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The Narrative Technique of the Postmodernist Novel: Tradition and Innovation in the Novels of
B.S. Johnson

por
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Part Three: The Novels of B.S. Johnson

1. B.S. Johnson and the Novel 389
2. The Novels of B.S. Johnson 441
2.1. Travelling People 444
2.2. Albert Angelo 465
2.3. Trawl 486
2.4. The Unfortunates 503
2.5. House Mother Normal 520
2.6. Christie Malry’s Own Double Entry 536
2.7. See the Old Lady Decently 557

Part Four: The Narrative Technique of B.S. Johnson

1. The Nature of Narrative and B.S. Johnson 583
1.1. B.S. Johnson and the Narratological Model 588
1.2. The Narrative Technique of Travelling People 602
1.3. The Narrative Technique of Albert Angelo 627
1.4. The Narrative Technique of Trawl 652
1.5. The Narrative Technique of The Unfortunates 679
1.6. The Narrative Technique of House Mother Normal 707
1.7. The Narrative Technique of Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry 737
1.8. The Narrative Technique of See the Old Lady Decently 764

2. The Games B.S. Johnson Plays 795
2.1. Travelling People 804
2.2. Albert Angelo 810
2.3. Trawl 817
2.4. The Unfortunates 824
2.5. House Mother Normal 832
2.6. Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry 838
2.7. See the Old Lady Decently 844

Conclusion 852

Works Consulted 863
Part Three

The Novels of B.S. Johnson
1. B.S. Johnson and the Novel.

In his essay referred to above, Richard Todd maintains that in British postmodernism, the techniques and kinds accepted as typical of postmodernism as such are "ancillary" and that its nature is much more dependent upon "an unusually intense perception of fiction's relation to various kinds of convention" (in D'haen and Bertens 1988 116). In fact the very title of the essay, "Confrontation with Convention," is significant. B.S. Johnson is typical of innovative British writers in that he takes up the challenge and confronts the conservatism of the English novel, an English novel which, after the Second World War, returned to the comfort of realism, a realism which has succeeded in normalising or naturalising most of the practices of Modernism. As Brian McHale puts it "'Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day,' Virginia Woolf instructed in 1925, and English novelists since the war have done so unremittingly" ("Why English Novels are Boring, or, Who Killed Bryan Johnson" 1985 2). While McHale sees the English novel as tolerating innovation to a certain extent, it always has to remain on the periphery, except when it is not English, the case of the novel written by the Irish or even the Scots, or when it can be considered as part of a minority kind of writing, like science fiction, and so on.

It is clear that B.S. Johnson made little impact on the English novel during his lifetime, and McHale,
perhaps rather flippantly, suggests that it was his frustration at his attempts to do so which may account for his suicide in 1973 (1985 1). Certainly, the English novel has tended to be conservative and it is clear that not only Johnson but many others reacted against modernism and the return to realism in many different ways. Todd firstly emphasises the efforts of the angry young men in the fifties to react against the modernist aesthetic, but that, in spite of its element of left-wing protest, tended towards insularity and safety, provincial, anti-heroic and parochial writing, which, in spite of opinions to the contrary, could be called "a retrograde step in the direction of aesthetic assumptions that antedates conceptions of the modernist British novel in the years immediately following the Second World War" (Todd 117). Todd suggests that the forms that these post-war authors made use of can be thought of as including a peculiarly close and self-conscious examination through fiction, of an increasingly solipsistic, almost autobiographically-perceived sense of past and present for many of those British novelists who were approaching maturity at this time. (1988 117)

Todd then draws a distinction between authors of the fifties and sixties who did this kind of thing and those of the seventies and eighties, who do the same, but in a much more "self-aware, self-conscious, and knowing" manner (1988 118). What we could say here is that even in the sixties and seventies, B.S. Johnson, who Todd
does not mention, was already doing so. Solipsistic and with an almost puritanical tendency to tell the truth about himself, Johnson wrote in a manner which confronted British novelistic conventions, which revisits but goes beyond the existing literary tradition in novels which are, effectively, postmodernist.

Postmodernism in Britain, and elsewhere, tends to be related to modernism in one way or another, and some writers have complained of the lapse of experiment after this movement, particularly B.S. Johnson, who felt that most British writers had "dropped the baton" handed on to them by Joyce (see Aren't You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs). It is true that as far back as the nineteen thirties the novel became indifferent to experimental writing; but even then, writers like Flann O'Brien, Jean Rhys, Malcolm Lowry and Lawrence Durrell were writing the kind of fiction that we now consider postmodernist. While the importance of it has remained rather foreign to the British reading public, there have been occasions when such novels have been successes, as is the case of John Fowles with The French Lieutenant's Woman, Lawrence Durrell's Alexandria Quartet and more recently the novels of Salman Rushdie, Alasdair Gray, Julian Barnes and others.

Curiously, rather than anti-modernist, Randall Stevenson, in his recent essay, sees the tendencies of some postmodernist authors as deriving from modernism. Particular trends towards innovation and experiment in modernist writing have been developed by some postmodernist authors, like those mentioned above. He
describes modernism as having been innovative in three specific areas: firstly, by providing the focalisation of the novel in the minds or private narratives of the characters; secondly, by reacting against linear sequentiaity and finally, by drawing attention to and exploiting language and language associations at the expense of referentiality (in Smyth 1991 19). It is particularly the interest in the autonomous world created by language, something which can be associated with Brian McHale's idea of a change to an ontological dominant, which Stevenson sees as a significant step, leading to the "self-reflexive foregrounding of language and fiction making" (23) in the contemporary English novel. However, British postmodernists also exploit the other two areas of innovation. According to Stevenson, who feels that B. S. Johnson's worries about the future of the novel might be unfounded, they exploit the possibilities of randomness and non-serial ordering which can lead to fragmentation, and they make use of a more developed form of stream of consciousness, in that they introduce hallucinations and warped visions of reality, which also highlight the ontological questions we have mentioned.

All in all then, it would seem that Johnson's preoccupations for the novel may have been unjustified, but in spite of the tendency towards this new kind of writing recently, the majority of writers still produce traditional realistic fiction, albeit with an added element of "creative hesitation and self-examination" (Stevenson 1991 23), although they do not foreground the
questions of conventional forms and expectation or highlight invention, imagination and their relation to truth and reality to the same extent as Johnson and the postmodernists do. In fact, it is because of the kind of preoccupation expressed by Johnson and others that we can talk of the existence of postmodernist fiction in Britain at all.

Many critics, among them Terry Eagleton, have been hostile to the kind of innovative writing produced by postmodernist authors like Johnson, accusing them of being exponents of gimmickry or kitsch. But even those who applauded Johnson’s efforts could not avoid his dual fate of critical success (he won several prizes including the Somerset Maugham Award for Trawl) and economic failure. It seems that the English novel and the English reading public, at least in Johnson’s day, did not want anything other than realism, the normalising of modernist and any other extravagances. It may be that Johnson was doing what he did too soon. Others would argue that he took himself and his writing too seriously which may have prevented his works from achieving popularity. Nowadays metafictional writing is popular, even a necessary ingredient for success. It has found its way into the cinema and even television series although we might suggest that it too has become somewhat naturalised. Be that as it may, the kind of metafictional writing produced by Johnson, even when comic, had a point to make, whereas nowadays it is lacking in seriousness, in fact we could say that it provides grounds for the knockers of postmodernism in
that it has begun to move into the realm of kitsch and gimmickry.

These comments have been necessary in order to place what was Johnson's constant battle with the establishment in some kind of perspective. His preoccupations are most notably expressed in his Introduction to *Aren't You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs* (1973), which has been a regular source for comment for the few critics who have bothered to consider him.

In this essay, Johnson sees Joyce as the author who has pointed the way for contemporary writers, but not in the sense that they should imitate him, but that they should concentrate on what the novel is good at: "the precise use of language, exploitation of the technological fact of the book, the explication of thought" (1973 12). Johnson compares film and the novel and states that while both are narrative, the cinema is better at some things than the novel, particularly the presentation of setting and the appearance of the characters, which makes the novelist's attempts to do this seem rather pathetic and anachronistic. For Johnson, because of this, what happens in the novel, the action and events, which can be much more successfully produced by film, becomes less important than how the novel is written. Here he emphasises that we should not continue to think in terms of form, style and technique in the singular but in the plural, as Joyce did. For the same reason, the subject matter of the novelist "should be exploring the inside of his own head" (12). But here
the operative word is novelist, as it is not simply the thoughts, memories and sensations of an individual that are of interest. Although most of Johnson's work is frankly and sometimes uncomfortably honest about himself, it is the inside of the novelist's head that the reader is aware of, which makes the creative process, the forms and conventions of the novel part of its subject matter too.

In what is a manifesto for and a defense of his kind of writing, which includes that of several other contemporary novelists, he emphasises that the novel is an evolving form. The nineteenth century novel is exhausted, and

[the novelist cannot legitimately or successfully embody present day reality in exhausted forms. If he is serious, he will be making a statement which attempts to change society towards a condition he conceives to be better, and he will be at least implicitly making a statement of faith in the evolution of the form in which he is working. Both these aspects of making are radical; this is inescapable unless he chooses escapism. Present day reality is changing rapidly, it always has done, but for each generation it appears to be speeding up. Novelists must evolve (by inventing, borrowing, stealing or cobbling from other media) forms which will more or less satisfactorily contain an ever changing reality. (16-17)
While this seems to contradict what he says about his subject matter being the inside of his own head, perhaps what it really shows is that Johnson, in a typically postmodern fashion, places his reality inside his own head. Moreover, he highlights the question of the evolving novel form in a manner which recalls what we have said about oppositional discourse, as it exists in some kind of oppositional relation to other media as well as the exhausted novel itself. This anticipates what we will discover about Johnson in that all his work is a dialogue with form.

Regarding this topic, Johnson, like many critics, also refers to postmodernist architecture when he writes:

The architects can teach us something: their aesthetic problems are combined with functional ones in a way that dramatises the crucial nature of their final actions. "Form follows function" said Louis Sullivan and Mies van der Rohe [said] to create form out of the nature of our tasks with the methods of our time--this is our task.

We must make clear, step by step, what things are possible, necessary, and significant. (AYRY 16)

He then goes on to speak of his aim to make explicit use of available materials and he asserts that form is the result. However, the explicit use of existing forms implies the defamiliarisation of these forms, which as we will recall, is the tendency that Shklovsky and
Bahktin describe in the novel when they discuss it as oppositional discourse.

Another vital point in Johnson's attitude to the novel form is his belief that telling stories is telling lies, that truth and fiction are opposites. He writes that "[l]ife does not tell stories. Life is chaotic, fluid, random; it leaves myriads of ends untied, untidily" (AYRY 14). Therefore, he chooses "to write truth in the form of a novel" (14) and to reject the telling of stories as an end in itself. Morton P. Levitt has written that "[t]he living of life and the writing are virtually interchangeable in Johnson" and he continues "[h]is is the most reflexive of all fictions: it makes the new term 'reflexive' seem strangely inadequate; it explicitly denies the old term 'fiction'" (1981-82 574). Johnson's close friend Zulfikhar Ghose emphasises this point too when he recalls that Johnson "insisted that he wrote novels and not fiction" (1985 27) all of which suggests that Johnson's novels do not tell stories but investigate the problems of the novelist in coming to terms with reality and that that reality is what is inside his own head: the materials for and the processes of writing and, of course, the novelist's own life. Levitt sums this up as follows:

What is significant about these novels is their continuing, developing determined effort to evolve a form (or series of forms) appropriate to their actions and to express through such forms the essential human quality of the people who live and create
Having decided that telling stories is telling lies, after *Travelling People*, Johnson sets out to tell the truth, which means to write a kind of autobiography in the novel form, at least in *Trawl* and the *Unfortunates*, or to make it clear that his works are a self-evident sham, as in the case of *House Mother Normal* and Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry.

One of the aims in Johnson's work is to draw attention to the novel and autobiography as a physical artefact involved in specific processes of production (Tredell 1985 35) and it is really the mind of the writer as he attempts to transcribe experience that is his subject (36). At the same time, he regarded himself as confronting the conservative literary establishment. His was a virtually evangelical insistence on finding alternatives to the conventions of social realism (see Mackrell 1985 42). Hence many of his novels are discursive, oppositional discourse, and hence his assertion that "[w]here I depart from convention, it is because the convention has failed, is inadequate for conveying what I have to say" (AYRY 19). Moreover, it was probably his awareness of how readily innovations are naturalised that lead him to express his belief that "no sooner is a style or technique established than the reasons for its adoption become irrelevant" (AYRY 17). But it is more than this. While new forms are required for contemporary life, he believed, like Beckett, that "[t]he forms and the chaos remain separate . . . to find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of
the artist now" (In AYRY 17). But he is aware of the paradox that is expressed here, that chaos is the most likely explanation of everything, and that order and chaos are opposites (18), which is why in many of his novels, having gone to the bother of ordering things, he retracts in order to show that it is all a lie. He is like Beckett in other respects too and not only in his adoption of a sometimes similar solipsitic style. A touch of the pessimism is there too. That there is nothing to express, nothing to express it with, and the expression of this condition is all the artist can do does not really sum up Johnson's work, although a touch of that kind of desperation is often apparent:

While I believe (as far as I can believe anything) that there may be (how can I know?) chaos underlying it all, another paradox is that I go on behaving as though a pattern could exist, as though day will follow night will follow breakfast. Or whatever the order should be. (AYRY 18)

In the first of The Duthuit Dialogues Beckett wrote:

Beckett. - Yet I speak of an art turning from it [the plane of the feasible] in disgust, weary of puny exploits, weary of pretending to be able, of being able, of doing a little better the same old thing, of going a little further along a dreary road.

Duthuit - And preferring what?

B. - The expression that there is nothing to
express, nothing with which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express.

(in Calder 1983 204-05)

This seems to be part of Johnson's problem and in much of his work he can be described as vainly attempting to escape from the sense of failure which Beckett saw as defining the nature of the history of painting (in Calder 1983 210). But at the same time he, like Beckett, also

make[s] of this submission, this admission, this fidelity to failure, a new occasion, a new term of relation, and of the act which, unable to act, obliged to act, he makes, an expressive act, even if only of itself, of its impossibility, of its obligation.

(Beckett 1983 210)

This is the kind of thing that Johnson does in Albert Angelo, where he deliberately brings about the disintegration of the structure he creates, thus rejecting the idea of the objective correlative which he abominates, but which he has ironically made use of throughout the novel. He admits failure and it seems that the point of the novel is to do so, underlining the fact that the form is imposed and falsifies, that fragmentariness is all there is and that his subject is himself and his writing. It is curious that the epigraph to the novel should come from Beckett's The Unnamable, and that he should emphasise the following: "there is nothing else, let us be lucid for once, nothing else but
what happens to me." This recalls the beginning of 
Trawl, too, where he admits that he must begin and end 
with I. We come back once more to the subject matter 
being the inside of his own skull. In the Introduction 
to Aren't You Rather Young, he explains it this way:

I think I write because I have something to 
say that I fail to say in conversation, in 
person. Then there are things like conceit, 
stubbornness, a desire to retaliate on those 
who have hurt me paralleled by a desire to 
repay those who have helped me, a need to try 
to create something which may live after me 
(which I take to be the detritus of the 
religious feeling), the sheer technical joy of 
forcing almost intractable words into patterns 
of meaning and form that are uniquely (for the 
moment at least) mine, a need to make people 
laugh at me, a desire to codify experience, to 
come to terms with things that have happened 
to me, and to try to tell the truth (to 
discover what is the truth) about them. And I 
write especially to exorcise, to remove from 
myself, from my mind, the burden, having to 
bear some pain, the hurt of some experience: 
in order that it may be over there, in a book, 
and not in here in my mind. (1973 18-19)

In this vein, Judith Mackrell sees there as being 
two central issues in Johnson's work: the formal 
potential of the novel and the consideration of the 
problems of viewing literature as a mimetic art form
(1985 43). Story and description have ceased to be worthwhile pursuits for the novel according to Johnson and so, as we have seen, it is the inside of his own head that becomes his subject. There, we find the struggle to find new forms for contemplating life that will be faithful to the chaos, flux and randomness that are our daily bread. Mackrell also underlines the puritanical element in Johnson's work, which results in a degree of pessimism regarding what he believes to be the impossibility of avoiding the distortion or evasion of reality, stemming from the rather exaggerated belief we mentioned that truth and fiction are opposites. It is because of his distrust of the fictional form that he begins his continual dialogue with it, usually writing about his own experience or the process of writing itself. However, Mackrell makes an interesting point when she picks up on the fact that Johnson does not question the nature of language itself as distorting reality (1985 44). In fact, she becomes rather critical of him, even excluding him from consideration as a postmodernist or as being atypical:

His aggressive polarization of truth and fiction, order and chaos, is never supported by any argument, and he never considers the possibility that an opposing case could be made for the collapsing of such antitheses which would see language, form and fiction, not as gratuitous or arbitrary impositions on a fundamentally chaotic reality, but rather as aspects of the way in which man necessarily
structures his experience (for without them how could the real ever become knowable?); so that even the conventional linear narrative, which Johnson attacks as an anachronistic attempt to tidy away the disorderliness of reality, may in fact embody a mode of perception that is crucial to human experience. On this view chaos appears not as the real but as the collapsing of this impulse to order and fiction as a natural extension of that impulse. (It is worth noting, too, the degree of pessimism that Johnson attaches to his notion of chaos; it has no post-modernist connotations of jouissance but seems rather to be a mark of man's fallen condition).

(1985 44)

Mackrell's is a rather extreme attack on what is a rather extreme outlook as regards the relation between truth and fiction. However, she omits to mention the fact that Johnson actually takes this impulse to ordering reality as part of his subject, and that while he wishes to reflect the chaos, the impulse to order is also apparent. She admits that his strategies in his novels manage to cope with the contradictions of the Introduction to Aren't You Rather Young, but it could also be suggested that already implicit in his essay is her assertion that form is necessary in order to know the real, and what Johnson does is make use of the novel form to write truth, rather than fiction. That truth, for him, is the inside of his own head and what he
depicts is the struggle to accommodate the mess, making use of available forms and conventions, or departing from them as he sees fit. That is not to say that there are no anomalies in his argument, but they depend on the existence of a fundamental paradox of which Johnson is clearly aware: order and chaos are exclusive, but order, or form, is necessary in order to know it. That is why Johnson invents, borrows, steals and cobbles his forms together in a self-conscious way, to emphasise the fact that they are forms.

It is here where Johnson surprises us by saying he is not a formalist. Obviously he is not solely interested in form at the expense of meaning, but it is equally clear that the significance of his works often lies in the defamiliarisation of the ways in which we know reality. In his essay and in his novels themselves, his intention is clear and the result is the kind of oppositional discourse which Bahktin speaks of.

The self-conscious examination of the mimetic possibilities of novelistic forms or the deliberate exposing of them as a self-evident sham are the two functions served by the deliberately playful use of form in Johnson’s work (Mackrell 1985 44-45), which while it does not detract from the personal and human, almost confessional nature of his work, is, in a critical sense, reminiscent of some aspects of Russian formalism. That is why a good deal of Johnson’s work is typically postmodernist in that it installs and questions the forms it makes use of, drawing our attention to their nature as forms.
As regards, Mackrell’s assertions about Johnson’s pessimism and the distinct lack of *jouissance*, we can say, as we have seen, that there is an element of truth in them, but they require further comment. One of the basic elements in his work and in the essay itself is their playfulness. However, Johnson’s games, as we will see later, are not simply gimmicks, but often draw attention to the possibilities of the novel form, although sometimes they have been considered more in terms of being jokes. Even the essay itself has its playful element when he leaves a blank space for the reader to fill in his own name in a list of writers that Johnson appreciates. This serious use of games usually makes a point about art, *artis est monstrare artem*, or about life, and they tend to draw attention to themselves in a metafictional way. It is true that his devices, once used, tend not to be returned to, which may be considered as a sign of pessimism, of exhausting the possibilities, but it is also a sign of Johnson’s awareness of these possibilities as well as their limitations. In fact, this is the source of yet another paradox in the author.

We have suggested that, like Beckett, Johnson makes a positive statement out of what at first seems to be a denial of any worthwhileness in art. In relation to this we can mention Patrick Parrinder, who records a change in his own attitude towards Johnson’s writing. Initially he had felt that Johnson was the victim of a trap of his own making as he saw him as a writer who deliberately courted failure, and who therefore failed, inevitably
(1987 115). However, he states how he later saw method as opposed to artlessness in the constant and inevitable disappointment that we find in his novels. In fact, he describes him as belonging to a Puritan tradition that includes writers like Edmund Gosse, thus placing his assertion that telling stories is telling lies in a different light. Parrinder writes:

Johnson's renunciation of fiction was, then, not so much a principle to guide the novel-reader as a standard against which to measure himself. Superficially he may have hoped to change contemporary fiction but, deep down, it would seem, he was setting himself tests he did not believe he could pass. While the exploitation of self-conscious devices was often playful, it could also be anguished and hurt. (1987 120)

The consequences of this are far-reaching and the reasons Johnson had for deliberately setting and failing tests will become apparent shortly, but initially what this draws attention to is two sides to Johnson's puritanism, one more playful, the other less so.

Firstly, and perhaps more significantly, let us consider the more pessimistic side of this. Parrinder speaks of the anguish and guilt that is produced by such an attitude towards the novel, and sometimes, in novels like Albert Angelo we see how self-deprecation becomes part of that too. In this light, he then refers to A. Alvarez' The Savage God, where it is pointed out that "technical exploration implies psychic exploration and
that the rejection of conventional art-forms is evidence of loss of the traditional sense of personal identity" (Parrinder 1987 121). The serious experimental writer has to be extremely self-conscious, but the result is that his art may cease to be therapeutic and simply make his preoccupations more present, even more painful. This is even more so when one considers the confessional nature of some of Johnson's work, which, rather paradoxically, failed to exorcise his experiences, which was supposedly one of his intentions. Parrinder describes this pessimistic side to Johnson as "the confessional impulse of the isolated soul searching for what is lasting among the ephemeral phantoms that assail him" (1987 132). I would say here that Johnson, in fact, as he deliberately courted failure, deliberately sought to create this sense of discomfort, partly as a result of his puritanical insistence on the fact that telling stories is telling lies. Basically, he seeks to make the reader aware of the sense of loss and the lack of consolation which results from this awareness of the chaos underlying the form that he has given to his experience.

However, as we said, there is a more playful side to Johnson's puritanism, which is that of "the Jacobean dramatists, with their farcical and morbid connoisseurship of evil, revenge and the suffering of the innocent, a way which is broached in Christie Malry and House Mother Normal" (132). This would seem to be another way of ridding oneself of the burdens of experience, but even in these novels, Johnson
deliberately draws the readers attention to what he is doing, again avoiding any possibility for comfort or consolation. Parrinder concludes his essay as follows:

I would suggest that these are two sides of the lurid, isolated and self-punishing Puritan imagination. To see Johnson in these terms is to suggest that, for him, experimental writing was the authentic expression of a deep-rooted artistic individualism. Despite his anti-religious obsession Johnson succeeded in reviving the characteristic religious form which British individualist consciousness has taken. His Puritanism offered a standpoint from which . . . he could at all times attack merely fashionable or respectable values. A corresponding tendency to solipsism was most adequately countered in House Mother Normal, which exploits the forms of Puritan consciousness in such a way as to transcend and negate them. (132-33)

Essentially, Parrinder here describes the kind of solipsism that we find in Beckett while at the same time suggesting that the forms adopted by Johnson set themselves up in opposition to existing traditions. But a further point should be made which is that Johnson tends to punish the reader as much as himself. This can be related to what has been called his intention to alter the ethical intention of the novel, drawing attention to the painful truth of reality, disintegration and decay (Davies 1985 80). While the
traditional novel offered consolation in the face of the kind of reality it described, Johnson does just the opposite, deliberately denying us the comfort and support that fiction normally allows. It is as Alvarez says, there is no relief in expression, the disagreeable truth becomes simply more present both to artist and reader (The Savage God 1974 53-4). But this should not be associated necessarily with failure, but ought to be considered as the desired effect.

Pilar Hidalgo also draws attention to the pessimistic attitude of Johnson in the Introduction to her work on the crisis of realism in the English novel (1987 vii-xv). She sees Johnson as part of a minority whose writing leads inevitably to a dead end, and whose insistence on the fictional nature of his work is obsessive. But this is not always the case as we can see in Trawl, The Unfortunates, and even in See the Old Lady Decently, where the truth of what is told is insisted upon. It is incorrect to say that all of Johnson’s anti-novels are futile or pointless exercises whose only aim is to state that you cannot write novels any longer. What he tries to say is that you cannot write novels of the kind Dickens wrote any longer. Moreover, Johnson’s aim was to find a form that would be more realistic in this day and age, because of which he does not abandon the attempt to reflect reality. Although, it would be truer to say that some of his novels can be considered as unrepeatable exercises which, while they are innovative, finally show up the limitations of the possibilities they have exploited.
They are investigations and, as Johnson himself would have it, the works he publishes are successes. That he goes continually one step beyond where he left off in every novel, is a sign of how he too was creatively experimental, although it must be said that the reader is certainly more aware of the limitations of the form than its possibilities for the future. However, the reasons for this are clear: it is precisely the dialogical imagination of Johnson which sets itself up in some kind of confrontation, or oppositional discourse, with the novel form that leads to this kind of writing. Although this continually brings us back to his insistence on the fact that when he is telling stories he is telling lies, this statement is not as redundant as some critics would have it, as he is equally insistent on this point when he writes fiction and when he writes fact. It is here that Johnson has something important to say, and it is here that he is decidedly postmodernist, confronting the ontological dilemma and showing that all the writer can do is describe the inside of his own head. So Johnson's narratives are metanarratives which provide a commentary on traditional concepts of realism and investigate the possibilities and limitations of the novel form for telling the truth.

At this point, perhaps we should put some of the things we have said about Johnson's pessimism in perspective. Firstly, he is pessimistic about many things, even about the future of the novel. However, as we have said he makes something positive out of this,
after the fashion of Beckett, by making the possibilities and limitations of the novel form part of his subject. His puritanism also leads him to deny the reader and himself any sense of consolation from his fictions or his confessions and he continually draws attention to the underlying chaos. As he so clearly points out in the *disintegration* of Albert Angelo:

> Faced with the enormous detail, vitality, size, of this complexity, of life, there is a great temptation for a writer to impose his own pattern, an arbitrary pattern which must falsify, cannot do anything other than falsify; or he invents, which is pure lying.

(1987 180)

Johnson's problem is clear and he makes his subject that very problem. While there are those who argue that the task he sets himself of truth-telling is insuperable and hence pointless, it should already have become clear how the basic point of his work is often to show the essentially paradoxical nature of his art and to deny the reader and himself the comfort of success: that is, he believes in the chaos underlying everything but cannot avoid writing as if there were a pattern to it all, finally breaking the pattern to draw attention to his essential truth. Somewhat pessimistic certainly, but with a point to it, it should be clear now that this kind of writing is a result of what we have called Johnson's unbelief.

At this point it is worthwhile remembering a few remarks which were made in connection with the theories
of Jean-Francois Lyotard, which should further illuminate the nature of Johnson's work in the light of what has been said, and place him clearly in a postmodernist context. In answering the question what is postmodernism (1984 79-83), Lyotard points out two distinct modes of expression: that which places the emphasis on the faculty to conceive, and the possibilities of invention and innovation, and that which places the emphasis on the powerlessness of the faculty of presentation, melancholia and nostalgia. Curiously, to a certain extent, Johnson combines the two. His innovativeness has already been remarked upon but what seems to be even more highlighted is his melancholia and his belief that in presentation the author must fall into the trap of telling lies, a fact which is continually made apparent for the reader in his work. Lyotard sees postmodernism as providing allusions to reality which cannot be presented, as presenting the unpresentable in presentation itself, and this is essentially what Johnson does. He conceives of the underlying chaos which cannot be presented by the use of traditional forms and consequently undermines or destroys the structures which he creates as they give form where there is none. This dynamically represents his crisis of unbelief in a way which denies the comfort of consensus and tradition, in a dialogue with form which we call oppositional discourse. In the same way, we can speak of him drawing attention to the nature of his work as what Baudrillard calls a simulacrum of reality, a simulacrum which he deliberately destroys
continually, not in a pessimistic tantrum because of the impossibility of representing reality, but in a positive statement of the inadequacy of existing forms, and in a way that makes us aware of a reality which while we can conceive of it we are still unable to present.

There is another way in which we can place Johnson's novels in some kind of perspective. In his remarks on the development of the novel, David Lodge talks of the division of narrative into fictional and empirical and their synthesis in the novel. Various emphases towards realism, allegory, romance and history are permitted in realism but when, the synthesis breaks down and the novel moves beyond traditional realism it goes in two directions: towards fabulation or towards non-fiction. However, there are also those who build their hesitation as regards moving in either into the novel itself in what Lodge calls the problematic novel (1971 3-22).

Now, Lodge, when he refers to B.S. Johnson in this essay, emphasises what he calls his disillusionment with the novel form in his writing of non-fiction novels (the essay was written prior to the publication of House Mother Normal and the subsequent novels), and "taking the fundamentalist Platonic position that 'telling stories is telling lies', but at the same time experimenting with form to bring writing into closer proximity with living" (1971 13). While these assertions are true, they tend not to reflect the whole story. Lodge places Johnson, firmly in the category of non-
fiction writer here when it could be argued that in these novels, even prior to his excursion into fabulation that we find in the two novels which follow *The Unfortunates*, he could be considered as an exponent of the problematic novel. Prior to considering this possibility, let us consider a few more remarks by Lodge.

He considers the case of Johnson in the light of some remarks by Harry Levin who writes,

The history of the realistic novel shows that fiction tends towards autobiography. The increasing demands for social and psychological detail that are made upon the novelist can only be satisfied out of his own experience. The forces that make him an outsider focus his attention upon himself.

(in Lodge 14)

He then remarks that this fact has been taken to its logical conclusion by Johnson who has made the autobiographical novel redundant by admitting that the "fictional reworking of personal experience inevitably falsifies it" (14). This kind of comment is reminiscent of what was said by Parrinder earlier and highlights what is clearly a fundamental problem for Johnson. However, as we have said, this problem itself becomes part of Johnson's subject, and the novels are full of self-reflexive commentaries, which clearly makes these novels more than autobiographical non-fiction.

In the light of this, let us now see what Lodge defines as the problematic novel:
To the novel, the non-fiction novel, and the fabulation, we must add a fourth category: the novel which exploits more than one of these modes without fully committing itself to any, the novel about itself, the trick-novel, the game-novel, the puzzle-novel, the novel that leads the reader (who wishes naively, only to be told what to believe) through a fair-ground of illusions and deceptions, distorting mirrors and trap-doors that open disconcertingly under his feet, leaving him ultimately not with any simple or reassuring message or meaning but with a paradox about the relation of art to life. (1971 22)

This is the paradox that Johnson has been seen to make manifest and we have already noted how he deliberately intends to make his readers uncomfortable. Moreover, this occurs not only in his novels which tend more towards fabulation, but in the non-fiction novels which Lodge himself talks about. Suffice it to say that when Lodge describes the problematic novel he sums up to some extent the nature of Johnson’s work:

[the problematic novel] clearly has affinities with both the non-fiction novel and fabulation, but it remains distinct precisely because it brings both into play. . . . [T]he reality principle is never allowed to lapse entirely -- indeed it is often invoked, in the spirit of the non-fiction novel, to expose the artificiality of conventional realistic
illusion. Whereas the fabulator is impatient with 'reality', and the non-fiction novelist is impatient with fiction, the kind of novelist I am talking about retains a loyalty to both, but lacks the orthodox novelist's confidence in the possibility of reconciling them. He makes the difficulty of his task, in a sense, his subject. (22-23)

This is just what we have been saying about Johnson: the difficulty of his task is his subject, and to make this apparent, in his non-fiction novels we are aware of his self-conscious obsession with falsification, while in his fabulations we are constantly reminded of reality. However, while we are aware of a process towards it, there is no real attempt at any reconciliation of the two as it is the failure to do so that is the recurrent theme in his work. In fact, perhaps it is this "lack of confidence," which is deliberately sought for and presented in the novels that many critics dismiss out of hand as pessimism, when in fact it has a much more positive intention.

We can say then that B.S. Johnson is the writer of problematic (postmodernist) novels which tend towards fabulation in some cases (House Mother Normal and Christie Malry’s Own Double Entry), towards non-fiction in others (Albert Angelo, according to Lodge, Trawl and The Unfortunates) and he even mixes the two modes in See the Old Lady Decently. The problems of making become the theme of each of these novels, and throughout the reader is constantly reminded of the relation between the
form and reality. In a typically postmodernist fashion, the tendency is that each structure that he creates is systematically undermined and even demolished in order to make apparent his underlying belief that chaos is what there is.

Johnson is then realistic to the extreme, to the puritanical extreme that we mentioned earlier. He continually moves beyond the previous fiction (and in the end he would admit that all of his works are fictions: failed attempts to tell the truth with falsification being the result), in search for the truth, or for a form that is more realistic than the available realisms which no longer come up to reality. His is then an oppositional discourse which while it shows up the limitations of the novel form at the same time develops it. In relation to this we should recall the idea that the novel’s realism can be seen as a kind of reaction to literary realism and that it, in fact, seeks a realism greater than that which literature allows (see Holquist and Reed 1988 417). Johnson would probably have agreed with this and, obviously, tried to put the principle into practice in his work, turning away from the realists who, for him, had dropped the baton handed on by Joyce, and, for the most part, he simply tries to be more realistic by drawing attention to his own shortcomings as well as those of the novel form itself.

Another way of placing Johnson’s novels in some kind of context is to consider the appropriate grouping of experimental modern and postmodernist writers
suggested by Randall Stevenson (The British Novel Since the Thirties 1986). The thread which he significantly depicts running through the English novel leads us from Joyce to Beckett and then from Flann O’Brien to Johnson. Referring to the modernists, Stevenson writes of the "apparently increasing disorder of the 'sensible world' and writers' increasingly self-conscious examination of their means of representing it in orderly form in their novels" (1986 195). This statement is valid for each of these authors, and the focal point of this problem in Joyce's work is the word itself. The self-referentiality of Finnegans Wake, for example, according to Stevenson, draws attention to "the nature and relationships of words, to linguistic issues such as phonetics and etymology, rather than to the traditional subjects of the novel" (1986 196), and, quoting Beckett, he writes that in this novel "form is content, content is form . . . His writing is not about something; it is that something itself" (in Stevenson 1986 196). This is strikingly reminiscent of what Johnson himself says in Aren't You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs, where he writes:

Subject matter is everywhere, general, is brick, concrete, plastic; the ways of putting it together are particular, are crucial. But I recognise that there are not simply problems of form, but problems of writing Form is not the aim, but the result. (1973 16)

Basically, what is implicit here is that the problems which Joyce and Beckett confront are similar to
Johnson's. He himself has commented on his debt to Joyce and Beckett and it is significant that, after Joyce, Beckett moves on to reflect on the limitations of language and narrative, particularly in his Trilogy, where he is self-conscious not only about language, but about the narrative act itself, about the author's attempt to articulate something (see Stevenson 1986 Ch.5). Like Beckett, Johnson, on occasions, reflects the paradox of the anxiety of the author to express himself combined with his inability to do so, and like him would share the belief that "nothing is more real than nothing" (Malone Dies 1979 177). With the movement from Joyce to Beckett, Stevenson sees a development in emphasis from the autonomy of language itself to the autonomy of fiction, or, perhaps we could say, of the narrative act. He describes Beckett as an author who "enacts and examines the mind's attempt to order and illumine the 'black void' around itself; to clothe consciousness in language and sense" (1986 199). The same can be said of Johnson. A good deal of his work, as he has said himself, can be considered as an attempt to make sense of experience although he consistently admits to the fact that they are just that: attempts.

Stevenson's grouping of authors is enlightening in itself as, after Beckett, we find a group of two whom we can consider as still carrying the baton that has been passed on to them. That Flann O'Brien and B.S. Johnson should be juxtaposed might be considered as mistaken by some, but, essentially, both authors deal with the idea of the autonomy of fiction and it is possible that
Johnson himself may have found a more immediate model for his work in O'Brien, particularly in those narratives which are for the reader a self evident sham.

O'Brien emphasises "'literary activities' and the nature and subject of storytelling" (Stevenson 1986 201), taking up from where Joyce and Beckett left off and leading on to Johnson who continues to "[scrutinise] within the novel their own fictional forms" (Stevenson 1986 201). Stevenson identifies a direct link between the two and we can find that there is a great similarity between O'Brien's belief that the novel should be "a self-evident sham to which the reader could regulate at will the degree of his credulity" and Johnson's statement in Travelling People that "it was not only permissible to expose the mechanism of a novel, but by doing so I should come nearer to reality and truth . . . I should be determined not to lead my reader into believing that he was doing anything but reading a novel (1963 11-12). In Johnson, this leads to excursions into fabulation where, as in O'Brien's novel, the fictional nature of the work and its mechanisms are obvious; and into non-fiction where his attempts at truthtelling are admitted to be failures, or only limited successes (the latter is perhaps a more reasonable description of the impression we get at reading Trawl or The Unfortunates). So, the mechanism of the novel once more stands out as the subject matter of Johnson's novels, where the narrative act is seen in terms of a struggle to articulate experience with only failure (or limited
success) as the inevitable outcome on the one hand; and where, admittedly, telling lies is the only alternative.

All of Johnson's novels, as we have said, are dialogues with form to one degree or another and are so either more or less explicitly. However, it is nowhere more explicit than in the short story "Everyone Knows Somebody Who's Dead," (1972), which it is worthwhile considering in order to understand more fully, just what this author is doing in his novels.

In this short story we are in no doubt as to the fact that we are reading oppositional discourse. First of all, the reader is clearly made aware of tradition when the "XLCR Mechanical Plot Finding Formula" is made explicit in italics. Briefly, it can be summed up as follows: first, you need a title, a conflict and a resolution at the end. Then we find interwoven throughout the text, this:

A plot is a conflictual situation exacerbated by additional circumstances of increasing difficulty, proceeding to one or more Abortive Efforts to overcome the situation.

... Extension is always achieved by the Insertion of one or more Abortive Efforts.

... The Solution Stage ... involves the character (a) overcoming his problems

... or (b) succumbing to them....

Resolution or point of solution ... which can admit of a Surprise Ending.

(in AYRY 1973 128-38)

At the end of the story the author, in what has been an
ongoing dialogue with the reader (as well as a dialogue with form, made more explicit in this manner) characteristic of Johnson, states, "There. I have fully satisfied the XLCR rules, I think. Popular acclaim must surely follow" (1973 140). This, obviously tongue in cheek statement makes what has been going on more apparent. Johnson ironically parodies the traditional form of storytelling in an explicit dialogue with form, and in a clearly postmodernist manner installs and at the same time contests these conventions. This is what goes on in all of his novels to some extent or another and the tone of voice that we find in the story, together with the ideology that accompanies it is reminiscent of the dialogue which the author has with himself in the disintegration of Albert Angelo, the author's dialogue with Christie in Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry, House Mother's dialogue with the reader in House Mother Normal, the ironic, Sterne-like (or O'Brien-like) authorial voice's dialogue with the reader in Travelling People and See the Old Lady Decently and even the more desperate, solipsistic voice of Trawl and The Unfortunates.

When considered more closely, then, Johnson's work, as a whole is a good deal more than a series of pessimistic failures leading to a dead-end that some of his critics describe. While we have suggested that in his work his unbelief tends to be on the side of what Lyotard would call melancholia, there is a good deal of irony, which is often combined with innovation and a sense of humour. At times, in a serious manner he
struggles with the problems of distortion involved in narrative and draws attention to the fact that we seem only to be capable of creating simulacra, forms which once they become forms displace the reality they were supposed to represent. Hence, his works often deliberately break down and he offers us, particularly in his non-fiction, fragmentation and disintegration, even knocking down the house of fiction that he has carefully built in *Albert Angelo*. He makes it clear that the image is separate from reality and believes it is necessary to make the reader aware of the fact. When the result of his work is fiction, he provides the reader with a retraction, puritanically, but also humorously, telling us the truth. However, his dialogues with form are not limited only to this kind of writing. He revisits the past ironically after the fashion that Hutcheon, Calinescu and Hassan describe, installing and contesting tradition and convention, although perhaps with less optimism than some of those who revel in the carnivalisation of the novel, but in *Christie Malry* and *House Mother Normal* in particular, we find a playful, tongue in cheek author, who, while he does not abandon serious concerns completely, allows the reader to revel in the fabulation he has created.

In a manner typical of the novel as oppositional discourse and, therefore, of postmodernism, Johnson's work is a response to contemporary concerns regarding realism and realistic fallacies, particularly regarding the relation between reality and realism. While he is highly aware of tradition, as we have seen in our
comments on his continual dialogue with form, his work assimilates other kinds and modes of discourse in a self-conscious manner in order to extend the novel's possibilities, and not simply for its own sake, but very often in order to say something about the nature of the novel form itself and even about the nature of reality. One has only to see how he applies a system of bookkeeping in Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry, in order to be aware of Johnson's critical attitude towards materialism and capitalism and he ironically makes use of a mode of discourse which significantly sees everything in terms of profit and loss.

When Johnson does this kind of thing and throughout his work, he is at once questioning the existing forms and conventions of the novel and at the same time investigating its possibilities for the assimilation of new forms. He emphasises his concern for the ways in which we are able to write about experience and experiments with literary and non-literary modes of discourse. However, due to his belief that telling stories is telling lies, he refuses to continue in the tradition of realism which attempts to persuade us of the verisimilitude of what we are reading. On the contrary, he self-consciously draws attentions to the falsity of even his own attempts to persuade the reader of this.

Johnson's novels are oppositional discourse, dialogues with form and as such are antagonistic towards tradition. We are continually aware of some kind of defamiliarisation as regards the ways in which reality
is represented, and we often find a tendency towards distortion, incongruence and playing with proportion to this end. Johnson simply attempts to be more realistic, either by admitting his falsifications or writing obvious fabulations. What he is moving towards is a renewal of realism in the face of traditional fallacies and he often installs and contests existing forms in order to draw our attention to their limitations. While his novels are often personal and moving, it is the mechanism which tends to be foregrounded and we are often confronted with texts that make use of and parody the conventions of realistic writing, after the fashion we have described in his short story "Everyone Knows Somebody Who's Dead."

Either self-evident shams, only limited successes or falsifications, with these, Johnson, in what some would call a puritanical and others a postmodernist fashion, emphasises the fact that all narratives are fictions. However, as we have seen, such an attitude is not wholly pessimistic. As Nicholas Tredell points out, even his autobiographical works are "ineluctably implicated in fiction," but they do

"tell truths" about fiction, about narrative, about discourse, about the construction of reality. And by forcing the truth-claims of fiction to dramatic extremes, Johnson raises fundamental issues. (1985 69)

These issues, among other things, are the ways in which we represent reality, the nature of narrative, the relation between existing forms of narrative and
reality, as well as other epistemological questions. However, yet another is the kind of ontological question raised by postmodernist novels as described by Brian McHale (1987). Johnson emphasises the fact that reality, even his reality, is a construct. We even find that reality becomes plural for him when, in virtually all of his novels, as in *The Unfortunates*, where due to the tricks that memory plays on the individual, the past becomes a series of possible pasts, which he reminds us are all equally fabrications.

On other occasions, ontologically distinct levels of reality are suggested by transgressing narrative levels (*Christie Malry*), or at other times by simply providing different points of view or constructions of the same reality, which also suggest the distinct ontological zones in which we exist (*Travelling People*). In a similar vein, Johnson often plays with style and modes of discourse (as in *Travelling People*) in order to underline the fact that we do in fact construct reality through language, and that the nature of the language we use can change that reality. Ultimately, this kind of view leads us to suggest that the words themselves become the only reality. Or, another way to put it is to say that the act of writing itself is the only verifiable reality, the only true subject for the postmodernist author, and for Johnson.

We can consider this in the light of what has been said earlier about Johnson’s tendency towards autobiography. In fact, autobiography for a writer like Johnson is the act of writing, it is the process of
narrating oneself, in which the narrative act is more than a means to convey one's reality, it is that reality. Heide Ziegler puts it this way:

In a sense . . . the postmodernist writer needs to be autobiographical; but autobiography, for him, has changed its meaning. It no longer requires that he write about his life [sic], or even that he [sic] --an unalterable identity-- write about his life; instead, autobiography comes to mean the process of narration itself as the author relates to it. (in Splendore 1985 94)

This brings us back to Johnson taking as his subject the inside of his own skull. What we have is that "there is an irrepressible need for the writer to establish his identity precisely as a writer," which leads him to "assert his right to comment on the form and the language of what is being written" (Splendore 1985 94). What we could say is that the writing of autobiography becomes a kind of metafiction itself. The dramatisation of the process of narration, of narrating oneself, inevitably turns into a dramatisation of the act of writing, which foregrounds these writing concerns. This is so to such an extent that in novels like Trawl and The Unfortunates, it is impossible to distinguish between narrative and metanarrative: "one can never be sure whether one is reading about the existential uncertainties of a fictional character or about the difficulties of writing a novel" (Splendore 95). However, it is curious to note also that the fictional
character would seem to be Johnson himself, and, as we have suggested, Johnson's existential uncertainty consists precisely in struggling to tell his self. Essentially, all the novels are not only about, but actually dramatise this struggle.

In Johnson's novels, fact and fiction are diametrically opposed and, in a novel like Albert Angelo, we are shown "the inadequacy of his fictional world when confronted with reality" (Mackrell 1985 52). He continually reminds us of the falsification that takes place in his novels, drawing attention to the fact that he himself is constructing a reality, or rather, a fiction which becomes so because it involves a search for a shape or pattern which can only give a subjective significance to existence, which, according to Johnson, can only be meaningful to the author. This takes us back to Beckett once more, an author whom McHale refers to in his work, and the idea of the autonomous nature of fiction. It could be said here that Johnson draws attention to ontological questions by writing (what he must always admit to being) fictions, which have nothing to do with anyone else's sense of reality. As he writes in Trawl, "everything is relevant only to me, to be seen only from my eyes, solipsism is the only truth," and "I create my own world in the image of that which was" (1968 193 and 176).

Johnson also draws attention to ontological questions in a more playful manner in his fabulations where due to the shifting of narrative (ontological) levels, once more we find the autonomous nature of
fiction but at the same time find the overlapping or interweaving of distinct ontological levels, and we can even find that it is interwoven with our own sense of reality. Clearly this kind of thing, which occurs in novels like Christie Malry's Own Double Entry, can be compared to an optical illusion, authorial sleight of hand, which is achieved in this case by the author involving himself in a series of dialogues about the novel with the reader and with Christie, which place both on the same ontological level. While it is unlikely that the reader is ever in any doubt as to his own reality or Christie's fictionality, what this does is, in a different way, draw attention to the same problems regarding the nature of narrative and its relation to experience. This novel, and Johnson's work as a whole, draws attention to the fact that man creates reality (albeit his own) and that this reality must necessarily be a fabrication of his own making. In this novel, it is most clearly represented by the author-God analogy which is made explicit on more than one occasion.

It must be emphasised here that Johnson never referred to himself as a postmodernist writer and that there are only a few critics who explicitly refer to him as such. However, it should be clear by now that he is, although in his own very particular way. In fact, his work enables us to establish more clearly the link between novel and postmodernism which we have been investigating previously. Johnson, rather than being a postmodernist writer, saw himself, above all, as writing novels in these works which we are going to discuss,
even when writing non-fiction. What he felt was that, given the circumstances of his age, and as other media had become more efficient at many things, like telling stories and providing verisimilitude, it was necessary to concentrate on the things the novel was good at. Significantly, this suggests that the novel had already been doing these things before, and while we might suggest that Johnson, and others, take the novel in new directions, these directions were already available to the novelist and had been exploited to one degree or another: for example, those whom Johnson himself mentions, Sterne, Joyce and Beckett, not to mention his contemporaries.

Moreover, Johnson was clearly an exponent of the novel, and must surely have considered the novel, as oppositional discourse. As we have seen, although he states that he is not a formalist, in his work form becomes function and in all of his novels we are aware of defamiliarisation as regards the way in which he attempts to recount experience. In spite of Johnson’s assertions, his way of writing novels implies certain formalist attitudes, especially if we consider that it was critics like Shklovsky and Bakhtin who promoted this view of the novel as oppositional discourse, an attitude which, we have suggested, Johnson shares. However, while the formalists emphasise the nature of the novel as speaking only of its own coming into being against a background of something else (Hawkes 1977 67), Johnson gives greater importance than the formalists to that something else, to the truth he wants to tell about
himself, about experience, even providing social comment that is often implicit, and even explicit in his works. However, his novels do tell of their creative process in a manner that we call oppositional discourse, highlighting our awareness of the forms of narrative in a process of defamiliarisation. Hence the direction the novel takes with Johnson does not break completely with the past but goes in the only direction which, for him, it could take. He writes oppositional discourse which reacts against existing forms; his too is the oppositional discourse of unbelief.

Therefore, it should also be clear that while we are suggesting that the postmodernist novel is not precisely a breakthrough, but rather a further development in the novel, Johnson’s way of expressing it should have enlightened us as regards its nature: the novel should be doing what it’s good at, and, in the light of the redundancy of traditional realism; the reduction of material to the inside of the writer’s skull, as well as all the water that has gone under the bridge as regards critical theory, social and historical change, even technological developments, what we have is a new phase of unbelief, spearheaded by writers like Johnson, where what is being contested is not just the traditional realistic novel but everything before and in between. The result is a mixture of innovation and revising of the past; the result is a mixture of fabulation and non-fiction; the result is a tendency to always work within the tradition of Sterne and draw attention to the process, but, with Johnson, not wholly
at the expense of the product. It is oppositional discourse, a dialogue with form where the unbelief of the author stretches from the abhorrence of the objective correlative and the anthropomorphism of analogy so disliked by Robbe-Grillet, to the similar belief in the inability of the author to close the gap between the fiction he creates and what he wishes to represent.

It should not be forgotten that most of this has always been part of the anti-traditional tradition of the novel. None being more anti-traditional than Johnson himself, the novel has, once more, begun to move in new directions, playing games to extend its repertoire, introducing modes to extend the range and so on. However, the tendency to be suspicious of Johnson's innovativeness (is it a gimmick?) and his pessimism (is he like the dog that chases its own tail?) always creeps in and makes it more difficult for some to consider him as a postmodernist. This is probably the case of Judith Mackrell, who has been considered earlier, but perhaps that is because she tends to see postmodernism as a kind of celebration, where jouissance is fundamental and where the tendency is to exploit the possibilities rather than discover the limitations of narrative. However, here, we should remember Lyotard's assertion that postmodernism is a new nascent state which, aware of the gap between the conceivable and the presentable, tends towards melancholia on the one hand and innovation on the other. Certainly we are aware of that rather pessimistic nostalgia in Johnson, which seems to miss
the comfort and security of being able to identify with the form that he has given to experience, but Johnson is also investigating and looking for new possibilities for the novel. Perhaps he is exhausting these possibilities by inevitably drawing attention to their fictionality and their limitations; perhaps he is too solipsistic, and simply strives to go against the grain; but that would be a narrow view of his work.

It might be suggested that there is no sense of dialoguing with the past, or even with his contemporaries, in Johnson’s work, apparently a prerequisite for postmodernist fiction, but that would give a false impression. Perhaps the voice seems to be talking with itself, but he is always struggling with form which means struggling with the past as well as with his contemporaries. Johnson’s is certainly a dialogic imagination. There are those who might affirm that he continues to dwell on the problems of modernism, struggling with epistemological questions about how to represent his reality, and in a sense he does. But so do many other postmodernist writers, and, moreover, Johnson was well aware of the autonomy of the fictions he created and he himself posed many ontological questions in them.

Like other postmodernists, Johnson reacts against realistic fallacies, although he differs from most postmodernist writers by, rather puritanically, reacting against fictions as such, too (telling lies). This, which has been called a trap of his own making, suggests the futility of all his works as any narrative requires
form and hence must distort, it must fabricate. However, much of his writing embodies what we can call typically postmodernist attitudes and we ought to see him as anticipating a good deal which has been done in the novel since. In a manner typical of postmodernists, he denies any objective reality, and even doubts if it is discoverable. He parodies and contests existing modes of writing in order to demystify the reader. He puts an end to suspension of disbelief or even puts the reader in a dilemma as to whether to suspend it or not. He sees writing as a process rather than a product and writes what we call metafiction. In this respect, all of his novels are self-begetting, in that they tell of their own creation. However, his metafiction is of different kinds and covers the broad spectrum as defined by Patricia Waugh:

There are those novels at one end of the spectrum which take fictionality as a theme to be explored (and in this sense would include the self-begetting novel), as in the work of Iris Murdoch or Jerzy Kosinski, whose formal self-consciousness is limited. At the centre of this spectrum are those texts that manifest the symptoms of formal and ontological insecurity but allow their deconstructions to be finally recontextualized or 'naturalized' and given a total interpretation (which constitute, therefore, a 'new realism'), as in the work of John Fowles or E.L. Doctorow.
Finally, at the furthest extreme (which would include ‘fabulation’) can be placed those fictions that, in rejecting realism more thoroughly, posit the world as a fabrication of competing semiotic systems which never correspond to material conditions, as in the work of Gilbert Sorrentino, Raymond Federman or Christine Brooke-Rose. (1984 18-19) Novels like Trawl and The Unfortunates are most obviously self-begetting and fall into the first category, although all of the novels deal with fictionality as a theme. Travelling People manifests the kind of “ontological insecurity” that Waugh describes, but finally reads like a kind of realistic novel. Albert Angelo is discovered to be a fabulation and House Mother Normal and Christie Malry’s Own Double Entry are much more obviously fabrications, while See the Old Lady Decently can also be placed at this extreme as a series of fabrications are juxtaposed even with realistic sections in such a way that any realistic mode is discovered to be a fabrication. So Johnson, in his novels, can be seen to have written metafiction of many different kinds, always with the fiction making process as part of his subject; the kind of novels which David Lodge would call problematic and which we call postmodernist.

Johnson draws attention to the limitations, but also sees new possibilities for the novel form. He sees through the question of point of view, discovering the author behind the fiction and makes the reader aware of
the autonomy of his fictions, which exist independent of reality, suggesting its existence, but deliberately denying himself the possibility of success in giving it form. In his work, after the fashion of Robbe-Grillet, there is a denial of the utility of analogy and metaphor, but, paradoxically, he uses it in a new way, extending its possibilities, but showing the artificiality of man's need to make use of it. He abhors the objective correlative, but equally paradoxically, shows how the author continually tends towards it in giving form to experience. He contests the conventions of novel writing, in a dialogue with form, writing what Barthes would call writerly texts in a more contemporary age, rediscovering the novel as artifact, but still struggling to communicate something of his experience, something of truth to the reader, even if that only truth is that he must fail.

We have said that much of what Johnson does in his novels can be considered in terms of defamiliarisation: that is, Johnson intends to denaturalise existing novelistic conventions so that the reader becomes aware of their nature. This has been seen earlier in terms of breaking rules or frame-breaking, and Johnson is clearly an exponent of this kind of writing, where the particular kind of activity that we find within categories of discourse tends to overdetermine the nature of the frame and the writing process itself. Reader expectation, our sense of proportion and appropriateness is played with on many occasions and the tendency is towards alterations and transgressions which
allow us to consider Johnson as a playful writer. Moreover, we find that Johnson extends the repertoire of the novel in terms of modes of discourse and the use of analogy, as well as playing many games which can be seen as particularly postmodernist. However, it should be made clear that the games he plays can be considered as variations of already existing possibilities and that he places particular emphasis on existing variables in order to write what has been called metafiction, foregrounding the medium as well as other postmodernist concerns.

As regards the nature of Johnson’s stories, we have already said that he has written non-fiction, fabulation and problematic novels. A more detailed look at his work will reveal that the tendency is to undermine any conventional treatment of story. In some of his plots it is made clear that it is the arbitrary will of the author that controls events within the autonomous fiction and not any laws of cause and effect. Attempts to create verisimilitude or suspension of disbelief are sometimes abandoned, often by simply playing with the reader’s sense of decorum, proportion, appropriateness, or simply what to expect. In particular, as regards setting and character we may find an over or under-determination of either in order to undermine what the reader would normally expect, or unimportant details may be highlighted at the expense of important material to the same end. In general terms, then, we can say that Johnson’s treatment of story is sometimes unusual or unexpected, although we often find passages of, usually
autobiographical, narrative which conforms to traditional expectations.

Much of the above will appear to have been some kind of defense of Johnson's work and this is partly so. However, it has been more important to see him as an author who represents, in his development as a novelist, the clear relation that exists between novel and postmodernist. When we refer to the dialogic imagination, the antitraditional tradition, the outsider model of literature, the anti-canonic, carnivalisation and so many other terms already mentioned, we refer equally to novel and postmodernism. It is simply that postmodernism comes at a time when western culture has entered into a new phase of unbelief. The postmodernist novel exploits the already existing possibilities of the novel to a different degree and with different kinds of emphasis in order to create a different kind of effect. For example, we could say, and we have already seen, that metafictional novels have always existed, where even in the traditional novel of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, intrusive narrators draw attention to the creative process. Of course, while these authors wrote in this way in order to persuade the reader of the verisimilitude of their fictions, the postmodernist author does so in order to persuade the reader that all is fabrication. For B.S. Johnson, it is impossible to distinguish between the fictional and the real as the narration of both involve fabrication. Given this circumstance, the only reality becomes the narrative process itself, which is also the process of knowing
oneself and which becomes increasingly foregrounded in his work.

From all that has been said, it should be clear that postmodernism, in general, and B.S. Johnson in particular are exponents of an oppositional discourse of unbelief. However, the nature of Johnson's unbelief should be commented on. While he shared the common unbelief regarding the truth-telling possibilities of the novel, his atheism went even further. Patrick Parrinder has commented on Johnson's anti-religious feeling (1987 118-19), but Johnson has already expressed his basic credence: that all is chaos, in spite of his behaving as if it might be otherwise. Particularly in a novel like The Unfortunates, he makes it clear that in spite of the inevitable tendency towards the search for meaning, the supplying of reasons, none of it matters. Hence his continually saying "Does it matter?", "what does it matter why do reasons matter?", "I don't remember, why should I, it doesn't matter, nothing does, it's all chaos, look at his death, why? Why not?" (His dog 2). Once more the paradoxical nature of his writing comes through, and his unbelief would seem to be total, not only in terms of the the novel or of religion, but as regards there being any possibility of there being any meaning, any pattern or any order in spite of everything. What his novels do is make this unbelief manifest in the most dramatic fashion possible, by undermining the very patterns that he creates in his narratives.

At this point we will now consider the novels
themselves in more detail in order to establish the peculiarities of Johnson's work, and in terms of criteria that have been followed throughout this work, beginning with a consideration of the ideological concerns and the nature of each novel as such, to be followed by an examination of Johnson's use of the elements of the novel and the kinds of games that Johnson plays. This process should make it clear just to what extent the particular exploitation of the possibilities of the novel, as well as particular attitudes towards existing forms and conventions, or tradition as such, rather than a complete break with the past, are what constitute the nature of B.S. Johnson's postmodernist discourse, the oppositional discourse of unbelief.
2. The Novels of B.S. Johnson.

The first thing that should be established is that there is a clear sense of development in Johnson's writing. Although he is always concerned with the mechanism of the novel, he tends to move beyond the new limitations which each novel supposed for him. As he wrote himself: "No sooner is a style or technique established than the reasons for its adoption have vanished or become irrelevant" (Aren't You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs 1973 17). At the same time, we can suggest that this development coincides with a growing concern with ontological questions which move beyond the desire to humorously expose the fact that he is writing a self-evident sham after the manner of O'Brien, to consider much more personal dilemmas regarding the relation between the nature of his own personal experience and the form that he is able to give to it. His work, then, becomes increasingly postmodernist as his unbelief becomes more apparent. In fact, as we have suggested earlier, in some of his novels a clear personal belief that there is no meaning possible in spite of the paradoxical act of narrating the self is made clear.

His dissatisfaction with existing forms of narrative and his desire to expose their limitations, while investigating new possibilities for truth-telling means that Johnson's novels combine epistemological and ontological questions in a manner which is not always satisfactory for critics. His tendency to make his
readers uncomfortable may have something to do with this: like overhearing a conversation which you know you should not or would rather not have heard (particularly in novels like Trawl and The Unfortunates); which should make it clear that his concerns are not exclusively restricted to the nature of narrative, although this would seem to be inextricably linked to these other concerns. As we suggested earlier, his novels do speak of their own coming into being, but not against a background of something else: that something else is a fundamental part of Johnson's work and is foregrounded to an extent uncommon in postmodernist narrative. As the source for his material was his own experience, the inside of his own skull, the process that we appreciate is, to some extent, the deconstruction of his personal history to be reconstructed as narrative. In this way, the postmodernist concern of the relation between history and the events that actually took place, or we could say the fabrication that is involved in writing history, is given a very personal form in much of Johnson's work. Indeed, his last novel. See the Old Lady Decently investigates the relation between personal and public views of history, fact and fiction in a manner which has not yet been repeated. In a sense, Johnson's frustration, so often apparent in his novels and, I believe, deliberately placed there, arises from the impossibility of avoiding fabrication in any kind of narrative. Moreover, it becomes the source of his indignation when he considers the lies that we have been subjected to by the education system and the history
books among other things. The growing concern of Johnson, then, is to denaturalise the ways in which we have become accustomed to knowing reality in order to draw attention to the nature of narrative and knowledge, even as regards our knowledge of ourselves. Ultimately, much of his work deals with and even dramatises the search for some kind of meaning of life and death, always ending fruitlessly, ultimately falling into fabrication, into telling lies, ultimately tied to narrative problems.
2.1. Travelling People.

His first novel was Travelling People (1963) and in it Johnson sums up "much of [his] thinking on the novel at that point" (AYRY 20). There he writes:

Seated comfortably in a wood and wickerwork chair of eighteenth-century Chinese manufacture, I began seriously to meditate upon the form of my allegedly full-time literary sublimations. Rapidly, I recalled the conclusions reached in previous meditations on the same subject: my rejection of stage-drama as having too many limitations, of verse as being unacceptable at the present time on the scale I wished to attempt, and of radio and television as requiring too many entrepreneurs between the writer and the audience; and my resultant choice of the novel as the form possessing fewest limitations, and closest contact with the greatest audience. But, now, what kind of novel? After comparatively little consideration, I decided that one style for one novel was a convention that I resented most strongly: it was perhaps comparable to eating a meal in which each course had been cooked in the same manner. The style of each chapter should spring naturally from its subject matter. Furthermore, I meditated at ease in far eastern luxury, Dr. Johnson's remarks about each member of an audience
always being aware that he is a theatre could with complete relevance be applied also to the novel reader, who surely always knows that he is reading a book and not, for instance, taking part in a punitive raid on the curiously-shaped inhabitants of another planet. From this I concluded that it was not only permissible to expose the mechanism of a novel, but by so doing I should come nearer to reality and truth: adapting to refute, in fact, the ancients:

Artis est monstrare artem

Pursuing this thought, I realised that it would be desirable to have interludes between my chapters in which I could stand back, so to speak, from my novel, and talk about it with the reader, or with those parts of myself which might hold differing opinions, if necessary; and in which technical questions could be considered, and quotations from other writers included, where relevant, without any question of destroying the reader’s suspension of disbelief, since such suspension was not to be attempted. I should be determined not to lead my reader into believing that he was doing anything but reading a novel, having noted with abhorrence the shabby chicanery practised on their readers by many novelists, particularly of the popular class. This applied especially to digression, where the
reader is led, wilfully and wantonly, astray; my novel would have clear notice, one way or another, of digressions, so that the reader might have complete freedom of choice in whether or not he would read them. Thus, having decided in a general way upon the construction of my novel I thought about actually rising to commence its composition; but persuaded by oriental comfort that I was nearer the Good Life engaged in meditation, I turned my mind to the deep consideration of such other matters as I deemed worthy of my attention, and, after a short while thus engaged, fell asleep. (1963 1-2)

This has been quoted in its entirety as there are several concerns which Johnson explicitly makes clear here, which govern the nature of this novel and which he pursues still further in later works. Obviously, the theme seems to be the nature of novel writing itself, and the intention to introduce certain innovations in a reaction against realistic novel writing which allows such things as suspension of disbelief, identification with the protagonist and so on.

First of all, we could say that Travelling People is a typical example of the novelistic tradition of Sterne as described by Shklovsky, as it is a novel which sets out to tell of its own nature while apparently telling of something else. In fact, in these opening paragraphs Sterne’s influence can be clearly observed in the manner in which Johnson parodies the style of
Tristram Shandy’s witty, digresive and intrusive narrator. Johnson himself said of this passage that it was
deliberately a pastiche of eighteenth-century English, for I had found that it was necessary to return to the very beginnings of the novel in England in order to try to rethink it and rejustify it for myself. (AYRY 22)

Significantly, this rethinking of the nature of the novel leads Johnson to identify with perhaps the most outstanding, albeit a rather side-stepped, tradition in the novel, that of self-conscious, self-reflexive narrative which deals with the writing process itself. He does this rather than resort to the nineteenth century realism of Dickens, which Johnson explicitly rejects, and which, we have seen, has tended to be taken as some kind of paradigm for the novel instead of being considered as a transitory phase in the novel’s development. But as we have already suggested, there may be a more immediate influence on this novel, or at least there is another author who broaches the same kind of concerns in a similar manner. Notwithstanding the obvious influence of Joyce and, particularly the early, Beckett, authors who clearly form part of the same tradition we have been describing, if we consider the opening lines of Flann O’Brien’s *At Swim-Two-Birds* in the light of the opening paragraphs of Johnson’s novel, the proximity in ideology and the similarity of characteristics will be clearly appreciated:

Having placed in my mouth sufficient bread for
three minutes' chewing, I withdrew my powers of sensual perception and retired into the privacy of my mind, my eyes and face assuming a vacant and preoccupied expression. I reflected on the subject of my spare-time literary activities. One beginning and one ending for a book was a thing I did not agree with. A good book may have three openings entirely dissimilar and inter-related only in the prescience of the author, or for that matter one hundred times as many endings. . . . I hurt a tooth in the corner of my jaw with a lump of the crust I was eating. This recalled me to the perception of my surroundings. (1967 9-10)

And later in the novel:

It was stated that while the novel and the play were both pleasing intellectual exercises, the novel was inferior to the play in as much as it lacked the outward accidents of illusion, frequently inducing the reader to be outwitted in a shabby fashion and caused to experience a real concern for the characters. The play was consumed in wholesome fashion by large masses in places of public resort; the novel was self-administered in private. The novel, in the hands of an unscrupulous writer, could be despotic. In reply to an enquiry, it was explained that a satisfactory novel should be a self evident sham to which the reader
could regulate at will the degree of his credulity. . . . The modern novel should be largely a work of reference. Most authors spend their time saying what has been said before - usually said much better. A wealth of references to existing works would acquaint the reader instantaneously with the nature of each character, would obviate tiresome explanations and would effectively preclude mountebanks, upstarts, thimbleriggers and persons of an inferior education from an understanding of contemporary literature.

(25)

As we said the similarities in ideology and style are obvious and a brief comparison of the two texts will be enlightening.

Both are, essentially self-begetting novels, which share the same kind of preoccupations about the state of the novel form. Both react against traditional realism, and both suggest a series of governing principles which offer an alternative to existing conventions. The parodic nature of both texts suggests their debt to the eighteenth century novel, and Sterne in particular, which offers the possibility of viewing these authors as part of a long-standing tradition which simply has not been kept up. Clearly Joyce’s stylistic variety in Ulysses and Beckett’s witty style in early novels like Murphy belong to the same kind of writing. The similarity between O’Brien’s idea of the self-evident sham and Johnson’s Artis est monstrare artem should also
be clear, as both authors insist on their desire to avoid the tendency of *unscrupulous writers* who practise *shabby chicanery* on their readers (that is, the realistic writer including those of bestsellers) to create in them any suspension of disbelief. The suitability of the novel form for foregrounding these concerns is also made clear, and the basic difference between the two is that while Johnson focusses on the possibility of stylistic variety in the novel, O’Brien suggests the possibility of various beginnings and endings, although, as the novel itself bears out, such a novel also requires an equal variety of styles.

These novelists are clearly exponents of metafiction, but a metafiction that should not in itself be considered as innovative, bearing in mind the influences that have been mentioned. In fact, notwithstanding Johnson’s inclusion of digressive sections, which are intimated at the outset, and which he describes as being metafictional (as we have seen in the above quotation, he even suggests to the reader that he might wish to skip these sections), the novel in spite of its stylistic variety, which may not be so noticable to some, perhaps because it follows on from the kind of thing that Joyce had been doing in *Ulysses*, reads fairly like a realistic novel. In fact, it is in later novels that Johnson begins to exploit the possibilities that he posits in this novel to a greater extent. Whereas O’Brien’s novel is a clear example of fabulation, in spite of the implicit social, cultural and literary criticism that we find there, *Travelling*
People, according to its author, is "in part truth and in part fiction [and] it now embarrasses me and I will not allow it to be reprinted; though I am still pleased that its devices work" (AYRY 22).

As the author says, the devices clearly do work in the novel and draw attention to several postmodernist concerns. In novels like Travelling People and At Swim-Two-Birds, the choice of a variety of styles involves a good deal more than simply springing from the subject matter, in fact, it draws attention to the way in which the choices of particular modes of discourse determine the nature of the reality that is described. In O’Brien’s novel, the three beginnings not only have different subjects, but are written in three different styles which are representative of different modes of realism taken from the vast repertoire of Ireland’s literary past. Literally, O’Brien makes it apparent that such choices embody distinct visions of reality, and the novel’s tendency to transgress the ontologically distinct levels of the narrative emphasises this further.

Similarly, we find the same kind of thing taking place in Travelling People. Johnson’s use of a variety of styles and narrators also implies different visions of reality, and due to their juxtaposition, which offers a perfect opportunity for contrast, we become aware of just to what extent the choice of mode determines the way in which a particular reality is constructed. Within the novel, this is paralleled by the way in which the protagonist, Henry Henry, makes the unpleasant reality
of being given a lift in a lorry full of dead dogs which are destined for a glue factory more acceptable, and distances it from himself, by reconstructing it or recreating it in the rather witty and ironic style of advertising slogans.

What becomes clear is just how the way in which we tell of reality distances us from it. For example, it has been remarked that

What he attempts, from Travelling People to See the Old Lady Decently, is to create a fictional world, which excludes referentiality and which achieves its cohesiveness only by virtue of its internal distance and artifice. Without their style, their structure, and their artifice, his novels would have little value, despite their obvious autobiographical content.

And,

Although he goes on to debunk the idea of telling lies in fiction, the idea of falsification in writing that establishes a relation to life only in distancing itself from it is central to Johnson’s work (Kanaganayakam 1985 88)

Johnson, in a sense, creates a fictional character, and situation, in order to distance himself from his own life, something that, in Albert Angelo, his next novel, will be rejected as being the use of what he calls the abhorrent objective correlative, as lying, in spite of its apparent inevitability. Travelling People, like his
later novels, is typically postmodernist in the sense that it dramatises the way in which narrative distances us from reality. It makes it clear that the only reality is the narrative itself, the word, the objective correlative, the lie. However, rather paradoxically, and most of his work involves the paradox, although it is less foregrounded in this work, the narrative continues, or travels on and tries to provide a pattern, and even suggests some kind of significance for what has passed, for what has been.

The plot of the novel is simple. His protagonist, a poorly disguised surrogate of the author, is fictionalised in an initially rather obvious way. Henry, the name is perhaps an example of later minimalist tendencies that we will find in Johnson's work, has recently graduated in philosophy from university and has decided to go on a hitch-hiking holiday to Dublin, prior to deciding the direction his life will take. Not surprisingly in a novel with such a title, this question of what direction to take as we travel through life is one of the governing motives. While in Wales on his way to the ferry at Holyhead, and after a curious encounter with the driver of a lorry carrying dead dogs to a glue factory, he is picked up by Trevor Tuckerson who offers him a summer job in a club in Wales. The experiences of the protagonist there make up the rest of the plot of the novel and are interspersed, not only with the metafictional comments and quotations from other authors that the author intimated, but with interruptions that include
biographical reminiscences about the protagonist's past life.

It should be noted here that each digression or interruption is emphatically intimated in order to draw attention to itself. Similarly, but in a rather more implicit fashion, although it is combined with the overt intimation in the introduction, the mode or style adopted in each section is also made clear. Each chapter heading introduces the opening phrase of the chapter and the mode is made clear by a variety of means which will be mentioned later.

At first glance, the plot of the novel, as such, would seem to have little to do with the postmodernist tendencies we have spoken about, but does anticipate the author's tendency towards intimate confession that will recur in many of his works. There is an undercurrent of social criticism in the novel too, even revealing a certain bitterness on the part of Johnson, related to the social and intellectual rivalry that is described during his time at the club. There is also a love story, which leads up to the brief affair of the protagonist with a young woman, Kim, who also works in the club. She, unfortunately, has been having a rather perverse kind of affair with the boss, Maurie (note the symbolic significance of the name). who dies while she masturbates him (it seems she does nothing more than this) after which, following a confrontation between Henry and his superior, they are both told to leave. In spite of statements to the contrary the young lovers will probably never meet again and the novel ends with a
summing up of what is, in part, the moral of the story: "For that matter, weren’t all of us travellers? Travelling people" (1963 296).

At first sight, such a story, and such a moral, seem rather superficial, but the novel deals with a number of significant themes at this level which are closely related to the stylistic variety and the desire to expose the mechanism that we have mentioned. For example, most of the characters in the novel are, as we have seen, travelling people, and part of the thematic significance of the novel is that they are all travelling in search of something, which is associated with some kind of paradise lost. At a superficial level, paradise is the Stromboli Club itself, with its gardens and so on. At the beginning of the novel we even find this: "The Stromboli Club sounds like Paradise" (1963 26). But Henry, the archetypal wanderer, with the recurrent motif of the river in the background (a symbol of transience), is cast out of Paradise, "‘Adam and Eve,’ he said, turning to Kim, ‘Cast out of the Garden of Gorgeous Hydrangeas’"(283), and he can be seen ultimately as searching for some kind of significance, even permanence, in his life. Considering what we have already been saying about Johnson, it could be suggested that paradise lost for Henry is indicative of themes which become paradigmatic for Johnson: alienation, decadence, the search for identity, the search for meaning.

Kanaganayakam, in his essay on this novel, suggests that Johnson never abandons the idea of meaning (1985
91), although this is a debatable point, but the essence of this novel, and what sums up part of the nature of Johnson's work in its entirety, is that meaning is never really discovered. Like Henry, Johnson continues always on the move, searching, alienated, unable to recover his paradise lost. Curiously, this is a theme that crops up again in Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry, where it is more explicitly associated with his anti-religious idea of the deception involved in suggesting that there is any kind of plan, any kind of god, any kind of order or significance in existence. Let us say, then, that in Travelling People we find the beginnings of this kind of attitude. We are only travelling people who touch and part, always moving on, choosing a direction but never finally arriving.

Of course, such a pessimistic rendering of the novel does not do justice to its humour and variety, and there is a good deal of that, or to the explicit purpose of exposing the mechanism of the novel and its ultimate consequence. If we return to the question of metafiction, the use of a variety of styles is significant in a number of ways. Not only does it invoke the literary past through the parody of Sterne, Fielding's "bills of fare" and chapter headings and so on, but he actually explores the nature of style, as Patricia Waugh puts it, "in terms of negativity" (1987 26). She notes how Johnson makes it clear that the choice of style means that we can represent certain aspects of style only at the expense of others, which is therefore also true of the earlier styles he parodies.
As we suggested earlier, he shows through Henry how, by stilising existence, we always subjectively, and inevitably linguistically construct existence.

It might be said, and it has been suggested that there is nothing fundamentally new about Johnson’s use of a variety of styles, but, according to Robert S. Ryf, although a number of the individual elements employed in the novel seem derivative, the combination of them into central substance and structure of the book is essentially a new venture - or was at that time. (1977-8 59)

While the mingling of distinctive styles is not new, and the end to which Johnson makes use of such a technique is reminiscent of O’Brien, the way in which this is linked to fundamentally metaphysical and metafictional concerns is striking. Johnson foregrounds artifice, but in such a way as to suggest that all narratives which search to provide meaning are artificial.

Again, it might be said that this takes the novel too seriously and foregrounds certain concerns to an extent to which they are not really foregrounded in the novel, but this has been done in order to show how the bases of Johnson’s later work are laid down here. A good example, which shows just to what extent these concerns are real in the novel, has been suggested, once again, by Kanaganayakam (1985 89). This is the episode when Henry decides to cut a path through the bracken to the river, which allows Johnson, on the one hand, to present several different attitudes towards the activity, suggestive of different versions, even visions of
reality, and, on the other, it provides a metaphor for one of the basic ideas in the novel, that the process is more important than the product, as Henry is described as having no specific end in view. As Bob, the gardener, says, Henry is wasting his time, but that is the point: there is no point. In the light of what we have said, this can be related to the idea that the process is the product, that there is no further significance: the process, the travelling is all there is.

There are a number of themes dealt with in a number of ways throughout the novel. The artificiality of human relations is made clear in the party narrated in the style of a film script. The way in which the media alters our conception of the world comes through when Henry sees and sometimes invents advertising slogans, and the problem of communication, of coming into any real human contact is involved throughout. As we said earlier, Johnson more or less sums up the moral of the story towards the end of the novel and this is tied to the significance of the river episode. Henry's quest, and Johnson deliberately makes use of this traditional motif, is fruitless. The novel, which is cyclical, ends where it begins, with Henry travelling on, continuing his quest. However, the questions that he asks have no answer, the decisions that he takes or choices that he makes are really arbitrary. It is at this point in the novel where the significance of what has gone before is really made explicit. We find this:

Who am I? he thought. No, don't start that again. I know very well who I am at this
moment, and it is always the particular moment that counts. I'm a hitchiker, a traveller.

For that matter, weren't all of us travellers? Travelling people.

And he goes on:

The best traveller, and the one who travelled farthest, was the one who travelled alone and decided his course for himself at all points where he was permitted by extra-human factors to do so. . . . The real way was alone, and loneliness was the fare to be paid, essential loneliness to keep oneself whole.

If one wished to pretend that loneliness did not exist, all kinds of Amusement Arcades gaped invitingly at one from the roadside wherein all forms of lying to circumvent or disguise loneliness were provided. Henry's basic maladjustment to life resulted from his inability to accept these lies . . . And yet he did accept his loneliness, in the fact, if he was nevertheless not wholly convinced that there was some hope for contact without lying.

(1963 296-97)

The metaphor which governs this passage is not original, wanderers travelling on the road of life, but Johnson's resigned pessimism really comes through in what is essentially and indirect interior monologue of Henry's thoughts. Only the present counts, and only travelling is possible until, he says at one point, the end of the journey, which is death. In spite of the lies
we tell ourselves to the contrary, this journey is undertaken alone. We are alone in a meaningless world where only death can put an end to our meaningless journey. All that is left to us is to "Travel on," (298). However, where to? is a question that the individual does not really answer for himself either. The penultimate scene in the novel involves Henry being offered a lift to London simply because he scratches his thigh. The absurdity of this is obvious, but underlying the exaggeration is a sincere belief in the arbitrariness of it all, in the ultimate chaos behind everything: "suddenly his whole life was changed. Merely through scratching his thigh" (299).

This is all rather reminiscent of Beckett, and the influence is obvious throughout the novel at many different levels. However, one remarkable coincidence is related to what is Henry's idea of truth:

Diagrammatically, Henry's idea of truth was a sphere, perfect, inviolate, in which he existed: his recent travelling had shown him that this sphere existed in space, in another element which was limitless, not truth itself, but not antithetical to it either. (297)

Now consider the following from Beckett's Murphy:

Murphy's mind pictured itself as a large hollow sphere, hermetically closed to the universe without. This was not an impoverishment, for it excluded nothing that it did not itself contain. Nothing ever had been, was or would be in the universe outside
it but was actually present as virtual, or actual, or virtual rising into actual, or actual falling into virtual, in the universe. inside it (in Calder 1983 54)

The similarity is striking and is suggestive of an obviously postmodern concern regarding the fact that each individual's reality is ontologically distinct. This is also related to Henry and, therefore, Johnson's solipsism in the novel, a tendency that recurs in all his novels. At the same time, we are brought back to Johnson's remarks about taking as his subject the inside of his own skull: the only reality for Johnson and distinct from that of anyone else.

This final statement of belief, or unbelief, in the novel seems rather ingenuous, perhaps even clumsy, as it is not really in keeping with the ironic and sometimes flippant tone of the novel, but for that very reason it stands out from the rest and sums up what Johnson's work is about. One other related point of interest also appears in the final part of the novel when we find the following:

Travelling itself was important, of course, thought Henry, but the most important thing was the having been. . . . Especially the having been. In fact, anything was all right as long as it had passed. All's well that ends. (300)

This parody of Shakespeare embodies a rather pessimistic attitude, suggesting, once more, that we live in a world without significance in spite of the tendency to
apportion meaning to past events: there is only the here and now and death is the only real end. Ending where he began in this cyclical narrative, Johnson refuses to provide the conventional consolation of literature.

Travelling People, we have said, did not please Johnson and he refused to have it reprinted, but the postmodernist concerns which are the basis of his art are all there. The narratological and stylistic devices he makes use of will be discussed in the corresponding section, but we can briefly sum up what he is doing in a few words. The novel is an example of metafiction in its most explicit sense where, from the beginning, as we have seen, the author, or the persona he adopts, enters into a dialogue with the reader who is overtly dramatised in the manner of Sterne. At the same time we can say that there is also a dialogue with form, as the overt statement made at the beginning of the novel makes clear, thus suggesting that the novel foregrounds its nature as oppositional discourse. In a more implicit manner, the mixture of styles and voices, in a negative manner, draws attention to the possibilities as well as limitations of each mode adopted. Johnson deliberately disrupts the frame he creates in his digressions and interruptions, and both implicitly and explicitly, points to form and language while searching for appropriate and accurate methods of representation, ranging from stream of consciousness and indirect interior monologue, to letters, a journal, even a film scenario, as well as the overriding ironic third person narrative.
Johnson also draws attention to the technological fact of the book, introducing typographical devices like the grey and black pages to indicate the loss of consciousness and death of Maurie, and the fictional nature of the narrative is further emphasised by interrupting the narrative continually, referring to his characters as puppets, making up for the limitations of his character and so on. The novel, too, is interspersed with intertextuality, which also places it in an oppositional stance to tradition, referring back to other texts which deal with travelling. And on the whole the parodic nature of the novel leads us to the conclusion that it is typically postmodernist in that, by its use of parody, it installs, but at the same time contests, the traditions and conventions it makes use of.

Judith Mackrell makes an interesting remark about this novel which is enlightening as regards Johnson's opinion that his novel was disappointing because of its mixture of fact and fiction. She draws attention to the fact that the main body of narrative tends towards social comment ans description on the one hand, while the interruptions expose artifice. There is a mixture of formal play which is dominated by what she sees as a rather traditional story, which resolves itself into a kind of contradiction: the novel often examines social and emotional problems sincerely, only to be undermined by the exposing of the formal artifice. For Mackrell this tension is not resolved and finally pulls the novel apart (1985 48).
In the end, *Travelling People* is a rather derivative work, but is so deliberately. Traditional themes (paradise lost and the wanderer) at first sight seem to be included rather naively in the novel, but the emphasis on their metaphorical significance finally draws attention to metafictional problems: the tendency to structure reality according to patterns even when there is none and so on. Johnson deliberately undermines this pattern too by having his protagonist come full cycle back to where he started, disappointing expectations by not letting him arrive at any destination. This, combined with the formal and stylistic play of the novel, alterations within categories of discourse and so on, make up a novel, which perhaps less forcefully than later works, is an example of Johnson’s oppositional discourse of unbelief. In the light of this we can say that this curious juxtaposition of familiar styles and innovative use of traditional themes is all part of a process of defamiliarisation in the novel. However, as we said, Johnson was not happy with the end result, for the rather puritanical reasons mentioned earlier, although he believed himself to have found the right direction to take in his following novel.
2.2. Albert Angelo.

Johnson wrote:

I really discovered what I should be doing with Albert Angelo (1964) where I broke through the English disease of the objective correlative to speak truth directly if solipsistically in the novel form, and heard my own small voice. (AYRY 22)

This statement suggests that this novel will continue Johnson's dialogue with form and convention and relates back to what seems to have been the problem of his earlier novel: that it was too indirect, that it involved the creation of a fiction in order to distance himself from his subject, that the narrative of Henry Henry was only an objective correlative for his own concerns. However, we saw earlier that he tends to do this in all of his works (Kanaganayakam 1985) and, initially at any rate, Albert Angelo is no exception and even bears comparison with the earlier novel: we find a fictional character and his fictional world, descriptions and anecdotes about the character's past in London, social criticism, the solipsistic element of the protagonist's interior monologue, the problem of the meaning of existence and man's tendency to look for and impose patterns on life, and at a formal level we find the variety of styles, modes and typographical devices, intertextuality, and so on. However, this time, the house of fiction that Johnson designs (and this in itself is ironic considering that the protagonist,
Johnson's alter-ego, is an architect) is quite literally demolished.

The author himself drew particular attention to the innovative techniques that he made use of in the novel and these will be discussed later, however, the most striking fact about this novel is the fact that the structure he creates is undermined when he interrupts the narrative to write:

---fuck all this lying what im really trying to write about is writing not all this stuff about architecture trying to say something about writing about my writing im my hero though what a useless appellation my first character then im trying to say something about me through him albert an architect when whats the point in covering up covering up covering over pretending pretending i can say anything through him that is anything that i would be interested in saying. (1987 167)

The novel has a five-part dramatic or musical structure (Prologue, Exposition, Development Disintegration, Coda), and this begins the section called "Disintegration." It explicitly refers to Johnson's belief that telling stories is telling lies and is in keeping with what we find prior to this moment in the novel, where there are allusions to some of Johnson's major literary preoccupations. For example there is a deliberate attempt to create an analogy between the work of the architect and the art of the author, and the technical devices and changes in style are also
indicative of metafictional concerns. With reservations, David Lodge suggests that,

Though Johnson uses a number of experimental expressive techniques (simultaneous presentation of dialogue and thought in double columns, holes cut in the pages so that the reader can see what is coming), the narrative reads like realistic fiction. (1971 12)

This is not, in fact, the case as, due to the changes in style, the use of unusual technical devices and other metafictional aids, it is being made clear that the reality of the narrative is a fictional construct. What Lodge probably refers to is the fact that the content or the story that is told adheres to the realistic conventions of verisimilitude. Prior to continuing a discussion of the technical and more postmodernist concerns of this novel, let us briefly describe that content.

For the most part, Albert Angelo tells the story of a young architect living in London, who, faced with the problems of his profession and his inability to find employment within it, is forced to work as a supply teacher in tough London schools. Albert is described by Lodge as "a fairly familiar kind of English post-war hero, or anti-hero: young frustrated, classless, mildly delinquent, disappointed in love" (1971 12) and the novel tells of his problems at the school, his difficulties in working at his drawing-board, his failed love-affair, his nights out with a friend, the protagonists social concerns about education, the pupils
attitudes towards him and so on. However, the novel does not really read in this way; to sum it up like this requires a good deal of abstraction, and fails to consider other concerns which are implicit in the text.

Like all of his novels, *Albert Angelo*, is about how we order what is past, or rather the all to human tendency to order that past, in spite of the fragmentary and chaotic nature of existence, and to give it meaning when there is none. This arranging of the past in order to find significance is related to a basic question which is implicit throughout the novel: who am I? This is first made clear in the epigraph taken from Beckett's *The Unnamable*, which reads:

> When I think, that is to say, no, let it stand, when I think of the time I've wasted with these bran-dips, beginning with Murphy, who wasn't even the first, when I had me, on the premises, within easy reach, tottering under my own skin and bones, real ones, rotting with solitude and neglect, till I doubted my own existence, and even still, today, I have no faith in it, so that I have to say, when I speak, Who speaks, and seek, and so on and similarly for all the other things that happen to me and for which someone must be found, for things that happen must have someone to happen to, someone must stop them. (in Johnson 1987 5)

This gives the reader a clue regarding how to read the text and explicitly draws attention to the tendency of
authors to write of their self in the guise of another: their I becomes he. The tone of voice is markedly similar to that of Johnson’s “Disintegration” section and both make explicit what will be implicit throughout the novel, that Johnson is writing of himself in the guise of another. It is as with his later novel Trawl, “I . . always with I . . one starts from . . one and I share the same character . . are one” (1968 9).

The theme of the novel, then, is the nature of the self, how one tells one’s self and how one tends to order experience in order to make what one tells meaningful, although the authority of the narrative that is ourselves is questioned. These themes are implicit throughout the novel from the beginning, even in the playful changing of pronouns or person which governs the structure of the narrative in the “Exposition” section. Although we move from first person singular to third person plural, stopping at all the other pronouns on the way, it becomes increasingly clear that it is always I, always Albert, or Johnson who is telling his self.

Another related theme is that of naming, or rather meaningful naming: “On the very special occasion of Albert’s coming to number twenty-nine it happened to be Luke: Luke to give him a name pregnant with significance” (14). The fact that the title of the novel itself is a name, in this context, should also be significant, and later we find that a large part of the novel is about who Albert is, particularly the essays written by the pupils about what they think of Mr. Albert. Indeed, their narratives, and the novel as a
whole are about the nature of narratives. The essays are, in one sense, instances of how we organise our impressions into narratives in order to explain or understand them, and also give examples of ontologically distinct versions of the same reality, of who is Albert, which in the end undermines the idea of their being any single or authoritative view.

These themes will be investigated further in due course, but what should be clear by now is that the novel is not a straightforwardly realistic narrative. Even Lodge makes it clear that Johnson, in this novel, breaks with conventional narrative, but he sees him as expressing his disillusionment with the form rather than investigating its possibilities for interpreting experience (1971 13). However, the novel does just that: Johnson is exploring the possibilities of different kinds of narrative but denies himself the right to authority or the truth. The novel draws attention to the limitations of narrative, particularly when the writer seems forced to depend on the objective correlative.

Lodge seems rather dissatisfied with the "Disintegration" section, too. He writes that Johnson "goes on to expose and destroy the fictiveness of the narrative he has elaborately created, telling us the 'true' facts behind the story," which is an "extreme strategy for achieving an effect of sincerity and authenticity, though coming as late in the work it is more of a gesture than an achievement" (1971 13). What Lodge implies is that the disintegration comes unexpectedly at the end, whereas, on the contrary, it
is, in fact, carefully prepared for. Johnson overtly leaves traces at the level of both form and content that make it clear that his story is a fabrication so that the disintegration simply makes more explicit what should already be clear, making the sham self-evident, making the nature of the objective correlative totally obvious. It is the dynamic of the narrative then, the way in which as we read the text it gradually dawns on us that it is all a fabrication, that foregrounds metanarrative concerns. The novel is not so much about Albert Angelo, or B.S Johnson, but about how a self is told.

This is also the view of Nicolas Tredell who also discusses the impact of the interruption. He rejects Bernard Bergonzi's view that it is a "brutal interruption of fictive illusion (in Tredell 1985 64) and states that it extends and pushes to the limit what has already been taking place. Contrary to what Lodge and Bergonzi suggest the novel is not a good story but "a demonstration; an exploration, an expansion of fictional conventions and the play of discourses. It is an investigation of the way stories are made" (1985 64), and therefore of the ways in which we know or tell reality, even the reality that is the self. Tredell goes on to draw attention to the devices that Johnson employs throughout the novel in order to achieve this and declares that

All the devices of Albert Angelo, conventional and "experimental," come, in the reading process, into a state of dynamic activity,
playing against and de-automatizing each other, disrupting "organic unity," impeding and displacing the narrative flow. (1985 64)

Just what these devices are will be clarified a little later, but the basic point we want to make here is that denaturalisation or defamiliarisation takes place throughout the novel at every level owing to the deliberate variety and juxtaposition of styles and techniques. Their use is justified as exploring the possibilities for mimesis but, paradoxically, we are increasingly aware of their artificiality.

Earlier, we said that one of the themes of the text was related to the idea of naming, or how we call things. In the novel, this is done in such a way so as to parody the way in which a world beyond the text is invoked. Tredell writes, "the range of methods highlights the realistic as well as the experimental devices" (65), and we find that the use of names to imply authenticity is undermined as we become aware that it is yet another way of telling lies. In fact, virtually every convention for telling reality is undermined in the novel, and we are prepared for this from the outset. The text itself foregrounds the fact that it is all rhetorical technique and each part of the novel is indicative of the fact that it is impossible to get away from naming and telling stories, or, what is the same, telling lies. The final disintegration is expected for other reasons too: one such reason is the fact that the section heading is announced in advance in the contents, and another is due to the fact that the
whole novel is a series of interruptions and stylistic shifts which defamiliarise the telling of, what Lodge calls, a realistic story. There is even a false prolepsis which occurs towards the end of the "Development" of the novel, when holes are cut in the pages and we read of the violent death of someone, whom we assume to be Albert, but who later turns out to be Christopher Marlowe. This is indicative of the way in which the novel continually disappoints expectations and anticipates the disintegration at the end.

As we have said, the novel is full of different kinds of naming and telling stories and, as Tredell points out, we are continually made aware of the metatext even prior to the disintegration, as Albert's story is always at one remove from us due to the foregrounding of the telling, achieved through the stylistic variety. One of these shifts in style occurs when we find the students' essays about Albert, where the telling of Albert is taken out of the official narrator's hands and is replaced by the disorder and disruption of the pupils' discourse.

Here we are provided with a series of ontologically distinct visions of reality, a series of character sketches or narratives of Albert, which essentially parody the styles of realistic writing and which, to a certain degree undermine the authority of the main narrative. This undermining of the authority of official discourse is, in fact, one of the major features of this novel; not only because of the almighty apsisiposis which interrupts the narrative, but because it is
embodied in a number of *mises en abyme* throughout the novel. An example of this is the intromission of the students' unofficial essays themselves, but another, perhaps even clearer, example is when Albert tells the students of the formation of the earth and, on being interrupted by the unofficial discourse of one of them, "'Ow does 'e know about the sun and the middle of the earth? 'As 'e bin there?" undermines the authority of his official narrative himself within his own official discourse: "True, how do I bloody well know? Might have been a ball of stinking shit for all I know, a ball of stinking shit. So? You don't have to believe in anything to teach it?" (1987 75). This sums up what the novel is basically about and anticipates the author's overt undermining of his narrative later.

Most of the techniques used in the novel are intended to highlight these problems in narrative as well as the relation between fiction and reality. At one point, Johnson even introduces an objet trouvé, a fortuneteller's card, rather than describe it: "It is further from the truth to describe it than simply to reproduce it" (*AYRY* 23); thus highlighting the fact that telling distorts the truth. In one sense, we find that Johnson makes use of realistic conventions like order, sequence, origin and causes within a variety of different styles, but at the same time they are undermined by postmodernist modes of subversion and disruption (*Tredell* 1985 66-9).

The disruption of the end of the novel, anticipated by the students' discourse taking over from the
teacher's in their essays, parallels the way in which their interruptions disrupt the teaching of the class. The teacher's authority, as teacher, is undermined in the same way as Johnson's authority, as author, is. One of the basic ironies of the novel is that it ends, not with the voice of authority, that of the author, but with the disruptive discourse of a student. We find a complete inversion of the hierarchy, then, which implies a sincere criticism of the conventional formality of novelistic discourse.

Related to this at a different level, within the story, is the discussion that takes place between Albert and Miss Crossthwaite regarding the speech of the children. The proposition is "That These Children's Speech is Bad" (138), with Miss Crossthwaite for and Albert against. Albert remarks that "any standardisation was quite wasted, even ludicrous" (139), and we can infer that such an attitude is equally applicable to the novel as such. So, in spite of the fact that the aposiopesis restores the author's authority after the students essays it is this bad speech that ends the novel: the low style of the students ends the coda and is further suggestive of disruption and the failure of authority in a manner that is final. In fact, the restoration of the author's authority in the "Disintegration" section is rather ironic and paradoxical anyway as, not only does Johnson explicitly undermine the previous authority the fiction had, but his discourse itself becomes "self-subverting, fragmentary, erratic" (Tredell 69)
The novel is about how a self can be told, is in fact a metaphor of that process, but shows that all narratives are inextricably linked to fiction. Johnson deliberately makes us aware of the inevitability of using structures, conventions and devices and "enhances our awareness and opens up possibilities in these respects" (Tredell 1985 69).

As we said earlier, Johnson deliberately leaves his house of fiction in ruins in this novel. David John Davies writes of it that he is "trying to use fiction to reproduce life as closely as possible and, in his inevitable failure to succeed, he extends our notions of the possibilities of the novel" (1985 75). The point is that he makes us aware of the relation between truth and fiction and overtly tells the truth about that relation. That relation is also that between what he tells and his self which are not the same. There can only be versions of the self, just as Murphy and the others are versions of Beckett, just as Albert is a version of B.S. Johnson, just as changes in style and person, even in point of view (the shift to that of the pupils) provide different versions of the self. None is authoritative, all are fictions. The disintegration simply provides a didactic statement of the fact.

Albert Angelo is an example of metafiction. The devices it uses continually remind the reader of the existence of the book as artefact. The reader is made to consider the conventional nature of the text and the contextual basis of its meaning (see Waugh 96-7). While this is achieved through the innovative interweaving of
narrative techniques within the fiction (use of pseudo-theatrical conventions for the presentation of dialogue, student essays, *objets trouvés*, stream of consciousness and dialogue in separate columns on the same page, a poem, holes in the pages, intertextuality, changing person, and so on), the most overt metafictional act takes place in the *disintegration*. There as we have said, the artifice breaks down and the author steps out from behind his characters, transgressing ontologically distict levels of narrative to speak the truth directly. However, a curious paradox is involved in that the *almighty aposiopesis* is clearly a rhetorical device. The irony here is that Johnson is unable to get away from rhetoric and telling stories. Not only that, but a large part of the section simply retells the true version of the fictionalised story as well substituting the right names for the fictional ones. Johnson, ironically and deliberately, shows that telling and naming is inevitable.

Judith Mackrell is aware of the paradoxical nature of this work, something that we find in everything Johnson writes. She draws attention to the curious dual-purpose of using so many styles, on the one hand extending the mimetic range of the novel but at the same time disrupting the narrative and alienating us from the character (1985 48). She highlights Johnson's desire to maintain the diametric opposition between truth and fiction, deliberately emphasising the inadequacy of his fictional world when confronted with reality (52). In fact she is rather disappointed by the novel when she
says that his "puritanical notions of 'truthfulness' prevent him from fully acknowledging or even comprehending his own fiction" (52), which she finds moving in itself but deprives her of the satisfaction of narrative resolution. However, that is, yet again, the point of Johnson's narrative, to avoid the consolation of literature. The kind of order and resolution that fiction provides cannot make up for "the loneliness . . . the lack of loving" (1987 168), but paradoxically here draws attention to that distinct lack in the author's life. Patrick Parrinder is also aware of the sincerity involved in the novel, but emphasises rather what he calls the exercise in self-abasement involved in the essays on what I think of Mr. Albert (1987 121).

Really what we have here is an attempt to describe different levels of perception, different ways of looking at reality and the self (consider the different versions of reality which the different columns of dialogue and interior monologue on the same page represent), while at the same time making serious statements about the education system, violence in society, literature and himself. As we have said, Johnson speaks of these things didactically in "Disintegration," but we also find his concerns reflected within the fiction itself.

From the very beginning, we find Johnson undermining the authority even of the mode he adopts, as is the case when, using the dramatic mode of theatrical presentation, he adds said after the name of the speaker (Albert said, Joseph said, Luke said), precisely in
order to draw attention to the fact that he is mixing modes and that what he is representing is artificial, fictional. This becomes clearer when he begins to mix modes and thus draws attention to style as style. As in *Travelling People*, in a negative manner, the mixing of modes draws attention to the limitations of each style, to what has to be left out, as well as to its possibilities for mimesis. Moreover, the implicitly metafictional nature of the narrative is conveyed by making occasional references to the process of writing, often in terms of what the author leaves out in deliberate paralipsis: "Joseph had oh many other friends," and "Someone lived upstairs" (1987 14) draw attention to the author leaving out detail and refusing to describe.

Implicit throughout the novel is the analogy between the architect and the writer and a curious attitude to the novel is implied when Albert says of his designs, "I do it for its own sake. You have to do something for its own sake" (13). Broadly speaking, this is related to the idea that the writer, like the architect, is struggling with tactics, with structure and form, and, in the case of the writer, doing it for its own sake, something which should not be taken too literally considering what he says later, suggests that form and structure is the result rather than a means to an end. Hence, Albert Angelo is about the nature of the forms of narrative

As we said, Johnson juxtaposes different kinds of narrative throughout the novel in order to make it clear
that the mode adopted transforms the nature of that reality, covering up the fact that, in spite of continual changes of perspective and person, it is the author who is behind it all. The reference to an almighty apophasis, is suggestive of the god-like nature of the author, who is free to randomly interrupt or put an end to events, as Johnson does in the novel, and who ironically gives form and significance to the formless, this last comment tying in with the use of the author-architect analogy.

The use of intertextuality in this novel, when Johnson simply quotes directly from a text that Albert is reading without prior introduction, is indicative of a kind of overlapping of distinct ontological zones, where someone else's reality begins to form part of the character's reality. In the novel as a whole, we find how different realities mingle and overlap on many occasions, for example when the fortune-teller's card is reproduced, ultimately making a statement about the relationship between fiction and reality (the limitations of narrative and description), and, in the same way as the previous example, suggests how, someone else's reality can be distorted or transformed when it becomes part of our own. In fact, the disintegration in the novel also draws attention to this relation between fiction and reality, but not simply in order to destroy the illusion, but to show that there is a link between the fiction and the author's reality in spite of his pessimistic awareness of its shortcomings.

However, Johnson, as always, is suspicious of any
kind of order and makes it clear within Albert's story as well as in the aposiopesis:

There was a tremendous need for man to impose a pattern on life, Albert thought, to turn wood into planks or blocks or whatever. Inanimate life is always moving towards disintegration, towards chaos, and man is moving in the opposite direction, towards the imposition of order: as the animals are, too, but to a far lesser extent. . . .

The past of a man's life could always be controlled in this way, be seen to have a fixed order because it was passed, had passed: almost always, that is, for when it could not be controlled then madness was not far away. When something was passed, it was fixed, one could come to terms with it; always the process of imposing the pattern, of holding back the chaos. (1987 133)

There is something vaguely reminiscent of Travelling People, where Henry also speaks of the comfort we feel in contemplating that which is past, because it has passed. Johnson, suspicious of the consolation that this brings, accepts man's need to order his past experience, but, in the novel, dramatises the fact that in doing so he creates a fiction.

Albert's story clearly embodies all that we later find explicitly and didactically expressed in the aposiopesis, where we find a sincere expression of the author's intention. Essentially, Johnson enters into a
kind of critical debate or dialogue with the reader, although it is ultimately rather solipsistic, with both voices clearly belonging to the author. He explains that the novel

is about the fragmentariness of life, too, attempts to reproduce the moment to moment fragmentariness of life, my life, and to echo it in technique, the fragmentariness, a collage made of the fragments of my own life, the poor odds and sods, the bric-a-brac, a thing composed of, then. (169)

And earlier he writes:

I'm trying to say something not tell a story telling stories is telling lies and I want to tell the truth about me about my experience about my truth about my truth to reality about sitting here writing looking out across Claremont Square trying to say something about the writing and nothing being an answer to the loneliness to the lack of loving. (167-68)

This is a clearly postmodernist novel that embodies its own criticism but is not such a negative assertion about the possibilities as some critics would suggest. In fact, Johnson really sums up what he has already done in the novel, which has been to reflect the fragmentary nature of experience, the tendency to order past experience, and he has shown just to what extent choice of mode affects the nature of the reality described. He clearly marks the difference between fiction and reality, but by so doing, explains also the relation
between the two.

In the "Disintegration," Johnson goes on at some length, but suffice it to say that we become aware that Albert's story has been an oblique representation of the author's selves, just as the epigraph suggested it would be. It explains the "salutary" effect of exorcising the past through writing, what has been distorted, what has been left out, his compulsive yet agonising desire to tell the truth as well as his didactic intention to make a comment about the possibilities of the novel and an open criticism of the education system.

However, the novel does not end there, and the almighty author decides finally to follow convention and arbitrarily tie up the loose ends for his readers. In the "Coda" the disruptive, unofficial discourse of low English appears once more in order to describe a funeral, presumably Albert's, once he has, not unexpectedly, been tossed into the canal by his resentful pupils. This "display of funeralization" literally buries Albert (who significantly gives his name to the novel) and the novel itself: "bury the loose ends, the lot" (176). However, Johnson is not burying the novel as a form as many critics have considered, but, rather than turning into an exponent of the literature of exhaustion, really draws attention to the nature of the "arbitrary and constricting limits of the conventional novel" (176). The "bodey was all painted up gust like someone on the stage" and is "Just a shocking display of funeralization on behalf of the furm that was calld in" [sic] (180). Here Johnson, ironically draws
attention to what the novel, as such, tends to do, paint and distort reality and, as he has done throughout the novel, sums up the truth about fiction.

So, once again, form is the result in Johnson's novel. It is about its own coming into being about the nature of narratives, about how the individual tells himself. There is an implicit dialogue with form and convention due to the deliberate alternating of styles, which, as he had done previously in Travelling People, rejects the idea of one style for one novel. His rhetoric is anti-rhetorical, and he inverts the idea of the authoritative text, continually undermining the many versions of the truth that are provided. Albert Angelo is oppositional discourse which embodies the unbelief of Johnson, reacting against the arbitrary constrictions of the conventional novel and ultimately telling us the truth about fiction and the writing process. The subject of the novel, then, is itself, and it becomes a metaphor for how we order experience. Really, we are provided with a number of ontologically distinct visions of reality, not least the radically distinct worlds of the past and the way in which we have organised it. This will be, once more, the theme of his next novel, how in ordering experience we distort and fictionalise it, but, in Albert Angelo, the technique has been to install the fictional world, using a variety of fictional modes, and then overtly subvert it. This is Johnson's oppositional discourse of unbelief, where the author struggles to describe the real in terms of the fictional. Paradoxically, in spite of admitting the limitations of
the form, Johnson really exploits the possibilities of the novel, takes us beyond the arbitrary conventions, and tells much of the nature of fiction.
2.3. Trawl.

Johnson's next novel, Trawl, deals with the same themes of the flux and chaos of the author's past life and how memory tends to impose patterns in order to give it order and significance. It is also, yet again, about the inside of his own skull, how that is the only reality, and we find that reality and experience are equated with the act of writing, with the act of telling one's self. Hence, the narrator's memories of the past are continually interspersed with comments on the act of remembering and the act of writing, and throughout the novel there is a constant struggle between the random chaos of his memories of the past and the tendency towards ordering and giving significance to it. So, this novel, is, yet again, about the relation between past events and how they are seen in the present; it is about the way in which we fictionalise the past.

Of the novel, Johnson himself wrote: "Trawl (1966) is all interior monologue, a representation of the inside of my mind but at one stage removed; the closest one can come in writing" (AYRY 23), admitting once again that his subject is the inside of his own skull and, in exploring the inner workings of the mind, he investigates the possibilities of art to order and shape past experience.

This novel, however, is solipsistic in the extreme (as he says, it is interior monologue) and represents a faithful autobiography of the author without fictional correlates (Mackrell 1985 53). The setting of the
novel is on board a trawler, where the narrator spends his time thinking and writing about his past in order to come to terms with his present "loneliness and lack of loving," as he says in Albert Angelo. Here there is no attempt to find a surrogate for the author and from the beginning we are told: "I . . always with I . . one starts from . . one and I share the same character . . are one" (1968 9). Here the fictionalised self of the novel, one, and the author's self are directly equated, and, equally directly, he explains the governing metaphor of the work: "Why do I trawl the delicate mesh of my mind over the snagged and broken floor of my past?" (24). As he wrote himself, "the rhythms of the language of Trawl attempted to parallel those of the sea, while much use of the trawl itself as a metaphor for the way the subconscious mind may appear to work" (AYRY 23), and, yet again, the author gives the clue to the theme of his work in a rather curious epigram: "Who are you and to whom are you telling this?" (1968 7). It is how one tells the self and the nature of that self that are being explored here.

According to Judith Mackrell, the novel reveals only the "depths of his own self-absorption" (1985 3), but this is not unexpected, considering the subject matter. Moreover, in spite of the commitment to autobiography, the novel is full of comments about the nature of narrative. But the value of this novel really lies in the way in which it investigates the pain of emotional suffering, the painful process of facing one's self, of remembering, without providing the consolation
of anthropomorphic human values. In fact, the novel is paradoxical in the sense that it inevitably tends towards the imposition of human values to give meaning to the past, while at the same time rejecting these same values as false. As Mackrell puts it, he:

Fears that the development of coherence in his memories, as well as the development of an imaginative apprehension of the lives of other people, is the result of invention only and a denial of the fragmentation of the real memories; he reminds himself that he is irretrievably locked in his own ignorance and subjectivity. (1985 53)

Therefore, the novel itself tends towards fragmentation with continual interruptions and hesitations, the representation of the mental process proceeding in a forced, disjointed manner, which often makes the reader feel uncomfortable. As in the earlier novel, Johnson deliberately provides us with aposiopeses in order to undermine his narrative, even suggesting that the whole exercise is virtually pointless: "What bloody relevance has a sodding lardy cake to me now?" (105); or "Compensating -- though, again, what use are bloody reasons?" (93). Or if not pointless, the process of narrating his past, which is foregrounded here, may provide him with reasons that deceive: it all may be some sort of self-deception: "no, I am deceived, misled" (123). In some ways, in this novel, Johnson is reminiscent of T.S. Eliot, not only as regards the sea imagery, which we also find in a poem like "Prufrock,"
but because the whole novel tends to be telling us "That
is not what I meant at all. that is not it, at all," or
"It is impossible to say just what I mean!" As we have
seen, this tendency to riddle the text with apophases
is indicative of the continuing dialogue with form,
always present in his work. He both explicitly and
implicitly rejects the telling of stories and
conventional fabrication, but finds himself inevitably
moving towards them, only to abruptly interrupt himself
to return to the dully accurate precision of his
solipsistic description of the mental process itself.
This back and forth movement recurs, wavelike,
throughout the novel.

The narrator presents himself at the outset in
total isolation, "down here" (9), painfully sea-sick,
separated from the rest of the crew, not only
physically, but because he is not one of them.
Paradoxically, they call him a pleasure-tripper, when
there is only pain and isolation. Due to the way in
which he describes himself at the beginning, we are
reminded of the idea of his being sealed inside the
sphere of his own head, and there is a curious contrast
between the moments down below when he describes his
past, and the moments on deck when he is able to
describe his surroundings and the members of the crew.
This movement from inside to outside is another of the
significant wave-like motions that appear in the text.

As in Travelling People, Johnson makes use of a
fairly traditional theme, even as Conrad and Melville,
when we find the protagonist on a voyage of self-
discovery. However, the real journey only parallels the literal voyage in search for fish, and the analogy governing the texts suggests that, the author’s mind searches for and recovers memories in the rather random fashion that the trawler trawls for the fish. However, again, as in Travelling People, the journey comes full circle, the voyager returns to where he has begun, and we find him, finally, returning to his "hermetically sealed consciousness and the novel ends as it began with his sense of perpetual self-imprisonment" (Davies 1985 75). Davies remarks that the reason Johnson trawls in his past is that

the mind compulsively returns to the past and
the book itself is a metaphor of a mind at
odds with itself, one that cannot rest until
it has laid to rest the ghosts of its earlier
self. Indeed the mind works under its own
compulsion. (1985 75)

As the narrator of the novel remarks at the end of the novel it is "as though I have at last paid off some vast emotional debt that I had incurred through all my years" (201), but as it always seems with Johnson, the true reason for this compulsion to remember is to come to terms with his isolation, to understand how it came about.

Pain is at the heart of all of Johnson’s work. Just as the pain of his sea-sickness permeates the novel, we are constantly reminded of the pain of having been betrayed in love, the pain of solitude and lack of love. Clearly, there is something cathartic about what is an
exercise in confession, but in spite of the suggestion of hope at the prospect of returning to his new love Ginnie at the end of the voyage, this is finally undermined by the turn full circle, back inwards into the solitude of the self. Johnson's puritanical dedication to truth means that he must always return to the only truth he knows, the isolated self, in a world which he refuses to interpret in terms of traditional moral values. Once more the paradox: while someone like Judith Mackrell believes the novel "rejects the search for pattern and meaning in his memories and accepts only the cathartic value of sifting through his past" (1985 53), the catharsis, as we have seen, is in fact denied. If she admits that Johnson denies the validity of fiction as he continually "[calls] a halt to this emergence of substance and coherence" (53), then the end of the novel should also be seen as calling a halt to hope and significance suggested by having paid his emotional debt and his return to Ginnie. What happens is that Johnson does call a halt: yet another almighty apsioiposis interrupts his narrative to return to "... I, always with I . . . . . one always starts with I . . . . . . And ends with I" (205). The novel ends as it begins with the author inevitably locked within his isolated self.

Up to now, most of what we have said about the novel is not very suggestive of its being postmodernist, but although it is autobiography, we should recall that for Johnson autobiography became a kind of metafiction in itself. The protagonist is the protagonist as writer,
so that the dramatisation of the narrator's remembering becomes the dramatisation of the process of writing itself: the text and the metatext become fused as one (see Splendore 1985 94).

Essentially, Trawl is a self-begetting novel in the most obvious sense of the word as it tells of its own coming into being while telling the story of an author writing a novel which is the product we finally read. Clearly, the content of the novel is this process of remembering which is explicitly related to the way in which one is able to narrate the self. Johnson is very wary of the subjective nature of all that he says and sees not only that selection due to importance is a purely personal opinion, but is also aware that the past is informed by the present, distorted by it. The present self, therefore, embellishes the memories of that past self. Related to this is the continual awareness of the contrast between belief or supposition and fact, and the narrator is continual stating that he must suppose or presume. The result is that the past and the present rendering of that past are ontologically distinct worlds. In fact, the narrator's awareness of alternative renderings and alternative choices suggests that the past, which is one's self, is plural. Even more, the rather random way in which personal associations bring memories back to the narrator are indicative of the way in which the self that one tells is equally random, plural, relative.

Throughout the narrative Johnson makes statements like this one:
So much of this is presumption on my part. There are ways of checking these things: but I cannot do so here and it would be too tedious in any case. This does not have to be a documentary. Dates are rarely important. The question that I must now ask may be significant, is likely to be important: why did I not return with my school to London?

(63-64)

The narrator doubts the value of the choices that are made in the narrative and suggests the ontologically distinct nature of his past experience and the remembered experience. In the end his life is a matter of presumption, purely and simply. This text is clearly metafictional, and in a manner that was to be repeated years later by Salman Rushdie in *Midnight's Children*, we see how it is personal significance that counts, not the accuracy of dates and place. As he writes later:

> everything is relevant only to me, relative only to me, to be seen only from my eyes, solipsism is the only truth: can be the only truth: a thing is so only because I think it to be so: if I do not think it to be so, then it is not so: this must be the only truth: belief does not arise. (193)

This simultaneous narrative retrospectively orders past experience in order to give it significance, but only to later retract and deny that these happenings had significance: they just happened. However, the mind remorselessly and continually asks itself questions:
"Perhaps that would be the kindest assumption: that she did not know that I could return, and that I wished to return. What other explanations can there be? ... I must think harder" (64). Here we see how the remembering and therefore the writing process is emphasised.

Earlier we mentioned that Johnson's attitudes resembled Beckett's in many respects, and in Trawl we find another example. The novel once more reflects the anxiety of the individual to express his self while, at the same time, being convinced of his inability to do so. The novel shows how we clothe nothingness with narrative due to our inability to be silent. Faced with the prospect of the meaninglessness of existence the self compulsively covers up the nothingness with narratives.

Johnson continually refers to the dichotomy between what he believes to have happened and the facts. At one point he explains:

There is a fault in my method, there must be, or so it seems, ... I create my own world in the image of that which was, in the past: from a defective memory, from recollections which must be partial: this is not necessarily truth, may even be completely misleading, at best is only a nearness, a representation.

(176)

Yet again he emphasises that, even with this method, which is an attempt to faithfully represent the inside of his mind as directly as possible, as in any narrative, the result is a fiction. He recounts the
facts, but only as he remembers them, which results in distortion and fictionalisation. It is a creation, not a recreation, a representation which is ontologically distinct from what actually took place, and which may not even be the truth. At the end of the novel, Johnson goes on to further consider the difference between an experience and writing about it, which, for him, can be equated with the difference between the past and the remembered past. In writing about that past the tendency to look for reasons when one can only know that one is. He writes:

The lifting of this --images fail, and are unimportant, as are the reasons: what use are reasons? To know that one is because, is no more use than knowing one is; and to believe the condition is made any more bearable for knowing why, is to be deluded. It is the condition must be suffered in itself, because of itself, not for any reason. (201)

It seems that the compulsion to remember the past, which for him is to write it all down, is to fix it, to take the pain out of the experiences, to effectively exorcise the past to be able to continue to live and he explains "I am only what I am now . . . . . I am not what I have been . . . . . It is as if I am free to be what I may be . . . . . I am not what I shall be . . . . . I am what I am now" (202). This shows that even his past selves are ontologically distinct from his present self which, it is clear, cannot be fixed and fictionalised like the past.

Curiously, the novel, with its own criticism
closely interwoven within the narrative, continually refers to its own looseness and randomness, which must surely have been a deliberate ploy on Johnson's part to draw attention to the chaotic and fragmented nature of experience, and is not, as some believe a flaw in his style. Even the selection of the events to be recounted is a random process, like the trawling, where it is simply personal associations that determine what he will tell next. Curiously, this implies the existence of other possibilities and also suggests that any other selection, or any other order would conform a distinct ontological world. Johnson foregrounds the fact that permutation is possible and that his past selves are plural.

At one point in the novel, Johnson employs a device that we find later in See the Old Lady Decently, when we find him looking a couple of photographs. This is rather like the inclusion of an objet trouvé, and highlights the difference between reality and any representation of it. The text reads:

The other photograph is of barely recognisably the same boy two years later: anxious, narrowed, the eyes look as though they have seen most disappointments, and expect the rest shortly, the hair is darker, combed, and haircombed back, parted, the mouth hard, compressed: in all, the face of a human being all too aware now of the worst of the human situation. (61)

The first point that we can make about this is that the
description highlights the ontologically distinct nature of the two selves represented by two different photographs. Moreover, we feel convinced that it is the bitterness and resentment of the present author that informs his impression of himself in his youth: the present informs and therefore distorts the past. A phrase like *all too aware now* foregrounds how one continually changes, and *looks as though* indicates just to what extent the description is presumption or wishful thinking, distancing the representation from the reality itself. Moreover, there is a subtle irony when we consider that the description is at two removes from reality as the photographs themselves are false fictional representations. So Johnson, as in *Albert Angelo*, undermines the authenticity or authority of what can only be deemed a version of his self, which is determined by the arbitrary and random workings of his mind which then, by ordering, selecting and giving significance, fictionalises that self.

The novel is full of phrases like *I don't think*, *it's difficult to say*, *I feel*, *may have been*, *perhaps*, and so on which are indicative of the contingent nature of the truth that Johnson is telling. They also draw attention to the remembering and writing process, the other possibilities open to him, the difference between what he thought then and what he thinks now and even the simple question of uncertainty. As we have already seen, Johnson deliberately undermines the idea of there being an authoritative version of his experience, but only personal significance, imposed from without which is
only valid for him, and only at that given moment.

Like the earlier novels, this novel relies heavily on imagery, although Johnson occasionally undermines the validity of making use of images, of describing the real in terms of the unreal. This distrust of imagery or his tendency to retract having made use of an image is a trait that will develop further in his later novels: "not a good image" (178). However, here the governing analogy is an interesting one. The sea becomes symbolic of constant flux, like the constant flux of experience, like the constant flux and randomness of a past that cannot be encompassed by the trawl of his memory:

The sea swells and subsides, swells, swells, subsides, swells, subsides, subsides, swells again: impossibly consistent, constantly varied, continuously backing, sliding, rolling, foaming, breaking: perpetually owning and destroying, breaking down and synthesising, accepting and enfolding, encompassing and losing, giving and demanding in return, drawing. . . . (107)

In spite of apparent wholeness and coherence, attempts to enfold and encompass itself are continually undermined. The sea, like memory, and the book itself, is random and chaotic and to give it form is to create a fiction. In an earlier passage about the sea, in keeping with Robbe-Grillet's ideas about anthropomorphism in narrative, Johnson draws attention to man's tendency to think of the sea as good or bad, when it is neither. This is equivalent to his memory continuously imposing
significance on experience and although it seems to be something that we are unable to avoid, he feels compelled to draw attention to the fact that we are doing it.

Another interesting point to note is that the novel, in spite of its seriousness, is filled with irony, the greatest being that Johnson continually refers to his principles in writing the novel: "discipline, order, clarity, truth" (28), although these are consistently undermined. When he writes that "this must be carefully in order, as far as I can think it" (49), he is, in fact, mocking himself, as the novel does not follow any chronological order in recounting the memories, but recovers them randomly in a text that is full of anachronies. The rules of rhetoric that he claims to follow in order to understand the reasons for his loneliness are deliberately ironised throughout. Rather than finding clarity and truth through discipline and order, the random workings of his mind which reflect the disjointed and chaotic nature of remembered experience, in spite of attempts to order it all significantly, leads us nowhere: "So where has all that taken me? . . . . . . . . . Nowhere. . . . . . . Where I was before? . . Perhaps. . . . Nowhere. . . . . . . . . . Here" (29). He asks himself what the point is and finds that he is unable to provide an answer. He simply remains under the compulsion to remember, to write.

Trawl is a self-begetting novel that recreates the process of remembering that may lead the author to a better understanding of himself. He writes:
Today has been a good day: I have felt less sick, the weather has been better than at any time on the trip, perhaps I am nearer to understanding something about myself: I shall sleep well tonight, or sleep and think, both: about the war, yes, and being evacuated: if any one event or section of my life can be said to be more responsible than another for my isolation, the word is not too strong, then it must be that one. (49)

It is implicit that Johnson imposes the form, selects the significant experience, and it becomes clear that, although there is a movement nearer to understanding, that understanding is never final. Throughout the novel, the happenings and the analyses of the happenings are kept separate by Johnson. When he asks "[w]hat are the analyses, reasons, causes?" he can answer himself only that "All I am left with are just things, happenings: things as they are, happenings as they have happened and go on happening through the unreliable filter of my memory"(106). There is no final truth, there are only approximations, and causes and reasons can only be subjectively put there. In spite of the fact that he is aware of the chaos underneath, the absence of meaning, he goes on: "But try. What else is there to do?" (106); all very reminiscent of the final words of The Unnamable: "I can't go on. I'll go on."

In this novel as in the others, B.S. Johnson draws attention to the fact that all narratives are essentially fictions and that meaning is something that
is subjectively projected by the individual onto reality. At one point he says, "But perhaps I go too far, project an ideal teacher on to his memory: but not very far past the truth" (96); and this sums up what happens in the novel. Johnson comes very close to telling the truth about himself, but denies himself and the reader, the comfort or consolation of believing that we can really come to understand the reasons why things happen or why we are as we are. There are no objective reasons, no objective reality, only what is now, and what has been is something we artificially fix and structure in order to give a semblance of significance to experience rather than admit that there is none. But Johnson, as always, finally admits that there is only "I, always with I . . . . one always starts with I . . . . . . . . And ends with I" (205).

Trawl is a postmodernist novel that installs and then subverts its own narrative, showing that the truth it places there is lacking in authority. By resorting to autobiography, Johnson shows that his concept of the inside of his own skull is that of a writer and we find that his past experiences are indelibly linked to his telling of those experiences: the process of remembering becomes the narrative process, and that is what is foregrounded throughout the novel. In this novel, a traditional, perhaps the most traditional form of narrative is returned to, but Johnson makes use of it in a new way, not to persuade the reader of his reality, but to persuade him of his unbelief.

One final point should be made before moving on to
the next novel. Johnson wrote that the only real technical device he introduced was the use of dots to represent the breaks in the mind's workings (AYRY 23), but there is in fact more to it than that. If we remember David Lodge's comments about the non-fiction novel, then Trawl ought, at first glance, to be considered as one. However, due to inclusion within the novel of its own metatext, it becomes a problematic novel, whose theme is the nature of narrative itself.

In this novel, as in the previous ones, Johnson mixes modes and styles like the use of anecdotes and jokes, objective third person narrative description of the trawler and more subjective interior monologue to describe his past. Implicitly, by the juxtaposition of these modes, the reader becomes aware of the nature and limitations of each of them, as well as through the explicit metafictional comments made by the author. Another point is that, from the outset, by becoming a character in his own novel, Johnson is really making a statement about how the notions we have of ourselves become fictional narratives. By using a realistic form of narrative and then undermining it, Johnson is saying something about realism. It is oppositional discourse in the sense that it shows that realism is more real than literature, and that is why the text embodies its own criticism. For all of the foregoing, Trawl is another example of Johnson's dialogue with form and represents, once more, his unbelief.
2.4. The Unfortunates.

Johnson's next novel, The Unfortunates (1969), is another example of autobiography and reflects how, on visiting Nottingham to report on a football match, "the dead past and the living present interacted and transposed themselves in my mind" (AYRY 24). This is what Johnson had been trying to represent in Trawl too, but this time he will resort to a different kind of device to reflect the random workings of the mind. The author recalls the fact that he has been in the city before, that he once knew a close friend who lived there and that that friend died an early death from cancer. Johnson explains his reason for writing the novel this way: "I realised that afternoon that I had to write a novel about this man, Tony, and his tragic and pointless death and its effect on me and the other people who knew him and whom he had left behind" (AYRY 24).

The Unfortunates strikes the reader as unusual right from the beginning when we are made highly aware of the nature of the book as artefact. This novel is a book in a box with the instructions for reading it pasted onto the box, rather like the instructions for a game. In fact, a playful element comes in immediately here when we are told that we are permitted to shuffle the different sections in a random fashion if we wish. This possibility of randomly ordering the sections is intended to suggest the randomness of memory, but many critics have noted how the device does not really work. David Lodge comments that he attempts to make the
availability of choice that exists for the author more explicit by refusing to decide for himself, but due to markers, particularly adverbials, which indicate chronological order and place, the reader is able to order and arrange the events for himself. For Lodge, then, all we have is a semblance of randomness, and the puzzle or game element tends to make it more fictional than autobiographical. However, this is not really the case. In the first place, what is achieved by Johnson is a successful representation of the rather random manner in which the work is composed. As always, the narrative has to be at one remove from the act of remembering itself, but as Johnson continually implies equivalence between the act of narrative and the act of remembering, we can suggest that the author comes very close to achieving his purpose. About this Johnson himself wrote:

The main technical problem with *The Unfortunates* was the randomness of the material. That is, the memories of Tony and the routine football reporting interwove in a completely random manner, without chronology. This is the way the mind works, my mind anyway, and for reasons given the novel was to be as nearly as possible a re-created transcript of how my mind worked during eight hours on this particular Saturday. (AYRY '25)

Note that Johnson uses the word *transcript* here, underlining the fact that it is at one remove. However, he goes on:
The point of this device was that, apart from the first and last sections which were marked as such, the other sections arrived in the reader's hands in a random order: he could read them in any order he liked. And if he imagined the printer, or some previous reader, had selected a special order, then he could shuffle them about and achieve his own random order. In this way, the whole novel reflected the randomness of the material: it was itself a physical tangible metaphor for randomness and the nature of cancer. (25)

Certainly, the reader is able to read the sections at random, and the effect of his mentally ordering the events is ironic, as it reflects the compulsive tendency of man to place order on that which has none. Not only does the novel do this within its specific sections: Johnson, once again, tends towards the ordering of experience, but the reader parallels the activity himself by participating in the ordering of what is at first random. However, the same paradox that is found in the earlier novels is emphatically reiterated in this novel: although the mind tends to order and explain events, even attributing significance, to do so is to create a fiction as there is only chaos behind it all. What Johnson achieves in the novel is to dramatise the struggle between the desire for order and the underlying arbitrariness and chaos.

Johnson was himself only too aware of the limitations of such a device as he states:
Now I did not think then, and I do not think now, that this solved the problem completely. The lengths of the sections were really arbitrary again; even separate sentences or separate words would be arbitrary in the same sense. But I continue to believe that my solution was nearer; and even if it was only marginally nearer, then it was still a better solution to the problem of conveying the mind's randomness than the imposed order of the bound book. (AYRY 25-6)

Yes, order is something imposed, and the author and even the reader tend to impose it on what are really random experiences, although Johnson makes it clear that it is all random underneath, and does effectively come nearer to conveying that randomness.

In fact there are other effects created by the use of this device too. While, we may feel the awkwardness of finding the narrator entering a restaurant or a pub after having read about him leaving it, or waiting for a bus after having seen him riding on it, these are minor deficiencies in the technique. The opportunity to shuffle the sections allows the possibility of juxtaposing disparate experiences and memories in a significant and often ironic manner. For example, it is possible to see the almost pathetic, or perhaps bitter, irony of Tony's hopes and dreams when we have already read of his funeral. Or Morton P. Levitt writes of how certain unusual juxtapositions give a semblance of simultaneity, a kind of double take, as in,
Tony's realization that he will never see his son grow up and only then reading that his wife June is pregnant, or hearing officially of Tony's death after we have witnessed his burial or only then appreciating the irony of Tony's being told that he has been cured of cancer. (1982 580)

This is truly what more accurately represents the workings of the mind: recalling the past with the full and often bitterly ironic knowledge of what happens afterwards. The shuffling of the sections allows Johnson to dramatise that irony, and to convey the sort of simultaneity that he experiences himself in recalling experiences with full posterior knowledge.

So, like Trawl, this novel is a metaphor for the random workings of the memory on a given day, showing how the past and the present are interwoven. Curiously, this is reminiscent of Virginia Woolf's description of what she was doing in Mrs Dalloway, and there are some curious similarities between this novel and the modernist classic. Both novels deal with the presentness of the past, the way the past informs the present and vice versa, and both attempt to reflect the randomness of memory as it is triggered by personal associations. Moreover, both novels reflect the epistemological preoccupation with trying to reflect a given reality. The recurrence of phrases like was it and is that it is reminiscent of similar phrases in Mrs Dalloway and reflects the process of remembering, of discovery, the uncertainty and doubts of memory.
The Unfortunates, apart from its innovation of the loose sections in a box, continues in the same line as the earlier novels. The narrative includes its own metanarrative and the narrator continually alludes to his concerns as a writer. Like Trawl before it, it makes use of an interior monologue which is continually interrupted by aposiopeses which provide metafictional commentary or take back what has been said before, while at the same time suggesting how thought is often random and incoherent. There is a clear link between the randomness of the memories as they come to him and the random fashion in which he orders and often interrupts what he says. It is suggested that it is not only the memories of the past with Tony that come randomly, but, in spite of the simultaneous narrative, he conveys the idea that the process of composition that recreates the experiences of that day is equally random. Again we notice the equivalence between the remembering and the telling.

Johnson, is again preoccupied with how the memory tends to distort and shape the past, even with how the narrative and language itself can distort the remembered fact. However, in spite of the pessimistic ideology underlying the novel, that it is all chaos and meaninglessness, the novel itself is less pessimistic about having achieved its aim to attain and communicate that truth. Judith Mackrell notes how he appears to be more willing to accept the relativity of truth and he is less strained in trying to convey it (1985 54). This time, it is as if the feeling of failing to say just
what he means has dissipated somewhat, but even so, the subjective, contingent and uncertain nature of his truth is consistently remarked upon.

Another step forward for Johnson is his stylistic development. The randomness of the sections is paralleled by a certain randomness in the positioning of parenthesis which gives a natural and spontaneous tone to the language. Mackrell remarks:

This new ease of tone also reconciles, for the first time, Johnson's attempts to represent the fragmented workings of the consciousness with the more deliberately structured critical commentary, since both actually seem to issue from the same voice. (54)

Once again the text and metatext are closely interwoven in a manner that demonstrates that, for the author, you cannot have one without the other, that telling stories is about the process of their coming into being.

Most of Johnson's works are paradoxical and this one is no exception. the basic contradiction can be summed up like this: in spite of attempting to faithfully recreate the random and subjective workings of the mind by denying a fixed structure for his work, he, at the same time, foregrounds the fact of the book as artefact, underlining that formal artifice is behind it all. The artificial and ludic element in the novel denaturalise the narrative devices and constantly remind that there is a gap between the felt experience and its representation (Mackrell 54-55). Reality resists the imposition of a pattern, but the individual insists on
imposing one. Johnson makes us aware of how compulsively we order experience by making us participate in it, which is the overall irony of the whole thing. Mackrell sums up the paradox of The Unfortunates like this:

However, although the reader is made aware of both the imposition of form and order (his own) on the work and of the randomness of the material on which this form is being imposed (the chaos of existence), it does not follow that either the form or the language of the novel in themselves offers a means of representing that chaos. (54)

What this suggests is that the novel fails basically on the grounds that each self-contained section, in spite of the disruptions and hesitations, is inevitably ordered and placed in its corresponding chronological position by the reader, when he restructures the events for himself.

However, this is not simply another traditional novel where linear sequence is interspersed with a series of flashbacks. The use of the book in a box defamiliarises what we would normally associate with flashback and constantly reminds us of the artificial nature of any order that has been, and which we might, impose. We find that Johnson puts a fairly traditional resource to a new and significant use.

Johnson is once more solipsistic in this novel, emphasising the inevitability of death and decay, and the fact that it is all governed by accident, that no matter how hard we attempt to give order and find
meaning, it is all random, chaotic and meaningless, totally indifferent to the imposition of human values. Thus the form and the content are related, and the mingling of past in present in a random fashion in the novel indicates the constant presence of death even in the living present. Essentially, it is this that constantly preoccupies the author: the existence of any significance in life is invalidated by the arbitrary and meaningless way in which the individual must decay and die.

One way of describing this novel has been suggested by Nicolas Tredell, who sees it as a modern elegy, a verbal act of mourning and remembering. He strikingly notes the remarkable parallel between Tony working on Boswell, when his Boswell will be Johnson. Implicitly the importance of the elegist is highlighted in this way (Tredell 1985 39). Death is the universal theme for Johnson and The Unfortunates becomes a kind of anti-ars moriendi, as it is totally lacking in any coherent system of values or belief. Tony is a memento mori of pain and decay, but without the possibility of consolation through his death. There is a complete absence of any lament for Tony. In fact, Johnson often seems annoyed or bothered by his decay, but the irony works both ways, as Johnson, finally admits the feeling of loss at this death. So we can say that the novel is a kind of modern, urban elegy (Tredell 1985 40).

However, there is more to the novel than that. Once more, we find Johnson playing with and mixing modes of discourse. If we find that the box draws attention to
the artefact of the book, the mixing of modes consistently makes us aware of the nature of narrative, and essentially, that is what the novel is about, as much as it is about the death of Tony and how that represents the meaningless of life, of death and of loss.

The first point that we could draw attention to is the fact that there is a clear mise en abyme which runs throughout the novel which is the fact that the narrator is writing about his thoughts and experiences while he writes a newspaper report on a football match. So, the author is writing about himself, who is writing. At this level, the novel is self-begetting, as the final newspaper article is the result of the process of narrative which we finally read. There is a subtle irony therefore when we get to the bottom of the box and find the report pasted to it. But it is not only about the coming into being of the article, but of its own coming into being. The mind of a writer is the subject of the novel (the fictionalised self of the newspaper journalist), but it is also the mind of the author of the novel. So, a certain irony is involved when we consider that we have a kind of anti-portrait of the artist, where the writing of low journalism is a kind of inverted correlative of the problems that the author of the novel is confronted with: "Does this bloody reporting affect, destroy even, my own interest in language, sometimes I feel I have mislaid perhaps, not lost, something through this reporting" ("The pitch" 8). The basic problems of the writer seem to lie in language
itself, which turns into cliché and remains distant from the reality that it hopes to express. In the end, what one writes is all a kind of discourse, and that discourse inevitably distorts the reality one hopes to describe.

Tredell draws attention to the existence of various kinds of discourse in the novel: the discourse of criticism in Tony's voice and also in the author's; there is a tentative, questioning discourse, that is interwoven with an orderly causal discourse; we have the discourse of journalism we mentioned, the medical discourse which explains Tony's cancer and death, a mystical discourse, which sees death as inexplicable and meaningless as well as frightening; all presented within the interior monologue of the narrator (Tredell 1985 36-9).

What we find is that by making use of these different kinds of discourse, combined with the random sections, Johnson is able to foreground the nature of language as unable to explain the nature of experience: it always fabricates, it always falsifies, as to explain things is to deny the underlying chaos and meaninglessness. As Tredell comments, Johnson "[p]roblematizes writing as activity which purports to offer certainty, precise categorization, causal explanation, sequential development, and a unified flow of experience" (1985 35).

The novel can be described, in a sense, as interrogative. It continually asks the question why?, and continually refuses to answer. The gaps we find in
the narrative, the retractions and the doubtful uncertainties recur with frequency. Even the point of imagery, which is clearly distrusted here is challenged. Throughout the novel, in an activity that parallels that of writing the newspaper report, Johnson struggles to look for a suitable image to reflect the reality of the past experiences. However, either he does not provide the image or shows its inappropriateness. This is one way in which he foregrounds the question of trying to embody the real in the fictional, and the devices that are used in the novel as a whole are foregrounded as devices in order to challenge the representational conventions they invoke (Tredell 36). The truth of the novel consists in the truths that it tells us about writing. The tendency to look for an image to express the nature of experience is a rather paradoxical one in that while it avoids telling what happened as it was, there seems to be a compulsive need to resort to it. A curious example of what happens in the novel is this: "and there was a straight column rising from the chimney of the crematorium, it went straight upwards, as far as smoke can ever be said to move in a straight line, into the haze, the sky, it was too neat, but it was, it was" ("We were late" 1). Johnson, here, finds a ready made image after the funeral of Tony that he might have made use of in order to look for some kind of symbolic significance, as in his spirit rising to heaven. However, he refuses to do so, simply preferring to state how it was. The contrary sometimes occurs, when this anthropomorphic tendency to look for images that
attribute value is made use of, but as often as not he prefers to leave a gap, or ironically comments on the appropriateness, or not, of the image he has used: "there, a good image, perhaps easy" ("First" 3), or "There might be an image there, I could use an image, there, if I can think of one . . ." ("The pitch worn" 1). Not only does he highlight the process of narrating the experience, but he highlights the nature of metaphor as distinct from the experience it hopes to describe. In a sense, what Johnson does is disappoint our expectations with his failure to provide an image, or invokes our participation by inviting us to think of one for ourselves. The problem is though that any image might distort the truth. He writes:

    ... how I try to invest anything connected with him now with as much rightness, sanctity almost, as I can, how the fact of his death influences every memory of everything connected with him. ("At least once" 1)

In the same way as a choice of imagery imposes significance on experience, the fact of Tony's death tends to distort the way in which Johnson tells of his experience. The presentness of that death, our awareness of posterior knowledge when he tells of past experiences with Tony, allows us to imitate this same process, of seeing his life in terms of his death.

Cancer leads to the disintegration of Tony. It is random and indicative of the meaningless of his existence. The continual search for meaning is always finally denied in the novel, and the possibility of ever
really explaining what happened is always undermined by falling into cliche, of having to resort to imagery, by the distorting forces of particular kinds of discourse. Curiously, his descriptions tend to be interrupted throughout by his use of or allusion to the image or cliche, and highlights the contradiction of attempting to show the uniqueness of experience while inevitably falling into the use of existing modes of discourse. But that seems to be the nature of discourse, of language as such, to invest experience with meaning, which means that the narrator must continually interrupt himself to say, "I don't remember, why should I, it doesn't matter, its all chaos, look at his death, why?" ("His dog 2). Johnson, in the Last section of the novel, reiterates this point:

The difficulty is to understand without generalization, to see each piece of received truth, or generalization, as true only if it is true for me, solipsism again, I come back to it again, and for no other reason.

In general, generalisation is to lie, to tell lies. (6)

The solipsism again, the inability to tell the truth, is reminiscent of Trawl, but, for the most part, he avoids the desperate denials of there being any point to what he is doing. However, the lack of pathos and the sense of resignation that we find throughout the novel is related to the ultimate truth, and the ultimate paradox in Johnson's writing. In the section beginning, "For recuperation," he writes
That this thing could just come from nowhere, from inside himself, of his very self, to attack him, to put his self in danger, I still do not understand. Perhaps there is nothing to be understood, perhaps understanding is simply not to be found, is not applicable to such a thing. But it is hard, hard not to try to understand, even for me, who accept that all is nothing, that sense does not exist. (2)

Johnson sums up his own paradoxical nature here. It is the can't go on, go on situation once more, where the tendency to endow narratives with meaning leads to fictionalisation when the only truth is that there is no sense, only chaos. However, what the novel does tell is about the fundamental truths of writing. In a self-conscious manner and through the mixing of modes of discourse, Johnson shows how we organise experience, suggesting the relation between narrative discourse and reality, and making it clear that the closest we can come to reality is to be aware of the distance that the narrative creates.

Johnson's unbelief goes much beyond doubting you can tell the truth, and we find not atheistic pessimism, but a kind of staunch resignation. In this novel, with its variety of narrative techniques, literary and non-literary, Johnson presents us with the oppositional discourse of his own personal unbelief that manages to incorporate text and metatext as one. It is not a question of setting himself a task that he cannot achieve, because due to the resigned quality of the
narrative, the melancholy is not absolute. Johnson tells us that all is chaos and that reality is unpresentable, but in a postmodernist fashion, alludes to that which is unpresentable in presentation itself.

Let us give Johnson himself the last word on this point:

What matters most to me about The Unfortunates is that I have on recall as accurately as possible what happened, that I do not have to carry it around in my mind any more, that I have done Tony as much justice as I could at the time; that the need to communicate with myself then, and with such older selves as I might be allowed, on something about which I cared and care deeply may also mean that the novel will communicate that experience to the readers too. (AYRY 26)

It is meaningful for Johnson, but the solipsism, joined with what he has just said casts a doubt on the communicability of experience: it is for his benefit only, although the catharsis of exorcising the experience never really comes. He denies it to himself and the implication that life is meaningless is perhaps the meaning that Johnson takes from his own narrative.

Autobiography, the non-fiction mode, is made use of in a manner which draws attention to itself as mode, and the autobiography as text, in this novel, becomes its own metatext. Johnson is always the writer of problematic novels, whether he tends towards non-fiction, as in the last three novels, or moves into the
area of fabulation in the next. What is always clear is that, by playing with proportion, he overdetermines the narrative concerns themselves, far beyond the informational need, so that the relation of the text with regard to convention is what is most present in the mind of the reader. Through digression, hesitation and interruption, he imposes the fragmentation of any authoritative or whole generalisation about experience. He denies himself the possibility of being authoritative, and in the end, in his struggle to make experience meaningful and, in his failure to do so, it is the solipsistic voice that we remember. For me, this is part of the achievement of Johnson: that in spite of the discomfort that we go through, he finally conveys that paradox, that anguish to the reader. One last thing, Johnson uses the word *unfortunates* only once in the novel, and this is when he sees the gravestones in a cemetery. From this, it should be clear that the *unfortunates* are not only Tony and those like him, but mankind as such.
2.5. *House Mother Normal.*

If we recall Johnson's own comments about why he refused to have *Travelling People* reprinted, we will remember that it was because it was part fact and part fiction. David Lodge, as we have seen, emphasises Johnson's tendency towards non-fiction in his essay (1971), although we have found that these are, in fact, problematic, or postmodernist texts. However, when we come to *House Mother Normal* (1971), we find that Johnson, although still concerned with personal and social problems, as well as with the problems of narrative as a compulsive tendency in order to organise and give meaning to experience, shifts towards fabulation, particularly in terms of presentation, while still continuing his dialogue with form.

Johnson, as usual, gives a good first insight into the significance of his novel:

*What I wanted to do was to take an evening in an old people's home, and see a single set of events through the eyes of not less than eight old people. Due to the various deformities and deficiencies of the inmates, these events would seem to be progressively 'abnormal' to the reader. At the end, there would be the viewpoint of the House Mother, an apparently 'normal' person, and the events themselves would then be seen to be so bizarre that everything that had come before would seem normal by comparison. The idea was to say*
something about the things we call 'normal' and 'abnormal' and the technical difficulty was to make the same thing interesting nine times over since that was the number of times the events would have to be described.

(AYRY 26-27)

He then explains that "[e]ach of the old people was allotted a space of twenty-one pages, and each line on each page represented the same moment in each of the other accounts" (27). He then explains that this meant an unjustified right-hand margin and led more than one reviewer to imagine the book was in verse. House Mother's account has an extra page in which she is shown to be the puppet or concoction of a writer (you always knew there was a writer behind it all? Ah, there's no fooling you readers!)

Nor should there be. (27)

The tendency of many critics is to applaud or criticise the success of the technique here as Johnson tends to avoid personal statement on this occasion. However, the novel really does constitute some kind of continuation with the author's war with convention, and takes up from where he left off, exposing the mechanism of the novel, and, once more, undermining the accuracy of his characters by exposing it all as a self-evident sham. Moreover, the themes of decay and death, alienation and solipsism may also be found, only this time in a series of voices that the author borrows.
House Mother Normal, would appear to be much more obviously experimental than the earlier novels, but, in fact, carries on from where the novelist began in Travelling People. We find the juxtaposition of a series of different styles and discourses to represent the ontologically distinct versions of the same experience, all being representations of the streams of consciousness of the characters, although these are interwoven with the spoken dialogue that takes place during the event. Johnson had already done this, but not on such a grand scale when he provided stream of consciousness on one side of the page and dialogue on the other in Albert Angelo, but significantly, in this novel, it all forms part of the same stream.

In order to handle this material, the author, rather ironically, allows the House Mother, in “House Mother Introduces,” to occupy the place of authority in the narrative (and we should already be accustomed to Johnson undermining his own authority), and she sets down the rules, or conventions that are to be followed throughout:

Friend (I may call you friend?), these are also our friends. We no longer refer to them as inmates, cases, patients, or even as clients. These particular friends are also known as NERs, since they have no effective relatives, are orphans in reverse, it is often said.

You may if you wish join our Social Evening,
friend. You shall see into the minds of our eight old friends, and you shall see into my mind. You shall follow our Social Evening through nine different minds!

Before entering each of our old friends' minds you will find a few details which may be of interest to you. A CQ count, for instance, is given: that is, the total of correct answers which were given to the ten classic questions (Where are you now? What is this place? What day is this? What month is it? What year is it? How old are you? What is your birthday? In what year were you born? Who is on the throne now–king or queen? Who was on the throne before?) for senile dementia.

You will find our friends dining, first, and later singing, working, playing, travelling, competing, discussing, and finally being entertained. (1986 5-6)

It has been thought worthwhile to quote this introductory text in full as it is indicative, to some extent, of the nature of the novel as a whole. To begin with, the narrator enters into a direct dialogue with the reader, revealing the artifice behind the novel, showing that it is obviously a fabulation, a self-evident sham. The transcursion into the minds of the characters is clearly foregrounded in such a way that we are aware of it, less as a form of realistic narrative,
than as a fictional, novelistic convention. In other words, in the form of an implicit dialogue, Johnson immediately confronts the reader with a fabulation which, at the same time, is a dialogue with traditional forms and conventions, not only as it highlights its use of convention, but also because it foregrounds where it will deviate from these conventions, in fact, imposing its own conventions.

These introductory comments also intimate the intention to introduce a new mode of discourse, and not only implies the limitations of the CQ as a form of knowing anyone, but through its juxtaposition with the, sometimes confusing, streams of consciousness of the characters, will suggest the limitations of any narrative discourse to present character. Moreover, the House Mother, rather ironically, addresses the reader also as friend, intimating a clear identification between the abnormal patients and the readers themselves. As Johnson himself has pointed out, his intention is to make a point about normality, and the irony that is evident as regards this is evident from this point on: to question the existence of any authority or standards to measure it.

This introductory section draws attention to the ontological preoccupations of the postmodernist, too. As it will be seen through a reading of the text, although it is anticipated here, the distinct nature of reality for each individual is a significant fact that the author wishes to underline. Moreover, within each of the sections, it will once more be clear how each individual
consciousness in continually influenced by its awareness of the past. The past also informs the present, and the novel continually interweaves that past with the present of each of the consciousnesses presented. Therefore, in spite of the technical innovation, Johnson seems to continue in a similar vein.

By entering into a clear dialogue with the reader, Johnson clearly distinguishes his metafictional comments from the rest of the text, albeit they are presented in the voice of the House Mother. Moreover, there is an implicit comment being made on the limitations of realistic modes of discourse to represent character, when the obvious reductiveness of the CQ test is juxtaposed with the fictional stream of consciousness of the characters. Curiously, and perhaps for the first time, Johnson seems to be saying something positive about the possibilities of art or fiction in this respect. That is, in comparison with the dehumanising forces of authority which categorise people according to a set of absurd questions which (and I think this can be easily inferred) many of us would on certain occasions be unable to answer, the possibilities of narrative allow us to come much closer to an understanding of the human being, although Johnson, as always, finally draws attention to the fact that it is all fiction.

When we have passed through the House Mother's welcoming introduction, we receive an impression as if she were literally welcoming us to visit the home, which brings with it a feeling of impinging upon or violating the intimacy of the friends that are there. Indeed, in
this novel, Johnson intends to make us feel uncomfortable once more, to ironically provide us with the single consolation that it is all a fiction, when we know only too well just how real such decay and loss of dignity is. Perhaps the greatest irony of all is that Johnson, contrary to what many critics believe, does not spoil the effectiveness of the character sketches he provides, but subtly shows that the only consolation we can have here is to pretend that it only happens to somebody else or that it never really happened at all. When the House Mother later says that there is no fooling the reader, we should not be fooled by her sarcastic, patronising tone. As she says at the outset, we are just some more friends to be welcomed to the home: the pain and decay is not a fiction but precisely what awaits us. This should be emphasised here: Johnson inverts his usual tactic and by sarcastically telling us not to worry, that it is not real, he manages to create a parallel between the process of distancing us from and the manner in which we tend to achieve consolation by distancing ourselves from pain and suffering.

Of course, the tongue in cheek attitude of the House Mother lightens our fate for us and the bizarre nature of what takes place makes us feel that we are in the presence of a fabulation. However, the obvious contrast with the moving nature of the old people’s thoughts, especially about the past, and their ability to put up with suffering is a serious reminder of human dignity in spite of the apparent absurdity of our experiences. In fact, in this novel, we can again allude
to the influence of Beckett as Johnson clearly places his characters in an absurd environment where there is nothing to wait or hope for except death. We are aware of the absurdity of their efforts to pass the time, the emptiness of every activity under these circumstances, but the staunchness of their resignation is a testimony to that dignity.

As we mentioned earlier, Johnson does without his own voice and experience in this novel. Moreover, it is only at the start and the end of the novel that we are overtly reminded of the fictitious nature of the narrative. This is important in the light of what we have said, as I believe that Johnson makes an important statement about death and human nature in this novel. The curious irony is that he offers us the consolation of believing it all to be a fiction in the full knowledge of the reality of what he describes. The net effect is that it is no consolation at all.

Judith Mackrell fails to appreciate this when she suggests that Johnson destroys the overall mimetic effect of the novel in the closing section (1985 56-7). I would suggest that it is somehow reminiscent of the disintegration in Albert Angelo, particularly in terms of its irony and that its effect is really the contrary, showing how the individual tends to distance the grim reality from himself by turning it into a fiction.

In fact, disintegration is a theme in the narrative: we see how there is a gradual breakdown in coherence in the minds of the inmates, and simply due to the directness of the interior monologues which omit
facts and details, we find that it becomes a task for the reader to attempt to reconstruct the events that take place. Again, the tendency is to interrupt the interior monologues of each character, but this time not with commentary from the author or his surrogate, but with irruption of bizarre reality into the distinct ontological world of their consciousness, which governed by its own laws of association is somehow isolated and even protected from the outside.

This latter point has a lot to do with what Johnson has to say here. There is a clear dichotomy between the inside and the outside here, between the official, authoritative versions (the CQ test and House Mother's) and the distinct personal reality of each individual. Johnson here is reiterating his belief in the plural nature of reality, in the real possibility that we cannot know another person.

One possible criticism is that the voices of each consciousness lack any real sense of distinctness. Even the ooohs and aaargs have been picked on as unconvincing, although more hope is held out this time for the blanks in the narrative, which indicate periods of extreme pain when a character is unable to think, or is asleep or unconscious (Mackrell 1985 56-57). However, if Johnson is unable to capture a distinct voice for his characters, this is made up for by the power of his observation and his insight into the way in which the existence of the past within each individual differentiates each of them and makes it impossible to associate them with the geriatric label they have been
given. Here there is a clear decision to criticise the authoritative voice that condemns individuals to such a fate.

Perhaps, at this point, we should sum up just what happens during the social evening, although the reader has to reconstruct that evening due to the partial knowledge that we have of it through the different responses of the inmates. They begin by washing and putting labels on bottles, after which they play a game of jousting (with wheelchairs as the horse and mops as the lances), then they play pass the parcel, where the surprise is, in fact animal excrement, then the House Mother entertains them by doing a strip-tease and then performing a sexual act with her dog. Curiously, there is no moment when the inmates go travelling, as the House Mother says as the beginning, which should suggest to us that the travelling goes on in their minds when they return to the past.

As we said, the reader has to reconstruct these events for himself prior to the House Mother explaining what happened at the end, and the effect is similar to that produced when reading Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*. There also it is necessary to reconstruct reality due to the contextual shifts and the movement from the point of view of one character to another. Uncertainty is therefore created about the nature of that reality, and, curiously, who is to say that the authoritative version of the House Mother is the right one at the end. The novel shows how reality is what is going on inside each individual mind, although there may be an irony
intended when we are told at the end that it is all "a diagram of certain aspects of the inside of his [the author’s] skull!" (204). In a sense, this last point is underlined when House Mother goes on:

Still, I’ll finish off for him, about the sadness, the need to go farther better to appreciate the nearer, what you have now: if you are not like our friends, friend, laugh now, prepare accept, worse times are a-coming, nothing is more sure. (204)

This suggests that the novel has been a kind of exercise by Johnson to enable himself to face up to the inevitability of death and decay, in the same way as it may also be for ourselves. So, what we find in the novel is Johnson’s attitude to reality, an attempt by him to face the truth, and ironically forces us to do so too.

Returning to the way in which we reconstruct the text, Patricia Waugh sees House Mother Normal as an exercise in modernist perspectivism (1984 102). The existence of an established hierarchy (suggested by the tabular and dehumanising CQ test) determines the degree of authority that each inmate has and allows to reconstruct the events with a degree of reliability. Our version of reality is then compared to that of the voice of authority, the House Mother, and we are able to establish if we have interpreted the events correctly. However, as we have seen, there is a deep irony involved here, as we find ourselves faced with a reality as inhuman and lacking in sympathy as the CQ tests suggest if we fail to take into account the inner selves of
these characters, something which authority fails to do. Patricia Waugh does not really appreciate this point in the novel when she writes:

What happens at the end, though, is a shift from modernist perspectivism to postmodernist doubt, for the house mother steps out of the frame of the world in the fiction to declare her reality, therefore as language, as B.S. Johnson’s invention. (1984 102)

This is so, and in one sense foregrounds typically postmodernist concerns about the fictionality of character in narrative, however, the whole point of highlighting postmodernist doubt here, is to make us even more aware of the fictionality of authoritative narratives about people.

Judith Mackrell feels that this postmodernist ending is disappointing. She feels that the effect is to “undercut the level of realism achieved in the earlier sections and to push the novel into the realm of a bizarre and unexpected fantasy” (1985 57). However, surely the effect is just the opposite, and we are made even more aware of the true nature of reality, that it has nothing to do with the fictions we create about people but is what goes on inside each individual mind. Johnson does break the illusion, but the clumsiness that some critics refer to in making use of this device might also be interpreted as deliberateness, in order to emphasise the point he wants to make about the nature of human existence.

For Patrick Parrinder, this novel is Johnson’s best
and it further reveals the presence of the moral vision of the puritan artist. For him, having the House Mother strip is part of Johnson’s tactic to say something about normality. It is precisely because her actions are so bizarre that we are able to see the old people in a different light (1987 197). He draws particular attention to the didactic passage pronounced by the House Mother towards the end of the novel which we will quote here:

How disgusting! you must be saying to yourself, friend, and I cannot but agree. But think a bit harder, friend: why do I disgust them? I disgust them in order that they may not be disgusted with themselves. I am disgusting to them in order to objectify their disgust, to direct it to something outside themselves, something harmless. Some of them still believe in God: what would happen if they were to turn their disgust on God for taking away control over their own sphincter muscles, for instance, and think, naturally enough, that He must be vile to be responsible for such a thing? (197)

For Parrinder, Johnson and the House Mother speak with virtually the same voice here, and there is a suggestion that the way the House Mother disgusts the old people parallels Johnson’s desire to do the same to us and, somehow, defuse any feeling of disgust we may have for the old people, and change our attitude towards them. Parrinder writes of the House Mother shielding the old
people from their disillusionment with God as an act of hypocrisy (1987 124) and goes on to say that she is a surrogate figure whom Johnson invests with his own guilty compulsion to be a writer and tell lies to command the attention of others. Yet the reader who responds to the hints of moral condemnation . . . has himself been manoeuvered into the position of the Puritan externalising his own guilt and finding a scapegoat for them. (124) Johnson does put us in a position where we are forced to make some kind of moral judgement, and this, precisely, is his point: to make us understand something about what he thinks about normality and abnormality. The overall effect is to feel that the House Mother’s authority is undermined and we are not convinced by her hypocritical view of the old people. Parrinder writes of this character’s “vile, perverted pretence of authority” and sees it as set against, the unassuming naturalness, and resignation of the old people, whose basic self-acceptance constitutes a true human dignity. The final irony of House Mother’s attempts at protecting them is that she does not know these attempts are quite unnecessary. (1987 125) The irony is that the old people are more in need of material than spiritual help, and we see that the House Mother’s attitude is quite mistaken. The fact that Johnson allows her to be the authoritative voice is part of this irony, as by having her reveal her own
fictionality at the end, we see that in this way, her authority is undermined, as it has already been by juxtaposing her authoritative version of events with those of the old people.

Johnson is telling us something about realism once more here, by showing that authoritative narratives fail to convey reality. The greatest irony of a postmodernist novel of this kind is that in spite of the author's protestations to the contrary he finally manages to present the unpresentable in presentation itself. By going outside of the established conventions at the end of the novel, Johnson undermines the structure established by the House Mother, although the irony is that that authority passes to the interior monologues of the old people. Inverting his usual process, the author's juxtaposition of different modes of discourse and points of view, rather than being suggestive of failure, proves to be a great success, as, while it undermines traditional or conventional attitudes towards old people, it gives them the authority to speak in their own voices. Johnson, here, by writing what appears to be a bizarre fabulation, writes a truly realistic novel, by substituting the point of view of old people for that of those who label them geriatrics.

When the House Mother goes one page beyond the convention established at the beginning of the novel, she not only steps out of the frame literally, but breaks it. This parallels what goes on in the novel as a whole where we find the breaking of imposed conventions and the undermining of authority not only at the level
of novel, as an artificial structure, but in terms of discourse as such, where, particularly the authoritative discourse of society is undermined. Curiously, the novel performs a curious trick where we find the inversion of factual and fictional. The more factual utterance of House Mother and the CQ test is shown to be reductive and fictional, whereas the alternative discourses of the old people become more real than the official version.

The frame-breaking at the end of House Mother Normal is obviously designed to draw attention to the idea that the whole thing is an illusion, a fantasy, a metafictional short-circuit to remind us that it is all make-believe. However, the effect must surely be ironic in this novel, as, although it all does go on inside his own skull, Johnson, by undermining the authoritative version, leaves us with a series of authoritative versions (the old people's) which are nothing if not realistic.

This novel is clearly another example of Johnson's oppositional discourse. It opposes conventional attitudes towards old people and opposes the conventional forms of labelling them. The variety of discourses and points of view that he provides us with, highlights this, and undermines any attempts to substitute a person's individuality with a CQ-rating, to substitute reality with a simulacrum. Through contrast and a form of negation Johnson destroys the validity of his fabulation, but at the same time alludes to the veracity of the interior worlds of his characters.
2.6. Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry.

Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry (1973) is another, and perhaps even more obvious example of fabulation, which, in a manner not unlike his previous novel, through a form of negation alludes to reality through its absence. More than this, however, we find an extreme example of metafiction which enters into a direct dialogue with the reader and with form, exploiting a wide range of narrative modes and embodying a sincere statement about the fictional nature of all narratives. Johnson here is writing about the inside of his own skull, but, in this case, almost wholly in terms of the mechanisms available to him as a writer.

The novel deals with Christie Malry, "a simple person" (1984 11), both in terms of his attitude towards life and in terms of the simplicity of his characterisation, an example of how Johnson, throughout the novel combines statements about life and narrative. Basically, as he was not born into it, we find this character faced with the problem of how to acquire money. When he joins a bank, thinking that by placing himself close to it some of it would rub off on him, a simple person, as Johnson says, he soon becomes disillusioned and decides to become an accountant to find out where it comes from. Studying a correspondence course on accounting he discovers the Double-Entry system of book-keeping, and decides one day, on finding his progress impeded by an office building, to apply it to life: for each offence received from society Christie
feels entitles to exact payment:

I could express it in Double-Entry
terms, Debit receiver, Credit giver, the
Second Golden Rule, Debit Christie Malry for
the offence received, Credit Office Block for
the offence given How settle that
account? I am entitled to exact
payment, of course. Every Debit must have its
Credit, the First Golden Rule. But
payment in what form? (1984 24)

Christie's form of exacting payment is to scratch the
wall of the office building with his key, and, from that
moment on, the novel describes how Society becomes
gradually more and more in debt to Christie for its
offences against him, and his modes of exacting payment
become more and more extreme, bizarre and, in the end
unbelievable. The story also tells of Christie's mother,
his upbringing, his girlfriend, the Shrike, and his
sudden death from cancer, each part of the novel being
concluded by an accounting or "reckoning" which balances
Christie's credits and debits.

The whole novel is an obvious fabulation as it is
overtly and self-consciously the creation of an
omniscient and omnipotent author. The narrator,
continually informs the reader, and even his characters,
of his involvement in this creation. However, Johnson,
as usual has a point to make: about the way in which man
has come to conceive of reality and even himself in
materialistic terms; about the way in which society
imposes a particular vision of itself on the individual;
and the way in which we have been misled, particularly by religion and history into sharing a false notion of the existence of form and meaning in our lives; as well as making a point about the nature of narrative, in a dialogue with form and convention which shows up the possibilities and limitations of available modes of discourse. In a sense, the novel is also about how any order that we perceive is imposed, impersonal and meaningless, so that behind the obviously comic and fictitious fabulation, Johnson, once more, makes a serious point about life and death.

Judith Mackrell pinpoints an important aspect of Johnson’s writing when beginning her discussion of this novel. As we have seen for ourselves, there is a consistent alternation between Johnson’s commitment to a meticulous form of mimesis and his radical desire to reject such attempts as fiction. This creates what she calls “a tension between efforts to find ways of rendering an accurate and sophisticated description of character and his compulsion to dismiss them as fictional artefacts” (1985 58). After the attempts at mimesis of some of his previous novels, Johnson clearly wishes to draw attention to the nature of character as an artefact, as a fictional construct, exploring the relation that exists between author and character. In a sense, what Johnson does is play with the logic of novelistic realism in a way that draws attention to the basic absurdity of the realistic fallacy. The omniscient narrator creates the illusion of independent, autonomous characters, who as independent characters are able to
transgress ontologically distinct narrative levels and discuss their situation with the author, only to find that the omniscient author must finally deny them their liberty due, in part, to "the constricting limits of the novel form" (Mackrell 58).

Johnson, here, really takes up from where Flann O'Brien left off, in order to demonstrate that all literary characters are merely types allowing them to show that they, like the fabulation itself, are a self-evident sham. Essentially, both make use of a kind of logic of the absurd where, to take the realism of the characters literally, means that they can have some say in matters and co-exist on the same level as the author, and, of course, the reader. Thus there are a series of dialogues at different narrative and ontological levels between narrator and reader, narrator and character, as well as between the characters themselves, who are perfectly aware of their existence as characters in a novel and who openly comment on the fact.

Once the exposition of the novel has clarified what Christie's great idea is, much of what takes place afterwards goes without any authorial comment and reads much like many stories of typical anti-heroes from the fifties and sixties. However, the tendency, which is prevalent throughout his work, to continually interrupt the narrative to make comments about the nature of narrative or debate about critical issues remains, although, on this occasion, it is more subtly worked into the novel by having the characters themselves make these comments or take part in the debates. This
provides a further comic aspect to the novel as well as introducing critical issues and provides Johnson with an opportunity to draw attention to the distinct ontological worlds involved in the novel. This gives Johnson a chance to investigate the nature of narrative as a distinct ontological construct from reality and the relation between the two. As Judith Mackrell remarks:

The paradox inherent in the fact that the novel— a self-contained and self-limiting form— should be trying to create an illusion of “real life” is precisely caught, for although life outside of the novel may go on, the life that Christie is part of is that of the novel, and of course ends very soon after his death. (1985 60)

Moreover, the fact that the novel is obviously a construct and ends so abruptly is not due to a lack of interest or imagination on the part of the author, but shows just how artificial any vision of reality is, just how fictional endings, or even beginnings, are. Curiously, Johnson allows Christie’s mother, one of the characters, to explain this:

'We fondly believe there is going to be a reckoning, a day upon which all injustices are evened out, when what we have done will beyond doubt be seen to be right, when the light of our justification blazes forth upon the world. But we are wrong: learn, then, that there is not going to be any day of reckoning, except possibly by accident. It seems that enough
accidents happen for it to be a hope or even an expectation for most of us, the day of reckoning. But we shall die untidily, when we did not properly expect it, in a mess, most things unresolved, unreckoned, reflecting that it is all chaos. Even if we understand that all is chaos, the understanding represents a denial of chaos, and must therefore be an illusion." (1984 30)

In the light of what has been said, the irony should be obvious. Johnson is denying that there is any form or significance in the universe and states, through Christie's mother, that everything that happens is only by accident. Any reckoning, which gives meaning to what takes place, must therefore be a false reckoning, and the form which Johnson has created in the novel is therefore an illusion. Christie's death is arbitrary and meaningless, as are all deaths, and the final reckoning, as we see at the end of the novel does not balance. The basic structure of the novel is undermined, or rather, the illusion of form and structure that Johnson has created, is shown to be just that, an illusion.

Much of what Johnson does in the novel can be seen in terms of it being a dialogue with form. In fact, he has Christie say just that towards the end in one of their critical debates about the nature of the novel: "'Your work has been a continuous dialogue with form?''" (166). In relation to this, we might recall that in the introduction to Johnson's novels, we referred to a short story, "Everyone Knows Somebody Whose Dead," in order to
show how, while it worked within the conventions of story-telling, it also undermined these conventions, by drawing attention to them as artificial. This is the same strategy that Johnson uses in this novel: he provides us with form and structure, an exposition, a development, complications and a kind of resolution at the end, but undermines them at the same time by drawing attention to their artificiality and fictionality. Basically, what the novel does is parody these conventions of realistic writing, from the role of the omniscient narrator to chapter headings and modes of discourse, in order to make it clear that they are narrative devices, at the same time drawing attention to the fact that these devices are what we have been accustomed to calling realistic.

Morton P. Levitt sees the novel as a parody of the modes of Victorian realism (1982 581), although there are clear parodies of elements taken from earlier and later novelistic realisms. There is an excessive use of realistic modes in the novel, exaggerating the roles of both narrator and reader, after the fashion of Sterne and Fielding, as well as exaggerating the complicity that exists between the two. In a sense, he plays with proportion here, but, at the same time, we find that he alters the purpose behind the use of the narrator-reader dialogue in order to underline, not the verisimilitude, but the fictionality of the text. So the author uses realistic techniques, but either undermines them or uses them in a new way. In a manner similar to that which we found in House Mother Normal, Johnson's narrator shares
the narrative with other voices, and similarly, by placing his voice on the same level as that of the characters, we find that the question of authority is once more broached. The struggle for independence on the part of Christie draws attention to the fact that he believes that there may be an alternative to the ending imposed by convention and the author. This in itself should suggest the idea of permutation and pluralism, as well as undermining the authority of the realistic narrative the author makes use of. This, coupled with the juxtaposition of distinct modes of discourse (realistic narrative and double-entry book-keeping) draws attention to the fact that the narrative is an ontological construct distinct from reality, but which ironically makes use of the same modes of discourse that we use to give form and significance to that reality.

So, the novel is about the limitations and artifice of the novel form, adopting certain eighteenth century characteristics, like the chapter headings which parody Fielding's as they comment, sometimes erroneously, on the action that will follow. This happens, for example, in the chapter entitled "Christie Described; and the Shrike created," where Christie is not, in fact, described, as the author enters into a dialogue with the reader that clearly draws attention to the fictional nature of both characters. In this case, as on other occasions in the novel, the narrator refuses to supply visual images, believing them not to convey a picture of the character. He even allows the reader to exercise his imagination although he believes that this might
undermine the fictionality that he hopes to achieve, leading the reader to identify with the character and so on. The chapter begins with a clear allusion to the fact that a description is expected of the author (the dialogue with form), and, moreover, in referring to "the Shrike created," the author clearly alludes to the creative process. Within the chapter he recreates this process by hesitating and thinking of a name for her and so on, but this is done in a manner which deliberately parallels, here as elsewhere, the idea of the creation being the work of an omnipotent being. In fact, the omniscient author, and the omniscient God are often equated in an ironic fashion in the novel, to underline the link between the fictionality of form and significance in both the novel and the world.

The chapter opens as follows:

An attempt should be made to characterise Christie's appearance. I do so with diffidence, in the knowledge that such physical descriptions are rarely of value in a novel. It is one of its limitations; and there are so many others.

Here the allusion to convention is obvious as is the total futility in trying to equate reality with a simulacrum. The irony is then reinforced when the narrator contradicts himself and leaves everything up to the reader's imagination, thus recalling the reductive tabular descriptions of characters in Travelling People, House Mother Normal, and Beckett, of course:

Christie is therefore an average shape,
height, weight, build, and colour. Make him what you will: probably in the image of yourself. You are allowed complete freedom in the matter of warts and moles, particularly; as long as he has one of either.

The sarcasm is obvious here, and it is curious how our freedom is limited in a fashion not unlike the way in which the author treats Christie. The point would seem to be that our vision, or idea of reality, must always be determined by some convention or another. The narrator continues:

Nor are his motives important. Especially are his motives of no importance to us, though the usual clues will certainly be given. We are concerned with actions. A man may be defined through his actions, you will remember. We may guess at his motives, of course; he may do so as well. We may also guess at the winner of the three-fifteen at the next meeting at Market Rasen. (1984 51-52)

What Johnson does here is totally undermine the realistic convention of cause and effect. He alludes ironically to the tendency towards the possibility of judging people by their actions, but this is obviously not his position when the reality of his character has been totally undermined by refusing to describe him. This point may also relate to the realistic reader's tendency to be interested only in what happens next, too, and the reference to being allowed to guess at motives is a reminder that all is chaos: there are no
reasons, everything just happens by accident. The link between this fact in the fiction and its truth in reality is made clear by the ontological leap that is made when he addresses us directly in relation to something outside the fiction: the three-fifteen at a race meeting.

Another important point about this passage is that it is later undermined by the insistence of the author in describing Christie's past life in order to discover the reasons for his behaviour. Clearly, the author contradicts himself here in order to mock, on the one hand, his own authority, and, on the other, to draw attention to the fictionality of any such attempt, given the increasingly bizarre circumstances of the novel (Christie at one point poisons 20,479 Londoners). For example, he writes: "You must be curious about Christie's father. So am I," (81) and goes on to describe this and other aspects of his past life. However, the point that Johnson really wants to make is made clear a few lines later:

I'm going to pack this in soon: both everything and nothing in a person's past and background may be significant. . . .

Oh, I could go on and on for pages and pages about Christie's young life, inventing and observing, remembering and borrowing. But why?

All is chaos and unexplainable.

These things happened. He is as he is, you are as you are.

Act on that: all is chaos. (81-82)
Once more, Johnson transgresses narrative levels and makes his didactic point, one that is already implicit in the novel, that the order and significance imposed on Christie's life is all artificial. Perhaps this kind of digression is heavy handed here, but it would seem to highlight the seriousness of the point that this comic novel is making.

We have spoken before about Johnson's anti-religious feeling, and this novel clearly relates to this. Curiously, there is an ironic allusion made to god as the omniscient prime mover of all things. In one sense, the story of the creation is referred to as a fiction, and the novel parallels this fiction in many ways, creating man and his mate and so on. However, in another sense, we see how the creation, or the story of the creation has been the prime mover in propagating the lie that there is order and significance in the Universe. This would seem to be the lie that Johnson sees as being the source of man's pessimism: in the light of such hope, how can we possibly accept that all is chaos.

The story of the creation, as told to Christie, and believed by Christie is included in the novel, and is foregrounded by being included in a self-consciously introduced analepsis:

Here is the story promised you on page 29, as told to Christie at his Catholic mother's shapely knee: It seems that there has always existed a God, or it may be that He created Himself. There is no doubt, however, that He
claims to have created something He calls the world, though in context this must be extended to cover the universe or universes, too. Into this world He places various creations, roughly interdependent though a certain amount of jockeying for position is evident in the early stages. Amongst these creations is Man and (shortly afterwards) Woman. God gives this couple, known as Adam and Eve, something called free will, which means they can act as they like,

and so he goes on. Then: "God has been making it all up as he goes along, like certain kinds of novelist. . . ." (79-80). It should be obvious that the story of the creation coincides at every point with the story of Christie Malry. Johnson deliberately emphasises that both narratives are fictions, and that there is no plan (God makes it up as he goes along too). Any order is a fiction, and the irony is that some people, like Christie, believe it. Hence the irony of Christie being given free will, when the novelist finally kills him off without there having been any suggestion of there being any point: Christie ends untidily, and the reckoning at the end, as we said, is false. By doing this, the link between the fictions that appear in novels and the fictions that we tell ourselves in real life is made clear in this novel. He makes use of the paradise lost theme as he did in Travelling People, and also inverts it by denying the possibility of any final reckoning. The underlying pessimism comes clearly to the surface
here, but in spite of that, it should not be forgotten that Christie Malry is a very playful novel, full of the kind of jouissance that typifies many postmodernist works.

Johnson, in this novel, successfully integrates the novel and the anti-novel, the text and the metatext, the fiction and its commentary. What is successful about it too, is the way in which this is done through a convincing interaction between author and reader as well as between the author and the characters. An important point that comes across when we appreciate the similarity between these dialogues which take place at different narrative levels, is that we realise that our own dialogue with the narrator is as fictional as that he has with Christie. Johnson deliberately draws us into a relationship in order to make us aware that it exists only as a fiction.

Related to the effect of the way the novel and anti-novel are interwoven, Johnson makes great use of retraction in the narrative. He says he will do one thing then does another, he promises information and then refuses it. At the same time, conventions are installed in the narrative to be subverted at the first opportunity. This has been seen as regards character description, but occurs throughout the novel at many levels. At one level, this is so when the characters refer to their awareness of being in a novel, "It was I who first told you the comic story of God, remember, which will no doubt be passed on to readers in due course" (29), says Christie’s mum; and this also takes
place when the narrator interrupts conversations with attributive phrases in the most unexpected places: "'What I would like to,' said Headlam, 'do is to . . .'") (102). In a sense the novel also breaks with the conventions imposed by the dimensions of situational constraint, juxtaposing formal and informal language, often referring explicitly (within a rather informal narrative) to his intention to use oratio recta or oratio obliqua, and so on. Simply the mixing of modes draws attention to their nature as modes, and in a negative manner shows up their limitations.

As we have seen, then, a dialogue is established with the reader in this novel, which is parallel with a dialogue with form. In fact, there is a continual dialectic here which draws attention to the existence of different possibilities for the novel's development, and, besides the use of explicit authorial comment to the reader, we find that the interweaving of modes and styles, by a negative process, shows the limitations as well as the possibilities of the discourses used.

Earlier, we noted a similarity between this novel and Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds*, and, as in the earlier novel, we find how Johnson makes use of realistic modes from different periods of literary history. One in particular, the parodic chapter headings in the style of the 18th century, because of its parodic nature, sets up a dialogue with form which functions in many different ways. These anticipate what will take place later, but are often, in fact, red herrings. They may be suggestive of the author's particular selection
process, and, as well as drawing attention to the possibilities available to him, draw attention to traditional structure and expectation. One good example of this is the title of chapter one: "The Industrious Pilgrim: An Exposition without which You might have felt Unhappy." There are a number of points here: the protagonist’s quest or search is introduced, although rather ironically as in Travelling People, as it is a quest that will be unsuccessful; as well as the use of particularly traditional material, the adherence to traditional rhetoric is also suggested ("An Exposition"), although this is something which is later undermined, by breaking the frame; the title also suggests reader involvement and expectation, the exercise of a specific choice by the author, one that could have been omitted, and in general, refers to the existence of alternatives in spite of certain limitations imposed on the novelist by the predispositions of novelistic convention. In fact, this particular use of the chapter heading is reminiscent of the way in which Johnson draws attention to the conventional use of character description in the chapter on Christie and the Shrike, emphasising just how conventional and artificial it all is.

These headings are like a kind of parenthesis in which explicit metafictional comment is made. In fact, the novel as a whole is full of such comment: in the headings, the author parodies the intrusive eighteenth century omniscient narrator. However, rather than underlining the verisimilitude of the narrative, these
headings and parentheses undermine the realism of the narrative, even undermining the authority of the narrator himself. In fact, this is another example of Johnson playing with the idea of the authoritative text, not only subverting the authority of his narrative by juxtaposing discourses which vie with each other for authority (the biblical grand narrative and modern accounting), but also by having the reader (implicitly) and his characters (explicitly), through their discussions with him, question the way in which he handles his material (the dialogue with the reader regarding the efficacy of description and the author being unable to compete with the reader’s imagination is an example of this).

Throughout, Johnson explicitly and self-consciously draws attention to himself and his technique, drawing the reader into a dialogue in which he himself questions his authority. This is also clear when he interweaves his different styles in such a way that the reader is continually reminded of inappropriateness or limitations or the existence of alternative choices. Reader expectation is continually referred to, but not just in terms of what has happened or what is going to happen at the level of story, but in terms of the creation of the novel as artefact, drawing attention to the page number or the place a particular passage or chapter has within an artificial novelistic structure. The arbitrariness of it all (albeit within novelistic convention), the existence of equally or even more valid alternative possibilities, all underline that it is an illusion, an
autonomous fiction, just as the grand narratives that we accept are fictions.

In fact, as in House Mother Normal, the reader is made aware of a hierarchy of narratives, or distinct ontological levels of authority, partly through the presentation of the different kinds of reckoning (all equally undermined), partly through the introduction of both reader and characters into a discussion about freedom and limitations within the novel (Johnson frequently alludes to the limitations of the novel form), and partly through the use of intertextuality (the Suma de Arithmetica, Geometria, Proportioni et proportionita), which provides yet another ontological level, adding to the tension that exists between them, as well as to the confusion that begins to exist between the real and the fictional or fantastic. The reader, for example, may feel that he is involved literally in the novel when the author addresses him, or gives him authority to make use of his imagination, but such an illusion is undermined when Johnson transgresses ontological levels to involve himself in a similar discussion with Christie, a fictional character, thus drawing attention to the fictional nature of everything in the text, even, ourselves. Our own freedom of choice, as readers, is undermined, as is the characters' as is the author's, all of which constitutes part of what Johnson wants to say about the nature of the narratives which we use to tell our lives: reality to a great extent is determined, created and limited by the mode of discourse we use.
We have seen that there is a confusion between the real and the fictional in the novel and this extends to a confusion even of the literal and the metaphorical, in a sense. We spoke of Johnson’s exploitation of the absurdity of logic after the fashion of O’Brien, when he allows the realistic to become real, that is, when he allows Christie to exist at the same ontological level as himself. By doing this, which is basically to overdetermine the fictional as real, we find that he shows up the fictionality of different kinds of discourse. Christie, at the outset, is just a name given to a character which we are allowed to imagine for ourselves, however, by making the ontological leap which involves him in a discussion with the author, Johnson shows that the laws which govern the construction of Christie’s fictional world, govern our own.

This is yet another way in which B.S. Johnson draws attention to the relation between fact and fiction. Ontologically distinct zones collide and we find that it is not just that telling stories is telling lies, but that we cannot escape the construction of reality through narrative. We find not only the use but the equation of different kinds of discourses, an affirmation of the relation between factual and fictional narratives. Once more, for Johnson, the only reality is the fictional process, and this far outstrips any idea of the existence of cause and effect. Arbitrary authorial intervention supplants this and, as Christie’s mother says, once more transgressing ontological levels, all is done “for the purposes of this novel” (28).
Essentially, what this tells us is that in any narrative, structure and meaning are imposed and artificial.

Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry, like all of Johnson's novels, is about its own coming into being, against the background of a story which shows a character artificially imposing form in order to give meaning to experience. The novel involves an essential paradox in that it gives form where there is none, both at the level of form and content, and, by paradoxically, tidying everything up at the end when he kills Christie, avoiding the untidiness of chaos, Johnson shows the arbitrariness and artificiality, and undermines the authority of narrative discourses.

The nature of the games Johnson plays will be gone into in a little more detail later, but suffice it to say that the overall effect is one of frame-breaking: the narrative creates itself in order to later subvert itself by the introduction of subversive elements. It is not only a parodic text, but is self-parodic, mocking its own self-consciousness. What becomes clear also in the novel is that by substituting cause and effect with the arbitrary will of the author, and by ironically relating this to the arbitrary will of God, the text, where it continually tends to impose order, as we see, undermines itself, and also undermines any belief in a prime cause or a final reckoning in reality.

This may seem rather pessimistic, but Johnson in his usual resigned manner is drawing attention to his basic unbelief, and in order to do so, his is an
oppositional discourse which installs and subverts a wide range of modes both literary and non-literary, ranging from the grand narratives of religious discourse to accountancy, and from an impressionistic stream of consciousness to a dramatic theatrical style. The use of these first two modes in particular within a novel which foregrounds the fictionality of every mode, implies a serious statement about the way in which our vision of reality has been distorted by both religion and materialism. The net effect is to suggest that reality is not like that, and while the novel does not, on this occasion, offer an alternative to those narratives, it alludes to a reality that is made more manifest to us by its absence. Johnson questions the grand narratives of the twentieth century, and allows us to look for our own alternative.
2.7. See the Old Lady Decently.

Up to now we have seen that B.S. Johnson is a postmodernist author. All narratives are shown to be fictions, distortions and fabrications and offer only a simulacrum of reality. He draws attention to the limitations of convention, but sees equally that all writing is governed by it, for which reason he extends the possibilities of the novel by introducing new modes of discourse, and mixing existing modes in new and unusual ways. To achieve his metafictional aims, he tends to create fictions and then subvert them, create a frame for reality and then break it, all to show that reality is not capable of being represented, or is at least distorted using the existing traditional conventions of realism. His last novel, See the Old Lady Decently, was no exception to this and we find that, once more, Johnson draws on all of his resources, many of them tried in the earlier novels, in his pursuit of truth.

In this novel, Johnson continues to make the same kind of point he was making in Christie Malry. In the earlier novel, his intention was to undermine some of the grand narratives of the present day, and the same can be said of See the Old Lady Decently. In this case, however, he seeks to provide alternatives to the lies that historians have told about the pasts of Great Britain and Broader Britain (the Empire) and undermines the authority of the discourses that are customarily used in order to recount that past.
Johnson is typically postmodernist in this novel in that he creates a series of ontologically distinct worlds, each determined by the use of a specific mode of discourse and representative of a different point of view of a period that covers roughly the same events. We find the alternation, overlapping and even transgression of distinct narrative levels, and, in order to suggest once more the idea of a hierarchy of authorities, the use of intertextuality, including the use of interviews and even the reproduction of documentary evidence. Hence, we find perhaps the broadest variety of sources and modes for this novel which sets out to develop three interlinked themes: the death of his mother, the death of the mother country and the renewal aspect of motherhood (Bakewell 1975 8), and as Bakewell points out, the cancer his mother died of was to parallel “the decline of Britain over the last forty years and the inevitable processes of growth/decay inherent in life itself” (1975 8).

See the Old Lady Decently was to be the first novel of a trilogy called the Matrix Trilogy where the second volume was to be entitled Buried Although and the third, Among Those Left are You, the whole reading See the old lady decently buried although among those left are you. The first novel, the only one to be completed, covers the period from his mother’s birth in 1908 until his own birth in 1933 and draws attention to the difference in the way historians recall this period compared with what must have been the personal experience of those involved. Of course, Johnson was well aware that he was
faced with a new problem in this novel. Whereas he had been able to rely on autobiography to write truth in some of his earlier novels, this time he had to admit that there was a great deal that he did not know about his mother’s childhood and youth. Bakewell writes, “He had only a handful of letters and a few old photographs to go on. He had therefore to draw the distinction between what was to be of necessity fiction, what was to be half fiction and half truth and what, in the final book, was to be All Truth” (1975 9-10). This idea of “All Truth” is related to what he is said to have called “‘the whole adding up to much more than the sum of its parts’” when talking about the trilogy (Bakewell 1975 8). While the author must necessarily select, distort and fabricate, which suggests that all of the sources and narratives can be considered fictions, it seems that Johnson felt that the whole would somehow reflect the truth, or perhaps at least offer an alternative to the authoritative versions of the past which he so clearly rejected. Certainly the aspects of randomness that we find in this novel, which, like earlier works, have to do with his desire to reflect the underlying chaos of reality, attempt to be faithful to the truth, as is the tendency to draw attention to himself as a writer, transgressing ontological levels, interrupting the different threads of narrative and making explicit comments about the writing process and even about himself and his present circumstances.

The more important features of this novel are clearly explained in Michael Bakewell’s Introduction to
the posthumous publication of the novel, where he draws attention to the distinctly factual and fictional narratives:

The fiction he decided should be patently so and he wrote a series of episodes set in a kitchen where his mother worked, dominated by a monstrous chef named Virrels. These were written very much in the brisk comic idiom he had employed in his previous novel Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry. These are indicated in the text by the sign V. (1975 10)

This kind of writing is wholly derivative, taken from the typical kind of pot-boiler set in the last century or the beginning of this one, reminiscent of Fanny Hill and full of types and caricatures. Here he really takes Flann O’Brien seriously and borrows plots and characters from readily available literature in a way that makes us aware that these sections are self-evident shams. In fact, he often alludes to the invention process in these sections: sometimes repeating himself; sometimes embellishing the obviously fictional narrative with increasingly more extravagant inventions; sometimes distancing himself from the fictional creation and emphasising the existence of distinct ontological worlds by referring to his real surroundings; sometimes hesitating or doubting due to his ignorance of fact and detail, tending even to make parenthetical statements in his own voice, addressing the reader, drawing attention to style and process, making it clear what is invention, even what his alternative possibilities are:
The reader will at once have seen the means by which the Virrels dominance could be threatened. Given only that I have to invent a sexual appetite for the Checker stronger in the mornings than late at night, a space for the entry of the Maitre can easily be created.

Or,

About four sentences back (I had to finish before saying this, for some reason) I went out to a pub called the Albion and what with sleeping that off, playing absurd cricket with my son and his mates, and attending to similar necessaries it was some seven hours before I could resume. (1975 55-56)

Here, fiction and reality overlap and interweave in such a way as to suggest that within the narrative they are essentially of the same nature, that is, narrative constructs which distort and fabricate in spite of their respective degrees of authority.

Bakewell tells us that

The main narrative of his mother’s life, part truth, part fiction, partly assembled from tape-recorded memories of those who knew her, is marked by the year and her age at the time, e.g., 16(8) represents 1916 when Emily was eight. Such letters and documents that were to hand were introduced into the text without amendment. (1975 10)

In these sections, Johnson makes use of the objet trouvé (telegrams), photographs (which are described),
letters and tape-recorded interviews (which are transcribed), in order to try to reconstruct parts of his mother's life. These are interwoven with fictitious journal extracts and letters as well as fictitious narrative, sometimes in third and sometimes in first person describing Emily's point of view regarding ongoing events, and sometimes in a third person, highlighting Johnson's own ironic point of view about the same events:

The old men ratified and gave forth the League. Except one, but he was American and had unfortunately thought of the idea in the first place. The word reparations gained currency beyond its means. Money was clearly going to be all the go. King George the Fifth was (numbers are going to be of more importance than most realise) fifty-five this year.

My Dad it is, Emily thought, not Unknown to me, as they read the papers. Glory to J.B. Wilson, News Editor of the Daily Express, who thought of the idea. (52)

Curiously, these sections can be considered as providing an ironic commentary on the generally accepted historical view of the events that took place, particularly those during and after the First World War. Another way to see them is as an ironic alternative to the authoritative grand narrative of imperialist Britain: by tending to be supported by authorial comment, as well as by being a much more moving and
personal statement about what happened to individuals
the authority of what is a grossly general and false
view of the First World War and its consequences is
undermined.

In earlier novels by Johnson, particularly _The
Unfortunates_, we saw how the author reacted against
generalisation as falsification. In a sense, this is
what this novel is about: how the broad general view of
history is a gross falsification which can be undermined
by the personal and individual, which is, at least more
ture than the lies propagated by the history books. This
brings us to consider the other sections into which the
novel is divided.

The Greater Britain sections are written in
the manner of a guided tour. They represent
the growth of Britain across the centuries and
its decay during the period of the three
novels. The actual names are left out --'to
give generality if not universality'. These
sequences are marked by the sign GB.

And Bakewell continues to explain Johnson’s attitudes
and intentions regarding these and the Broader Britain
sections:

For Bryan the decay of the Empire began at
Ypres. This was to be the reason for the two
return journeys there across the years. The
growth and decay of the Empire and
Commonwealth itself is treated in a similar
manner to the Great Britain sequences. 'The GB
and BB bits are intended to involve the reader
he has to supply information himself - what he knows of the Empire.' The relevant information is present without comment, although Bryan realised that this posed him with a personal dilemma: 'At some point I shall have to point out that I did not approve of things as they were - when I condemn at one point, it does not necessarily mean I approved of what happened earlier. It may mean that it is all chaos.' The Empire - Broader Britain sequences are indicated by the sign BB. (10-11)

For the most part these sections read like history books or travel guides and basically represent the grand narrative of the British Empire's history. Through what is a clearly stereotypical form of narrative with its omissions, cliches and formulae, Johnson draws attention to the fact that such views of reality are general, limited and partial, totally ignoring anything that might have to do with the individual or his personal suffering. By leaving out details, not only does he give generality, but such generality underlines the fictitious nature of any such statements which could often be attributed to a variety of names, places or periods. This is reminiscent of what he says in The Unfortunates about generalisation, that "In general, generalisation is to lie" ("Last" 6). The point that is being made is that the grand narratives are lies, that their authority has to be denied and replaced by discourses that come closer to the truth in spite of their limited and fragmentary nature. In this way, and
more will be said about it later, by parodying certain accepted modes of passing on the national heritage Johnson undermines the authoritative narrative and gives that authority to the more personal narrative dealing with his mother.

As we have seen, Johnson is continually preoccupied with the presence or absence of meaning in life and See the Old Lady Decently is no exception. In a sense, there is a similarity between this novel and The Unfortunates in that both deal with the way in which the death of someone close to the author has affected him. Of course, the death of the mother does not appear in the novel, but, as Bakewell remarks, "He was greatly affected by her death and found himself involved in a total reappraisal of her life and his own... He felt a need to examine her life in detail and to explore the whole concept of motherhood" (1975 7). Also like The Unfortunates, we see how he is preoccupied with the way in which the death itself affects and changes one's attitude and memories of the past, and once more the underlying concern is with how cancer strikes randomly in a manner which totally undermines any sense of meaning that life may have. As we have said, cancer and the death of the mother do not appear in the novel in an explicit manner, but they formed part of the overall scheme, and we find how the concrete poems that figure in the text show, not only the development of his mother's breasts, and as such her development as a woman and mother, but we also find that, in Poem Five, the introduction of the letters n and nc into the poem are
indicative of what was to be the growth of the cancer that killed her: these two concrete poems that appear in the novel are both in the form of a breast, the first smaller than the second, and are made up of the words ma, mamma, mammary, Mary, marry and tit in the first, and the repetition of breast with tit forming the nipple as in the previous poem, in the second, with n and nc introduced in a random fashion indicating the beginnings of the cancer.

The subject matter and the use of the poems clearly indicate the theme that preoccupied Johnson here, but another aspect of the novel is suggestive of the fact that his attitude towards the mother goes beyond the personal and that he begins to see her in terms of the archetype. In fact the novel is interspersed with the presence of the Mother Goddess. Bakewell writes:

> Obviously the Mother Goddess could not figure directly in the text and Bryan chose to reflect her importance by a series of quotations from Neumann's The Great Mother. A quotation which was to have figured in the second volume draws the essential parallel: 'Early man, and the child, perceives the world "mythologically". That is, he experiences the world predominantly by forming archetypal images that he projects upon it. The child, for example, first experiences in his mother the archetype of the Great Mother, that is the reality of an all-powerful numinous woman, on whom he is dependent in all things, and not
the objective reality of his personal mother, this particular historical mother which his mother becomes for him later when his ego and consciousness are more developed.' 'The Mother', wrote Bryan, 'is she who makes all things possible (even when those things seem to be done against her; even when at least some of those things must necessarily have been done against what she stood for).

(1975 12)

In the novel itself Johnson begins with a reference to "the Great Round, uroboros, container of opposites, within which we war, laugh and are silent" (17), which he later relates to the mother in Poem Three:

she
of clay
the potter

she
of earth
the bearer

she
of all
the great round. (84-85)

Now Johnson, as we have observed, was not a religious person and even in this novel continually alludes to the chaos that underlies everything. In fact, he even quotes Neumann to attest to the fact:

'Our conscious classifications and
schematizations are always attempts to arrive, through abstraction, at an orientation within the reality of life. But this living reality, with its crests and troughs, progressions and regressions, irruptions and anticipations, is at every moment spontaneous and unformulable.'

(78)
And in his own, familiar voice he writes:

All this is very difficult to comprehend. Look, there were millions of people, thousands of peoples, hundreds of countries, all of them going in every direction and performing every kind of significant and insignificant act. How could anyone impose order on that multitudinous discontinuity? History must surely be lying, of one kind or another, no more true than what used to be called fiction? How can any one mind comprehend it? And would there be any point if it could? (96)

This seems to reflect the same preoccupations as before, but with a more specific focus being placed on the fictitious nature of History. He also draws attention to what must necessarily be the fictitious nature of his own efforts, having given form to what is formless. But what is implicit here is the importance of the fact that he is offering a narrative, a petite histoire, about an individual, which surely undermines the authority of the lies that have been, and still are, told to us by historians. Moreover, the continual references to the Great Round and the Great Mother are suggestive of some
other underlying truth that he is able to allude to even if he is unable to formulate it. Certainly the overall impression that we get from the novel is of Johnson's being aware of there being some archetypal pattern, which although he cannot explain it, is still there to undermine all of the narratives that we might care to write; and that pattern would seem to be a fairly familiar one, that of birth, death and regeneration, which, in this novel at least, Johnson seems to be reconciled with and which incorporates all of the paradoxes.

There are other sections in the novel which convey fictionalised ideas or statements about the novel itself, which are indicated by the use of smaller letters. These also follow a pattern which it is not necessary to go into, and, as well as the sections dedicated to Neumann being marked by N, there are sections dedicated to the much hated Lord Haig, marked by H; and sections marked by O, to represent birth, death and regeneration, the Great Round.

In this novel, like all the others, Johnson dedicates a good deal of time to the nature of novel writing itself. Bakewell quotes Johnson as saying: "'To be absolutely honest the process of writing must enter into it, since that is what one is about'" (13). Hence the tendency to draw attention to his surroundings as he writes, and to randomly introduce anecdotes and other comments among the obviously written parodies of so many styles to make it clear precisely how the work was written, the process that the author had to go through,
and how the distinct ontological worlds of the novel coexisted and intermingled with his life. On what the reader can expect to find in the novel, Johnson is quoted thus:

'Something for everybody! If you do not like this part, or that part, or the other, then skip ahead or back to a part you did enjoy. It is no part of my intention to provide a continuous narrative, no, that you can get from television at the turn of a switch, who can compete with that? No, my purpose is to reflect with humility the reality of the chaos, what life really seems to be like.'

(1975 13)

What life seems to be like would seem to depend a great deal on how you look at it for Johnson and the truth is something that still seems to elude him, although he draws attention to the ways in which the truth is formulated in order to undermine the authoritative versions and allude to alternatives in a typically postmodern fashion.

In this novel, as he did elsewhere, Johnson flaunts the idea of the teller, self-consciously drawing attention to himself as narrator. Unlike the modernists, who sought impersonality, we find him laying bare his self and drawing attention to the processes he goes through, his limitations and disappointments. All of this underlines the fact that everything in the novel is told, and by interweaving the personal with the absurd historical generalisations, he implicitly draws
attention to the way is which histories are also told. He exaggerated the existence of the authorial presence in this novel as he did in *Christie Malry*, far beyond the needs of story or information, which implicitly draws attention to the fact that there is an author behind the history books too, equally limited and probably mistaken when he makes such sweeping generalisations about the past. The alternations from one ontological world to another, and the transgression of the ontological gap which brings the real world into the fiction, on the occasions that Johnson speaks of his surroundings draws attention to the relative distance between the distinct narratives and reality.

Although Johnson integrates the fictional with the real on occasions in the novel, and he does this in a parodic manner, particularly at the end of the novel when he fictitiously recounts his birth after the fashion of Sterne, usually the two are deliberately kept apart with the author commenting on the act of narration and the construction of the story frequently. The use of parody in other sections, combined with the ellipses we mentioned, particularly in the hisory and guide book sections, is metafictional in a more implicit manner. This kind of thing emphasises the nature of these texts as discourse which orders reality in terms of an accepted ideology, in which particularly the omission of names and the substantial underlines the tendency to construct reality in a particular way.

The effect of all of this is to show just how relative reality is, and to remind us of the distance
between the verbally ordered construct and the reality that it is supposed to represent. The fact is that is makes it clear, particularly in the case of the history and guide books that, by using a discourse that tends towards generalisation and abstraction in the terms of a given ideology, the grand narratives of history have little or nothing to do with personal lived experience. Rather ironically, for a change, in Johnson, we find that the exaggeratedly fictionalised version of his mother Emily’s experience working in a kitchen does have more to do with her reality than the abstractions of history which are clearly more fictitious. Once more Johnson inverts the hierarchy by undermining the authoritative version, even at times undermining his own authority and distancing himself from reality by reminding us of the limitations that he is governed by, particularly as regards the availability of information about his mother.

As we have seen, the novel is made up of a series of interwoven narratives, or distinct ontological worlds, each told in a distinct style, and belonging to a distinct literary or non-literary mode. There are implicit conventions laid down, which we have made explicit earlier, and which make it possible to read the continuous narrative in a particular mode by referring to the appropriate section headings. What this does, first of all, is to suggest the artificial nature of the text, but at the same time foregrounds its lack of linearity. As well as drawing attention to the writing process as such, it shows how distinct ontological
worlds are interrelated in reality, and the relation, or lack of one, that exists between them. We could say that the interweaving of history textbook, guidebook, letters, telegrams, poems, letters, journals, anecdotes, interviews, fictional narrative and autobiography and so on, turns the novel into a kind of collage, and this is so. By juxtaposing these interrelated narratives in such a way, Johnson highlights the idea of the the whole thing as construct, revealing the process as well as suggesting the apparently contradictory notions of arbitrariness and artifice involved. History is not truth, nor is biography or autobiography, and perhaps not even the sum of all of these can tell the truth. But Johnson alludes to it and undermines the authority of any narrative that believes itself to have done so.

The novel as a whole is clearly fragmentary, and Johnson highlights the fabrication process and the fictionality of much of what he does by introducing false starts and hesitations, repetitions and many other anti-rhetorical devices that draw attention to the process of writing and undermine any notion of it being a complete and finished product. The alternating levels of narrative combined with intertextuality give a view of the realities that are described as limited and contingent, even distant from what they intended to recreate. This draws attention to the fact that the novel is as much about itself and the nature of narratives as such, as it is about his mother Emily. In a sense, this novel, which is about Johnson's coming to terms with and understanding his mother's life and death
and his own birth, is about how these things can be narrated, how these selves can be told.

As regards how a self can be told, Johnson deliberately foregrounds two particular forms of telling, which we could call the social and the personal. Each excludes the other, but are interwoven in such a way that they are complementary, although Johnson underlines the fact that in both you cannot avoid fabrication. In fact the novel is full of shifts like this from the social to the personal, from the general to the particular, from home to abroad, from the factual to the fictional, from autobiography to history; and we find that by addressing the reader, Johnson is inviting us to participate, and, in the manner of Flann O'Brien, he invites us to modulate our degree of credibility as we wish. This is, in fact, part of the point, that in the same way as there are degrees of credibility, we are also able to ascertain the varying degrees of fictionality of the various sections, but not without realising that they are all to some degree fictional. Johnson even exaggerates his own sense of fictionality in the novel by introducing himself into it not only as dramatised narrator, but as his own character, giving birth to himself, after the fashion of Joyce and particularly Sterne, in the parodic final chapter. Hence, at the level of content, Johnson shows how the author can bring himself into being in the fiction, and by transgressing the ontological gap, draws our attention to the relation between fiction and reality. Johnson is coming to terms with his own truth in the novel, but
emphasises the fact that he is doing it within a fiction. It seems that the basic paradox that recurs throughout his work is once again implicit here. Although chaos is underneath it all we can only aspire to reflect what life seems to be like: the fiction can only seem to reflect the chaos and fragmentariness, but surely this is what Lyotard and Hassan refer to as presenting the unpresentable in presentation itself.

This novel is rather full of ironies and contradictions. The first is that it is a fiction that tries to arrive at some kind of truth; or that it is a fiction that tells the truth about fictions; or that it is a necessarily fictionalised account of events interwoven with factual evidence. His mother, ironically becomes a fictional character in the novel, or becomes part of a fiction, in the Virrels’ sections, which is a kind of mise en abyme of what happens in the novel as a whole: real events and real characters are being fictionalised. This happens again, obviously, when the author himself becomes his own fictional character when he recounts his own birth, which is doubly ironic as Johnson ends with his own beginning: this really is a self-begetting novel in more than one sense of the word. There is irony present even in Johnson beginning and ending at all, as he says himself, as there is only the great round. The I can’t go on, I’ll go on attitude also reappears when he talks of being unable to imagine what happened and then proceeds to do so, and in general, much of the novel resolves itself into a description of what might have been: a fiction based on fact, but a way
of coming to terms with himself, of discovering his own truth about his reality in terms of his mother. The contradictions abound even here in describing the novel, and all of them simply underline the basic paradox that informs all of Johnson's work, his desire to tell the truth, when he must distort and fabricate, the desire to give form when there is only chaos.

See the Old Lady Decently is perhaps more typically postmodernist in its use of particular modes of discourse which are continually installed and then subverted by the author, either through explicit commentary, by the very juxtaposition of these mutually exclusive modes, or through the use of parody, which provides an implicit commentary on the nature and appropriateness of the form. Johnson does this in the final part of the novel when he parodies Sterne's idea of beginning at the beginning, with his narration of his birth ab ovo, which might, at one level, be a form of recognising his debt to the author, or may be a way of saying that there is nothing really new under the sun. On the other hand, what Johnson does here is draw attention to the fact that it is all writing, that it is all style, underlining that, even when it comes to one's own birth, the use of available modes of discourse, which ultimately create reality, cannot be avoided, nor can the tendency of narrative to fabricate and distort, for that matter.

The way in which Johnson makes use of the possibilities available to him will be gone into in detail later, but suffice it to say that the tendency is
to play with proportion in such a way that the effect is to draw attention to the nature of narrative as such. The narrator himself, for example, is foregrounded beyond the necessary requirements, and the narrative as a whole tends to be interrupted to such an extent that the whole thing seems to turn into some kind of series of digressions, not unlike *Tristram Shandy*.

This is a novel about its own coming into being, but it is set against a background that involves a number of significant themes. The mother as the individual and archetype, as the harbinger of all things, is seen as some mysterious life force in the novel. This basic acceptance of his inability to fathom the significance of the mother, and the introduction of intertextuality dealing with the archetype is significant here. In the first place Johnson here alludes to his own personal debt to his mother, but he also alludes to a possible significance which is present in spite of the author's acceptance of his inability to give it form.

The social comment is also obvious in this novel. This appears not only in the way in which he undermines the accepted grand narratives of patriotism and Empire, as well as criticising much that has to do with class consciousness (his mother was a servant) and politics (he was a socialist), but it pervades the narrative as a whole in terms of explicit allusions to the decadence of England and the Empire itself as well as being implicit in the history and guide book sections which are generally racist, class conscious and patronising
towards their readers.

On a more personal level, the novel is about death and loss. In the light of his own personal loss, Johnson dedicates a good deal of time to the description of his own mother's loss of a father. He ironically refers to "the end," when we are all dead (58), and the more positive side of things is represented by the importance of his wife, seen broadly in terms of this great round, this continual cycle of birth, death and regeneration. However, once more, it is death that would seem to be Johnson's main preoccupation, in spite of ending the novel with his own birth. In fact, the tendency throughout is to juxtapose birth, marriage and death in an ironic manner, where the positive connotations of birth or marriage are undermined by the continually looming presence of death, particularly that of his mother. As he had done previously in The Unfortunates, Johnson shows how the past of an individual, even life itself must always be seen in terms of this, and how his mother's death leads him to attribute significance to events in a manner that is not objective. However, death not only changes and shapes the way in which we remember or tell the past, its looming presence can even suggest the meaningless of past effort and suffering in the light of it.

In See the Old Lady Decently, then, Johnson once more draws attention to his preoccupation with truth in a manner which deliberately undermines the authority of the grand narratives in order to give that authority to alternative discourses, including fiction, apart from
more personal fragments of biography and testimonial evidence. The novel is once more a dialogue with form in that by continually juxtaposing different modes of discourse, it alludes to their limitations as well as their possibilities and it becomes clear just how reliable each mode is, and to what extent there has been exclusion, distortion and fabrication, although to some degree these are present in all of them. However, all of this is set within a novel that alludes to some possible significance, some intangible truth, embodied in the archetypal mother, which the novel itself is unable to give any form to. The novel alludes to there being some possible significance and ends with reconciliation and regeneration, but this is done tentatively. The sense of there being any authority in such assertions is undermined, even in the ironic and parodic tone of the author giving birth to himself. At this point the fictional and the real come into close contact, but we are made more aware of the fictionalising processes that have taken place more than anything else.

See the Old Lady Decently is a postmodernist text; it is another example of B.S. Johnson’s oppositional discourse of unbelief. He rejects all totalising narratives as fictions, particularly those of the modern age, and juxtaposes them with alternatives. However, he is willing to undermine even his own authority as author in this respect, and this novel, like the others, shows how in the process of narrativisation of truth, a process which is inevitable, distortion and fabrication are equally so. However, it should have been clear all
along that Johnson is not denying the possibility of truth-telling. It would be more true to say that his interest is in drawing attention to the relative distances that exist between that truth and narrative. Although there may be opinions to the contrary, B.S. Johnson tells a good deal of truth in this and in the rest of his novels, about the nature of narrative and about himself.

To state that Johnson had set himself an impossible task or that his novels are pointless statements that it is impossible to tell the truth in the novel form is reductive and, in the end, untrue. Certainly, he investigates the relation between fiction and reality, often in ways that had not been tried before, and indeed he draws attention to the fictional nature of his narratives, but he does so in order that we understand the true nature of narrative discourses, and that while all narratives distort and fabricate, there are degrees of fictionality which should be considered. The underlying point of the early novels, which becomes gradually more obvious as his work continues is that his desire is to undermine the grand narratives of our time in an oppositional discourse of unbelief which offers alternatives to and challenges the authority of accepted belief. Johnson saw this as carrying on in a tradition that had been started by Sterne and continued by Joyce and Beckett, and we can see how he takes advantage of the possibilities of the novel form in order to show the different directions in which it is possible to take it
while, at the same time drawing attention to their limitations, and the distance that exists between narrative and truth. What we perceive may be a simulacrum, a fiction, but we become increasingly aware of reality in his novels precisely because of its absence, and even then we have to take his word for it that he is distorting, that he is fabricating. Johnson is typically postmodernist in that he presents the unpresentable, or at least alludes to it, and all of this he does while he is stating undeniable truths about the nature of narrative and the narrative process.

At this point, let us now go on to consider just what the nature of Johnson’s narrative is and how, by taking particular advantage of the alternatives that are available to him, he extends the range of the novel, while at the same time drawing attention the limitations imposed by conventional form.
Part Four

The Narrative Technique of B.S. Johnson
1. The Nature of Narrative and B.S. Johnson.

The postmodernist narratives of B.S. Johnson tend to undermine the value of authoritative narrative, which is made manifest in a developing tendency in his novels to transgress rules and break frames in a manner which denies the idea of a single structure. He goes beyond the predispositions of a conventional single structure by foregrounding process rather than product, by highlighting the alternatives available to him, on occasions deliberately refusing to make choices. In simple terms, he often undermines conventional reader expectation or we could say that he goes against the rules of conventional rhetoric, drawing attention to these rules and expectations and making the reader aware of the artificial nature of any narrative construct.

One of the ways in which this process of defamiliarisation is achieved is to make an emphatic use of alterations and transgressions within categories of discourse which foreground aspects of the narrative other than story, and force the reader to become aware of the narrative process. Due to the existence of reader expectation, or what is the same, the predispositions of conventional rhetoric, the use of such alterations and transgressions are suggestive of a dialogue with the conventional forms of narrative, which, we have said, tend towards a single structure. Although he would appear to go beyond the bounds of convention, Johnson, in fact, is simply taking advantage of possibilities within narrative that have always existed. Each novel
may be a unique set of variables, but it is so within the same categories of discourse that are available to all novelists. As he said himself, he simply goes in a direction which exploits what the novel is best at. By doing so, he explores the nature of narrative, highlighting the possibilities and limitations of the novel form.

This sense of exploration and of dialectic is underlined by the manner in which Johnson’s anti-rhetoric incorporates doubts and hesitations into the narrative. Moreover, on some occasions, his dissatisfaction with conventional narrative brings him to formulate his own conventions as an alternative to existing rhetoric, further highlighting the artificial nature of these rules and conventions. However, it is also part of Johnson’s oppositional discourse to undermine even those conventions that he introduces himself, as he does, for example, in House Mother Normal, where he steps outside of the frame, transgressing even his own rules in order to highlight their artificiality and the fictional nature of the narrative. The point is always to undermine the idea of the authoritative text, even that of the author, in order to highlight the autonomous nature of fiction and to show that it is ontologically distinct from reality and experience.

Earlier we made it clear that in spite of the tendency to think of the novel in terms of its variables it is possible to consider the areas within which there may be variety as constants: that is, it is possible to
think in terms of a given set of elements of the novel, of categories of discourse and codes that make up the narrative frame. It is not the elements that we find in the novel that determine its nature, but the degree to which the author takes advantage of already existing alternatives, the activity that we find within categories of discourse, the degree to which codes or other elements within the narrative are determined, as well as the extent to which the author plays. At the same time, it must be said that even the breaking of the traditional rules of rhetoric must always be seen in terms of the rules that they contravene and never as the simple absence of those rules. Even rhetoric itself ought to be considered as a developing set of naturalised conventions, so that when we speak of Johnson’s oppositional discourse, or dialogue with form, it is in these terms that we should consider it. What Johnson does, then, is to make a particular use of a continually developing series of alternatives within a constant set of variables that can be called the elements of the novel.

B.S. Johnson’s dialogue with form is the oppositional discourse of unbelief in which his concerns about the nature of narrative and its relation with experience become increasingly apparent. In order to highlight these concerns we find that he tends to take advantage of the possibilities of narrative in an unconventional manner. Some of these consist in varying and mixing modes in his narratives, in order to show how the choice of mode is indicative of a particular way of
seing experience and therefore influences the way in which that experience is constructed. We find both public and private games, frame-breaking, alterations and transgressions within categories of discourse, the unusual foregrounding of codes and other elements of the novel, which play with our ideas of proportion and appropriateness. There is a tendency towards parody, towards play in the more conventional sense of rhetorical games, and sometimes even the refusal to play the game in order to defeat reader expectation and to make us more aware of the nature of the game. Johnson is innovative when it comes to his awareness of the novel as artifact, and to this end we find many unusual uses of graphology. Story is yet another area in which we find the unexpected with the substitution of cause and effect by the arbitrary will of the author as well as an unusual treatment of character and setting, even a Sterne-like tendency towards digression which undermines the importance of story as such. All of this, and much more, draws attention to the author himself as well as to the nature of his narrative in a series of novels which can be called postmodernist metafiction.

However, rather than describe the nature of his narrative in this arbitrary manner, let us now return to our narratological model. By describing Johnson's novels in these terms, it will allow us to see them as examples of a form which develops by exploiting already existing alternatives, and it should become clear just to what extent his peculiar use of the existing possibilities of the novel can be described as a dialogue with form or
oppositional discourse.
1.1. B.S. Johnson and the Narratological Model

Before looking at each novel in detail it is worthwhile to just sum up the kind of tendencies likely to be found in Johnson’s narratives in terms of the model we developed previously. First of all, we should say that his narratives are playful, in that there is a tendency towards alteration and transgression within most categories of discourse as well as a disproportionate foregrounding of certain aspects of the narrative. These are thematically significant in that they draw attention to themselves and therefore to the nature of the narrative as such.

As regards time, we find many alterations which deny the reader the comfort of linear sequence and suggest the existence of an alternative order outwith the structure imposed by the author. The fact that anachronies are frequent might suggest that Johnson carries on from where the moderns left off in his desire to show the randomness of memory, the interaction of past and present and the way in which each informs the other, in his use, particularly, of analepsis or flashback. Due to the self-conscious manner in which this device is made use of, or overdetermined, we can see how particular thematic concerns are foregrounded, not least the nature of the narrative process itself, the artificiality of chronological sequence and the chaos underlying it all. Moreover, we find that analepsis and prolepsis in Johnson’s novels often draw
attention to the nature of the novel as artefact, self-consciously looking forward and back to particular pages or chapters in the physical book.

The same kind of thing occurs due to alterations as regards the duration of the narrative. While traditional narratives tend towards scene and summary, there is a good deal more pause in Johnson's postmodernist narratives to allow the possibility of authorial digression and comment which tend towards explicit metafictional statement. Moreover, his narratives tend towards summary rather than scene, the effect of which is to make us more aware of authorial intervention, and even when we find examples of scene, Johnson sometimes draws attention to himself, as well as the fictitious nature of the scene, by announcing it as oratio recta (for example, Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry), by overtly changing his mode of discourse and making use of theatrical conventions (as in Travelling People, Albert Angelo and elsewhere), and so on. Self-conscious ellipsis often foregrounds the limitations of the author and the lack of information available to him, while the simple tendency to alternate between different durations, avoiding any single choice that might govern the nature of the narrative, again gains thematic significance by implicitly foregrounding the existence of alternatives and suggesting the distance between the narrative and its referent.

While frequency, on the whole, tends to be singulative, even in Johnson's novels, there are occasions when we find deliberate repetitions or the
iterative mode. Again, the effect of the overdetermination of repetition in particular, especially if it is combined with a shift in perspective, as in *House Mother Normal*, can take on thematic significance, in this case, foregrounding the ontologically distinct nature of a series of narratives which describe exactly the same events.

As regards mode, we can expect to find a good deal more authorial intervention and a distinct lack of distance from the events. Johnson is usually very much present in his novels and tends to intervene in the narrative in an overt manner. As regards narrative distance, we can say that the tendency is towards narrativised discourse, both in the narration of events and in the narration of speech. As regards events, the narrator is overtly involved, summarising here or digressing there, in a manner which links up with the tendency towards pause and summary in the duration of the narration. In speech, even when we find reported discourse, the narrator tends to be intrusive also, particularly in the manner speech is attributed to the speakers, sometimes even breaking the rules or conventions for the presentation of speech, which highlights the existence of these conventions as such.

As regards the presentation of thought, Johnson occasionally experiments with stream of consciousness techniques, but even then, he usually undermines the authority of his narrative in an intrusive manner by reminding the reader that it all goes on in the author’s head, or by revealing the illusion. Simply alternating
from one mode of presentation to another, which occurs frequently in his narrative, highlights the existence of alternatives and foregrounds the extent of fabrication in the presentation of events, thoughts or speech.

In Johnson's novels, there is also a tendency towards alterations in perspective. In many of them the reliability of the narrator is often undermined, sometimes because of a lack of any ideological hierarchy, or because of the inversion of what we would expect to be the reliable narrative, sometimes because of the intrusion of the author, or an extradiegetic narrator-focaliser, who undermines the authority of a narrative told from a different point of view. Even the idea of reliability or unreliability becomes an important factor, sometimes because the author, or narrator indulges in paralipsis, by admitting his limitations or his lack of information, sometimes by over-imaginatively providing more information than he can possibly have access to and sometimes by providing alternative versions of the same events. The effect in these cases is to undermine the value of the authoritative text which is often behind Johnson's intentions. Curiously, even when the whole narrative is told in first person (as in Trawl or The Unfortunates), there is a tendency to undermine the authority of the narrative and foreground unreliability by showing how the narrator's perspective has altered since the occurrence of past events, and how the narration of these events is shaped and informed by what takes place afterwards.
When we consider the categories of discourse concerning voice in Johnson's narratives, the tendency is to mix or alternate the time of the narrative. This often coincides with a concern for the interaction between past and present events, but as often as not has to do with foregrounding the artifice of the novel. for the most part, time is ulterior in the novels, but the tendency is to alternate or interweave the ulterior narrative with simultaneous narrative, usually to highlight the narrative process that is going on, as distinct from the events that are being recounted. This is also related to the tendency towards digression in Johnson's novels, which involves a tendency towards metafictional comment, as well as to the preoccupation with the way in which the present can transform or affect the way in which we narrate the past.

As Johnson is very much aware of and preoccupied with ontological questions, we often find how he foregrounds these questions by transgressing distinct narrative levels in his novels. He does this very often in order to draw our attention to the relation between fact and fiction, or between the ontologically distinct worlds that he has created, often placing the reader on the same level as fictional characters in order to draw attention to the fact that even the relation created between the reader and the author is part of the fiction. The autonomous nature of the fiction is made manifest in this way and we also find how the rules governing the way in which we narrate real experience function in fictional worlds.
As regards person, the tendency towards alteration continues. The reason for this is clear in that Johnson simply wishes to emphasise the way in which distinct perspectives alter the nature of reality. At the same time, this aspect of discourse is usually linked to the distinct ontological levels present in the narrative, and therefore the relation between different visions of experience. By playing in the area of narrative level and person, Johnson often takes us beyond the limits of the single narrative structure in order to deliberately break the frame and foreground the fictionality of the worlds he creates.

Related to this is the way in which narrators and narratees are dramatised in his work. Curiously, these overt and intrusive dramatisations, play a number of roles in the narrative, but for the most part they tend to foreground metafictional concerns, and they draw attention to the nature of the communicative act that is taking place in the narrative. At times Johnson dramatises the dialogue between reader and author at an extradiegetic level in order to highlight the ontologically distinct nature of the fiction, but it also serves to make us aware of the fact that the same rules and conventions govern factual and fictitious discourse, as well as being related to the question of reliability and unreliability which can be foregrounded by dramatising these elements of the novel. At the same time, the nature of the narrative itself can be transformed depending on the roles assigned to narrators and narratees, as these are linked to the mode of
discourse used which governs the ways in which we shape reality. One other point in connection with this is related to what we can call the solipsistic element in postmodernist narrative: in this respect, we find very often that the narratee in Johnson’s narratives becomes himself, or that a supposed dialogue with the reader becomes a dialogue with the self, or the narrative turns in upon itself and exists for its own sake after the manner of Beckett. This is the kind of thing that is experienced at times in Trawl and we find it also when first person comments erupt into other narratives to question the point of what he is doing.

From what has already been said, it should be clear that Johnson’s narrators tend to employ the narrative function to a much lesser extent than their more traditional counterparts. For the most part the tendency is towards metanarrative, although the ideological and testimonial functions, and to a similar extent the communicative functions are also highlighted. This corresponds with the tendency towards pause, digression and simultaneous narrative in Johnson, and his foregroundering of the process of narrating as such. The subject for his writing becomes writing itself, with story often taking second place.

When we consider the principles that govern Johnson’s narratives, in terms of mode and analogy we can say that, as regards the former, the tendency is established from Travelling People on. Johnson uses a variety of literary and non-literary modes of discourse which self-reflexively govern the way in which reality
is formed by the narrative and determine the roles of narrator and narratee, the style used, from contextual words to point of view, and so on. The mixing of modes in the majority of his novels takes on thematic significance by showing how reality is transformed by choice of mode, highlighting the extent to which choices are governed by it. This is particularly true of *Travelling People* where we find how the choice of mode in the narrative can distance us from or bring us closer to the characters' experience. Moreover, as his work progresses, we find that certain choices of mode becomes relevant in terms of their relation to the grand narratives of the epoch (for example the language of religion and accounting that are interwoven in *Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry*, the CQ tests in *House Mother Normal*, or the language of History text books in *See the Old Lady Decently*). What Johnson does, by juxtaposing the language of the grand narratives with alternative discourses is to undermine the authority of these narratives by showing how they arbitrarily and falsely impose order and significance on experience. One further point here is that Johnson’s sometimes unexpected or unusual use of mode and the mixing of modes can take on a different kind of thematic significance. In the case of *The Unfortunates*, for example, we find that the high discourse of elegy and the low discourse of journalism are juxtaposed in order to show that they both fictionalise, that they both fall into the use of formulae and cliche, which is true of all the discourses we find in the text. However, this
novel goes further by inverting the expected use of this mode in the sense that this elegy, which the novel undoubtedly is, does not bring the expected sense of reconciliation and catharsis, but makes the pain somehow more present, denying the reader any sense of consolation or comfort. This suggests a comment on the nature of elegy as such, as well as drawing attention to the way in which choice of mode determines reader expectation and so on.

As regards the use of analogy, we find that it too tends to draw attention to the ways in which the author’s way of seeing experience determines the way in which he writes about it. This is done in a very self-conscious manner by Johnson, often to show the limitations of seeing experience in these terms (the analogy between the way in which God gives form and significance to existence and the way in which the author does it in Christie Malry), or to foreground the fictional nature of such analogies by showing that they determine how we shape experience (for example, in Travelling People, the paradise lost motif, and in Trawl, the quest).

We mentioned that a consideration of the narratives in terms of codes would also be helpful and this is so due to the degree of determination of these codes in Johnson’s novels. In general terms, we can say that the proaeretic and referential codes are underdetermined and greater emphasis is placed on the symbolic and hermeneutic codes. This is so because of the relative lack of importance of story for Johnson as well as
because of the autonomous nature of the fiction. His subject matter tends to be the inside of his head, and the most important theme the nature of narrative itself. The foregrounding of the symbolic code often occurs through transgressions of levels of narrative or the use of analogy, and tends to highlight metafictional concerns. The foregrounding of the hermeneutic code, which often occurs when Johnson makes use of anachronies in the text and also when he deliberately disappoints reader expectation, also highlights metafictional concerns by making us more aware of the predispositions of the text and the arbitrary nature of linear sequences. The semic code is often played with too, particularly when Johnson refuses to describe characters (as in Christie Malry), or when he confuses what is and is not important in the development of his character's or his own past experience. This draws attention to the fictitious and almost arbitrary way in which significance is attributed to experience. Of course, our awareness of the overdetermination of a particular code often coincides with the use of a particular narrative function, or a particular kind of activity within a category of discourse.

It was suggested earlier that it was in terms of narratology that we were more able to discover Johnson's postmodernist tendencies, but story has its part to play too. In fact Johnson's dialogue with form continues at this level of the narrative too.

If we consider his use of plot typology, we find that he often makes use of traditional and even
archetypal forms, from autobiography and bildungsroman to the use of the quest myth, paradise lost, some rather obvious analogies, and so on. What is curious about this, however, is that he tends to undermine the validity of his choices of analogy or plot type by, for example, foregrounding the fictionality of his personal history, aborting any possibility of development or growth for his fictional character, denying any sense of fulfilment in the quest by returning to the beginning, humorously parodying the idea of paradise, and so on. This is partly due to Johnson’s deliberate desire to create a sense of discomfort in the reader and avoid the typically liberal humanistic, and even Christian values imposed on Western European narrative. There is a tendency to avoid any sense of harmony, reconciliation, catharsis or transfiguration, simply because, for Johnson, that is fiction.

There is also a sense of there being a certain lack of proportion in the novels, in fact, proportion often lapses, stemming from the way in which story is swamped by digression and postmodernist concerns, or by the beginning of a series of different threads of narrative which do not allow the reader to distinguish between the kernel and the satellites. This stems from Johnson’s desire to highlight the fictional nature of selecting the most significant events from the past. Everything and nothing is important, he often reminds us, and this is precisely the effect that he hopes to achieve by denying us any sense of seeing things in proportion.

Similarly, Johnson sees the fictionality of
attributing causal sequences to past experience and continually undermines causality by substituting it with arbitrary authorial intervention (see Christie Malry, for example). Linear sequence is seen as fictional and is also avoided, as he tends towards anachronies which highlight the way in which the past and the present interact. The point is to show that while we struggle to find out and explain how and why things happen, we can only fail or presume. Any attempt to explain, to give form and significance results in fabrication and falsification. There are only happenings without reasons. Curiously, it is more realistic for Johnson to let causality lapse and to avoid any suspension of disbelief.

We have spoken of Johnson’s narrative as tending to defamiliarise the ways in which we narrate experience, and one other way in which this functions is to continually surprise the reader by violating expectations at the level of story. It also involves the use of a kind of anti-narrative which goes against the predispositions of the text in terms of traditional rhetoric as well as the more particular predispositions of the text. This sometimes involves the transgression of distinct ontological levels of narrative, the undermining of cause and effect, the use of contradiction, retraction and so on. Essentially, the surprise for the reader is to be made more aware of the text as an autonomous fiction, rather than it having some direct relation with reality. By continually surprising us, Johnson avoids the possibility for any
kind of naturalisation of convention.

This kind of defamiliarisation exists as regards the presentation of setting and character in his novels too. While a novel like Travelling People tends to be read like a realistic novel for the most part, the use of a tabular form to describe the character, or the unusual naming of Henry Henry, which perhaps anticipates a later minimalist tendency in Christie Malry, where he refuses to describe the protagonist, highlights the fictional nature of character as a fictional construct. The same applies to setting, where as in his description of character, Johnson, particularly in his fabulations, often fails to describe the surroundings, or resorts to stereotype and caricature (think particularly of the obviously fictional characters and setting of the Virrels sections in See the Old Lady Decently).

Hence, the way in which Johnson takes advantage of the alternatives open to him within categories of discourse is paralleled by a similar kind of activity at the level of story. The underlying aim is to draw attention to the nature of the narrative, the fictitious nature of the story, and the way in which selection, omission and falsification must always be a part of any narrative. Of course, Johnson does this to undermine the idea of authoritative texts, to suggest the existence of alternatives and to extend the possibilities of the novel form while at the same time showing up its limitations.

Now, having fully developed our model for analysis earlier, and having made clear, in general terms, the
way in which Johnson takes advantage of the alternatives available to him, as well as the reasons for it, it is now possible to briefly consider the nature of each novel in terms of that model.
1.2. The Narrative Technique of Travelling People

There is a tendency towards alteration in every category of discourse in Travelling People, although there is no transgression of narrative levels to further highlight the fictional nature of the narrative. However, that it is a fiction is clear from the outset as the narrative begins with a prologue, an extradiegetic prolepsis, which anticipates what the author will do in the novel, even outlining the conventions (imposed by the author as an alternative to conventional rhetoric) that are to be followed, particularly regarding the adoption of a series of different styles. In this way, the way in which the novel is to be written is highlighted at the expense of story, which, at this point, is referred to only obliquely.

Continuing within the category of Time, we can say that Johnson makes use of anachronies self-consciously, and with considerable frequency. Apart from giving considerable emphasis to the prolepsis at the outset, there are a number of compleetive, internal and external analepses which draw attention to problems of linear sequence in the narrative as well as foregrounding the nature of the novel as artifact. For example, in one of his interruptions to the linear narrative, which is self-consciously announced as an interruption, besides having already been anticipated in the Prologue, the narrator refers to his characters as puppets, in a
manner parodically reminiscent of Thackeray, and, at the same time, recalls O’Brien and At Swim-Two-Birds, when he alludes to the novelistic absurdity of giving birth to a character at age 26. These features in themselves highlight the use of analepsis as a narrative device, but this is further underlined when the interruption ends: “I think that is all I want to tell you about Henry before page one. End of Interruption” (159). The narrator explicitly reminds us that we have just read a complete exterior analepsis in order to fulfill the novelistic conventions of supplying a realistic character with a past that accounts for his character and behaviour in terms of cause and effect. Obviously, our awareness of the convention is heightened by the fact that Johnson, rather than following it, parodies it, in a manner which reminds us that it is a fictional device. Something similar occurs when a further complete, but this time internal analepsis, makes up for the deficiencies of Henry’s narrative abilities in his journal by recounting an episode which he has found unpleasant. The intrusive heterodiegetic narrator explains:

Henry was unable to find words to describe the events of the night of Saturday, August 24th; I am under no such difficulty, however, and feel it no less than a duty to record what happened. (173)

He then goes on to sum up what happened in the third person, and from an extradiegetic level, what Henry had avoided as a homodiegetic narrator at an intradiegetic
level within his journal. The alterations within several different categories at the same time further emphasise the narrator's use of a technical device, and explicitly draws our attention to the nature of the narrative as fiction and as fabrication.

Whenever anachronies of this kind occur in the novel, they are usually signalled by an explicit statement to the effect in a heading, which alludes to the fact that the narrator is about to digress or to interrupt the previous narrative. Clearly, this is a self-conscious attempt to foreground the process rather than the product.

There are further alterations of time as regards duration, too, which are most obvious in shifts which occur at the same time in style or mode. For example, while most of the novel is told as a kind of summary of the events that took place, both when the narrative is told by the heterodiegetic narrator and when it is told by Henry, there are occasions when there are examples of scene. These are highlighted, as we said, by a corresponding change in mode and refer to the chapters in which Maurie's stream of consciousness is reproduced, interspersed with the conversations that take place around him (this is clearly an example of scene as the voiced and unvoiced thoughts of Maurie are represented in a kind of dialogue form along with the voices of the other characters), and also when, the author presents the scene of the Gala Night at the Stromboli Club in the form of a film scenario. Both examples of scene are foregrounded by the self-conscious manner in which they
are presented, involving the corresponding change in mode, and particularly the Gala Night scenario is made to appear most artificial by being preceded by an "Interlude" which provides the reader with a glossary of technical terms and abbreviations so that we might better understand it. The effect is to highlight the artificiality of it all, to make us aware that a particular choice has been taken with respect to mode and duration, and to suggest that other alternatives are possible. In fact the alterations in duration tend to highlight just that throughout the novel.

In the same category, we must also refer to pause and ellipsis. There is relatively little ellipsis, as any omissions that occur at one particular level of the narrative (usually the intradiegetic level where Henry narrates) are usually made up for by the heterodiegetic narrator at the extradiegetic level. However, the frequency of pause in the narrative is notable and tends to be foregrounded by the use of headings like "Interlude," "Digression" or " Interruption" when it occurs. These pauses in the narrative (and even the prologue could be considered as one) tend towards metafictional commentary for the most part, providing an easily distinguishable metanarrative for the narrative, which draws attention to the devices being used. In fact, even the headings themselves can be considered as such.

The tendency in most of Johnson's novels is towards singulative narrative and Travelling People is no exception. However, there are examples of repetitive
narration which further highlight the nature of the narrative within different categories. For example, the cyclical and partly episodic nature of the novel is made manifest by the way in which similar events are recounted at the beginning and the end of the novel, with Henry finding himself on the road waiting for a lift. This highlights the travelling people motif, and is suggestive of Johnson’s deliberate refusal to provide resolution at the end of the novel. Another case in point is the repetition of statements to the effect that the Stromboli Club is paradise or sounds like paradise, which also occurs to highlight a particular leitmotif, which is of symbolic significance in the novel. The same can be said of references to travellers and travelling, both within the narrative and in the frequent examples of intertextuality interwoven within the text itself. However, perhaps a more significant example of repetitive narrative, which is of greater metafictional importance occurs when, following the scenario of the Gala Night at the Club, there is a shift in focalisation, person, narrative level and mode, and we are presented with Henry’s account of the same events within his journal. Then, after that, we find a newspaper report, suitably altered and mistaken, which gives its account of the gala. A similar kind of technique was to be used later in House Mother Normal, and the effect is basically the same. Johnson draws attention to the fact that the nature of an experience is determined by the way in which, and the point of view from which it is recounted. The idea of impersonality
and the nature of the characters as characters performing a role is suggested by the scenario, while Henry’s version is obviously much more personal. The newspaper report shows how choice of mode can alter the nature of the events recounted. The use of repetition here, then, raises an ontological question which will be explored further as Johnson’s art develops.

From what has been said up to now, it should be clear that there are a number of alterations as regards mode in the novel too. The tendency to alternate between scene and summary as regards the narration of events makes us aware of the relative involvement or lack of involvement or distance of the narrator from the events he is recounting. The most obvious example of scene as regards the narration of events is the film scenario, which we have already mentioned. The use of a dramatic presentation of the events ought to be suggestive of a lack of involvement on the part of the heterodiegetic narrator. However, there is a clear irony involved due to the clearly self-conscious presentation of this episode of the novel and the inclusion of the glossary of technical terms. The fact that this episode and choice of mode is juxtaposed with episodes which have made other choices, draws attention to the form of narrating the scene as an alternative to other modes of discourse, and, in spite of the apparent absence of authorial intervention (which is also made up for by the ironic stage directions), we are very much more diegetically aware of his presence. Much of what remains of the narrative is narrated by Henry, which also ought
to suggest an absence of authorial intervention and greater authorial distance, particularly as the forms which are adopted are those of letters and a journal, however, even this illusion of the autonomy of the character from authorial intervention is broken when we consider the use of headings to introduce these sections, which allude to the author's presence, as well as the interruption of some of these sections of narrative with the author's digressions and complective analepses, some of which we have already considered. Of course, the digressions, which are full of metafictional comment force the story to recede into the background and make us most aware of the existence of the self-conscious narrator, and of the narrative process.

Alterations of this kind also occur as regards the presentation of thought and speech. Even in the first chapter, following the prologue, there is a mixture of third person omniscient narrative and Henry's narrativised discourse, which precedes a shift, in the following chapter to Henry's interior monologue. This indicates a clear movement from a high degree of narrator involvement to a lesser degree. From the beginning we are aware of the author taking advantage of alternatives. One of the most notably mimetic sections in this respect is the presentation of Maurie's stream of consciousness, which includes the speech of the other characters. However, the typographical innovations (shading the pages grey and then black to indicate unconsciousness and then death following his heart attacks), draws attention to the technical devices
involved in the narrative process once more and to the fact that this incursion into the mind of the character is only an illusion. The use of ooohs and aaargs throughout this stream of consciousness are considered heavy handed by some critics, but rather than as a flaw in the narrative, could be considered as deliberately obvious devices which are intended to draw attention to themselves. Similarly, when we have Henry’s interior monologue earlier in the novel, the typographical device of representing the advertisements he reads in the Underground in steps as he goes up or down the escalator, although in one sense it is more mimetic, due to its innovativeness also draws attention to itself as a device. The idea, then, is to make us aware of the fact that the author is choosing a particular style or mode, rather than any other alternative, to make us aware of his presence and the varying degrees of fabrication involved in constructing the narrative. Remember, that any particular choice is surrounded by other alternatives and that the author has highlighted the fact that it is his intention to do just that in his prologue. Hence, once more, the reader is aware of the author’s presence in spite of appearances to the contrary. A curious point worth remembering here is that the presentation of thought in modernist narratives, although it was also innovative as regards the use of stream of consciousness, suggested no such sense of fictitiousness. We become aware, then, of the return of the intrusive narrator, partly because of the degree to which alterations are present, and partly due to the
self consciousness implicit in making such choices and foregrounding the nature of his devices. Even the psycho-narration that we find in this novel, once avoided by traditional realistic novelists, when it appears in the section which analyses the events of the Saturday which Henry refuses to recount, is introduced in a heavy-handed manner drawing attention to the shift in mode and focalisation that occurs. Such changes also highlight the artifice involved in presenting speech, particularly in the Gala Night chapter, although for the most part realistic conventions are observed and we find a good deal of mimesis in the reproduction of dialogues, although the omniscient narrator, does tend to show up his presence once more by tending towards narrativised discourse.

Let us make one further observation regarding the modes of presentation of thought and events here: it is clear that the tendency is towards polymodality, where there is no single choice that governs the narrative. Therefore, in spite of the obviously intrusive authorial voice that appears from the beginning, the predispositions of this text are towards a playful kind of variety, which draws attention to the nature of narrative as such and undermines the existence or any single or authoritative form of narrative. Let us say that the conventions imposed in this novel are unconventional and are at odds with tradition.

These shifts in narrative distance are paralleled by shifts in focalisation in the novel too, and both have the effect of suggesting the distance that exists
between the experiences and the narrative that recounts them, as well as suggesting that there is no authoritative manner in which to do so, only a number of alternatives which when juxtaposed, in a rather negative manner show up their several limitations. While an internal focaliser is used in the episodes which present Henry's interior monologue, his letters and journals, much of the rest of the novel is narrated from the point of view of an external focaliser, the heterodiegetic narrator, including the film scenario, with the exception of the internally focalised stream of consciousness of Maurie, and the examples of intertextuality, usually dealing with travelling of one sort or another that are quoted throughout the text. This, at first sight would seem to be an inevitable result of shifting modes throughout the novel, and the changes in focaliser could be considered not to be alterations in terms of the self-contained nature of the different episodes. However, there are more obvious examples of alterations within specific episodes which are worth mentioning. For example, in the opening chapters of the novel, there is a continual shift from the external focalisation of the heterodiegetic narrator to that of Henry himself as we observe how he reacts to being told he is riding in a lorry full of dead dogs and also when he is found reading the advertisements in the Underground, laid out on the page in a typographically innovative way to imitate the movement of the escalator. The alterations are deliberate here in the same way as we find them from one episode to another in order to
draw attention to the limitations of specific viewpoints as well as to the way in which a particular perspective determines the nature of reality. The same can be said of shifting the focalisation when the narrator interrupts or digresses, which often coincides with metafictional comment to further highlight these questions. However, the fictionality of the narrative and the nature of the narrative process is made even more apparent by the inclusion of paralipsis, when Henry’s narrative excludes the account of the events of the Saturday night, which must then be made up for by the omniscient narrator. The net effect is to end suspension of disbelief and make us aware of the limitations of certain modes of narrative discourse. Curiously, there is a secondary effect which is almost that of the heterodiegetic narrator usurping his role within the narrative and going against the predispositions implicitly laid down by the text in an intrusive manner. We might say, then, that, in an equally metafictional manner, the heterodiegetic narrator indulges in paralipsis by providing information which had previously been refused by Henry himself, and which he prefers not to think about. Johnson continually shifts from the panoramic to the restricted, from restricted knowledge to unlimited knowledge, from objective presentation of events to the subjective thoughts of characters. Ideologically speaking, we might say that the more ironic view of the heterodiegetic narrator is highlighted, but this is at odds with that of Henry and the dominant ideology
appears even to shift to the character due to the return to the same mode and point of view at the end of the novel.

Essentially, then, we find that Johnson deliberately undermines the possibility of there being any dominant mode in this novel due to the high degree of alterations that we find within these categories of discourse. The effect is, ultimately, metafictional, but curiously the tendency towards a straight rendering of events in a realistic manner would seem to be at odds with this. We will see that alterations within other categories tend to highlight this tension in the novel which pulls in two directions, and which might account for Johnson refusing to have the novel published again.

There are also a number of alterations within the categories of voice in this novel which further emphasise its metafictional concerns. The first to be considered are those regarding the time of the narration. Obviously the novel begins in the anterior mode by anticipating what will take place later, or rather the strategies that will be used in order to recount the narrative, and this foregrounds the metafictional concerns of the novel. This is followed by the traditional use of ulterior narrative to tell the story of Henry Henry, a character who, when given the opportunity to narrate for himself in letters and in his diary, also uses the ulterior mode, but often lapses into simultaneous narration, which is typical of letters and diaries as modes of discourse anyway. The same kind of simultaneous narration occurs throughout the several
digressions and interruptions of the heterodiegetic narrator which, along with the prologue, draw attention to the novel as a self-begetting novel, a novel about its own coming into being, in which the narrative process is the subject. In fact, in this novel, we find how the use of pause and simultaneous narration in narrative often indicates metafictional tendencies, which is the case here.

The kind of interwoven narrative which we find in the novel is typical of narratives which make use of letters and journals, but the shifts towards digressive pause on the whole indicate the foregrounding of metafictional concerns although this is not wholly at the expense as our awareness of a certain tension between the two has suggested.

As regards the levels of narrative in the novel, these are fairly clearly marked. There is an extradiegetic level where we find a heterodiegetic, omniscient narrative, who plays the part of the intrusive author, which clearly contrasts with the intradiegetic level where Henry narrates much of the story in his journal and letter. The use of intertextuality, when extracts from texts dealing with travelling of different kinds are included, is suggestive of a further level of diegesis which is essentially from outside the narrative, highlighting the existence of distinct ontological worlds, and the way in which they overlap. This is really the case when we find the interweaving of the extra and intra-diegetic levels within the novel and is highlighted when there is a kind
of metalepsis, when the intrusive heterodiegetic narrator at an extradiegetic level usurps his position to involve himself in the narrative of the events of the Saturday night. This, as we have suggested, is not a true digression of narrative levels, as the omniscient narrator at the extradiegetic level never actually becomes involved as a character at a different level, but it does make us aware of the ontologically distinct nature of the two and questions the borders between reality or realism and fiction. In fact, the tendency to alternate from one level to another is suggestive of a lack of any particular dominant as regards the predispositions of the narrative in this respect.

The existence of different voices has already been made clear, and suffice it to say that there is a heterodiegetic narrator at an extradiegetic level and a homodiegetic narrator (Henry) at an intradiegetic level. Curiously, it is the interweaving of their voices which highlights some of the metafictional questions in the novel and draws attention to the tension that exists between realism and metafiction that we have mentioned. There is no transgression of levels involved but the polymodality of the narrative undermines the existence of an authoritative voice, and while we do not question the reliability of either voice, we do tend to be aware of questions about the nature of narrative.

The roles of these narrative voices are several and often depend on the mode of discourse adopted. The heterodiegetic narrator refers to himself on one occasion as a puppet-master, after the fashion of
Thackeray, which is in keeping with his occasional tendency to parody the narrative techniques of the eighteenth and nineteenth century novel. This suggests some kind of involvement or even complicity of the reader as dramatised narratee on these occasions and undermines the realism of the narrative with both reader and narrator existing in an ontologically distinct world. However, the use of a different voice which, anticipated by the internal focalisation in some of the third person narrative sections, sometimes takes over from that of the intrusive omniscient narrator, is significant. We find that elsewhere, Henry has his distinct role as narrator, as letter-writer or writing in his journal, which involves the reader more fully at the intradiegetic level. And while the reader is not dramatised, even implicitly, at these levels, there is a suggestion of our becoming involved in the fictional world of the character. Hence, the voices compete with one another even in this way. In fact, the solipsistic voice of Henry communing with itself is perhaps the voice that we recall with greatest facility after reading the novel.

Obviously, the functions of the narrators change according to the roles they adopt, but for the most part, the heterodiegetic narrator and Henry adopt the narrative function, as the novel does recount a story. There are exceptions to this, when Henry is communicative towards his friend in his letter, or the puppet-master addresses the reader in his digressions, or when we find the ideological function being used to
discuss questions of the meaning of life, the existence of form and significance, particularly towards the end of the novel. However, the existence of digressions and interruptions throughout the novel, highlight the use of the metanarrative function which, as we said, is clearly distinct from the narrative as such and vies with it for dominance in this novel. Depending on the role and function of the narrator at any given moment in the narrative, we find a wide range of degrees of overtness and covertness, of involvement and lack of involvement as regards both narrator and narratee. The more we are aware of any kind of intervention, the more aware we are of the process involved in the narrative.

In the same way as the tendency is towards alterations in the other categories of discourse, with narrative and metanarrative tending to be kept apart, at least explicitly, there is no single governing principle in the novel. The prologue immediately states the existence of alternatives which are more suitable for specific contexts, and which will, by a kind of negative effect, show up the limitations in discourses which are determined by mode. If we recall what Johnson wrote about the novel himself, we find:

*Travelling People* employed eight separate styles or conventions for nine chapters; the first and last chapters sharing one style in order to give the book cyclical unity within the motif announced by its title and epigraph. These styles involved interior monologue, a letter, extracts from a journal, and a film
script. This latter illustrates the method of the novel typically. The subject matter was a gala evening at a country club, with a large number of characters involved both individually and in small groups. A film technique, cutting quickly from group to group and incidentally counterpointing the stagey artificiality of the occasion, seemed natural and apt. (AYRY 21-22)

Johnson goes on to draw attention to his use of a pastiche of eighteenth century prose in the prologue and the grey and black passages that he introduces into Maurie’s stream of consciousness, but the basic point that he wanted to make was that of the appropriateness of the modes used. Obviously, the choice of mode governs the contextual language (social formulae and so on) which is in turn determined by situation, but what is really highlighted by the variety of modes adopted is the way in which they alter and determine the nature of what they describe and not the other way around.

First, let us state what these modes are: eighteenth century novelistic prose in the prologue; the mode of the traditional realistic novel with third person omniscient narrator using the internal focalisation of the principle character; the quoted interior monologue of the protagonist (this is almost confessional at times and could be called autobiographical); traditional third person omniscient narrative with external focalisation; a letter; a film scenario; a series of journal entries; the stream of
consciousness of Maurie, interspersed with the dialogue of the other characters; a further pastiche of eighteenth century prose; and a return to the third person narrative with the internal focalisation of the protagonist in the final chapter. Besides these modes which govern particular sections, we also have the use of a tabular representation of the protagonist's physical description after the fashion of Beckett which appears in the first interlude; the use of concrete visualisations of what the character sees by presenting advertisements in steps; the use of grey and black shading to indicate Maurie's states of unconsciousness and death; a newspaper report of events previously narrated; a "TABULAR REPRESENTATION OF PROBABLE STATE OF THE FACTIONS" within Henry's journal; and even a song at the end of the novel. In all of these sections, we find how reality literally changes depending on the mode adopted, which is particularly clear when the same events are recounted in different modes (the gala night is recounted in the scenario, in Henry's journal and in the newspaper report). At the same time, when we are in the presence of Henry's quoted interior monologue, we find that he tends to adopt the mode of journalistic or advertising jargon in order to narrate states of affairs or events to himself, particularly when he hears that he is travelling with a load of dead dogs. This shows how he is able to distance himself from the events, transform and even ironise about reality.

The choice of modes is highlighted by the prologue which self-consciously anticipates them and, in an
inverse manner, draws attention to the fact that all conventions are artificial. The novel, in a metafictional manner, tells us that discourse, or language creates reality and thus, Johnson, in a manner that owes a debt to Sterne and O’Brien foregrounds the fictional nature of his own, and any other narrative. Here, too, Johnson, denies us any authoritative mode, and undermines any such idea by highlighting the way in which reality is transformed in the ways we have already mentioned.

We find that the nature of the experiences recounted is also determined by the analogies that govern this narrative. Behind the novel are two fairly obvious ones: that we are all travelling people and that we are also in search of some kind of paradise lost. The former is made manifest in the choice of plot and situations, with the protagonist found hitch-hiking, catching trains and the underground, walking and so on; as well as being further highlighted by the choice of intertextuality, which has to do with expeditions and other forms of travel. Curiously, the cyclical nature of the novel emphasises the fact that travelling is an ongoing thing and that we never arrive. There is no beginning and no end, only the journey, which reaches no goal, with the only end being death. In the same way as an end is denied, the paradise lost motif has no resolution, although the novel is full of language related to gardens, the repetition of this is like paradise, and the expulsion of the young lovers from their haven. However, Henry’s quest is unresolved, and
the curious thing about this novel is the way in which traditional analogies are adopted, but combined with a structure which is full of alterations, makes us look at them in a new way. Johnson, as he does throughout his work, denies the reader the traditional sense of catharsis and resolution.

When we consider the determination of codes in Travelling People, there is a good deal which makes us read it like a realistic novel, with some emphasis on referentiality and the proaeretic code, and the foregrounding of the hermeneutic code, particularly in the title creates a number of expectations in the reader related to story (where are they travelling to and who are they?), as does the offer of a job to Henry at the outset, the suggestions of a romantic relationship and so on. However, the hermeneutic code is foregrounded in a rather distinct way in the prologue, when metafictional concerns are highlighted, as we are made to expect the playful alterations in mode that do in fact occur throughout the novel. Again this is suggestive of the tendency to alternate between narrative and metanarrative. While clarity and realism are indicated by the way in which the narrative works within the semic, proaeretic and referential codes, the particular activity within the hermeneutic and symbolic codes are indicative of the foregrounding of metafictional concerns. This is so due to the overdetermination of alterations and the transgression of conventions which draw attention to the nature of the narrative within the symbolic code, in the same way as
the prologue does so in the hermeneutic code. On occasions, the use of digression means the underdetermination of the proaeretic code at the expense of metafictional concerns, although the opposite occurs in other episodes. There is a foregrounding of the hermeneutic and symbolic codes also when expectations are disappointed when no destination is arrived at by the travellers and paradise is not found. This in itself draws attention to Johnson's desire to deprive us of resolution which links up with his metafictional concerns.

One final point regarding the codes can be related to the idea of mise en abyme, which foregrounds the symbolic code. In this sense a particular episode or activity in the narrative can take on a thematic significance which is indicative of the nature of the novel as a whole: in one sense, this is so of the alterations throughout the several categories of discourse in the novel which undermine the existence of any authoritative mode, but also occurs in a more limited manner in the episode where Henry recounts the cutting of the bracken to reach the river in his journal. Here we find how the process, without any particular end is foregrounded, and this, if we link it to the significance of going on a journey that has no end, is suggestive of the importance of the narrative process as such at the expense of story. That is, the foregrounding of metafictional concerns is related to the determination of the symbolic code here. From all of this, we become aware of how the way in which Johnson
takes advantage of existing alternatives within categories of discourse highlights metafictional concerns.

When it comes to story as such, there is less to indicate that this is a postmodernist novel. The plot itself tends to be rather conventional, a kind of *bildungsroman* which makes use of the archetypal motif of man questing in search of paradise lost. Of course, Johnson undermines our expectations by providing no sense of resolution at the end, but the plot typology, with its motifs of paradise lost and travelling people governs a good deal in the story, particularly as regards character and setting, with Henry and Kim as those cast out of the garden and much of the story taking place on the road, in the paradise, or travelling to or from it by some other means.

Even causality is allowed in this novel as the intrusive omniscient narrator foregrounds the effect that past experience has on the protagonist in some of the interruptions and also when he introduces "a brief delineation of a selection from the experiences, direct and indirect which may be said to have formed those opinions and determined those attitudes of Henry Henry which were displayed in the foregoing passage" (187). However, the way in which this rather self-conscious and intrusive digression is introduced, suggests Johnson is parodying rather than following the conventions of cause and effect, and, in this particular case, the fictionality of the whole thing is foregrounded.

As regards sequence, we have seen that there are
analyses, but for the most part, linear sequence is respected and is never undermined by the intrusions of the narrator. However, there are a few areas where the intrusions of the narrator have their effect.

As we have seen, there is a fairly frequent tendency in the novel towards digression, and this usually means a pause in the narrative, so that story is sometimes underdetermined at the expense of symbolic and metafictional concerns. Moreover, these intrusions are often arbitrary, which draws attention to the possibilities that exist for the author to impose his will over and above the causal sequence of events of the story. If this is linked with the prologue, which does not refer to story as such at all, we find that the realism of the narrative as a whole may be seriously affected.

There are other aspects of the story that highlight metafictional concerns. There is a clear contrast between the rounded character of Henry and the stereotypical caricatures of most of the other characters. The setting of the club is very much like the setting for a film, a mode we have seen used within the novel. Therefore, we can suggest that there is a kind of disjunction involved in the novel between the author’s tendency towards realism and verisimilitude and his tendency towards what is obviously fictional. Much of the novel, in fact, becomes very stagey, and not only within the film scenario. Everything is set up to lead us towards the rather stereotypical romance and escape of the two lovers. However, Johnson deliberately
fictionalises to good effect here, as he later surprises us by disappointing our expectations. Everything that points to some kind of resolution at the end, a narrowing of possibility towards inevitable consequences, is undermined by Johnson's typical avoidance of any such sense of resolution or finality.

By applying our model to this novel, we have found how it is the use of available alternatives that allows Johnson to foreground postmodernist concerns about the nature of narrative and its relation with experience. We have seen that this novel is a clear example of his oppositional discourse through its allusions to tradition and convention and its tendnecy towards the foregrounding of alternatives to them. Johnson goes beyond the limits of the single structure and undermines the idea of the authoritative mode by showing to what extent choices within the categories of discourse determine the nature of the reality narrated. Johnson highlights the way in which narratives are framed and makes it clear that the frame interposes itself between the reader and reality, denying us, ultimately, the belief that we can look beyond it to reality.

While excessive detail has been avoided in this analysis it should be apparent to what extent the playful use of alternatives, readily available to him, allowed Johnson to highlight postmodernist issues. This will also be apparent when we consider other aspects of game in his novels, but now let us continue, briefly, our consideration of the rest of the novels in terms of
the model.
1.3. The Narrative Technique of Albert Angelo

Albert Angelo is another example of Johnson's oppositional discourse in which alterations are foregrounded and the idea of the frame and its nature are made clear. However, this novel actually breaks the frame in a deliberately violent and self-conscious manner towards the end, when narrative levels are transgressed and the author comes out from behind the guise of impersonality to reveal the ontologically distinct nature of the fiction he has created. He deliberately breaks the illusion created by the fiction to make an explicit metafictional statement about the relation between the fiction and reality in a way that clearly surprises the reader. However, if we consider the novel in terms of categories of discourse, we become aware that the degree to which alterations are foregrounded in the text ought to have prepared us for just such a thing. The variety of styles, voices and levels of diegesis, by their juxtaposition, continually highlights the limitations of any particular choice, as well as its possibilities, and shows to what extent they are instrumental in transforming and creating reality.

The novel, not unlike Travelling People before it, imposes its own anti-conventional conventions, which are made clear in the contents page and in the headings or titles given to each section. This could be considered as a kind of prolepsis which anticipates the disintegration that will take place and the author's
refusal to remain within the bounds of one set of predispositions.

As regards time, we find that there are a number of anachronies (analepses) in terms of the linear sequence of events that occur following Albert moving into his new flat up to his death at the end of the novel. This linear sequence predominates in the novel, but, during the *Exposition*, there is a complettive external analepsis which recounts what happened in the past regarding Albert’s meeting and falling in love with a girl called Jenny up to the occasion that will lead to their later separation. Obviously, this is related to the realistic desire for causality, as it explains a good deal about the character’s present behaviour, as well as showing the way in which the present is influenced and informed by the past; and even how present knowledge of later events transforms the way in which we narrate or recreate these events:

When Jenny left me, betrayed me for a cripple whom she imagined to need her more, my mother said never mind, perhaps he would die and then I could have her back again. (27)

Or

On the ninth day they had left their Balgy, regretfully, and had walked eastwards to Tralee, twenty miles in that one day, on that warm day, and with heavy packs: and this journey and its physical exhaustion had drawn them the closest they ever were to be, for its length. Well before they had reached London
they had both known that they had passed the pitch of their loving. (60)

Clearly, the way in which posterior knowledge influences the attitudes of the character as well as the way in which the events are, rather pessimistically, related is clear.

Also related to alterations in time is the existence of the almighty aposiopsis that occurs towards the end of the novel. This Disintegration section is also a kind of analepsis in that it too looks back to what has been narrated earlier in the novel. In this case it is a complective internal analepsis which interrupts the linear sequence, but more than that it is self-conscious and metafictional in nature, filling in what we have to know about the narrative in terms of its relation with reality. It makes us much more aware of the nature of the narrative as a fabrication and draws attention to the devices that have been made use of throughout. Thus, a rather obvious, self-conscious device draws attention to the other devices used in the novel.

There is also a rather self-conscious and highly foregrounded example of prolepsis, when, using the device of cutting holes in the pages of the novel, Johnson lets the reader look ahead to something that will take place later. The prolepsis is partial, however, and is a kind of red-herring which leads us to believe that the death of the protagonist is imminent. However, while it is, in fact, the death of Christopher Marlowe that is narrated at that point, Albert's death
does, ironically, and inevitably, take place later on. What is even more significant about this anachrony, and in fact links it to the aposiopesis, is that it draws attention to the nature of the novel as artifact, made up from physical pages and so on, as well as showing that linear sequence is a fictional artifice anyway, as the author must previously know what he is foreshadowing. Perhaps even more significantly, the events that are recounted took place long before B.S. Johnson began to write Albert Angelo. Therefore, the use of alterations in time in this novel are self-consciously metafictional, drawing attention to the narrative process and the artifice involved.

In terms of duration, we can say that there is a good deal of variety in the novel. There is a tendency towards scene at the outset, particularly in the pseudo-theatrical presentation of the scene with Albert and his new neighbours in the prologue, although this is contrasted in its juxtaposition with a third person summary description of Percy Circus where Albert lives. This sets the tone for the whole novel as we will find the contrastive juxtaposition of different times, modes and styles from this point on. The use of summary could be said to be typical of much of the novel, in the pupils essays, the narration of Albert’s past and so on, but there is also a good deal of scene when Albert’s interior monologue is presented, and particularly when it appears on one side of the page and the pupils’ and his own comments appear on the other. Curiously, pause is avoided in this novel and we are unaware of any kind of
authorial presence, except implicitly because of the existence of alterations, until the almighty aposeopisis towards the end. At this point, the narrative ceases completely and there is a digressive pause which highlights metafictional concerns which have been implicit throughout the narrative. Ellipsis is barely noticeable in the novel either until, in a similar fashion, and coinciding with the same interruption, we are denied the continuation of Albert's narrative in terms of the predispositions laid down by the text. The fictionality of the narrative is therefore highlighted and expectations are seriously disappointed. The suggestion is that the fiction and metafiction are kept quite separate here, although we can say that postmodernist concerns are implicit throughout the novel because of alterations within other categories of discourse.

In terms of frequency, most of the text, which is highly mimetic on many occasions, as we can see from its use of scene, tends to be singulative. However, there is an unusual use of the iterative present in one section which is highlighted by an equally unusual change to the second person singular, beginning: "You have a phone call from them sometimes, but usually you have to go to the office and wait until someone wants you" (27). The effect is to emphasise the routine and boredom involved in going to work and teaching, as well as underlining the way in which the nature of an experience or activity can be altered by such a change in the mode of its presentation or narration.
Basically, then, there is a subversive treatment of time in this novel too. Anachronies are less frequent than in the earlier and later novels, which may be linked to the author's desire to make his fiction, which he will explode later, read realistically at the start. However, as we have seen, that realism is continually undermined by alterations of a different kind, and is finally shown to be a sham in the complective analepsis that is the disintegration section.

When we consider mode, and this has been suggested earlier, we find that Albert Angelo tends on the whole towards mimesis, and we are relatively unaware of the existence of the narrator in any explicit manner. Of course, that this is mimetic at all is just an illusion and the author will make us aware of it in due course. In terms of the narration of events, we can say that the irony of the novel consists in its intention to avoid the intrusiveness of the narrator from the use of dramatic showing at the start to the straightforward rendering of events on many other occasions, although there is a good deal that can be called narrativised summary which means that the author is, of course implicitly there. However, most scenes are presented dramatically, very often within the stream of consciousness of Albert, or from his point of view. The irony is there, however, if we look for it, as the continual alterations within every category of discourse continually remind us of his presence, by foregrounding the devices he makes use of. The mimesis, to varying degrees, that we find throughout the novel (the
presentation of the students essays, the use of intertextuality and the inclusion of a fortune-teller's advertisement), where we are relatively unaware of authorial presence, is finally undermined by the aposiopesis, making us aware that the author has been there all along.

As regards the narration of speech and thought, the same is true, and Johnson tends towards a mimetic reproduction of them. This is seen most clearly in sections where he tends towards first person narrative; quoted interior monologue representing the stream of consciousness of Albert; the section written in second person singular which also reads like the first person; the section when the reading of the school roll is reproduced verbatim, as in a list; and in the section where the interior monologue of Albert appears on one side of the page and the spoken words of himself and the students on the other. The tendency is also to avoid narrativised discourse as even the discussion between Miss Crossthwaite and Albert is reproduced in a dramatic fashion, although that is not to say that this does not occur. Moreover, during the development, when Albert is found going out with his friend Terry, much of Albert's thought is presented in free indirect style, suggesting the point of view from which everything is really being told, and the conversations are presented fully in the manner of dialogue, further suggesting the absence of authorial intervention. As we have said, the essays of the students are also reproduced in their entirety as are examples of passages from the books that Albert is
reading at the time. It should also be mentioned at this point how mimesis also comes into the use of regional and social varieties of language in the dialogues and essays of the pupils, which are forms of discourse which often interrupt and vie with more standard uses of the language. Thus we find how the voices of others interweave with the thoughts of Albert. However, throughout all of this the voice of the author is nowhere to be found, or at least he is extremely covert, although this is undermined when mimesis is shown to be a sham and the author transgresses levels to speak in his own voice, crossing the distance that he had maintained previously. Essentially, the effect is to make it clear that the disappearance of the author is as much a fictional device as any other.

When we come to focalisation, the point of view of the author is equally absent, until the disintegration, and, in general terms, we can say that except for the third person description of where Albert lives in the prologue, and the paragraph, also written in third person, which precedes the disintegration section, both of which are externally focalised (for the most part), the rest of the novel makes use of internal focalisation, as everything tends to be seen from Albert’s point of view. Even the essays and other examples of intertextuality appear as part of his interior monologue as he reads them at the time, although, essentially, a change in point of view does occur. However, although the main alteration in focalisation is emphatically foregrounded in the
disintegration, there are many others, and the curious tendency towards changing person in the exposition foregrounds the nature of this category of discourse in a very self-conscious manner. What happens here has a curiously ironic effect which ties in with the explicitly metafictional statement that appears towards the end. This is so because the reader becomes aware that in spite of changes in person, and Johnson goes through all the pronouns here (I, you, he, she, it, we, you, they), the focalisation is always relative to Albert’s point of view. Thus, when you (singular) is used, it is really an impersonal you referring to what Albert’s own routine is. The third person singular refers wholly to Albert’s love affair and clearly gives his version of events, as does the use of the first person plural. The second person plural is used to reproduce a talk about God given to his class, and the third person plural provides further details about Albert’s relationship with Jenny, particularly when they go to Balgy, and, once more, recounts it from the point of view of Albert. The point that Johnson is implicitly making is that in spite of changing points of view, there is only one, in this case, that of Albert. But what comes through after the disintegration is that the only view is really that of the author himself, in spite of the disguises.

What we could say about this is that Johnson, by altering person in this category, but essentially without changing the perspective from which the events are narrated, draws attention to the fallacious nature
of any sense of objectivity that we might take from the text. Any idea of an objective or authoritative narrative is undermined as we gradually become aware of the limited perspective (cognitively, emotively and even ideologically) that governs the whole thing.

However, there is more to focalisation in this novel. As we said, although the major shift is from internal to external focalisation when the disintegration occurs, we also find the point of view shifting to that of the students, particularly within their essays, but also when their point of view and voice takes over in the final coda. The final comment comes from their point of view when Albert Angelo (character and novel) is finally buried. Therefore, ideologically speaking, although it is the author's point of view that has taken control in the disintegration section, he allows his authority to be usurped by the pupils once more so that in their unofficial low discourse, they can mock the "shocking display of funeralization"(180) that has been the novel. In fact, it is from the point of view of the pupils that we are given a good deal of insight into the character of Albert, and it is they who continually challenge his authority as teacher, as well as challenging the authority of his discourse and point of view in a broader manner. Johnson is again highlighting the alternatives to the authorial voice and vision.

Hence, there are multiple viewpoints in the novel, as it shifts from one internal focaliser to another in order to show the limitations of each point of view, not
only emotively, due to the subjectivity which influences not only the students view of Albert, but even Albert's vision of his past, but cognitively speaking too. What we find is that we become aware of the limitations of each viewpoint, something which is borne out explicitly when Albert questions the validity of authoritative views about God and the creation. In a sense, by doing this, continually shifting perspective and providing multiple points of view, Johnson undermines the authority of his own viewpoint as narrator-focaliser.

One final point which remains to be said about point of view also highlights the metafictional nature of the novel. In the final interruption, Johnson denies the reader any resolution to Albert's story by suddenly imposing limitations on his vision and refusing to go on. This constitutes a kind of paralipsis, foregrounding the limitations of the authorial vision, as it occurs in a section that makes use of external focalisation, suggestive of the point of view of the narrator-focaliser. The result is that Johnson makes us aware of the imaginative process that has been going on and the limitations of his point of view and the fictionality of the whole.

In general terms, we find that there is a variety of modes made use of within this category and that the predominance of modal variety draws our attention to the lack of a governing authoritative mode of presentation of the events.

Alterations also take place within the category of voice in Albert Angelo, which should be apparent even
from what has already been said. As regards time, we find that the novel shifts frequently from simultaneous to ulterior narration, which usually coincides with a shift in person and focalisation. Simultaneous narration tends to coincide with Albert's first person narrative or interior monologue, and appears in the exposition sections dealing with his ongoing routine habits as a supply teacher and the passage that reads like a journal entry where he speaks of how things are going with Jenny. There are also examples of simultaneous narration in the students' essays which are descriptions of their attitudes towards Mr. Albert. The disintegration section is a metafictional digressive pause and also makes use of simultaneous narration for the most part although it is presented in the form of a dialogue. The effect here is obviously one of contrast, following on from a traditional sounding, externally focalised, third person ulterior narrative in the previous section, and, by suggesting the on-going process of writing, highlights metafictional concerns and the self-begetting nature of the work. The rest of the narrative is ulterior and fairly conventional and it is possible to notice a correspondence between it and the students' narratives, which essentially follow the same kind of conventions, although the kind of discourse they make use of is different. This kind of parallel (the students' essays about Albert are really mises en abyme of what the author himself is doing throughout the novel) does in itself highlight metafictional concerns, which become even more apparent when taken in conjunction with the
rest of the activity within categories of discourse that we have described up to now.

One last and rather curious use of time in narration in the novel which is worth mentioning, appears in the final part of the exposition which begins, "They had had to walk on the third day" (58). As this narrates the last positive experience that Albert had with Jenny, the shift in tense is very appropriate, highlighting the pastness of what has taken place and the fact that the relationship is now over. In a sense, what becomes clear here, is how changes in the time of narration can influence our attitude towards or the significance of what is narrated. More simply, the frequency of the alterations make us aware of a lack of any single set of predispositions and draw attention to themselves as fictional devices.

There are clearly distinct levels of discourse in this narrative. From the outset when we find Joseph said, Luke said and Albert said, the presence of some narrator at an extradiegetic level is clear, although that voice is never intrusive and allows the diegesis to proceed without interference from the outside. The narrative told in the voice of Albert, is clearly at an intradiegetic level, while the pupils' essays are within his discourse and are therefore at a hypo or metadiegetic level. There is a clear metaelepsis, transgressing the narrative levels and breaking the frame of the narrative, when we find the extradiegetic level, a distinct ontological zone, erupting into the diegesis in the disintegration, which really does make
the narrative structure fall down in ruins about itself. There would appear to be a similar kind of transgression involved in the coda, too, where a narrator from an inferior level, usurps the role of the narrator at the extradiegetic level to finish the novel, although this could be considered alternatively as a return to a text at an inferior level within the narrative as a whole. The effect of both metalepses is to disrupt the narrative and rest authority from it, even from the authorial voice, this authority finally being passed on to the anonymous voice of the low discourse which ends the novel. On the whole we find that these levels alternate throughout, drawing attention to different degrees of authority and reliability, and the transgressions finally draw attention to the relation between the ontologically distinct worlds of reality and fiction when they are made to overlap in the disintegration. Related to this is the inclusion of an objet trouvé in the novel. In a similar fashion, when Albert finds the Fortune-teller’s card and it is reproduced literally in the novel, what we have is an eruption of reality into a fictional world. The intertextuality can be considered in similar terms, and the novel, implicitly draws attention to the relation between the distinct ontological worlds to which they belong, that is, the relation between fiction and reality. This is, of course, what the digressive pause towards the end of the novel, and the novel itself as such are about anyway.

The transgression of levels which occurs after the
almighty aposiopesis, and elsewhere, draws attention to the god-like nature of the author who has been there all along, and with the corresponding shift to simultaneous narration makes us aware of the self-begetting nature of this narrative whose subject is its own coming into being and its relation with reality.

Clearly, too, there are a variety of persons involved in recounting this narrative. The heterodiegetic narrator at an extradiadic level invades the intradiadic level where a variety of homodiegetic narrators have been forwarding the narrative in the guises of Albert and the pupils and all provide the reader with alternative versions of the events recounted in the narrative. This combined with the shifts in other categories of discourse is suggestive of polymodality and the undermining of authoritative voices, particularly as the voice that ends the novel is not that which begins it, and even more so as the credibility of the heterodiegetic narrator has been impaired by his admission of telling lies anyway. Johnson, as we have seen, deliberately intends for us to question the authority of authors, and does so, ultimately, in a rather ironic fashion, inverting the hierarchy by placing a homodiegetic narrator from a hypodiegetic level within the extradiadic level of the closing frame, or coda, of the narrative.

The functions of the narrators tends to vary depending on who happens to be recounting the events, but for the most part, until the disintegration, the
narrative function is foregrounded. However, this is reversed when Johnson appears in person, so to speak, to exercise the metanarrative function above all others, although the communicative and ideological functions are also involved: a dialogue, apparently is begun with a dramatised reader-narratee, and Johnson speaks didactically of his intentions within the novel as well as the nature of it. However, the ideological and metafictional functions are apparent on other occasions when Albert himself muses about man's tendency to impose form on chaos, and the latter is generally manifested in an implicit manner due to the continual alterations that we find throughout the novel. A curious point regarding the communicative function in the disintegration section is that it is ironically undermined (deliberately) in order to suggest the essentially solipsistic nature of the narrative when the two voices involved in the dialogue turn out to be one, and the author is caught quite blatantly talking to himself. As he says himself elsewhere, there's no getting away from solipsism.

In a similar fashion we find the roles of the narrators and narratees changing throughout the novel. For the most part we are left with the extradiiegetic narrator leaving the characters to themselves until he transgresses the levels to become author, critic, teacher, even a man confessing his sins, as well as architect and artist, while the reader, who had not been previously dramatised is also brought into it all as reader, pupil and almost a confessor, although, as we suggested a moment ago, this is only an illusion as the
author's interlocutor becomes himself, and the essentially solipsistic nature of the novel becomes clear. The narrator as teacher and the narratee as pupil is an effect we are aware on a number of occasions during the classes Albert gives, and Albert himself, in an inversion of roles becomes the narratee when he reads the students essays as well as other texts, while the students, and others take over the job of the narrator. Perhaps this fact also adds another clue to the overall tendency to invert the hierarchy in the novel to undermine the idea of the authoritative text.

When we come to consider the modes of discourse adopted by Johnson in the novel, we also come into contact with a good deal of variety. The opening part of the novel is set out after the fashion of the dramatic mode, but it is curious to note that rather than present each speaker solely by name, Johnson writes Albert said, and so on, thus parodying the dramatic mode in order to draw attention to the nature of the choice he has made in this category. Something similar happens when we consider that most of the exposition is written in fairly conventional novelistic prose. However, the changes in personal pronoun draw attention once more to the artifice involved. Other modes of discourse involved include those of architecture, teaching, the debate, even that of the school textbook, when Albert gives his class on geology, and there is also a poem, all of which are supplemented by the modes of discourse that we find in the intertextuality: the historical account in early modern English of the death of Marlowe, the
architectural text book and so on. Of course, we have to mention the mode of the essay, which is made use of exclusively by the pupils which draws attention to certain issues regarding certain social varieties of English. One of the points that is highlighted here is the confrontation between authoritative modes of discourse which make use of standard English and the less authoritative discourse of the students which break the rules of the dimensions of situational constraint by making use of colloquialisms and slang within the form of the formal school essay. The co-occurrence of these discourses is in itself unlikely, and by the curious juxtaposition of more and less authoritative, high and low discourse, Johnson highlights the problems related to how we tend to be swayed by the use of a particular kind of language, which can change our attitude towards what is said, and lead us to give more credence to one account than another. This ties in with the debate that Albert has with Miss Crossthwaite about whether the pupils' English is bad or not, and in a sense what the novel does is come out on the side of the pupils, as Albert does in the debate. By putting them forward as an alternative to what, it is suggested, may be mistaken or misinformed authoritative discourses, Johnson undermines the idea of the grand narratives that form part of our education system in a highly critical manner. In a more limited sense, he also suggests that the students' view of Albert may be more valid than that put forward from other points of view, and generally highlights how alternative discourses transform the nature of what is
described.

One mode of discourse that has not been mentioned is that of the critical debate or dialogue, which appears in the disintegration section after the fashion of a kind of Socratic dialogue designed to convince the reader regarding the critical issues involved. Clearly the dialogue gradually turns into a monologue which undermines its validity by putting forward only one view, and the use of an ungrammatical stream of consciousness technique at the outset brings in questions regarding appropriateness and dimensions of situational constraint once more. The telling of a slightly rude joke within the dialogue also undermines its seriousness and authority, and, on the whole, this must be what Johnson is deliberately trying to do throughout the novel: that is, draw attention to the alternatives and remind us that the governing mode of the novel, which has been to follow conventional narrative in many respects, even in its use of the objective correlative, is, for him, unsatisfactory.

When we consider analogy in this novel, we have to mention the objective correlative again. Johnson writes:

look, I'm trying to tell something of what I feel about being a poet in a world where only poets care anything real about poetry, through the objective correlative of an architect who has to earn his living as a teacher. This device you cannot have failed to see creaking, ill-fitting at many places, many places, for architects manqués can earn livings very
nearly connected with their art, and no poet has ever lived by his poetry, and architecture has a functional aspect quite lacking in poetry, and, simply, architecture is just not poetry. (168)

As Johnson says, we ought to have realised this from the beginning, particularly when Albert explicitly draws attention to questions about form and structure in architecture, when the novel from the outset has been struggling with the same concerns. Albert struggling to design his building clearly parallels the writing process and its concerns with form and appropriateness. However, the irony is that Johnson sees the use of this parallel as lying, and undermines the authority of the analogy or his way of seeing, which by determining much that has to do with setting, discourse (contextual language) and so on, has given form and stucture, but in a manner which has led him to falsify: “fuck all this lying” (167). Johnson installs and then subverts his analogy, in the same way as he undermines any authoritative discourse in the novel. He believes that to attempt to give any form to the formless is to falsify, something which he says explicitly in the voice of Albert in the development of the novel. As he does elsewhere, Johnson shows how reality is transformed by the choice of mode and analogy and draws our attention to this fact by simply knocking his house of fiction down.

There is a curious kind of activity regarding the determination of codes in the novel too. For example,
the hermeneutic code is highly foregrounded throughout
due to our concern regarding the fate of Albert, who is
continually threatened by the students in a manner which
suggests that his life may be in danger. This
foregrounding is further emphasised by the use of the
holes in the page which anticipate the death of someone,
although, this false red-herring actually tells of
Christopher Marlowe as we said. The overdetermination of
the hermeneutic code is culminated by the complete
disappointment of reader expectation when suspension of
disbelief lapses and we are told of the fictionality of
the whole thing, the suggestion being that Albert’s fate
is to be omitted. However, not being one to forget the
conventional expectations of his readers, Johnson
finally provides them with the expected ending, Albert
being thrown in the canal by his pupils, in a rather
obvious fictional manner. This particular foregrounding
of the hermeneutic code, which creates, disappoints and
later fulfills expectations in a self-conscious manner
draws attention to metafictional concerns, in the same
way as the use of the titles to the sections in the
contents page created rather conventional expectations
on the one hand, but anticipated the disintegration at
the same time.

An unexpected foregrounding of the semic code takes
place in this novel too. By alternating between distinct
points of view and by making use of a series of
different voices, there is a kind of non-determination
of this code regarding the character of Albert who we
see finally in a rather ambiguous manner: the effect of
this is to suggest the existence of alternatives to the authorial voice which, normally at the top of the hierarchy, determines the way in which we consider the character.

There is a good deal of referentiality, which is obvious, particularly as regards the architectural setting of the novel (here the semic code is overdetermined too), and the action progresses in a series of cause and effect occurrences in a realistic manner. However, this sense of verisimilitude, which has implicitly been undermined throughout due to the proliferation of alterations within categories of discourse, is finally ended when the disintegration takes place. Hence, the realistic determination of the proaeretic and referential codes is ironised by the author in such a way that draws attention to the artifice involved.

Obviously, the symbolic code is hard at work in this novel, particularly when we consider the overt use of the objective correlative and the existence of other parallels and mises en abyme related to writing and the writing process. Obviously, the alterations within the categories of discourse, the changes in person, and the transgressions of ontologically distinct levels of narrative, symbolically dramatise the nature of the novel as dealing with the nature of narrative and the relation between fiction and reality. Even the pupils' essays can be considered as part of the overdetermination of the symbolic code in the novel, as they too can be seen as parallels or mises en abyme of
what takes place throughout: that is the use of a variety of discourses in order to tell a self. Another example of this would be the narrative about the funeral at the end of the novel, which is another mise en abyme to emphasise the "funeralisation of the painted up corpse" which has been the writing of Albert Angelo as a whole.

From what we have said, it would seem that story is dealt with fairly realistically in this novel. The plot is a kind of bildungsroman, or even kunstlerroman, if we think of the architect as artist, and much of the setting and argument is determined by the use of the architect-artist objective correlative. However, the nature of this novel is once more that of the self-begeting novel, which becomes apparent due to our awareness of the objective correlative and the disintegration section near the end. Hence the conventional use of plot, setting, character, sequence, and even cause and effect, is undermined by the arbitrary imposition of the authorial will. This means that catharsis and resolution is once more denied the reader except in the form of the reluctant and again arbitrary creation of an ending that is supposed to satisfy conventional reader expectation. The aposiopesis clearly surprises the reader, but has in fact been led up to by the continual, and sometimes abrupt shifts and alterations that recur throughout the novel, so that at the metanarrative level, if not as regards story itself, we should have seen it coming all along.

The setting and character within the story are
determined largely by the context (the school, London, architecture); and characters, excepting Albert himself, are fairly easily classed as stereotypes, particularly the schoolchildren and pub characters, who are caricatures that rely largely on the repetition of characteristic slang phrases. Curiously, the physical descriptions of these characters are foregrounded by the use of an unusual punctuation mark to indicate that they are physical descriptions. Many of these read not unlike the tabular lists of features that can be found in other novels, and give the impression of not quite managing to get across what these characters look like. This is obviously deliberate and alludes to the limitations that are placed on novelists in this regard, something that is mentioned explicitly in the disintegration section and in later novels like Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry.

Basically, then, Johnson breaks the frame he creates in this novel, both in terms of the categories of discourse he makes use of and by undermining the verisimilitude of his story, by substituting plot and causality with the arbitrary will of the author. Proportion lapses, and the related kernel and satellites of the story pale into significance as the metafictional disintegration takes place. In a sense, the disintegration is a kind of retraction of everything he has said and done previously, and the novel by installing and then subverting a series of predispositions, many of which are conventional, becomes another example of Johnson’s dialogue with form, of his
oppositional discourse of unbelief. Technique is foregrounded in this novel in many of the ways we have already seen both explicitly, in the disintegration, and by planning for and anticipating the undermining of its predispositions continually throughout. After all Johnson just wants to make it clear that telling stories is telling lies.
1.4. The Narrative Technique of Trawl

In Trawl, Johnson continues his dialogue with form by ostensibly making use of a conventional autobiographical mode of discourse. The novel can be read as a painful, true-life confession, but it also has its metafictional concerns too, as Johnson's struggle with past experience becomes a struggle with narrative form in the process. And it is the idea of process that we come away with in this novel. It is self-begetting in the more conventional sense (the author writes a story about himself writing a story and the novel we read is the result of the labours described by the novel itself), and we will find that the way in which the author takes advantage of the possibilities open to him within categories of discourse allows him to highlight the novel writing process as such, as well as the relation between past and present, the narrative and reality. In a sense, the ideology behind this novel is like that of Beckett, regarding the compulsive need to tell stories, the compulsive need to tell the self and come to terms with it, even if there is no significance and all is only chaos. The narrative technique allows Johnson to highlight these concerns.

There are continual anachronies in Trawl due to the autobiographical nature of the narrative. For the same reason there is no prolepsis except at the beginning when the author anticipates what his task is to be on board the trawler, which is "to shoot the narrow trawl of my mind into the vasty sea of my past" (11); or when
he anticipates what things will be like when he returns ashore to be with Ginnie, although that is all speculation, rather than looking forward to something that will occur in the narrative.

As the narrative begins in the now of the author and simultaneous narration is used, all of the analepses are external, referring to a past prior to the beginning of the novel, which ties in with the author's intention to know how he came to feel so isolated in the present, although the task is somewhat undermined at the end when he writes:

I still do not know exactly why I felt isolated, how it had come about that I was isolated; but I do know now that I feel it no longer, that, rather, I accept the isolation, such as it was, can encompass it and move on. . . .

But then

To know that one is because, is no more use than knowing one is: and to believe the condition is made any more bearable by knowing why, is to be deluded. (201)

Curiously, this point, made late in the novel, comes in a section which is reminiscent of the disintegration section in Albert Angelo, which is a kind of retraction regarding the validity of having written down those experiences that have made him as he is.

However, the novel dedicates itself to just that, to randomly trawling his past in order to come to terms with himself in a series of partial, completive,
external analepses which alternate with the simultaneous narrative of his experiences on board the ship. The foregrounding of these analepses, their random occurrence and their partial nature as well as their frequency draw attention to a number of points of thematic significance, not least the way in which the past and present are interwoven and how each informs the other, transforming the nature of the past and influencing the attitudes of the present:

I create my own world in the image of that which was, in the past: from a defective memory, from recollections which must be partial: this is not necessarily truth, may even be completely misleading, at best is only a nearness, a representation. (176)

Thus, metafictional concerns are highlighted in the novel at the same time as the anachronies draw attention to themselves as narrative devices as such, interrupting the sequential development of the simultaneous narrative, and, in a sense, explaining the situation in which the author finds himself, as well as dealing with the typically modernist theme of the presentness of the past.

What ought to be mentioned about the analepses is that, in spite of the sometimes arbitrary way in which these memories occur to the author, there is a great deal of self-consciousness and deliberation regarding the way in which they are elaborated. Moreover, the continual interruptions which return us to the simultaneous narrative present, remind us of the
narrative and remembering process that is going on, and therefore draw attention to the analepses as such: that is, they are foregrounded as narrative devices.

Within the simultaneous narrative of the experiences on the trawler, the tendency in this novel is towards scene as regards duration, with these thoughts being presented as part of the interior monologue of the author-narrator. This is interwoven with episodes of dialogue when the narrator talks with crew members, tells or is told a joke and so on. However, at this level of narrative present, we find that there are continual interruptions which provide pauses in the narrative where the author draws attention to metafictional concerns, which could be considered on a par with intrusive authorial digressions. Of course, besides these examples of scene and pause, there are the continual analepses which tend towards summary, with even the dialogues being suppressed within narrativised discourse, so that it is then that we are most aware of the presence of the author as narrator in his narrative. This is deliberate as Johnson clearly wants to draw attention to the way in which we tend to mould and transform the past from our point of view of the present, and many of the pauses that we find in the narrative draw attention to this fact as we have seen above.

Due to the nature of the narrative, and the desire to be mimetic (although this is ironically undermined by the retractions which come at the end) to as high a degree as possible, we find that there are also ellipses
in the narrative. These occur due to the defective or partial nature of the memories of the narrator, or because of some other present interruption of his reveries on board the ship. The effect of this is to highlight the limited nature of this representation which does not fully reflect reality, and therefore, also serves a metafictional purpose. In fact, it should be clear that a high degree of alterations in any category have this effect. One final point worth mentioning in this respect is that the higher degree of scene in the simultaneous narration is related to the fact that the novel is more faithfully mimetic as regards the recreation of the narrative process (which is deliberate) rather than the recreation of past events, once more drawing attention to the metafictional nature of the narrative.

Frequency in the narrative tends to be singulative as the narrator recounts the more significant experiences of his past, although in the simultaneous present we find a good deal of repetition as well as examples of the iterative mode. The reasons for this is that Johnson wishes to highlight the repetition of the trawling and remembering processes, usually signalled by the use of similar phrases and other markers, thus suggesting the parallel that exists between them. Similarly, the routine involved on board is made manifest in the use of the iterative present (thus emphasising its distinctness compared with the memories that he recounts). The bouts of sickness tend also to be told in the iterative present which foregrounds not only
the continual nature of the discomfort involved when one is on board, but, due to a parallel which is drawn between being sick and the pain of remembering, also highlights the continual pain created by his awareness of certain episodes of the past. That is, those painful experiences are part of the iterative present too.

In this novel, then, alterations in time are significant both thematically, regarding the past and memory, but also play there part in alluding to postmodernist concerns.

As regards narrative distance in the use of mode in this narrative, we have already suggested that Johnson attempts to be highly mimetic, especially concerning the experiences on board, recounted in the simultaneous present as part of the narrator's stream of consciousness. A certain irony must be apparent when we consider that the same stream of consciousness contains the much more diegetically aware narratives of his memories of the past, which involve the narrator much more in his tendency to summarise events or interrupt the narrative, often to make metafictional comments about what has been previously been recounted. Obviously, the time categories are influential here, as the tendency towards summary and ellipsis, as well as the digressive pause, mean that the presence of the author is much more overt. Perhaps this too has significance in the novel, as Johnson clearly wishes to draw a distinction between what he is now and what he was in the past, and the limitations of recalling and fixing the past compared to living the present
experience:

I have found few reasons in analysis of my past, so the benefit must have come from the rehearsal of the experiences themselves, like writing an experience down, it fixes it, takes the hurt out of it: one remembers one was hurt, but not the hurt itself. . . . All this, all reasons, are in the limbo of the unconscious, . . . which . . . is not known, cannot be known, and concern with it, with reasons, must always be delusion. It is what I am now that is important. (201)

The very fact that he speaks of the analysis of his past draws attention to the way in which he, as rememberer, but also as narrator, is present, transforming the past under the influence of the present, when he begins to analyse it. This, linked with the continual movement back and forth in time shows a clear contrast between the real present and the fiction that we make of the past and also embodies postmodernist concerns about the nature of the past as a distinct ontological construct. In fact, it will become clear that the narrated past exists as a distinct ontological entity as regards the events that actually took place and as regards the present that it interacts with.

When we consider the representation of speech and thought, we should also say that the text tends to be mimetic, again particularly in the simultaneous present, as the use of punctuation, the existence of hesitations and repetitions, more mimetically represents the present
thoughts of the narrator and is suggestive of spontaneity. As regards the presentation of speech there is a greater frequency of dramatic scenes where the conversations with the crew are reproduced verbatim. However, this is not so regarding the narration of past events. The narrator becomes clearly unreliable as he tampers with the facts and we find that the tendency is towards narrativised discourse, and in fact many conversations are summarised and even elided. His past thought processes (what he thought) are often summarised or elided too, so that, the presentation of past events can be seen as much more dependent on diegesis, which is clearly a deliberate ploy on the part of the author. Many narrative pauses arise out of the narrative of past events which allow the author to intrude more frequently into that part of the narrative, thus making us much more aware of the narrative process involved. It should not be forgotten, however, that the whole of the novel is a kind of quoted interior monologue, even those parts that are more highly organised as a narrative. This is related to Johnson’s desire to make the inside of his own skull his subject, and as his skull is that of an author, we find that the thought processes represented there resolve themselves into narrative processes. The novel, therefore, is a self-begetting novel whose end is to reflect its own coming into being.

From what we have said about the whole novel being a representation of the interior monologue of Johnson on board, it might be assumed that there are no alterations in focalisation. However, this is far from the truth as
these alterations do in fact coincide with the alterations in time that we mentioned earlier. At first glance the focaliser would seem to be internal (the homodiegetic narrator who is a participant in the diegesis), however, this is only true within the simultaneous narration of the events that take place on board the trawler. It is implicit here that internal focalisation is really only possible in such a simultaneous narrative, as the shifts in time, which coincide with changes in the nature of the presentation of the events, correspond with a similar shift in focalisation. The narrative person is the same, but his point of view of the events is different. He becomes external to those events, as he no longer remains the same person who was involved previously, his judgement having been altered by posterior events. There is a shift to an external perceptual facet which allows a simultaneous view of different events which is suggestive of a transgression within this category of discourse, in that, as internal focaliser of these events, this should not be possible. However, this further underlines the fictionalising process that takes place in recounting past events, and suggests that the narrator is no longer the same self that it all happened to. There are cognitive limitations, as he makes it clear that his memories are only partial and much of what he says is supposition. The subjectivity involved is also clear as his posterior emotions colour every account of the past. Even ideologically speaking, we find that he is unreliable, as his vision would seem
only to be valid concerning present experience, not in an analysis of it, but in a presentation of it. This underlines the problem about giving reasons for things. The quotations above make it clear that the analysis is not valid, and this is underlined by the alteration that takes place from internal to external focalisation, in that the narrator himself becomes a focalised that can only be seen from the outside, and the events are told from the external perspective of the present.

In this novel, we find that shifts in focalisation coincide with alterations within the categories of time. This allows Johnson to further foreground the nature of the narrative as lacking in authority, particularly when the partial analepses are interrupted to show the limitations of the narrator in recounting the past. This also shows the distinct nature of the perspective of the narrator-focaliser as regards the events that have taken place in the past, particularly as regards the inevitability of fabrication due to the influence of posterior knowledge and experience. The narrator continually asks himself if there is an error in his method in his desire to avoid such fabrication, but the point that Johnson wants to make is that it is inevitable.

Another way in which these alterations are foregrounded is through a straightforward change from looking inward to looking outward: that is, the narrator frequently gives up his inward looking reveries to look around himself at the activities on board in the simultaneous present. For many critics, these passages
are the best written and most convincingly realistic, as Johnson makes a startling use of descriptive imagery which attempts to avoid the anthropomorphic fallacy. These descriptions of the activities on board, as we have seen, are more detailed, more mimetic, and further highlight the contrast that Johnson wishes to draw between our awareness of present experience and our fabrication of the past. There are limitations imposed on this same first person narrator as regards the function of certain tools and machinery on board, or the names of the fish and so on, but the overall effect achieved in the externally focalised description of these objects and events is of objectivity and reliability within the simultaneous narration, which is impossible in the hesitant workings out of past experience which is subjectively and internally focalised during that same simultaneous narration, and where the cognitive aspect is impaired even as regards the emotive response of the narrator when these past events took place.

The effect of all this activity within the categories of discourse of time and mode is to suggest just to what extent even first-hand factual accounts of events, when told a posteriori, are inevitably subject to fabrication. The tendency is towards polymodality which undermines the existence of a dominant or authoritative narrative, which is just the postmodernist issue that Johnson wishes to foreground.

Curiously, for a first person autobiographical narrative there is no single voice, but we find, once
more, a tendency towards continual alteration. This alone ought to be suggestive of the dialogue with form that inevitably takes place in Johnson’s narratives. As regards the time of the narration, this has already been alluded to. Simultaneous narration is prevalent in the passages which describe the activity on board ship, which is also so of the ideological and metanarrative comments regarding his analysis of past events. This draws attention to the fact that the novel is a self-begetting novel which recreates the circumstances of the writing of the work, and shows that the theme is the process of creation itself. Obviously, this simultaneous narration is interwoven with passages recounted in the ulterior mode which highlights the distinct nature of these events with regard to present experience, although the presentness of the past is suggested by its being interwoven with the simultaneous narration. These alterations in time, when considered jointly with the alterations we have previously mentioned, highlight questions about the reliability of ulterior narrative which is required to be continually interrupted and complemented by simultaneously narrated comments and suppositions. Thus postmodernist concerns are alluded to and Johnson begins to make it apparent just to what extent past experience and present experience, past experience and the present account of that past experience are ontologically distinct. In a sense, what comes across is that the narrator, rather than representing or recreating his past can provide only a simulacrum.
Clearly, this is made more apparent when, aware of the alterations within the other categories of discourse which foreground the distinctness of past and present, we are able to speak of them as ontologically distinct narrative levels. We can describe *Trawl* as a series of narratives of the past embedded within the simultaneous diegetic level of the trawling experiences. Thus the narrator, as participating character on board the trawler and narrating the events as they happen is a homodiegetic narrator at the intradiegetic level. The narratives of past events exist at an inferior or hypodiegetic level within this simultaneous narration, highlighted by the alterations within the other categories we have mentioned. These very alterations, in time and focalisation particularly, highlight the ontologically distinct nature of these levels. However, there is a curious problem when we come to consider the nature of the person who recounts the events at the hypodiegetic level. It is still the same character who narrates the rest, and it all, rather ironically, takes place as part of the interior monologue of the same character. However, to all intents and purposes, the narrator is no longer the person to whom those events occurred, as the partial and sometimes non-existent nature of the recollections shows. In fact, in the simultaneous narration when he describes two photographs of himself two years apart when he was a boy this is made even more apparent when he speaks of himself as:

a bright, chubby, roughly fairhaired boy, his eyes burnished with interest. The other
photograph is of barely recognisably the same boy two years later: anxious, narrowed, the eyes now look as though they have seen most disappointments, and expect the rest shortly, the hair is darker, combed, and hair-creamed back, parted the mouth hard, compressed: in all, the face of a human being all too aware now of the worst of the human situation. (61)
The use of the third person to speak of his past self, to speak of the hair, mouth and face rather than his or my face, highlights this impersonality and the distinct nature of his past selves. Another relevant point about this particular passage in the novel is that, in a sense, an objet trouvé finds its way into a distinct ontological level, and the representation in one medium of two past representations of what are manifestly two distinct selves in a different medium, is further indicative of the lack of identification between the narrator and the past selves he attempts to narrate. Therefore, for this and other motives, we can consider the person who recounts the experiences of his past selves as behaving like a heterodiegetic person at a hypodiegetic level, although it might be argued that all that changes is focalisation. But the point that should be made here is that relative to that hypodiegetic level within the simultaneous narration, Johnson as narrator considers himself and manifests himself as an ontologically distinct being. Therefore, to sum up about this category, the narrator is homodiegetic at both the intradiegetic and hypodiegetic levels, but, like all
narrators of past selves (for example the older Pip who tells of his past self in *Great Expectations*), his behaviour is like that of a heterodiegetic narrator with respect to that past. Alterations in focalisation can account for this, but the point that is really being foregrounded is that the past and the narrator's past selves are ontologically distinct from those in the present. As we said, this simultaneous presentation of his past selves indicates a shift in focalisation to an external perceptual facet which seemingly transgresses the logic of categories of discourse by allowing the homodiegetic narrator to present different views of himself, separated in time and place, simultaneously. Once more, the narrative technique, by providing a number of alterations within categories of discourse draws attention to postmodernist concerns.

When we talk about the roles of the narrator in this novel, then we would be expected to highlight the narrative mode as this is a story about the experiences of the narrator on board a trawler which includes his past memories. However, there is much more to this as there are continual commentaries in within the simultaneous narration which exercise, most frequently, the metanarrative and testimonial functions, when the narrator tells about himself and the nature of his narrative. In fact, it might be said that the testimonial function is working throughout the novel as what we have is a kind of self-justification or confession from beginning to end. Of course, there are occasions when the narrator exercises the ideological
function and considers what we could call philosophical concerns, but perhaps one of the most significant points about this category is the lack of use of the communicative function. Now this may be a contradiction in terms as the narrative act can be considered as essentially a communicative act, but let us see what the narrator has to say about this:

Now I know these rocks only as shapes, that they are rock is of no point, they drop, but how do I know they even do that, they may climb, everything is relevant only to me, to be seen only from my eyes, solipsism is the only truth: can be the only truth: a thing is so only because I think it to be so: if I do not think it to be so, then it is not so: this must be the only truth: belief does not arise.

(193)

Now, this kind of comment, combined with his references to beginning and ending and always returning to I; his references to wishing to come to terms with his past selves, and write down past experiences and even present experience in order to fix it and so on, undermine any sense of him communicating with anyone other than himself. This relates to the feeling of discomfort that we sometimes have, as if we were overhearing something that was not meant for our ears. Hence, the rather ironic fact that the narrative exists only for the narrator’s sake, when combined with the metanarrative function highlights a number of postmodernist concerns, not least the personal and limited nature of truth.
Obviously the roles of the narrator and narratee are related to the narrative functions and we find that the narrator in this novel can be seen as one confessing to himself in a kind of quest of self-discovery. The use of the trawling metaphor and the sea-going plot help to foreground the idea of quest and search which are relevant to our understanding of the personal motives behind the narrative. The lack of any true communicative function leaves the reader as an undramatised narratee who, as we said, is left in a position of overhearing the most intimate of secrets, and it is probable that Johnson actually intended to reproduce this feeling of discomfort, involved in remembering his past, in the reader. Of course, the rather postmodernist element of solipsism is also related to the narrator becoming his own narratee.

In this category there is also an element of irony when we consider that the trawlermen think of him as a pleasure-tripper, when the journey means just the opposite for him. This, combined with allusions to his not being of any use on board, by extension, can be related to the narrator's self-conscious preoccupation with the utility of what he has actually set out to do, which is questioned in the latter part of the novel when he asks himself if he really has paid off the vast emotional debt that he has accumulated over the years. It is in the closing passages of the novel when the narrator becomes his own critic, and in something that resembles at times the disintegration of Albert Angelo, he draws attention to the limitations of the narrative.
that has just been recounted in a metafictional manner. What he does is undermine the authority of what he has told, and draw attention to the fictional nature of the reasons he gives for his present state, in a typically postmodernist fashion. Hence, we see that the roles and functions adopted by the narrator are also capable of taking on thematic significance.

When we go on to consider the modes of discourse selected for this narrative, again there would seem to be little worth of comment as the whole thing would seem to be a straightforward autobiographical reminiscence. However, this choice of mode for the ulterior narrative is interwoven with a mode that resembles the style of the journal, and the claims for authority of both implicit in the contrast between them are again suggestive of some of the postmodernist problems we mentioned earlier. Essentially, it is not simply that each is seen as an alternative to the other, what is really suggested is that the simultaneous journal is more authoritative than the partial and more fictionalised ulterior narrative. In fact, there is a sense of the simultaneous journal being somehow more appropriate for the situation as it resembles, in some ways, a log of the trawler's voyage. The autobiography is too self-centred, whereas the simultaneous narration tends to look outwards at what is going on, and suggests a greater semblance of objectivity. Hence, the claims for authority of autobiographical confession are undermined, particularly as there is a sense of having failed to explain his past. This point introduces the
existence of another more critical mode of discourse, which appears in some of the metafictional digressions of the simultaneous narrative, and where this sense of failure is explicitly articulated.

Within the novel we also find jokes and anecdotes, particularly in the simultaneous narration, as well as there being a poem, about the sea, which is introduced without introduction, which makes a statement about the tendency to impose anthropomorphic significance on states of affairs. The alterations within this category, as we have seen regarding alterations of distance and perspective, are indicative of the existence of alternatives in order to narrate experience and undermines the idea of there being any authoritative manner in which to do so. The narrative is recounted, then, through a variety of what we can call realistic modes of discourse, but what comes through is that there are only degrees of reliability and authenticity. Alterations here then foreground postmodernist concerns, by installing modes of discourse but at the same time subverting them. Conventional forms are introduced into the narrative but it is not done in an innocent manner, and is therefore suggestive of Johnson’s continuing dialogue with form.

In this novel, as well as showing how our way of seeing is governed by mode, Johnson explicitly shows how it can be governed also by analogy. The choices are deliberately obvious from the outset as his statement of intention at the beginning of the novel proves: to trawl his past with his memory. Hence, an obvious parallel is
created which means that the movements from present to past coincide with the occasions when the trawler is hauling or trawling and we find that a similar effort is involved in both hauling and bringing his memories back to the surface. The analogy works at every level in the novel, from the use of the contextual language of seafaring terminology, the setting and activities described, even the sailors’ jokes and anecdotes, accompanied by the appropriate use of slang words and colloquialisms: all are governed by this analogy. However, this analogy is combined with others. There is a further parallel between the pain of remembering and the pain of being sick, and, perhaps overriding them all, we have the image of the sea, unfathomable and neither savage nor friendly, which like the narrator’s past, cannot be made to surrender any real significance, but only randomly throws out those memories of experiences, which like the sea, just are.

While the trawling analogy allows Johnson to give form and substance to his narrative, it is curious that this way of seeing which informs and does add significance to what is said should be accompanied by the symbol of the sea as being like his past, unfathomable. What the author tends to do throughout the novel is to give significance to past experience as men impose their anthropomorphic significance on the behaviour of the sea. But the poem in the novel, a choice of mode which is made to deliberately stand out from the rest, explains just what significance we can wrest from the whole thing. The poem can speak for
itself:

They mislead who say the sea is savage:
Are wrong who believe the sea is friendly:
The sea is neither and both: is neutral:
Men put themselves at hazard on its face:
Attribute savageness and friendliness:
But the sea merely and mightily is. (44)

A curious paradox is involved in the novel, then, in terms of analogy: the trawling metaphor allows Johnson to order his narrative significantly, while the symbol of the sea shows that the significance imposed on chaos is just an illusion.

This allusion to the significance of analogy and symbol in the novel suggests that there is a clear overdetermination of the symbolic code in Trawl. This is, in fact, the case, but not solely due to the use trawling and the sea as objective correlatives for his fruitless search for significance. Once more, the tendency towards alterations in every category of discourse highlights metafictional concerns within the symbolic code, and linked to the use of metaphor and symbol, dramatises the way in which the narrator struggles to give form and significance to experience.

One more aspect of the symbolic code, which is perhaps more subtly alluded to in the novel, involves the quest motif. The use of the seaman on board ship questing or in search of something is a motif that we are accustomed to, even in fairly recent fiction and obviously in the works of writers like Melville and Conrad. In this novel, the same motif recurs, and we
find that we expect there to be some kind of discovery on the trip: the parallel, in this sense, refers to the trawler finding fish and the narrator finding the reasons for his isolation, although both will not be entirely successful.

As regards the semic code, we can say that there is overdetermination of semes belonging to the analogies mentioned above, where the semantic features related to the trawling activity at sea pervade the whole: we find curious similarities involved in the descriptions of trawling, remembering, confessing, being sick, and even, at one point, having sexual intercourse with a prostitute. To give an example, a phrase like regular movement can be associated not only with the movement of the trawler and the sea, or with the movement back and forth from past to present, but at one point refers to the activity during a sexual encounter with a green prostitute (171). Even a fairly innocuous word like raising takes on a different kind of significance when we shift from one context (trawling) to another (sexual intercourse). Hence the overdetermination of semes related to the use of analogies within the symbolic code plays a great part in governing the kind of language we find in the narrative, which is fundamental in forming and giving significance to the experiences that are recounted. At the same time, the way in which coherence in the novel is determined largely by the laws of association within the ulterior narrative is related to how the narrator’s mind moves along the lines suggested by these governing analogies.
The novel reads fairly realistically most of the time due to the creation of a semantic context which is recognisable and the narration of events that are believable. This could be associated with the choices of the autobiography and journal, which lead us to expect some kind of account of significant events. However, the hermeneutic code plays an important role as our expectations are not fulfilled here. This code is clearly overdetermined from the title onwards, and the disappointment of expectations occurs from the beginning. The title rightly suggests that we ought to expect a narrative about trawling, but expectations are disappointed in that respect too, and what is foregrounded is the narrator's trawling in his past. Even once that is established, the hermeneutic code tends to foreground the need for some kind of resolution, and Johnson, as always denies any such possibility in a series of retractions at the end of the novel which tend to deny any significance which he has attributed to the past events. There is another problem in the novel being cyclical, with the narrator finally turning once more in upon himself, in spite of an apparent resolution at the end. Thus, the novel, as it resolves itself into a novel about writing a novel, tends to undermine our expectations regarding the search for meaning too. Hence this overdetermination of the hermeneutic code is instrumental in foregrounding postmodernist concerns regarding experience and significance.

The plot typology of Trawl is fairly archetypal in
that the quest myth can be seen underlying it, as well as the whole thing having elements of the seaman's tale, the autobiographical bildungsroman and so on. Obviously the setting and character are determined a great deal by the choice of plot, which is behind the analogies and symbols we mentioned too. However, the novel is, in fact, cyclical, and denies any real sense of final reconciliation by returning to the solipsistic I, and although the traveller completes his physical journey and returns home to physical rest, the psychological journey which is foregrounded by the narrative remains without resolution. In this sense the novel plays with and undermines our expectations even at the level of story.

Trawl also resolves itself into a series of narratives which in some ways vie with one another for supremacy. The basic kernel of the novel is the simultaneous narration of the events on board the trawler, but this is undermined by the existence of a vast number of satellites which in their way form a reasonably coherent if fragmentary narrative on their own. There is a lack of proportion then as the past and present mingle with one another and we find that the past begins to take on greater significance than the present experiences, which, considering what we have said about the relative unreliability of that part of the narrative, becomes rather ironic. This is thematically significant as it relates to the tendency of the narrator to wallow in the past, much as the ship wallows. We find the overall irony of the novel is
linked to this too, as the overdetermination of these past experiences proves to be of relatively little consequence compared with the value of the narrator's present experience.

We have already said that the story reads realistically for the most part, and much of this is due to the self-conscious search for and imposition of cause and effect relationships between the series of events that are narrated in the novel. In broad terms, it is made clear that Johnson seeks to relate his present state to past experience. However, it is equally clear that he fails in doing this, in fact deliberately courts failure throughout the novel, by showing that causality is not objectively there, but is a consequence of man's anthropomorphism. Another way of putting this could be to say that Johnson substitutes causality for his own arbitrary will, which, considering the self-begetting nature of the novel, can be interpreted as a statement about the nature of narrative as such.

This point is also related to the question of sequence. Causality is sought for, but what we find is a sequence of past events that is fragmentally put together in the novel, interwoven within the coherent linear sequence of the simultaneous narrative. This in itself suggests a contrast, but the existence of any causal relation between the events is undermined by the arbitrary manner in which they appear within the narrative. Another suggestion is that the past is not actually linear at all and that only ongoing events follow any kind of sequence, hence the greater authority
of the simultaneous narrative, and the arbitrary non-
sequential nature of the ulterior narration. In fact,
the ulterior narrative effectively does render itself
into just the kind of thing the narrator says the vast
sea of his past is: that there are no reasons
(causality), only happenings (chaos). Let us say that
Johnson is undermining literary realism and substituting
it with what is more realistic, that is to let causality
lapse, although the manner in which he does so is
essentially through posterior retraction.

Throughout Trawl, the tendency is to play with
reader expectation, and the tendency towards the end of
the novel to undermine the narrator's own analyses of
his past can be considered as surprising. However, the
degree to which alterations are foregrounded from the
beginning of the novel defamiliarise us as to the nature
of the realistic conventions that are being used and
thus conforms part of Johnson's dialogue with form.

As we said, setting and character are governed to a
large extent by the nature of the plot and the analogies
and symbol we described earlier. However, what comes
through for the most part is the inability, or refusal
of the narrator to attempt any kind of psycho-narration
other than his own. What we find here is, that if you
want to be realistic such a possibility must be
discounted.

On the whole, then, it has become clear how even an
apparently straightforward series of choices within this
autobiographical novel, in fact undermine the
authenticity of following any single set of
predispositions. The novel offers alternative modes of discourse in a dialogue with form that highlights the nature of the narrative and the inevitable fabrication that takes place in any ulterior narration of past events. It is not that the novel is a fiction, but an example of fact fictionalised. Johnson is reminding us that all narrative is fiction, even, history, and even more importantly, personal history.
1.5. The Narrative Technique of The Unfortunates

There are several similarities between Trawl and The Unfortunates. Both involve the examination of the past through memory, and both reproduce the simultaneous narration of the experiences and thoughts that take place while the narrator recalls that past. Hence there is a similar interweaving of memory with the thoughts and perceptions of the present. The narrator in this novel also seeks to come to terms with past experience, in particular the death of his close friend Tony; and the choice of mode would seem the most appropriate: a factual, autobiographical account of events both past and present. However, the nature of the novel defamiliarises any narrative technique made use of and we are continually reminded of the nature of the novel as artefact. The frame is foregrounded by presenting the novel in loose sections inside a box with instructions so that we must always be aware of how the narrative is being told. What Johnson did, as he wrote himself, was to write a novel which "was to be as nearly as possible a re-created transcript of how my mind worked during eight hours on [a] particular Saturday" (Aren't You Rather Young 25). Randomness was, therefore, to be a fundamental part of the novel and is suggested by making use of the loose sections, thus becoming "a physical tangible metaphor for randomness and the nature of cancer" (25), which had killed his friend.

As in all of the novels we find that narrative
concerns, which are already manifested by the physical presentation of the novel, are also made apparent through the tendency towards alterations within categories of discourse which undermine the idea of the inevitable, authoritative single structure throughout the novel.

When we consider time in *The Unfortunates*, it would seem to be the category which is most highly foregrounded from the outset. The first thing to strike us in this regard is that the author’s note which introduces the narrative is a self-conscious metafictional prolepsis which draws attention to the physical nature of the novel as artefact, at the same time making the random nature of the material clear, and anticipating what will become a series of analepses and prolepses when considered in terms of the mutual relationships between the randomly ordered sections. The newspaper report pasted to the bottom of the box, also becomes a kind of external complettive prolepsis, by reproducing the report that is being written during the narrative which is the novel. In a sense, both this, which appears as a kind of *objet trouvè*, and the instructions are suggestive of the existence of a distinct ontological level from that of the narrative, and already begin to highlight postmodernist concerns regarding the relation between fiction and reality.

We said a moment ago that the mutual relation between the randomly ordered loose sections (excluding the sections marked *first* and *last*) allows us to consider them as a series of analepses and prolepses,
looking ahead to and back from the events that have just been narrated. However, this is not so when we consider these sections in terms of the chronological sequence imposed by the inclusion of these first and last sections. These actually suggest the implicit chronological order of the events that take place. However, a basic problem is involved in this novel which does not appear in Trawl. The ulterior narration of past memories causes no difficulty as these can all be considered as complective external analepses whether they are placed in a chronological sequence or not. The problem arises with the simultaneous narration of the events that take place during the day which are governed by the logic of sequence although they often occur out of that chronological sequence when read in a random order. The basic contradiction is that you cannot really have an analepsis or prolepsis during simultaneous narration at all (unless it is interwoven with ulterior narrative, which actually happens in the novel), as the process of simultaneous narrative must essentially coincide with the narrative sequence. The effect is that Johnson’s narrative often goes beyond the bounds of logic in its attempts to be faithful to the idea of randomness in memory, and impossible events take place during the simultaneous narration in the present, like catching a bus after he has already been on it.

No such problems with logic arise when we consider the ulterior narrative. As in Trawl, these may quite logically be narrated in any random order as they occur in the mind of the narrator, and the way in which they
are narrated, interwoven with the simultaneous narrative in a non-sequential random order, draws attention to the way in which memory works randomly. Other related themes are the presentness of the past and the mutual influence that exists between past and present, particularly as regards the way in which posterior knowledge and attitudes inform the ways in which we mould and transform the past, in the same way as present attitudes are dependent on our memories of that past.

There are clearly several metafictional concerns involved here, not least the relation between the present and the past as ontologically distinct worlds and the ways in which they overlap. Curiously, another point of interest is the way in which there are alterations even within the same narration of events which allows experiences that took place on different occasions to be recounted as if they were part of the same day. In a sense, this shows how we clearly fictionalise past experience, and when related to frequency, we could say that it is linked to the use of the iterative mode, which allows, separate events to be told as one.

Prior to summing up the way in which these postmodernist concerns are related to anachronies in the novel, we should come back to the basic problem of the illogical nature of the existence of anachronies within simultaneous narration. We have said that these cannot logically occur, but the novel belies that by having them occur. The effect of this on most critics is to have them consider it as some kind of flaw in the
method, but there are another couple of ways of looking at it. One is to see it as simply denaturalising or defamiliarising what is a narrative or novelistic convention, drawing attention to it by transgressing the rules. But another is to see this illogical flaw as denaturalising the way in which narratives are composed, highlighting the process of composition, the process of narrative which is not necessarily governed by any kind of sequential logic at all. If we consider that it would be quite straightforward to rewrite the narrative in chronological sequence, then this indicates that the sequential logic is still implicit in the narrative. What the novel does, however, is involve the reader in that process of recomposition, which in a negative manner draws attention to the nature of the novel as if it were some kind of previous stage in the process. It is as if the novel were a dramatisation of the composition process, denying its existence as product (in spite of appearing in a box with instructions) rather than a flawed attempt at recreating the randomness of the events on a particular day (something that Virginia Woolf had done some time before anyway).

The anachronies then, due to their complexity are highly foregrounded in the novel and even tend towards questioning the logic of sequential narrative, even as something imposed on some kind of rawer material which is closer to reality. For me, *The Unfortunates* comes close to representing that kind of raw material by dramatising the creative or composition process that deals with it. Let us say that this mode of presentation
is more realistic, or is at least one step less distant from that reality.

Apart from that, we can say that the anachronies draw attention to themselves as anachronies, and we become aware of their nature as literary devices, with the denaturalisation of literary technique being the result. One more point to be made is that the whole thing can be considered as some kind of game, intimated by the use of the instructions of the box, which lead us to this kind of reconstruction of some kind of jigsaw puzzle. However, to see the novel as only that would be to ignore the other fundamentally postmodernist issues that we have mentioned.

One final point should be dealt with as regards anachronies here. In spite of the illogical ordering that may result in the simultaneous narration of events, the effect of continually shifting the order of past events within a randomly ordered present, highlights the way in which different kinds of significance, and particularly irony can be achieved by juxtaposing these past events and present perceptions in different ways. The net effect of this is to show how the significance of past events is altered by posterior knowledge, and how present attitudes and experiences are affected by our awareness of the past. Hence, there can be no objective account of either past or present as both begin to signify in ways that are influenced by this awareness. In this way, the authority of the narrative is, then, questioned and its essentially fictional nature laid bare.
When we come to consider duration, this is yet another area in which the tendency is towards alteration. As the whole is presented as a simultaneous narration of the stream of consciousness of the narrator on a given Saturday, then we can say that the prevailing duration is that of scene, as the narrator’s interior monologue is faithfully reproduced in its entirety. However, as was the case with Trawl, we find that such completeness is not possible in the ulterior narration of past events which tend towards summary and even ellipsis, as the partial nature of the narrator’s memories force him to omit detail.

These alterations in duration are highlighted by the varying lengths of the sections, but we also find that alterations from simultaneous to ulterior narrative tend also to be related to changes in this category. The narration of past events is often tentative and full of supposition and tends to involve ellipsis when they are interrupted by the narrator’s simultaneous narration. This is often done to create a pause in the narrative which indulges in speculation or comment on the nature of the events; or provides a metafictional commentary on the limited nature of the memories, and, therefore the narrative. The pauses also highlight ideological concerns about the meaning of life and death, which are, in turn, related to the metafictional concerns of the novel. The narrator, in referring to the tendency to give order and therefore significance to events, draws attention to the fictional nature of the narrative and, essentially, undermines its authority. In the same way
as the random ordering of the sections of the novel, undermines any single set of predispositions, and therefore, any idea of an authoritative and meaningful account, the tendency towards alterations in duration highlights the continual interruptions of the ulterior narrative which result in ellipses and lead to pauses which foreground these same concerns. The alterations in duration, with frequent ellipses and pauses in the ulterior narrative, draw attention to the relative reliability and unreliabilty of the accounts of past and present and highlight the fictional nature of the memories of past experience.

The frequency of the narrative tends to be singulative, particularly throughout the simultaneous narration as this reflects a series of ongoing events and experiences which occur only once. The same is true of the ulterior narrative for the most part, as the memories that are narrated tend to be of different encounters that the narrator has had with Tony. However, this narrative is sometimes repetitive in that the narrator sometimes confuses different encounters, or repeats what happened more than once, which leads to a degree of unreliability which is linked to the postmodernist concerns we have mentioned. There is also repetition in the pauses, where we find the same insistence in comments about life, death and the nature of narrative, which also emphasises the metafictional nature of the narrative. There is, however, one instance of repetitive narrative in the simultaneous narration in the novel, which highlights the process of creation in
the novel to a great extent, as we can consider it to be a kind of *mise en abyme*. This is when the narrator is preparing his report on the football match as the match goes on, and we find that he repeats and alters what he writes down on a number of occasions. Hence a curious alteration in frequency, within the simultaneous narration, takes on thematic significance by highlighting a process of composition which parallels that of the novel.

Earlier we referred to a possible instance of iterative time in the novel which occurs when the narrator recounts a series of separate events as if they were all part of the same singular experience. In a sense, this highlights the distance that exists now from the past events, and a relative lack of singularity which exists in the present regarding them, as well as foregrounding the way in which the randomly selective memory distorts and fabricates. This, of course, is also true of narrative as such.

In the same way as alterations in time draw attention to themselves as alternative devices and are suggestive of polymodality in the novel, the same is true regarding distance and focalisation. However, in general terms we can say that the reader is highly aware of the presence of the author throughout the novel (we are in the presence of a transcription of his interior monologue), although there are varying degrees of intrusiveness or involvement as regards the way in which the narrative is presented. In fact, it is in this category that we first notice the varying degrees to
which the narrative is fabricated, and this is more particularly the case in the ulterior narration.

When we consider the narration of events, those recounted in the simultaneous narration are more highly mimetic than those in the ulterior narration. The reasons for this are fairly clear in that the stream of consciousness of the narrator introduces and straightforwardly describes each of his perceptions and thoughts. This includes the verbatim telephone call that he makes to the newspaper, including repetitions, spelling out words, full stops and commas, describing what is included on the menu of the restaurant and so on. The reader is less aware in this narrative of the author selecting, ordering or omitting information as the whole thing conforms more or less to what we would expect of an interior monologue. However, the same is not true of the ulterior narrative where the narrator is much more intrusive and we are aware of the number of alternatives open to him for the narration of these past events. This is related to the high degree of speculation involved, which we find in the continual pauses in the ulterior narration, as well as by being highlighted by the use of phrases like *I remember, I think, that was I think sure, it must have been, is that it, was that it and so on*. There are many other self-conscious remarks about the creative process involved in this ulterior narration, too, where he draws attention to his attempts to order the narrative and give meaning to it. On the whole, we can say that the tendencies of this narrative towards summary, pause and
ellipses are also suggestive of the intrusiveness of the narrator, who is always reminding us of how selective the memory is, and, therefore, the much more fictitious nature of the memories that are recounted.

There is no such need to say I think or I remember in the simultaneous narration, and the point of view is as often as not focussed on what is going on around the narrator, so that we tend to have objective, fuller and more detailed description of the surroundings rather than the self-conscious and partial selections of past memories.

When we consider the presentation of thought and speech, the same ideas apply. Very little spoken language is presented in either the simultaneous or the ulterior narration, the most obvious exception being the presentation of the complete phone call to the newspaper in the former. However, there is very little spoken language to be narrated in the simultaneous narration which means that there is no narrativised discourse either, which is suggestive of a higher degree of mimesis and a lack of overtness and intrusiveness in these parts of the novel.

This is not so in the ulterior narration. Here the conversations that he had with Tony and his family tend to be left out, simply mentioned in a narrative summary, or are reproduced in narrativised discourse. There is little or no reported speech, either direct or indirect, which indicates a higher degree of involvement and therefore fabrication in these parts of the novel.

As regards thought, we can say that the whole novel
attempts to be mimetic and can be considered as quoted interior monologue. However, as occurred in Trawl, we find that the narration of past events, although they occur within the same interior monologue, are much less mimetic and more highly involve the narrator. That is to say that, within the narrative, there are sections which recall his thoughts on previous occasions and these tend not to be produced mimetically at all, but are partial or even sometimes non-existent as he fails to remember his attitude or thoughts at the time. This results in ellipsis and a tendency towards the avoidance of psycho-narration in these sections. Hence, we can say that the narration of past thoughts and events requires a great deal more authorial intervention and is, therefore, much more fictitious than the simultaneous narrative of the events of the Saturday.

Generally speaking, then, the alterations in distance highlight the past nature of the events and foreground the need of the narrator to speculate, select and fabricate in order to tell his past. This wrests reliability from this part of the narrative and brings up questions about the authority of a narrative of past events, which we can consider only as a kind of simulacrum. Due to the interrelation of present and past suggested by alterations in this category, we find that it is posterior knowledge that is often instrumental in altering the past for us, which ties in with similar considerations in Trawl about only the here and now having importance as well as the fact that there are no final reasons for what has taken place.
As was suggested earlier, alterations occur in focalisation too. While, the perspective would seem always to be that of the same narrator-focaliser (the interior monologue of the author during a particular Saturday), there is a shift in focalisation depending on whether events are recounted in the present or in the past. Essentially, in the simultaneous narration, the gaze of the narrator is fixed on the outside and we see that everything is externally focalised by this internal focaliser. This is suggestive of objectivity and reliability, although there are occasions in the simultaneous narration when the narrative pauses and the narrator-focaliser looks inward, and his perceptions are therefore much more subjective.

In the ulterior narration, we have the same narrator-focaliser, however, the relative distance from the events means that he relates them as if from the outside. Hence, the internal focaliser becomes an external focaliser whose cognitive aspect is much more limited and who is emotively much more subjective regarding the narration of these events. This means that the simultaneous narrative can be considered more reliable and authoritative than the ulterior narrative and again, draws attention to the more fictitious nature of narratives in the past.

Clearly, these shifts in perspective coincide with alterations in time and narrative distance, which highlights their existence in the text and draws attention to the way in which changes in mode transform the nature of what is narrated. The basic point that
comes through by making use of these particular alternatives in the novel is that, in the ulterior narrative, choice and selection and, therefore, fictionality is much more highly foregrounded.

One more point worth considering further highlights the fictionality of the ulterior narration. We said that the internal focaliser behaves as an external focaliser in terms of these past events, in spite of being, to all intents and purposes, a homodiegetic narrator. Now, a narrator who is also a dramatised character is unable to give a simultaneous view of events that take place at different times and in different places. However, in the ulterior narrative of *The Unfortunates*, the random ordering of the sections allows a series of juxtapositions which bring about just such an effect of simultaneity, which can be considered as a transgression within this category of discourse as, given the nature of the narrator, an external perceptual facet is not logically possible. Of course, the distance in time which exists essentially changes the nature of the narrator, but what happens is that this transgression is further suggestive of the fictional nature, or the greater degree of fabrication involved in the ulterior narrative. Moreover, in this way, we are aware of the effect of present knowledge on the past.

From what has already been said, it should now be clear that there are a number of alterations in narrative voice in *The Unfortunates*. We have already mentioned the continual movement from simultaneous to ulterior narration which highlights the mutual
interdependence of present and past. This shows the way
in which each informs the other, with the narrative of
Johnson's friendship continually being coloured and
transformed by his posterior knowledge of his death. The
use of simultaneous narration also adds a sense of there
being an ongoing process involved in the novel, which is
related to our awareness of the process of ordering and
giving significance to events in narrative. We are aware
of the narrative as process rather than product, which
is emphasised by the random ordering of the sections,
which further denies any sense of a single or definitive
product. Curiously, the random ordering, which means
disruption of order in the simultaneous narrative,
questions the ways in which linear sequence is imposed
in narrative, foregrounding the choices that are made in
this category as technical devices rather than
inevitable consequences. Essentially, the artifice
involved in the writing of the novel is foregrounded in
this respect. Moreover, there is a sense of
transgression of rules and breaking the frame which
stems from the random ordering of the simultaneous
narrative, which draws our attention to the existence of
the formal conventions with which Johnson is involved in
a continual dialectic.

The tendency towards simultaneous narration, we
have said, highlights the idea of process in the novel,
and the tendency towards pauses, narrated
simultaneously, even within the ulterior narrative,
draws attention to the nature of The Unfortunates as a
form of self-begetting novel, where the result of the
thoughts and reminiscences of the day that is described is the novel we have just read. Once more, alterations in this category suggest that this is a novel about its own coming into being and all the other consequent metafictional concerns; while the alterations and transgressions in mode are suggestive of polymodality, which undermines the idea of there being any single, dominant or authoritative mode in the narrative.

As regards levels of narration, we might be tempted to suggest that there is only one. However, the alterations in time and perspective are indicative of the existence of the intradiegetic level, which is that of the simultaneous narration, which is embedded with a series of ulterior narrations which belong to the hypodiegetic level. The existence of the instructions for reading the novel and the newspaper report pasted to the bottom of the box belong to the extradiegetic level which we tend not to be aware of when reading the novel, but which we are constantly reminded of due to the physical nature of the book in a box with loosely packed sections. Postmodernist concerns are highlighted by the existence of these three levels, particularly because of our continual awareness of the book as artefact, which suggests questions about the relation between the narrative and reality, and, for the most part, the reader is made aware of the ontologically distinct nature of the worlds that exist at each level.

The existence of these levels also suggests a sense of there being a clear hierarchical relation between them, which we can link to the question of the
authoritative nature of the narratives we find. The random ordering of the intradiegetic level suggests the existence of alternatives and therefore undermines the authority of any order imposed on the text. Within that ordering, we find the ontologically distinct level of the ulterior narrative, which due to the existence of further alterations, can be seen as an unreliable account of the friendship between the author and Tony. This is so, partly because of the existence of a hierarchy, as well as through our awareness of the great distance between the present experiences and the past. The levels are made to interweave and we are aware of the relationship between present and past, even the presentness of the past, and how it influences the present and vice versa. The effect is to highlight the way in which these distinct ontological zones interact, to make us aware of their mutual influence, which ultimately suggests the fictional nature of any ordering and significance that we find there.

In terms of person, we tend only to be aware of a homodiegetic narrator at the intradiegetic level. However, the instructions about how to read the novel are from a heterodiegetic narrator at an extradiegetic level, while the hypodiegetic level, where we find the ulterior narratives would appear to be told by the same homodiegetic narrator whose stream of consciousness we are in the presence of throughout. However, the way in which the narrative shifts from simultaneous to ulterior narrative, and the fact that the narrator of the past events often pauses to digress regarding the ordering of
the events and his partial memory of them, suggests to us that, with regard to the hypodiegetic level of the narrative, the story is told as if it came from a heterodiegetic narrator. The distance from the past and the need to fabricate are foregrounded in these ulterior narratives as we have seen, and the novel in this way draws attention to the fictional nature of the narrative, and the ontologically distinct nature of the present and past selves of the narrator.

Hence, the alterations in voice within the novel also highlight postmodernist concerns about the nature between fiction and reality and the ontologically distinct nature of the present and the past. Curiously, the way in which the present and the past are interwoven in the novel is suggestive of the fact that they both participate in the creation of the fictional narrative which is the self, or selves. The random ordering even of the simultaneous narration suggests that there is a series of ontologically distinct selves which are made up of these randomly interacting zones.

Obviously, from this, we have seen that the narrator tends to be more or less overt depending on the level of narrative to which he belongs, although we are always aware of his presence in this novel. At the extradiiegetic level we find him overtly instructing us what to do and we, as narratees, would seem to become the players in some kind of game (the novel is in fact very playful). Within the narrative itself, the narrator takes the role of biographer, recounting his friendship with Tony, and because of the nature of the material, we
can see him almost as elegist, providing a *memento mori* for his friend. Of course, when he goes to Nottingham he goes as a football reporter, and we see him doing that too in the novel, and the reader, when he reads the report becomes the reader of a newspaper for an instant. We find the narrator present also as critic and as author speaking of his concerns about literature, criticism and writing. What this variety of roles for the narrator suggests is just how overtly present he is in the narrative, and, at the same time, we find that the function he performs tends to change throughout. Moreover, as we will see shortly, these changing roles correspond with changing modes of discourse, which draw attention to the way in which the nature of what we narrate changes in accordance with role, function and mode.

The reader is only directly addressed in the instructions to the novel, and is given his role in a very clear manner. It is his job to order the sections of the novel as he pleases in accordance with his own criteria. What happens here is that the reader becomes not simply a player, but a participant in the process of recreating these events which took place on a particular Saturday. In a sense, this use of narrative technique allows Johnson to have the reader parallel his own activity in transcribing his thoughts and perceptions on that day. In a highly metafictional manner, then, Johnson foregrounds the creative process by making the reader participate in it all.

The narrative functions are several in the novel,
too, depending on the particular role adopted by the narrator. The narrative function tends to be undermined by the presence of pauses or hesitations which interrupt the ulterior narration in order to make use of the metanarrative or ideological function. Hence it is the nature of the narrative rather than the narrative itself which is emphasised. The communicative function is foregrounded in the instructions to the reader which encourages participation and is also linked to the metafictional concerns we just mentioned.

Curiously, this novel, like Trawl and Albert Angelo before it, tends to become rather solipsistic, as the ideological and metanarrative pauses tend to question the random selection and ordering of events which, once more, only have a subjective significance for the author. In this way, Johnson further emphasises his pessimism about finding any authoritative sense of meaning in experience.

Up to now, it is clear that postmodernist concerns lie behind this novel too. The questions of what mode or what predispositions to follow and the allowing of alternatives which deny any sense of inevitability or finality is instumental in this. Hence, when we talk of governing principle in this narrative it would seem that there are none, only a series of alternatives which tend to show up the limitations of each other. So, what we can say of The Unfortunates is that there is a wide variety of modes of discourse employed which complement but also undermine one another.

The novel is clearly a mixture of biography and
autobiography in which we find orderly sequential discourse, although this is undermined by the random ordering of the book, as well as by the questioning tone of many of the digressions which suggest that the order imposed is not the correct order. We also find that the discourse of journalism is highly foregrounded and this establishes a contrast which suggests the way in which narratives tend to falsify, how the cliché comes to the surface, when, in his narrative about Tony, his intention is to achieve sincerity and authenticity. However, such possibilities are questioned by the introduction of the low journalistic mode which foregrounds the ontologically distinct nature of experience and the narration of it.

Nicolas Tredell draws attention to the existence of a mystical discourse, a medical discourse and a psychological discourse to talk about death in the novel (1985 39), and the point of introducing them is to show just how limited they are in their attempts to explain the cancer that kills Tony, the meaning of his life and his death. The novel as a whole denies any such possibility anyway, and we find that, linked with the obvious falsification that goes on in the newspaper narrative, we find that, whatever the discourse, any attempt to impose order and meaning must result in falsification. So, behind the mixing of modes in the novel, there is a clear enough message about the way in which narratives falsify experience. We find that the language used is highly influenced by choice of mode, too, and shows how the nature of the narrative is
determined by imposed choices of formulaic phrases, apt images and cliché. As he says at one point, "Images for rain are common" ("Away from the ground" 1), which suggests the idea of some kind of storehouse of images waiting to be called upon to impose its expected significance on what happened. Thus mode, as it imposes a particular choice of language on us, is instrumental also in the way in which we fictionalise experience. One final point about mode here can be related to the idea of the novel being a kind of urban elegy. It is curious that Johnson never becomes elegiac in this novel, clearly denying himself and the reader the consolation that such a choice of mode might bring about.

There are no obvious analogies in The Unfortunates, although perhaps the most important parallel that we can find is implicit in the relation that exists between the writing of the newspaper report and the composition of the novel itself. The effect is clearly metafictional as it draws attention to the degree of fabrication involved in each. In fact the novel tends to avoid analogy or imagery to a great extent, often positing some choice of image, but failing to provide it on many occasions. Clearly, this is related to the foregrounding of attempts to achieve authenticity, as, although the tendency is there, all the same it is a tendency which is finally retreated from. Any other kinds of analogy which might be found in the novel tend also to be related to the analogous kinds of discourse, all of which have in common their intention to create order and clarity, but which tend to fail in their attempts to
give authentic significance to experience.

The only other analogy worth mentioning now is perhaps the most important, which is the analogous nature of our activity in ordering the events in the box, and the way in which memory and narrative tends to order experience. As we already said, Johnson here attempts to dramatise the process that we go through to recreate or recompose past experience in a significant manner.

Many critics tend to emphasise the fact that The Unfortunates reads like a realistic novel once we have ordered the experiences and events in our own minds. However, such a statement simply glosses over what is in fact highly foregrounded in the novel: the ordering and arrangement of what we find there. It is a fact that the referential and proaeretic codes are determined in such a manner that each episode reads realistically, and there is an abundance of detail regarding what the narrator perceives throughout the simultaneous narration. However, there is an underdetermination of the proaeretic and referential codes in the ulterior narrative which results in our awareness of the lack of detail and specificity of the narrator's memories, which leads even to a kind of non-determination of the semic code as he struggles to reconstruct his attitudes towards these past experiences. Hence, there is a certain ambiguity about the narrator's attitude towards Tony on a number of occasions which stems from his posterior knowledge of his death influencing his interpretation of previous events.
The hermeneutic code in the novel is also highly foregrounded in the novel, but in a manner which is unusual due to the random ordering of the material. In this novel, the way in which the hermeneutic code may be overdetermined is in our own hands as we can delay or anticipate the knowledge of Tony’s cancer, his supposed recovery and his relapse as we please. From the outset the death of Tony is no surprise as it is explicitly announced, but the way in which unexpected juxtapositions of events and information can result with quite ironic effect due to a different ordering of the text, shows how the hermeneutic code is highly foregrounded in the novel. In fact, randomness, order and sequence become themes in the novel due to this elaborate foregrounding of this code.

Of course, as in all of the novels, the theme of writing and other narrative concerns is highlighted by the overdetermination of alterations within the categories of discourse within the symbolic code. The analogous nature of the narrator ordering his memories and the reader ordering the loose sections and the mise en abyme of the football match report which parallels the fictionalising process of the narrative symbolically dramatise Johnson’s concerns with the power of narrative to authentically reconstruct experience. The alterations of levels, particularly considering the ever-present extradiegetic reality of having the book in a box, draw attention to the relation between fiction and reality, and in general the alterations within the other categories draw attention to the usual metafictional
concerns about ways in which to articulate experience.

The story of The Unfortunates is of a fairly familiar kind if we remember the title of one of his stories: "Everyone Knows Somebody Who's Dead." This theme brings to mind the ideas of the ars moriendi, the memento mori and the elegy as such and governs the events that are to be told: the friendship that exists between the narrator and the dead man and the events that lead up to his tragic death. There is something of the tragic in all this, but, once more, Johnson avoids any final sense of catharsis by denying that the death had any meaning, and by denying the possibility of believing that things could have been different. In this narrative we find that Tony's life and death are meaningless, which is highlighted by the nature of the simultaneous narrative which solipsistically insists that the only significance can be for the author in the present. Hence there is an unusual use of conventional material which breaks with what one would usually expect.

The novel also provides us with a readily recognisable kernel which gives coherence, literally from first to last, which is the simultaneous narration of the events of the day. However, Johnson begins to play with proportion in such a way that the satellites, the ulterior narration of the past events, begin to take over, and we find just to what extent the past influences present experience. One more point in this respect is related to the way in which narrative tends to be interrupted in order to provide commentary, which
also undermines the importance of the simultaneous narrative as narrative, and highlights the simultaneous narrative as narrative process.

Clearly, the most problematic aspect of *The Unfortunates* is related to order and sequence. The random ordering of the sections does not deny the existence of some order which the reader is able to impose for himself, but the novel, as such, only alludes to this order. Clearly the use of adverbials and simple logic tells us what happened before and what happened after (the funeral obviously comes after Tony's death), but Johnson deliberately foregrounds the artificiality of that sequence when the reality of our lives is often randomly interrupted by memories in no particular order. What happens is that the author suspends his own authority as regards imposing order or sequence on the events in order to make this point, that the ordering is part of the fabrication and falsification.

This is also related to what is essentially the point Johnson wants to make about causality. In several digressions the narrator informs us that all is chaos and meaningless. Thus, although the author does impose a sequence of cause and effect relations which are implicit rather than explicit in the novel, the existence of any such sequence is undermined by the random presentation of the sections. Curiously, in this novel, Johnson does not undermine causality by substituting it with the authorial will, but does so by suspending the authorial will and leaving it up to the reader to determine the inevitable chain of events.
Critics say that this is not really the case, and that the causal sequence is implicit in the novel. This is true, but only in part, as what Johnson does is dramatise the tendency and need of man to order experience in such a way, while at the same time retreating from it, and, in fact, dramatising the opposite by presenting his semblance of randomness.

The novel then shows how the reasons that we attribute for things happening are often posterior to the events, in the same way that order, sequence and causality are imposed after the events. Hence the use of the loose sections allow us to precede that posterior ordering which man inevitably performs.

The novel does not really surprise the reader in any way as regards the events that take place, although there are, as we mentioned some curious juxtapositions that allow for irony or pathos. There is no real suspense involved either, although, what does happen is that the novel provides its own antinarrative by maintaining a series of unresolved alternatives, and by doing so defamiliarises the conventional ordering of the narrative text.

The novel tends to avoid any real analysis of character although there is a good deal of physical description. Curiously, and this is deliberate, Johnson highlights the limitations of physical description, coupled with the realistic avoidance of psycho-narration about characters other than himself. When we find the description of "his cheeks sallowed and collapsed round the insinuated bones, the gums shrivelled, was it, or
shrunken" ("First" 1) about Tony, the use of was it
draws attention to the fact that it is a description
which must rely on accepted and recognisable formula,
and has nothing to do with his remembering, or not, what
Tony's appearance was like. There is a similar parodic
style made use of in the description of setting, which
parodically alludes to realistic writing in a similarly
formulaic way: referring to architecture and making use
of cliché and so on. If this is related to the *mise en
abyme* of the composition of the journalistic match
report, we see how Johnson in fact draws attention to
the limitations of physical description which tends to
be governed by the conventions imposed by the chosen
mode of discourse.

Throughout *The Unfortunates*, then, we find that
narrative technique is foregrounded at every level, not
least by the fact that a process is involved if we even
want to read the novel. This, too, is immediately
suggestive of some kind of deviance from the norm which,
combined with alterations at every other level in the
narrative dramatically represents Johnson's oppositional
dialogue with the novel form.
1.6. The Narrative Technique of *House Mother Normal*

In *House Mother Normal*, B.S. Johnson changes direction and moves away from autobiography in order to write a problematic novel which tends towards realism in its descriptions of the interior monologues of the old people, but towards fabulation in other respects, particularly as regards innovations in the form of the novel, the bizarre and obviously fictitious nature of ongoing events in the story, and in the use of the intrusive and self-conscious House Mother who draws attention to the artifice and fictionality of the whole thing, including herself. In spite of the obvious change in the nature of the material, Johnson continues his tendency towards a kind of dialogue with form which, by breaking the narrative frame, and making use of continual alterations within every category of discourse, challenges the authority of the dominant voice in the narrative and highlights a number of postmodernist issues regarding the nature of the relation between fiction and reality and the function of literature. In fact, among other things, *House Mother Normal* is a challenge to the ways in which we impose criteria for judging old people, and, in broader terms shows to what extent any attempt to categorise or tell another's self must result in fiction. In a sense, this is a novel which highlights the limitations of accepted modes of discourse and shows how Johnson opposes the way in which we tend to label everything.
When the frame is deliberately broken in this novel, the authoritative narrative is undermined in order to foreground the existence of more realistic alternatives, in particular, the interior monologues of the geriatrics. *House Mother Normal* is a self-evident sham which exposes the mechanism of narrative, while at the same time drawing attention to the ontologically distinct nature of reality for each consciousness involved in the story.

This is a novel which imposes its own rules as alternatives to traditional novelistic conventions and then transgresses them in order to highlight their nature as technical devices with their corresponding limitations. The alterations and transgressions that we find throughout the categories of discourse in this novel have a similar metafictional end and tend to be fairly obvious in order to make us aware of the nature of the narrative as a kind of fabulation.

When we consider time in the narrative, for example, anachronies appear continually from the outset. At the very beginning there is a prolepsis, which explains the way in which the narrative will develop. Obviously, this is done in a manner which highlights the artificiality of the whole thing, foregrounding the novelistic convention of being able to see into the minds of characters as well as anticipating the use of an alternative mode for categorising these old people as having varying degrees of senile dementia. At the same time, the use of the House Mother to introduce all this at an extradiiegetic
level and in a manner where she directly addresses the reader as narratee at this level, suggests an obvious hierarchy of reliability which will be related to the ontologically distinct nature of each version of the events that is supplied.

Each interior monologue is a simultaneous narration which involves a series of analepses which look back to the pasts of these characters in varying degrees of completeness. What might be an excessive use of this at times suggests to what extent the characters are in touch with their surroundings as well as indicating to what extent they take refuge in that past. Certainly, what is clear is that the past is very present for the characters and helps to make their present circumstances more acceptable.

Following each interior monologue, we return, in what must also be considered a kind of analepsis, to the beginning of the social evening to have it recounted once more from a different point of view. As these different perspectives provide us with different information about the evening, we can consider them as internal, partial, complevtive analepses, which turn the novel into a kind of puzzle, where the reader has to complete his idea of the evening from the partial information provided by the old people. However, to consider it only as a game would be to miss the point, as Johnson intends us to become aware of the ontologically distinct nature of each version of the events, as well as making us aware of the existence of alternatives to the official narrative of the House
Mother. Moreover, by repeating the use of the same conventions, within which we find the same use of analepses mingling with the ongoing simultaneous narration of the interior monologue, we are made more aware of the conventional nature of the devices that are being used: in other words, by doing this, Johnson foregrounds his technique, almost at the expense of what is being narrated, and certainly in a manner which shows to what extent the material is moulded by adherence to such conventions.

In terms of duration, we can say that this novel is innovative in that each interior monologue (except for the House Mother’s) is of exactly the same length, so that there is no variation in terms of the duration of the reveries of each character or the duration of the narration of the events within them. We can also say that each interior monologue is an example of scene, as the interior monologue of each character is presented in a mimetic manner which reflects both what they are thinking, the conversations and events that take place around them. Essentially, for each character, narrative time is equivalent to story time, then, and the reader is able to reconstruct the events through cross-references which will give a dramatic sense of simultaneity regarding the respective visions of the same events by the characters.

However, if we consider the narrative of the House Mother who exists at two distinct levels, both extra and intradiegetic, her participation in the novel is somewhat different. Her prolepsis in "House Mother
Introduces," is an example of a narrative pause, as she simply anticipates what will take place in a manner which draws attention to the structure of the narrative without furthering the story in any way. At the intradiegetic level, her interior monologue involves a great deal more of deliberate narration than those of the other characters, and the tendency to continue to address the reader as friend within this section, as she did in the introductory prolepsis, undermines the idea that it is an interior monologue at all. There are pauses where she comments on the nature of her work, the character of the old people and so on, and finally, when she extends beyond the expected length of her section, she begins to indulge in metafictional comment. Broadly speaking, then, we can say that the interior monologue of the House Mother is much less of an example of dramatic scene than the other monologues as it tends towards pause and summary in spite of the fact that it occupies the same space within the novel (except for the brief transgression of the novel's predispositions when it deliberately and self-consciously goes one page beyond the length of the other monologues). This transgression of the novel's predispositions and the fact that the device of the interior monologue is parodied rather than followed, highlight the nature of the technique as well as the fictionality of the House Mother's involvement in the narrative.

Within the several monologues of the characters, however, there are varying tendencies towards summary
and pause. Each character thinks of the past and some do this more or less fully, tending towards summary, but occasionally having to omit details due to the incomplete nature of their memories. There are also varying tendencies towards pause in the simultaneous narration when the characters consider their surroundings and make comments to themselves about the nature of the events that are taking place. The effect of this is to suggest, much more fully than the CQ test, just how aware each character is of what is going on, and to undermine the authority of the official version of their physical and mental states.

As the monologues move in a gradation from the most mentally sound character to the least, prior to the House Mother's intervention, we also know just how much information is omitted from each monologue, while the use of spaces, which increasingly disrupt the monologues of the inmates, highlights this use of ellipsis, which occurs both as regards the events that are taking place as well as regarding memories of past events. Once more the distinct nature of each vision of reality is foregrounded, while, at the same time, we are well aware of the device that is being used.

The overall effect of all this is to draw attention to the variety of possibilities that exist in order to recount the same events and the ontologically distinct nature of the worlds of the characters. This is reinforced by their own narration, in the form of some kind of summary within the simultaneous narration of their thoughts, of aspects of their pasts which have
gone to make up their present. In fact the ontologically distinct way in which the past erupts into the present of each character highlights the differences between them, as, when we take time to indulge in cross-references, we find that each character is involved in a totally different situation, and may not even be paying attention to what the others are doing at any given moment.

The use of the clinical record and CQ Test is essentially an example of a distinct kind of duration, where the sum total of the ontologically distinct existences of these characters is summed up in an exaggerated manner which cannot do justice to the variety and depth of their lives. Implicit in this use of summary, is a comment on the way in which society tends to categorise and label individuals in an impersonal and reductive way.

There is a curious use of frequency in this novel too. Obviously the same events are recounted nine times, so that we would have to say that the narrative is repetitive. However, the events are recounted from a different point of view on each occasion, and, moreover, each interior monologue is singulative, as it recounts only once what happens. This curious mixture of singulative narrative in terms of a series of monologues which, as they coincide in exactly the same place and time, are of the same duration and also narrate the same events in a repetitive fashion, highlights the differences that exist between the characters and their worlds. Each character constructs
the same reality in a totally different way and, therefore, reality for each of them is ontologically distinct.

What we find in the novel, then, is that the highly organised frame gives Johnson an opportunity to draw attention to the nature of his devices as devices in a metafictional manner, but, at the same time, they allow him to foreground the distinct nature of reality for each individual. That is, Johnson provides a series of alternatives to and undermines the authority of the House Mother's official narrative (the tendency towards scene in these narratives suggests that they are less diegetically aware and therefore more authentic accounts of who they are, what takes place and of the past).

There is clearly polymodality in House Mother Normal, which also undermines the idea of a single, dominant mode in the novel. In fact, we can say that the variety of modes of presentation of the events is suggestive of a certain irony in the novel which we will now explain. We have suggested earlier that the narrative of the House Mother is presented in such a way as to be given a greater degree of authority within the novel, as she is allowed to appear at both the extra and intradiegetic levels. Moreover, it is her narrative which resolves any doubts that we may have about the nature of the events that actually take place during the evening. Her narrative is more diegetically aware and, both in her introduction and interior monologue, she tends to be highly involved as a
narrator and tends to tell rather than show what takes place. This is clear due to the existence of narrative pauses in which she provides comments about the nature of the patients and her work as well as about the nature of the novel at the end. However, there is a good deal of mimesis in her narrative too, as she faithfully represents the song they sing, her comments to the other characters, some jokes she tells, even the talk that she gives the inmates is presented verbatim. The irony is that her narrative totally ignores and is at variance with what we have experienced of the interior monologues of the rest of the characters themselves, and tends to sum up even her own attitudes rather than reflecting what she is really like. We might even say that there is a curious correspondence between the summary way in which the House Mother's interior monologue narrates the events that take place, and the limited view of the characters that the clinical record provides. Hence, we can say that there is a great deal of involvement on the part of the House Mother regarding the way in which she, effectively, narrates what takes place, even summing up the differing degrees of involvement of the other characters, as well as providing an idea of what these characters are like. Ironically, this suggests that as narrator, her official version of events involves a greater degree of fabrication, as we are more fully aware of the way in which her vision is imposed on things. In some ways, this involves an implicit comment on the nature of narratives as such which do just that.
This irony is further highlighted when the House Mother herself undermines her own authority by drawing attention to her fictionality, which implies a similar comment on the nature of narrative and the fictitious nature of even the narrative voice.

In contrast with the way in which House Mother recounts events, the rest of the characters can hardly be said to narrate what takes place, and we are much more conscious of overhearing what they think rather than anything else. Although, they do occasionally summarise what has happened in the past, it is easy to see it as part of their ongoing reverie rather than as a deliberately organised narrative. Moreover, within the simultaneous narration of their thoughts, the events are presented obliquely, and we are aware of events in a more implicit manner as something going on around them which is effectively distinct from and seems to impinge on their inner world.

We said that the whole novel was a series of interior monologues, and therefore, the presentation of thought could be said to be done mimetically. This is the case more particularly of the patients, as there tend to be hesitations, repetitions and increasingly more frequent occurrences of ellipsis, as some of them fall asleep, become unconscious or just stop thinking because of pain or any other circumstance. These can be said to be representations of the streams of consciousness of these characters as opposed to what we find in the House Mother's section, which, in keeping with her tone of voice in the introduction, tends
towards a summary of what takes place and comments about it, although it too appears as a simultaneous narration.

We find examples of *oratio recta*, in inverted commas, interwoven within the streams of consciousness of all the characters, in a manner not unlike what we found in *Albert Angelo* and parts of *Travelling People*, which is also suggestive of a high degree of mimesis, but we are more aware of contrast in the House Mother's discourse, as what she says appears within a monologue which is much more clearly narrative than the others. In the other monologues, there is simply a shift from quoted interior to quoted spoken monologue, a change that is indicated by the use of italics.

What further emphasises the distinct nature of the House Mother's participation in the novel is the existence of the opening and closing remarks which are diegetically aware to a very high degree and, in a sense, undermine the realism of the rest of the novel by alluding to its fictionality. These sections, like the rest of her monologue, are overtly addressed to the reader which suggest her awareness of a distinct narrative level, and can therefore be considered as transgressions. This use of the interior monologue and the implicit transgression of conventional expectations as regards the House Mother's use of it simply draws attention to the fictitious nature of this device and metafictitiously foregrounds the technique of the novel.

Essentially, what we find with the presentation of
speech and events is that the narrative tends towards mimesis on the part of the inmates and diegesis on the part of the House Mother. The former provide us with realistic examples of interior monologue whereas the House Mother puts an end to our suspension of disbelief by making us aware of a distinct narrative level within a self-consciously narrated monologue which is metafictitiously addressed to the reader. Curiously, an ironic inversion wrests reliability and authority from the House Mother as she draws attention to the fictional nature of the narrative by exposing the mechanism and allows us to give greater credence to the narrative of the inmates.

In general terms, in this category, technique is foregrounded in such a way that we are made aware of alternative modes for the presentation of thought and events. The inclusion of the reductive tabular form as a means of summing up the state of mind of the characters and the diegetically aware narrative of the House Mother in particular allow us to consider these official modes as inadequate and undermine their authority in favour of the more realistic streams of consciousness of the rest.

As regards point of view, it should already be clear that a number of alterations take place. Obviously, we find that the perspective as regards the events shifts from one character to another, each of the inmates being an internal focaliser. Perspective in the novel is therefore multiple and shifting, and, by its nature, undermines the idea of any single or
dominant mode of presentation. The House Mother might be thought to provide just one more point of view as regards the events that take place in the same way as the others, but, as has already been suggested, this is not the case. Basically, the introduction to the novel sets the House Mother up as an external focaliser, as she exists at an extradiegetic level at this point. However, as a participant in the events, whose stream of consciousness appears within the intradiegetic level, she would seem to be a homodiegetic narrator at that level, and therefore act as an internal focaliser. However, she demonstrates a self-conscious awareness of the reader, and the way in which she steps beyond her allotted number of pages to speak on behalf of the author, as she did at the beginning, shows that she is aware of her place as a character within the novel. She is aware of the structure that is to be adopted and her place within it since her inclusion within the extradiegetic level and for this reason the presentation of her narrative as that of an internal focaliser is a sham. She is, in fact, an external focaliser, who while she makes use of simultaneous narration, tends to pause in her thoughts to give opinions about the nature of the characters, her job and the narrative itself. Another way in which we could describe what happens is to say that, as an internal focaliser, her awareness of the reader as well as her role within the narrative, is an example of paralepsis, when an internal focaliser demonstrates the knowledge of an external focaliser. This is a transgression which
breaks the frame adopted by the narrative and highlights the nature of the characters and their interior monologues as narrative devices.

Curiously, in a manner not unlike what we find in *Albert Angelo*, this particular alteration in focalisation draws attention to the fact that it is all narrated from the same point of view, that of the author, as the House Mother explicitly points out at the end. The view of the House Mother is therefore that of the narrator-focaliser, in spite of all indications to the contrary, as the transgression of levels indicates at the end of the novel. Therefore, a combination of alterations and transgressions in perspective and narrative level draw attention to the fictitious nature of the narrative and foreground the technique employed.

If we go into a little further detail, we find that, to all intents and purposes there are no alterations in perspective within the interior monologues of the old people, as past and present flow together as part of the same stream of consciousness, indicating the presentness of the past to them and the way in which external reality seems to be less important. In a sense, reality for them is their inner life, which is not considered at all by the clinical records or the House Mother's external view of them, and the events that take place are only relevant in terms of the degree to which they impinge on that inner life. The House Mother, is totally the opposite as we are aware of no such inner life as her view tends
always to look outward. Emotively, cognitively and perceptually, the interior monologues of the old people all have internal focalisation which further highlights the contrast with the House Mother.

As regards House Mother, we can say that during her monologue the perceptual facet tends to be internal but shifts to an external perceptual facet in a paralepsis when she shows herself to be aware of the reader, the nature of the narrative and so on. The cognitive facet is external and limited as regards the focaliseds, the old people, and emotively we find that she tends also towards external focalisation: she is cold, objective and unfeeling. As well as foregrounding the contrast with the interior monologues of the others, all of this further undermines the idea that the nature of this part of the narrative is that of the interior monologue, which requires internal focalisation, which is not apparent here. The ideological facet of the narrative would seem to suggest that, due to the hierarchy implicit in the novel, the objective, external focalisation of the House Mother who provides a fuller account of the events is more reliable. However, this is not so as, for reasons that have been suggested, her total ignorance of the inner lives of the characters, and our knowledge of their interior monologues as alternatives to her version, undermine completely her authority. In the same way, and for the same reasons, the apparently reliable perspective of the clinical records is also undermined. These are governed by the kind of rules
which govern any mode of discourse, and by their tendency towards generalisation and standardisation, falsify, by completely ignoring claims in favour of the particular or personal. Johnson would seem to be making claims for the reliability of subjective and fragmentary visions of reality as alternatives to the official and authoritative versions put forward by society.

Up to now, we have seen that alterations and transgressions within the categories of time and mode are indicative of polymodality in this novel. This undermines the idea of the authoritative text and draws attention to the nature of the narrative as such. When we come to voice in the novel, the trend continues. We find all three times of narration in *House Mother Normal*: simultaneous and anterior narration in the introduction to the novel; interwoven simultaneous and ulterior narration in the interior monologues. Obviously, the use of anterior narration in the introduction highlights its metafictional nature, as it anticipates the way in which the material will be presented, only briefly alluding to the story that will take place. In this part of the novel in particular, the simultaneous narration is used to foreground the communicative act which takes place between the House Mother and the reader, as well as drawing attention to other concerns about the nature of the old people and so on. What is apparent is the way in which this stands out from the rest and draws attention to the fictitious nature of what follows.
When we are introduced into the minds of the old people, we find that their interior monologues tend to be similar in terms of style and that simultaneous and ulterior narrative are interwoven throughout. The simultaneous narration alludes to what is going on around the characters often without explicitly stating what happens, while most of their thoughts tend to be taken up with past events which lead them to use ulterior narration. In a sense, it would be an exaggeration to say that they narrate anything of the ongoing situation, but rather pause in their reminiscences of past experiences to allude to what goes on around them. This foregrounds the presentness of the past and the degree to which their inner lives are tied up to actual circumstances.

As regards the House Mother’s monologue, this can be described in similar terms, although her narrative tends much more towards simultaneous narration and can much more rightly be called a narrative as such, due to her awareness of the reader. A great deal of her narrative explains what is happening in a way that the monologues of the others do not. At the same time, she tends to avoid reminiscences about past experiences except to speak of the conditions in other nursing homes. Moreover, a good deal of simultaneous narration involves comments about the nature of geriatrics and their problems, prior to her going beyond the conventions of the novel and outwith its framework to make metafictional comments about fictionality and so on.
These alterations in the time of narration tend to be barely noticeable within the monologues of the old people, but are most apparent when we consider them when accompanied by the further alterations that take place when we move to the House Mother's introduction and monologue. It is then that we become aware of the nature of the technical devices that have been used and the fictitious nature of the whole thing. Within the more realistic monologues of the patients, however, the presentness of the past is made more manifest and the way in which it allows the patients to have some kind of dignified inner existence removed from their unpleasant surroundings comes through, partly because of the use of alterations in the time of the narration with the emphasis lying on the ulterior narration which dominates their reveries.

Perhaps one final point should be made here about simultaneity in the novel. Of course, the time scheme corresponds exactly page for page throughout each interior monologue and this provides a standard for chronology and linear sequence throughout the novel. What is curious about this is the fact that the simultaneous narration that predominates in the House Mother's monologue and therefore alludes more fully to the events that take place, can be compared to any of the other monologues at exactly the same stage of the events, to give a semblance of their simultaneous co-existence. As we suggested, the effect is to draw attention to the distinctness of each experience of reality as well as drawing attention to the relative
depth of experience of each character at any given time. Let us say that the lives of the characters can be considered to be more or less full according to the nature of and the fullness of their narrative at any given moment. An externally focalised account of what goes on, like that of the House Mother, totally ignores this.

Therefore, a self-conscious and self-foregrounding typographical device of imposing a space-time correspondence in the novel highlights the opposition between the different awarenesses and realities of the characters, which we can see as highlighted by their using simultaneous or ulterior narration at any given point.

There are two (or perhaps three) narrative levels in the novel and levels are transgressed by the House Mother when she steps beyond the allotted number of pages at the end of the novel. Basically, there is an extradiegetic level at which we find the House Mother in the introduction. The interior monologues all belong to the intradiegetic level and the transgression takes place when the House Mother breaks the frame and speaks once more directly to the reader from the extradiegetic level (something she had been doing anyway). This draws attention to the fictitious nature of what has been narrated as well as highlighting the nature of the narrative frame. However, there is more to this, and we have to consider at what level the section headings and the clinical records exist. The records, including the CQ Count might conceivably be placed at the same
intradicgetic level as the interior monologues as they simply provide another point of view regarding the inmates. However, when we consider the titles and the overriding structure of the novel, we become aware of yet another level which brings us very close to reality. In fact, the House Mother refers to the framework of the novel and she says: "Thus you see I too am the puppet or concoction of a writer (you always knew there was a writer behind it all? Ah, there's no fooling you readers!)" (204). The writer is behind or above the whole thing at the same level on which the reader now exists, drawing attention to the fictional nature of the narrative and the relation between the different ontological levels that exist in the novel. Thus, we might suggest that the extradicgetic level is now that alluded to the House Mother Here which organises and controls and supplies headings for each section. While the intradicgetic level is provided by the narrator focaliser substitute who is the House Mother (her interior monologue being a self-consciously foregrounded fictional device). The interior monologues of the old people would then belong to a hypodiegetic level. This may sound a little confusing, but the point to be remembered is that the metalepsis which allows the House Mother to exist at two distinct levels draws attention to the relation between fiction and reality and the nature of narrative devices as such.

In terms of person, there are a number of clear alterations. The House Mother is both hetero and homodiegetic narrator as she shifts from one level to
another in yet another transgression, while the old people are homodiegetic narrators within their intradiegetic level. Basically, the way in which reality changes when we change from one person to another is what Johnson expects to foreground, and he does so quite convincingly.

As we change from one narrator to the other, the nature of the narrative also changes. The old people adopt no particular role, and we barely consider them as patients or anything else. In fact, as we said it is difficult to consider their interior monologues as narratives at all. For this reason, there is an effect of greater sincerity and authenticity which is lacking when we come to the narrative of the House Mother who tends to be patronising towards the reader, addressing him as friend and so on. The role of the House Mother changes from that of the guide in the introduction to that of commentator in her monologue, where she provides a great deal of comment about the nature of her work. She is, of course, House Mother, and we see that the way in which she behaves turns her into games organiser, work foreman, entertainer, and leader of a choir among other things. At these times her discourse changes, and we find songs, anecdotes and so on. However, her final role would seem to be that of puppet, and this is the image that we are left with. Following everything that takes place, she herself undermines any realism that might have been apparent by drawing attention to herself as such. However, irony is involved in this, as Johnson draws attention to the
fictitious nature of her role at the outset of narrator-focaliser, essentially highlighting the nature of any viewpoint adopted as a technical device.

Of course, the function of the narrator changes depending on the role that is performed. Regarding the inmates, we can say that they tend towards narrative in their reminiscences and occasionally towards the testimonial and ideological functions as they consider the nature of their plight and how things have changed. However, the narrative of the House Mother implies a great many more functions. Her monologue tends to be much more narrative oriented, but we also find a great use of the ideological function as she justifies her actions and explains the nature of old people and their needs. The communicative function is continually present from her opening comment: "Friend (I may call you friend?)" (5) right to the end; and this awareness of the reader draws attention to the fictional nature of the work, as well as alluding to the existence of distinct ontological levels. Moreover, it is clearly linked to the metanarrative function which, emphatically made use of at the beginning and the end of the novel, foregrounds the nature of the narrative technique, its structure and its fictionality. Hence, alterations in fuction tend to be frequent and also involve the reader in different ways.

The reader is referred to on a number of occasions in the novel and exists at an extradiegetic level throughout. However, the way in which we are addressed as friend at the start places us in a position not
unlike that of the other inmates, and while we read the
House Mother's narrative we begin to adopt the role of
friend like them as we too are entertained. The aim of
dramatising the narratee is to disgust us, just as the
old people are, and to make the statement about
normality that Johnson refers to elsewhere. House
Mother Normal, is obviously ironic, and Johnson wants
to reconsider our ideas of normality. Of course, the
narratee is returned to the extradiiegetic level at the
end when the reader is placed on a par with the author.
We are reminded of his existence and suspension of
disbelief dissipates as we are self-consciously made
aware of the fictional nature of the whole. But irony
is involved here because of the implicit contrast
between the self-consciously aware narrative of the
House Mother and the interior monologues of everyone
else. Johnson has in fact given us an insight into how
limiting and fictitious the official renderings are
compared to the inner lives of individuals.

When we consider the use of distinct modes of
discourse, the most striking point to be made concerns
the contrast between the use of the clinical records as
a tabular form of summing up the physical and mental
traits of the characters compared with their own
interior monologues. Medical language appears, and the
same kind of language is used to refer to each of the
characters. This tends towards generalisation and, in
spite of their official nature, the records totally
ignore the individual nature of the characters. This
same kind of discourse appears in the monologue of the
House Mother as she describes the state of her patients and she even begins to become quite pedantic as she, teacher-like draws attention to the needs of these individuals, The effect is ironic as the authoritative discourse of medicine is undermined by the simple authenticity of the other interior monologues. There, the mode of discourse is that of colloquial spoken English, which further highlights the simplicity and authenticity we have mentioned. At the same time, these changes in mode (and we could also refer to the critical or literary discourse of the House Mother here), draw attention to the ways in which reality is shaped and transformed by the choice of discourse. Johnson wants to make it very clear that we should not accept this official way of categorising individuals.

There is no obvious use of analogy in the novel, except to make it clear that the various interior monologues are analogous to one another, as are the modes of discourse that are used to narrate experience or describe reality. However, it is the singularity and the differences between the individuals that tend to be foregrounded in this respect, rather than the limiting definitions of the clinical record and the CQ Test, which label individuals as geriatrics. There is one analogy that is significant in the text that is emphasised by the House Mother herself. In fact, we could say that the activities organised by the House Mother conform a kind of mise en abyme which parallels the activity of the author in writing the book. As we said, House Mother herself foregrounds this when she
says "I am disgusting to them in order to objectify their disgust, to direct it to something outside themselves, something harmless" (197). This is, essentially, what the novel does as it too distances us from and objectifies reality, as, in fact, all narratives do.

*House Mother Normal* draws attention to itself as fiction but there is a good deal of accurate referential description involved in the reminiscences of the old people. This is perhaps the most realistic part of the novel, although it is worthwhile noting that it is referentiality towards past events and experiences that is overdetermined, whereas, they barely refer to what is going on within their simultaneous narration. As regards the *House Mother*'s narrative, referentiality tends to refer only to the world inside the home and the events that take place in the present, and past events and experiences tend to be underdetermined. This highlights the contrast between the obviously distinct worlds of the old people and the *House Mother*, which symbolically represents the way in which the inner life of individuals is ignored by society.

The proaeretic code is underdetermined in the interior monologues of the old people as they tend to ignore what is going on around them. On the contrary it virtually fills up the *House Mother*'s monologue and is also anticipated in her introduction. Thus, the contrast between the different ways of looking at things is again highlighted, although, ironically, it
is the bizarre nature of the House Mother’s behaviour as compared to the dignity of the old people’s inner lives that we notice.

The semic code tends to be overdetermined in the House Mother’s discourse, which is similarly paralleled in the clinical records. We find that, there, everything is described in terms of medical or psychiatric categories which involved judgement and lead to the definition of geriatrics. In the other monologues of the patients, any such generalisation and judgement of individuals is avoided, and only person assessments of their attitudes towards individuals appear. This is also related to the way in which the general official view can be undermined by the more authentic alternative of the patients.

The hermeneutic code is overdetermined in this novel and the way in which it is done takes on symbolic significance. From the beginning, what is going to happen is emphasised by the use of the introduction. However, information as regards what actually does take place is withheld due to the overdetermination of the pasts of the patients, while what actually takes place is elided. The effect of this is to intensify reader expectation, and create some kind of suspense, so that the shock or disgust is all the greater when we appreciate more fully the bizarre nature of what takes place. Let us say that the enigma is all the greater due to the limited views provided by the patients.

One other point about the hermeneutic code involves the expectations that are created at the level
of the novel's structure. The hermeneutic code is overdetermined and expectations are disappointed when the House Mother breaks the frame. The effect of this is to highlight the metafictional concerns we have already mentioned.

Of course, most of the activity within codes, as well as the alterations and transgressions that occur within the categories of discourse, are designed to draw attention to the narrative technique, the fictional nature of the narrative and its relation to reality. In this way, the novel is, once more, about its own coming into being, and sums up a great deal about how narrative tends to distort and even ignore the inner lives of the characters it refers to. Of course, the real polemic involves the criticism of social attitudes towards old people, which the novel does throughout.

The story of House Mother Normal can be considered as instrumental in allowing us to consider it as a kind of fabulation. The character of the House Mother is flat and she even describes herself as a puppet. Cause and effect and any other possibilities for verisimilitude are swept away by the explicit statement that it is all a fiction at the end. However, this contrasts once more with the interior monologues of the patients which are realistic, and which connect events in the past in a manner which involves sequence and causality.

Concerning the typology of the plot, we could say that the title of the novel, a geriatric comedy,
supplies us with a clue in this respect. This conditions the nature of the events that take place within the simultaneous narration, which are bizarre fabulation. However, such a title is misleading, in the same way as the term *geriatric*, when we consider the interior monologues of the patients which are not comic at all. Hence, a certain irony is involved in describing the novel in this way, and the plot that goes on in the present is clearly designed to contrast with the nature of the inner lives of the characters.

Related to this is the way in which the basic kernel of the narrative (the social evening), takes on relatively little significance when seen in relation with the inner lives of the characters. What happens is that proportion tends to be lost throughout the first eight monologues and is only restored at the end. The satellites which are the reveries of past experiences of the old people are given greater time, and importance, than the narration of the events which is foregrounded in the House Mother’s monologue. This is a deliberate manner of undermining the authenticity of a narrative which refuses to take these inner lives into consideration, as we have already seen.

The sequence in the novel is exact in terms of the simultaneous narration, as each page corresponds with the same page in another monologue. However, we find that this sequence is interrupted by the reminiscences of the old people which allows the past to take on greater significance. In fact, when we speak of the presence of the past here, it actually usurps present
concerns for these people.

Of course, cause and effect tend to be respected throughout. It is even implicit that the behaviour of the patients is a result of the conditions described in the clinical records. However, we find that the singularity of the characters is not done justice by these records, and we have to reconsider the validity of such a form of generalisation.

Of course, there is verisimilitude and cause and effect as regards the plot as such, but this, too, is undermined when the House Mother tells us that it is all fiction at the end. Once more, the arbitrary authorial will is in control. However, such authority has already been questioned in the way we have just mentioned.

We already mentioned the use of surprise in the novel when we talked about the overdetermination of the hermeneutic code. Although we may be surprised by the way in which the frame is broken at the end, this should not be too unexpected due to the way in which previous alterations and transgressions draw attention to the frame as such. However, the way in which all of this is done draws attention to metafictional concerns. At the same time, the continual surprises that the characters have in the story (the parcel is dog’s dirt, the spectacle involves bestiality), draw attention to the story as fabulation as well as suggesting the parallel between what the House Mother does and what author’s do: that is, distance reality for the characters by making them look at something even more
absurd or disgusting than themselves.

When we come to consider setting and character in this novel, the first thing that comes to mind is the fictionality involved in the geriatric hospital. The setting and the character of the House Mother are stereotypical and obvious fabulation. The characters, from the point of view of the House Mother, tend to be seen as types, in a way that parallels the gross generalisations of the clinical records. However, the interior monologues of the characters themselves, which avoid any tendency towards physical description, provide a rounded and full idea of what the characters are like within themselves, and undermines the fictionality of the external view.

One more point about character is to consider how Johnson makes use of the absurd logic involved in the realistic fallacy by allowing his character of the House Mother to be aware of her fictionality, after the fashion of Flann O'Brien's self-evident sham, At Swim-Two-Birds. By doing this, Johnson again foregrounds the nature of narrative convention.

For all of these reasons, we see how the narrative technique of House Mother Normal, is able to draw our attention to metafictional concerns, undermine the authority of the standard view and suggest the validity of the alternative, albeit fragmentary, visions that are available. This is an example of oppositional discourse which foregrounds its disbelief of social categories.
1.7. The Narrative Technique of Christie Malry's Own Double Entry

Christie Malry's Own Double Entry is an even more obvious example of fabulation than House Mother Normal as it overdetermines alterations and transgressions to an even higher degree. We are also highly aware of the fact that he is involved in a dialogue with form, not only because of the explicit reference to the fact within the novel, but because of the way in which conventions are observed but at the same time parodied and subverted throughout. This playful novel explicitly provides its own meta or anti-narrative and involves the same kind of frame-breaking that we saw in his previous novel. The effect is that in exploiting the possibilities of the novel Johnson draws attention to its mechanisms.

Within the category of time we find a number of self-conscious and highly foregrounded anachronies in terms of the narrative sequence, which draw attention to the nature of the conventions that are being used. For example, the chapter headings in the novel parody the kind of bills of fare that can be found in the eighteenth and nineteenth century and can be considered as prolepses within the novel. However, they do more than anticipate what will happen in the novel at the level of story, but foreground a great deal related to the formal conventions being followed and the expectations created by the novel itself. An example would be Chapter IX, which is called "A Promise
Fulfilled, and Christie's Younger Life; a Failed Chapter." Here, the author refers to a previous prolepsis which anticipated the telling of the story about God that Christie's mother told to him. The novelistic convention of providing a background for the character is alluded to, and there is also a metafictional comment about the way in which the chapter disintegrates, the reason for which will become clear later, as the author fails in his commitment to select the most important features of the character's life for our perusal. This kind of prolepsis would seem to be metafictional in an explicit manner then, and rather than simply drawing attention to the chronological sequence of the narrative implicitly, it foregrounds the conventions of narrative at the same time as it contests them.

There are further prolepses and as well as analepses which occur in a similar self-consciously metafictional way and draw attention to themselves in order to deliberately foreground the nature of the conventions that are being followed and even the nature of the novel as artefact. Thus we find the narrator saying, "Here is the story promised you on page 29, as told to Christie at his Catholic mother's shapely knee" (79), which is a completive internal analepsis that, more than filling in information for the reader, draws attention to itself as a fictional strategy as well as referring to the novel as a physical artefact. Referring to the page numbers intensifies our awareness of the novel as a made object particularly as the
author would have to have seen the finished novel in order to know on which page everything would appear. One more point about this analepsis is that it foregrounds the telling of this story in a way which will allow us to identify the analogy which Johnson draws between the omniscient author and God.

This novel is interspersed with *Reckonings* which sum up what has taken place earlier in the novel in terms of a tabular account of credits and debits. This is also a kind of analepsis which looks back to what has happened previously in a completive or perhaps repetitive manner. However, the change in mode which accompanies this draws attention to the way in which the nature of the events and experiences recounted changes according to the mode adopted. In this way Johnson, foregrounds the reductively impersonal and general nature of the capitalist grand narrative, as it contrasts so greatly with the earlier account of events.

In fact, we could say that the tendency in the novel is towards a number of parentheses which often take the form of self-conscious analepsis or prolepsis in order to deliberately draw attention to the degree of involvement of the narrator in the ordering of the events. In fact, chronological sequence, in this respect, is undermined by the imposition of the authorial will, which will also supersede the realistic convention of causality. The kind of thing we find highlights the fictional ordering of events: for example, "I did tell you Christie was a simple person"
(11, repetitive internal analepsis), "for reasons Christie was just about to experience for himself" (12, internal prolepsis), "of which I shall probably not tell you much" (13 internal prolepsis). Each of these examples draws attention to the narrative process, sometimes referring to the author's intention, and simply foreground the nature of the ordering of events by continually interrupting that sequential order.

These kinds of anachronies recur frequently in the novel and all tend to foreground narrative technique and other metafictional concerns, particularly highlighting the nature of the narrative process as opposed to the idea of it being some kind of inevitable product. In fact, the arbitrary way in which anachronies are introduced is indicative of the flouting of convention which is typical in this novel and foregrounds the author's involvement in the making of the narrative. To underline the way in which Johnson plays with sequence in order to draw attention to its conventional nature, here is another example. At one point the narrator makes the following parenthetical comment: "time now being more or less continuous" (27), which is almost immediately followed by a completive external analepsis delivered by the mother which begins, "'My son: I have for the purposes of this novel been your mother for the past eighteen years and five months'" (27). This makes it clear just how alterations within a category of discourse are related to a novelistic convention is installed and then subverted. It also highlights a complete lapse of referentiality
and suspension of disbelief in favour of arbitrary authorial will and the predispositions laid down by the novel itself.

When we come to speak of duration, we also find a great many alterations. We could say that there is no governing mode in the novel as the narrator, again self-consciously, draws attention to the alternative nature of the choices that may be made in this category. For example, at one point we find, "That is enough of that, certainly. Let us subside with relief into oratio obliqua" (65), where, following a dialogue between Christie and another character, the narrator deliberately foregrounds his reasons for subsiding into an alternative mode of presentation. Or, "I shall now attempt a little dialogue between Christie and the Office Supervisor, as if it had happened" (39), where the fictionality of the text and the process of writing is foregrounded, as well as involving a clearly metafictional statement regarding the choice of mode, with its subsequent effect on duration. Such self-consciousness is typical of this novel as any movement towards scene or summary, or any refusal to describe resulting in ellipsis is usually accompanied by some comment which foregrounds the choice that is being made. Hence, in the chapter, "Christie Described; and the Shrike created," the narrator self-consciously refuses to describe his character, an obvious example of ellipsis which is in opposition to the traditional conventions of novel-writing. We could say, that in this chapter, contrary to the expectations created by
the title, there is a narrative pause, which highlights metafictional concerns and omits the expected description of the character. Thus, we see how the narrative alternates readily between scene, summary, pause and ellipsis, in a self-conscious way which foregrounds their nature as alternative modes of presentation, and makes it clear that the narrative we are reading is fabulation.

One more point worth mentioning is also related to the use of ellipsis in the novel. The refusal to describe Christie can also be linked with similar occasions when the author refuses to describe other circumstances, like, for example, the nature of the contrivances Christie creates, the way he gets hold of explosives, or how he manages to get poison into the water supply. This highlights the fictionality of the text as well as drawing attention to the novelistic convention that it is flouting. Moreover, by drawing attention to the nature of the novel as fabulation, it suggests more about how novels are written rather than foregrounding any other concern.

There is also a good deal of pause in this narrative which allows the narrator to indulge in metafictional comment. To isolate just one example we could refer to the occasion when the narrator refuses to describe Christie, thus going against the expectation created by its title. We find that the ellipsis of the description results in a pause which takes the form of a metafictional commentary on the pros and cons of character description in narrative,
once more foregrounding narrative technique at the expense of story. This kind of pause recurs frequently in the novel.

The frequency of the narrative tends to be singulative, although there are examples of repetition. One such example is "I did tell you Christie was a simple person" (11), a statement which appears repeatedly throughout the novel. There is a certain irony involved in doing this as the narrator refers not only to the simplicity of Christie's idea of seeing everything in terms of credit and debit, but also foregrounds the parallel between narrative and story in that Christie as a character, or a construct, is also very simple (remember, the author refuses to describe him). Similarly, many of the analepses we find in the novel refer back to something that has already been said, so that repetition and alterations in sequence often go together in order to highlight the way in which the author plays with convention in this category. The tabular double-entry reckonings are also examples of repetition as they repeat, or sum up what has been previously narrated using a different mode. As we suggested, the effect of this is to highlight the way in which accounting reduces everything to terms of profit and loss, where even human lives can be evaluated in terms of sums of money. By using repetition in this way, the limitations of this way of seeing reality are highlighted in an implicit criticism of contemporary society which tends to value everything in this way. The iterative mode tends to be avoided.
From what has been said we see that alterations regarding time tend to foreground metafictional concerns, particularly as regards the novelistic conventions involved in sequence and duration. This kind of activity, which draws attention to the alternative nature of any choices in narrative, even as to their random nature, as well as suggesting the artifice involved, is paralleled by a similar kind of activity in the categories of distance and perspective.

It has already been suggested that there is a variety of modes in use in this novel and it would not be wrong to say that we have another example of polymodality on our hands. The way in which the narrative switches from one mode of presentation to another alternative mode undermines any idea of there being a dominant, and allows us to consider the novel as playful in a manner which highlights its own narrative techniques. This was already made clear when we suggested that a narrative pause, involving some kind of metafictional comment, often accompanied many of these changes.

As regards distance, we can say that it varies considerably regarding the narration of events from one chapter to another. However, what is clear is that we always tend to be aware of the presence of the intrusive narrator, who continually draws attention to himself and the way in which he is doing things. Therefore, although there are occasions when the narrative tends towards mimesis (for example, there are occasions like those above when conversations are
presented in the form of dialogue, and even examples of making use of the conventions of dramatic theatrical presentation), the constant alterations regarding presentation and the tendency to draw attention to the nature of the mode used in metafictional digressions, show that the narrator is diegetically aware.

Any tendency towards mimesis in the novel is usually undermined by some explicit comment on the part of the narrator about the nature of what he is doing. The examples regarding the use of oratio recta or obliqua that we find as well as referring to his attempt to reproduce a dialogue are indicative of this. Moreover, the narrator tends to omit detail from the narrative through summary or ellipsis, and occasionally draws attention to alternative choices that are available to him as regards what to tell the reader. For example, when he describes Christie’s mother’s funeral, we are aware of how the arbitrary authority of the narrator supplants realistic cause and effect logic when we find: “Christie was the only mourner, economy as to relatives (as to so many other things) being one of the virtues of this novel” (33). The fiction is seen as autonomous, wholly under the control of the ever-present author. We also find: “The observant will be aware that I have avoided a claret-burgundy comparison here, having an unashamed preference for the latter myself (when I can afford either) and use of the cliché creme de la creme was also rejected for its punning awkwardness” (65). The emphasis is on the diegesis here, as process, the need to select from a number of
alternatives (which, by being mentioned, remain as alternatives for the reader), and the presence of the narrator are foregrounded at the same time as the narrative continues. Even ellipsis is accompanied by metafictional comment which highlights the author's involvement and the fictitiousness of the narrative: "And he had contrived a method of throwing these switches by remote control, so to speak, in an unusual way which I am not going to bother to invent on this occasion" (101). Once again the diegesis is foregrounded in an arbitrary and self-conscious manner.

What also makes the reader so aware of the nature of the narrative and the involvement of the narrator is the fact that he is involved in a kind of dialogue from the very beginning, which creates a sense of collusion which foregrounds the fiction-making process. The title of the first chapter explicitly involves the reader at the same time as it refers to the way in which the narrator will observe convention: "The Industrious Pilgrim: an Exposition without which You might have felt Unhappy," and in the opening of the chapter itself the narrator overtly addresses the reader: "I did tell you Christie was a simple person" (11). This along with the other features mentioned foreground this overt, self-conscious narrator and the narrative techniques that he makes use of.

Obviously, the same kind of foregrounding of the diegesis occurs in the presentation of speech and thought, and we have already seen how explicit references are made whenever there is an alteration in
this category from narrativised discourse to reported discourse. Moreover, it is clear that the narrator is inventing as he speaks of his attempting to present a dialogue as if it had happened (39). There is a good deal of variety as regards presentation of speech with the use of the conventions for theatrical and novelistic dialogues both appearing. However, within these dialogues we often find the characters short-circuiting the narrative by alluding to their existence within a novel as is the case with Headlam, Christie's mother and Christie himself, who, although their speech is presented mimetically, come up with phrases like Christie's mum saying "my son, for the purposes of this novel" (27) or Chistie saying, "There wasn't any more time. It's a short novel" (40). Clearly, the effect is to destroy any realistic illusion and draw attention to the author behind it all. Even when we consider the observation of conventions for the presentation of speech as regards attributive phrases and so on, we find that the novel is subversive. For example: "'What I would like to' said Headlam, 'do is to ...'" (102), which alludes to and undermines the convention at the same time. Hence, we are always aware of the presence of the author even when speech is presented mimetically as reported dialogue, although a good deal of speech is presented as narrativised discourse, which further foregrounds the overtness of the narrator.

The same kind of thing is true of the presentation of thought which is often presented as narrativised discourse, although there are occasions when we find
quoted interior monologue. However, the illusion that we are within the stream of consciousness of the character is undermined by the author in the following way: "For the following passage it seems to me necessary to attempt transcurcision into Christie's mind; an illusion of transcurcision, that is, of course, since you know only too well in whose mind it all really takes place" (23). This destroys any sense of suspension of disbelief by drawing attention to the author behind it all. Even the interior monologue which follows is artificially foregrounded by using italics, so that we are further aware that a particular technique is being exploited, and, of course, undermined.

The involvement of the narrator is clear throughout the novel, then, and we find that this is so because of the high number of alterations as regards distance as well as because of the tendency to highlight any change by accompanying it with authorial commentary, thus making the reader aware of the artifice involved. The perspective and alterations in perspective adopted in the narrative makes us equally aware of authorial intervention.

We can say that the perspective in Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry is shifting as there is a tendency to move from internal to external focalisation throughout. This, in fact, should already be clear from the examples we have used earlier, as there we see how the heterodiegetic, omniscient narrator-focaliser remains on the outside as an external focaliser with external focalisation on many occasions, or suddenly
and self-consciously can shift the perspective to look inside Christie’s mind. We find that the narrator is aware of everything that Christie thinks and does, but it is equally possible to find that the narrator has no knowledge of this. Let us go into a little more detail.

In general terms we can say that the narrator is omniscient and therefore is an external narrator-focaliser. As regards what takes place, the focalisation is external in the perceptual facet as it allows him to be aware of what is going on at different places and at different times simultaneously. As regards Christie and the other focaliseds, internal focalisation is allowed as he is aware of their thoughts and feelings, and there are no limitations to his cognitive powers as he is aware of everything that goes on. His is the perspective that dominates the narrative and his position in the ideological hierarchy is rarely challenged. However, there are a series of alterations in perspective as well as there being examples of paralepsis and paralipsis, which foreground the techniques employed and the fictitious nature of the narrative. For example, when the narrator refuses to describe Christie’s appearance or is unable to explain or invent the contrivances he uses in order to carry out one of his plans, these are examples of paralipsis, where the focalisation of the narrator shifts from the external cognitive facet which allowed him to know everything in this regard, and results in his telling us less than would be expected of him. In each case, the paralipsis is accompanied in each case
by a metafictional comment which foregrounds the alteration. The opposite occurs when the unwritten codification of Christie's Great Idea is written down by the narrator: "Christie did not write down these principles or thoughts, as I have, for especially the Shrike had eyes" (90). Although, this could be considered as simply part and parcel of the external focalisation of the omniscient narrator, the fact that this ability is foregrounded by the narrator highlights the logical impossibility of doing such a thing, thus emphasising the artifice involved. However, apart from emphasising the alterations in perspective or the nature of the narrative technique by commenting on the possibilities open to him, the tendency is towards paralipsis when the author refuses to or is unable to describe or narrate. The arbitrary ending of the narrative could be considered as such, as we are denied any resolution to the narrative, but the general tendency would seem to be summed up in what he calls his failed chapter:

Physically Christie as an adolescent had no more than his fair share of spots and blemishes: is that significant?

Yes.

No.

Oh, I could go on and on for pages and pages about Christie's young life, inventing and observing, remembering and borrowing. But why? (82)

This draws attention to the real limitations of the
author as regards the narrative which could be seen as a kind of transgression which highlights the nature of the conventions that have been subverted in the text. Postmodernist concerns are also involved here as he goes on to discuss the relation between fiction and reality and the tendency to impose order where there is none. Hence, alterations in perspective, which are suggestive of transgressions of the predispositions of the novel are involved in highlighting these concerns as well as foregrounding narrative technique.

So, a variety of modes are adopted in this narrative which draw attention to the self-conscious narrator and narrative technique, and the alterations that we find tend to be accompanied by metafictional comments which draw attention to their nature. They are shown up as conventions to which there are alternatives and which have their limitations. Thus, we find Johnson continuing with his dialogue with form in a highly self-conscious manner. Particularly the paralapses in the narrative are indicative of the metafictional nature of the whole thing.

When we consider voice in this novel, we again find that the tendency is towards alteration. There is simultaneous narration involved in the continual metafictional comments which draw attention to the devices being used in the narrative, and while the tendency is towards ulterior narration for the most part there are alterations which occur which foreground the idea of the narrative as process rather than product. For example, on one occasion we find:
"Christie Malry . . . is making his way home" (23), which by shifting the tense to the present continuous, alludes to the process of creation as it goes on in the mind of the author, rather than suggesting immediacy or any other effect. This particular episode is followed by the metafictional reference to the attempted transcursion into the character's mind which highlights the fictitious nature of the whole thing in a manner not unlike the shift in tense.

Besides this use of simultaneous narration within the narrative and in authorial comments, we also find anterior narration in a number of prolepses which are diegetically aware in that they end suspense and foreground the artifice involved in imposing the narrative sequence. For example: "It was hardly apparent to him at the time; it would be of great value to him later on" (17). In general we can say that the way in which these times of narration are interwoven highlights the fictitious nature of the narrative, and, particularly in the simultaneous narration, we can say that the tendency towards authorial commentary highlights narrative process and technique. Curiously, unlike earlier narratives, there is no attempt to suggest the presentness of the past or the effect that the past has on the present. Basically the possibility for the existence of all three times of narration within a narrative full of diegetically aware analepses and prolepses simply underlines the fictionality of it all. Another way of considering this use of times of narration is to see Johnson as simply
taking advantage of existing alternatives and, essentially, they are highlighted as such.

There are two clearly distinct narrative levels in the novel. There is an extradiegetic level where the narrator indulges in his comments and dialogue with the reader, and there is an intradiegetic level where we find the story and the interaction of the characters. If we also consider person at this point, then it is clear that the narrator is always the heterodiegetic narrator-focaliser who tells the story from the beginning. However, there is a clear transgression of levels as the omniscient narrator becomes a character at the intradiegetic level when he becomes involved in his discussions with Christie about the way the novel is going, and also when Christie is in hospital. The narrator moves from the extradiegetic to the intradiegetic level to become his own character, and therefore draws attention to the relation between the distinct ontological levels, and consequently, the relation between fiction and reality. Moreover, we find that the nature of the dialogue in which the narrator becomes involved with Christie, which deals with metafictional concerns, is not unlike the dialogue that goes on between the narrator and the reader. For example at one point when the narrator discusses the nature of his character with the reader, the way in which we may guess as to Christie’s motives is equated with the way in which we may guess at the winner of a horse-race (52). The effect of this is to confuse the ontologically distinct worlds of the fiction and
reality, which is precisely what the transgression of levels we have described does. What happens is that we are forced to recognise that the same rules apply in both real and fictional worlds. Curiously and ironically, the reader becomes aware that the nature of the dialogue that takes place between himself and the author is the same as that which takes place between Christie and the author, and we are forced to recognise the fictitious nature of our role and participation in the novel.

There are other examples of transgression of levels in the novel when the characters show that they are aware of their existence in the novel. Essentially, what happens then is that the characters demonstrate their awareness of and their existence at the extradiegetic level when they speak of their existence for the purposes of this novel, or when they say that this is a short novel. It draws the reader’s attention to the fictitious nature of the whole thing, but again foregrounds the relation between the fiction and reality.

As regards person, we might also suggest that there are moments when, particularly Christie’s mother takes over from the omniscient narrator. This is particularly the case when she tells of Christie’s background and also the story she told him about God. Her awareness of the extradiegetic level and the nature of her participation in the narrative coupled with the alteration in person that is involved, highlight concerns about technique in the novel.
The person who narrates this novel is always overt and adopts an obvious role as god-like omniscient narrator. In fact, the role of narrator is parodied here as he is characterised as such from the beginning. This also involves the dramatisation of the narratee as reader at the same extradiegetic level, which foregrounds the acts of reading and writing in a metafictional way. There are, of course, other narratees in the narrative, for example Christie is addressed by the author, and we see too that the way he is dramatised on these occasions is as a character in the novel. What we find in this respect is that Johnson highlights the artificial nature of the relationships created between the various participants in the narrative and, therefore, the artifice involved in narrative as such. Moreover, the way in which the reader as narratee is involved in a relationship which is paralleled by the dialogue between the author and Christie, draws attention to the fictitious nature of even that. One other possibility as regards the inclusion of Christie as a diegetically aware narratee and his mother as a diegetically aware narrator in the narrative, can be associated with the kind of absurd logic that we find in *At Swim-Two-Birds*, by Flann O’Brien. In a sense, when we pursue the logic of realism to its absurd conclusions, the realism that is a result of following realistic conventions results in the relative autonomy of the characters as real rather than realistic characters who are able to make their own judgements about the development of the narrative.
Of course, the fact that the omniscient narrator is able to decide as he pleases allows us to become aware of the realistic fallacy and the degree to which arbitrary authorial will governs narrative along with these conventions, but at the expense of realistic rules of logic or cause and effect.

In terms of the functions of the narrator, we can suggest that, for the most part, Johnson's narrator tends towards but then turns away from the narrative function. While, as a fabulation, the bizarre nature of some of the events is foregrounded, this is paralleled by a similar tendency to pause in the narrative and exercise the metanarrative function. In fact, as we have seen, almost every narrative act is accompanied by a comment which exercises the metanarrative function. Involved with this is the tendency of the narrator to address the reader and even his characters, which foregrounds the communicative function in the novel. This tendency usually coincides with the narrator making some point about the nature of the narrative which further draws attention to our awareness of narrative technique. There are occasions when the narrator refers to other concerns, particularly the way in which society treats the individual, explicitly, although these are implicit throughout the novel by the inclusion of the reckonings which suggest the limitations of this form of organising experience. Thus we can say that, while it is not foregrounded to the same extent, the ideological function does draw attention to social problems in this novel.
There are a number of modes of discourse in use which govern the nature of the narrative and mould the events accordingly. The three most important modes are the parody of eighteenth and nineteenth century novelistic prose which governs the narrator's role as a kind of puppet master, as well as influencing the narrative structure and bills of fare; the religious mode of discourse introduced by Christie's mother which governs the way in which even the author's narrative tends to give form to experience; and the discourse of materialism and capitalism, which is manifested in the double-entry bookkeeping entries at the end of each section. What the novel does by juxtaposing these distinct modes of discourse is highlight the limitations of them, particularly as regards the grand narratives of religion and accounting. The obvious fabulation involved in the use of the parodic discourse which pervades the novel highlights the reductive and fictitious attempts of the other modes to explain, give shape and meaning to reality or to evaluate experience. What Johnson does is to undermine the authority and validity of these modes of discourse in favour of any other alternative, although his rather pessimistic belief in the chaos underlying everything comes through on at least one occasion in the text.

The use of analogy is also apparent in the novel, the most important being that between the story of God and the novel itself. What Johnson does is to follow the story of the creation as told to Christie at every level in the novel from the inclusion of an omniscient
being who is really making it up as he goes along to the creation of man and his mate by this being, only in order to punish them in an authoritative and arbitrary manner afterwards. By doing this Johnson highlights many postmodernist concerns about the nature of fictional narratives as well as ridiculing the grand narratives of western culture.

*Christie Malry’s Own Double Entry* is a fabulation and we can therefore say that there is a tendency to underdetermine the referential code in the novel. This is made apparent by the number of occasions on which the narrator refuses to describe character, setting or circumstances, thus allowing the emphasis of other concerns as well as drawing attention to the fictitious nature of the work. The proaeretic code is fairly evenly determined until the end when it is overdetermined by a refusal to carry on with the development of the narrative. In this way the arbitrariness and fictitiousness of the events that take place is again foregrounded. In terms of the semic code, we can say that there is a distinct lack of determination in this respect as the refusal of the author to describe character and setting suggests. Again this minimalist tendency draws attention to the limitations of narrative and the fictitious nature of the text, although there are occasions when we can find determination of the semic code as when the Shrike is described. There is an obvious use of caricature here as the relation between her job, name and appearance suggest: the Shrike is, after all, Christie’s *butcher*
bird. In general then, we can say that the determination of this code highlights the fictitious nature of the novel and even alludes to the limitations involved in physical description.

In terms of the hermeneutic code, the novel tends to play with expectation and finally disappoints by refusing to continue with Christie's story until its resolution. The arbitrariness of the narrative surprises at the times but this is deliberate so that the relative unimportance of convention and logic becomes apparent. This code is also overdetermined when expectations are disappointed through he refusal of the author to fulfill the expectations he has created in the reader in the titles to the chapters: Christie is not described nor is his past in the chapters whose titles say so. Again, technique and convention are foregrounded.

However, it is once more the symbolic code that is most highly overdetermined in this novel as, due to the continual alterations and transgressions throughout which highlight the narrative techniques employed, we become aware that this novel is about its own mechanisms. It is a self-begetting novel which, by making use of analogy, highlights the importance of the omnipotent author's will above logic and convention. Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry is, above all, about how novels are written.

As we said, the story of Christie Malry is a fabulation, so that at this level we also find a good deal that suggests its fictitiousness. As regards the
typology of the plot, we can say that what governs it to a large extent is the analogy that is suggested by Christie’s mother. The archetypal creation motif recurs at many levels, from the overall structure of the narrative, the involvement of the narrator, and the creation of the characters to the tendency to create parallels between the creation and the development of the novel as such. Christie, as a character, can even be seen as an inverted Christ figure, as his name suggests, which would account also, in part, for the way in which the plot develops, his suffering, his retribution and so on. However, any analogies which might become too significant tend to be undermined by the arbitrary introduction of the authorial will, and the development of the plot in terms of the analogy is truncated arbitrarily at the end. At the same time, the inclusion of the reckonings as a governing mode also brings its influence to bear on the choice of setting, in a bank and in an office, as well as allowing the inclusion of texts from accounting text book. Other than that, we could say that the novel goes along the lines of the bildungsroman, although the fictitious nature of it all is what is most apparent.

The basic plot of the novel is clear, but there is an obvious tendency to digress in order to foreground metafictional concerns. Other than that, the novel respects novelistic convention in allowing satellites regarding Christie’s background and so on to further the development of the story.

A point worth talking about is the way in which
sequence tends to be undermined by continually looking forward and back in the story in a self-conscious manner in order to highlight its artificial nature in the novel. Basically, the arbitrary way in which the author is able to do this comes through, as does the fact that sequence tends to be imposed retrospectively as we can judge from references to page numbers and so on. A similar kind of self-consciousness and fictionality is made apparent as regards the nature of cause and effect in the narrative. While the narrator constantly invokes the novelististic convention of causality, he also undermines it by contradicting himself: at one point he says he will not describe Christie’s background, on another he goes ahead and does so. We find that he refuses to describe or refers to the pointlessness of describing his youth, but later feels himself impelled to do so. What we find is a curious dialectic here between the dictates of novelististic convention and the arbitrary will of the author. This is suggestive of the dialogue with form that we mentioned in a manner which installs and later subverts convention. The fictitious nature of the fabulation is highlighted also by the way in which the author refuses to describe the circumstances which allow him to destroy a factory or poison the water supply. In this sense, too, the limitations of the author’s imagination, rather than any other logical concern, is foregrounded, with causality, suspension of disbelief and verisimilitude lapsing under the influence of the arbitrary authorial will.
The fabulous nature of the novel is also made clear by the tendency of the narrative to surprise the reader. We saw how the narrator continually contradicts himself or fails to fulfill his promises, and, by the time we reach the conclusion of the novel, we have become accustomed to his failures to describe or explain. This culminates in an arbitrary surprise ending which simply kills off the protagonist. This, too, undermines any semblance of realism or cause and effect and highlights the nature of the novel as anti-narrative. Essentially, Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry deliberately undermines novelistic conventions and reader expectation, in order to foreground their artificial nature.

There are obvious minimalist tendencies in this novel as regards the author's tendency to avoid description of setting and character. While there are examples of this, there are also self-conscious commentaries as to the limitations and artifice of such a thing. To further highlight the problems involved with the conventions of realism, characters are allowed a degree of autonomy from the author, and become aware of their existence as characters in a way not unlike that of the House Mother in his earlier novel. This extrapolation of the logic of realism to the degree that characters are really aware of their existence and are able to converse with their creator basically intensifies the reader's appreciation of the realistic fallacy as well as understanding the way in which narrative speech acts are governed by the same rules as
those in other realistic speech acts. In a sense, we become aware of the relation between fictions and reality due to this device.

Broadly speaking, then, we see how this novel exploits novelistic convention in order to show up its limitations. The absurd logic implicit in suspension of disbelief and the acceptance of the realistic fallacy is made apparent in the way in which the author transgresses the conventions of narrative and breaks the narrative frame. The continual alterations within categories of discourse and the mixing of modes highlights the nature of novelistic mechanisms and ultimately undermines the idea of authoritative discourse. This is done most forcefully with regard to the grand narratives of religion and economy which are shown also to be reductive and artificial. Johnson installs and subverts the conventions of novelistic discourse in this novel in order to make us more aware of the nature of narrative.
1.8. The Narrative Technique of *See the Old Lady Decently*

Johnson's last novel makes use of most of the devices we have seen in his earlier works. Once more he foregrounds the mechanism and technique in order to make it clear that all narratives are fiction, even those of history books and text books, the authority of which he deliberately challenges. The point he wishes to make is that these modes of discourse are too general and reductive and fail to consider the personal and singular nature of experiences and events. Therefore, he exploits a variety of techniques in order to recount his mother's life and his own birth in a manner which, while it takes into account these grand narratives of British History, provides an alternative to them. The novel is a form of biography at one level, where its self-begetting nature allows it to foreground the function of the biographer and the techniques he adopts. However, it is the sum of the whole rather than any specific alternative that comes closer to reflecting reality in this novel and we will find that there is a tendency towards alterations and transgressions throughout this narrative in order to highlight the nature of the modes of discourse that are made use of, their possibilities and limitations. This novel also breaks its imposed frames and goes outwith the bounds of the single structure, but always by making use of available alternatives, although Johnson would appear to extend the range of the novel by interweaving so many different threads in such an original manner.
As regards time, we can say that there are a number of narrative sequences in the novel which can be read independently of one another, although there are areas in which they overlap. The sequences which deal with the life of his mother, Emily, are in an obvious chronological sequence marked by the year and her age which appear in the heading, as are the fictional Virrels' sections for the most part, which are interwoven with the more personal narrative, not to correspond exactly with their chronological order, but to highlight the nature of the previous years which lead up to her working there. The letters, a photograph and telegrams which are present tend to appear at the appropriate point in the chronological sequence. However, in the Greater Britain and Broader Britain sections, no such chronological sequence is respected, at least with regard to Emily's story, and we find that there are several other sections which tend to be introduced randomly in a fashion which highlights their, often, metafictional content. These digressions are sometimes included within other sections, often take place in the real present of the author, and narrate the nature of his surroundings and so on.

From this, it is apparent that the narrative technique of this novel is somewhat complicated as it interweaves several threads within a somewhat fragmentary structure. Of course the fragmentation of chronological sequence, with each story line being interrupted by the others, is deliberate on the part of the author in order to draw attention to the chaotic
nature of experience. Therefore we can speak of discontinuity and randomness in this novel to a degree that has not been apparent before. Hesitations and repetitions are also included as the narrative moves back and forth often repeating itself, saying what has just been said, or looking forward to what will be said later.

The existence of these interwoven narratives, each of which more or less respects some kind of linear sequence, draws attention to the way in which they can co-exist in the mind of the individual as they do in the narrative itself. If we consider, first of all, the existence of the Greater Britain and Broader Britain sections, these conform a basic background to the whole novel, which we can interpret as belonging to the grand narrative of history which is our cultural heritage, summing up the typical class-conscious, patriotic and imperialistic attitudes, among others, of the British people. Obviously, these are ever-present and must, therefore, appear as such, interwoven within the fabric of the novel in what we can consider as a series of anachronies (external completive analepses for the most part) which draw attention to the presentness of, not so much the past, but of antiquated standard attitudes about that past.

The novel also provides a number of poems and other examples of intertextuality, including transcriptions of conversations about his mother’s life. These, too, can be considered as interruptions of the narrative sequence and tend to belong to the present of the narrator.
However, they usually represent some contribution to the forwarding of the narrative. The concrete poems are essentially prolepses as they anticipate the growth of cancer in Emily's breast. The intertextuality associated with Neumann is included as a comment on the nature of the archetypal mother goddess, which gives significance to existence, as do the other poems about motherhood. These would seem not to belong to any particular sequence but, not unlike the sections about Britain, also conform part of our cultural heritage, but this time in terms of the universal unconscious. Therefore, these too, as they refer back to before civilisation in some way, can also be seen as complete external analepses.

The transcripts of conversations with his father about meeting his mother and so on, are also analepses, this time internal, although their inclusion usually forwards the narrative at the appropriate point in the sequence.

There are also examples of prolepsis in the novel. These tend to look forward to what is to come in a self-conscious manner, which undermines any idea of there being a natural development in the novel and highlight the fictitious nature of the chronological sequence that is imposed. Quite often these prolepses refer to the need to invent more fiction about Virrels and are therefore diegetically self-aware. To sum up about this use of anachronies in the novel, let us say that they give a sense of drawing attention to the creative process that is involved and highlight the way in which
the author actually pieces together the information that he has about his mother. Hence the need to move back and forth, sometimes in order to fill out previous sections or conduct some other kind of reappraisal. Even at the outset, we see how the fictional Virrels' section, where Emily is first introduced, is followed by an external analepsis which refers to her, aged eight and before, and begins the documented account of her life up to and beyond her employment with Virrels.

Another curious point is suggested by the fact that the birth of the author is narrated in the novel. This allows us to take his life as following on in some kind of continuation of the narrative of his mother's life. For this reason, the series of interruptions which return us to the present can be considered as external prolepsis which allude to the time after his own birth and therefore go beyond the limits of the novel. Thus, there is a developing awareness of how the present attitudes of the author are affected by the past events and experiences of his mother, which allows for irony in terms of our awareness of Emily's later role as mother, and of her death within the framework of the narrative.

From all of this, it appears that the anachronies in this novel do not only draw attention to the sequence imposed on the narrative and the relation between past and present, but are in fact related to an exploration of the relationship between the narrative or the author's mother's past and his present reality.

The use of anachronies, as well as being considered in terms of the whole structure, as we have done up to
now, can be seen relative to the particular thread or narrative sequence they belong to. The most significant use of analepsis in this respect belongs to a chronological sequence which we have only mentioned in passing up to now, that is, the ongoing present of the author, which ought now to be considered as yet another sequence in the text. This simultaneous present, coincides with the ongoing process of creation which is reflected in the narrative, and, as it interrupts the ulterior narrations continually, in what essentially breaks the narrative frame, foregrounds that narrative process. We can consider the novel, for this reason, to be self-begetting, as it turns in on itself to simultaneously narrate the events that take place as the author writes the novel. The result of the labours described in the narrative, at this level, is the novel we have just read. This is significant in itself, but also involves the use of anachronies, particularly internal complicative analepsis, like the occasion when the author-narrator refers to having visited the pub and having had a sleep between writing. The effect of this is to highlight the way in which these fragmentary sequences which represent the past coexist with the ongoing present of the author.

Anachronies can be considered at a number of levels, then, and the result is that they highlight the complex and fragmentary nature of perception and experience particularly with regard to the way in which the past, attitudes towards the past and even the unconscious are continually present, and also allows the
author to depict the way in fiction and reality interweave, intersect, and, in this novel, complement one another.

When we consider the category of duration, we are also aware of a good deal of variety. There are examples of all four categories in the novel: pause, ellipsis, scene and summary; with each category tending to appear in particular sections of the novel. Scene, particularly the reproduction of conversation, is a feature of the fictional episodes withWirrels, where the author's imagination allows him to invent. The same is true of the fictional events that take place in these sections, which are often described in detail. On any other occasions when a scene is described in detail, there is a tendency for the narrator to draw attention to the fact that he is inventing. For example, in a long section which narrates the events leading up to the conception of the author, the narrator continually reminds us that it is all supposition: "Before they went to bed they might have had a nightcap, Horlicks and Ovaltine were relatively new at that time . . ." (124, my italics). Therefore, no detailed factual representation of events or dialogue in the past is possible. These tend towards summary, and ellipsis, whenever the author lacks information about events that have taken place, although there are one or two examples of anecdotes that are recounted in the narrative which are supposed to have happened. The use of ellipsis is typified by the first example we find in the novel: "Of her first eight years I know nothing" (22), and is
indicative of what will recur throughout. These gaps in
the author's knowledge will be filled by documentary
evidence, supposition or pure fiction, as in the case of
the Virrels' sections.

To do justice to his mother in the novel, Johnson
has to try and imagine even what his mother might think,
which involves a few sections when her stream of
consciousness is presented. This is obviously
fictitious, but can be regarded as another example of
scene.

However, there are factual examples of scene with
regard to the past in the transcription of letters and
newspaper reports, as well as the reproduction of the
letter from the War Office informing of the death of
Emily's father. When the author quotes from a recorded
conversation with his father, that is as close as we
come to a detailed factual account of Emily's past,
although this part of the narrative is really an example
of summary.

There are two other occasions when scene is
possible in the novel: one is when the birth is
described, the other involves the description by the
author of what takes place in the present. In the
former, the narrator describes what takes place during
the development of the foetus in a rather tongue and
cheek manner, with detail taken from medical textbooks,
and the actual birth described according to information
received from his father. However, this still mingles
fact and fiction and reads like the latter, particularly
as the prose parodies Sterne. The latter examples of
scene take place when the narrator describes in the simultaneous present and *in situ*. Examples of this are the photograph that he describes of Emily with her brother and parents, taken during the war (although a good deal of speculation is involved about the circumstances of it being taken), and the description of a house in a square near where his mother once worked. This is introduced, "The next sentence you read will have been written on location in Chester Square" (66), and begins:

The first thing I see is that the gate into the long thin garden in the centre of the square has a sign on it which reads:

**WARNING**

**PROTECTED BY INTERSTATE SECURITY.** (66–67)

We also find the author describing what goes on around him, his daughter disturbing him, the state of his desk and his manuscript, even his state of mind, in what is the only scene that he can really accurately describe: that is, we come back to the inside of the author’s skull, his perceptions, and the creative process. These digressions from the narrative as such could be considered as pauses, and as is usually the case, draw attention to the narrative process and give the narrator an opportunity for metafictional commentary.

The point that comes across here is the fact that there is so little to go on to tell of his mother’s life, and emphasises just to what extent the author is limited when it comes to factual description. We could
say that the effect is to show just how necessary it is to complement fact with fiction and supposition as fact (scene) can provide us with very little information. In a sense the limitations and possibilities of narrative are associated with alterations within this category.

When we consider the Greater Britain and Broader Britain sections in the novel, these are obviously examples of summary. The point that Johnson wants to make by omitting details from these parodies of history text books and guide books, is to further emphasise the degree to which they generalise, are formulaic and embody a particular ideology. Once more, an alteration in duration allows him to highlight this.

In terms of frequency, we can say that the tendency is towards singulative narrative, although the iterative mode is used to good effect in some of the Greater Britain and Broader Britain sections. The effect of this is to highlight the ever-present nature of an ideology which underlies British culture, and tends to categorise races and individuals in terms of attitudes belonging to the nineteenth century. There is occasional repetition too, which, as it sometimes reveals itself as hesitation, tends to highlight the creative process as, when it occurs, it tends to take up from where a previous fictitious section left off.

Hence, alterations in time bring about various effects in the narrative, drawing attention to the way in which past and present, fiction and reality, supposition and fact, are all interrelated, as well as suggesting the limitations and possibilities,
particularly as regards detail and extension, that each allows. The alterations also draw attention to themselves as involving particular choices within particular categories and allow Johnson to foreground the narrative technique. In fact, this rather subversive treatment of time suggests the artificial nature of chronologies as such. Not least, it highlights a preoccupation with time that implies a number of ontological questions about past and present, fiction and reality.

Obviously, these alterations in time tend to correspond with alterations in other categories. If we consider mode, we will find that there are a number of alterations in distance and perspective.

Alterations as regards distance are fairly clear in the novel. In the narration of events the intrusiveness or lack of it by the author varies from section to section. We can say that there is a high degree of mimesis whenever documentary evidence is provided. This includes the transcription of letters, his father's eyewitness report, the newspaper articles, any other form of intertextuality, including Neumann's work, and the objet trouvé, of the letter from the War Office. These are really the only occasions when we are allowed to be aware of the absence of authorial intervention. In the rest the reader is much more diegetically aware although there is relative distance from the narrative in the Greater Britain and Broader Britain sections which are interwoven in the text almost as intertextuality although they are mainly parodies of history books and
guide books.

The rest of the narrative tends to involve the narrator, and the reader is usually aware of him. The reason for this is that Johnson wants to make it clear that objectivity is really impossible and that, when he does anything other than present documentary evidence without comment, selection, omission, transformation and even falsification are involved. In a sense, the fictional Virrels' sections are an extreme example of what takes place throughout the novel, and makes it clear that all narrative is fiction.

Of course there are varying degrees of involvement on the part of the author which correspond, to some extent, with the alterations in duration of the various sections. Whenever, we are in the simultaneous present, the narrative is self-reflexive and draws attention to the narrator and the narrative process. At these points the narrative tends most fully towards diegesis, in what are, effectively, pauses or digressions. Curiously, these often occur within the Virrels' sections, which, while they are narrated more fully as scenes, and therefore are suggestive of the absence of authorial intervention, are obviously fictitious, which is underlined by the digressions which refer to the creative or imaginative process, and because of the hesitations and repetitions that are built into them. Clearly, in spite of the observation of realistic conventions and the provision of detail, the point is to show up the illusion and remind us that such detailed description of events and speech in the past can only be
make believe.

Most of the rest of the narrative involves the narrator to a high degree, and we are very much aware of authorial intervention in those sections which tend towards summary. This is particularly so of the Greater Britain and Broader Britain sections in which an authorial point of view is highly foregrounded due to the choice of mode of discourse and the obvious selection, omission and moulding of material. In recounting other events and experiences, the narrator self-consciously draws attention to his presence in a manner that has been alluded to earlier, making clear statements as to what is supposition and what is fact. The section in which a photograph is described sums up the nature of this technique in which authorial intervention fictionalises fact, by imagining circumstances and so on. The narrator himself draws attention to the fact that he is imposing himself on the family, and the repetition of it looks as though highlights the degree to which the author does this.

In general terms, we can say that Johnson draws attention to the inevitability of the author imposing himself on his material, and, even in a factual biography, when documentary evidence is provided without comment, we are aware of the authorial presence that selects it and places it within a given point of the overall fabric of the narrative. In a sense, the section headings further draw our attention to this.

As regards the presentation of thought and speech, the same kind of thing applies. The narrator does manage
to represent dialogues in the fictional Virrels' sections, but due to the parodic nature of these and the continual interruptions of the narrator, not to mention the continual shifts to documentary evidence which highlights their nature, the reader is highly aware of the degree of fabrication involved. The same can be said of Emily's stream of consciousness, which, while it is equally free of authorial intervention, its juxtaposition with the other factual sections draws attention to its fictionality. The recording of his father's reminiscences is faithfully transcribed and is a truer example of mimesis of speech, but the rest of the narrative tends towards diegesis and narrativised discourse, which once more highlights the impossibility of avoiding authorial intervention, of affecting and transforming the available material. In fact, for the most part, excepting the obviously fictional sections and actual evidence, the only factual presentation of speech or thought that is possible would appear in the simultaneous narration of the author. However, even there, the presentation of speech tends to be through narrativised discourse, which leaves us only with the thought process of the author himself. Johnson, as always, brings us back to the inside of his own skull, which is the only reality he feels he can represent.

As regards narrative distance, then, we can say that the author is always present in this text, and deliberately draws attention to his presence in order to highlight the way in which fact must always be fictionalised in a process that involves selection,
organisation and, therefore, fabrication. The novel presents a series of alternative modes of presentation rather than any single mode in order to undermine the notion of the authoritative narrative. What the novel as a whole does in this respect, is undermine, in particular, the broad, general and, therefore, more fictitious modes of presentation of history books and guide books that represent the grand narrative of British culture. If we go to one extreme, we could say that, in the novel, even fiction comes closer to representing reality in this sense.

Perspective also shifts throughout this novel, and these alterations usually coincide with others which take place when we move from section to section. The obviously fictional sections about Virrels and the others make use of an external narrator-focaliser after the fashion of the traditional novel, which highlights the fictitious nature of such a point of view in itself. It is this that allows the external perceptual, cognitive and emotive facets of focalisation which enables the narrator to narrate what takes places at different times and in different places simultaneously. In terms of the Greater Britain and Broader Britain sections, with irony we find that a similar perspective is adopted. There is an external narrator-focaliser who is able to provide information about what goes on simultaneously in different places, which highlights the fictionality of the history and guide book sections, and therefore, of the prime sources of Britain's grand narrative. It is curious how the external focalisation
allows for objectivity, when, ironically, Johnson wishes to highlight the degree of fabrication involved in such narratives.

In other fictional sections a similar point of view appears. When Johnson goes on to narrate his own birth, it is after the fashion of Sterne, addressing the madam who is reading the novel, and providing details which he could not possibly be aware of in spite of his presence at the event. The external focalisation of a narrator-focaliser, when the character was actually a participant in the events is therefore a transgression and is an example of paralepsis in the novel. That is, the fictitious nature of the narrative is highlighted in spite of the fact that it really did happen. Similarly, we can say that paralepsis is involved in the factual history book accounts of the past which also distort what has taken place.

As far as the rest of the novel is concerned, we can say that in the simultaneous narration, Johnson, as a homodiegetic narrator of what is going on, is an internal focaliser. With regard to his mother's past, he is an external focaliser, but with a limited point of view perceptually and cognitively speaking. This shift in perspective highlights the limitations imposed on the narrator in recounting the past and, therefore, the inevitability of fabrication. What we find with perspective, then, is that there are continual shifts which coincide with the movement from the present to the past and from fact to fiction. The external focaliser which objectively presents information must become
subjective in his appraisal of that information, which is highlighted by a corresponding shift in focalisation. That is, the external cognitive, perceptual and emotive facets in play when presenting the photograph or any other factual circumstance, shifts to a subjective exercise in supposition where the opposing internal viewpoint takes over. In a sense, this sums up what takes place throughout the novel, where Johnson's limited factual information is complemented by subjective supposition or fiction.

What we must regard as reliable information that is supplied in the novel curiously comes from an individual, like Johnson's father, who is an internal focaliser of events and who is inevitably subjective. His narrative is significantly more reliable than the externally focalised sections of the narrative, both factual and fictional, which suggests that it is more authoritative, although more subjective than the more official versions of history that he provides us with. This need for individual testimony and for the subjective point of view to provide an alternative to the reductive and general grand narrative, leads Johnson to adopt a similar internal focalisation when presenting the fictitious stream of consciousness of Emily.

These alterations in focalisation draw attention to the nature of particular choices as literary and fictional devices, particular with regard to the choice of the external focalisation of the narrator-focaliser. By foregrounding these alterations, which are further emphasised by being used in conjunction with other
shifts within different categories, Johnson highlights the mechanisms involved in, and therefore the fictitious nature of all narratives.

When we come to voice, the alterations continue. Up to now we have seen how the limits of the single structure have continually been transgressed, and this corresponds also with choices made in the time of narration. A good deal of ulterior narration is present, which is to be expected considering that this is a narrative about the author's mother. And, particularly in the Virrels, Greater Britain and Broader Britain sections we can find it. These have already been compared in terms of perspective and distance, and we find that the use of the ulterior mode, which tends to fix the past, is designed here to suggest that these narratives are more fictional, when compared to the rest of the ulterior narrations which tend to involve supposition, and draw attention to it by using expressions like must be, no doubt, or thereabouts, and several modals like would, might have and so on. This more tentative alternative would appear to be more realistic than other ulterior narrations within the novel.

A good deal that we find involves simultaneous narration, particularly the sections which refer to the present of the author as he writes the novel. We have said that this is, in some respects, as self-begetting novel, and it is in these sections which can be called pauses or digressions in terms of the ulterior narrative, that narrative mechanisms and technique are
foregrounded. There are also occasions, within these digressions, that anterior narration appears, usually to anticipate part of the fiction which is yet to be recounted.

As we said earlier, throughout the novel we are aware of several threads which are continually interwoven. These are ulterior or simultaneous narrations, or make use of a more tentative ulterior narration involving supposition. The simultaneous narrations of the testimony of witnesses or transcriptions of letters also appear, and these several threads can be felt to exist simultaneously in the novel. The point to be made, which was suggested before, is that by continually shifting the time of narration, Johnson makes us aware of how the past and our attitudes towards it coexist in the present, and, in fact, are all part of a continuing simultaneous narrative which is the self-begetting novel itself.

Hence, shifts in time draw attention to the mechanisms involved in the narrative and show the way in which the past and present are interwoven. Postmodernist concerns are also involved here in that the relation between ontologically distinct visions of reality, which are related to these changes in time, are investigated.

As regards narrative levels we must say that there are several. These, too, co-exist in the novel, and we find that a number of alterations and transgressions are involved. Broadly speaking we can say that there is an extradiegetic level which involves the narrator in the simultaneous present, and embedded within that level are
a series of narratives which appear at an intradiegetic level. These are the independent narrative sequences we spoke of earlier, as well as the documentary evidence and intertextuality which appear. However, the distinct nature of the material presented, both factual and fictitious, particularly with regard to the inclusion of real testimony and evidence, is suggestive of the existence of another distinct ontological level which would seem to correspond with reality itself, and exists above or outwith the extradiegetic level which we have suggested corresponds to the simultaneous narration of the author. The alterations that take place between these levels are indicative of an exploration of the relation between fiction and reality which the novel deliberately sets out to do. Hence, we can say that in terms of the diegesis itself, there are only two levels, although a further ontological level (reality if you like) erupts into the novel in the form of intertextuality (the letters the transcription of the recording and so on).

As we said, there are continual alterations between these levels which are indicative of the way in which they coexist with one another and how the narrative itself moves between fiction and reality. In fact, we could say that the narrative somehow arbitrates between the extremes of fiction and reality, questioning the relative values attributed to each, in an attempt to offer an alternative to the official versions of the past. There are also transgressions of levels, as the author who exists at the extradiegetic level, becomes a participant when his own birth is narrated. This also
happens when reality enters into the narrative to form part of a fiction that is recounted at an intradiegetic level. In this way, Johnson shows how fiction and reality are related and can somehow complement one another.

In terms of person there are also alterations. There are a number of narrators involved in the novel, some who appear in the intertextuality, others who narrate the Greater Britain and Broader Britain sections, Emily herself, a homodiegetic narrator, who narrates in letters or in her stream of consciousness, the author's father, another homodiegetic narrator, whose account is transcribed. The heterodiegetic narrator who keeps the whole thing together, seems to change too, shifting from the fictitious narrative which is narrated from an extradiegetic level by a heterodiegetic narrator, to become a homodiegetic narrator in the simultaneous narration of the ongoing process of creation. These alterations and transgressions in person once more foreground the narrative mechanisms involved in the creation, and are suggestive of the relative possibilities and limitations of particular choices in this category. As they tend to coincide with shifts in perspective, too, we are highly aware of the relative degrees of reliability of these several narrators as the novel progresses. The juxtaposition of these independent narratives combined with the obvious polymodality that we find in the novel, denies the reader any possibility of identifying one single authoritative voice, which is probably the whole
point of the novel; to make us see that a whole or reliable view is not possible within a single structure. At the same time, the polymodality, the continual alterations and transgressions show that artifice is unavoidable.

To coincide with the many narrators that tell of Emily, Greater Britain and Broader Britain, there are an equal or greater number of roles. Johnson is highly involved in the novel as author, drawing attention to his problems while writing the novel in the simultaneous narration. More than this, we can consider him as biographer, although there is irony involved in his shifting from this role to that of the author of fiction, which highlights the limitations of the biographical mode. In this respect we are aware of a parody of the Shandyean narrator in the account of Johnson's birth, which is not unlike a similar parody of the omniscient narrator involved in the Virrels' sections. These two are obviously set up as kinds of entertainers. Many characters are allowed to speak for themselves as witnesses; we also have the point of view of Emily presented as letter-writer and diaryist; there are other letter-writers too, not least Emily's father; and of course there are the roles of journalist, guide and historian, which also figure in the novel. The function that is performed by each tends to vary as does their reliability.

The point that has to be made is that the nature of the narrative changes depending on the role adopted by the narrator, as does the mode of discourse, the degree
of overtness or covertness of the narrator, the degree of fictionality that we perceive, and so on. This foregrounds yet another aspect of mechanism in the novel and shows that artifice pervades the whole thing. By juxtaposing these different kinds of narrators, we are also aware of their respective possibilities and limitations.

The functions of the narrators vary, as we have said, and the tendency is for the metanarrative function to be exercised during the simultaneous narration of the author. The narrative tends to be suspended at these points, and in a directly communicative act with the reader, he also speaks of himself, making use of the testimonial function. The most obviously fictional parts of the narrative make use of the narrative function at the expense of any other, although the reader is often addressed in a parodic manner. The accounts of events which come from eye witnesses tend to be narrative as would be expected, while other examples of intertextuality, mainly letters, are almost wholly communicative (the letters to Emily from her father exercise no narrative function at all). While the history and guide book sections would seem to be narrative too, we find that the ideological function is highly foregrounded, which is also the case in newspaper articles which are mentioned on occasions. These changes in function, as we see, tend to coincide with shifts in mode, which is further suggestive of the way in which particular choices can affect the nature of events and experiences that are recounted. The novel as a whole,
while it tells the story of his mother's life does tend
to foreground the mechanisms that are used, so that the
metanarrative function is explicitly or implicitly
exercised throughout.

The narratee is also dramatised at different
levels. The author speaks to him directly on occasion,
although his participation is implicitly invited
throughout when we consider the nature of the section
headings which are often quite gnomic. For example we
find at one point: "What do all these letters mean?"; an
obvious invitation to the reader to ask himself that
question. He is also dramatised in the more fictional
sections after the fashion of Sterne's madam: "I thought
it a delightful story, worthy of Chaucer, perhaps, or
even of Sterne. You, Madame, will no doubt think it
obscene" (127). Here, Johnson invokes a parody of the
unreliable narratee, which basically expects and invites
collusion on the part of the reader, who, remaining at
the extradiiegetic level, is above such a failure to
appreciate his anecdote. However, again the artifice
involved is highlighted, and this use of parody draws
attention to itself as such here.

On occasions we are also dramatised as readers of
guide books and text books, newspapers and anecdotes,
all of which involves a different kind of role for us.
However, what may be implicit is just that: the reader
is expected to adopt a role which is written into the
semantic context of the narrative. This itself is part
of the fiction and conditions us to respond in a
particular manner. By juxtaposing such a wide variety of
roles for the same reader, we become aware of the artifice and fictionality involved and become suspicious of the role allotted to us. The point behind this is to denaturalise the way in which we passively accept authoritative narratives.

There is a wide variety of modes of discourse adopted in this novel, and each tends to mould and transform reality in a particular way. By juxtaposing these modes, Johnson draws our attention to the fictitious nature of each. The letters from Emily's father seem to be a rather innocuous example, by showing just to what extent a particular mode can be fictitious. During the First World War, and shortly before his death, his letters say nothing about the obvious discomfort and so on. The letter is a fiction, which avoids any attempt at narrative. It exercises a purely phatic function as it communicates nothing to his daughter.

The same kind of falsification would seem to be involved in all further choices of mode. Some of the many examples are the parody of eighteenth century novelistic prose and the use of history books and guide books. The omissions in the history and guide book sections highlight the general and reductive nature of their accounts. The authoritative tone of voice which conveys these Victorian attitudes does not invoke any participation from the narratee who is passively expected to learn from these accounts. The language used in these narratives, as in many of the other modes used, falls into the use of cliché and other formulae, which
totally avoid the personal or individual, and can be considered as embodying ready-made attitudes towards reality. The juxtaposition of these generalisations with more personal narratives, highlights the limitations of the former, and allows the reader to question official or authoritative texts.

Of course, the novel, as a whole, can be considered as a form of biography as it tells the story of Johnson’s mother’s life. However, it becomes apparent as we read that it is necessary for the biographer to complement his material by moving into other modes of discourse, not least the fictional mode of the eighteenth century novel. This suggests the limitations of the biographical mode and suggests the extent to which the biographer must always be involved in selecting and moulding his material.

One more point worth mentioning before going on is to draw attention to the use of poems in the novel. These tend to be symbolic of the development of the mother, or are related to the archetypal mother goddess. In these, we find that Johnson moves away from narrative which suggests that there are aspects about his mother which cannot be faithfully presented by using the narrative mode. This further highlights the limitations involved in any mode of discourse, and makes us further aware of the polymodality of this novel which continually breaks the frame and goes beyond the bounds of the single structure.

There is relatively little use of analogy in this novel, except as regards the analogies that Johnson
himself pointed out between the growth and decadence of Britain and the Empire which was to correspond in the narrative with the birth, life and death of his mother from cancer. However, there are one or two other possibilities: the use of *uroboros* is significant in that the cyclical nature of the narrative gives an idea of continuity, reconciliation and regeneration in a manner not yet tried by Johnson. The only other kind of analogy that immediately attracts our attention is related to the analogies involved in choice of mode, which draw our attention to the way in which distinct forms of narrative are juxtaposed with one another in order to highlight their common artifice and fictionality.

In terms of codes, we can mention the underdetermination of the referential code in the history book and guide book sections. This draws attention to the total absence of reality from these narratives which essentially do little more than propound ideology in the guise of history. There is a greater degree of referentiality in the rest of the novel, which attempts to draw attention to the real circumstances surrounding Johnson’s mother. However, this referentiality lapses in the Virrels’ sections where the high degree of fictionality in a totally non-specific setting with characters that are just caricatures comes through. The referential and proaeretic codes are determined in a way which allows realism in the sections where eye-witness accounts are involved, and this same treatment is true of the more
hypothetical sections where the narrator allows his imagination to impose itself on fact. However, the way in which both kinds of narrative tend towards a similar treatment of these codes highlights the similarity between a factual narrative and fictitious supposition. The hermeneutic code tends to be underdetermined as there is little suspense or surprise. The reader is well aware that the protagonist is the author's mother, and his birth is an inevitable outcome. That is, other concerns are foregrounded.

The proaeretic code is obviously underdetermined in these parts of the novel where the narrative is interrupted. This suggests that there are other considerations of greater importance, which involve the overdetermination of the symbolic code throughout the novel. The continual alterations within categories of discourse, as well as the contrasting of depths involved in crossing ontologically distinct narrative levels, symbolically foregrounds the postmodernist concerns of the novel regarding the relation between fiction and reality and the artifice involved in modes of narrative discourse.

When we come to discuss story in this novel, we can say that its typology is often dependent on mode, although underlying the whole thing is the archetypal myth of the mother goddess. This determines the way in which it inevitably moves towards the birth of the author, as well as the circularity suggested by beginning and ending with the author. The Virrels' sections in the novel follow the pattern determined by
similar narratives of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, like *Fanny Hill*, with the usual ingredients of sex and the struggling servant girl. The content of the history book and guide book sections are likewise determined by the mode of discourse used.

Although the several threads which are interwoven in the narrative may distract our attention from the basic kernal of the story, the birth, growth and development of the mother, leading to the author's birth are, fairly obviously, the main thread of the narrative. However, a good deal of emphasis is placed on the underlying ideology and mythology, as well as the metafictional concerns.

Although there are anachronies in the several layers of narrative, chronology tends to be respected in each independent thread. The point behind this is to allow the relation between the different threads to become apparent, as the reader is expected to appreciate the link between the different layers of development.

Cause and effect is allowed to govern the logic of the novel, as we are aware not only of chronological sequence but of the way in which events lead up to one another. However, the author makes us aware of the fact that much that might be considered to be cause and effect logic is, in fact, imposed by the author. We are most aware of this authorial intervention when he tends to suppose and narrate what might have happened, particularly in the sections leading up to his parents meeting and his birth. Hence, cause and effect, like sequence, is foregrounded as part of the artifice of the
novel.

There is little surprise or suspense, as the narrative progresses quite inevitably to Emily’s fulfillment as mother. However, perhaps the tendency to interrupt the narrative and pass from one ontological level to another could be considered to draw attention to the relation between fact and fiction and the nature of the narrative in this respect.

Setting and character tend to be foregrounded or underdetermined depending on the mode of discourse that is adopted. The obvious omission of detail as regards both is a significant feature in the history and guide books which allows the author to foreground the general and formulaic nature of them as mere purveyors of ideology. The use of caricature in both setting and character in the Virrels’ sections draws attention to the artificial nature of physical description, which is contrasted with factual attempts on other occasions. The overall impression which we get from Johnson is that it is difficult to do justice to character and setting, which is just one further limitation of narrative as such. In fact, if we consider that the novel, on one level, is about the possibilities of biography and the inevitability of resorting to fiction even there, then, this can be seen as a further limitation of this mode.

From all that we have said it is clear that the narrative technique of this novel allows Johnson to foreground his concerns about the nature of narrative and the way in which it tends to transform reality.
However, by juxtaposing such a broad variety of modes, he alludes to reality in a way that no single mode is able to do. Thus, while he undermines the idea of an authoritative narrative, he suggests that alternatives which go beyond the single structure are possible.

To briefly sum up what we have been doing here, it should be emphasised that B.S. Johnson makes use of alternatives that are readily available to him in terms of what he is able to do within categories of discourse and in terms of the modes of discourse. However, by tending towards polymodality and by going beyond the limits of the single structure, he highlights the limitations of conventional narrative, while at the same time extending the possibilities of the novel form as such. Of course, at all times we are made aware of the mechanisms of narrative which are foregrounded by his tendencies towards alterations within categories of discourse, and it is in this way that he is able to make us aware of novelistic conventions at the same time as he subverts them. The fact that narrative must always distance us from reality in some way, does not mean that the author is unable to allude to it, as the majority of his novels have shown. Suffice it to say, that for all of these reasons, we can consider the novels of B.S. Johnson as being highly aware of tradition but in a way that leads him to contest rather than to simply make use of it. His is a continual dialectic with form; his is the oppositional discourse of unbelief.
2. The Games B.S. Johnson Plays

When the novel was spoken of in more general terms as oppositional discourse, it was suggested that it tends towards carnivalisation. In postmodernist texts, this tendency towards playfulness is sometimes called jouissance, and it is usually accepted that there is a high degree of playfulness in postmodernist narratives. In applying the model to the novels of B.S. Johnson, one form of playfulness in his work has become clear, that is, the tendency towards alterations and transgressions within categories of discourse, which foreground narrative technique and the existence of alternatives which often take the novel outwith the limits of the single structure.

Although the nature of B.S. Johnson's postmodernist narrative is already clear, to complete the picture we should consider that this playfulness found within categories of discourse continues at other levels too, in ways we outlined earlier. The playing of these games further highlights the surface and fabric of the narrative with the text becoming more of a methodological field or autonomous artefact rather than a referential object for the reader. The playing of games in literature in general, and in postmodernism in particular, tends to denaturalise the process of reading and foregrounds the surface and structure of the work: the pane and transparency, as opposed to facilitating our passage through the text to some easily recognisable referent, becomes the object of our scrutiny. When this
happens, the reader becomes aware of the nature of the narrative in terms of autonomous language relations and its distance from reality is more fully appreciated. So besides the kind of public games and anti-rhetoric involved in the alterations and transgressions we have found in Johnson’s novels, there are others that also draw attention to the mechanism and artifice involved in narrative.

Now play is part and parcel of narrative anyway, so it is a particular kind of play which interests us here, or, rather, we shall concentrate on play which draws attention to itself, often for its own sake, and at the expense of other considerations. Often, the kind of play we are talking about distracts our attention from the story or impedes rather than facilitating the transition from the narrative to its referent. This kind of play, we have discovered, can be viewed as anti-style or anti-rhetoric as it is often foregrounded due to its high incidence, its inappropriateness or intrusiveness, or because of some innovation in the form of playing the game. However, a point that should be kept in mind is that the kinds of games we find should not be considered as new. It is simply that sometimes they are highlighted or played in new ways. For example, the author is able to take advantage of advances in printing and other techniques to bring about typographical and other innovations, although these, very often, go no further and involve little more than similar devices in concrete or visual poetry.

The way in which we will focus on play here is to
see it as associated with Jakobson's poetic function, although it ought to be seen more significantly as part of the metanarrative function, which rather than drawing attention to language or the message for its own sake, which does happen in narrative anyway, draws attention to the fabric of the narrative often to a different end: to highlight the ways in which we encode experience, the mechanism and artifice involved and so on. We have said that in postmodernist texts, there is a tendency to overdetermine what can be called carnivalisation, which sometimes involves a degree of breaking rules. This is part of the subversive element in postmodernist texts which tend to draw attention to the limitations of the devices which they make use of. Now, let us recall some of the strategies that postmodernist texts make use of in order to foreground their concerns, and see to what extent these techniques are taken advantage of in Johnson's novels.

Now carnivalisation involves indeterminacy, fragmentation, decononisation, selflessness, irony, hybridisation, allegory, self-reflexive parody, travesty and pastiche, the deformation and contesting of existing forms. All of these are typical of the novels of B.S. Johnson, which we have already called dialogues with form. There is an element of montage and collage in all of them, as he makes use of a variety of narrative modes in a manner which is far from innocent. This involves parody, which installs and contests a form at the same time, and, by juxtaposing these in a particular way, he shows up the possibilities and limitations of each,
turning each novel into a hybrid which undermines the idea of the authoritative narrative. This kind of thing is done to varying degrees in all of the novels, some of which become more fragmentary than others, and some of which are more self-conscious than others. But even in *Travelling People* we find the ironic and parodic tendency which becomes a model for the rest of his work, in that making use of a variety of styles draws attention to the limitations of adopting only one. From this novel on, there is always the inclusion of more than one mode of discourse, with each choice highlighting the possibilities and limitations of itself and the others.

It is this first novel which also sets the pattern for Johnson to look for alternatives to the existing principles of composition. Part of this is to go beyond the limits of the single structure by making more than one choice within each category of discourse, and by treating each choice of mode subversively. This leads him to take advantage of the alternative possibilities described by Lodge, so that contradiction, permutation, discontinuity, randomness, excess and the short-circuit are all part of his work. His works incorporate the paradox that he feels under the compulsion to create narratives which give form to experience, but at the same time he is aware that there is only chaos underlying everything, and that fiction is the inevitable result. Hence, most of his works tend to take back what they have previously said. They investigate the possibilities of narrative but admit the limitations
of what they have done. Retraction is then a feature of his work, and we find that some novels, like Albert Angelo, deliberately knock down the house of fiction they have created.

At the same time, Johnson makes use of other devices which are typical of, but not exclusive to postmodernism. The logic of the absurd, which allows the semantic context created by fictional discourse to be considered as if it were real rather than realistic, means that Johnson can discourse with his characters, who exist on the same ontological level as himself. This is a kind of short-circuit and is one way in which the relation between fact and fiction is explored in novels like House Mother Normal and Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry. The use of mise en abyme recurs throughout his work too, particularly as a way of foregrounding the writing process. Hence most of the novels involve a writer who is writing, or we may find some other analogous process referred to which allows Johnson to thematise this, which is the case in Travelling People when Henry cuts a path to the river for its own sake.

Another significant aspect of play in Johnson's work has to do with his use of imagery. Now, a number of references have already been made to this in discussing his work, but the point to be made here is that there is a tendency to be mistrustful of metaphors, so that, in many of his works, we find the process of choosing a suitable image is highlighted. This is overdetermined in novels like The Unfortunates and Trawl, although the way in which Johnson makes use of imagery tends to highlight
the gap between the narrative and the world. His suspicion of imagery as tending to impose some kind of anthropomorphic significance on experience has already been referred to in discussing the two novels we mentioned, but there is another source which can provide us with a clue as to Johnson's attitude here:

The Dishonesty of Metaphor

The sound of rain
is like only
the sound of rain
(rain seen against the black threat of copper beeches)
in truth can be
like nothing but
the sound of rain. (Ewart et al 1973 197)

This poem, like the poem we quoted earlier from Trawl, draws attention to the distance that exists between the image and its referent, and the tendency to impose significance on what has none. This leads Johnson to, what we might call, non-performance, where the possibility or the use of metaphor is suggested but no choice is made. This kind of non-performance can also be related to the appearance of blanks and silences in the text, which is a typical manner of highlighting the nature of the narrative as process and plural, rather than as some kind of inevitable single product.

What we have said about the distance that exists between the image and its referent can be extended to involve the narrative as such in Johnson, which, he
consistently reminds us, does not faithfully represent experience. The games he plays in the novel, particularly the visual or concrete games which draw attention to the surface of the narrative as an autonomous object, like cutting holes in the page, or reproducing the form in which something has been perceived (for example, the advertisements that are presented as in a succession of steps in Travelling People), or including objets trouvés, are related to this. All of these devices are indicative of the way in which the narrative distances itself from reality in the same way as the author distances himself from that reality by alluding to it in a narrative. Here is another poem which explains this point by drawing attention to the opposition that exists between the experience of the individual and the ways in which this is articulated:

Distant Piece

I may reach a point
one reaches a point
where all I might have to say
where all that one has to say
would be that life is bloody awful.
is that the human condition is intolerable
but that I would not end it
but one resolves to go on
despite everything
despite everything. (Ewart et al 1973 149)

Narrative distorts and transforms, is what comes out of
this, and Johnson’s use of games is intended to make us aware of the autonomous nature of narrative and its distance from reality.

It is worth remembering that many of the games played by Johnson are devices which set out to explore the mimetic possibilities of narrative. This is the case of presenting stream of consciousness and dialogue simultaneously on different sides of the same page in Albert Angelo, and could also be said of cutting the holes in the page in the same novel. However, what we find throughout Johnson’s work is that, in spite of the mimetic qualities of his narratives, the literary artifice involved in the use of these devices is paradoxically revealed. Although he makes use of a variety of strategies in order to be faithful to the flux and fragmentation that is reality it is impossible to avoid artifice. The mimetic possibilities of his narratives tend to be undermined as he almost inevitably admits that all we can achieve is a kind of simulacrum. As he writes in Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry: “‘Even if we understand that all is chaos, the understanding itself represents a denial of chaos, and must therefore be an illusion’” (30).

Now, Johnson’s narratives tend to be highly artificial in spite of the way in which he explores the possibilities for mimesis. This is highlighted by the way in which he plays with a variety of alternative formal possibilities rather than remaining within the bounds of the single structure. Curiously, by making the reader aware of the formal possibilities of a given
narrative, the effect is to make us aware that the conventional single choice is artificial. At this point, let us consider each of the novels and the games that they play which draw attention to the fabric of the narrative and foreground postmodernist concerns.
2.1. Travelling People

Travelling People tends to keep its narrative and metanarrative well apart, but in spite of that there are a number of games which are suggestive of carnivalisation and a dialogue with form, as well as foregrounding the narrative technique. From the beginning, the novel makes use of parody, which installs, but at the same time contests the conventions that it makes use of. By harking back to eighteenth century novelistic prose, Johnson highlights the way in which narratives make use of convention, and, at the same time, he anticipates the form the novel will take. The novel will unconventionally encourage polymodality (or hybridisation) in a collage of several parodies of distinct modes of narrative discourse. The way in which each of these tends to transform the nature of its material becomes apparent and the reader, through their juxtaposition, becomes aware of the limitations of each style. This is a kind of anti-rhetoric which foregrounds the nature of the narrative and which is paralleled by other playful devices. A few examples from the novel would include the use of the film scenario, which presents the characters as if they were playing a part, thus highlighting the artificiality of the situation and their relationships; another would be the way in which the disagreeable facts of reality are distanced from Henry when he thinks about the dead dogs in terms of advertising slogans; and yet another is the way in which the newspaper article about the gala evening transforms
the whole thing into something totally different from
the other accounts we have of it.

Another form of public game in the novel involves
the anti-rhetorical use of digression, interruption and
repetition, which draws attention to the process
involved in writing the narrative, something which the
foregrounding of other technical devices has already
made us aware of. In fact, the writing process is
thematised in a number of ways, not only by making use
of a variety of stylistic choices within the novel, but
in an explicit manner on at least a couple of occasions.
This occurs when the events omitted in Henry’s journal
are recounted by the omniscient narrator and also when
Henry, the film scenario and later the newspaper report,
all give their versions of what took place in the gala.
These differing perspectives of the same events are
suggestive of permutation, or the existence of
alternative choices. This thematisation of the writing
process here might also be considered as a kind of mise
en abyme.

At a more idiosyncratic level, we find Johnson
makes use of typographical devices, particularly in the
presentation of the stream of consciousness of Maurie,
and in the presentation of the advertisements which he
sees in the Underground. To make use of grey and then
black passages in the former to indicate unconsciousness
and death, is reminiscent of Sterne’s Tristram Shandy,
and, while it does attempt to reflect mimetically the
state of the character, it also foregrounds itself as a
device, making the reader more highly aware of the
narrative technique employed. The same can be said of the latter device, which becomes a visual representation of Henry's perceptions, but again paradoxically, in spite of its mimetic effect draws attention to itself as a device.

We previously mentioned the use of analogy and symbol in this novel, particularly as regards the paradise lost and travelling people motives, which are fairly traditional. However, particularly the former is presented in an exaggerated manner, which borders on the kind of excess Lodge describes. The least we can say is that there is a certain inappropriateness with regard to the image in comparison with the setting of the novel, while the narrator's insistence on the parallel draws attention to its artificiality. When joined to the travelling people motif, the heavy-handedness of the author is further apparent in that it creates a number of fairly obvious expectations in the reader regarding there being some end to Henry's wandering and so on. This becomes something of a red herring as the novel cyclically returns to where it began, with the character continuing on a journey without end. The symbolism is obvious, and is also highlighted by the use of a number of quotations related to travelling throughout.

However, this, at first sight, traditional use of imagery is at variance with the metafictional element in the narrative which is highlighted by the use of parody and collage in a novel which resolves itself into a number of fragments. While the former is suggestive of coherence, the latter undermines the idea of order. We
could say here, that there is no resolution to this dichotomy, which might be a factor which would account for Johnson refusing to have the novel reprinted.

There is another example of *mise en abyme* in *Travelling People* which we referred to earlier. This works at two levels, in that cutting a path to the river for its own sake can be interpreted as referring both to the continual travelling that takes place, or to the process of writing itself. The latter foregrounds the idea of the novel as an autonomous narrative distinct from reality, something implicit in the way in which the various modes of discourse transform and distance events (particularly the film scenario), and is also related to other clearly fictional elements in the novel, like the choice of names and so on.

We referred earlier to the tendency towards retraction in postmodernist novels, too. There is even an example of this in Johnson’s first novel. We find that reader expectation is conditioned to expect some kind of resolution in the novel and that this is denied. Moreover, the novel, at the level of its story, denies the existence of any form and significance in life. If we link this to the use of devices which highlight the way in which the form of discourse gives form to experience, then we can state that Johnson draws back from any possible significance that his novel might move towards, and which is suggested by the choice of motives we mentioned.

Part of the game that is played is to continually expose the artifice involved in a dialogue with the
reader which takes place during the interruptions and
digressions. This forms the anti-narrative that we
mentioned and explicitly draws attention to the nature
of his character, Henry, as a puppet, and parodies the
Thackeray-type idea of the narrator as puppet-master.
This, accompanied by the abrupt changes from one style
to another, which disrupts the frame of the narrative,
produces the impression that the narrator wishes to
expose and destroy the structure that he builds. The
dichotomy, in the end is never resolved in the novel,
and this will become a tendency in Johnson’s work, to
later draw back from or destroy what he has previously
created.

We mentioned earlier the use of interruptions in
order to highlight the narrative process, but there is
also another aspect involved here. Johnson introduces
quotations or intertextuality at these points and we
find references to a series of fictional and real
accounts of journeys. While this emphasises the
existence of the travelling motif within the novel, it
also allows narratives which exist at ontologically
distinct levels to enter into the narrative, thus
exploring the nature of narrative and its relation with
reality.

In all, we can say that, besides foregrounding
postmodernist concerns by the nature of the choices
within categories of discourse, Johnson complements this
with the use of the games and devices we have mentioned.
By playing these games, which draw attention to the
artifice and mechanisms of the novel, he is continually
pointing towards the surface and fabric of what becomes an autonomous artefact.
2.2. Albert Angelo

In Albert Angelo, the reader is highly aware of the use of a number of devices from the very beginning. These also highlight the nature of the narrative in a significant manner. First of all, we can again allude to the hybrid nature of this novel which also tends towards polymodality. This is not only related to the adoption of distinct modes of discourse, which does take place, but also involves the continual changing of person and tense, which highlights the nature of the choices made within any given section of the narrative. The absence of any single style or point of view is unconventional and suggests alternatives to the more conventional choices that remain within the possibilities of a single structure.

The novel is parodic in that its choices of style tend towards a variety of literary and non-literary modes of discourse, from theatrical presentation to the language of the text-book and the class room. However, more significantly, Johnson is playful in his choice of a mode which involves a kind of caricature of schoolchildren when he makes use of the school essay. Curiously, this mode is deliberately contrasted with the more official language of the school teacher, the authority of which will be undermined by the end of the novel, not only in terms of the story that is told, but at the level of diegesis, where it is their voice that is given the final word.

By making use of such a variety of modes and
perspectives the novel becomes fragmentary. Moreover, the choices that are made seem to be random, particularly with regard to the changes in tense, as there is no logical explanation for these other than that implicit in the availability of these grammatical choices. This in itself is suggestive of permutation, or the simultaneous existence of alternative forms of presentation. Permutation is further highlighted by the variety of points of view provided regarding Albert himself. Thus, play in this respect, implies a number of ontological questions as well as foregrounding the artifice and technique involved.

There is also discontinuity in the novel, brought about at one level by the fragmentation involved in the almighty aposiopesis and the disintegration of the narrative, but also by the inclusion of so many interruptions, changes in point of view and mode, the use of collage in presenting the pupils’ essays, the visual innovation of presenting the stream of consciousness of Albert on one side of the page and the spoken dialogue on the other and so on. Hence, although the aposiopesis finally disrupts the whole narrative, this has been prepared for by a tendency towards interruption throughout. These interruptions are apparently random, and the whole thing involves the short-circuit mentioned by Lodge, when the objective correlative is laid bare and reality erupts into the fictional narrative.

In the disintegration section, the process of the novel is highlighted, not only explicitly, but by
incorporating repetitions and hesitations into the supposed dialogue that takes place. Moreover, randomness is also apparent as the observations of the author sometimes go off at a tangent following what he has said previously. Thus the novel becomes a self-begetting narrative, where the writer is simultaneously writing the novel that we are reading.

The disintegration of the novel also foregrounds the nature of the objective correlative that has been used. The limitations of the analogy between the architect and the poet are suggested although we realise that this has allowed Johnson to incorporate a mise en abyme into the novel, as the way in which the architect looks for form and significance parallels the task of the author. At the same time, the entire logic of the novel is undermined as its disintegration is a deliberate and forthright retraction which leaves us with the ruins of an incomplete structure. This also alludes to the idea of non-performance, where the novel will not be completed except on totally artificial terms. Not only that, but the artificiality of all that has gone before is highlighted, which includes the use of imagery, to draw attention to the way in which it distances the narrative from reality. Curiously, in this respect, the continual shifts in tense and person are reminiscent of the poem "Distant Piece," and it is this distance from experience that is unacceptable for the author as he both implicitly and explicitly reminds us of it.

As in Travelling People, the author indulges in the
tactic of entering into a dialogue with the reader in order to disrupt the narrative, break the frame and highlight the artifice involved in the novel. This also draws attention to itself self-consciously as a device, and is even self-undermining, as the dialogue turns out to be a monologue, with the author highlighting the fact that every guise that is adopted, even that of the narratee, has himself behind it. This is also the point of shifting the person and tense throughout the "Exposition": although the distance between the narrative and events may vary and the nature of the experience may be transformed, there is always an author behind it all.

There are also a number of typographical innovations in the novel which further draw attention to the surface and fabric of the narrative. The use of a new kind of punctuation mark indicates the appearance of physical descriptions. These tend to be limited, subjective, even cursory, and it is suggested that this kind of description is, perhaps, a pointless exercise. The author did believe that his readers might wish to pass over these descriptions and such limitations actually become an issue in later novels like Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry.

Earlier we mentioned the simultaneous presentation of speech and stream of consciousness on different sides of the same page. As with many such devices, the attempt to be more mimetic foregrounds itself as a device and makes the reader more highly aware of the artifice involved and the distance of the narrative from reality.
This is true of including an objet trouvé in the novel too. The basic point is that the inclusion of the fortune teller’s advertisement is much more mimetic than any narrative about discovering it in the street might be. Thus, the relative distance of the narrative from reality is suggested, as well as foregrounding the relation between fiction and reality and, at the same time, the reader is made aware of the artifice involved in the narrative. Yet another typographical device is the use of holes cut into the pages in order to anticipate a later event. The holes look through to what is a description of a murder. Although we do not know who is murdered, it would seem to be Albert. As we now know, it turns out to be a narrative of the death of Christopher Marlowe, and the partial analepsis is a red herring. However, irony is involved: Albert will be murdered later. Now, this is just a new way of performing an old trick, the effect of which is to highlight the artificial nature of adumbration or foreshadowing in a narrative. Moreover, as the narrative of Marlowe’s death is an example of quotation or intertextuality, we find that the embedding of ontologically distinct layers into the narrative is foregrounded even further. In simple terms, we can say that a device foregrounds itself as a device here, thus emphasising the nature of technique in the novel. Once again the paradox occurs: the more highly mimetic the device is, the more artificial it would seem within the narrative structure as it does not conform to conventional rhetoric. This, combined with the explicit
statements in the *disintegration* section, conform Johnson’s dialogue with form.

In general, we can say that *Albert Angelo* makes use of a number of unusual devices which foreground the artifice involved in writing the novel. Some of these are, paradoxically, more highly mimetic than the conventional presentation of experience in the novel, which highlights the distance between narrative and experience. Apart from that there is a tendency to undermine the conventions made use of. There is no straight use of any of them as, sometimes through juxtaposition and sometimes by other means, we are aware of their nature as devices. One occasion on which the realistic use of a convention is undermined is when the theatrical presentation of a dialogue at the beginning of the novel is parodied. Clearly, the limitations of this are foregrounded when it is considered in terms of the later section which presents the ongoing stream of consciousness of the character and the dialogue at the same time, but when the name of each speaker is followed with *said*, we are made even more aware of the author behind it all, as well as the artificiality of the mode of presentation. Thus, in this novel, we find that parody belongs to another level of gameplaying which highlights the nature of the narrative as existing in some kind of relation to convention.

On the whole, this novel is clearly self-referential, with the use of the disintegration section conforming a kind of anti-narrative, in which even the nature of the rhetorical device used is made clear: the
almighty aposiopesis. The fact that this is not new is made clear by making use of the literary term and it is significant that Johnson is highlighting the nature of the convention that he has made use of. Similarly, the idea of the omniscient and omnipotent god-like author is parodied by using the term almighty. The disintegration undermines the authority of the narrative, as does the inclusion of a variety of modes, which suggest fragmentation, randomness and permutation, all in a work which finally short-circuits itself, leaving the voice of the fictitious pupils to take over at the end. This is clearly indicative of Johnson’s desire to go against the idea of a single or official narrative or point of view.

Throughout Albert Angelo, Johnson plays games which draw attention to varying degrees of realism by adopting several different modes and by including objet trouvé and quotation. The end result is that the reader is aware of the relative distance from reality of each technique, all of which undermines the authority of the narrative, even before its disintegration at the end.
2.3. *Trawl*

We found that *Trawl* was an unusual kind of confessional autobiography, although at first sight it seemed to be fairly conventional. However, there was a good deal of alteration within categories of discourse and we can state that there are many more playful aspects which are suggestive of its postmodernist concerns. For example, the novel tends towards indeterminacy and fragmentation, as the way in which the narrator recalls his past is full of hesitations, repetitions and interruptions, as well as being tentative in making statements about the past. He speaks in terms of what might have been, or draws attention to the way in which later experience has altered his attitudes towards the past. This curiously wrests a good deal of authority from the narrative, as the result is that the narrator reminds the reader that he has been unsuccessful in providing reasons for his present solitude, there are only happenings. This might be seen as a form of retraction as the novel actually sets out to provide just such reasons. Therefore, the novel could be said to fail, or break down in its attempt, thus, as we said, undermining the authoritative nature of the narrative.

If *Trawl* is a kind of autobiography, it is not typical. In fact, we earlier drew attention to the fact that there was a variety of modes made use of in the novel, varying from autobiographical confession to anecdotes, jokes, a poem, the description of
photographs, and a large part of the novel which resembles a kind of journal or ship's log. The tendency towards one or other of these modes depends a good deal on whether we are reading the simultaneous or ulterior narrations, which in itself is suggestive of alterations in this respect. More than that, the novel belongs to a number of traditions, particularly those suggested by Melville and Conrad, as well as being a psychological journey, a quest in search of the self, a kind of portrait of the artist and a self-begetting novel. Thus, while there tends to be little parody of specific works, we can speak of it in generic terms, as the modes which are made use of are seriously contested by their being juxtaposed with one another in a way which highlights their several limitations. However, we can also talk of parody at a more specific level: Trawl is Johnson's Odyssey and it could be argued that, in a manner not unlike Joyce before him, Johnson uses an epic voyage in order to structure the narrative, with the themes of quest, discovery and returning home all being involved. Of course, there is a kind of inversion involved with the hero being sick continually, the sordidness of some of his reminiscences and his failure to account for his loneliness at the end. However, the parallel is a valid one, and deliberately put there by Johnson, who, in a manner which contests the epic as such, gives us his personal and postmodernist version, a journey which takes place within the psyche of the individual, where overcoming obstacles in order to return home is no longer suggestive of fulfillment, resolution and
consolation.

From this it is clear that the narrative is a kind of hybrid, which, as it is continually interrupted by sickness or trawling, is a fragmentary series of disjointed narratives, often arranged in a random and arbitrary order which reflects the nature of memory. Curiously the effect of the fragmentation in the novel is that it becomes like a kind of collage with the past reminiscences, which appear in random order, being arbitrarily superimposed on the simultaneous narrative of the ship's journey. Therefore, while a number of conventions and a number of traditions are adhered to, the continual shifting from one to another becomes part of the playful element in the novel, which foregrounds the nature of the narrative.

We said that, at the end of the novel, there is a kind of retraction which undermines any authority the narrative might have had by admitting that the reasons for the narrator's present state have not been explained. This is anticipated by the way in which a number of modes of discourse are made use of and contested, and is related to the use of imagery in the novel. The whole thing tries to undermine the tendency to look for and impose meaning and the way in which imagery is used foregrounds this anthropomorphic tendency in man. Earlier, we mentioned the poem which draws attention to this by stating that the sea is neither friendly nor cruel but that these are impressions imposed on it by man. Curiously, the fact that Johnson makes use of the image throughout the novel
to represent the past and his memories may be considered in this light to be self-undermining. However, the way in which it signifies here is to indicate the randomness involved in remembering, like trawling, and the lack of objective significance in the past. Thus, imagery is foregrounded explicitly in the novel in a way that suggests the limitations of its use. An example of this is the following, "The jazz of those 78s runs through my head like the . . . . . never mind the image, the thing itself, that is important" (183). Here, we have an example of non-performance where the distance between the thing itself and its narration is highlighted. A similar effect is achieved when the narrator, in a form of retraction, draws attention to the unsuitability of his images with phrases like "not a good image" (178).

Once more, in this novel, Johnson writes about the inside of his own skull and in order to highlight the processes involved there, imagery is made use of in the form of the deliberate parallels that are set up between trawling and remembering and writing. Thus these processes, when they are described, are like mises en abyme which thematise the process of writing in what is, after all, a self-begetting novel. The use of imagery and symbol, then, is deliberately obvious in order to draw attention to the nature of the narrative technique, but the whole is undermined when the final emphasis is on the fact that all is chaos.

Johnson thematises the writing process in this novel by creating the parallels we mentioned between trawling, remembering and writing, and, at the same
time, due to the hybrid nature of the work, we are aware of how he explores the borderline between autobiography and fiction. The point would seem to be that it is impossible to avoid fictionalising one's past, and the authority of the narrative is contested, not only by the retraction at the end, but by the tendency of the novel to become random and fragmentary. In fact, the novel embodies a fundamental paradox: while it makes use of analogy and imagery to suggest form and significance, these are undermined throughout as the novel breaks up into fragments. Just how random it all is is suggested at the beginning when he writes, "There, something to start me, from nowhere" (11), while contingency is implicit in the continual use of may be or likely to be, among other expressions, which undermine the existence of causality. At the same time, the novel is full of aposioposes, or interruptions, which also embody retractions, denying the relevance of what he is doing: "What bloody relevance has a sodding lardy cake to me now?" (105). In fact, if we consider the principles that the novel itself lays down for itself: discipline, order, clarity, truth; these are continually undermined by such interruptions, and we find that the novel is self-contesting.

If we return briefly to the principles of rhetoric laid down by the novel, it becomes clear that Trawl is, in fact, anti-rhetorical as it is undisciplined, disordered, and fails to achieve clarity and truth, tending towards hesitation, repetition, interruption, and so on, all of which foregrounds the narrative
process, but in a way which is suggestive of making it up as he goes along, led by the random dictates of his memory. In fact, there is no sense of having arrived at a final explanation for his loneliness in the novel, as the end result is permutation, with a variety of possible alternatives as to how things happened being left unresolved.

As far as typographical devices are concerned, the novel introduces a varying number of dots to indicate moments of non-performance, blanks or silences. Once more, these are kinds of interruptions which draw attention to the idea of process in the novel as well as suggesting the breakdown of coherence. Thus the fragmentary nature of the narrative is further foregrounded, which is intended to reflect the way in which his past resolves itself into a series of disconnected happenings which resist the imposition of meaning.

Along with this use of dots, Johnson also attempted to mimic the rhythm of the sea with his language, as well as shortening the length of the line to give the novel a long narrow format on the page like the trawl net. This is a visual representation of the trawling image for the way in which the mind works and remembers, with the dots on the page probably representing the ones that got away (fish that escape or forgotten memories) from the long narrow net of the trawl. Of course, the mimesis is undermined by the way in which these devices draw attention to themselves.

In fact, the whole thing is intended to undermine
itself as the narrator avoids a final resolution and
draws attention to the inevitability of solipsism,
returning inevitably to the I. In a sense, this is a
kind of non-performance too, which parallels the
inability or refusal of the narrator to recount certain
parts of his past, suggested by the dots and blanks, and
the pain involved in recounting others. Finally, we can
say that the games Johnson plays in Trawl foreground the
nature of his technique, drawing attention to the
limitations of narrative in that form and significance
are seen to be imposed and therefore distance the
narrative from reality. Thus, even in autobiography, the
tendency is towards artifice and fabrication. Johnson,
both implicitly and explicitly, draws our attention to
the fact that narrative can only provide a simulacrum,
and once more undermines the idea of the authoritative
narrative.
2.4. *The Unfortunates*

Obviously, the most striking thing about *The Unfortunates* is the way in which it attempts to reflect the randomness of the way in which the mind of the author works as he remembers a dead friend on the day when he goes round the city where he knew him to report on a football match. The loose sections, the presentation in a box, and the instructions to the reader that he can shuffle all but the first and last sections into any order, are supposedly a physical tangible metaphor for the random workings of the mind and of cancer, but they are also a constant reminder of their own nature as devices, so that the attempts of the novel to be more mimetic result in our increased awareness of the artificiality of the devices made use of, even when, in this case, these do come closer to representing the randomness we mentioned. This makes us more aware of the nature of the book as artefact and also of the gap that exists between the narrative and experience.

However, at the same time, this does come closer to representing the random workings of the mind as it intends. Although there are anomalies in the narrative which involve logical impossibilities like catching a bus after getting off it, and all within the simultaneous present, the novel reflects the way in which the memory we have of the past is affected by posterior knowledge. The novel does bring about random and different juxtapositions in a way that dramatises
what Nicolas Tredell calls the "fabula/syuzhet distinction" (1985 35), so that fresh juxtapositions can be produced by rearranging the material which create new possibilities for pathos and irony. Not only that, but our attitude to what is narrated can change depending on the information that has previously been made available to us.

Another effect which comes from this device is that the reader participates in the composition of the novel. In this respect, we can say that Johnson allows the reader access to his material prior to arranging it so that it is we who have to go through the process of composition. This further dramatises the effect of simultaneity or the double-take, which we appreciate when different pieces of information are juxtaposed and also forces the reader to recreate the way in which the mind works in order to give order and significance to experience. In other words, the novel allows permutation, not so much in terms of what takes place, but in terms of the way in which our attitudes to information can be changed by ordering it in a different way. In fact, the whole thing turns into a kind of montage where it is the reader who becomes involved in ordering the material, once more pointing to the randomness and artificiality of any relations which might be imposed.

The Unfortunates is not unlike Trawl in that it tends towards randomness, indeterminacy, fragmentation and permutation, but not only for the loose ordering of the sections. In a sense, Johnson reverts back to an
exploration of the same kind of epistemological problems as Virginia Woolf when she also attempted to reflect the workings of the mind on a given day, and the novel tends to continually interrupt and question itself. In fact, we could call the mood of The Unfortunates interrogative as it continually hesitates and questions the veracity of the assertions it makes, with phrases like was that it, was it and so on, so that the past becomes something indeterminate. Similarly, we find that the novel questions the legitimacy of imagery, foregrounding its choices of metaphor and simile, by referring to their aptness, or not, and sometimes reverting to non-performance, or retraction when the narrator either fails to find an appropriate image or questions that appropriateness: for example: "the mind as a think of an image Two days I was ill" (The estates 5). Once again, the point of imagery is challenged, and the novel as a whole, by doing this, foregrounds the distinction between the narrative and what is described. That is, it installs and subverts the tendency towards the objective correlative, or the desire to see everything in terms of something else. Moreover, we see, in the example, how the gaps and silences are included in order to highlight the nature of the work as process rather than product.

However, this is not the only way that the gap between narrative and reality is put across in the novel. Again we find a series of hesitations, interruptions, aposiopeses and digressions which allow the narrator to question the validity of what he is
doing. In fact, phrases like **what use such speculation?**; **but what is relevant?**; **why do reasons matter?**; and so on, recur throughout the novel, and can be considered as a series of retractions which are culminated at the end of the narrative when Johnson writes:

> The difficulty is to understand without generalization, to see each piece of received truth, or generalization, as true only if it is true for me, solipsism again, I come back to it again, and for no other reason.

> In general, generalization is to lie, to tell lies. ("Last" 6)

Here, in a rather paradoxical affirmation, Johnson makes it clear that fabrication is inevitable, questioning the point of what he does, but finding that there is no alternative to it. In a sense, comments such as these do the opposite of what the realistic novel did: rather than try to persuade the reader of verisimilitude, and in spite of taking a step closer towards a new kind of realistic presentation, Johnson suggests that he is able only to allude to reality but not represent it.

The loose sections of the novel are representative of the fragmentary and indeterminate nature of experience and due to their random ordering permutation is made possible. This is also paralleled by the continual questioning that we mentioned earlier all of which denies the possibility of their being any authoritative version of the past events. As he writes at one point: "how I try to invest anything connected with him now with as much rightness, sanctity, almost,
as I can, how the fact of his death influences every
memory of everything connected with him" ("At least
once" 1); which suggests to what extent the past has
been distorted by his present knowledge of Tony's death.

However, it is not only the knowledge of his death
that affects the nature of the past but the nature of
language itself. The novel plays a good deal with
different kinds of discourse and continually foregrounds
the fact that language itself moulds and shapes reality.
In a previous section we considered the following
example: "His cheeks sallowed and collapsed round the
insinuated bones, the gums, shrivelled, was it, or
shrunken" ("First" 1); which highlights the extent to
which physical descriptions can become clichés or
formulaic as it is the choice of word in the context
rather than the extent to which it reflects reality that
is highlighted. In fact, this ties in with an important
mise en abyme in the novel, which is the writing of the
newspaper report. In it we find Johnson struggles to
avoid clichés, but inevitably falls into them, and in
this connection we find: "Does this bloody reporting
affect, destroy even, my own interest in language,
sometimes I feel I have misplaced perhaps, not lost,
something through this reporting" ("The pitch" 8). At
the same time the tendency to make use of different
modes of discourse, ranging from medical and religious
language in explaining the nature of the cancer, to the
journalistic style of the newspaper report, all points
to the way in which language shapes reality. If we link
this to the desire to avoid generalisation, we find that
it is language itself which is foregrounded in its role of making everything slot into already existing categories.

The novel makes use of different styles and the indeterminate, random structure allows us to consider it as a kind of hybrid. We can see it almost as a game in one sense, purely for its own sake when we consider the inclusion of the instructions for reading it. However, for these reasons and because of the continual questioning and searching for the appropriate phrase that we find, both in the novel as a whole and in the mise en abyme of the composition of the match report, the novel highlights the way in which the author explores the different possibilities of language in an attempt to come close to reflecting reality. However, even the choice of words becomes an almost arbitrary process which, due to the hybrid nature of the work happens within a number of different modes of discourse. Johnson plays with these and thus language foregrounds itself as what really shapes reality, denying the possibility of there being any authoritative version of the truth. Even the inclusion of the obvious literary pun about Alexander dragging his slow length along in the finished newspaper report foregrounds the way in which language becomes artificial and autonomous. On top of this, we have the narrator’s own refutation of his authority at the end by saying that all is chaos and that generalisation and hence falsification is inevitable.

Once again, in The Unfortunates, Johnson
deliberately foregrounds narrative technique, even to the extent of suggesting the autonomous nature of language and its being separate from reality. The fragmentation, indeterminacy and randomness of the novel, are those of a mind trying to discover form and significance, but, even more significantly, we find that this ordering of events in our minds in the hope of encountering significance becomes like a gratuitous game. This gratuitousness and the luck involved in coming up with any significant combination of episodes underlies this deliberately designed unofficial biography. It has no authority as even the reader may rearrange its parts. It has no authority because death has distorted everything. This is the significance of Johnson writing the following: "But it is hard, hard, not to try to understand, even for me, who accept that all is nothing, that sense does not exist" ("For recuperation" 2). This is a final retraction which, combined with the foregrounding of all artifice that attempts to give order and significance to experience, avoids the consolation that might be expected of what appears to be a kind of elegy: "yes how the mind arranges itself, tries to sort things into orders, is perturbed if things are not sorted, are not in the right order, nags away." ("In Southwell" 1).
This statement is directed at a reader who is involved in an attempt to create such order, almost as in a jigsaw puzzle with instructions, and it is this desire for order and significance that Johnson dramatises in this novel. However, the statement itself and the
technique of the novel undermine any such attempts, and emphasise the degree to which any such order and significance is artificial.
2.5. House Mother Normal

House Mother Normal also plays a number of games with the reader as we try to piece together the various streams of consciousness of the old people to find out what really happens during the social evening, as if this novel were also a kind of puzzle. Once again, indeterminacy is the result as there are many gaps in each section which lead to a great deal of supposition on the part of the reader. However, the facts become clear following the section dedicated to House Mother (normal), although irony is the result of paying attention to her official version of the events, which totally ignores the inner lives of the patients. The use of a number of different consciousnesses also results in permutation, as the ontologically distinct worlds of each of the inmates is revealed to us. The whole thing becomes even more ironic when the House Mother steps outside the predispositions of the novel to reveal her awareness of her role as a character in order to short-circuit the whole thing by testifying to the fact that it all takes place within the mind of the author.

The House Mother parodies the role of the narrator, and for that reason Johnson sets her up as the source of the authoritative or official version of the events that take place. As she does not consider the old people's inner lives and mistakenly believes that her antics prevent them from being disgusted with themselves, the reader begins to doubt the reliability of this narrator, with the result that Johnson basically undermines the
concept of the reliable narrator as such, who tends to impose a particular vision on experience anyway. Thus, while the novel moves towards the reader’s appreciation of the truth as told by the House Mother, it involves a final retraction which undermines the House Mother’s reliability as she admits that she too is only a figment of the author’s imagination. What we should take from this, in effect, is that any authoritative point of view in a narrative is fictitious and artificial.

*House Mother Normal* is a kind of montage which provides a series of different but simultaneous points of views of the same events. The technique adopted by the author to achieve this semblance of simultaneous presentation (each line on each page corresponds to the same moment in time) is a step towards a greater degree of mimesis, but, paradoxically, the effect is one of artificiality although it does draw attention to the great difference that exists between each point of view, as well as to the reductive and general nature of the House Mother’s official version.

The parodic nature of the House Mother extends to her becoming almost a caricature of the typical eighteenth or nineteenth century narrator of realistic fiction who virtually leads the reader by the hand, ingratiating herself to us by calling us friend, and effectively patronising us. This was something which was to be parodied again in Johnson’s following novel, but here we find how this attempt to persuade the reader of the verisimilitude of what is described is totally undermined by the short-circuit at the end. While the
novel begins as a form of persuasion, it ends with a retraction which, although it wrests credence from the House Mother, ironically makes the streams of consciousnesses of the old people more convincing. It is curious, moreover, that it is the House Mother herself who installs and then subverts her own discourse, her own authoritative voice.

There is yet another authoritative voice in the novel which we referred to in a previous section, which is that of the clinical records. After the fashion of the House Mother’s discourse, the records are reductive and general and do not allow for the individual private and inner lives of the patients. Much like The Unfortunates, this novel also sees generalisation as falsification, so that implicitly, and later explicitly, with the retraction, the authority of these versions of the events is undermined. Although the individual voices of each of the characters are not fully realised in the novel, because of the variety of points of view presented and the changes in mode of discourse, we find that this novel is also a kind of hybrid which tends towards fragmentation and indeterminacy. In fact the whole thing is geared towards the undermining of the official voice which appears at the outset, and while this is done explicitly by the House Mother herself, the amount of space afforded to the patients, and the variety and richness and even authenticity of their experience suggest that the House Mother’s version will be nothing if not limited.

The House Mother enters into a dialogue with the
reader from the beginning and acts as a kind of guide into the minds of the characters. Her role, we said, parallels that of any narrator, while the heavy handed nature of her presentation draws attention to her fictitiousness. Basically, this parallel conforms a kind of mise en abyme of an extreme form of a narrator imposing his authority. While the parallel is deliberate, Johnson quite as deliberately allows the character to expose her fictionality and undermine her authority. As we said, this is a kind of short circuit where fiction and reality come into contact, as the House Mother draws attention to the author who is really behind it all. However, this can be seen as involving the kind of logic of the absurd which we found typical of some postmodernist narratives. In a sense, the fictional is treated as if it were real, and the distinct ontological world created by the author overlaps with reality. This breaks the frame of the narrative and thematises the relation between author and reader, which, it becomes clear, is also part of the fictional semantic context generated by the narrative. Thus we have a novel which establishes and then breaks its own conventions in order to draw attention to the nature of these conventions, destroy our suspension of disbelief and denaturalise the conventional relation between reader and narrator.

We have said that this is a playful novel as we find ourselves piecing together information as in a jigsaw puzzle. Within this puzzle there are many gaps and silences and examples of non-performance, which
increase gradually as we move on to the streams of consciousness of the more senile patients. We find that the memories of all of the characters are partial and fragmentary, as well as seeing the random way in which memories come to them and are associated with the present ongoing activities. Curiously, this is totally different from the organised monologue of the House Mother, and the contrast is deliberate. By undermining the authority of his narrator Johnson shifts the emphasis to the interior monologues of the other characters which sets them up as alternatives to the official version of the House Mother. The point that is made is that the random and fragmentary inner workings of the mind are more realistic than the organised narrative of the House Mother, or any organised narrative for that matter. In the same way as the tabular clinical records are reductive and general, any ordered form of generalisation results in telling lies. The House Mother’s monologue tells lies, and we find that the indeterminacy, fragmentation and permutation of the inmates several ontologically distinct views comes much closer to reality.

So, House Mother Normal is another novel where the games the author plays foreground his technique in order to suggest the autonomous nature of the narrative as distinct from reality. This may be emphasised by the retraction at the end of the novel which short-circuits the whole thing, but is suggested by the many devices made use of throughout. Thus, while the retraction at the end makes it clear that it is all fiction, the
reader is aware of varying degrees of fictionality, as well as appreciating that Johnson has been able to allude to the reality of suffering in the presence of death in spite of the bizarre nature of the situation, and the fictitious nature of the House Mother’s rendering of it.
2.6. Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry

The kind of games we find in Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry are suggestive of Johnson’s continuing dialogue with form, particularly as he installs and subverts the conventions of the traditional novel. This involves an element of parody, where a variety of modes are used, alluding particularly to the eighteenth century novel again with the parody of bills of fare in the chapter headings, the parody of his role as narrator, and even the thematisation through parody of the role of the reader who is involved in a dialogue with the narrator from the beginning. Even the realistic conventions of providing a naturalistic background for the characters, giving them a physical description, linking events in a chain of cause and effect leading to an inevitable final consequence are parodied by Johnson, as he observes the conventions but foregrounds and subverts them at the same time.

For example, he often disappoints the expectations created by his bills of fare by contradicting himself and refusing to provide the information he has promised, as in “Christie Described; and the Shrike created,” where Christie is not in fact described at all. There are examples of non-performance, too, when, in “A Promise Fulfilled, and Christie’s Younger Life; a Failed Chapter,” the narrative breaks down, becoming fragmentary and hesitant, and finally refuses to continue in the description of the character’s background. In fact, this parallels the failure of the
narrative to provide a logical resolution to Christie's story and is another example of the arbitrary imposition of the authorial will, which undermines the realistic convention of cause and effect.

Christie as a realistic character, as well as a narrative construct is a simple person, whose physical appearance is described only as average. His appearance is left up to the reader which, as well as being another example of non-performance, suggests indeterminacy in the novel, something which is echoed by a comment like this one: "All is chaos and unexplainable" (82). The point seems to be to move towards the observance of novelistic convention and then turn away from it, to install and then subvert it, in order to demonstrate just to what extent the imposition of form, order and significance is artificial. At the same time, the authority of the narrator is again questioned, not in terms of him being in control of the narrative, as the arbitrary interruptions and so on point out, but in terms of the way in which the validity of the order and significance imposed by him is questioned.

We find that other conventions are also subverted in the novel. The conventions for the presentation of speech, for the example, are observed to some extent although their conventional nature is foregrounded by the way in which different modes are used. For example, theatrical conventions are self-consciously introduced on one occasion, and at different times the author alludes to what will be his attempt to invent a conversation between characters. In a more
straightforward manner, the author tends to introduce attributive phrases in a way which interrupts the utterance of his characters in order to draw attention to the way in which the convention is being subverted. Thus the nature of the convention is foregrounded at the same time as he deliberately refuses to follow it.

The nature of the novel is digressive, as the narrator tends to make comments which draw attention to the fictional nature of what he is doing. Sometimes this involves comments as to the page number in the novel which foregrounds its nature as artefact, and on other occasions, it is the characters themselves who make this clear with comments as to the length of the novel, their role in it and so on.

This awareness of the characters is another example of the logic of the absurd, where we find that fictional characters act as if they were real rather than simply realistic, all of which is part of the short-circuiting of the novel as a whole, which foregrounds the relation between the fiction and reality. In a fashion not unlike that of *House Mother Normal*, this novel places characters in situations which thematise the roles of the narrator and narratee, with Christie’s mother becoming the narrator at one point in telling the story to Christie, and with the narrator addressing Christie in a dialogue which is reminiscent of the dialogue he has with the reader. Thus ontologically distinct levels overlap and we find that the fictitious nature of the relationship between author and reader is emphasised.

The narrator of this novel also alludes to the
process of creation on occasions, with the fact that he does not know what will happen next being made apparent to the reader at times. Thus the process of creation is seen as random, rather than relying on cause and effect, while the interruptions of the linear sequence to introduce more naturalistic background makes the novel more fragmentary as well as showing that the chronological sequence of cause and effect is something that does not come out of the narrative itself but is imposed later by the author. This is suggestive of an indeterminacy which can be related to the refusal to describe how events take place, or what characters look like, as well as being a consequence of the narrator simply admitting to his ignorance of how things could have happened.

The novel also involves a different kind of parody from that we have mentioned before, as the story of god, which involves a kind of religious discourse, and the tabular reckonings or accountings suggest. In fact both these discourses parallel what the novel itself is doing and can be considered as mises en abyme which thematise the process of giving order and significance to events in an authoritative manner. The novel as a whole has an almighty author creating a man and a woman who move towards a final reckoning, just as the story of the creation, and the accountings provide a reductive version of everything that takes place. What we find is that each of these narratives is fictitious and that the orders they impose are just an illusion. What Johnson does here, is to undermine the grand narratives of
religion and capitalism, but at the same time shows that any attempt to impose such order results in falsification.

The tendency to continually interrupt the narrative and incorporate the author's hesitations into it are means of foregrounding the fictitious nature of the conventions observed. These can be considered as aposiopeses, like that at the end of the failed chapter, and like that which the end of the novel itself suggests. When the story is deliberately and arbitrarily interrupted in order to impose an ending which provides no sense of resolution we find that reader expectation is disappointed and the fictitious nature of the whole thing comes once more to the surface. In a sense, Johnson wants to draw attention to the autonomous nature of all narratives and their distance from reality, not only the fiction but the grand narratives themselves. What becomes clear is that the same conventions apply in fictitious and real situations and that the same kind of artifice is involved.

The short-circuit implied in the dialogues with the characters and their awareness of their existence as characters is an absurd extrapolation of logic, and by the same token, Johnson wishes to foreground the fictitious nature of the order that religious and capitalist grand narratives impose. The intertextuality in the novel further emphasises the relation between fiction and reality as these quotations also have to do with the way in which we order experience. Thus any kind of order and significance is seen to be reductive and
artificial.

In the end, it seems that Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry, by playing these games with the reader allows the reader to consider alternatives to the authoritative narratives that tend to be imposed on him. This is so at the level of the narrative itself, when indeterminacy and non-performance allow the reader to fill in his own gaps, and perhaps even to consider an alternative ending to the arbitrary one imposed by the author. However, broadly speaking the suggestion is that there are alternatives to the authoritative grand narratives of our time which are equally fictitious. Alternatives are possible in this novel due to the permutation suggested by the participation of the reader and even by the participation of the characters who seem to have some kind of say in their future. However, the failed chapter like the arbitrary ending are a kind of retraction which suggests that all order is fabrication, and that the only reality is chaos.
2.7. See the Old Lady Decently

See the Old Lady Decently is a novel which combines many of the playful elements we have seen up to now. It is highly parodic in that it travesties the fictional novel itself as well as the history book, the guide book, with elements of autobiography, the use of quotations and even the inclusion of poetry. This is obviously a hybrid work which, with its fragmentary nature, attempts to reflect the variety and flux of experience. However, as with all his other novels, this attempt at mimesis draws attention to itself as a device, and the reader becomes aware of the nature of each technique, its possibilities and limitations, as well as discovering the artificial and sometimes random way in which the whole thing is put together.

Within some of the sections, like GB and BB in particular, we find a great number of gaps and silences, examples of non-performance, which draw attention to the process of narrative. If we consider the Virrels sections, we find that this fictional part of the narrative never reaches any kind of resolution, which further emphasises the randomness and fictitiousness of the imaginative process involved. The BB and GB sections are indeterminate in that there are many gaps which exclude mainly substantives. Johnson believed that this would lead to generality, if not universality, but really, this kind of indeterminacy foregrounds the degree to which the modes of discourse used in the sections (history text-book and guide-book) are
formulaic and embody a particular kind of ideology, moulding and transforming the nature of their material, rather than being a faithful reflection of reality.

Within the fictional sections, there is a good deal of hesitation, interruption and repetition. In simple terms this draws attention to the creative process involved, allowing opportunities for the narrator to introduce comments about his present circumstances as he writes. Essentially, artifice is foregrounded and the distance between the fictional narrative and reality is highlighted. This is also true of the inclusion of evidence from witnesses, intertextuality and the objet trouvé. These allow reality to interrupt into the narrative in order to show the distinct ontological nature of what is told and what actually happened. In fact speculation plays a large part in the novel as the narrator wonders about what might have happened on the occasion of his birth, his parents meeting and even when a photograph is taken. In the case of the photograph of his mother and her family we find that he has to impose himself on his family in order to suggest the possible circumstances of it being taken. This is so in the other factual sections too and we find that the novel plays with the ideas of what is or was and what might have been. This is foregrounded throughout the novel, and, in the end, in order to suggest some kind of order and coherence, we find that the narrative must fabricate and make use of artifice. See the Old Lady Decently, foregrounds this artifice within a number of modes of discourse, making it all the more apparent by
juxtaposing them.

Another such occasion when this kind of artifice is apparent is when the author recounts his own birth. This part of the novel clearly owes a debt to the eighteenth century novel and to Laurence Sterne in particular, and due to its obviously parodic nature highlights the way in which narrative tends to fictionalise actual experience. The overall effect of this kind of play in the text is to achieve a kind of decanonisation which draws attention to the relative degrees of artifice involved in each part of the narrative. In this way, Johnson deliberately wrests authority from any given mode, but at the same time alludes to the reality that he is unable to represent. In a sense, what happens here is that even autobiography is shown up to be a kind of sham, involving the kind of fabrication which we find in an extreme version in the Virrels sections.

In one sense, the Virrels sections of the novel, and the self-conscious digressions within them, which allude to the process of composition, are a mise en abyme for what happens in the whole novel. Thus the role of the author is thematised and the devices that are made use of are foregrounded in what is essentially a self-begetting novel. At the same time, the relation between fiction and reality is further foregrounded.

As we said, there are many gaps, blanks and examples of non-performance throughout the several sections of this novel. It is discontinuous and fragmentary and we find that it is full of gratuitous interruptions, anecdotes, and even jokes. This aspect
also highlights the artificial nature of the work and the varying degrees of reality that are embodied within it. In fact, the use of jokes, which is something that is found in an earlier novel, Albert Angelo, can in itself be seen as a kind of mise en abyme or parallel for the nature of the work as a whole, or part of it, which is to amuse or entertain.

Although much of the novel is much more serious than these jokes, on a small scale, and the Virrels sections on a larger one, there is a tendency within the novel to play games or to make jokes or even fun of respectable ideas or figures. In particular, we find that Earl Haig, whom Johnson holds personally responsible for much of the suffering that took place during the first world war, is made to look like some kind of ogre. One of the ways in which this is done is to involve the reader in a game of mnemonics, where the letters of Haig's name stand for words which represent the kind of pain and suffering that he brought about. For example:

Here's a very little puzzle then:
hatred anguish indescribable grieving
(95)

This kind of thing is interwoven throughout the novel to form part of the collage and to continually remind the reader of the suffering that took place in what is a very immediate and visual manner.

Visual techniques abound in the poem, including the concrete poems which represent the growing breasts and therefore the developing potential for motherhood of the
author's mother. At the same time, cancer which kills her is subtly introduced by the inclusion of a couple of the letters which form the word. While this attempts to represent the random workings of cancer in a visual form, again we find that the artificial nature of the device is also foregrounded. Apart from this Johnson tends to include a number of letters as headings to each section which seem to form part of some code that the reader has to break. While the significance of letters like V for Virrels and GB for Greater Britain is clear, many others are not. The point would seem to be to draw attention to the existence of some underlying scheme of things which the reader was to be aware of without it being necessary for him to understand it completely. In the end, it provides a kind of game element which alludes to the process of giving order, form and significance to experience in an artificial manner.

When we consider this novel as a whole, the tendency is to see it as a rather hybrid and fragmentary collage of different modes of narrating the reality of a given period of time. The way in which these are juxtaposed suggests that none of them has any authority and in fact, by parodying the history and guide book, the novel, playfully, tends to undermine the authority of the grand narratives of that period of history. We find that there are alternatives to the official narratives which are foregrounded as highly artificial, although these alternatives themselves are equally fictitious. The positive element in the novel is that even fiction can be seen as an alternative and a
complement to the lies that the history books tell us of the glory of war. The novel, then, is able to allude to the truth of Johnson's mother's experience although it is unable to depict it accurately. Fiction, on a rare occasion in Johnson's work, is looked on as a more reliable alternative to the grand narratives of society, although it would seem to be the effect of the whole rather than any specific part of the novel which allows him to allude to truth. In the end, it is permutation and indeterminacy which prevails as the continual hesitations, repetitions and non-performances suggest.

The devices made use of in this novel tend to foreground themselves as such in order to suggest the autonomous nature of the narrative. The effect of introducing the intertextuality and objet trouvé is to highlight this point. As a kind of montage or collage made up of fragments of different kinds we find that the lack of authority of any single piece of information is also highlighted. In fact, it becomes clear that there are varying degrees of authenticity as regards the information presented, although there is artifice in the manner of its presentation throughout. Again, the idea that there is no single authoritative version of truth is denied in favour of an attempt to reflect the flux of experience. Of course, the artifice involved in representing this has already been alluded to.

Johnson continually plays with the reader by shifting and changing within categories and modes of discourse, often interrupting what he is doing in a random fashion to show just to what extent the whole
thing is an artificial construct. When, in the Virrels' sections the narrative is interrupted to introduce comments by the author about his circumstances during the composition of the novel, a kind of short-circuit takes place which forces the reader to consider the relation between reality and fiction. The same is true of the use of the objet trouvé, the intertextuality and the tape recording of his father's testimony. This makes it clear just to what extent realism is possible and the degree to which artifice is inevitable. This is particularly so in, what we might call a number of retractions throughout the novel, when Johnson refers to the fact that he has very little to go on, and that much of his mother's life is a closed book to him.

Related to this is the fact that much of the novel is recounted in the simultaneous present, which draws attention to the fact that the only reality available to the novelist is the act of narration itself, which he continually foregrounds. In the end, Johnson's novels are about this rather than anything else: they are about the relation between narrative and reality and the degree to which artifice must always be involved.

See the Old Lady Decently is a hybrid novel which foregrounds the degree to which every narrative, even biography, must be indeterminate. We find the randomness of composition and of memory, the permutation of different possible occurrences and different possible modes of presentation, which, in themselves alter and transform the nature of the experiences they recount. By mixing fact and fiction, Johnson shows to what extent
the narration of both are governed by the same conventions, and we see just how much artifice is inevitably involved in narrative. The games that are played in the novel are designed to draw attention to this artifice and make us more aware of the autonomous nature of the narrative artefact, as well as of the limitations of biography.

From all of this, it should be clear that B.S. Johnson deliberately plays a number of games to make the reader aware of the autonomous nature of narrative. The degree to which artifice is imposed by the conventions of a number of modes of discourse and results in distortion and fabrication is made clear. Narrative technique is highlighted and the distance between the narrative and experience becomes apparent. This is the point that Johnson wishes to make, that the novel can only provide a simulacrum for what experience might have been. Thus the games that B.S. Johnson plays involve what Jakobson would call the poetic function of language, drawing attention to themselves for its own sake, although it would be more accurate to say that they perform part of the metanarrative function, which foregrounds narrative technique in order to show to what extent the narrative is an autonomous artefact which inevitable shapes and structures experience.
Conclusion

It has been a long road, but from all that has been said it should be clear that novel and postmodern are analogous and many of the misunderstandings about the work of B.S. Johnson should have been cleared up. The general discussion of the history and ideology of the novel has shown that it is an openended, antihierarchical and antitradiational form which develops continually in terms of its relation to and its understanding of realism. For this reason, we have been able to go beyond historical, convergent and osmotic views of the novel in order to conclude that it is a form of oppositional discourse, which, while it always bears some relation to tradition and convention, its contemporary nature means that it tends to develop in terms of its new attitudes towards realism, manifested in its hybrid nature as it incorporates different kinds of discourse, both literary and non-literary, the new and the old. This has always been so with the novel, and with the advent of postmodernism, the story does not change, with the novel doing the same kind of things but in a more informed and less innocent manner and also to a different end.

One of the aims of much postmodernist fiction, and of the novels of B.S. Johnson in particular, is to show that all narratives are fictions, that they are made objects, to foreground their artificial nature and the fact that they must involve some degree of fabrication. However, these are considerations that have always been
implicit in the novel as such and have been prepared for throughout its historical development: that is to say, we have found that the self-conscious and self-reflexive element in the postmodernist novel exists in its predecessors: in other words, the novel is about its own coming into being against a background of something else, but in the case of the postmodernist novel, that coming into being is foregrounded to the utmost.

One of the aims of this study was to make it clear just how narratives are framed and how their predispositions depend on the choices made within a fixed set of narratological categories or possibilities which are common to all novels. This has been done, and we have seen how the postmodernist novel tends to undermine reader expectation as regards these predispositions, tending towards playfulness and the breaking of the frame; incorporating the alternatives which take it beyond the limits of the single structure. At the same time, the way in which the predispositions of a narrative are governed by mode and analogy has also been made clear, so that alterations in these areas will result in changes at other levels of discourse. Clearly, the high incidence of alterations in the postmodernist novel in any category results in the foregrounding of the techniques which have been made use of and they therefore have a metafictional function within the text.

In terms of story we have also found that a variety of possibilities are available to the author and that in the postmodernist narratives of B.S. Johnson the tendency is to substitute causality with the arbitrary
will of the author, avoid physical description and allow suspension of disbelief to lapse. Even plot tends to be subject to rather obvious analogies which foreground the inner workings of the novel. While we can state that any choice in a narrative is for the purposes of that particular novel, Johnson foregrounds this, sometimes through overt statement, but generally through a subversive treatment of what have been seen to be the codes of verisimilar discourse.

The games that authors can play were also considered and it was found that there was no real innovation on the part of B.S. Johnson except perhaps at the level of typographical devices which tend to foreground the nature of the novel as artefact. However, it was also made clear that the typographical and other innovations in this area tended to further highlight the basic paradox inherent in much of Johnson’s narrative, which is that any device used in order to achieve a higher degree of mimesis tends to be, ironically, foregrounded because of its artificiality. In fact this relation between mimesis and artifice forms a basic aspect of Johnson’s work. In broader terms, games are found to belong not to the poetic but to the metanarrative function of the text, highlighting the surface and the artifice involved in the narrative: that is, the end of game-playing in postmodernist narrative is not solely for its own sake, but to foreground the narrative technique itself.

By making use of a common model for the analysis of more traditional and more innovative narratives, we
have found that the postmodernist novel tends towards a high incidence of alterations and transgressions in categories of discourse, which is paralleled by a similar incidence of what have been called anti-rhetorical, or anti-stylistic devices. It is no surprise then that Johnson tends to write and then rewrite his novels, presenting the narrative and the metanarrative, installing and subverting his own text in a deliberate fashion in order to highlight the very artifice that has been used to make and then unmake it. However, rather than being a self-defeating purpose, what his narratives do is inform us precisely about the only reality he believes we can truly know: the rules and conventions that allow us to tell ourselves, the process that we go through in order to articulate experience and the inevitable falsification that occurs. However, the fact that reality is unpresentable and that any attempt to give it form and coherence results in illusion or fiction does not prevent this author from alluding to the same. In fact his work is typically postmodernist in that, while it undermines the authoritative text, it allows for alternatives, very often incorporating these alternatives within itself. Thus what appears to be an admission of defeat is very often an allusion to or an acknowledgement of the existence of a reality which eludes the text.

In general terms, it is for this reason that postmodernist texts in general, and B.S. Johnson in particular tend to avoid the single choice and incorporate alternatives into their narratives. This
leads to the defamiliarisation of the choices made and
draws attention to the conventions that have been
adhered to or broken. Thus the frame and artifice are
foregrounded, something that tended to be avoided in the
traditional novel which tended towards persuasion and
suspension of disbelief, an aspect of which involved
this keeping within the single structure.

This tendency to incorporate alternatives within
the same structure, something that has been called
permutation, also affects the use of mode and analogy,
the governing principles of the novel. In traditional
narrative the tendency was to write according to a
single mode, biography or autobiography, for example,
although other modes might be incorporated within the
same structure. In terms of analogy, we have seen that
traditional narratives tended towards a use of typical
analogies taken from literary tradition and often from
nature itself. However, the novel as such has been seen
to have always been a hybrid, and with the advent of
postmodernism, the range of modes and analogies has been
extended, and we often find that a variety of modes are
made use of within the same narrative. Moreover, when we
consider the idea of appropriateness or proportion,
postmodernist narratives tend to subvert our ideas of
these, sometimes by introducing discourse which is not
appropriate in the context, or shifting from one mode to
another in an exaggerated manner. The effect of this is
to undermine our appreciation of the authority of the
discourses used, which is part of the nature of
postmodernist narrative as such, as well as
foregrounding the fact that choices in this area are not inevitable but that alternatives are always available. Moreover, by making such use of a variety of modes and extending the range of analogies, the artificial nature of each is highlighted. While traditional novels implied the inevitability and appropriateness of the modes and analogies used, postmodernist novels make it clear that the choice of mode affects the nature of the experiences narrated, moulding and transforming them, and while the discourse used might allude to the true nature of the experience, fabrication is inevitable.

Thus the postmodernist novel indicates a new attitude towards realism and tends to question the reliability of narratives. In fact, the tendency is to take the process of writing itself as the only reality that can be represented by the writer. So the postmodernist novel foregrounds process at the expense of product, and B.S. Johnson's theme tends to be the nature of narratives as such and how they transform experience.

From all that has been said, it is clear that Johnson writes oppositional discourse, an oppositional discourse that questions the authority of narratives, even his own, for which reason we can call his novels the oppositional discourse of unbelief. They always involve a dialogue with the novel form as such and draw attention to the nature of its techniques and devices in order to highlight to what extent reality is shaped and transformed by them. The traditional novel was not ignorant of the problem of referentiality which is why
it became a form of persuasion, borrowing from a variety of modes of discourse in order to create suspension of disbelief. The postmodernist author, on the contrary, while he makes use of the same materials, rejects any attempts at persuasion in order to make us aware of the autonomous nature of narrative. Tradition and convention are there, but they are foregrounded and contested in order to make us aware of their nature.

It should be clear that the novel, as oppositional discourse tends towards carnivalisation. This is also true of the postmodernist novel although the tendency is for it to emphasise these elements of carnival, so that there is a higher degree of playfulness, fragmentation, the flouting of authority and so on. The postmodernist text makes it clear just to what extent narrative is governed by traditions and conventions which are used in an informed manner precisely in order to make us aware of their nature. Essentially, there is a process of defamiliarisation in such texts, which while they make use of the same materials and take advantage of the same possibilities as their more traditional counterparts, they do so in a parodic manner which creates a dialogue with the past, installing but at the same time subverting the conventional rhetoric. Rather than looking through the referential text to some world beyond, the postmodernist text draws attention to the frame and surface to make us aware of the autonomous nature of the narrative, so that we can understand the nature of the novel as artefact.

We can say, then, that carnivalisation is an
aspect of the novel which is overdetermined in postmodernist narrative. Typographical innovations and a use of what can be called anti-style or anti-rhetoric, which involves a high degree of parodic elements are involved here in order to make the postmodernist text much more overtly playful. But the kinds of games we find in the postmodernist novel are also subversive, as we often find non-performance and retraction as a part of it, in order to deliberately disappoint reader expectation in a way which further defamiliarises the conventions that have been played with.

The subversive element in B.S. Johnson's work leads him to deny authority even to his own narratives, but on a broader scale we can see how he also challenges the authority of the grand narratives of western culture, particularly religious and capitalist discourses, although authoritative narratives in general, including history and autobiography are also contested as being artificial fictions like any other narrative.

The discussion of the history and ideology of both novel and postmodernism has shown just to what extent they are similar and we can now state that they are both forms of oppositional discourse, but that postmodernist narrative is the oppositional discourse of unbelief, deliberately contesting the authority of narrative as it inevitably shapes and transforms its material.

Both novel and postmodern are tied to tradition and convention, but postmodernist narratives tend to contest these traditions and conventions while they must
also inevitably make use of them. The use of a new working model for the analysis of narrative has allowed us to point out just to what extent the same possibilities and variables are common to all narratives, and how the postmodernist novel simply takes advantage of alternatives that have always been available to the novelist and which have been made use of before but not to the same degree. The postmodernist novels of B.S. Johnson differ from the traditional novel in that they avoid persuasion and their mood is questioning. Johnson always avoids the authoritative text and always allows for the alternatives. His novels make it clear that there is no official single structure or discourse which is made clear by his tendency towards alterations and transgressions throughout his narratives, which are part of the metafictional aspect of his work, whose end is to defamiliarise the artifice involved in all narratives.

B.S. Johnson has taken the possibilities of the novel form further, but the basic paradox involved in his work is that all attempts to provide a more mimetic form of narrative result in the foregrounding of the artifice involved in the use of the device. We should now better understand that he did not simply and gratuitously knock down the houses of fiction he constructed, but drew attention to the inevitable fabrication involved in them. He admits the possibility of alternatives to his own narrative, but, at the same time, seriously alludes to the unrepresentable. However, one of the points he is making, is to contest the idea
of authoritative narratives which presume to present the unpresentable.

B.S. Johnson embodies those elements that we can consider as typical of the novel and we can see his work as progressing in such a way that he exploits the possibilities of novel rather than of postmodernism. That is to say, the postmodernist novel is a result of development in the novel form, and not of the imposition of a new ideology upon it. It should now be clear, then, that the postmodernist turn of B.S. Johnson is a result of his having pushed the possibilities of the novel in a particular direction. This enables us to state that the postmodernist novel is a result of the development of the possibilities of the novel in the light of contemporary ideology, which has always been the nature of the novel. The basic paradox that lies at the heart of postmodernism and postmodernist narrative in particular has also been cleared up, that is to say, that it is inextricably linked to convention and tradition and must always be considered in the light of it. In fact, in postmodernist narrative, innovation consists in the particular use of existing conventions, traditions and possibilities, which is something that the novel has always tended to do, so that we can say that, as oppositional discourse, the ideology of the novel, at its most profound, is that of postmodernism.

By studying the novels of B.S. Johnson we have become aware of the autonomous nature of all fictions as they shape and transform experience. He alludes to reality, while pointing out the gap that exists between
reality and narrative, highlighting the manner in which the narrative is framed, and foregrounding technique in order to make it clear just to what extent fabrication is inevitable. In fact, his novels show that it is only possible to provide a simulacrum of experience and that there are always alternative forms of presentation.

B.S. Johnson’s novels are a continual dialogue with form which involves a particular use of tradition and convention, which are always implicit in narrative. His is the oppositional discourse of unbelief which challenges the authority of the official grand narratives of our culture showing to what extent they too are fabrications. He does this by taking advantage of the possibilities that are inherent to the novel form as such, taking it in a particular direction to exploit what he believed the novel is best at. The postmodernist novel, then, is the oppositional discourse of unbelief although, while it grows out of the novel, it has a different relation with realism and reality.
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