Lise's thoughts, views, opinions, or experiences, but with her mother's. Often the stories of disabled people are appropriated by those around them, so instead of the disabled person having the space to talk about their experiences, close friends or family will talk about their own suffering in relation to the disabled individual. Keen writes,

Many novelists call up empathy as a representational goal by mirroring it within their texts: they present empathetic connections between characters or thematize empathy explicitly... This ubiquitous form of empathy depends heavily on character identification and on reading habits that emphasize the feeling connection of readers to imagined beings in novels. (Keen, "Author's" 120)

Smith uses empathy here as a subversive theme. The other characters, like Diedre, show sympathy towards Lise, but sympathy is not a feeling that we as readers are satisfied with. Instead of representing examples of empathy between characters, Smith writes in a lack of empathy so that readers feel the lack of connection and are invited towards that feeling themselves. Lise narrating her own experience serves as the most immersive part of the chapter; her recollection of her time at the Global Hotel may not have been as accurate, but it is far more moving to hear what Lise is going through instead of an omniscient narrator who comments on details that the readers simply may not care about.

It is important for readers to hear Lise's story, due to the stigmatization ill people often face. Diedre makes a comment that that being ill can be a gift, which is meant to be uplifting and kind. Instead, Lise thinks to herself, "It's true. Being ill is revelatory. It reveals to you exactly what well people think of ill people" (99). After Lise falls ill, the people around her treat her differently. While it is true that she does not have the same range of abilities that she had when she was well, Lise notices that people either do not believe she is as ill as she says, or they treat her like a complete invalid. By doing so, Lise is treated as unreliable for a variety of reasons. The way that Smith conducts Lise's chapter reflects how outsiders would view Lise: she takes the common tropes of appropriating the narrative and space from an ill person to focus on the people around them instead. However, since Smith begins the chapter by having Lise tell her own story in such a personal way, the readers must acknowledge Lise's loss of agency as the new narrators take over. We can experience a similar loss of power that Lise feels due to the shifts in narration throughout the chapter.

Loss of power as it relates to trauma is a main theme with the next character. The final chapter centers on Clare who is the little sister of Sara, the first main character in *Hotel World*.

We first meet Clare in Penny's chapter as she tries to find the location in the hotel where Sara fell to her death. Through Penny, we see that Clare is searching for answers regarding her sister's death by attempting to tear open the wall where the dumbwaiter has been sealed away. When the wall is opened, and Clare sees exactly how her sister died, she begins to sob. Penny, being uncomfortable and unsympathetic, calls reception to deal with the distraught teenager. Clare's chapter begins with Lise treating Clare to a full breakfast and some new shoes, Lise having recognized the girl from Sara's funeral.

Clare's chapter is by far one of the more emotional parts of the novel. Like Sara's chapter, it is written in exclusively first person. The difference between the two is that Clare's narration has no action and no dialogue; the entire chapter is written in stream of consciousness in an effort to portray Clare's thoughts in the purest form. There are no sentences and very little punctuation. Instead of commas or periods to indicate breaks in thought, Smith uses blank space on the page. Smith enables us to see exactly how Clare is dealing with the resulting trauma of losing a loved one by using stream of consciousness to show her thought process. Currie remarks, "There are many senses in which the future is in the past in Clare's heartbreaking, sleepless expression of grief, and none of them linked to any actual occurrence of the future perfect as a tense form" (Currie 57). The entirety of Clare's chapter takes place in the present, a place that she does not want to be in because she is so focused on her past interactions with Sara who is now lost to her. The reader is put in a position of extreme intimacy with Clare's thoughts since Smith uses first person narration and stream of consciousness simultaneously. Reading Clare's chapter is disorienting and rushed, since there is no organization to her thoughts and the clauses all run together. Clare begins the chapter by thinking, "& since the main thing is I counted I was there & since I have come home with really the most fucking amazing new shoes

& also they gave me breakfast & it was really good ... & since I knew I did know already about the horrible thing about being crammed in all upside down..." (185) From the very beginning, Clare dwells on the specifics of her sister's death, and this is a pattern that repeats throughout the chapter. Since the process of thinking is hardly linear, the narration shows how Clare will jump from thinking about the death to the amazing breakfast she had, then she will return to the death.

Over the course of life, any person is likely to lose someone close to them. However, Clare's specific grieving process is unusual. Keen explains, "Externally recognizable markers of identity are not the most suasive element, for character identification is not limited to those who match up by traits. Characters can and do invite empathy from readers who differ markedly from them in identity and traits" (Keen, "Readers' Temperaments" 302). Therefore, it is not the actions or situations that may influence a reader's empathy—though these narrative strategies can certainly help—but the way in which an author writes the character that will invite empathy. Clare's identity in her chapter is so exclusively based around her sister, which would not have been the case was Sara still alive. As readers, we only know Sara as a character who already died, so we cannot mourn the loss of that character without the influence of Clare's internal grieving. The stream of consciousness and repetition serve as representations of Clare's grieving and coping, allowing us to empathize with the loss readers would not feel prior to Clare's chapter.

Clare is very focused on the way in which others perceive the death of her sister. The newspapers wrote countless stories about Sara, all of her classmates knew, and her parents react in different ways when they receive reminders of Sara after she has died. Clare sees other people's reactions to Sara's death as largely inappropriate, while she views her own coping mechanisms as fitting, if strange. Clare spends hours looking at the location of Sara's death, she

saves pieces of clothing or even skin that her sister once had, and she is always thinking about her sister at any given hour of the day. However, it is Clare's parents that frustrate her the most. Clare remarks, "I can hear him now that endless fucking snoring I can hear him turning over in his sleep he has no fucking trouble sleeping does he no he fucking doesn't & our mum not our only my completely out of it going round like she's a ghost herself" (193). Clare is not sleeping regularly, but she perceives this to be a normal reaction to loss. The fact that her father can continue on like nothing has changed absolutely infuriates Clare. Her mother, on the other hand, is handling the death differently from both Clare and her father: she is compared to a ghost, just like Sara is now. Clare struggles to rationalize her mother's coping, but she is missing the language to talk about it. When Clare is at a loss for words, it is represented through blank space on the page. It becomes apparent in the times in which Clare criticizes others for their ways of coping that she feels extremely alienated from everyone around her.

Clare keeps retuning to the all-encompassing loss of Sara in her life, as she often mentions the ways in which her life has changed and how she copes with the unexpected death. She is obsessed with the thought that other people believe Sara purposefully killed herself. It is very important to Clare that the death was not suicide, which is primarily why she keeps returning to the Global Hotel. Now that Clare has been where Sara died and dropped objects down the dumbwaiter where Sara fell, she reveals, "& since now I know for sure though really I knew already that she didn't actually mean to do it I suppose that too is keeping me awake though more usually at this time of night morning I am lying here not sleeping" (187). There are a multitude of hints that Clare is dealing with trauma that could have easily been revealed in other modes of narration, but with the stream of consciousness, it becomes even more clear how the repetitive thoughts of death and suicide are also symptoms of the resulting trauma.

Blakemore states that writing using internal discourse "...contributes to the sense of *listening* to characters speak their thoughts and grapple with their emotions – an experience which we cannot have in the real world" (Blakemore 597). Through the fictional representation of internal conflict and pain, we are able to empathize more closely with a suffering fictional character, like Clare, than with someone whose mind we do not have access to.

When Clare jumps between different trains of thought, as is expected with stream of consciousness, Smith reveals the chaotic nature of Clare's feelings. Clare describes the way in which everyone thinks of her differently and how none of her habits are the same now that Sara is gone, so Clare then feels the resulting lack of order in her life. Instead of simply telling the readers that Clare has lost her sense of direction when interacting with others and living her life independently, Smith clearly illustrates Clare's state of mind through the way the chapter is written. The reader then experiences the same emotional turmoil that is present in Clare's thoughts.

While each chapter focuses on a different character, it is important that the novel ends with Clare. Many of the echoes of other characters, particularly Sara, are present in Clare's section. One prominent example is Sara's interest in how long it took her to fall to her death; Sara's ghost pursues this question when she speaks to her corpse. Smith reveals that Clare was motivated by the same question. Clare's chapter relies on second person narration more heavily towards the end of the novel. However, in direct contrast with Sara's chapter, the reader is not the intended audience. Clare is instead speaking directly to Sara for the majority of her narration. After visiting the hotel and dropping her shoe down the dumbwaiter shaft, Clare concludes her chapter with a message for Sara: "listen Sara even though you couldn't even though you couldn't move couldn't do anything about it listen to me you were fast ... I still can't believe how fast

you were less than four seconds just under four three & a bit that's all you took I know I counted for you" (221). The echo of Sara's final words in her chapter resounds in Clare's ending as well. The reader, along with Clare, feels a cathartic resolution regarding Sara's death. The novel begins and ends with how Sara fell to her death, and by the end, Clare answers all her own questions about that day. Now, along with Clare, we are ready to move past the trauma of reliving the fall and the days that followed.

Every person deals with trauma in a different way, and to see representations portrayed in fiction helps to normalize reactions to trauma and potential resulting mental illness. Smith shows Clare's thought processes which justifies her actions that otherwise seem erratic or unnecessary. The final chapter is the only one that uses exclusively first-person narration, so through stream of consciousness, the reader is placed in immediate intimacy with the innerworkings of Clare's mind. The techniques Smith uses are some of the most valuable for increasing the chance for character identification with Clare, which in turn, promotes empathy towards her.

Throughout *Hotel World*, Smith uses a variety of narrative techniques that increase the likelihood of empathetic responses from readers. By using so many modes of narration and styles of diction, Smith often breaks the conventions of traditional storytelling which defamiliarizes the narrative context. In doing so, Smith creates a character-driven novel that layers meanings around the way in which each character is represented. Sara, Else, Lise, and Clare all share a similar experience of marginalization due to societal inequity based on identity. Through differing narrative perspectives such as point of view, stream of consciousness, and free indirect discourse, we are called to empathize with these characters who hold identities we may not relate to in our own lives. Penny juxtaposes the other women by exemplifying a character who we do

not want to empathize with; her judgements and callous behavior is something we do not want to recognize within ourselves, even if we share some of her qualities and beliefs.

While authors can shape reader response, it is impossible to entirely predict how readers will react to a given character. Keen claims, “By no means do authors completely control the range of available reactions to their fictional people, nor should readers feel limited to identifying with a central character (either a center of consciousness in a third-person fiction or a self-narrator in first person)” (Keen, “Reader’s” 76). In an effort to control the unpredictable reader’s response, Smith makes use of polyglossia in *Hotel World*, meaning that there are a multitude of voices represented in the novel, and no one voice is dominate over the others. Readers will sometimes identify with side characters whom the author did not intend in novels with one or few dominant narratives. However, Smith rejects the idea of a single voice and only names the focalizer characters (with one exception). By giving each character equal representation and forgoing side characters, the only options for empathetic responses are the five characters who have names and a story. It is no coincidence that the characters readers are likely to find palatable and empathize with—Sara, Else, Lise, Clare—are the ones in need of the most understanding due to their status on the margins of society. Fiction has the power to inform our understanding of and empathy towards people of differing identities in the real world, and that is why Smith’s thoughtful and intentional narrative representations of marginalized people in *Hotel World* is incredibly powerful.

Works Cited

- Blakemore, Diane. "Communication and the Representation of Thought: The use of Audience-Directed Expressions in Free Indirect Thought Representations." *Journal of Linguistics*, vol. 46, no. 3, 2010, pp. 575-599.
- Cohn, Dorrit. "Narrated Monologue." *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*. Princeton University Press, 2011. 493-514.
- Currie, Mark. "Ali Smith and the Philosophy of Grammar." *Ali Smith: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, edited by Monica Germana and Emily Horton, Bloomsbury Academic, 2013, pp. 48-59.
- Keen, Suzanne. "Authors' Empathy." *Empathy and the Novel*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY, 2007, 121-143.
- Keen, Suzanne. "Intersectional Narratology in the Study of Narrative Empathy." *Narrative Theory Unbound: Queer and Feminist Interventions*, edited by Robyn Warhol and Susan S. Lanser, Ohio State University Press, Columbus, OH, 2015. 123-143.
- Keen, Suzanne. "Readers' Empathy." *Empathy and the Novel*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY, 2007, 65-99.
- Keen, Suzanne. "Readers' Temperaments and Fictional Character." *New Literary History*, vol. 42, no. 2, 2011, 295-314.
- Palmer, Paulina. *Lesbian Gothic: Transgressive Fictions*. Cassell, 1999.