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TRAVELS WITH EINSTEIN:
THE UNEASY RELATIVITY OF MODERNIST TRAVELOGUES

By

Michelle Lynne Veenstra

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ABSTRACT

TRAVELS WITH EINSTEIN: THE UNEASY RELATIVITY OF MODERNIST TRAVELOGUES

By

Michelle Lynne Veenstra

The travelogue is a subgenre of modernist travel writing that represents how relativity, as a physical, cultural, and psychological concept, intensifies and complicates the significance of the traveler-narrator's idiosyncratic perspective. While much modernist travel writing portrays a traveler's experiences as more subjective than objective, the lesser known travelogues analyzed in this project feature anxious moments at which this subjectivity manifests as a relative traveler-narrator who seems to narrate simultaneously from multiple locations in space and/or time. These moments extend relativity as a narrative technique to an extreme that illustrates both its liberating potential to create a new kind of storytelling and its ultimate limitations, especially as a means of autobiographical representation.

As a term and technique developed by American showman Burton Holmes in 1903, the multimedia travelogue provides a model for incorporating the multiple temporalities and relative perspectives of traveler, narrator, and audience within a cohesive performance that produces a sense of immediacy, authority, and life. The written travelogues of high modernist authors from the 1920s and 1930s imitate but do not reproduce this balance between relativity, multiplicity, and authority. In so doing, these texts show the influence of Einstein's theories, producing representations of travel that enact or meditate on such concepts as an expansive present moment, the relativity of simultaneity, the speed of light, and the curvature of space-time. Both Gertrude Stein and

Vita Sackville-West invoke Einstein's theories, and their travelogues, *Everybody's Autobiography* and *Passenger to Teheran*, emphasize how the concept of relativity provides an appealing metaphor for experimental representations of the human interaction with space and time. In contrast, Ford Madox Ford's travelogue *New York Is Not America* resists the relativity he encounters in his representation of traveling in America, depicting his view of this nation as analogous to Prussia and a sinister fourth dimension. For each travelogue, close readings of such moments of relativity are combined with analysis of primary documents such as letters and newspaper articles to position these texts within the larger context of the authors' work and attitudes to literary representation. Much as Einstein did, these travelogues ultimately apply the metaphor of relativity to the process of self-perception, producing an irresolvable paradox between the individuality of human perception and a universe governed by complex, predetermined physical laws.

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Introduction: Framing the Relative Travelogue

When one travels far one travels also in time. A week ago at this hour I was still in Brussels, but I feel separated from that time by weeks not days. In 1957 I travelled more than 44,000 miles. Is it for that reason—I began my long journeys in the 30's—that life seems to have been quite interminably long?

—Graham Greene, *In Search of a Character*

The traveler-narrator is a figure that enacts the modernist fascination and experimentation with relativity. Einstein's special theory of relativity states that all motion is relative and that the frame of reference of one observer is equally valid to that of any other observer. Given the constant speed of light, simultaneity is relative. Events that are seen to occur at the same time from one perspective – i.e., that of an observer traveling at high speed – can be seen as occurring over a longer span of time from another perspective – i.e., that of a stationary observer. Thus Graham Greene can claim that his years of traveling have seemed “interminably long” compared to what they would have felt like had he remained a largely stationary homebody. Since observers in different states of motion (or frames of reference) can have different perceptions of temporal order, neither observer can claim that his perception of events is what *actually* happened. The observer can only claim that his perception is unique to his particular spatio-temporal location and is no more or less accurate a rendition of physical events than any other perceiver's experience. This awareness of the relativity of perception undermines the single meaningfulness of the travelogue, suggesting that the traveler-narrator's perceived experiences could be seen from a perspective in which the events either make no sense or mean something completely different.

In many ways, Einstein's theories intersect with modernist literature and culture, mirroring artistic representations of the modernist world and the condition of the modernist subject. Arthur I. Miller has pointed out, for example, that between 1904 and 1908 Einstein and Picasso simultaneously grappled with new conceptions of the fourth dimension and non-Euclidean geometry, influenced by Henri Poincaré's book *La Science and l'hypothèse*, in the process developing their ground-breaking contributions to physics and art.¹ In *Einstein's Wake*, Michael H. Whitworth details many of the mutually supportive relationships and parallel developments in modernist art and science in the first two decades of the twentieth century. According to Whitworth, Einstein's ideas on simultaneity, the speed of light, and the curvature of spacetime are some of the more compelling scientific developments that authors such as Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence, and Joseph Conrad employed as thematic and structural metaphors within their fiction.

In their experimentation with and representation of such concepts, some modernist travelogues apply the attributes of relativity to the figure of the traveler-narrator, which often becomes an object seen in relation to multiple competing frames of reference. As long as the traveler-narrator can control the potential proliferation of self-representations, such multiplicity is exciting in its production of a persona that can evade the limitations of any single context or narrative structure. But it is also terrifying in its suggestion that there is no underlying stability to the physical world or any intrinsic authority to the present manifestation of the perceiving individual. If multiple versions of the traveler-narrator can coexist simultaneously, seen from an infinite number of alternative perspectives, which version is the *real* one?

¹ See Arthur I. Miller, *Einstein, Picasso: Space, Time, and the Beauty that Causes Havoc*. New York: Basic Books, 2001.

Modernist travelogues represent this contradictory and unnerving experience of relative self-perception, both enacting the feeling of relativity and describing it. The difficulty of narrating from a relative position produces traveler-narrators that operate in multiple temporal frames simultaneously, evident in strategies of metalepsis and temporal anachronisms, or attempts to transcend or resist the limitations of narrative, evident in disclaimers of the narrator's unwillingness or inability to find language that can depict the experience. These traveler-narrators function not as reflections of the authors but as performers that portray the complexity of the processes of representation and self-perception. Likewise, the term travelogue, as opposed to travel writing, denotes texts that are more performance than description in their attempts both to portray the traveler-narrator's view of a certain time and place and to enact the psychological/temporal sensation of occupying the position of the perceiving traveler-narrator. This complex positioning of the narrator persona reflects the attempt of these modernist authors to create texts and personas that forestall both the forces of mass culture and the philosophy of determinism that Einstein adopted as an outgrowth of his theories of relativity.

The Chapters

Chapter One discusses the live, multi-media performances of Burton Holmes, the American showman who coined the term "travelogue" to describe his entertaining presentation of photographs, films, and oral narration. Holmes's travelogues establish a representation of travel that is distinctly modernist, not just a depiction of one's past journeys but a performance of the experience of narrating and perceiving a version of self from another time and place. With their inclusion of photographs and films, Holmes's

travelogues demonstrate how the potential for encountering a mediated version of self can intensify the sensation of relativity. On stage, the lecturer Holmes could occasionally see an image of himself in another place and time (e.g., the 1900 Paris Exposition) projected on screen for the audience. At such moments, the live narrating Holmes takes precedence over the mediated versions of his past self due to his presence and immediacy. However, the relativity and multiplicity of his traveler-narrator persona is harder to maintain when his travelogues are distributed as films independent of the live performance, and when the travelogues and Holmes's life story are translated into print. The loss of the traveler-narrator's physical presence and the one-dimensional, linear structure of written narrative collapses this multiplicity and replaces it with a static figure that evokes the inevitability of death.

Chapters Two through Four focus on travelogues written by well-known modernist authors, beginning with Ford Madox Ford's *New York Is Not America* (1927) in Chapter Two. In his depictions of America as it appeared between the wars, Ford presents a nation whose population is composed of both the cosmopolitan residents of New York who value the arts and culture, and the dangerously belligerent and narrow-minded citizens of America. In the course of narrating the more threatening aspects of American mass culture, the narrator becomes a relative figure, creating distance between one narrator persona who sees the parallels between present American nationalism and past Prussian militarism and another narrator persona who suppresses this knowledge. Given his past experiences in World War I, the traveler-narrator finds himself periodically encountering the possibility of his death, both in the past and in the potential future of American world dominance. At such moments, the travelogue enacts his

attempts to avoid that death by locating himself outside the travelogue and refusing to narrate the most troubling moments of his journey.

Chapter Three moves from America to Persia with Vita Sackville-West's 1926 travelogue *Passenger to Teheran*. Sackville-West explicitly attempted to apply Einstein's theories of relativity to her representations of travel, wishing that she could recreate her visual, spatial, and temporal frame of reference for the readers of her letters and her book. Attempting to create a sense of immediacy and imagistic presence to her recollected travel experiences, the narrator experiments with narrative techniques such as listing and grammatical relativity. In her frustration with the temporal limitations of language, which merely emphasize the much faster form of communication made possible by the image, the narrator positions herself in moments that feel timeless. In her representation of such moments, the traveler narrator takes on attributes of relativity, appearing dislocated from time and space. While this dislocation is troubling, it also represents the psychological life of the traveler-narrator as a disembodied process that cannot be commodified or rendered a passive object in a deterministic physical world.

Chapter Four returns to America with Gertrude Stein, reading *Everybody's Autobiography* (1937) as a travelogue of her six-month lecture tour in America. The complex relationship Stein had with her birth country produces an equally complicated narrative that often features a temporally relative narrator persona. This persona is depicted in the past, present, and future, as well as in relation to multiple times simultaneously. Most often, the narrator is seen in relation to both the now, or the continuous present endemic to much of Stein's writing, and the not yet, or the potential future toward which the story appears to be progressing. While this relativity creates the

illusion of an active, multi-dimensional narrator, it also leads the narrator to see herself from an alternative perspective in which she may be dead or nonexistent. The travelogue does not resolve this tension, but instead concludes that life and death are relative concepts.

The Modernist Travelogue In Context

As a genre, the travelogue is a tale of exploration and discovery conveyed through the single perspective of a narrator (typically first-person) who is presumably writing a nonfiction story that includes facts and events that can be verified by consulting other sources. Travelogues are generally organized by episode, present events in chronological order, follow a particular geographical route, and are dominated by descriptive passages and impressions. Despite their clearly informational content, travelogues have historically been crafted as works of literature (stories) rather than science (data). As stories of a personal journey, travelogues differ from written and printed guidebooks, which present factual information about such things as inns, roads, transportation, and expenses. However, such guidebooks have often been included as supplementary components of larger narratives of an individual traveler's experiences (Adams 38). This common integration of contrasting genres indicates that travel literature serves dual purposes of both conveying information and identifying the human perspective from which these observations originated.

Modernist travelogues differ from their historical predecessors in both content and style, although many of these variations are less radical innovations in the genre than intensifications or exaggerations of typical elements of the travelogue. Major changes in

content include portrayals of the impact of world war, the rising nation of America, and the ubiquity of mass culture and technology. Some of these changes in content influence style. For instance, modernist travelogues are less burdened with the task of providing historical depictions of new territories, so they shift from depicting geography as a subject to using it as a motif, organizing the narrative around geographical sites onto which the traveler-narrators hinge mental associations. Tonally, modernist travelogues are less likely to be earnest, depicting the modern world from a more playful, ironic, and self-reflexive perspective. The awareness of the relativity of perception further positions the traveler-narrator as a limited human observer, not an authority. No longer an iconic representation of authority, the traveler-narrator changes from functioning as a stable, unifying subject to one that is multi-faceted, operating as both a passive traveling object and an active narrating subject.

These variations intensify in late modernist texts and travelogues from the 1920s and 1930s, and my project focuses primarily on such later texts that exemplify the more aesthetic perspective on travel and writing. In her essay on “Modernism and Travel,” Helen Carr identifies three periods of modernist travel writing between 1880 and 1940, noting that travelogues increasingly become more literary and less informative over this time:

From 1880 to 1900, the long, ‘realist’ (not of course synonymous with reliable), instructive tale of heroic adventure remained dominant. In the years from 1900 to the First World War, the ‘realist’ texts have not disappeared, but much travel writing becomes less didactic, more subjective, more literary. By the inter-war

years, which saw a surge in the popularity of travel and travel writing, the literary travel book had become the dominant form. (75)

Of the primary texts I discuss in this project, three are from the 1920s and 1930s. Ford Madox Ford published *New York Is Not America* in 1927; Vita Sackville-West's *Passenger to Teheran* appeared in 1926; and Gertrude Stein published *Everybody's Autobiography* in 1937. As something of an outlier within the project, Burton Holmes's various texts, including both his travelogues and his autobiography, span the years from 1890 to 1953 and provide a sense of this larger continuum within which the three other texts are situated. His work also demonstrates the influence of new visual media on the formation of travelogues, incorporating both photography and film into his narrated portrayal of his journeys.

Many of the modernist authors who journeyed about the world in the first few decades of the twentieth century were best known for their fictional works, but they also published numerous travelogues that were popular at the time and remain in print today. These authors include E. M. Forster, D. H. Lawrence, Ernest Hemingway, W. H. Auden, Henry James, Evelyn Waugh, Vita Sackville-West, Theodore Dreiser, and Ford Madox Ford, among others. For each of these authors, many of the same creative experimentations with form and voice found in their fiction are also prevalent in their travel writings.

Many of these writers are included in the evolving "canon" of modernist travelogues, which consists primarily of male British authors. As a result of this demographic, many travelogues are read as indicative of colonial and postcolonial relations. Although a fictional version of his lived travels, E. M. Forster's *Passage to*

India illustrates the appeal of such readings in its description of the tense relations and difficult friendships between British officers and Indian officials. However, just as prevalent in that novel are moments of confusion and misunderstanding as well as disorienting experiences that are difficult to express in language. The uncertainty and unnarratability of what happened in the Marabar caves illustrate this dilemma. It is of course much easier to focus on the specifics in such travelogues – place, landscapes, people – than to attempt to untangle such moments of uncertainty and relativity. For this reason, the travelogues in this project have not received the same critical attention that more “canonical” modernist travelogues have. The present canon of travel writing also overlooks or omits work by Americans and women, as well as other authors whose narrator personas foreground uncertainty and relativity instead of the representation of place. Analysis that prioritizes consideration of gender, nationality, or other stabilizing markers of identity often obscures the complexity of these curious textual dynamics.

However, this uncertainty and relativity is a defining feature of the modernist travelogue, which even in less experimental forms depicts an era defined by a pervasive sense of movement, change, and displacement. Indeed, this era saw numerous developments in the means of transportation that enabled more people to travel than ever before, so that individuals who were writing were also often on the move. Many of these innovations in transportation, coupled with new media technologies such as the telephone, radio, and cinema, produced a sensation that the pace of modern life had increased exponentially. Further sensations of instability resulted from changes in conceptions of time epitomized by the institution of standardized time and time zones,

both of which competed with Einstein's theories of relativity, which proposed that the experience of time depends on the individual's unique spatio-temporal location.

Like other literature of the twentieth century, much travel writing provides a direct or indirect glimpse of the cultural impact of the two world wars. Notably, travel writing from the modernist era was most prolific in the interwar decades of the 1920s, when global economic prosperity facilitated easy travel, and the 1930s, when many Europeans were seeking to escape troubling political situations at home. In *Abroad*, Paul Fussell explains the distinctiveness of travel and travel writing between the wars, noting the common theme of escape from one's nation and its bureaucracy, the search for independence, and the desire for warm, exotic climates. Travel writing from this period is also marked by a general disdain for a civilization that could produce the atrocities of world war. This attitude is prevalent in the travelogues of both Ford and Stein, who fear the developing American culture that is becoming more organized, materialistic, and involved in foreign affairs.

The Role of America in Travelogues

As the "New World," America plays a contradictory role within the genre of the travelogue, embodying both a simple landscape ripe with opportunities for exploration and discovery and a modern nation that embodies the commercialism, technological innovation, and materialism of a new era. Describing how the "New World" appeared to denizens of and visitors from the "Old World," Peter Conrad observes that for writers from Columbus on, America has served as a blank canvas onto which European travelers

can project their fantasies and desires, and in the process to discover themselves.² This freedom to craft a new version of self was embraced by many writers in the thirties, when America was seen as a refuge from the problematic binary that existed for artists in Europe: either one was completely removed from society and politics or one's work was more akin to propaganda, thoroughly defined by a specific social agenda. America offered an alternative in which artists could enjoy creative freedom without being stigmatized as aesthetic decadents.³ As Conrad states, "Europe equips you with a hereditary, natal self. America allows you to invent a self better adjusted to the individual you have become since outgrowing the impositions of birth" (5). As Conrad suggests, the American self thus produced is distinctly new and of the moment, decontextualized from tradition, history, and other forces of stability. However, some author-travelers, including Ford and Stein, find that this new self can be produced without their explicit intentions as a result of their encounters with the American public and mass media. America thus creates the possibility of a disorienting scenario in which the traveler-narrator finds himself attempting to narrate an unfamiliar version of self. In order to see America as the idealized land of freedom, these texts and travels suggest that one must view America from the perspective of an outsider⁴, a traveler who takes full advantage of her ability to come and go as she wishes, recreating her relationship with the country in this process of perpetual movement.

² Similar arguments are made by others including Todorov (*The Conquest of America*) and Baudrillard (*America*).

³ See Peter Conrad 195-200. Huyssen also makes a similar point: "major artists of the 1920s used precisely the then wide-spread 'Americanism' (associated with jazz, sports, cars, technology, movies, and photography) in order to overcome the bourgeois aestheticism and its separateness from 'life'" (60).

⁴ Baudrillard makes the same observation in *America*. "It may be that the truth of America can only be seen by a European, since he alone will discover here the perfect simulacrum – that of the immanence and material transcription of all values. The Americans, for their part, have no sense of simulation" (28).

In many ways, modernist America represents a culture in which identity is tied to celebrity and the performance of self for a mass audience. This cultural and geographical landscape of America figures prominently in two chapters of the dissertation, presented through the eyes of the expatriate Gertrude Stein and Englishman Ford Madox Ford.⁵ Both Stein and Ford are anxious about how the commercialism and consumerism of America will affect not only the future of literature but also their own future reception as authors and lecturers. This anxiety is intensified because their travelogues are the direct result of their experiences promoting their work on lecture tours in the United States and interacting with the American public. During the 1920s and 1930s, many European authors were giving lecture tours in America, a sign of cultural vitality as well as a reflection of the public desire for “info-tainment” by contemporary figures of renown. Burton Holmes’s travelogues fully capitalized on this American trend, selling millions of tickets for his multi-media performances that incorporated the new media of film with interesting information about unfamiliar locations. Holmes also embraced the opportunity to create a charming and authoritative persona of self-as-traveler for his audience. Whereas Holmes clearly enjoyed his status as a live performer on the American stage, Ford and Stein were reluctant to market their authorial personas to an audience of mass consumers.

As the travelogues of Holmes, Ford, and Stein make apparent, the prevalence of mass technology and mediation in America influences not only the nation’s historical narrative but also personal narratives of self-discovery. The American definition of self and self-discovery is inextricably linked to the technology of fast-paced travel and

⁵ While I do not discuss it in the dissertation, Vita Sackville-West also traveled to America to give lecture tours in 1933. She did not produce a travelogue as a result of this journey, but she did incorporate some of her experiences into a novel, *The Grand Canyon*, published in 1942.

instantaneous communication. As it develops a distinct national culture in the 20th century, America comes to embody the experience of modernity as travel, marked by speed, detachment, rootlessness, and an unshakable optimism about the future.⁶ To some degree, Stein and Holmes are typical American icons, figures of power whose prestige results from their mediated relationship with the public. As Peter Conrad notes, many American icons are mediated heroes, bound to technology (e.g., FDR's Fireside Chats) and industriousness linked to their nation-building work clearing forests (Paul Bunyan), building railroads (Casey Jones), creating factories, or working with steel (J.P. Morgan).⁷ In contrast, Ford Madox Ford's perspective as a British author reflects his concern about the future of society and literary culture that may be determined by the increasingly mediated and technological culture of America.

The narrative connection between the American nation and industrial technology is due in large part to the fact that America's development as a modern political nation occurred in conjunction with the many advances in transportation and communication that helped usher in the modernist era. Train travel serves as the most explicit example of a technology that was incorporated into America's national self-definition, but was perceived as disruptive to European notions of geography, culture, and self. As Wolfgang Schivelbusch explains, in America,

the mechanization of transportation is not seen, as in Europe, as the destruction of a traditional culture, but as a means to gaining a new civilization from a hitherto worthless (because inaccessible) wilderness. [...] Since American history really

⁶ For more on America in relation to modernist literature and culture, see Edward Cutler's *Recovering the New* and Andreas Huyssen's *The Great Divide*. In *Melodrama and Modernity*, Ben Singer argues that the speed of American modernity is reflected in sensationalist films and other media.

⁷ See Conrad 200.

begins with the industrial revolution (all else being colonial prehistory), that revolution is a constituent part of American national and cultural identity to a far greater degree than it is in Europe. (94)

Making a similar point about the significance of industrialization to the notion of America's distinctiveness, Auden wrote in the 1930s that "America is unique in being the only country to create myths after the industrial revolution" (qtd in Conrad 199-200). America's national mythology is thus simultaneously ancient and modern, linking industrialism with narratives of discovery and nation-building. Far from viewing the technological changes of modernity/modernism as a rupture in either time or space, Americans perceived this technology as helping to produce a coherent and progressive history of a nation with a seemingly limitless capacity for expansion and growth.

Introspection and the Difference Between the Traveler-Narrator and the Author

While many travel narratives from the Age of Exploration (c. 1500-1800) catalogued foreign lands and aided cartographers in mapping newly-discovered territory, the texts that sold best emphasized the role and personality of the traveling narrator.⁸ While many readers seemed to want an objective description of lands beyond their ken, these accounts were more engaging when they foregrounded the human experience of traveling in and reacting to those lands. This preference for a strong narratorial presence intensified in the Victorian era, when "travel books came close second in popularity to the novel" (Shattock 154). As the genre has evolved, some travel writing remains more focused on descriptions of place, while other texts emphasize the traveler's idiosyncratic

⁸ For more on the popularity of the narrator, see Percy Adams' chapter on "The Narrator" in *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel*, particularly pages 167-172.

experiences and perceptions. Modernist travelogues heavily foreground the role of the traveler-narrator, often to such a degree that it obscures a clear sense of the places in which they are traveling.

Many of the conventions of the travelogue hinge on the impression that the traveler-narrator is deeply idiosyncratic and often a solitary figure. In her journeys away from home, the traveler-narrator attains independence from various social norms, many of which seem to be unduly constricting, producing a sense of cultural relativism in the process. Women travelers are most notable for this characteristic, as their travels allow them to replace cultural expectations of passive domesticity with alternative behavior that often includes vigorous exploratory activity. Such tales of escape and empowerment explain in part why readers of travelogues are as compelled to discover the traveler-narrator's personality as to discover the geopolitical landscapes she describes.

While travel as self-discovery is common to travelogues from all eras, modernist travel writing takes a particularly inward perspective on the journey as an existential opportunity to rethink the notions of self as both citizen and individual. This is particularly true after the first World War, when many people were disillusioned with British/Western civilization and the assumption that technological advancement was moving culture in the right direction. Many interwar travelers often seem to be attempting to escape various political and social situations; thus both their travels and their travel writings reflect a degree of self-indulgence as the traveler-narrators turn their attention away from exterior realities and toward aesthetic, theoretical, and philosophical concerns. Andrew Hammond connects this shift in the motivations for and lived experience of travel with the experimentations of modernism: "After the assertive, self-

aggrandising journeys of the nineteenth century, there emerged in the 1920s and 1930s a markedly different set of travellers who, rejecting the identifications of their forebears, displayed gentler, more sympathetic and more intricate subject positions, along with a fascination with spiritual and literary pursuits that, at times, linked their work to the complex and self-conscious writings of Anglo-American modernism” (169).

These introspective journeys often reveal that the subjectivity of the traveler-narrator was increasingly losing stability and cohesiveness. Philip Dodd notes that this trend of disintegrating subjectivity continues throughout the first half of the twentieth century, focusing on travel writings from the 1930s:

The stance of the 1930s traveller suggests that he enjoyed neither the culturally bestowed conviction of superiority of the late eighteenth [nineteenth?]-century traveller, nor the Edwardian traveller’s confident exploitation of place as a source of renewal for himself and his reader. Indeed what distinguishes 1930s travel books is not any particular stance but the variety and complexity of stance. (128)

Adding to this proliferation of subject positions and corresponding feelings of fragmentation, the existential journeys of the modernist traveler are further complicated by the relatively new contrast between traveling and tourism, one defined as an individual endeavor, the other as part of a mass commercial enterprise. Hammond argues that the 1930s thus see “the emergence of a generation torn by this very split between tourist and traveller—between the materialist desires of the ‘modern’ and modernist inner exploration” (175). Both politically and socially, the modernist traveler-narrator finds herself in situations of existential uncertainty, feeling both connected with and disengaged from many competing contextualizing narratives at once.

This emphasis on the narrator as a complex psychological subject occurs similarly within both modernist fiction and travel writing, as the narrator increasingly comes to the forefront as not just the composer of the story but as a subject of the story. In extreme cases, the narrator's acts of perceiving and representing overshadow the physical journey or external experiences he appears to undertake. As in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* or Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the intense focus on the characters' thoughts, via psychological and subjective impressions of external events, suggests that there is no single, knowable objective reality in which the characters live and move. Similarly in travelogues by Ford, Sackville-West, Stein, and others, representations of the landscape, geography, and people encountered along their journeys are overshadowed by the narrator's mediated interpretation of those components of the travelogue or by the associative process whereby an encounter with a foreign experience evokes a more familiar memory or thought that shifts the reader's attention from the time/space of the journey to a much more idiosyncratic moment which only the narrator seems capable of locating.

Although the traveler-narrator often appears to be synonymous with the author, the literary persona that emerges within these texts is multi-faceted and lacks the cohesiveness and singleness of identity that we attribute to living, embodied individuals. In fact, these modernist authors were consciously distancing themselves from their "autobiographical" narrators, uneasy with the prospect of equating their experiences as moving, living subjects with a textual figure that could so easily become, like their books, a commodity marketed to the masses and ultimately consumable, forgettable, and quietly relegated to the past. The Author as an object illustrates the potential immobility of

death, a conclusion these travelogues resist. Roland Barthes explains this dynamic in his essay “The Death of the Author,” noting how some critical perspectives attempt to reinstate the author as a means of controlling the potential proliferation of meaning that exists in literature:

To give an Author to a text is to impose upon that text a stop clause, to furnish it with a final signification, to close the writing. This conception perfectly suits criticism, which can then take as its major task the discovery of the Author (or his hypostases: society, history, the psyche, freedom) beneath the work: once the Author is discovered, the text is “explained”: the critic has conquered (147).

Setting aside the problematic assumption that there is some definitive truth to be discovered about the past, such analysis risks negating the literary characteristics of relativity and proliferation that define these modernist travelogues. Yet as Barthes maintains, “We know that a text does not consist of a line of words, releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God), but is a space of many dimensions, in which are wedded and contested various kinds of writing, no one of which is original” (147). Modernist travelogues, like many other works of modernism, operate on multiple levels of signification simultaneously and often gesture to those intuitive or nonverbal moments of experience and/or representation that question the traditional limits of narrative structure. These moments both acknowledge the limitations of language and narrative and manage to convey a sense of the traveler-narrator’s personal experience of the journey.

Much as the narrating subject of travel narratives becomes a site of literary experimentation that mirrors and creates the aesthetic innovations in fiction produced in

the same era, the narratives themselves also share many of the same stylistic innovations as their fictional counterparts. While most nonfiction travelogues of the 1920s and 1930s are more realistic than abstract in their representations of a traveler's experiences in a foreign land, many works exhibit, to varying degrees, experiments in voice and form typical of modernist fiction. These experiments include moments in which the texts are self-reflexive, ironic, inconclusive, and self-mocking. They may cobble together images and impressions and present them more as unsortable bricolage than as connected elements of a meaningful journey. They often veer away from objective reportage toward psychological realism via the techniques of literary impressionism, perspectivism, or stream of consciousness.⁹ Such aesthetic traits dominate in the texts I evaluate, as the travelers' awareness of the act of writing and representation often overpowers the realistic portrayal of their journeys.

In their self-reflexivity, modernist travelogues frequently question both the conventions of the genre and the presumed role of the travel writer. This foregrounding of the act of representation (of translating one's travels into text) is a common feature of all travel writing. Focusing on post-Enlightenment European travel writing, John Zilcosky points out that travel writers have historically referred to other texts and writers in an attempt to endow the often amorphous genre with a sense of history and stability: "Both the Grand Tourists and the great explorers reflected self-consciously on themselves as travel writers: The former drew on Addison and the medieval pilgrims, the latter referred back to Columbus and Cortés. By ruminating about itself as a tradition, travel writing began to gain the confidence and consolidation of a genre, however loosely

⁹ See Hammond 181-185.

defined” (11). Thus, built in to the very genre of the travelogue is a degree of metacommentary and self-reflexivity.

Modernist travel writing relies heavily on such descriptions of the act of writing to impose a sense of narrative order on events that seem otherwise unstructured. Kai Mikkonen observes that the more the journey itself seems to lack a sense of progress or meaning, the more the narrator’s account of it attempts to structure it by referring to the act of writing and narration: “The moment of writing, as different from the time of traveling, provides the text with connections based on circularity between departure and return” (298). Because the writer typically has already returned when he is writing his travel narrative, he imposes order via his “retrospective point of view, where the goal of remembrance is to integrate events into a narrative” (299). In *Everybody’s Autobiography*, Stein’s narrator frequently interrupts her account of the American lecture tour with descriptions of her current act of writing and recollecting. She does this to such a degree that the time of the journey seems obscure in comparison to the seemingly more important time of her writing. In other travelogues, when the writer seems at a loss for a sense of narrative, the narrator references other literary travelogues, which provide alternative ways of conceptualizing such incomprehensible experiences. In *Passenger to Teheran*, for example, Sackville-West quotes from Kinglake’s travelogue *Eothen* to illustrate the difficulty of writing about one’s deeply personal experiences of traveling in the Middle East. While travel narratives from all eras reference the act of writing, modernist travelogues (especially the ones in this project) often do so with great unease, as if searching for some assurance that the recounted experiences of a journey, no matter

how personal and idiosyncratic, both contain and convey significance on a social scale larger than just that of the individual traveler-narrator.

In the hands of modernist authors, this self-awareness heightens when combined with an aesthetic emphasis on form, psychological realism, and abstraction. For some authors, such as W. H. Auden and Peter Fleming, this self-reflexivity manifests with a tone that is often ironic and sometimes comic. Considering works such as Auden and MacNiece's *Letters from Iceland* (1937), Stan Smith observes that "self-conscious undermining of one's own seriousness is central to the ethos of Modernist travelogue, acknowledging the artifice, the factitiousness even, of the genre in which it finds itself" (Smith 7-8). When not presented with this protective irony, such questioning of the genre occurs via periodic proclamations of the narrators' doubts that there is a larger, realizable significance to the processes of both traveling and representation. "In what one could consider a defining feature of modern travel, the writers constantly revealed doubts or misgivings about their own procedures: about the act of physical travel, about themselves as travellers/tourists, and about the final scripting of the journey, admitting those misgivings in a way that worked to destabilise their texts" (Hammond 184). In the introductory sections of Ford's, Holmes', and Sackville-West's travelogues, the author-narrators apologize for the incomplete or subjective nature of their writings, insisting that these texts present only their personal experiences with the journeys and hardly stake any claim to being objective, authoritative representations of a complex and ultimately unknowable external reality.¹⁰ In addition, these texts feature moments at which

¹⁰ Because Stein is not writing a text intended to be read as a travelogue, she does not make such a disclaimer. Her narrative does feature many of the same techniques by which the narrator undermines the sense that, although a work of nonfiction, the writing portrays a single, verifiable version of her experiences in America.

representation seems to fail, as the traveler-narrators seem unable or unwilling to translate the complexity of their experience with both place and time into language that tells a story.

On Travel Writing, Time, and Narrative Theory

The interior focus of modernist travelogues, combined with their enactive nature, often produces a sense of time that is more mythological than progressive. Additionally, travel in America and the Middle East produces an alternative, mythological, or relative sense of time, putting the traveler-narrators into situations in which the impulse to note their specific location conflicts with a spatio-temporal location that feels timeless, circular, or transcendental. Viewing many destinations beyond England in this way, British writers of the 1930s often “turned their travels into interior journeys and parables of their times, making landscape and incident – the factual materials of reportage – do the work of symbol and myth – the materials of fable” (Hynes 151).

The treatment of America as a blank canvas onto which privileged, Western travelers project their own fears and desires (as noted in Peter Conrad, Jean Baudrillard, and Tzvetan Todorov) parallels many European representations of “primitive” countries like those of the African continent or the Middle East. This parallel attitude of primitivism suggests that travel engenders a feeling of timelessness or produces alternative relationships to time as well as space not typically encountered when one remains relatively static. In America, industrialization and technological means of transportation are tied mythologically and symbolically to a sense of origins and new beginnings. Travel in America thus often seems to be an encounter with origins, whether

one's own or that of others. This is particularly true for Stein, who returns to her childhood home in Oakland, California. Ford's traveler-narrator seems to encounter the beginnings of a new civilization, and the rising empire that he glimpses terrifies him.

The sensation of the timelessness of the Middle East influences the perspective of Vita Sackville-West's narrator in *Passenger to Teheran*, as well as Burton Holmes's travelogues on Japan, a nation with which he felt a special bond. Within her travelogue, Sackville-West's narrator notes that Hindi, unlike English, uses the same word for yesterday and tomorrow. From her perspective (admittedly a rather romantic one), these competing temporal frames of reference reveal how British society is marked by a governing sense of order and linear progression, while Eastern society views time as more fluid and multidirectional. The former sees the present moment as part of a larger historical narrative; the latter sees history as a collection of present moments and encourages one to experience the present moment as a time valuable in and of itself, without reference to an outside context. This temporal contrast is a fundamental concern of *Passenger to Teheran*, evidenced in both its content and its narrative structure, as Sackville-West's narrator seems to take her travels as an opportunity to reevaluate Western cultural norms.¹¹ Similarly, Holmes's perspective on Japan depicts the island nation as a refuge from the modern pace of Western life, aligning his traveler-narrator persona with Japanese culture in numerous ways. In his travelogues on Japan, Holmes's narrator frequently links the place to the personal history it represents for him, both a destination on his first overseas travels and the subject of his first professional travelogue.

¹¹ Barbara Korte notes that such cultural comparison and escapism is common to modernist travel writers. Referring to a similar passage from D. H. Lawrence's *Mornings in Mexico* (1927), Korte observes that "such remarks on 'alternative' cultural notions of time are made frequently by travel writers who seek to escape modern life, like [Robert Louis] Stevenson, Lawrence, and also Wilfred Thesiger." (32). While Korte does not label this trait primitivism, there are obvious parallels.

As such, it signifies the beginning of Holmes's career and, despite the modernization that he observes taking place in Japan over the years, remains a powerful symbol of his youth and the opportunity to create a new persona through travel.

All four travelogues reveal temporal distortions that result from a combination of such primitivism and relativity. The more certain locations evoke a feeling of romantic timelessness, the more the narrator becomes aware of the relativity of perception. The English version of history differs fundamentally from the American or Persian history, and seeing oneself in relation to both time lines produces uncertainty about the traveler-narrator's temporal location. Faced with the opportunity to see themselves from contrasting cultural and temporal perspectives, the traveler-narrators find themselves unable to resolve the multiplicity of self-perception or to consolidate it back into a single, unified subject position. The travelogues reflect this relativity.

The typical function of temporal markers in travelogues is to communicate the specific spatio-temporal location of the traveler at specific moments in the account of her journeys. Barbara Korte argues in her essay "Chrono-Types: Notes on Forms of Time in the Travelogue" that "time reference in the travelogue contributes to a text's reality effect, supporting the genre expectation that travelogues are based on actual journeys" (26). Korte examines a number of ways in which travelogues typically foreground the time of their journey: following a diary format, noting the dates of the journey's beginning and end, describing how long a train trip lasted, or detailing the times at which major events of a day's journey occurred. Very few of these markers are present in the modernist travelogues in this project. Instead, these travelogues replace such certainty with markers of time that are mythological, relative, or multiplicitous. Alternately, the

present is replaced by the past, as memories of a previous experience at a particular location stand in for a description of the present moment. As a result, it becomes very difficult to know when and where the traveler-narrator is at any given point, often because her mental orientation is more important than the physical spatio-temporal location she is ostensibly describing.

At such moments of reflection, the travelogues create a narrative rhythm replete with descriptive moments at which the narrator's act of perception and recollection overshadow the sense that the traveler is progressing through either space or time. Although travelogues feature many of the same temporal variations as other narratives, including ellipses, summary, and slow motion, Barbara Korte identifies "the most characteristic element in the rhythm of a travelogue" as "the frequent use of the pause, by which a travelogue's story is almost systemically interrupted. This is owing to the large amount of descriptive and informative passages that are part of the travelogue's genre definition" (35). Such pauses often enact the relativity of perception, as traveler-narrators represent a multiplicity of impressions as if they are contained within a single, timeless moment. Ford's traveler-narrator produces such a pause when contemplating the potential future decline of New York, comparing it to a hypothetical situation of seeing old war medals that remind him of a past self. In this pause in action, the travelogue appears to depict past, present, and future within a single, expansive scene that also undermines the temporal singularity of the traveler-narrator.

A compelling contradiction emerges when thinking about the traveler-narrator in relation to the time-sense of the travelogue. As a focal point of the travelogue, the traveler-narrator provides the illusion of stability when it most closely resembles the

author's physical movements within a particular place and time. However, the traveler-narrator undermines that stability at textual pauses that reflect the relativity of perception, making it difficult to locate the persona at a single time or place. According to Korte, "Manipulation of a journey's time line in a travelogue thus has limits, and the linear progress of the actual journey is rarely 'anachronized' in a travelogue in a dramatic way. Analepses and, more rarely, prolepses are possible, but they are unlikely to cause confusion as to the journey's temporal progress" (34). This reading of travelogue time equates the traveler-narrator with the author, and it dismisses the integral nature of the aesthetic manipulations of time. In evaluating the modernist travelogues in this project, one could easily follow Korte's lead and dismiss the brief moments in which the traveler-narrator interferes with the progress of the story. Doing so would allow one to talk about the compelling historical and cultural conditions in these travelogues as if they had been reported by an objective observer. However, such analysis would neglect the fascinating attempt of these travelogues to negotiate the relativity of perception and self-perception.

Because modernist travelogues so consciously reflect on the process of crafting a story for a reading audience, they provide insight into our understanding and expectations of both narrative and the narrator persona. Walter Benjamin famously observes in his essay "The Storyteller" that there are two kinds of archetypal stories: those told by the resident who knows local tradition and history, and those told by the traveler returning or arriving from afar. The master storyteller combines these two types of stories and their resulting perspectives, integrating "the lore of faraway places, such as a much-traveled man brings home, with the lore of the past, as it best reveals itself to natives of a place."

(85).¹² The ideal story, therefore, is relative, the product of the difference between competing perspectives on both time and place.

The travelogue illustrates the limits of what is generally understood to function as a narrative, seeming to depict the bare bones of what constitutes a story – in its presentation of loosely connected episodes – while still communicating the sense that something happened and that it has been experienced, perceived and depicted by a human narrator. However, these events take on narrative significance only in their relationship to the narrator. As Kai Mikkonen claims, “the causal organization of the elements of a story may not be separated from the mediating perspective of the traveler’s personal experience, whether in the form of a narrator or character, through which the sequence of the events is seen” (291). At the same time, the representation of those travels creates the position of the traveler-narrator. Explaining how the concept of travel often provides a meaningful way to organize disparate experiences and impressions, Mikkonen writes, “the notion of travel is prone to give identity and narrativity to a series of events since it ‘humanizes’ the experience of time and space. A travel story is dependent on the projection and experience of a world from a particular perspective, a person or a group of people moving through space in a given time” (287).

Mikkonen’s investigation of the connections between travel and narrative suggests that the traveler-narrator functions as both the producer and product of the travel narrative. The story of travel produces the subject, and vice versa. Returning to

¹² The intrinsic connection between travel and narrative is also evident in the many parallels between the development of travel writing in the 18th and 19th centuries and that of Western narrative as epitomized by the novel. Both depend on the illusion of a single observer’s perspective that not only conveys information about the physical and social world in the form of a compelling story, but also gives the reader a sense of the observer’s personality. The fundamental element of the act of observation in narrative gets overturned in modernist fiction and travel writing as navigating time and space becomes increasingly challenging and unsettling for modernist narrators.

Einstein's theories of relativity, both the travelogue and the traveler-narrator are relative – to each other. Vita Sackville-West's traveler-narrator in *Passenger to Teheran* acknowledges this disturbing interdependence as she laments, "There would seem [...] to be something wrong about travel itself. Of what use is it, if we may communicate our experience neither verbally nor on paper?" (13). Faced with the challenge of representing the relativity of self-perception, Sackville-West discovers that her narrator persona is not in control of the process of representation, but an object within a larger structure that is itself defined by uncertainty and relativity.

This disturbing awareness of oneself as the arbitrary product of a particular location in space and time can be found in other modernist literature. As Philip Weinstein points out in *Unknowing*, such modernist authors as Faulkner, Proust, and Kafka undermine the Enlightenment notion of self as a subject in the process of mastering his relationship to space and time, replacing this Western narrative with stories of spatial uncanniness, epistemological uncertainty, and temporal displacement. In doing so, they "reveal the human subject as situational, space/time dependent, capable of coming to know *only* if the props that enable knowing are already in place. [...] In modernist art, time and space do not resolve into docile conditions enabling the subject to center; the modernist narrative refuses to mimic a plot resolution it finds missing in the real." (2, 6-7). Much as in modernist fiction, modernist travelogues reveal that the experience of moving through space and time actually decreases the illusion of mastery instead of reinforcing it. Many traveler-narrators attempt to assert their authority over their experiences, often by taking a tourist approach that appropriates place and time by photographing or otherwise limiting the expansiveness of the moment. However, just as

often, the modernist traveler-narrator resists such authority, refusing to tell the story of one's travels through time and space as a neatly ordered, linear voyage of (self-) discovery—largely because such a representation would be dishonest, a watered-down version of the complex experience of traveling and writing in a modern world defined by uncertainty and relativity.

The travelogues discussed in this project demonstrate this tension between mastery and powerlessness, as the traveler-narrators alternate between occupying positions of acting perceivers who order their experiences in a meaningful way and passive objects who are determined by their surroundings. In the end, these travelogues close by depicting the traveler-narrator having returned home, a stable subject no longer seen from a potentially infinite number of competing perspectives. But this position is temporary, one of many possible locations that can define and destabilize the traveler-narrator's tenuous stability. Delving into the fears and insecurities depicted and enacted in these travelogues, this project seeks to continue this process of destabilization and relativity, exploring the multiplicity of positions and perspectives that can exist for both the traveler-narrator and the reader. Indeed, by addressing their journeys to an unknown future reader, the travelogues remind us that the position of the audience is just as likely to be determined by the forces of travel and relativity as the narrator.

**The Expansive Present Moment:
The “Illusion of Life” in Burton Holmes’s Travelogues**

In addition to the lantern slides in color there will be presented *for the first time* in connection with a course of travel lectures, a series of pictures to which a modern miracle has added the *illusion of life itself*,—the reproduction of recorded motion.

—Foreword to promotional booklet for Holmes’s 1897-1898 season (emphasis original; qtd in Stoddard)

The clouds and mists and the ether and the sunshine have played an evening color symphony at the close of every day since the old earth was born. The crowds, however, like children, prefer the artificial to the real. Spectators, who have looked unmoved upon the glories of the western skies, turn, with ecstatic admiration, to those chromatic harmonies, waked by the magical musician of the future,—Electricity! We stand upon the threshold of the Age of Electricity—the Age of Light.

—Burton Holmes, *Paris Exposition Travelogue, Part II* (1900)

Burton Holmes’s live travelogues embody the shift from the nineteenth-century illustrated travel lecture, a didactic combination of reportage and lantern slides, to the twentieth-century multi-media travelogue, a more entertaining representation of past travel that has a sense of life and immediacy that results largely from the inclusion of new visual technology. That life is artificial, an illusion; but as Holmes points out in his travelogue on the Paris Exposition, it is often more appealing than the real thing. Holmes takes advantage of the modern (and particularly American) fascination with technology and recorded motion in his travelogues, but he also counterbalances it with his living, human presence as a narrator. As such, his travelogues present the best of both worlds – the physical world and its simulated reproduction.

The difference between live, multi-media travelogues and their written counterparts reveals that the concept of modernist travel is intrinsically relative, especially in its ability to create the sensation of an expanded present moment in which

time appears to slow when compared to the time of a stationary observer. In (re)creating this experience, the live travelogues approximate the sensation of traveling near the speed of light, a hypothetical phenomenon explored in Einstein's theories of relativity. When Holmes's travelogues succeed at recreating the sensation of that expansive present, his traveler-narrator takes on the attributes associated with that experience. His presence and immediacy seem heightened, and he seems to exist in multiple locations simultaneously. When the written travelogues/autobiography lose that sense of relativity and immediacy, his traveler-narrator persona likewise takes on the qualities of staticity, linearity, and singleness, and he seems to be removed from the experiences he is recollecting in a way that does not happen in the live travelogue. This separation and singularity is disturbing and unnerving as it makes the traveler aware of his embodied and mortal human nature, which cannot compete with the speed and vitality of a multi-media persona.

The short period from 1903 to 1905 witnessed significant changes in the representation and conception of travel. In 1903, Burton Holmes's manager coined the term *travelogue* to market Holmes's live, multi-media performances to a London audience that would not be enticed by the traditional, informative illustrated travel lecture. 1904 is commonly considered a tipping point in the development of cinema, when the narrative conventions of continuity editing began to coalesce into a cohesive genre and practice that has been used ever since.¹³ The first film recognized as crafting a story using these techniques of continuity editing, Edwin S. Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), largely centers around the experience of train travel, highlighting that

¹³ Both Lynne Kirby (*Parallel Tracks* [pp. 34, 41, 54]) and Charles Musser ("The Travel Genre in 1903-1904"), among other film critics, note that 1904 is a clear point of demarcation in the transition from actualities to narrative film. However, this change is not immediate. The conventions of Hollywood storytelling do not fully coalesce until the 1920s, and even then feature films are commonly preceded by short newsreels or travel films.

the concomitant developments in high-speed travel and the cinema paralleled each other in offering new methods for experiencing and representing the modern, moving world. This film also demonstrated how cinema could approximate simultaneity by using parallel editing and cross-cuts.¹⁴ In 1905, Albert Einstein published his special theory of relativity, revealing that simultaneity is a relative concept since individuals in different states of motion can perceive events from contrasting spatio-temporal perspectives. Most compellingly, as a traveler approaches the speed of light, time appears to slow when compared to the position of a stationary observer. While the high-speed travel possible on trains or simulated in movie theaters comes nowhere close to these speeds, these experiences parallel Einstein's theories in their ability to shorten a journey or compress the unfolding of events into a compact story.

The Immediacy of Travel as Continuous Motion

Holmes describes the strategy behind his travelogue presentation as creating a sense of immediacy and continuous motion, aiming for this goal even before he incorporated filmic moving images into his performances. Describing his first travelogue attempts in his autobiography, Holmes states,

My text was intended, as I told myself, "to take the edge off the awful silence and keep the pictures moving." [...] I wanted the show to move smoothly, to create an illusion of travel, not to be just an exhibition of lantern slides. I wanted the talk to lead up to and introduce each picture which must come on at just the

¹⁴ See Musser's "The Travel Genre in 1903-1904" for more on the significance of this film in particular and the travel genre as a whole on the development of cinematic narrative. Of course, there is a strong historical and conceptual link between film and train travel, beginning with the Lumière brothers' 1895 film *L'arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat*.

right moment. The picture must not be seen until the audience had been prepared for it and was expecting it. Nor must the picture be delayed even a second, nor must it linger longer than was necessary for the telling of its illustrative story. (Holmes 1953: 76, 114-115)

Holmes generally downplayed the significance of his narration, maintaining that the most important part of his travelogues was the images. However, for these images to convey the sensation of being on a journey, Holmes's narration manipulates the audience with foreshadowing, synchronization, and other means of orchestrating the temporal coordination between image and narration. He also carefully coordinated pre-arranged verbal cues with the man in the projection booth to create seamless transitions. Holmes distinguished his strategy from that of other travel lecturers such as his predecessor John Stoddard, which included awkward breaks between images, overly long and boring stories, and transitions produced by requests for "next slide, please." In the Burton Holmes travelogues, the coordination between image and narration imbues both components with a sense of movement and immediacy, qualities that are reflected back onto the traveler-narrator to make him appear equally present within both forms of representation.

This immediacy of personality and consistent ability to connect with his audience largely explains the longevity and popularity of Holmes's travelogues. Between 1891 and 1951, Burton Holmes traveled the entire world over nine times and turned his experiences into wildly popular travel lectures which he delivered to American audiences. The lifelong connection between Holmes, travel, and film began in 1897, when his travelogues included the first travel films ever made. These short films were

initially shown as technological novelties on topics that were unrelated to the evening's travelogue and were projected after the conclusion of the lecture. In this same year, Holmes's predecessor, John L. Stoddard, resigned from the business and publicly named Holmes as his successor, in many ways enabling the success of Holmes's travelogues. A year later, Holmes's travelogues incorporated short travel films, and Holmes's cinematographer, Oscar Depue, traveled with him to film on location. Throughout his long career as a traveler and performer, Holmes remained the sole photographer, only occasionally using stock photos to round out his performances. By 1903, Holmes and his manager Brown rebranded his performances by changing their name from the Burton Holmes Lectures to the Burton Holmes Travelogues, acknowledging the change in format wrought by the inclusion of film. In 1915, Holmes began partnering with Paramount (and in 1929 with MGM) to create stand-alone travel films that were distributed by the film companies as travel shorts rather than in connection with one of Holmes's live travelogue performances. Holmes continued giving his live travelogue performances until his retirement in 1951.

Within a typical Burton Holmes Travelogue, the audience enjoys a mixture of lecture, film, and photography as they travel vicariously to a scenic location. This location is one of four or five available during one of Holmes's winter lecture seasons. In 1903-1904, the season in which Holmes also performed his one and only series of travelogues for a London audience, these destinations included The Yosemite Valley, The Yellowstone Park, The Grand Canyon, Alaska the Beautiful, and The Golden

Klondike.¹⁵ As in most seasons, these destinations are geographically related and conceptually connected. Once the lights dim, the audience directs its attention to a hand-colored photograph projected on the screen as the voice of Burton Holmes fills the auditorium and begins narrating the journey of an elegant professional tourist. One image blends seamlessly into the next. At times, the narration accompanies a portion of Holmes's journeys filmed by his cinematographer. Occasionally, the photograph or 35-millimeter film features Holmes himself caught in the act of traveling. At these moments, the audience hears Holmes narrating his physical action within the past, and the live narrating Holmes becomes a spectator to his own image. Although these photographic or cinematic images of Holmes depict a past version of the traveler-narrator, they retain a sense of presence and immediacy in their association with the expanded present moment of the travelogue performance.

Holmes's travelogue on Paris, originally presented in the 1907-08 season and later published as part of his collected travelogues in 1919, exemplifies the way multiple perspectives, times, and media are incorporated within a moment that feels not only immediate but also pleasantly cordial. In addition to the hand-colored slides, Holmes's live narration integrates interesting details of Paris's history and present curiosities with tales of Holmes's connection to the place and to the composition of the travelogue he is narrating. Near the beginning of this Parisian travelogue, Holmes sets the playful, personal tone that defines his style with a few anecdotes about the Café de la Paix. Because it offers a model of Holmes's enjoyable style and the travelogue's sense of immediacy, I quote this section at length.

¹⁵ See Lothrop Stoddard, *Burton Holmes and the Travelogue* (1939). Although the shows did well at Queen's Hall in London, they were not profitable enough to justify future performances, especially when compared with Holmes's great success in American cities.

I must urgently recommend that you pass your first leisure hour in Paris at the corner table of the *terrasse* of the Café de la Paix [...]. No stranger can sit here for an hour without seeing some one whom he knows or used to know. Once, however, [...] I was a trifle disappointed not to see at first glance some well-known face, but [...] there, displayed among the periodicals was [...] the face of our American tenor George Hamlin [...]. The next time I came to the Café de la Paix, two young Americans, just arrived for the first time in Paris, greet me sadly – because my appearance makes them lose a bet. They have wagered with a more experienced traveler that they could sit at the café for an hour without meeting an acquaintance, and that is why they are not glad to see me.

Another time – an incident even more striking – just arrived from Ceylon, via Suez and Marseilles, I sit me down to enjoy my afternoon *apéritif* at my accustomed tiny table on that well-trodden sidewalk; two ladies and a gentleman, Americans, simultaneously take the table next to mine. The three look at me and then at one another – smile in amazement, and one of them exclaims, “Well, Mr. Holmes, this is *too* good. The first thing we do in Paris is to come here just to test the truth of what you said in your lectures about being sure to meet some one you know at the Café de la Paix, and whom do we see but *you!*” [...]

So while in Paris let us do as the Parisians do, and standing, or sitting, if you please, at the Café de la Paix, let us also “rubber” to our heart’s content at the marvelous array of interesting humanity that surges past. (6:117-122)

This scene creates “the illusion of travel” and extends it to Holmes’s traveler-narrator, the accompanying images portraying Paris, and the position of the audience, who is invited

to become part of the travelogue experience. Three photographs accompany this description, one of the café, one of the news kiosk at which Holmes sees the image of the American singer, and one of well-dressed people in the street in front of the café. All three photographs appear to present the view from Holmes's perspective without including him in the photographic frame. In the live performance of this travelogue, Holmes appears instead on stage, personally narrating the photographic evidence of what he saw with the oral descriptions of what these sights meant to him. This section concludes with a typical feature of Holmes's narration, an imperative plea in the first person plural that invites the audience to join in the action and identify with Holmes's perspective, both now and for the duration of the travelogue.

As the perspectives in this scene progress, via both photographs and oral narration, the audience occupies the position of passive spectators and then transforms into identifying with a spatio-temporal position and psychological perspective that seems equivalent with that of the traveler-narrator Holmes. This perspectival movement begins with the audience being hailed in the second person by Holmes's first-person, present tense narration: "I shall urgently recommend that you [...]", an injunction that assumes the audience, at some point in the future, will journey to Paris and follow Holmes's itinerary. Immediately, the audience is magically transported to this location, as the slide accompanying this section depicts the Café de la Paix. The next photograph shows the news kiosk at which Holmes saw George Hamlin's photograph, putting the audience more directly in a position analogous to that of the traveler-narrator. As it continues, the scene easily leads the audience into the rhetorical position prepared for it and confirmed by the invocation of the first person plural: "let us do as the Parisians do," a section

accompanied by the photograph of strolling Parisians seen as if from the vantage point of the Café de la Paix. The view provided for the audience, and the perspective from which that view can be seen, has come full circle, shifting the audience's implied location from that of a temporal and spatial outsider looking in at the café to that of an insider looking out from one of its tables, enjoying the illusion of being in Paris. This scene also creates the illusion that Holmes's traveler-narrator is always-already there at the Café de la Paix, in the past, present, and future.

In his association with various media, Holmes enacts the modernist traveler-narrator as a temporally multiplicitous persona simultaneously occupying (and producing) the positions of traveler, narrator, and spectator. He is at once a present lecturer, a past traveler, and a future spectator/photographer. While the photographer may seem to exist in the past, he stands in for the position of the future viewing audience. Each of these roles and corresponding temporal positions is inextricable from the others, produced by the view from the other positions. (To illustrate: we only know the past exists when we view it from the present.) By filtering past, present, and future through each other, the travelogue enacts a version of temporal relativity as well as temporal expansion and condensation. There is no unframed time, no singular present; but all times seem immediate and present within the confines of the performance. The time of the journey becomes compressed in its representation on stage, and then becomes expanded again within the present moment of performance, a new version of travel time. In this way, the framed times create the illusion of life and the illusion of travel.

Travelogue Time: Approaching the Speed of Light and Encountering the Relativity of Simultaneity

The concept of travel – whether lived or represented – is often understood as an experience of immediacy and simultaneity, in which multiple sensations, times, or locations register to the traveler as if all at once, even while maintaining their distinctiveness and connection to competing frames of reference. Burton Holmes describes this as the ideal sensation that he aims for in his travelogues. In the foreword to his first printed collection of travelogues from 1910, he bemoans its impossibility in print: “In an illustrated lecture the impression upon eye and ear should be simultaneous, that the suggestion of travel may be successfully produced. [...] Therefore the author begs that all who read, will, at the same time, listen with the mental ear” (n.p.). By coordinating and emphasizing the simultaneous experience of images, sounds, and narration, Holmes’s travelogues create the illusion of movement as well as the illusion of life as idiosyncratic experiences that are not easily translated into another format or reproduced from another perspective. Doing so only proves that simultaneity is, as Einstein’s theories point out, a relative experience and fully dependent on the perspective from which they are viewed.

Among their many ground-breaking contributions, Einstein’s theories reveal how constant, high-speed travel creates awareness of multiple competing frames of reference, leading to the conclusion that simultaneity is subjective and relative. To illustrate this concept in his explanation of the special theory of relativity, Einstein tells a story about the contrasting perceptions of a single event by a train traveler and a person standing on the railway embankment. In this scenario, lightning strikes along the embankment in two

places. According to the stationary observer, the strikes occur simultaneously. The passenger, however, is moving toward one and away from the other strike, and so sees one slightly before the other. This example proves that moving at a high speed condenses time and makes events appear to happen more quickly as one moves toward them. It also unhinges these events from a single location in time, resituating them within a dynamic structure defined by time, space, and movement. Neither observer's perspective has any more validity than the other; both are equally correct and subjective. The act of moving changes one's understanding of time and space, as well as the framework within which to conceptualize oneself as a perceiving and acting subject. In Einstein's universe, every person experiences time differently—but only when seen from a competing perspective.

As Brian Greene points out, Einstein's theories revealed not just how motion affects measurements of time and space but also how the limits of human perception make it difficult to imagine such large-scale phenomena:

Roughly speaking, spatial separations shrink and time slows for an object in motion. These spectacular features of space and time remained fully hidden until 1905 because although the effects are real, they're miniscule except when the speeds involved approach that of light. It took the genius of Einstein to see beyond everyday perception and reveal the true character of space and time.

(Greene ix)

Within Holmes's travelogues, the sensation of an expanded present moment and the role played by photographs and film provide an opportunity to "see beyond everyday perception." Cinematic motion, while it produces the illusion of life, is not life itself. It is, significantly, better than life, a mode of perception that surpasses human limitations in

its ability to condense time and suggest simultaneity. Photographs, on the other hand, seem to stop time and decontextualize events from their original history. In their recontextualization within the travelogue, they become part of a new history (or narrative) defined by relativity and immediacy.

While some modernist writers – such as Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West – directly invoked Einstein’s name and theories, many others conducted literary thought experiments on such concepts of space and time as simultaneity, the fourth dimension, and the speed of light both before and after Einstein’s theories were published. The coincidence of these experimentations with space and time indicate how new technologies of communication and transportation, such as those changing the cultural landscape around 1900, can alter the way individuals imagine their relationship to the physical world. Michael Whitworth explains:

New technologies not only affect the material circumstances of our lives, but they introduce new metaphors by which we live. Through these metaphors, new technologies can change our relationship to concepts as abstract as space and time, and phenomena as intangible as the velocity of light. At some point in the early twentieth century, the concept of simultaneity changed [...] (170)

While Burton Holmes never explicitly compares his experiences as a traveler-narrator to the theoretical travel made possible in Einstein’s universe, his travelogues demonstrate his awareness of the massive social changes he is witnessing, such as the power of electricity, while providing a model of how the travelogue can approximate the sensation of high-speed travel (such as that experienced when one approaches the speed of light) by condensing both time and space.

Holmes's travelogues often emphasize how the finished product of the travelogue has condensed the protracted journey he took to acquire his material. The two travelogues on the Paris Universal Exposition of 1900 highlight this dynamic of time-space condensation with exceptional clarity, largely because in depicting a World's Fair they are simulacra of simulacra of the experience of world travel. In their unapologetic artificiality and imitation of the experience of instantaneous, relative travel, these travelogues call attention to the disorienting spatio-temporal distortions that occur in modern travel. Describing how the national pavilions are oddly situated next to each other, Holmes's narrator acknowledges that the expo has created a geography that does not "really" exist. "The geography of the street of nations is hopelessly confused. To our surprise we find that Italy is bounded on the west by Turkey, and that Turkey encroaches on the frontiers of the United States. [...] From South Africa to Russia is but a step across this interesting 'map' in the Trocadéro Gardens." (2:178-181, 258) Much as in Holmes's other heavily-edited and condensed travelogues, the traveler-narrator-audience can jump from one city or country to another without appearing to take the time formerly necessary for moving through the intervening spaces.

Similarly, the travelogue condenses the time of Holmes's past travels into a single evening, a dynamic both emphasized and naturalized within the narration. Although the travelogue creates the illusion that we spend a day at the fair, Holmes clearly culls from a summer's worth of experiences visiting the expo. As he explains at the outset, "it was so vast that a hundred days did not suffice for the mere *seeing* of it. [...] How, then, attempt to tell of it in two brief lectures, how save with the assistance of pictures which speak more quickly, more compactly, and more comprehensively than the tongue?" (2:116-

117). This disclaimer suggests that photographs not only stop time, they condense it and contain an experience that was otherwise too “vast” for comprehension. The narrator emphasizes that he did not even *see* all of the expo, suggesting that he certainly did not fully comprehend it, especially as part of a larger, explanatory narrative. However, the photographs can “speak” for him and do it better, using a fundamentally different medium to tell the experience of sensory overload and convey the sensation of immediacy and space-time condensation. Rather amusingly, this explanation has to be rendered verbally, suggesting that the best depiction of this experience of simulated world travel comes from the relative experience of viewing images and hearing live narration simultaneously.

Holmes concludes the second travelogue on the Paris Exposition with a meditation on electricity and the power of electric light that seems both to idolize the new technology and to embrace the inevitable future it embodies:

We stand upon the threshold of the Age of Electricity – the Age of Light. The Universal Exposition of Paris commemorates the close of the nineteenth century, the Age of Steam. And as we look by night upon the Wonder-City of 1900, we see the Eiffel Tower, ablaze with electrical incandescence, pointing like a prophetic finger toward a radiant future — a future in which the Light of Science and the Light of Knowledge shall be universal — a future which shall have no darkness upon the earth, nor shadows in the lives of men. (2: 336)

Employing the first person plural to create a single perspective that includes both narrator and audience, this closing scene positions the audience not just in Paris but at a very distinct time, a moment of massive cultural transition that seems to be occurring quickly

and quite literally before their eyes. The photograph of the Eiffel Tower that accompanies this concluding text shows the Parisian landmark outlined in lights, with a bright beacon projecting several beams of light from the top. The caption to this photograph in the printed version of the travelogue reveals that Holmes views this new technology through an astronomical metaphor: “The Eiffel constellation and a tri-tailed comet.” This caption is linked to both the past and the emerging future, invoking both the timelessness of constellations that humans have observed for countless generations and a future in which the speed of starlight and the limits of space are no longer incongruent with daily reality, but are instead sensations that may be artificially created by the genius and technology of the modern era. Other photos in this final section portray the Palace of Electricity, which is topped by the Star of Electricity. In this caption and other descriptions, the narrator plays with astronomical metaphors that compare electricity to starlight, as the former delightfully seems to be replacing the latter.

The future that this passage envisions is defined not just by electricity and light but by the *speed* of light, the universal constant that undergirds Einstein’s theories and ushers in the age of relativity. Earlier, Holmes makes it clear how the phenomenon of electricity creates a new sense of life that is intoxicatingly appealing: “The Palace of Electricity was the soul of the Exposition; from it went forth along the myriad, endless nerves of wire the thrills that gave it life and light and motion” (2: 329). Here the illusion of life is explicitly bound to the speed at which electricity and light can travel, a speed that surpasses the limitations of human movement. This technology also creates a new mode of perception that resembles synesthesia, epitomized by the water fountains that were lit by colored lights and accompanied by recorded music by such composers as

Beethoven and Wagner. (The expo fountains seem very similar to the famous fountains of the Bellagio Hotel in Las Vegas, and thus illustrate an attraction that remains appealing today, over a century later.) Describing the experience of watching these fountains, Holmes's traveler-narrator enthuses that "the eye listens to this *color music*, finding in it a new sensation, a new pleasure, and a promise for which as yet there is no name" (2:335). The ability to perceive with both the eye and the ear simultaneously resembles the ideal mode of perception that Holmes wants his travelogue audience to employ. In this "new pleasure" of simultaneity as synesthesia, Holmes suggests that, just as photographs can speak, the eye can listen, telling a new kind of story about travel and perception that moves at, and is determined by, the speed of light.

New Modes of Travel and Perception: The Image Standard and Narrative

The photographic image has a symbiotic relationship with travel and representations of it, largely because the technology of film, photography, trains, and other transportation technologies developed around the same time. As a way of conceptualizing travel, photographs stand in for the experience of travel and produce a sense of immediacy and decontextualization. As in the passage above, the photograph provides a way to capture a space and time that seems too "vast" for human comprehension. Surveying all types of travel images, not just photographs, Tom Gunning considers the infatuation with and consumption of postcards as characteristic of how travel images help to control and restructure the sense of travel that can otherwise feel overwhelming. Citing examples of tourists arriving at their destinations only to

quickly buy, write, and mail postcards¹⁶, Gunning observes that these images are not merely a side effect of modern travel, but constitute its very structure and *raison d'être*.

The postcard seemed to function not only as a souvenir of the journey but as its goal and purpose. This obsession with documenting one's trip by an image brings me to the core of the issue that I believe the travel genre poses for modern perception and use of images. In the modern era the very concept of travel becomes intricately bound up with the production of images. The image becomes our way of structuring a journey and even provides a substitute for it. Travel becomes a means of appropriating the world through images. (2006: 27)

Notably, the journey is structured around the image, rather than vice versa. This dominance of the image begins in the nineteenth century, when the advent of photography helped create the "image standard," a "form of representation that itself becomes the common currency mediating among different forms of representation and thereby endowed with a seeming stabilizing effect" (Cohen and Higonet 16). Even when representations of travel do not include images, they take on the qualities of images – immediacy, time condensation, singularity and staticity.

The postcard serves as a good example of how the image enacts time condensation, eliding the time spent in transit, much as Holmes's travelogues do for his audiences. Typically, very little text is written on a postcard—the receiver's address, a quick note describing the writer's arrival or personal connection to the scenic image, and the writer's signature. Rather than a story giving the details of the time in-between the

¹⁶ "In 1900 a traveler reported in a magazine that he had joined a group to climb the Rigi in Switzerland. Upon reaching the top, he saw to his utter amazement that his fellow mountaineers immediately stormed the hotel counter where postcards were sold! Five minutes later they were all scribbling furiously." (Fabian and Adam 339)

images and sights perceived, the receiver gets a glib, disconnected greeting that may mean little. In one example from 1900, a husband wrote to his wife, “‘This is a most awful torturing death. Kind regards.’ The opposite side of the card showed a Chinese criminal in a death cage” (Fabian and Adam 339). Additional time condensation occurs as the receiver finds herself looking at, on one side, the textual details of her spatial location given by her address (here/now), then flipping the card around to see a snapshot of the tourist destination (there/then). The journey getting from there to here has been erased, much as it does when a cinematic ellipsis deletes the time it takes to move a character from one scene to the next.

As Holmes’s travelogues show, taking photographs is a particularly effective way to frame and delimit time and space when one’s interaction with them can be disorienting or seem to dislodge the traveler from a single stable spatio-temporal location. Noting the parallel between photography and tourism, both of which commodify and render the physical world manageable, Susan Sontag claims that photographs

help people to take possession of space in which they are insecure. [...] A way of certifying experience, taking photographs is also a way of refusing it—by limiting experience to a search for the photogenic, by converting experience into an image, a souvenir. [...] Unsure of other responses, [most tourists] take a picture. This gives shape to experience: stop, take a photograph, and move on. (9-10)

Notably, the “shape” of travel that results from such photographs is segmented, framed, and decontextualized from the history of both the original object’s physical location (e.g., the pyramids are severed from their Egyptian context) and the traveler’s journey.

Whether moving or static, the image acts within the travelogue to establish an alternative

conception of storytelling that appears to communicate while remaining disconnected, non-narrative and non-progressive. We gain the image, but we lose the story – and the story may be the part that most reflects the difficulty of conveying the relativity of modernist travel within the linearity of language.

An example of the image standard in written representations of travel occurs in Holmes's travelogue on *Japan—the Cities*.¹⁷ Japan represents for Holmes a number of firsts as well as a sense of encountering a culture and time that does not fit in to western notions of progressive storytelling. Holmes first visited Japan in 1892, just as the island nation was being exposed to Western outsiders. His cameraman, Depue, was the first ever to film in Japan, and Holmes was told that he was the first foreigner to stay at an especially lovely tea-house in Miyajima. Describing the unique perspective he attained at this location in the travelogue on Japan, Holmes departs from his conventional strategy of ending with an optimistic look toward the future. Instead, he indicates that every encounter with Japan – whether real or mediated – is for him an encounter with his past, with the person he was on his first Japanese journey. Surveying the landscape from this tea-house, Holmes admits:

the thought that mine was the only foreign eye to feast on all this quaintness and this beauty gave me a sense of ownership in it all—the proud pagoda on the cliff—the modest dwellings far below—the granite stairways and the terraced streets—of all these I took possession. [...] Other richer journeys may await me, but none will have, for me the same peculiar charm, nor in remembrance give the

¹⁷ The date of this travelogue performance is unclear, since Holmes gave travelogues on Japan in 1892, 1893, 1897, 1899, 1904, and 1908. The printed version of the travelogue, from which this quote is taken, first appeared in 1919.

same enthusiastic thrill; for the Japan that I have tried to show you and to tell you of, is the Japan that fascinated me when I was twenty-two. (10: 335, 336)

The sense of newness and discovery is significant here, and in its recollection of this time the travelogue recreates the sensation of original discovery for the audience. While prior to this moment, the narrator has told stories of his encounters with places like the pagoda referred to here, at this point the narrative comes to resemble snapshots, decontextualized images that are presented outside the structure of an encapsulating story. The long dashes in the passage show the points of separation between these images of the pagoda, the dwellings, the stairways and streets. Instead of narrating these images within a story, the narrator “takes possession” of them, imposing what order he can in an effort to compensate for the timelessness evoked by the moment. While disorienting, this experience is also intoxicating in its newness. This scene as recollected also parallels the narrator’s sense of encountering a younger version of himself, a delightful sensation that he seeks to recreate.

This method of representation and self-representation is indicative of the way Holmes creates a performing persona that appears both continuous and decontextualized. By embracing photography and cinema as crucial components of his travelogues, Holmes crafted a performance of travel that reordered and renarrated a series of decontextualized images that all seem to exist in an unlocatable present moment. Visual theorists including Jonathan Crary and Walter Benjamin, as well as philosophers like Friedrich Nietzsche, note that the rise of capitalism (and other social forces) in the nineteenth century led to a visual culture in which images seem detached from history and are no

longer presented in a format in which they can be deeply contemplated.¹⁸ Although the travelogue removes images and events from a location within a singular, historical time line, the performance nonetheless produce the illusion of continuity, as Holmes edits out all the ruptures of representation, all the delays of travel. Holmes's travelogues seamlessly integrated travel images with his performer persona, so that both the photographs and films as well as Holmes's performer-narrator become detached from cultural and historical context. In the travelogue format, travel and representations of it have become ways of detaching oneself from any larger context and creating the possibility for a fully new frame of (self-)reference wherein the illusion of continuity can be created.

Reacting to these changes in representations of travel and the position of the narrator, such modernist authors as Joseph Conrad emphasized the importance of the narrated journey as detailing the in-between time of physical movement that joins together disparate spaces and images. In his 1924 essay "Geography and Some Explorers," Conrad links writing with cartography and admits his preference for a representation of space that results from "the thoughts, the impressions, and the toil of [the explorer's] day" rather than "a long array of precise, no doubt interesting, and even profitable figures" (1). Conrad contrasts objective maps of space, as static images of travel similar to photographs, with narrated stories of an individual's journey, making clear the conflict he sees between competing methods for depicting the physical world. Later, Conrad insists that "geography finds its origin in action" (2), reminding modern readers that space can only acquire human significance when understood in relation to the

¹⁸ See Crary 21.

process of one's journey through it. Faced with an abundance of representations of travel that devalue the traveler's experience, Conrad expresses some anxiety at losing a feeling of connection not just between person and place but between the moments of space and time that appear to becoming increasingly fragmented and disorienting.

The story that gets lost in such objective and decontextualized representations of travel is often that of the disorienting nature of high-speed travel, sensations that are not easily understood or put into words. In her study comparing cinema to train travel, Lynne Kirby has noted that these technologies create a new subject position, the "spectator-passenger" or "unstable subject of both the railroad and the cinema" (8). This easily-manipulated subject is "molded in relation to new forms of perception, leisure, temporality, and modern technology," having been prepared by the disorienting speed and isolation of railroad travel that was capable of inducing such physical and psychological conditions as railway spine and railway brain (24). After becoming inured to the shock and disorientation of high-speed travel, this subject becomes, in Kirby's words, "claimed" by the cinema, which utilizes montage and continuity editing to both create and control instability in the spectator¹⁹ (24, 70). Having lost one sense of narrative and connection to the physical world that they are encountering at high speeds, these spectator-passengers are easily integrated into the new logic of cinematic narrative, in which time becomes both compressed, as an image, and then expanded, as the moment of film projection and performance produces a new sense of continuity.

¹⁹ Kirby's explanation is worth quoting in full. "Later, montage would absorb the aggressive function of a violent interruption of a journey, of a narrative—discontinuity as a shock principle, or rather that which terrorizes vision with the shock of the unexpected. If, as is commonly asserted, the repression of discontinuity is what classical, invisible editing is all about, then we could say that continuity editing is about the control of trauma as well." (70) Kirby also argues that the spectator-passenger, as a hysterical figure, becomes feminized in the face of the aggressive (masculine) technology that was dominating both American landscape and culture. In her analysis, this dynamic was especially prevalent in the transitional period of early film, before the standardization of Hollywood conventions circa 1920.

As a consummate performer, Holmes is happy to manipulate his travelogue audience with techniques that he modified from his childhood magic shows, given in his grade-school years to impress and entertain his teachers, schoolmates, and family friends. By his own account, he admits that his travelogues satisfied the same desire as his magic shows to “bamboozle” his audience, albeit with a more elite and cultured form of worldly entertainment that mixed information with vicarious travel (Holmes 1953: 61). Just as a magician distracts the audience from the action behind the scenes, Holmes’s traveler-narrator likewise distracts the audience from the time-space journey that has been omitted while emphasizing the new sense of continuity and immediacy of the travelogue.

Continuity and Multiplicity in Holmes’s Travelogue Films

The modernist travelogue demonstrates the tension between two competing strategies for representing one’s travels: to represent the increasingly compartmentalized world through which one journeys, and to render one’s disparate impressions into a story that produces the illusion of temporal, spatial, and psychological continuity. In Holmes’s travelogues, the act of looking and self-perception creates an illusion of narrative unity and continuity by acting as a focal point that bridges the gaps in a performance that, at first glance, appears to be composed largely of decontextualized and disconnected images and impressions. In so doing, these travelogues produce a model of narrative that is organized around the process of perception and the experience of simultaneity, embodied by the multiply-located figure of Holmes himself. Demonstrating how the image standard integrates a new way of looking with a new way of conceptualizing narrative,

Holmes's travelogues also illustrate how the narrator persona becomes a site of multiplicity, uncertainty, and relativity.

Common to the films, photographs, and lectures of Holmes's travelogues are techniques found in cinematic editing for continuity, such as establishing shots, point of view shots, and parallel editing, whereby sequential images or impressions are understood to occur simultaneously. Much of the continuity of the live travelogue comes from the centrality of Holmes's traveler-narrator, whose perspective unifies both the various forms of media and the alternating segments of time into a cohesive performance of travel. No matter what the audience is seeing or hearing, it is all subsumed within their reception of the living, traveling, narrating persona of Burton Holmes.

Holmes's travelogue films straddle genres, both as stand-alone films and within the context of their exhibition, and they have been considered both in relation to early ethnographic films and early narrative cinema.²⁰ Although most of these films function primarily as documentary presentations of Holmes's journeys or objective views of scenic locations, some are clearly orchestrated to tell stories. During their 1898 visit to Arizona, for example, Holmes and Depue produced a number of short films that served as documentary evidence of their travels, including films of the Grand Canyon and the Hopi Snake Dance, a Navajo ritual commonly presented to tourists as a local curiosity. However, on this trip they also staged for film a chase scene in which a young white woman, aka Rattlesnake Jack, steals the Navajo Chief's horse and is then pursued by a

²⁰ See, for instance Fatimah Rony, *The Third Eye*; Lynne Kirby, *Parallel Tracks*; Charles Musser, "The Travel Genre in 1903-04"; Musser and Nelson, *High-class Moving Pictures*; and the essays in *Virtual Voyages* (edited by Jeffrey Ruoff).

group of Navajo Indians.²¹ The production of Rattlesnake Jack's film reveals how Holmes and Depue both incorporated and developed fundamental techniques of narrative film within their work on the travelogues, as the chase genre was one of the earliest forms of cinematic storytelling in film's first decade (Hall).

As Lynne Kirby points out, Holmes's multi-media travelogues made a significant contribution to the development of both the travel genre and early narrative cinema, most particularly for the way in which they created the illusion of movement out of disparate components and images:

What makes Holmes interesting for my purposes is that the kind of continuity which can be identified from the projection of static scenic views, including those of trains, to that of moving images of the same genre was made by Holmes and de Pue themselves. Their tour began to incorporate projected moving pictures in addition to colored stereographs as early as 1897, and they included, significantly, their own version of the *Empire State Express*—to compete, one can only assume, with Biograph's extremely popular film of the same title. Holmes thus contributed to producing one of the great genres of early film, the travel genre.

(41)

Some of Holmes's films demonstrate how the tendency to edit for continuity can produce the illusion of a traveling subject who perceives and exists in multiple frames of reference simultaneously. In a 1937 film of the French Riviera, for instance, the discontinuity of filmic images suggests the discontinuity of the traveler-narrator's perception, the

²¹ It appears that at least some of these films were projected as part of Holmes's 1904 London travelogue. The inclusion of the Rattlesnake Jack film-story may offer further justification for changing the name of Holmes's performances from lectures to travelogues, as it indicates a new format of representing an individual's actual travels in combination with thrilling fictional stories that are only tangentially related to the traveler's journey.

disconnect between what is seen and the seer, between object and subject. This film subtly blurs the distinction between Holmes as subject and as object, so that he appears to occupy both positions simultaneously. Within this ten minute film, narrated by Holmes, the camera portrays aspects of the southern French landscape typical to a travelogue. Included in the scenes are depictions of village residents, the coastline, people frolicking on the beach, two winding mountain roads that run along the Cote d'Azur, and Holmes sipping coffee at a café in Nice with a scenic overlook of the beaches below. This last scene featuring Holmes, which lasts about thirty seconds, exhibits editing choices that prioritize both continuity and discontinuity. Following several film segments showing a car driving on the winding mountain roads, the travelogue cuts to Holmes at the café, positioned in the lower right corner of the screen. The next cut shows the coastline below, from a position that is easily identified with that occupied by the leisured Holmes. However, as the camera pans over the coastline from right to left, Holmes comes into view on the left edge of the screen, looking at the coastline through binoculars. The camera rests on him, as he sets down his binoculars and takes a sip of coffee. The next cut transitions to another segment showing another part of the Riviera countryside.

The organization of this scene into the story of an afternoon on the Riviera lends continuity to this series of images, in particular suggesting connections between images in which the audience first sees Holmes, then from his perspective, and then back to Holmes. In classical cinema, this shot-reverse shot structure implies that the audience is looking at the landscape from his perspective. But this short scene also illustrates cinematic (and travelogic) discontinuity, being a series of separate shots taken from different camera angles. On one level, the audience is presented with the separation

between Holmes as object, sipping his coffee or otherwise engaged in on-screen action, and Holmes as perceiving subject, as the film shows him actively looking as well as directly showing what we presume he sees in a way that allows the audience to identify the camera's lens with Holmes's eyes. On another level, the panning camera shot merges these two subject positions, creating the illusion that one Holmes, seen on/looking from the right side of the screen, is observing another Holmes, seen on/looking from the left side of the screen. For an audience trained to understand the shot-reverse shot as establishing a point of view, this editing creates an uncanny situation in which Holmes appears to perceive himself.

Holmes may thus appear to exist (within the film) in two places at once, as the quick cuts also suggest simultaneity. To approximate the sensation of simultaneity, authors and cinematographers often resort to parallel editing, a strategy dominant in early chase films from 1909 on. Working with the short scenes and quick cuts distinctive to early American narrative film, parallel editing alternates two lines of action so that sequential scenes both follow each other and are understood to occur simultaneously.²² In *The Great Train Robbery*, parallel editing allows the film perspective to shift between the simultaneous events of the train entering the station and the robbers murdering the station attendant. As a result, the short film generates a sense of tension and foreshadowing about what will happen when these two "times" meet and the action of the train intersects with the dubious actions of the outlaws. In the uncanny scenes of Holmes's self-perception on the French Riviera, the cinematic logic of continuity editing suggests that the multiple Holmeses exist simultaneously within the story of his

²² See Gunning, "Continuity," 92.

travelogue. Within the parameters of this short scene, therefore, and within the space-time of the travelogue performance, these multiple selves appear to exist within an expanded present moment of representation in which versions of self are meant to be synonymous and interchangeable, not temporally differentiated from each other. On Holmes's travelogue stage these personas coexist simultaneously, as live Holmes can view a photographic or filmic image of himself, but in film they are presented sequentially instead, breaking down the illusion of continuity between self as perceiver and self as perceived object.

Whereas one typical means of creating cinematic continuity involves a moving figure who leaves one shot and enters the next, thereby bridging the filmic cut, Holmes's travelogues often use an eyeline match to suture the cut between distinct scenes. Thus the act of perception holds the subject of Holmes together, even when mediation presents that subject with multiple versions of self. This strategy of self-reflexive representation is analogous to the foregrounded act of writing and narrating that functions in written travelogues to create a sense of structure and meaning at moments that might otherwise seem disconnected or confusing. For both film and written text, the traveler-narrator's awareness of the media of representation attempts to counteract the limitations of the genre.

The centrality of the traveler-as-perceiver is evident in a film on the Grand Canyon from the 1920s, in which Holmes again appears as a subject of the film, both moving through the landscape and perceiving it. The film begins with a train arriving at the station, moving toward the viewer from the upper right of the screen to the lower left, a typical strategy for depicting a moving train that follows the example set by the

Lumière brothers' 1895 film. Holmes disembarks from the train; he walks toward the canyon, points toward it, then walks to the edge and looks over; the camera pans the canyon. In this segment, the audience again understands the cinematic editing as establishing Holmes's point of view, an equivalence underscored by Holmes's emphatic miming of the act of looking for the camera. About two minutes later in this film, Holmes has arrived, via donkey ride, at the bottom of the canyon. The film shows Holmes sitting next to the river with his guide, who covers his head with his hands and turns his back to the camera, as if to protect his anonymity. Holmes, however, shields his eyes with his hands and looks directly at the camera/audience, then points at the river; the camera pans the river. This segment interpolates the audience into the scene, aligning them with the film camera, so that in the next scene of the river, the audience both shares the perspective of Holmes and acknowledges that they have become identified with the camera, in this way retaining their individuality as subjects who were hailed by the great man himself.

Whereas the act of looking often creates a sense of continuity within Holmes's travelogues, the act of narrating, when separated from the live narrator persona, creates a sense of distance and discontinuity between verbal and visual representations of travel and the traveler-narrator. In the 1937 film of the French Riviera, which was likely distributed through Paramount or MGM instead of shown as part of a live travelogue, the voiceover narration emphasizes the difference between narrating Holmes and his cinematic persona. This distancing demonstrates a reluctance to equate the two personas, since the filmed Holmes exists clearly in the past instead of in the present of the live performance. Instead of identifying with the past traveler, narrating Holmes employs the

passive voice to distance himself from the mediated Holmes on the screen, thereby both revealing and enacting an experience of self perception that is temporally diffuse. As the scene depicting Holmes at the café begins, Holmes's voice narrates: "Returning to Nice over the Grand Corniche, an occasional café or restaurant *is encountered*, from which beautiful views of sea and mountain *can be enjoyed*." (my emphasis) At this point, the camera cuts to the shot of the coastline below, as the narration continues: "Looking backwards and far below can be seen Cap Martin" (here the camera begins to pan to include Holmes in the shot) "and in the distance the irregular coastline of the Ligure Riviera." At no point does Holmes's narration acknowledge his on-screen presence. However, the synchronization of language and image in this scene guides the audience's reception of Holmes's filmed persona, spatially locating the second filmic Holmes, along with the coastline, "in the distance," as well as temporally removed from the first Holmes, from whose perspective the second Holmes can be located and described by the phrase "backwards and far below." Unlike in Holmes's performed travelogues, the narrator does not tell a story about his afternoon at the café, which might well have included some interesting details about the waiter who appears in the film. Instead, this film seems to convey a universal, impersonal experience of southern France.

Translating the Travelogue and the Traveler-Narrator Into Print

While Holmes was successful at creating the illusion of a continuous self within his travelogue performances, largely due to his skill at manipulating his audience by simultaneously presenting multiple representations of himself and his travels, he struggles to produce this same effect when working only with a single medium,

especially the printed word. Much as he resists identifying with his cinematic persona, Holmes also resists identifying with the written persona in his autobiography. In comparison with the live travelogue's capacity to create the illusion of life as an immediate experience of multiplicity and even synesthesia, the written autobiography is a poor substitute in its singularity and retrospective nature. If this autobiography produces any illusion of the world traveler's life, it is an illusion of the past, a story that has already occurred. To create the illusion that this life is still continuing in the present moment, Holmes's traveler-narrator draws attention to the artificial nature of literary representation, often employing metalepsis to suggest that his narrator persona exists beyond the borders of the text.

In the foreword to his 1953 autobiography, Holmes laments the temporal and stylistic changes that occur in the translation from image to text, when simultaneity must be replaced by linear succession and description (i.e., the typical notion of narrative storytelling).

I have done my best to make my hearers SEE the things that have thrilled me in the course of my more than sixty years of travel. Now I am asked to do this without the aid of pictures glowing on a screen, without the help of spoken words which can be made to mean so much by a shading of a tone or a stress of an inflection. Now I am asked to work with nothing but a sheet of paper and a pen to help me re-create the atmosphere of "otherwhere" [...]. Word pictures are difficult to paint. We are told that "words are the only things that last forever." Therefore words should be the most durable pigments with which to paint pictures of the things that have seemed best worth while, the things that have become

one's property, in the sense in which travel endows one with a title deed to the entire world. (ix-x)

Several of Holmes's assumptions about self and representation come to the forefront in this passage. His notion of narration has become defined by the multi-media presence of performance and the image standard. He wants to use words to paint pictures, not just tell stories. Holmes wants both the immediacy of images and the synesthetic combination of images and oral narration. The image standard has permeated his sense of representation, self, and self-representation, suggesting that he wants to produce for his readers a picture of his traveler-narrator persona rather than his life story.

In assuming that the purpose of his autobiography is to create the illusion of travel, Holmes reveals that he has come to define himself as travel, not just as a traveler or performer. If the travelogue produces the best illusion of life, this logic may also extend to Holmes's conception of his own life. While much of his life was spent traveling, and he has many great stories to share about these experiences, one would expect there to be other interesting details about his personal life. However, the autobiography minimizes Holmes's personal relationships, while emphasizing both his connection to place and his public relationships with famous figures or notable traveling companions. While he describes meeting his wife, she is remarkably absent from this account of his life.

This disclaimer also reveals Holmes's anxiety about mortality, a fear not uncommon for an 83-year-old man looking back over the span of his life. Faced with his own imminent death, the traveler-narrator embraces the ability of his printed words to live on after him, since "words are the only things that last forever." However, he also

resists the possibility that his once vibrant, ever-moving personality will be replaced by these static, monochromatic marks on paper. Such resistance to a representation of self as object, as a static image rather than a dynamic performance, drives many of the narrative choices in Holmes's autobiography. These techniques share much in common with the written travelogues of other modernist authors who worry about the ability of mediated versions of self to replace the living entity. If, as discussed above, the simultaneous acts of traveling and narrating create awareness of multiple competing framed versions of self, then one can encounter those alternative versions of self throughout the journey, on the return home, and most likely as captured by media, as happens with Holmes. In his travelogues, he must continually view past, mediated versions of himself from the stage. Such self-viewing can create something of an ontological crisis if the observer is unable to synthesize these versions of self within a continuous narrative.

These past selves are not just temporally removed from the present self; their mediation also removes them from the movement of life, turning them into specters of one's death. Although it becomes amplified in the multi-media modernist travelogue, this disturbing scenario of self-encounter is endemic to the travel story in general, as Steve Clark makes clear: "The [travel] story appears to confirm survival, but publication itself, though a form of immortality, may be seen as a kind of animus against the living self. The traveller *qua* traveller is a textual figment, synonymous with the duration of the tale, the voice of the dead" (18). The persona produced by travel has with a limited kind of life that is tied to the immediacy of the image. This persona dies at the end of the journey, and written or narrated accounts of that tale produce the unfortunate sensation for the traveler-narrator of describing that alternative version of self that no longer exists.

That this persona is both a textual creation and a representative of the living author raises the stakes for such moments of self-confrontation, a conflict that often accompanies moments of metalepsis in Holmes's autobiography. Metalepsis is a quality of narrative voice that Genette defines as "taking hold of (telling) by changing levels" (235). In so doing, metalepsis appears to "transgress" the boundaries between "the world in which one tells [and] the world of which one tells" (236). In Holmes's autobiographical account of his travels, he finds himself narrating a past world and self that both differs from his present perspective and shares many inevitable similarities. On one level, of course, past and present Holmes are merely different temporal occurrences of the same person. However, the combined processes of narrating, resisting the past, and producing metalepsis draws attention to the artificiality of the life thus produced. In Genette's words, "The most troubling thing about metalepsis indeed lies in this unacceptable and insistent hypothesis, that the extradiegetic is perhaps always diegetic, and that the narrator and his narrates—you and I—perhaps belong to some narrative" (236). In overstepping the bounds between life and fiction, the distinction between the two becomes blurred. The notion of self comes to resemble a constructed narrative, a life that may be equally artificial with all the illusions that Holmes has created over the years.

In an effort to present a living entity, a multiplicitous persona that transcends the limitations of time and narrative, Holmes's autobiography frequently employs prolepsis, countering the retrospective nature of the genre. In his writing and in his life, Holmes always appears to be looking forward, defining himself as a perpetual traveler and anticipating future trips even as he is recounting former journeys. Much as he concludes the lecture on "Japan, the Cities" with a projection of the many future Japanese journeys

he will take, Holmes repeatedly gets ahead of himself, or at least of his self as a narrated tale, within his autobiography. Many examples of this metaleptic technique come from representations of Holmes's experience with Japan, a nation that embodied his youth and traveler-narrator persona for many reasons. His desire to capture this past self and represent it as existing in a moment that retains a sense of immediacy and multiplicity produces metaleptic accounts of his encounters with Japan that balance retrospective narration with prolepsis. These moments of metalepsis suggest Holmes's resistance to describing these events as past occurrences, preferring instead to give an impressionistic and multi-dimensional portrayal of a place that had become part of his traveler-narrator persona.

For many reasons, Japan symbolized a sense of timelessness and perpetual youth for Holmes's traveler-narrator persona. During his first trip to Japan in 1892, he met John Stoddard, who would later help Holmes replace him on the travel lecture circuit when Stoddard retired. The stories and photographs Holmes collected in Japan created his first professional travelogue in 1893. The iconic beard he would sport throughout his life first appeared in Japan. In 1932, Holmes celebrated the "fortieth anniversary" of this beard by returning to the Japanese village of Ikao, where he claims the beard was "born" (Holmes 1953: 88). Holmes loved Japan so much, he visited it over 10 times during his career, and this country continued to have a deep impact on his sense of self as a man, a traveler, and a public performer.

In his blatant appropriation of Japanese culture and artifacts for his home and his travelogue performances, Holmes demonstrated how Japan functioned as a symbolic (and thus timeless) place and time. He felt a strong bond with the country and customs of

Japan, to such an extent that he transplanted many items and practices from Japan to his orientalized homes. He installed a plethora of spoils from his trips to the Far East in his Manhattan and Chicago homes. These accoutrements ranged from statues of Buddha to a thirteenth-century tile ceiling from a Chinese temple. To fully give a flavor of Japanese fashion, he presented some travelogues on Japan wearing a kimono. He also wore the kimono when lounging at home.

When Holmes begins describing his first journey to Japan in the autobiography, he interrupts the story to include eleven newspaper articles he wrote on the country. To fully illustrate his present view of Japan, he presents a sampling of what he has already written about it. While these articles represent his experience in Japan, they are focused more on the place than on the traveler's life in them. Not chronologically ordered, they resemble memoir more than autobiography. They also demonstrate his resistance to narrating an autobiography, as the narrator interrupts his life story to include them in the middle of the text rather than as appendices or back material.

Another example of the multi-dimensional representation of Japan occurs in the narrated account of Holmes's first journey to Japan, illustrating the metaleptic technique that Holmes uses throughout the autobiography. On the ship ride from Vancouver to Japan, Holmes describes another first—his first meeting with Nathaniel Curzon, then the ex-Under-Secretary for India. Holmes describes chatting with the “Superior Person” on the ship, and then explains that afterward he followed Curzon's steady advancement through the ranks of British Imperial society, ultimately becoming Lord Curzon, Vice-Royalty of India. After describing a conversation with Curzon's daughter in 1930, Holmes breaks his narrative with this direct appeal to the reader:

Kind reader, pardon me. You see how difficult it is to tell a straight, coherent story of my wandering life. A moment ago I was introducing you to Nathaniel Curzon in the middle of the Pacific Ocean in 1892 and now I have just had you meeting his daughter in Ethiopia nearly forty years later! So with your permission, back to my first voyage from Vancouver to Japan. (84)

In this example, the reader becomes aware of multiple temporal frames of reference, reading 1892 both in chronological order, as Holmes's account of his life has progressed toward it, and with the hindsight of 1930. This passage also demonstrates the narrator's resistance to portraying his life as "a straight, coherent story," clearly preferring to meander in both space and time. A true performer, Holmes as narrator tells his reading audience how to interpret his digressions – they offer an illusion of meandering movement that is meant to distract the reader from the static linearity of his life as a told tale.

In another example, Holmes's narrator again both employs prolepsis and draws the reader's attention to the text's temporal movement. The autobiography is describing Holmes's stay in war-time London in 1918, and he reaches both to past and future events to shed insight on a present social encounter with the stage actress Leslie Carter: "Apropos of Mrs. Leslie Carter, let me go farther back and then farther forward along the pathway of the moving years. First back to the eighteen eighties of the last century [...]. And now with the years, I move to 1931. [...] But to get on with the war" (216-217). In these two additional scenes, Holmes describes awkward moments he witnessed involving Carter first in St. Augustine, Florida, and then in Santa Barbara. Such sections of the autobiography read more like portions of a travelogue than a chronological account of the

events in Holmes's life, in this case pulling all pertinent information about Holmes's encounters with Leslie Carter in order to give the audience the fullest picture possible. While such temporal movement and contextualization is hard to avoid in autobiographical tales told with hindsight, Holmes's life story does not simply add these prolepses (and occasional analepses) to the otherwise straightforward account of his life; the structure of his autobiography is defined by this repeated metalepsis. As a result, the narrator appears to be a moving figure, existing outside any of the single temporal frames of reference within which the narrated Holmes appears to be confined.

By narrating from a position external to the many competing temporal frames of reference, the present, narrating Holmes appears distinct from the past, narrated versions of his traveler-narrator persona. Whereas in his travelogues, the competing versions of Holmes appeared to coexist simultaneously within the expanded present moment of the performance, the progressive textual narrative of Holmes's life can only approximate such simultaneous multiplicity. Instead, the text employs metalepsis, generating a multiplicitous traveler-narrator that can also be found in the parallel editing of some of Holmes's cinematic travelogues. Much as in written travelogues, the modernist traveler-narrator presents itself as a relative persona, both a static object and a moving subject – as well as the product of the difference between these two subject positions.

Holmes developed the term and concept of the travelogue, a distinctly modernist representation of an individual's journeys that is idiosyncratic, impressionistic, decontextualized, relative, and more concerned with the process of connecting with the audience in the expanded present moment of a journey than with recreating the time line of his past experience. As modernist authors followed in his wake, they too crafted

narratives that demonstrate how storytelling can be altered by the image standard and the relativity of perception. Much as Holmes felt discomfort at translating his life into print, so too did authors such as Ford Madox Ford (discussed in the next chapter) experience the uneasy process of self-representation when depicting their travels enabled them to encounter competing versions of self.

As a live performer, Holmes managed to contain the multiple versions of self within the illusion of a continuous persona. But as his struggle with the translation to print indicates, this continuity depends on the simultaneity enabled by the multiple forms of media included in his travelogues. Ordered within the finite structure of a book, Holmes and other authors like Ford realize that the mediated versions of their traveling selves have been rendered static and mortal. In an effort to compensate for that encounter with death, Holmes and others experiment with the vision of the universe imagined by Einstein's theories of relativity, in which one can always appear to be a moving subject if seen from multiple competing frames of reference.

Ignorance is Bliss: Relativity as Resistance in Ford's America

I was asked to write this book by some one who has a certain right to ask me to write books. No, I do not mean a lady, I mean a publisher. He wanted me to write a book to prove that AMERICA had assumed in the eyes of the outside world the position that Prussia had before the late War. And America undoubtedly has assumed that position – in the eyes of Europe. She looks like the great, bullying, militarist Thing that Prussia certainly looked like. I am using the expression “looked like” with care and attention.

I am not writing this as one who knows.

— Ford Madox Ford, *New York Is Not America*

What is the difference between what a Thing looks like and what it is? That is one of the main questions that runs throughout Ford Madox Ford's narrative of his time in America, and it applies not just to America but also to his narrator persona. In the anxiety Ford expresses about the reception of his text and narrator persona, *New York Is Not America* points to the difference between a live travelogue produced by a performer like Burton Holmes and a written travelogue. Holmes embraces the image version of himself when it seems to represent one of many possible traveler-narrator personas, but Ford sees his image persona as a static object that can be commodified and consumed by the masses. As a live performer, Holmes remains in control of this process, but Ford's textual persona does not. The more he writes about America, the more he sees himself becoming a static part of a geographical and cultural landscape that he fears.

The chapters of *New York Is Not America* were originally published as cultural essays in American magazines while Ford was giving a series of lecture tours in 1926. As a book, these chapters come to be organized around the charge Ford received from his publisher: to write a book about how America looks to an outsider. The process of taking

on this perspective while at the same time writing as an insider, a part-time resident of New York, produces a narrator persona that fluctuates between depicting his present vision and experiences and imagining what this representation of America will look like to a future reading audience. As with other travel narratives, Ford's writing is frequently dominated by visual descriptions of what he sees – the Flatiron Building in Manhattan or the endless plains of the Midwest, for instance. However, once he describes these images and places, his narration progresses to imagine what they will look like from a future perspective. What happens, for instance, when New York is no longer the financial capital of the world? What happens when the rising population of the Midwest tries to take over American and European culture, as Ford fears they will? These considerations destabilize the position of the traveler-narrator, who becomes a temporally relative figure that can likewise be seen in the present and from the perspective of an unpredictable future. For Ford, this relative self-perception is made all the more anxious by his past experiences in the first World War and his ambivalence toward his German heritage. Imagining the future, when America will resemble the Prussian empire, becomes a disorienting experience of encountering the past.

Faced with these disturbing insights, the narrator attempts to convey information that he prefers not to acknowledge to himself. In doing so, the narrative becomes determined by literary techniques that mirror the processes of psychological suppression and cognitive distancing. Despite the publisher's request that Ford confirm the bellicose nature of America in his book, Ford ardently advocates for peace and insists that people all over the world are much more alike than different. He explicitly invokes a coming era of globalization, when the concepts of nation and nationality will become outdated modes

of thinking about the relationship between self and place. This vision is more utopian than realistic, and it represents the narrator's desire to avoid the disturbing realities of the present American cultural landscape. Faced with a lack of control over both a present and future that he finds terrifying, Ford's narrator also resists the authority implicit in writing and replaces it with feigned ignorance and impotence. His text includes numerous disclaimers about the limitations of his experience and narrative abilities, insisting that no one generalize or come to any firm conclusions based on this collection of idiosyncratic anecdotes. In this way, Ford's autobiographical narrator resembles John Dowell, the fictional narrator of *The Good Soldier*, who tells the story of his wife's infidelity and other unsavory events that occur in their European journeys without seeming to admit them to himself. This similarity in narratorial perspectives demonstrates a consistent experimentation in Ford's writing with how to portray the process of narrating in an era of uncertainty and shifting contexts.

In order to avoid giving an air of certainty to his literary portrait of America-as-Prussia, the narrator of *New York Is Not America* employs a strategy of modified relativity, filtering single places and times through other competing frames of reference. Thus, America is seen in relation to New York, the present in relation to the past and future, and knowledge in relation to ignorance. At points, this strategy produces an existential crisis for the narrator, who suddenly finds himself narrating himself, as if from the perspective of an outsider describing an unfamiliar object. Such moments are rare, but they suggest the high stakes for a narrative that embraces true relativity. In a text where differences are minimized and everyone can be said to be much the same as any other, the narrator can appear to be just another one of the indistinguishable masses.

Anecdotes, Impressionism, and Self-perception

Throughout his life, Ford Madox Ford spent a great deal of time traveling and reflecting on his various homes and frequent destinations—particularly London, Paris, New York, and Provence. Many of his nonfiction essays and books reflect his habit of travel, especially as it relates to his notions of self, the art of writing, and the characteristics that distinguish specific places. These works of sociological impressionism include *The Cinque Ports* (1900), *The Soul of London* (1905), *When Blood Is Their Argument* (1915), *New York Is Not America* (1927), *Provence* (1935), and *Great Trade Route* (1937). Throughout these works, Ford consistently conveys his personal impressions of countries and cultures, leaving to tourist guidebooks the task of providing helpful facts and information for travelers.

Within *New York Is Not America*, Ford explains that his style of writing depends on using anecdotes and people to express larger ideas, and he claims that the idea for this style originated in New York during a particularly emotional viewing of the Flatiron building. Ford describes this particular insight as the “half-philosophical, half-literary idea that has ever since formed the chief basis of my technical stock in trade.” Explaining its connection to his memory of a friend who had once made his experience of the Flatiron a joyful experience, he explains,

the imagination of that figure made the Flatiron suddenly alive for me [...] In effect that is why when I wish to give the effect of a city or the exact incidence of a moral apophthegm I try to do it with an anecdote, essaying the rendering of

the turn of a phrase or the twist of a crooked mouth rather than with any
generalization of a loftier or more academic kind. (103-104)

The narrator concludes with a thought on the human connection: “it seems to me true that a city will be dear to you if it have human associations and that if it have none it will be nothing but a pile of stones however phantasmagoric in arrangement” (104). In Ford’s style of writing about place, he seeks to find a way to imbue inanimate objects with a sense of life, a reflection of the humanity that created them and gives them meaning. Prior to this insight, the Flatiron had seemed a dingy, gray building that contrasted with Ford’s memory of its original white façade. By conjuring up a memory of encountering the iconic building with his friend, Ford enlivens the dreary, aging edifice. This perspective also avoids the dullness of describing a single place at a single time, since the Flatiron becomes a product of a temporally relative perception, seen in both the past and the present. The difference between these times produces the illusion of depth or three-dimensionality, and thus of life.

For the majority of *New York Is Not America*, the persona who enlivens place with “the twist of a crooked mouth” is Ford himself, as events and places are strongly connected to his idiosyncratic and often odd experience of them. For example, he describes certain street corners in New York on which memorable experiences occurred. On one corner he twisted his ankle; on another, he was complimented on his writing. He mentions the Flatiron building several times, repeatedly contrasting its original white appearance with the pollution-stained building it became on later viewings. Despite its deterioration, it continues to serve as a landmark for him primarily due to the thoughts he recalls having at various moments while walking by and looking at the building. These

city sites signify the ability of physical objects to contain multiple meanings from various times, retained in the memory of the narrator. In this way, he provides an indirect glimpse of himself, a living figure who has experienced the city over a period of twenty years, while also portraying the city and nation that is the ostensible subject of the book.

This attempt to portray self indirectly, as a personality known through its words, thoughts, and actions, is characteristic of Ford's impressionistic and psychological writing. According to Ford, "The Impressionist gives you his own views, expecting you to draw deductions, since presumably you know the sort of chap he is. [...]" Impressionism is a frank expression of personality; [...] non-Impressionism is an attempt to gather together all the opinions of as many reputable persons as may be and to render them truthfully and without exaggeration" ("On Impressionism" 261). The distinction between Impressionism and non-Impressionism resembles the difference between travel writing and guidebooks, the former being less informative but more personal than the latter. This style also determines the traveler-writer's personality, which comes not only from what he chooses to describe, but also from how he expresses those thoughts in language. As he explained it in his lecture-notes from the 1920s on *vers libre* : "however you [...] phrase your thoughts to yourself, the rhythm of your thought phrases will be your personality. It will be your literary personality ... your true one" (qtd. in Saunders, "Introduction" xiv-xv). In Ford's travelogue, the narrator's persona is determined both by his perspective on New York and America and by the techniques of literary relativity and suppression with which he distances himself from the more troubling moments of insight.

Ford's narrator persona is defined as much by what he includes within the travelogue as by what he omits or delays. In his biography of Ford, Saunders discusses how Ford's impressionistic self-portrayal in nonfiction accounts of past literary experiences allows the narrator to resist representing himself as a singular, limited entity, producing instead a figure that is seen in relation to other writers and texts: "Fordian literary autobiography is not only to do with recalling the effects of past readings, but of seeing yourself as you read about someone else [...]; and thus avoiding the resistances produced by direct self-confrontation" (150). The version of Ford that gets produced in this fashion is always a relative figure that is seen as if through a filter, never directly. He also becomes part of a network of literary figures, and in these connections he writes himself into literary history, creating a persona whose reputation will live on after the author has died. This attempt to avoid the finality of death or uselessness also drives many of the strategies in *New York Is Not America*, a text in which the narrator finds himself describing a culture that threatens his authority as a creator and guardian of literature and the arts.

The awareness and avoidance of the potential demise of New York as a cultural haven for writers like Ford creates a narrator persona that enacts a strategy of resistance and relativity. From Ford's literary perspective, New York is a cosmopolitan haven of ethnic and artistic diversity, while the rest of America is characterized by a narrow-minded nationalistic attitude particular to residents of small towns who pose a threat to New York in their desire to standardize the population. In a passage that indirectly highlights the powerful personal connection Ford feels between New York and his literary persona, the travelogue features a parallel between the future decline of New

York and the traveler-narrator's potential decline. Describing a hypothetical scenario in which New York has lost its "financial supremacy," which translates into the loss of its cultural supremacy and suggests the triumph of Americanists, the narrator compares how a glimpse of the city's former glory would be analogous to stumbling upon old war medals while looking through a travel chest. Emphasizing that he is interested in culture, not money, the narrator daydreams about getting rid of the financiers in New York, only to realize immediately the unfeasibility of this plan:

all financiers outside bankers I would export, as was done with the dogs of Constantinople, to a small desert island where they might subsist on each other's flesh. But it is difficult to see how New York could do that and keep at the bottom of the trunk that medal of the empty renown of Financial Supremacy. . . .

Precisely like one's war medals. One keeps them in bits of brown paper, tossed into a valise amongst old footwear, tubes of tooth paste and mildewed, forgotten papers. Occasionally, when on one's travels, one searches for a supplementary shoe-horn and digs to the bottom of the valise, getting a glimpse of the bright ribbons and the metal discs. For a second, then, one has satisfaction. . . . Atque ego. . . . Oneself, too, once. . . . (82-83)

In this passage, the anecdotal quality of the war medals seems to become depersonalized, as the narrator resists identifying with this moment by shifting from first-person to third-person narration. However, the example obviously comes from Ford's own past experience serving as an officer in the Welsh Regiment during the First World War, an event Ford famously fictionalized in the four-volume novel *Parade's End* (written in the same period as this travel narrative, published from 1924-1928). Despite the fact that the

traveler-narrator shares these and other biographical qualities with the author Ford, the text prevents a complete equivalence between the two personas by distancing the narrator persona from the “one” that may be looking through his travel chest. This distancing reveals that the hypothetical moment produces an uncanny experience of unexpected self-perception.

The disturbing nature of this self-perception comes largely from the fact that the narrator sees himself as an object, like the medals. In this passage, the difference and distance between self as subject (I) and as object (“one”) is only partially traversed by coding the linguistic moment of self-perception or identification in Latin. Possibly, this Latin phrase reveals that the hypothetical “one” who glimpses himself is the narrator, who uses the first person pronoun (“ego”) only in linguistic disguise. However, the linguistic shift also reveals the reluctance of the narrator to equate himself with this past persona. The past is both appealing in its familiarity and connection with a classical language long used by intellectuals²³ as a lingua franca and disconcerting in its ability to repeat itself in the present or future, especially when such repetition involves the trauma of war.²⁴ At this point, the avoidance of this perception of self as object results in a proliferation of narrative perspectives that suggest the relativity of perception, portraying the traveler-narrator as both a traveler overloaded by sensory observations and a narrator

²³ Such intellectuals included those who surrounded Ford in his childhood, as the social set of his grandfather included the Rossettis and other prominent Victorian artists, writers, and thinkers.

²⁴ This fear of the past repeating in the present connects to a common attitude held by many modernists who felt that the past was bleeding into and dominating both the present and the future. Freud’s psychoanalytical theories are one example of epistemological transformations that occurred around 1900 that emphasized the unending presence and impact of one’s past on the present, making the individual appear pre-determined by events no longer in his control.

whose purpose is “to mediate impressions into story”.²⁵ The sudden appearance of the ellipses, a common feature of Ford’s writing, indicates that the narrator is resisting the process of translating these impressions into a cohesive story. Instead, the moment of self-perception becomes fragmented and delayed, as the ellipses attempt to slow the pace of the insight that the narrator is both narrating and resisting.

The language and grammar of this passage enacts the temporal relativity of self-perception. The vocabulary vacillates between singleness and multiplicity, enacting the dynamic process of perceiving self as a single entity from an outside perspective that necessarily situates the self in multiple positions at once, revealing the coexistence of perceiving selves and perceived selves. The temporality of this process of self-perception reveals the difficulty of ever knowing oneself in the present moment, since all recognition is immediately relegated to a past knowledge that is frustratingly static for the narrator. In a sentence near the end of this passage, several words mark time as a plurality rather than singularity: “For a second, then, one has satisfaction.” The traveler-narrator uses the smallest available unit of time – a second – to demarcate the period in which his desire for self-awareness is quelled, indicating the fleetingness of the experience. The word “then” doubles the singularity of “a second,” surrounded by commas that indicate a need for pause and that identify an apostrophe that equates “then” with “a second,” a cognitive process that doubles the instance of singularity which the traveler-narrator seems to be simultaneously pursuing and rejecting. As soon as “a second” occurs, it becomes the past—“then.” He seems terrified that if his persona can be contained by a single object

²⁵ In his article “Ford, The City, Impressionism, and Modernism,” Max Saunders uses these words to describe Ford’s impressionistic depiction of London in *The Soul of London* (1905). The larger context explains the connection between impression as a narrative strategy and the traumatic experience of the city. “Urban fragmentation multiplies our ignorance; makes us aware of all the uncompleted lives, the people, the stories, about which we can only wonder. Narrative attempts to mediate impressions into story” (72).

or moment and rendered static, he will have succumbed to the standardizing effects of America. Similarly, if the narrator can perceive himself as a lifeless object, then New York can just as easily become a depopulated landscape lacking the vibrancy that gives it meaning. If the people of the American Midwest overtake New York, this emptiness and death is precisely what may result.

Both New York and the war medals have the potential to become empty symbols for Ford's narrator. Elsewhere in the text, Ford's traveler-narrator frequently wonders how New York can retain its position as a global capital in the business and financial world, particularly when he observes so many inefficiencies and interferences with the transportation and communication necessary to successful business activity. He marvels at how little work business men do after they have negotiated traffic to get to the skyscraper in which their office is located, waited for an elevator that has room for passengers (a rare occurrence), fielded countless telephone interruptions, left the office for haircuts and lunch appointments, and handled the other aspects of city life that interfere with the business of business. The contrast between surface appearances of success and internal emptiness is echoed by the narrator's use of the phrase "empty renown" to describe the value of the discovered war medals, suggesting that this past soldier-self is not a welcome memory but a reminder of the meaninglessness of war and of one's past actions in the war.

However, this moment of multi-dimensional perception – at which past, present, and future appear to overlap – is oddly appealing for the narrator in its approximation of the relativity of self-perception. The periodic sentence continues to its primary message, the independent clause "one has satisfaction," a declarative statement that suggests the

nostalgic appeal of this potential encounter with a past version of oneself. This “satisfaction” is complicated, however, as it depends on the simultaneous perception of singularity and multiplicity. As an approximation of this simultaneity, the passage oscillates quickly between competing perspectives, similar to cinematic parallel editing in which quick cuts between scenes suggest that events that follow each other in the film are intended to be perceived as if happening at the same time. The final sentence fragment in this passage, Ford’s modified translation of the Latin, moves from singularity to duality back to singularity of time: “oneself, too, once.” Thus duality and singularity can be understood as registering to the narrator within a single moment. The word “too” expresses similarity and connects the past self with the present self in the act of remembering. As a homophone, this word sounds like the number two, suggesting the doubling and continual multiplying that occurs with self-recognition. This “too” communicates the realization of satisfaction, a paradoxical and ephemeral moment in which the self from many different times overlaps and converges without losing particularity.

This moment of seeing a past version of self as analogous to a future decayed New York creates a vision of the inevitability of death, as well as the potential meaninglessness implicit in the struggle for life. In the introduction to *New York Is Not America*, the narrator expounds on the philosophy that all people are largely the same, illustrating this concept with the fact that all nationalities are just as likely to die. In this

scenario, the narrator gestures toward astronomy in an attempt to find an alternative scale of perception in which national differences seem insignificant.²⁶

If one-tenth of the sums spent on diplomacy or international leagues were spent on saying: “Here we are; we are just all merely poor humanity making our voyage upon a spinning planet that is whirling to its doom somewhere in space,” there would be no more international misunderstandings; for sure there would be no more war. [...] We are exactly the same food for crows. (xi)

In this scenario, the narrator’s view of Internationalism takes democracy to an extreme that ends with the death of everyone. The awareness of an emerging global society leads the narrator to imagine the Earth as a planet, which can be seen from an external perspective. This view from the stars, an astronomical perspective, creates a new frame of reference that emphasizes the relativity of perception and the potential insignificance of humanity and our planet when seen in the much larger spatio-temporal context of the limitless universe.

This formulation resembles a statement in which Einstein expressed his view of determinism, comparing people to stars as equally determined by the laws of physics and lacking in free will. In a statement to the Spinoza Society, Einstein declared, “Human beings in their thinking, feeling and acting are not free but are as causally bound as the stars in their motions” (qtd. in Isaacson 391). This determinism, for Einstein, is a product of his theories of relativity. By insisting on certain absolute laws of physics, such as the constant speed of light in a vacuum, these theories seem to divest the human perceiver of

²⁶ The ideas in this passage are similar to the connections Gertrude Stein makes between astronomical relativity, the crisis of identity, and death in *Everybody's Autobiography*. See Chapter Four for further analysis.

agency over both the physical world and the process of perception.²⁷ For Ford, as for other authors including Gertrude Stein and Vita Sackville-West, the extension of relativity to humanity, as to celestial bodies, emphasizes how little control one has over one's destiny while also suggesting a lack of differentiation between life and death.

In some ways, the implications of the relativity of perception are comforting for the narrator who is seeking to avoid a future conflict brought on by nationalism and perceived differences. However, there are two ways to achieve the cultural relativity that Einstein's theories suggest are possible. One method is standardization, following from the American (or Prussian) propensity to obliterate national differences by imposing American culture on the global population. The second is a more cosmopolitan and egalitarian approach in which different cultures and perspectives coexist peacefully, no single culture dominating any other. In this way, the population of Germany differs little from that of England or America, because the people of all nations are a diverse collection of individuals. Both versions of relativity can be described in the phrase Stein's narrator uses to articulate her understanding of relativity in *Everybody's Autobiography*, "one was as good as another one" (243). This phrase can mean either that everyone becomes the same, part of an indistinguishable mass, or that people are all different, and no one can be judged as any better than any other one. Ford clearly fears the former understanding of relativity while advocating for the latter.

²⁷ For more on this dynamic, see my discussion of Einstein in Chapter 1 (Holmes) and Chapter 4 (Stein).

Why America Looks Like Prussia, From Ford's Perspective

In 1901, Ford (then Hueffer) published *The Inheritors*, a novel he coauthored with Joseph Conrad. This fantastic novel features a writer protagonist, Mr. Granger, who becomes an unwitting pawn in the hands of beings from the fourth dimension who are attempting to colonize Britain. The fourth dimension is a realm that exists in the same time and space as London, but as if in a parallel universe, a reality that is briefly manifested to Mr. Granger as “an unrealizable infinity of space” (8). If these fourth dimensionalists can infiltrate British politics successfully, they can fully materialize their civilization and impose it on the dimension in which humans currently live and move. As the spokeswoman for the fourth dimensionalists explains rather callously, they would treat the current residents of Earth as subjugated beings, as the British currently treat the “inferior races” (13). At the time, the book was a critique of British imperialism and the Boer Wars. While by no means a great work of literature, this novel demonstrates Ford's fascination with and fear of the possibilities of a future society that will dominate and destroy his beloved culture.

In many ways, the fourth dimension parallels Ford's view of America in the 1920s. Both are explicitly compared to Prussia. Both are inhabited by beings who are powerful, efficient and intelligent, but also remorseless, bent on world domination, and lacking any refined artistic sensibility. Although *The Inheritors* predates Einstein's special theory of relativity by four years, its invocation of the fourth dimension shows the appeal of Henri Poincaré's new conception of a non-Euclidean space and time, a concept that directly influenced Einstein's theories. It also demonstrates an imaginative attempt to depict the simultaneous coexistence of competing versions of reality. America in *New*

York Is Not America might be seen much as the fourth dimension, a potential future reality that can already be glimpsed if one looks in a new way, with a relative perspective.

In his encounters with this present and future America, Ford's traveling narrator portrays America as a relative entity, usually seen in contrast to New York and in comparison to Prussia. He depicts America as ideologically similar to the imperial and nationalistic Prussia that destroyed the German intellectual tradition and whose mechanical efficiency led to the horrors of the First World War. Although he acknowledges that many New Yorkers were once Americans (considering them now expatriates, if not refugees), the narrator admits that "I am afraid of America—and I and the world will go on being afraid of America" (91). While he does not take this opportunity to explain immediately the source of this fear, he refers vaguely to the "oppressiveness" of America and contemplates the nature of "Anglo-Saxondom" in the current international climate. As the text develops, the comparisons between America and Prussia accumulate, but they are narrated in such a way that the narrator can plead ignorance to the full implications of what he is observing in the heartland of America. Instead, the text gives glimpses of the impact that the fear of America-as-Prussia creates for the narrator, most often evident in scenes of feigned ignorance and impotence or active suppression, in which descriptions of an alternative time (the past or future) overwrites the present troubling awareness of the perceived American hostility.

Similar to the depiction of the narrator's glimpse of a future New York as analogous to his meaningless war medals, these scenes of impotence or suppression reverberate back on the narrator's self-perception, largely because Ford defines himself in

relation to both New York and America. In his essay on “Screen Memories,” Sigmund Freud identifies the way certain memories can function as masks for subsequent events that are traumatic to the individual’s psychological well-being. As Freud explains it, a screen memory is “one which owes its value as a memory not to its content but to the relation existing between that content and some other, that has been suppressed” (320). In the example of the war medals, the narrator’s invocation of his medals marks a moment at which the narrator shifts from narrating the feared future to a past that feels safer if only because it is concluded and known. This scene of a potential memory thus functions as a screen that suppresses his fear of the threat posed by America and the possibility of a future war.

Although the traveler-narrator’s memories of war and New York are hypothetical future memories instead of past events that have been recalled, the relation between these two imagined memories reveals the lingering ability of Ford’s war trauma to act as a screen memory for his interpretation of American culture. Ford’s narrator maps onto the war medals the feelings he now has about American culture. Certainly his traumatic experiences in World War I are enough to cause him psychological distress when he is reminded of them, since Ford suffered shell shock during the war, temporarily forgetting his name and losing his memory of three weeks of his life. However, these medals are also linked explicitly to the symbolic importance that New York now holds for him. Thus the war medals carry a double burden from multiple times, associated with two wars – the past Great War and the potential new cultural war waged by Midwesterners. As such, they have implications for his interpretation of his selfhood. The traumatic experience of war is well known by psychoanalysts including Freud to be fragmenting

and alienating, producing emotions that often remain with the soldier in the present instead of taking their proper place in the past. In Ford's case, the war medals both represent the presence of his past while paradoxically embodying this war-time identity as static, foreign, and perpetually disconnected from the present traveling and narrating self.

Freud notes that such perception of self as both past object and present subject is characteristic of the functioning of screen memories and suppression:

In the majority of significant and in other respects unimpeachable childhood scenes the subject sees himself in the recollection as a child, with the knowledge that this child is himself; he sees this child, however, as an observer from outside the scene would see him. [...] Whenever in a memory the subject himself appears in this way as an object among other objects this contrast between the acting and the recollecting ego may be taken as evidence that the original impression has been worked over. (321)

In Ford's narrative, the traveler-narrator becomes portrayed as an object when some insight is being suppressed, signaling the emotional distance between the recollecting narrator and the traumatic awareness of his future death and the potential of war. In addition to reminding him of his time serving in the war, the experience of writing *New York Is Not America* parallels Ford's previous experience of writing about the threats posed by the Prussian empire before World War I.

While much less direct in its depiction of the problems that can result from overzealous nationalism, *New York Is Not America* shares an unnerving concern with *When Blood Is Their Argument*, one of Ford's two books of anti-Prussian propaganda

commissioned by the British government in 1915. In the foreword to that book, Ford depicts Prussia as posing a military and cultural threat to other European nations, stating his case strongly, passionately, and personally. He admits, “I am selecting, bringing forward, and putting with a hatred inspired by a cruel and cold indignation everything that I can think of that can make Prussianism, materialism, militarism, and the mania for organization appear hideous in their products and disastrous for humanity” (xi). These characteristics are most contemptible for their polluting effects on education, literature, and the arts. To illustrate this effect, Ford sings the praises of the former glory of German culture found in works by such cultural icons as Wagner and Nietzsche, arguing that the empire has unduly influenced artists and intellectuals to create no longer works of beauty but “patriotic and semi-militarist orations and writings.” Ford acknowledges the right of a country to determine its culture, but adamantly denounces the Prussian attempt “to dominate the culture of the entire Occident and of the entire world” (xvii). This impulse toward “world-domination” from a country that could be notable for its artistic accomplishments is for Ford the crucial point of comparison between Prussia and America. In his experience with Americans, Ford fielded anti-British rhetoric and the harangues of numerous individuals intent on forcing their culture, most notably in the form of ethnic conformity and Prohibition, on New York, Britain, and as much of the world as possible.

Two years prior to his lecture tour, Ford’s editorial in the July 1924 edition of *the transatlantic review* commented on the troubling changes he had observed in America, explicitly drawing connections between the past totalitarianism of Prussia and the current cultural climate of America. He observes the development of an American “Ruling

Class—the class that with a very marked and articulate will has brought about Anti-Drink Legislation, Anti-Realist Literature Legislation, Anti-Emigration and all the Anti-Legislation whose end would seem to be to enforce on the American citizen what we will call the Old German virtues. You might call them the old Anglo-Saxon virtues were it not that England has so long ago abandoned the attempt to make the Englishman good by act of Parliament that virtues so obtained can hardly be styled English. They might indeed more exactly be diagnosed as Prussian, the determination to drill a nation into a set mould of civic characteristics” (“Chroniques III” 211). Two years later, Ford had the opportunity to observe the effect of these legislative reforms on the average American, and his personal encounter with citizens who have been molded by them only confirms his earlier concerns.

In the description of his journeys, Ford’s traveler-narrator portrays this attempt to instill morality through prohibition as most successful in the Middle West, especially in small towns where individuals are isolated from larger, more diverse communities and thus tend toward cultural intolerance. Here exists “the very worst type of Puritanism, the very worst of Anglo-Saxondom, of terrorism, of bullying, of ignorance and of intolerance” (*NYINA* 89). The traveler-narrator describes this American from the perspective of a culturally savvy New Yorker:

these oppressions, the terrifying aspect of America as a new and worse Prussia jack-booting it across the world—all these things come from hundred-per-centism, which was invented by gentlemen with names like Hunderttausendstrassenheimer, from the Klan, from those impressed by the fact that one gentleman possesses a Complete Billion and above all from the terrible

small-town ladies with silver-gray hair, Roman noses, protuberant shell-rimmed glasses—from the terrible ladies²⁸ who are the most oppressive and the most reactionary feature of hundred-per-cent life. (*NYINA* 92)

The hundred-per-centism that the traveler-narrator refers to here and throughout the book is a nationalistic philosophy of being one hundred percent American, a sentiment that was exceptionally popular in response to the first World War and the “new wave” of immigration that was bringing people from numerous foreign countries to the shores and cities of the New World. As Ford’s observations confirm, this nationalistic and bellicose attitude persisted well after the war’s end. Such zeal resulted in the Immigration Acts of 1921 and 1924, both of which restricted immigration by instituting quotas based on national origin. Ford predicts that these Immigration Acts will have the effect that “all future modification of the American populace will be German-Scandinavian” (“Chroniques” 210-211). Ford thus imagines that the Prussian empire may be quite literally transplanting its citizens from Europe to the fertile soil of the American continent.

Ford’s problem with a German America is not simply related to his fears of another Prussian empire. On a personal level, Ford was trying to distance himself from his German heritage. In 1919, following his involvement in the war, Ford officially changed his patronym from Hueffer to Ford, aligning himself linguistically and ideologically with his maternal grandfather, the pre-Raphaelite painter Ford Madox

²⁸ The traveler-narrator’s rant against the “terrible ladies” may be a reaction to the fact that many of Ford’s lectures, like other author lectures of the 1920s and 1930s, were given at events organized by ladies’ societies. This passage may also foreshadow Ford’s unfortunate conversation with a woman on a train ride to Chicago, which the traveler-narrator describes as evoking a feeling of “impotence.” That passage is discussed later in this chapter.

Brown, and distancing himself from his German-born father.²⁹ Ford's encounters with a German population in America are thus often encounters with an undesirable past version of himself. His attempt to distance the cosmopolitan narrator from the German Hueffer intensifies the moments at which Ford views his narrator persona as an object (as in the case of the war medals) and when he claims to be incapable of fully expressing his fears (as occurs in the train journeys across the Middle West plains).

Much like his fraught relationship with Germany, Ford also had an ambivalent relationship with the reading public of America. On their own, the lectures he gave to colleges, literary societies, and women's clubs were enjoyable but not profitable. In New York, he attended numerous dinner parties and artistic performances in his free time, and his lectures throughout the country often concluded with personal expressions of praise and admiration from members of the audience. However, Ford needed money, not just praise. He began his ten-week lecture tour in October 1926 to promote his recently published book *A Man Could Stand Up*—. Several months before his departure to America, Ford wrote in a letter to his agent William Aspenwall Bradley that he was two weeks away from being financially “very hard up” and was concerned that the publicity tour would do little to help increase book sales and thus, income (*FMF Reader* 490). Not only were sales of his books marginal, but he was also notoriously bad at balancing his personal finances. In an attempt to make some money on the tour, Ford wrote and published several essays in contemporary periodicals such as *Harper's Magazine*,

²⁹ Curiously, Ford's disdain for all things German was not consistent throughout his life. Although his views were strongly anti-Prussian once war broke out, his feelings prior to 1914 were surprisingly cordial. In a vain attempt to obtain a divorce from his first wife Elsie so that he might marry Violet Hunt, Ford attempted in 1910 to become a German citizen and spent six months in his ancestral homeland trying to add legitimacy to his claim. Ironically, a man who was willing to forego his British citizenship for personal gain harshly judged Americans who suppressed their ancestral heritage in preference for the sense of a unifying national identity.

recounting his travels, his thoughts on writing, and his perspective on the country. These essays form the basis of *New York Is Not America*.

The conflicting emotions Ford held for the American reading public are reflected in passages in which these masses are portrayed through a relative perspective – in this case, they can be seen as both positive and negative. Ford resents his financial reliance on the American reading public, especially since he sees Americans acting so often as a mass of consumers without discriminating tastes. This dependence on American readers threatens to distort his sense of self into more of a public figure who cannot control his reception by the masses instead of a writer motivated purely by personal creativity. But Ford also acknowledged that his sales in America far eclipsed those in England, so he resigned himself to self-promotion. Contrasting the success he enjoys with American readers with the tepid response he has endured from his British compatriots, Ford's traveler-narrator writes:

I do not know that I am a writer of any merit; no one has any means of knowing that with regard to himself; but whatever my merit, it is equal in Great Britain and the United States.... And to be a writer in England is to be like—oh, say, a tin of jellied eels that has for years reposed on a country grocer's shelves—whereas if you were a piece of bread on a mill-pond that contained a hundred thousand hungry minnows you would not be one-tenth so pulled about as if you were a writer of any position at all in New York.... And as to America! (*NYINA* 171)

This passage paints a vivid sensory picture of Ford's perception of his relationship with the audiences produced by the burgeoning American mass culture. Stylistically, the breathless desire and consumption that Ford loves and fears is represented by the breathy

alliteration of “h” in the phrase “a hundred thousand hungry minnows.” However, this passage reveals a displacement of what the consumed product is. The goods consumed by the indistinguishable masses/minnows are not Ford’s books but the writer’s body, sensuously and tantalizingly pulled in many directions at once.³⁰

The danger of a “hungry” American society defined by mass culture and rampant consumerism parallels the ideas in Walter Benjamin’s essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” Describing how mass reproduction destroys the sense of an art work’s unique aura, Benjamin also suggests that this process can extend to people as well, as photographic or cinematic copies of one’s image can destroy the sense of connection between author or actor and audience. As Benjamin states, “Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction. [...] To pry an object from its shell, to destroy its aura, is the mark of a perception whose ‘sense of the universal equality of things’ has increased to such a degree that it extracts it even from a unique object by means of reproduction” (223). Thus, even the human individual can be reproduced through technology to be rendered equivalent to the masses, controlled by them instead of speaking for himself or controlling his own self-portrayal. Much as Ford suggests that this commodified persona can be consumed like bread, Benjamin illustrates the loss of aura with the metaphor of shelling a nut the better to eat its tender meat, as the hungry masses want to “pry an object [or author] from its shell.”

³⁰ This passage may also reflect his experience of feeling sexually desired by the masses of American women who were apparently much charmed by his wit and intelligence, despite his less than romantic appearance. As Max Saunders notes in his biography, Ford not only flirted with a few women on this tour but became involved with Rene Wright, a Midwesterner from St. Louis. Saunders argues that the affair with Wright influenced the composition of the essays in *New York Is Not America*, which, in his words, “explicitly sexualizes [America’s] social geography” (315).

In an American society focused on superficial appearances and material culture, Ford finds his ideals endangered; both the definition of literature and his authorial identity are in danger of being reduced to simplistic, sensational, and infinitely consumable commodities. In fact, the traveler-narrator continues on to point out that this public excitement over authors results more from their status as celebrities than from appreciation for their literature. The concluding exclamation in this passage – “And as to America!” – thus communicates a doubled meaning. The number of eager consumers in America so far surpasses those in New York that it leaves the narrator speechless – with gratitude and dread. The potential for great good and great harm goes unstated, a suppressed thought masquerading as praise for Ford’s American readers who see themselves glowingly depicted.

With the memory of Prussian culture still influencing his perceptions of America, Ford worries that the future of literature and authorship is one in which agency will be wielded not by individual artists but by the market forces of publishers and an indiscriminating, increasingly hostile, mass of readers. Looking at the American population as a whole, which is large and growing, the narrator also observes many young people pursuing careers in literature and the arts. Ford’s narrator urges his American readers, as citizens of the next cultural and economic empire, to exercise discrimination in their judgments and actions. In his 1929 book *The English Novel*, Ford acknowledges that America may well be the future home of the novel, but he resists stating what that novel looks like, creating another example of narrative suppression. Charting the development of the novel from Apuleius to Joseph Conrad, Ford identifies the current endpoint of this literary progression as “the gateway to the Middle-West—say

at about Altoona.³¹ For it is there that the Novel [...] is nowadays erecting itself into the sole guide and monitor of the world” (30-31). Although it is surprising that the very place he considers anathema to literature is also its new home, Ford acknowledges the growing contingent of influential writers who hail from the American Middle West.

As an editor, Ford had personal reasons to be wary of literary America. His preference for the national and intellectual diversity of New York mirrors a commitment to artistic and cultural diversity that distinguished Ford’s work throughout his life. As editor of both *The English Review* (from 1908-1909) and *the transatlantic review* (from January 1924 to January 1925), Ford published literature and criticism from America, England, France, and Germany, creating timely international artistic forums. When Hemingway acted as temporary editor of *the transatlantic review* in May 1924, he published an edition composed solely of American authors rather than maintaining Ford’s commitment to an assortment of international writers and artists. This Middle West author was one of many surrounding Ford at the time, as he was either working directly with or publishing the work of Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, William Carlos Williams, H.D., Ivan Beede, and other rising Americans. Ford recalls feeling constantly overwhelmed by a hostile American attitude at editorial meetings: “the eyes of Middle Westerners during discussion look exactly like the eyes of men looking down their gun barrels” (qtd in Saunders, *Dual Life* 156). Even in the office, Ford encountered Americans who reminded him of war. Hemingway’s blatant disregard for Ford’s editorial preferences bolstered Ford’s fears that the Middle Western artists’ promotion of their work and that

³¹ Altoona, Pennsylvania, was a pivotal railroad city created by the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1849 as a shop city that serviced all the company’s locomotives. Since the railroad lines from New York to Chicago took a turn at Altoona’s Horseshoe Bend, the city also embodied the transition point from New England to the treacherous Middle West.

of their compatriots could radically alter the future path of modernism as a movement, distinct at this point for its national and stylistic diversity.

How Trains Create Narrative Impotence and Relative Personas

Ford's fears of America are substantiated with anecdotal evidence of his interactions with Midwesterners. However, Ford spent most of his time on this and other visits predominantly on the East Coast and in American cities, most often New York, Chicago, and Boston. His experience of the "rest" of America, that troubling heartland of the country, occurred primarily as he traveled between cities, usually on a train. These train rides are distinguished by forced conversations with the Americans seated near him and visions of the vast American landscape from the train window—both of which are traumatic experiences for an agoraphobic writer searching for signs of cultural vitality. The descriptions of these travel experiences indicate the narrator's discomfort at encountering this version of American culture, and they are often marked by traces of suppression or narrative pleas of ignorance or impotence.

Ford, like many of his contemporaries, viewed trains as symbolic of the end of "the old world" and portentous of a new world of fragmentation brought about by, among other things, the disorienting experience of speeding from one town to another and seeing unrelated glimpses of village scenes from the window. In her essay "Ford's Training," Sara Haslam notes that both Dowell in *The Good Soldier* and Ford during the war experienced moments during which trains failed to run on schedule, producing "endless waiting" and a "lack of control" that "informs a state of mind. It drove Dowell into a 'frenzy,' ... it helped to rupture Ford's sense of himself." (38). Ford's rupture results

from seeing one of his books sitting neglected on a dusty shelf in the Hazebrouck train station in Flanders in February 1917. As Ford's train left the station, the line was bombed by the Germans, and Ford was forced to spend the night in a train car with no windows or doors. Ford later fictionalized this experience in *The Marsden Case*.³² This connection between trains and war colors Ford's future feelings about trains and produces the emotional and argumentative connection between the horrors of the first World War and the American landscape he glimpses through the isolating window of the train that shuttles him between cities.

Scenes narrating Ford's train travels through America produce a perspective defined by the combination of passive motion, captive spectatorship, and forced conversation. Together, these dynamics produce a sense of helplessness for Ford's narrator, which he either blatantly admits or refuses to narrate. In the final chapter of *New York Is Not America*, "Regions Caesar Never Knew," the traveler-narrator describes his train journey from New York to Chicago, which shuttles him across the landscape of the upper Midwest. On this journey, he contemplates and narrates the majority of his observations about America, distinguishing this chapter from previous ones that foreground his impressions of New York. During his journey, he chats with an elderly woman from Boston who serves as his tour guide to the Middle West. As an anecdotal component of the narrative, she symbolizes Ford's perception of the typical, horrifying American. Her culinary and cultural tastes reflect an aggressive blandness that Ford imagines is endemic to a segment of the population. She advocates Prohibition and blindly obeys her doctor's authority, forcing herself to eat food he has recommended but

³² More details about the fictionalization of this incident can be found in Max Saunders, *Ford Madox Ford: A Dual Life*, Vol. 1, 27.

which she finds unappetizing. Looking out from the observation car, she directs his attention to the “rails of the line running perfectly level in a perfectly diminishing perspective between the brownish snow to the lowering horizon” (240). She asks if he is thrilled by this display of spaciousness and mechanical perfection.

The narrator’s response – solidly in the negative – expounds on his association between the American landscape and his feelings of powerlessness and perceptual relativity:

I said that I was not thrilled—nor do I believe that she was—only she thought that foreigners ought so to be. I said that I disliked the thought and the sight very much. It emphasized one’s sense of impotence; it was as bad as looking at the night sky and considering that the nearest star was seven thousand million miles away. I said I liked plains to have a border of hills; I said that once you stood in a plain with a completely unbroken horizon all round you it made no difference to you at that moment whether the plain continued for seven thousand miles or only for seventy and that if you moved into another, adjacent complete horizon it made no difference to you then, either. So, it made no difference. (*NYINA* 240)

Three times in this passage the narrator repeats “it made no difference,” suggesting that the problem with the plains is their unceasing sameness, a background against which the narrator is unable to locate himself in a single, identifiable spatial position. Without that self-location, the narrator cannot determine a frame of reference that will give meaning to him and his story. The undifferentiated landscape also serves as a spatial metaphor for the culture and attitude of America, both of which threaten to flatten and immobilize the traveler-narrator’s sense of importance as a cultural authority. Faced with this physical

representation of his lack of control, the narrator admits to and embraces his narrative impotence. He cannot narrate from that disorienting spatio-temporal moment, so he will not try. To distance the present narrator from the past man trapped in this uncomfortable situation, the narrator frames his conversation by repeating “I said” multiple times, creating the illusion that the narrator is reporting on his past actions.

The narrator invokes a variation of relativity by arguing that looking at America is like looking at the vastness, emptiness, and incomprehensibility of the universe. This problematic perspective connects back to the question that began this chapter: what is the difference between what a Thing looks like and what it is? By using an astronomical analogy to describe the sensation of perceiving America, the narrator suggests that, on some level, the two views of reality are comparable. In fact, this passage implies the relativity of perception by acknowledging that “another, adjacent complete horizon” would be indistinguishable from this Midwestern landscape. One frame of reference is just as meaningful as any other, and the laws of physics and perception make these positions theoretically equivalent.³³ The inability to distinguish one frame of reference from another makes it difficult for the narrator to locate himself in either space or time, invoking the idea of infinity and endlessness—and thus impotence—much as the fourth dimension does in *The Inheritors*.

In another passage describing the narrator’s train journey in the Middle West, the narrator courts the relativity of perception, creating the illusion of an ignorant narrator who nonetheless describes the landscape that terrifies him. Faced with a sense of spatial and temporal infinity, the narrator resists his insight and attempts to contain what appears

³³ Stein comes to much the same conclusion by comparing her view of America to her awareness that stars are worlds. For Stein, however, this view does not just give her a feeling of impotence; it conjures up the possibility of her death. See Chapter 4 for an extended discussion of this literary phenomenon.

to be boundless. A large majority of this travel book describes New York, which is *not* America, and which is a safe topic for him. As he is conveyed into the heart of the Middle West, he emphasizes the visual difference between New England and the Middle West before excusing himself from narratorial responsibility. "But at least, with its rolling hills, its small ravines, there is an end to [New England] for the eyes as there is an end to it as a civilization. Here there is none; to the landscape there is no end and the farming in the sad farms or the industrial occupations in the sad industrial towns may well go on for ever and ever.... Mind, I am not writing this as one who knows; I will write as one who knows a good deal more in a minute" (229). The problem of the Middle West landscape comes not just from its monotony but from its unendingness. Ironically, the narrator is calmed by the idea that the New England civilization will inevitably come to an end. In contrast, the appearance of unchanging timelessness in America so thoroughly disturbs the narrator's sense of self and place/meaning that it distorts his ability to determine his spatio-temporal location, the place from which he can narrate. The narrator's refusal to accept the threatening vision of America produces in this passage a relative perspective that distinguishes between the narrator who knows ("one") and the narrator who will write ("I") at some indeterminate time in the future. As in the scene with the war medals, the narrator exists as both a perceiving subject and perceived object as his journey into the Middle West takes him closer to both a past and a future he wants to avoid. His position on a moving train allows these two personae to coexist simultaneously, creating a textual approximation of relativity that conveys the disturbing information without aligning the narrator persona with it.

The traveler-narrator also enacts a relative perspective at moments when he draws attention to his unwillingness to narrate his conclusions about the American attitude toward ethnic diversity. At one point approximately a third of the way into the book, he describes extensively the differences between New York and the rest of America, arguing that New York is unlike any other country despite the prevalence of Italian, Jewish, German, and Irish immigrants. Directly following this description, the narrator feigns weakness in the face of the larger argument he is constructing against the Prussian attitude of Americans: “For the moment I do not feel strong enough to expose exactly what I mean—or rather that particular exposition does not at the moment fit in with my plan. What I want to point out amounts to this—that a man who has settled in New York, and only for the shortest of spaces of time, is irrevocably altered” (*NYINA* 96). The traveler-narrator employs contradiction and delay to create the illusion that he is resisting the narration of his troubling insight. He begins by claiming weakness, “I do not feel strong enough.” He then modifies that weakness into a conscious decision to delay a point that “does not at the moment fit in with my plan.” He concludes by then making his point, but this insight is about New York, not America. One might be able to infer that the narrator is really concerned with those who have *not* been changed by New York into cosmopolitan citizens, but the narrator only suggests this conclusion.

Unlike the Middle West, where everything seems the same, nothing changes, and things seem meaningless (enacting the wrong kind of relativity), New York provides the opportunity for a positive experience of relative perception and narration. In this city of perpetual change, the abundance of impressions that result from the bustling cultural activity seem to coexist in the narrator’s consciousness as equals, neither impression or

interpretation taking precedence over any other. This city “changes so fast,” Ford writes in *New York Is Not America*, “that you cannot at any moment say: ‘This is my New York.’ And yet your New York it remains. [...] Impressions are all there so vivid that what, in another place, would leave next to no impress on the mind becomes between the Battery and Central Park of almost epoch-making importance.” He concludes convinced that “one thinks—or at least feels—quite twice as fast in front of the buildings of Fifth Avenue as before the stones of the Avenue de Wagram” (NYINA 108-109). New York does not mean just one thing; it has many competing meanings that coexist simultaneously. This relativity of signification is true on an individual level, for Ford’s traveler-narrator, and on the larger level, applying also to the diverse assortment of New Yorkers, none of whom are any more or less representative of the city they live in. Their multiplicity defines the city, just as the multiplicity of impressions that the city creates in the traveler-narrator defines him.

Ford’s representations of New York in *New York Is Not America* and other writings³⁴ exhibit his experimentation with a relative style in their attempt to recreate the sensations of perceiving a multiplicity of impressions as if in a single moment. As Michele Gemelos observes in his essay on Ford’s literary relationship with New York, “Ford experimented with forms and styles, vacillating between artistic and journalistic approaches and creating hybrids of fact and fiction. His New York writings are more than catalogues of newsworthy events or impressionistic moments; they probe for the reasons why visitors in the early decades of the twentieth-century may have struggled to find the diction and the form for what seemed like an unreadable and illegible

³⁴ Other fictional works that feature New York as a subject include *The English Girl* (1907), *When the Wicked Man* (1931), and *The Rash Act* (1933).

environment” (182). While Gemelos does not make this point, the vacillation between contrasting styles produces a relative narrative that depends on the coexistence of multiple competing perspectives to give the illusion of depth to a complex and dynamic city.

Despite this multiplicity and the relativity of perception it produces, Ford’s narrator, much like the city of New York, can only ever know himself from a temporal distance—as memory or speculation, or some combination of the two. Although this glimpse of self reveals a reassuring image, it also relies on knowing that one occupies a different time from that other version of self, that one is a relative figure, always split between a knowable past entity and an unknown, ever-changing present consciousness in the process of recognition. In many ways this psychological split is reassuring for an author who is worried about the arrival of a future that will flatten and standardize literary and subjective representations. If self-representation remains a process that requires perceiving self from more than one temporal position, the illusion of a three-dimensional character will remain. However, according to Freud’s theories on screen memories, the future has the ability to overwrite and change the past, displacing meaning from one memory onto another. For Ford’s narrator this future is in the hands of Middle West authors and the reading (American) public, and the unknown nature of that identity, which appears to be in danger of standardization, has the potential to revise Ford’s narrative persona into a passive, lifeless object.

In its oscillation between New York and America, the narrative *New York Is Not America* offers a textual representation of the paradoxical relativity of the modernist travel narrative. As a whole, it is inconclusive, neither here nor there, then nor now. But

it is also both, as multiple times and perspectives occasionally coexist productively. This multiplicity and relativity reflects the ideal version of America Ford wishes for the future, as he optimistically imagines a future in which New York and America are not just culturally distinct but have evolved into separate nations. In a letter to Stella Bowen written on another American train ride from Pittsburgh to Philadelphia during this lecture tour, Ford writes, “They say the M.W. will eventually secede from the East & have Chicago for its capital. I hope it may.” “I sh^d like to come to N.Y. often—& I daresay even to Chicago” (Qtd in Saunders, *Dual Life* 312). This secession would serve two key benefits in Ford’s estimation. It would free New York from the danger of being defined by America and, by allowing the two regions to pursue different cultural agendas, it would enable Ford to traverse safely the difference between two cultures (and times—the present and the future) that are both necessary to his literary success.³⁵ In Ford’s hypothetical scenario of two Americas coexisting peacefully, a cultural future determined by this dual nation would produce both a geography and literary style of relativity, neither nationalist perspective overpowering the other. If Ford’s traveler-narrator can manage to attain a similar status of relativity, seen in relation both to New York and America, his travelogue suggests that perhaps he can resist being propelled against his will into a potentially unstable future that includes the possibility of his death.

³⁵ Ford’s argument that the future of literature was to be found in America turned out to be remarkably prescient, if not for all literature, at least for Ford himself. In the 1930s, he wrote pieces for the WPA. He eventually made his literary home in America, spending the last two years of his life as a lecturer at Olivet College in Olivet, Michigan.

Creating Meaning in the Moment: Vita Sackville-West's Literary Travels to Persia

There would seem [...] to be something wrong about travel itself. Of what use is it, if we may communicate our experience neither verbally nor on paper?

– Vita Sackville-West, *Passenger to Teheran*

Vita Sackville-West has a problem: how to write about the experience of travel without losing the sense of immediacy and meaningfulness that it holds for her, the traveler-writer. On January 20, 1926, Sackville-West embarked on a four-month journey to visit her husband Harold Nicolson, who was stationed as a diplomat in Teheran. On this leisurely trip, she stopped in India and Egypt on her way out, returning through Russia, Poland, and Germany. While her published account of this journey, *Passenger to Teheran*, describes many of her travel experiences in these countries, the text is also frequently preoccupied with the psychological challenges the author faced in her attempt to translate lived experience into literature. She voices her frustrations about this process both in the travelogue and in her letters written to Virginia Woolf during the journey. Whereas Ford's travelogue frequently emphasizes the distance between the narrating subject and a traumatic present moment, Sackville-West's travelogue narrates the present moment as a psychologically rich interaction with time and space whose immediacy is difficult to render into language.

Some of the author's struggles come from her desire to embrace the mind-expanding possibilities of time- and space-travel recently made apparent by Einstein's theories of relativity. In a world explained by Einstein's physics, time and space intersect in a four-dimensional reality, so that the twentieth century ushers in an era in which

“space by itself, and time by itself, are doomed to fade away into mere shadows, and only a kind of union of the two will preserve an independent reality” (Minkowski, qtd. in Isaacson 133). Sackville-West’s experience of both traveling and narrating heightens her awareness of this four-dimensional reality, and she refers explicitly to Einstein in letters she wrote during this trip. In particular, she focuses on the experience of perceiving multiple sensations, times, and places simultaneously, a process that is nonetheless attached to the intersection of a unique time with a particular place. However, the process of representing that simultaneity in text confirms that this idiosyncratic union of time and space cannot be reproduced within narrative structure, and her attempts to do so merely reinforce her awareness of relativity, as her experience appears differently when viewed from other times and places. Disenchanted with the lack of connection between the theoretical possibilities of Einstein’s physics and her lived experience of travel, Sackville-West’s narrator does not include any direct references to Einstein in the text of her finished travelogue. Instead, the narrator embraces notions of simultaneity, relativity and identity that are more compatible with the theories of time found in the work of philosopher Henri Bergson.

Passenger to Teheran thus depicts travel as more of a psychological experience than a physical journey, even while demonstrating how Sackville-West’s awareness of Einsteinian physics had altered her mental perception and expectations of travel. In so doing, the travelogue enacts Bergson’s idea of duration, or *durée*, as a psychological experience of time that cannot be measured or put into language and in which a multiplicity of sensations coalesce simultaneously. In order to convey the experience of such multiplicity, reflected as moments at which the narrator admits feeling unable to

describe adequately the sights, sounds, and feelings she has encountered, the travelogue embraces the rhythm of storytelling. While the majority of *Passenger to Teheran* describes the landscape, people, and customs Sackville-West observed, it is punctuated at moments by meditations on the difficulty of communication and transcendental moments at which the text seems to become timeless and temporally relative. Taken together, these moments create a rhythm for the travelogue that centers around simultaneity, relativity and the challenge of communication. However, these moments resist the order and determinism that Einstein's theories produce and depend on, resembling instead Bergson's relativity and insistence on free will. Reflecting the tension between these competing notions of relativity and human perception, the travelogue obscures the identity of the author and subtly replaces it with a narrator persona that is both a timeless part of the text and a flawed, limited approximation of the living author-traveler.

Genette and Rhythm

On her ship voyage from India to Iraq, Sackville-West occupies her time by reading Proust, perhaps influencing her thoughts on travel and the composition of the travelogue that she begins writing on this same journey. Describing the disorienting experience of shifting from a perceptual focus attuned to the novel's world to one in sync with her voyage, Sackville-West writes in *Passenger to Teheran*, "when I passed from a ball at the hotel de Guermantes into the little dining-saloon of s.s. *Varela*, Proust's world was still truer than the ship and I was puzzled to know, really, where I was" (57). Reading Proust while traveling leaves the narrator struggling to locate herself in a single location, and it is in this frame of mind that Sackville-West begins writing a text whose

rhythm seems frequently determined by a narratorial position that has become unfixed from a single time and space, oscillating between the competing realities of life and literature. Curiously, Proust was also influenced by Einstein's theories and acknowledged a similarity in their radical conceptions of time. In a letter to a physicist friend in 1921, Proust wrote, "How I would love to speak to you about Einstein. I do not understand a single word of his theories, not knowing algebra. [Nevertheless] it seems we have analogous ways of deforming Time" (qtd. in Isaacson 280). Given that the narrator begins writing when "Proust's world was still truer than the ship," it makes sense that her notion of time, exemplified by the rhythm of the narrative, would be more subjective and relative than chronological. Sackville-West explicitly invokes the concept of rhythm in *Passenger to Teheran* and of style or "surface-texture" in her letters as she formulates a strategy for representing her travels in book format. As described in the writings of Forster, Woolf, and Genette, this style or rhythm can be understood as a motif that moves through time but which is not reducible to the steady metronome of clock time.

The interplay between time and space as depicted in *Passenger to Teheran* is an organizing principle within the text, as it is to some degree in all travelogues that depict an individual's journey through space within a finite amount of time. Unique to modernist travelogues like *Passenger to Teheran*, however, is the prevalence and importance of moments at which time feels more infinite than finite. Genette's articulation of narrative rhythm provides an analysis of such spatio-temporal relationships as these, identifying narrative "speed" as "the relationship between a temporal dimension and a spatial dimension" so that it can "be defined by the relationship between a duration (that of the story, measured in seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, and years) and a

length (that of the text, measured in lines and in pages)” (87-88). By analyzing this relationship of narrative speed, one can determine a text’s rhythm. Genette identifies four main “forms of narrative movement,” or variations in speed, which feature distinct relationships between narrative time and story time: ellipsis, pause, summary, and scene. Most intriguing for the analysis of *Passenger to Teheran* are the two extremes, ellipsis and pause:

Theoretically, indeed, there exists a continuous gradation from the infinite speed of ellipsis, where a nonexistent section of narrative corresponds to some duration of story, on up to the absolute slowness of descriptive pause, where some section of narrative discourse corresponds to a nonexistent diegetic duration. (93-94)

As temporal extremes, the ellipsis and the pause communicate a meaning that is both “nonexistent” and “infinite,” compelling ideas for any form of representation, and especially so for the highly temporal medium of written language. In *Passenger to Teheran*, the concept of infinity provides one way to describe the curious time-sense of passages that approximate the immediacy and multiplicity of the present moment. The narrative moves from start to finish by alternating descriptive scenes with pauses and ellipses that indicate a lack of connection between story time and narrative time. This incommensurability is so severe at these moments that time seems to stop in one arena (e.g., the story of Sackville-West’s travels) while continuing in another (the narrator’s description of some place or feeling). In this way, the travelogue creates a rhythm and time-sense approaching infinity, creating a narrative and narrator that feel unbounded and expansive rather than limited and singular.

While not found in all travelogues, such tendency toward infinity is a common trait among high modernist literature. The concept of narrative infinity offers an appealing description for many works of high modernism that are frequently preoccupied with imagining a subjective form of time that feels infinitely expansive or otherwise out of sync with the precise measurements of standardized, steadily progressing clock time. For example, Marlow's account of his almost infinitely slow journey up the Congo River in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* produces a text that is overwhelmed by the act of narration while the story seems to stand still, an effect emphasized by the listening audience's periodic interruptions that voice their frustration with the tediously slow pace of the storytelling. Other examples include Joyce's *Ulysses*, especially the final fifty pages in which Molly's thoughts expand almost infinitely and, again, tortuously. The poetry of Imagists such as Ezra Pound and H.D. provide another example in which the authors attempt to replace the time-sense of language with the immediacy of imagery.

Notably, Sackville-West's pauses are much like Proust's pauses as Genette describes them: "Proustian 'description' is less a description of the object contemplated than it is a narrative and analysis of the perceptual activity of the character contemplating: of his impressions, progressive discoveries, shifts in distance and perspective, errors and corrections, enthusiasms or disappointments, etc" (102). This description of Proust's narrative style, which also applies to that of Sackville-West, identifies an alternative form of narrative based on the act of perception that falls outside the overarching narrative of events, even while providing that narrative with a sense of rhythm and significance. At the temple of Karnak, a scene discussed in more detail below, the narrator's pause is concerned with the process of perception and the lack of

connection between language and life, both depicting her perceptions and filtering them through a layer of metacommentary that distances the text even further from the hypothetical transcendent moment that resists the bounds of time and language. Such descriptive pauses often occur at the point in the narrative where the present moment goes missing, in effect substituting a pause for an ellipsis in the story. Thus, the most common feature of her rhythm – not the most common style of her writing, but the way she interrupts and punctuates her scenes and summaries – comes from the overlapping combination of pause and ellipsis. Taken together, these two forms of narrative movement not only attest once again to the structuring principle of relativity, but also create a rhythm that escapes the bounds of measurable time, gesturing as they do toward infinity.

Passenger to Teheran describes many of the sights and events of Sackville-West's journey in Persia well enough that "it would be easy to trace her route on a map" according to her son Nigel Nicolson, who wrote an introduction to the 2007 republication of the book. However, Nicholson explains how the text might seem more meaningless than meaningful for someone looking to discover information about the identity of Sackville-West and her companions (17). On one hand, Sackville-West gives detailed descriptions of her involvement with the coronation of Reza Khan, a new shah of Persia who introduced many modern and secular changes to the country and collaborated with the British government. On the other hand, she omits many seemingly important details. She never mentions within the book that she is journeying to Teheran to visit her husband Harold Nicolson, who is posted as a diplomat there. Nor does she mention the poet Dorothy Wellesley, who accompanied her to India. Nor does she describe in the

travelogue that while she was at Luxor, archeologists had discovered a new chamber in Tutankhamen's tomb, although she did mention it in her correspondence to Woolf, including a picture postcard of the tombs. These omissions prompt Nigel to complain that "she is reticent to the point of obscurity about her own identity, her companions on different parts of the journey and her motives for it" (17). Coming from a son with biographical knowledge to add to this travelogue and a vested interest in shoring up the historical persona of his mother, Nigel's introductory remarks fill in these gaps while acknowledging the aesthetic beauty of his mother's finished product. However, he doesn't seem to consider that her autobiographical "obscurity" and omission of historical details may have been attractive compensating strategies when the process of composing this narrative threatened to destabilize Sackville-West's very sense of time and authorial persona.

Translating Travel From Instantaneous Images to Written Narrative

Vita Sackville-West admits that she is struggling to find a satisfactory technique for depicting her experiences of travel. Writing to Woolf during her first Persian journey in the spring of 1926, Sackville-West explains that she has begun writing what will become the book of her present experiences, but that the process is challenging: "[I] find it difficult to write about travel. My drawer is full of loose sheets, that refuse to connect up. I daresay you are right about rhythm; all I can say is, that rhythm and I are out of gear" (*Letters* 118). The problem of how to connect the disparate and discontinuous experiences of travel – the "loose sheets" – is inherent to travel writing: the most common stylistic feature of travel narratives is that they are episodic, and what

organization they have comes largely from a basic chronological and geographical structure.³⁶ This strategy is unacceptable for an author who is hoping to produce a text that has the right “rhythm,” a composition that approximates the way the travel experiences and sights have felt to her as a whole, rather than merely describing a series of separate, self-contained episodes. Because the experience of traveling and representing it in language has become a part of Sackville-West’s identity and personal history, the travelogue foregrounds the psychological experience of travel/writing while interweaving themes and stylistic techniques that mirror the frustrating sensations that accompany the writing process.

Woolf, her primary correspondent during this trip, influenced Sackville-West’s thinking about writing and communication both because the two were trading letters throughout the journey and because in these letters the two were discussing the craft of writing. As Sackville-West begins writing *Passenger to Teheran*, she laments that “it is a rambling, discursive sort of affair. And I think of your lovely books, and despair. Why is it that critics pay so little attention to style and surface-texture?” (*Letters* 106). This question indicates that Sackville-West feels more comfortable with style than content and may feel that the rambling nature of her preliminary writing is the only conceivable way to organize the literary account of her largely unstructured travels. But the anxiety and “despair” undergirding this description of the process of travel writing suggests this style is ultimately unsatisfactory. Woolf responds to her friend’s thoughts with a definition of style as rhythm, confirming that Sackville-West is not alone in feeling that the goal of writing is more to capture a style and to evoke a feeling than to convey information:

³⁶ For a more detailed discussion of the travelogue genre, see my introduction as well as Percy Adams, *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel*, and Joanne Shattock, “Travel Writing Victorian and Modern: A Review of Recent Research,” in *The Art of Travel* (edited by Philip Dodd).

Style is a very simple matter; it is all rhythm. [...] Now this is very profound, what rhythm is, and goes far deeper than words. A sight, an emotion, creates this wave in the mind, long before it makes words to fit it; and in writing (such is my present belief) one has to recapture this, and set this working (which has nothing apparently to do with words) and then, as it breaks and tumbles in the mind, it makes words to fit it [...] (107-108)

Woolf here espouses a theory of narrative that is endemic to high modernists, echoing not only Ford Madox Ford's impressionism but also fellow Bloomsbury author E.M.

Forster's emphasis on rhythm as articulated in *Aspects of the Novel* (1927): "the function of rhythm in fiction [is] not to be there all the time like a pattern, but by its lovely waxing and waning to fill us with surprise and freshness and hope" (167). Forster uses Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* to define the "easy" sense of rhythm, and half a century later, Gérard Genette likewise uses Proust's magnum opus to formulate a theory of narrative that hinges on rhythm, or "speed." Sackville-West is attempting to render her travel story within a modernist form of narrative that hinges on style and rhythm, although developing the appropriate rhythm for this travelogue is a challenging process.

Woolf's elaboration on rhythm also points out the centrality of vision in writing, as the process often involves translating the experience of seeing or perceiving something ("a sight, an emotion") into words that reproduce the sensation of perception, not simply of the object perceived. For Woolf, an example of this technique can be found in her then-recently published novel *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), which is structured largely around objects seen and the act of perception. The aeroplane in the opening pages is both depicted as a visual object of interest and employed as a focal point around which the

reactions of various characters are oriented and connected. In Sackville-West's letters and *Passenger to Teheran*, the experience and depiction of travel is likewise largely visual, indicating that she understands the purpose of a travel narrative as providing her reader with the opportunity to "see" the sights she has seen in both a visual and an emotional register. As demonstrated in the example of Burton Holmes, the modernist travelogue as a form attempts to adapt the image standard to written travelogues without losing the sense of immediacy and life. In written travelogues, the inability to present image and narration simultaneously raises the question of organization and rhythm; how can one approximate such immediacy and simultaneity in a written form, in effect translating synchrony into diachrony?

In her attempts to create the kind of rhythm Woolf describes, Sackville-West periodically abandons traditional chronological or narrative accounts of her experiences and tries instead a variety of alternative organizational strategies. Within her travel letters, she frequently resorts to listing all the phenomena she has encountered instead of attempting to put them into any kind of story. She often uses this strategy to begin her letters, afterwards moving into a more straightforward narration of events. One example comes from a letter written on board the S.S. Varela during the same journey in which she began composing *Passenger to Teheran*. Sackville-West begins by listing the faces of people and animals she has seen since her last letter to Woolf. The letter then lists other images that are not clearly related to each other by any obvious similarities: "Jungle on either side of the train; rocks looking like mediaeval castles; peacocks paddling in the village pond" (104). A long paragraph full of such sights and impressions creates the sense that she is overwhelmed by the stimuli found on her journey and attempting, to

some degree, to purge her mind of these details that remain disorderly both in her mind and on paper. Since most of the listed items are visual images, the list serves as one way to approximate the new mode of decontextualized perception and representation embodied by the photographic image. Only after this jumbled list does Sackville-West continue on to tell, in a more traditional story form, how she feels about India and being ill on board the ship.

In an earlier letter to Woolf from Luxor on 29th January 1926, Sackville-West again lists the phenomena she has encountered, but she has not yet resigned herself to the random organization found in her later lists. Perhaps searching for an alternative, non-narrative structure, she chooses to organize alphabetically eighty words related to her Egyptian experience, beginning with “Amon” and concluding with “zest (my own).” The list again features items that are largely visual, depicting more things one sees while traveling rather than the sensations one experiences. Items on the list include “donkeys, dust, dahabeeahs, dragomen, dervishes, desert; Egyptians, Evian; [...] kites, Kinemas, Kodaks; [...] ophthalmia, Osiris, obsidian, obelisks; [...] vultures, Virginia” (93). The visual aspect of travel is highlighted by the inclusion of Kodaks and ophthalmia. The Kodak camera implies the framed, photographic vision one often attains during travel, while ophthalmia alludes to the distortion of human vision produced by inflammation that can result from the harsh conditions of desert travel. Unable at this point of her traveling to find a suitable narrative order in which she might integrate both the objects she perceives and the experience and meaning that such perception produces for her, she isolates the objects from the cognitive process by listing them as single words. In the process, Sackville-West also creates a parody of narrative, substituting one means of

ordering these often simultaneous impressions – alphabetization – for the causal or chronological conventions of narrative structure, which may often seem equally arbitrary as a system that producing meaning. This alphabetical list also demonstrates, like the list discussed above, a form of rhythm or temporality that is not chronological. At the end of this lengthy barrage of images, the reader feels saturated with impressions that cannot be put into any kind of recognizable story. While the images described are suggestive of the original context in which Sackville-West may have encountered them, as words they remain detached and frustratingly far from the actual experiences towards which they gesture.

The structure of the letter that follows the listing indicates a continued struggle with how to communicate her experiences in a satisfactory way. As Sackville-West segues from the list into a recounting of what she has encountered, she vacillates between claiming there is nothing to say and then instantly finding something to describe:

“Having said this, there doesn’t seem to be anything else to say, except that Mr. Robert Hitchens is living in this hotel [...] But indeed, and there is much more to say, only I can’t say it: there is the great untidy desolation of Karnak [...]” (93). Here again, she lists a few of the more powerful sights and events she has encountered. Amusingly, she over-narrates and negates simultaneously, employing preterition to narrate the very things she insists she “can’t say.” In this way, her letter demonstrates her ongoing experimentation with a variety of organizational strategies and rhythms.

By prefacing her descriptions with negative disclaimers about the inadequacy of language, her epistolary technique shows evidence of the narrative relativity that she will employ throughout *Passenger to Teheran*. Her letters both depict events that can be

imagined while reminding their reader of the difference and distance between the words on the page and the actual phenomena they describe. As a result, the events and images become relative – neither just the unmediated phenomena nor the words describing them, but a combination of the two that create the effect of perceiving these events and images as multi-dimensional objects seen from both perspectives simultaneously.

Sackville-West's anxieties about communicating her travel experiences come to the surface within *Passenger to Teheran*, and in their repetition become one component of the rhythm she creates within the travelogue. Repeating the concerns she was then voicing in her letters to Woolf, the narrator of *Passenger to Teheran* begins her travelogue with a disclaimer about the problematic lack of connection between experience and writing, especially focusing on letters. Setting the tone for the remainder of the travelogue, she laments:

there is something intrinsically wrong about letters. For one thing they are not instantaneous. If I write home to-day and say (as is actually the fact), "At this moment of writing I am sailing along the coast of Baluchistan", that is perfectly vivid for me, who have but to raise my eyes from the paper to refresh them with those pink cliffs in the morning light; but for the recipient of my letter, opening it in England at three weeks' remove, I am no longer coasting Baluchistan; I am driving in a cab in Bagdad, or reading in a train, or asleep, or dead; the present tense has become meaningless. [...] There would seem, going a step further, to be something wrong about travel itself. Of what use is it, if we may communicate our experience neither verbally nor on paper? (25, 27)

Read in relation to her letters with Woolf, this passage can be understood fairly simply as an echo of Sackville-West's frustration over the temporal delay implicit in letter writing. She frequently wrote to Woolf that she was anxious to receive her letters, and she was sure to mention when she would be leaving one destination and arriving at another, so that her mail would not be misdirected, lost, or further delayed.

Additionally and more importantly, however, the inclusion of this passage within a travelogue indicates its larger significance to her conception of travel writing, as does her shocking conclusion that there is "something wrong about travel itself." As a traveler-writer, Sackville-West cannot separate her experience of traveling from her representation of it, as the process of looking back at these incidents with the goal of communicating them to someone else irrevocably distorts them, along with her traveler-narrator persona, in her mind. While Sackville-West is the only author to express this dynamic so bluntly, she is not the only modernist traveler-author to struggle with this fundamental shift in the conception of travel and travel writing. Gertrude Stein and Ford Madox Ford also grapple with the disconnect between literature and travel experiences, employing distinctive narrative strategies to distance the narrator from the author. Other modernist travel writers such as W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood similarly write their travel accounts from an ironic narrative distance, indicating their discomfort with the process.

Part of what's "wrong about travel itself" is that new visual representations of travel (photographs, postcards, films, etc.) – as well as Einstein's theories of space and time – have changed the way the traveler conceptualizes and perceives her journey. As discussed in Chapter 1, visual theorists Susan Sontag and Tom Gunning describe how the

modern image offers a new kind of structure, especially for representations of travel, that feels timeless, decontextualized, and immediate. In the passage above, the narrator illustrates her frustration by referring to what she sees *now* that her letter reader never will: “[I] have but to raise my eyes from the paper to refresh them with those pink cliffs in the morning light.” Her position as a traveler seems defined by the images she perceives rather than the choices she has made, making the position inherently passive. Indeed, the title of Sackville-West’s travelogue hints at this problem, as she imagines herself a *passenger* to Teheran, not a driver. This perceived loss of agency is exacerbated by the attempt to communicate these images – the defining characteristic of the modernist traveler’s experience – into any medium other than the image. Able to make this translation “neither verbally nor on paper,” the narrator understandably concludes that travel as well as its representation have become meaningless.

The narrator indicates that her notion of communication is four-dimensional by suggesting that to communicate is to convey the sensation of experiencing the intersection of a particular time and place – a kind of spatio-temporal snapshot that can only occur within the unrealizable ideal of immediate communication. Unable to achieve this ideal, the narrator repeatedly draws attention to the delay involved in translating sensory perceptions into language via a narrative process that involves inevitable distortion and creates multiple competing perspectives, most notably coming from the position of the reader. At other moments (such as the description of the temple of Karnak, discussed below), the narrator describes and enacts a sensation of timelessness, portraying the moment of perception as analogous to the immediacy of the image rather than framing it in the causal or chronological structure of language. Having

acknowledged that words are a poor substitute for images, the narrator is left with the option of using words to describe the present moment as an experience of rhythm – a sensation of the relation between time and space – and to call attention to the difference between words and reality. Somewhat ironically, these repeated disclaimers about the inadequacy of language are one way that Sackville-West orders her impressionistic account of a series of present moments, retaining their significance both as individual events and as components of a larger structure.

Leading “Two Lives”: Doubled Perceptions and Relativity

The doubled vision of the traveler, a common theme in her letters to Woolf, becomes another organizing strategy in *Passenger to Teheran*. In the chapter “Round Teheran,” in which she describes the bazaars and the typical sights and people in the city, Sackville-West’s narrator crafts a vision of this Eastern culture through a relative lens, often depicting the present sights in relation to her English sensibilities. She articulates this relativity in temporal terms, contrasting the ancient way of life she observes in Persia with the modern life of England.

Describing some of the more rural and harsh sights in Teheran, such as starving men and abused donkeys, the narrator opines:

It is a country of contradictions; there is nothing to bridge the gulf between the dark ages and the twentieth century; thus, although the postal system between province and province is ramshackle, unreliable, and dilatory in the extreme, you may hear Big Ben striking on the wireless in Teheran – with such discrepancy in

time that although black night covers Persia, London still basks in a June evening

[...] The modern and the mediaeval jostle in the same phrase. (80, 81)

Again, the narrator foregrounds the delay in postal service, a primary concern that becomes yet another structuring component of the travelogue's rhythm, giving a sense of how frustrating it feels at times for Sackville-West to be so far removed from her home and friends. This reminder of the difference between Sackville-West's home country and her current location also revises the descriptions she has given of Persian sights so that they are seen in contrast to the modern reality of England, a perspective familiar to Sackville-West, Woolf, and the assumed English reader who can quite easily see and hear the modern comforts of London while reading about the ancient culture of Persia. The prevalence of such "contradictions" both within Persia and in her narrative account of it combine to produce another motif of her journey and of her travelogue, an aspect that she acknowledges in the final sentence above.

By describing the juxtaposition of the "modern and the mediaeval" as occurring "in the same phrase," the narrator makes an explicit analogy between (the complex, relative) grammatical structure and the lived spatio-temporal experience of traveling in Persia as a foreigner. In this passage, grammatical relativity results from parallel descriptions of Persia and London prefaced by the adverbial conjunction "although," a word that communicates contradictory simultaneity: "although the postal system [...] is ramshackle [...], you may hear Big Ben [...] although black night covers Persia, London still basks in a June evening." In this second example, the parallel structure of the two dependent clauses underscores their equivalence, phrasing both realities in the simple present tense and following a basic subject-verb order. This grammatical relativity

reinforces the notion that both Persia and London exist simultaneously, as do “black night” and “a June evening,” and these places and times exist fundamentally as psychological and sensory realities in the narrator’s mind.

While at times these jostling contradictions are invigorating and pleasant, the sensation of relativity that they produce becomes overwhelming and disorienting to the traveler-narrator at other points of the journey/travelogue. After further description of the bazaars, at which Sackville-West enjoys browsing for goods and observing the common inhabitants of Teheran in a social setting, she reflects again on the doubled nature of her perceptions as a traveler. At this point, the duplicity of her experiences creates something of an existential crisis, interfering with her ability to locate herself either in time or space:

Such a desultory life I lead, and the life of England falls away, or remains only as an image seen in an enchanted mirror, little separate images over which I pore, learning more from them than I ever learnt from the reality. I lead, in fact, two lives; an unfair advantage. This roof of the world, blowing with yellow tulips; these dark bazaars, crawling with a mazy life; that tiny, far-off England; and what am I? and where am I? That is the problem: and where is my heart, home-sick at one moment, excited beyond reason the next? But at least I live, I feel, I endure the agonies of constancy and inconstancy; it is better to be alive and sentient, than dead and stagnant. “Let us,” I said, as we emerged from the bazaars, “go to Isfahan.” (96)

A sample of the rhythm at play throughout the travelogue, the quick and repeated vacillations within this passage between such opposites as Persia and England, constancy and inconstancy, and life and death create a sense of movement, groundlessness, and

vertigo. The question “and what am I?” hints that this relativity of perspective not only impacts the story and perceptions that Sackville-West is trying to convey, but also destabilizes the author-traveler’s sense of self. Unable to attach herself singly to any one time or place, Sackville-West loses a singular sense of identity, able only to imagine herself in relation to multiple competing narratives and contexts at once. At such moments when the narrator seems to represent the experience of perceiving oneself as a spatially and temporally relative figure, the language enacts the sensation of disorientation and instability. The narrator also describes the difficulty of communicating when there seems to be no single, stable position and/or perspective from which to write. Having complicated the textual identity of the traveler-narrator, this moment of ambivalence ends as the narrator takes action. She embraces the relentless sense of movement with the imperative and performative statement, “Let us go to Isfahan,” an injunction that ends the chapter and her account of this time in Teheran.

This sense of movement and relativity is produced both through the oscillating grammatical and narrative structure of the travelogue and through the portrayal of images and the act of perceiving. Grammatically, the parallel structure of the passage illustrates the narrator’s sense of leading “two lives,” if not more: “This roof of the world, blowing with yellow tulips; these dark bazaars, crawling with a mazy life; that tiny, far-off England.” The compound-complex sentence equates “this,” “these,” and “that,” relative pronouns that serve the same grammatical, descriptive function while also suggesting competing degrees of closeness. The subjects of the clauses are likewise rendered equivalent, as “roof,” “bazaars,” and “England” occupy the same syntactical position

within a series of clauses whose interconnectedness and equivalence is underscored by their being joined by semicolons rather than periods.

The visual imagery in this passage links visual perception to the literary depiction of travel, creating a multi-dimensional narrative perspective that shows the influence of the image standard on both the experience and representation of travel. England appears, from an appropriate distance, as “little separate images” – like postcards – that render the country easier to see from afar than from up close. In this and other passages, the travelogue presents the challenge of perceiving two competing visions that exist on such different scales, in terms of both size and proximity. A few pages earlier, the narrator explains the necessity of maintaining a vision split and balanced between foreground and background:

Close and constant observation is necessary, [...] a shower of rain will bring out a crop of miniature anemones, a day of hot sun will shrivel them; [...] It is necessary to look towards the distance, and then into the few square yards immediately beneath the foot; to be at one and the same time long-sighted and near-sighted. (90)

The narrator here integrates the act of visual perception in a temporality of immediacy, suggesting the possibility of a vision that can sustain attention on two competing distances simultaneously, “at one and the same time.” This notion of a dualistic perspective comes up in her letters as well, as she repeatedly points out that she sees the places of Persia juxtaposed against the people of England; the two overlap in her mental and sensory perceptions to the point that they seem to create a new reality that is relative and inextricably multi-dimensional: “I find it very difficult to look inward when I am also

looking at the coast of Sinai; and very difficult to look at the coast of Sinai when I am also looking inward and finding the image of Virginia everywhere” (*Letters*, 95). In this letter to Woolf, Sackville-West mixes her metaphors, equating the physiological act of looking at the coast with the imagined act of looking inward at images of her friend stored in her memory. Again, this split perception threatens to create a sensation of perceptual parallax for Sackville-West that cannot be mitigated and leaves her feeling attached not only to two places and times at once but also to two modes of perception, sensory and psychological.

The problem of self-location is not merely spatial but also temporal, as Sackville-West imagines that she can identify versions of her traveler persona that have existed – or should have existed – at a multiplicity of alternate times. Earlier in the journey, Sackville-West experiences another moment of existential crisis related to the problem of locating herself in time. In her letter from Luxor, Sackville-West reflects on her boat ride across the Adriatic Sea: “It is an odd sensation being so cut-off. And even the clock different. We kept dropping half-hours at sea. What becomes of those poor waifs of one’s existence over which one has skipped? Mine are flotsam and jetsam now somewhere on the Adriatic” (94). Sackville-West externalizes, embodies, and spatializes a purely metaphysical concept: one’s time-self. That she has skipped over and left behind portions of her time-self shows that her own psychology/subjectivity has become fragmented and discontinuous, and her awareness of this fragmentation is heightened when her travels take her across temporal and spatial borders that increase the distance between these various versions of self. Curiously, her spatial continuity (i.e., her body) is not enough to compensate for the temporal discontinuity she experiences at moments

such as these, as she seems to defer to the objective and somewhat arbitrary authority of standardized clock time.

However, these temporal selves do get the opportunity to reconnect and collapse into a single, timeless self when the traveler-narrator returns to a space she has visited before. Describing her journey from London to Teheran, Sackville-West's narrator includes a short depiction of her train ride across Italy, in which she retraces the path the author had taken on a previous journey in 1921. Before depicting her current journey, the narrator recounts a previous experience in which she heard midnight chime twice, an experience that produces the sensation of living twice through a single time.

I remember how once I woke in Verona to hear midnight striking, and lay awake, overcome by the Shakespearean romance of it, quite sufficient already; but then, five minutes later, heard midnight strike again, on a different, dissentient clock; two Veronese midnights, where one alone had sufficed to fill me with delight!

(34)

Far from causing disorientation or confusion, this doubled time (the opposite of the missing time-zones and time-selves on the Adriatic Sea) is delightful in its production of multiple versions of Sackville-West that are nonetheless contained in a single location. Likewise, the narrative account of Sackville-West's 1926 journey across Italy becomes doubled and multiplied within the composition of the travelogue, having been prefaced by this memory, so that past and present seem to exist alongside each other simultaneously. If anything, the present moment seems to go missing in this polytemporal description of her position in a somewhat mystical space:

I savoured the special pleasure of travelling over ground already sharpened by a previous experience; of dwelling with a sensuous slowness on old, revived memories; when the future is full of the promise of new experience, pregnant with a prophetic sense of memory, as though the spirit had rushed forward and had come back, bringing with it hints of treasure, as the spies brought fruits from the promised land. (34)

The same self is narrated here in multiple temporalities simultaneously, interweaving past, present, and future both descriptively and grammatically. As the long, complex sentence progresses, the present becomes increasingly complicated, and turns into a future time that her past self could have prophetically imagined. From that vantage point, that past self could also have imagined her future self remembering the past self. The traveler-narrator thus perceives and narrates the “present” and her present self from both the past and the future. In the process, the past, present, and future versions of Sackville-West’s traveler-narrator all seem to coexist simultaneously within this sentence and within the Italian space she is ostensibly describing.

Slightly later in the travelogue, the narrator presents another encounter with a landscape that produces the sensation of transcending time. In the section on Egypt, the narrator describes her visit to the temple at Karnak, comparing its simplicity, ancientness, and monumental scale to that found throughout Egypt. After describing the giant columns in the moonlight and a few other remnants of the ancient Egyptian empire, the narrator describes her frustration and struggles with language. Unable to give a satisfactory explanation of the personal significance of this experience, the narrator

substitutes in its place a meditation on rhythm and the failure of language to approximate the visual and psychological experience of being in such an ancient setting.

We come back, always, to those odd, false, true relationships, which stir our emotions [...]: such relationships as that of a pagan temple under the moon—though why the moon should have any bearing on the temple we do not know, except that both are old, so old that both have become unreal to us; unreal, and charged with a significance we are quite at a loss reasonably to interpret [...]; the conjunction stirs us as an aesthetic harmony stirs us: and who shall explain such mysteries as conjunction and rhythm, intuitively felt, but not by our present crude terminology to be defined? Who shall explain, either, the bearing of visual experience upon psychical experience? [...] But all these words are so vague [...]

(42)

In some sense, this transcendental experience of time and place is an alternative to the troubling relativity that so much of her journey produces. This section is free from reference to England or concerns about letters. Instead, the narrator presents this scene as an emotion that produces a sense of harmony between landscape and architecture, an emotion that cannot readily be put into words. By describing this scene as transcending time, the narrator also gestures toward the possibility that literary representation can transcend language, and enact something like the immediacy of the image standard, by portraying the present moment as an experience of rhythm. This invocation of rhythm strongly echoes the ideas that Woolf wrote in response to Sackville-West's frustration at depicting experiences such as these. In the narrator's struggle to describe her emotions, she creates two of the rhythms that run throughout the travelogue: on the sentence level,

the grammatical and syntactical relativity; and on the larger scale, the common refrain of the problem of communication and the disconnect between life and literature.

The grammatical and syntactical relativity in this passage results from a modified chiasmic structure found in the repetition and syntactic reversal of key words such as “moon,” “temple,” “both,” and “old.” In the first few examples, the narrator creates a relationship between two concepts and then reverses that relationship in the next clause: “a pagan *temple* under the *moon*—though why the *moon* should have any bearing on the *temple* we do not know, except that *both* are *old*, so *old* that *both* have become unreal to us.” The implication of this syntactic structure “is that the two parts of a chiasmic whole mirror each other as do the parts of the letter x. [...] Chiasmic structure may also create or heighten paradox” (Murfin 53, 54). The repetition of “temple” and “moon” provides a sense of unity to the passage, and combined with other repetitions and reversals, pushes the reader through the incredibly long sentence without feeling that there is a clear stopping point. This propulsion adds to the sense of temporal multiplicity that the scene captures. The reversed order of these words also changes their grammatical roles, shifting from subject to object and object to subject, so that there is no single chronological or causal direction. As with the theory of relativity, it is irrelevant which came first – temple or moon – and erroneous to insist on a single order of perception. The temple and moon mirror each other, two parts of a whole that coexist simultaneously, while their chiasmic depiction points to the paradox implicit in grammatical and narrative structures that, of necessity, preface one concept or image with another. As with the parallel syntax the narrator uses elsewhere in *Passenger to Teheran*, this chiasmic representation creates an alternative sense of time and rhythm that is relative and multi-

directional, and thus an appropriate means of encapsulating the traveler-narrator's perplexing experience. The invocation of the moon as a measure of time also suggests the narrator's attempt to resolve the difference between astronomical time and human time, another example of the impact of Einstein's theories of relativity that is common to modernist fiction and travelogues.

Why Einstein?

While she does not refer to Einstein in the body of *Passenger to Teheran*, Sackville-West and Woolf discuss his ideas in the letters they exchanged during this journey, and the narrator of *Passenger to Teheran* periodically describes phenomena using such astronomical analogies as black holes and the speed of light. Her curiosity with Einstein's radical reconceptualization of space and time surfaces more explicitly in a short story published in 1930, "The Unborn Visitant." In this story, a woman on the verge of engagement in 1908 receives a visit from her unborn daughter, who has come from 1932 to urge her mother to hurry up so that the daughter might be born sooner. She explains her ability to time travel by referring to Einstein and claiming that she lives in the fourth dimension, as does her mother. The story concludes with the daughter's visit having changed the future and eradicating herself, as the potential mother is motivated by her visitor to change her destiny and not marry. Although it hinges on a provocative theory in which travel and identity can be liberated from the confines of time and space, the structure of the narrative remains fairly traditional in its scenic portrayal of this encounter. The story does not experiment with any time-bending narrative techniques or

attempt to depict the time traveler's experiences, focusing instead on the perspective of the static figure in 1908.

This lack of connection between the imaginative possibilities that Einstein's theories brought to public attention and the inability to realize those possibilities in existing forms of communication and travel was something Sackville-West described struggling with in her letters to Woolf. Nine days before leaving England for her tour of the Middle East, Sackville-West explicitly invokes Einstein and his theories, lamenting the lack of connection between Einsteinian travel and the means of travel and communication available to humans and mail moving at less than the speed of light. Worried about her friend and lover who had once more become ill, she writes that

letters are the devil, disregarding Einstein and being subservient to so fallacious a thing as time, e.g., if you write to me in Persia and say you have got the ague it is no use my writing back to say I'm sorry, because by the time you get it you'll have recovered, whereas if I write from the Weald you'll still be wretched when you get it and my condolence will be of some slight grain of use, but *my* feelings will be the same, whether in Persia or the Weald. (*Letters* 84)³⁷

She again laments the time delay involved in postal travel, wishing instead that the mail could travel in the fourth dimension much as the daughter in "The Unborn Visitant" can, taking advantage of the possibility for travel at the speed of light to eradicate the notion of "so fallacious a thing as time." As the descriptions of her travels in *Passenger to Teheran* indicate, her experience of time seems to vary as a result of her movement, frequently producing the sensation of an expanded present moment, depicted within the

³⁷ Interestingly, Sackville-West writes that she begins *Passenger to Teheran* while she herself is suffering from a fever, much as Virginia was before she left. In a twist of fate, Sackville-West is the one in need of immediate condolence.

travelogue as narrative pauses that have a time-sense approaching infinity. Thus, when Sackville-West compares herself to the time and place she left behind in England, viewing it from the perspective of Teheran or another of her interim locations, she feels that she is traveling fast enough for time to have slowed, for the present moment to have expanded in relation to those who have remained at home in England. Perhaps deliberately misunderstanding the implications of Einstein's theories, Sackville-West imagines that she and Woolf could share this present moment and thus communicate with each other simultaneously, if only they could manipulate the fourth dimension as easily as her fictional characters can.

When Sackville-West returned to Teheran a second time in February 1927, she wrote again of Einstein in her letters to Woolf. Much as in the passages discussed above from *Passenger to Teheran*, her return to a location she had previously visited distorts her sense of time, self, and perspective, so that the present moment again becomes expansive and difficult to narrate: "I hardly know how to write to you, everything is so confused, so Einsteinian, an effect which I never can hope to communicate to you, so I won't try" (*Letters* 171). She continues in this letter to elaborate on the effect this experience has on her sense of self and her ability to write about travel: "But what is really odd, is that I should be sitting again at the same table [...] writing to you as I used to do last year, and feeling again the helpless sense of impotence, travel being, as you know, the most private of pleasures" (172). Sackville-West here echoes the first line of her travelogue, published the previous year, which begins with these sentences: "Travel is the most private of pleasures. There is no greater bore than the travel bore" (9). This repetition indicates that, in addition to the disorienting experience of retracing her physical steps

through Persia, Sackville-West is also retracing her writing, as if she is unable to find new words to approximate the sensation of such doubled experience. Her writing, much like her travel experience, cannot return to the illusion of singularity and uniqueness; both are instead filtered through the previous visit and its previous, flawed representation in language. Her letter thus demonstrates something approximating Einsteinian relativity, as the written depiction of 1927 Teheran seems to become synonymous and indistinguishable from its past incarnation in 1926. This dynamic leaves Sackville-West feeling “impotent” to communicate the singularity of the present moment and to discern her present self from her past experiences. As a traveler-writer, Sackville-West has become a relative experience, understood in relation to multiple times and places simultaneously.

Sackville-West wants Einstein’s theories to apply to her lived experience, but the astronomical scale on which his description of space, time, and the universe depends leaves it having little practical relevance for an earth-bound traveler limited by terrestrial speeds. In an unpublished poem from around 1943 titled “Litany: I am,” she parodies the Catholic form of litany with a series of declarative statements on identity that move from terrestrial to astronomical metaphors. Framed initially in terms of oppositions, this poetic persona is also explicitly relative, as the speaker identifies herself simultaneously with both hunter and prey in the first four lines:

I am the snail crawling out at night to devour the flower.

I am the flower devoured by the snail—

I am the lion in his desert

I am the gazelle brought down by the lion—

[...]

I am the star—the black dwarf

I am the Galaxy

I am the speed of light

I am the atom. I am the atom bomb.

I am the Universe, receding so fast that no telescope can catch up with it.

I AM, because I think I am. (qtd. in Stevens 118)

Michael Stevens, one of Sackville-West's biographers, attributes the ideas in this poem to her embrace of pantheistic beliefs over those of the Roman Catholic Church, a personal conflict of values and beliefs that she was struggling with around this time (Stevens 70). Sackville-West's litany embraces not only pantheism but also a conception of the universe that is deeply indebted to modern scientific developments. For an author who is often characterized as neo-romantic, Sackville-West demonstrates a fascination with the scientific concepts that Einstein devised. By identifying herself as both the atom bomb and the galaxy, the poem's speaker aligns herself with the ability of the deceptively simple equation $e=mc^2$ to explain a wide range of phenomena, from the shape of the universe (ever-expanding and infinite yet bounded) to the massive energy contained within the atom.

The appeal these ideas held for Sackville-West are evident in *Passenger to Teheran* as well, as she explicitly refers to the speed of light, relative time, and black holes. In her introduction, still concerned with the lack of connection between travel experience and written accounts of it, the narrator writes:

It may be that language, that distorted labyrinthine universe, was never designed to replace or even to complete the much simpler functions of the eye. We look; and there is the image in its entirety, three-dimensional, instantaneous. Language follows, a tortoise competing with the velocity of light [...] The most – but what a most! – that language can hope to achieve is suggestion; for the art of words is not an exact science. (27)

This passage establishes oppositions between art and science, language and image, the slow, earth-bound tortoise and the seeming instantaneity of disembodied light. She indicates that she feels her narrative has to compete with science and images in its depiction of reality, and she must advocate for the unique ability of the written word to capture and enact feelings rather than facts. That she ends optimistically considering the possibilities implicit in the power of language indicates her attempt to portray her travels with words that function as both components of a larger narrative of her journeys and as approximations of the immediacy of viewing a particular time and place.

The narrator continues her reflections on the temporal distortion involved in language by referencing relative time, ironically noting how even the concept of relative time is itself culturally relative when understood through the flawed human structure of language:

Give a thing a name, and it immediately achieves an existence; but either that thing had an existence before it had a name, or else the reverse is the case; we cannot tell which. Thus for the Hindu ‘to-morrow’ and ‘yesterday’ have but one denomination, so that we may assume his idea of relative time to be very different

from our own, or surely he would have forged a word to suit the needs of his enlarged perceptions. (28)

The meditation on names and language reveals that Sackville-West's travels and her interaction with the cultural variation between languages has led her to confront personally the lack of any intrinsic, universal relationship between words as signifiers and the signified concepts to which they refer. Her frustration with this disparity invokes Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic analysis of the process of signification, ideas first published in 1916 as *Cours de linguistique général*, as well as the ancient Greek formulation of this disparity found in Plato's Theory of Forms. In her embrace of linguistic rhythm found elsewhere in *Passenger to Teheran*, Sackville-West clearly aligns her writing with these theories that acknowledge the lack of connection between language and the ideal forms or ideas to which language can only gesture.

By expressing these ideas with the example of "relative time," Sackville-West adds the fourth dimension of time to her conception of language, suggesting that in the Hindu conception, time can be perceived to move multi-directionally. Given her manipulation of time found elsewhere in the travelogue, one might expect Sackville-West to praise this linguistic oddity that seems to create the possibility for a kind of time travel. Instead, she characterizes this Eastern notion of time as limited rather than "enlarged," since a single word holds two meanings that are compressed as if within a single space. Seen from the British perspective, the word "kal" introduces ambiguity into an already difficult act of translation for a foreigner who is unfamiliar with these linguistic conventions. This word thus embodies both the concept of simultaneity – containing two meanings at the same time – as well as the Einsteinian notion of the relativity of

simultaneity, as the word carries different connotations of time when seen from competing cultural and grammatical perspectives.

The passage continues by drawing an analogy between language and mathematics, arguing that within both systems of representation, complex ideas may exist that elude the process of signification.

We have no means of apprehending those ideas which we cannot clothe in words [...]; yet it would be no more reasonable for us to pretend that such ideas may not exist, than for a child to crumple in a temper a handbook of higher mathematics.

(28)

To illustrate her point about the potential opacity of language, the narrator acknowledges the existence of a higher level of math within which revolutionary ideas such as Einstein's theories are framed, but which remain elusive to a non-specialist lacking the technical ability to decode them. This passage suggests that the best way to represent the experience of traveling in the era of Einstein and the fourth dimension is within the symbolic language of mathematical equations. Written language, bound as it is to a one-dimensional system of printed words that must be read individually and in a single direction, cannot hope to approximate the complexity, ambiguity, and epic scale on which mathematical equations can describe the physical world. We see here again the contrast between language and science, suggestion and certainty – contained within a passage that suggests the narrator may be wishing “to crumple in a temper” the limiting structure within which she is forced to frame her ideas.

The frustration with the limitations of language to describe the enormous scope of the traveler's universe, and the corresponding appeal of the new conception of the

universe created by Einstein's theories, is evident in the narrator's description of her train journey from Delhi to Bombay, in which she is overwhelmed by the scope of India and her intermittent, decontextualized perceptions of it. In her attempt to convey an experience that is not only hard to express in language but also difficult for the traveler to conceptualize, she reaches to the astronomical metaphor of a black hole:

India is too vast, too diverse, to be grasped as a whole, therefore only details emerge. I know that for two days and nights I travelled shut up in a stifling little box with smoked windows, which was a railway carriage but which seemed to me like the Black Hole of Calcutta on wheels, and that through the windows I watched the enormous areas go past [...] and that was India, but almost before I knew it I was back in Bombay harbour, on another boat. (54-55)

Twice in this short passage the narrator frames her perceptions in relation to her partial knowledge, suggesting that this experience, while visceral and meaningful, has transcended the bounds of what she can grasp cognitively. This disorienting experience is comparable to the nervous disorders, such as "railway brain," that resulted from the traveler being overwhelmed by a barrage of sensory experiences and feeling unable to order these perceptions into a logical order. In the face of what she does not fully comprehend – the vastness and diversity of India – the narrator instead asserts what she does know – her personal encounter with the country: "I know that for two days and nights I travelled." At the conclusion of this section on India, she again foregrounds her limited knowledge: "almost before I knew it I was back." This disclaimer suggests that the speed of her cognitive abilities is in danger of being surpassed by the speed of her body.

The narrator's use of the phrase "Black Hole of Calcutta" carries two connotations, both of which illustrate the cramped and disorienting spatio-temporal experience of this train ride. The most direct reference is to an infamous small dungeon in which over one hundred English prisoners were confined by Bengalese forces in 1756. After a single night in the twenty-foot-square room, very few of the prisoners survived. Arguably, this prison provided the name for the astronomical concept of a black hole, an object of such concentrated mass that "at the center, spacetime would infinitely curve in on itself" (Isaacson 250). By linking her meditations on the process of knowing with the metaphor of a black hole, the narrator suggests that she imagines herself in a spatio-temporal and cognitive position in which perceptual phenomena are falling in to her position at a rate that is much faster than the speed at which her words and thoughts can get out. In fact, if she were truly in a black hole, no light or language would ever be able to escape the vast mass and gravity created by her ever-compressing and temporally infinite position. Fortunately for Sackville-West, she escapes the physical and psychological discomfort³⁸ of this prison-like position by moving to a new location and a new mode of travel, trading in her crowded and hot train car for a boat ride that promises a slower pace and fresh air. It is on this boat journey that she first begins composing *Passenger to Teheran*, after suffering a fever for four days and reading a great deal of Proust. Taken together, the combination of her uncomfortable time in India, the fever, and her reading of Proust produce a sense of psychological relativity as she begins translating her travel experiences into literature.

³⁸ Further evidence of Sackville-West's bias against India comes from a letter written to Woolf after this trip, in which Sackville-West rails, "India is a loathsome place, without one shred of any quality, and I never want to go there again" (*Letters*, 104-105). Her dislike of India is also implicit in the passage discussed earlier concerning relative time and the Hindu language.

Relativity: A Sign of Determinism or Free Will?

Sackville-West, like other modernist travel writers, was struggling to adapt Einstein's theories of relativity to both self-perception and narration. Her engagement with relativity on a philosophical level, rather than a mathematical one, illustrates Henri Bergson's psychological view of relativity as expressed in his book *Time and Free Will*. Notably, Bergson and Einstein had a contentious debate about the implications of relativity on the human experience of time and movement. While the specific point on which they argued was minor, the broader implications were huge.³⁹ Einstein was a determinist, while Bergson was a fierce advocate of free will. While Einstein's theories suggested that the individual perceiver has no control over his encounter with the physical world, Bergson insisted that the individual's experience of moving through the world was not just physical but an intrinsically psychological sensation.

Einstein and Bergson publicly disagreed over the physics of relativity and simultaneity in a pair of papers published in 1921. In 1922 Bergson tackled the issue further in his book *Durée et Simultanéité*. As Jimena Canales writes in her article describing this high-profile⁴⁰ disagreement, this was a debate not just about "the nature of time and simultaneity" but about "the status of philosophy *vis à vis* physics."

³⁹ The disagreement resulted from competing interpretations of a variation in the twin paradox, in which one twin stays on earth while the other travels away from the earth at a velocity near the speed of light. On return, the traveling twin's clock would appear to have slowed in comparison to the earth clock. Bergson acknowledged this conclusion, but insisted that for twins experiencing absolutely no difference in movement or acceleration (an impossible hypothetical scenario), the clocks would read the same time.

⁴⁰ The disagreement between Einstein and Bergson became so heated that it turned into a political problem. In the article "Einstein, Bergson, and the Experiment that Failed," Jimena Canales explains in detail their involvement in the International Commission for Intellectual Cooperation (CIC) of the League of Nations in its attempts to unite intellectuals, foster productive globalization, and prevent a second world war. Einstein's involvement was crucial because he was born German, but he was so irritated by Bergson's

It was, in essence, a controversy about who could speak for nature and about which of these two disciplines would have the last word. [... Bergson] was clear: “All that I want to establish is simply this: once we admit the Theory of Relativity as a physical theory, all is not finished.” Philosophy, he modestly argued, still had a place. Einstein disagreed. He fought against giving philosophy (and by inference Bergson) any role in matters of time. (Canales 1169, 1170)

This debate has direct implications for modernists such as Sackville-West. Much of the modernist literary experimentation with subjective time illustrates Bergson’s concept of duration or *durée*, a distinctly non-scientific and immeasurable notion of time that corresponds to the transcendent moments depicted in *Passenger to Teheran*. While Bergson may have slightly misunderstood the physics of relativity, his work is more concerned with consciousness, or how it feels to perceive oneself as a moving subject in time and space. As Canales explains, “Although *physically* the twins’ times were equally valid, Bergson argued that *philosophically* differences could remain between them” (1173). Bergson’s work thus provides one model for how new theories of time and space were impacting notions of identity, a concern that weighed heavily on the minds of modernists such as Sackville-West.

For Einstein, the human experience of time was largely irrelevant when compared with the physical measurement of time. While he acknowledged that one can only know reality as a result of sense impressions, the theories that have evolved as a result of those impressions have confirmed a physical reality that is determined by unchanging laws of physics. Einstein’s determinism evolved after the publication of the general theory of

public disagreement with his theories that he withdrew from the CIC and published a damaging letter explaining his many problems with the organization.

relativity in 1915, and this philosophy accounted for the fundamentally predetermined space-time structure of the universe. As Walter Isaacson explains, the misunderstanding of Einstein's theories of relativity as cultural relativism go against Einstein's determinism: "In both his science and his moral philosophy, Einstein was driven by a quest for certainty and deterministic laws. If his theory of relativity produced ripples that unsettled the realms of morality and culture, this was caused not by what Einstein believed but by how he was popularly interpreted" (278). In fact, Einstein's determinism was the opposite of moral relativity. Einstein explained this determinism as it applied to human thought in the essay "The World As I See It," published in 1931. Expounding on a number of beliefs, Einstein writes, "I do not at all believe in human freedom in the philosophical sense. Everybody acts not only under external compulsion but also in accordance with inner necessity. [...] This realization mercifully mitigates the easily paralyzing sense of responsibility and prevents us from taking ourselves and other people all too seriously" (8-9).

In *Time and Free Will*, Bergson conducts detailed thought experiments on the mental experience of time in order to refute the claim of determinists like Einstein that personality is passive and predetermined, a mere product of human reactions to external stimuli. His insistence that humans have free will hinges on his articulation of *durée* as a mode of time that is deeply subjective and not chronological or progressive. At a few points in his text, he links *durée* to the sensation of motion, and in the process describes the quality of experience that Sackville-West struggles to capture within *Passenger to Teheran*:

In a word, there are two elements to be distinguished in motion, the space

traversed and the act by which we traverse it [...]. [T]he successive positions of the moving body really do occupy space, but [...] the process by which it passes from one position to the other, a process which occupies duration and which has no reality except for a conscious spectator, eludes space. [...] motion, in so far as it is a passage from one point to another, is a mental synthesis.... (112, 111)

Both Bergson and the narrator of *Passenger to Teheran* define motion as existing in one's consciousness and having "no reality except for a conscious spectator." In *Passenger to Teheran* and Sackville-West's letters to Woolf, the problem of feeling like a spectator to an overwhelming succession of images becomes a common refrain, and the mental experience of this perception is not easily translated into language or narrative. At such moments, the narrative of *Passenger to Teheran* becomes defined by pauses and ellipses that create the feeling of infinity, a timelessness that can not be measured, much like Bergson's duration.

Translating this sensation of motion into the homogeneous medium of language alters the temporal dimension of the experience, which feels like an organic whole perceived all at once rather than a series of events. *Passenger to Teheran* demonstrates this difficult act of translation, foregrounding the temporal aspect of motion and emphasizing moments at which time becomes understood as an internal rather than external perception. Acknowledging this difficulty for novelists, Bergson suggests that literature is most successful when it uses language both to convey a story and acknowledge language's limited ability to capture the pure sensation of duration or consciousness.

Now, if some bold novelist, tearing aside the cleverly woven curtain of our conventional ego, shows us [...] under this juxtaposition of simple states an infinite permeation of a thousand different impressions which have already ceased to exist the instant they are named, we commend him for having known us better than we knew ourselves. This is not the case, however, and the very fact that he spreads out our feeling in a homogeneous time, and expresses its elements by words, shows us that he in his turn is only offering us its shadow: but he has arranged this shadow in such a way as to make us suspect the extraordinary and illogical nature of the object which projects it [...]. (133-134)

While Bergson at first seems optimistic that the novelist can somehow represent the “infinite permeation of a thousand different impressions,” he quickly admits that such infinity cannot be depicted in the homogeneous, time-bound medium of language. However, he concludes with some optimism about the ability of literature to gesture to what is missing by portraying the “shadow” of the narrator’s consciousness, the indirect effects of perception.

By depicting the traveler in the act of perception, *Passenger to Teheran* and other modernist travelogues represent motion as a “mental synthesis” rather than a physical movement across space. The motion that results from these psychological journeys is temporally multiplicitous and includes omissions and elaborations that lead the narrative beyond the simple description of the story of events. Doing so allows the traveler-narrator, in a small way, to resist becoming equated with the historical author who, as a physical object, may be subject to deterministic laws and philosophies advanced by Einstein.

Passenger to Teheran demonstrates one hallmark tendency of modernist travelogues, distancing the author from the (autobiographical) narrator by presenting the narrator as a textual performer who is determined by the rhythm of the language rather than any external spatial body that exists outside the text. The narrator thus functions as a placeholder for the author-traveler, having both more and less agency than the writer. On one hand, the narrator is infinite and ever-expansive, as the traveler feels when in motion, a truly disembodied consciousness that exists in the textual depiction of what it experiences. This infinity occurs within *Passenger to Teheran* at such moments as the Italian train journey during which multiple times and versions of the traveler-narrator seem to coexist simultaneously within a single space. On the other hand, the narrator is a second-hand product of the retrospective act of representation, temporally removed from the immediacy of the travel experience and confined within the bounds of the text. The traveler-narrator thus becomes a relative figure understood in relation to two temporalities at once, defined by the difference between the immediacy of experience and the temporal delay inherent in representation.

Given Sackville-West's struggle to reconcile the liberating possibilities of Einstein's theories with the representation of her lived experience of travel, it is not surprising that the traveler-narrator of *Passenger to Teheran* becomes a relative, textual version of the authorial persona. This relativity occurs both in the act of composition, as the distance between the author and the narrator becomes amplified in the process, and in the act of reading, as the ever-shifting perspective of the audience (acknowledged by the narrator within the text) inevitably alters the meaning of the travelogue and its narrator. Far from solidly placing the narrator in the middle space between past and future – the

present – this temporal oscillation and relativity destabilizes the narratorial position in the travelogue. This destabilization is both disorienting and exciting: the narrator represents both a passive object/passenger determined by physical laws and forces beyond her control and an active perceiving mind that creates and controls a version of travel and self that remain fundamentally psychological experiences and evidence of her free will.

**Seeing Oneself Again as a Relative Thing:
Gertrude Stein's Life and Death in America**

then we left for San Francisco and Oakland there *I was to be where I had come from*

It might be nice to go to America again [...]. But now in this book we are not in America yet not yet so of course we cannot yet talk of going again.

— Gertrude Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography*, my emphasis

These quotations exemplify the confusing temporalities Gertrude Stein's autobiographical traveler-narrator creates when attempting to represent the experience of self-perception and self-location in her home country of America. Stein travels forward in space and backwards in time to her childhood home, a place suffused with memories strong enough to interfere with her ability to perceive and depict it in the present moment. This temporal confusion is evident in the tenses with which the narrator describes a past time from which she imagined a future time when she would return to her past home. In this formulation, any arrival to an American location is a return to a place she has been before. What's more, the narrator's return brings her (back) to an alternate version of herself, a disconcerting experience of self-perception that allows the narrator to see herself as if from an external perspective. As an account of the author-narrator's awareness of these many competing versions of self as both object and observer, the text of *Everybody's Autobiography* resists prioritizing any single narrator persona. Instead, *Everybody's Autobiography* produces a spatio-temporally relative traveler-narrator who exists both "now" and "not yet," in France and America, in the book and outside it.

Everybody's Autobiography is one of Stein's more accessible works, written for her public rather than as an experiment for herself. The text tells a fairly clear account of

key events from the years 1933 to 1936, strongly centering around her lecture tour in America in 1934-35. As a whole, *Everybody's Autobiography* is structured in chronological order, beginning with the publication of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and concluding with Stein's return to Europe after her tour. In the chapter "America," the most descriptive portion of the book, the narrator describes her arrival in the New York harbor, her reception by the press, her experiences giving lectures, meeting other celebrities including Charlie Chaplin and Mary Pickford, and her enjoyment of driving through and flying over the United States. As in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, *Everybody's Autobiography* tells individual events and stories multiple times – a technique Stein calls insistence rather than repetition. Not only does *Everybody's Autobiography* feature this iterative narration within the text itself, but the second autobiography also retells events already portrayed in the first autobiography, such as key events from Stein's childhood like her move from Oakland to Baltimore. The slight variation in their telling reveals how these events clarify the importance of America to Stein's sense of identity while also conveying how her return to these locations is imbued with memory and past significance.

While *Everybody's Autobiography* is not labeled as a travelogue, the text reveals the influence America has produced on both the author's public persona and her style of writing. Much of the content of *Everybody's Autobiography* repeats core ideas from the lectures Stein delivered while on her tour, and her brief section on Oakland reveals the cognitive difficulty the expatriate encounters on her long-overdue return home. Describing this return to a once-familiar and familial space, Stein writes in one of her much-quoted aphorisms, "there is no there there" (EA 289). As a hybrid of

autobiography and travelogue, the text investigates the sometimes troubling relationship between geography, movement, and identity, while revealing how this relationship influences Stein's narrative technique. In short, the finished text enacts, while describing, the sensation of perceiving oneself in relation to multiple places (France and America) and multiple times (now and then) within the moment of writing.

At moments where this multiplicity of self-awareness and self-representation is most evident, the author-narrator takes two main approaches: she portrays her identity crisis in astronomical terms that invoke Einstein's theories of relativity, and she positions herself in both the "now" and the "not yet" of the book's composition and future reception. The latter technique is a compensating strategy for the former, as the application of relativity to the notion of identity threatens to invalidate the meaningfulness of the narrator's present moment and raises the specter of the author's inevitable death. Despite Stein's frequent insistence that her writing exemplifies the "continuous present," the narrator of *Everybody's Autobiography* more often positions herself in the uncertain, extra-diegetic future that stands in explicit contrast to a number of competing present moments, all of which appear to be equally valid and, thus, relative. In the process, the text both enacts the possibility of a relative self-narrative and resists including the (most authoritative) narrator within that relativist structure.

Stein's Identity Crisis and the Constructed Narrator

Following the 1933 publication of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Gertrude Stein suffered an identity crisis brought on by the unexpected publicity of having authored a major bestseller. Her subsequent lecture tour in America further

amplified her concerns about how writing for an audience and for money fundamentally changes the writer's purpose, and thus her sense of self. Stein describes this crisis in her second autobiography, *Everybody's Autobiography*, and in other writings such as "And Now," first published in *Vanity Fair* in 1934: "When the success began and it was a success I got lost completely lost. [...] I was not just I because so many people did know me. It was just the opposite of I am I because my little dog knows me" ("And Now," 63). The second chapter of EA explicitly covers "What was the effect upon me of the Autobiography," focusing both on this publicity and the concomitant identity crisis that interferes with her ability to write. Together, this publicity and the crisis lead to her lecture tour, the dominant subject of the remainder of *Everybody's Autobiography*. As the text continues, the narrator returns to this crisis repeatedly, so that the question of identity comes to resemble and function as an unresolved trauma that cannot be left behind in the past. As a result, these reflections on identity provide an alternative center of meaning (or structure) around which the narrative develops, undermining both the sense of chronological progression and the illusion of a cohesive narrative persona.

Such complexity of narratorial position is endemic to much of Stein's work, as she was always aware of and insistent on the difference between the writing author and the textual narrator. This concern is evident already in her early magnum opus, *The Making of Americans*. Describing the narrator persona that Stein constructed in this text, Steven Meyer writes: "Stein, to be sure, isn't just an author; yet she has made an author who is just that, and nothing but that, and the moment one confuses actual author and author-narrator, this remarkable achievement is lost" (xxvii). Within *The Making of Americans*, the pseudo-scientific project of cataloging all types of human nature requires

a particularly scientific and objective perspective, a task for which Stein crafts a narrator whose vision and purpose are more narrow and limited than those of the living author. To some degree, the author-narrator of *The Making of Americans* is just another character that illustrates a certain type of human nature.

In her autobiographies, Stein's interest in the difference between author and narrator becomes more complicated and revealing, as the genre presumes an even closer equivalence between these competing versions of self. Additionally, of course, the author is presumed to be both the narrator and subject of an autobiography, further collapsing the already tenuous dividing lines between text and life/reality. In her first two autobiographies, Stein re-envisioned the genre by creating alternative narrators and, as a result, alternative subjects whose life stories are depicted. Within *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, she famously uses Alice as a narrator to provide an indirect representation of Stein as a historical figure, while also providing occasional glimpses of Alice's personality. As Lynn Z. Bloom observes, by using Alice as narrator, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* "provides a persona—real or not [...]—to express the real Gertrude Stein's point of view. It allows the author much greater latitude of expression than she might have had if she'd been speaking in the first person, for she has two people speaking for one" (82). Bloom's article analyzes how Stein's innovative techniques are related to "three major uses of point of view, [which are] to perform egotistical, interpretive, and objective functions within the autobiography" (81). Stein's self-narration from Alice's point of view thus has three primary effects: it both minimizes and maximizes the egotism of self-representation; it creates a perspective from which Stein's behavior can be interpreted; and it produces the illusion of objectivity.

Given Stein's life-long anxiety about the difference between her private and public identity, these effects of her narrative ventriloquism allow her to boast of her accomplishments without becoming defined by them. As Bloom explains, the egotism inherent in autobiography is mitigated, as one form of posturing is replaced by another. The use of Alice as narrator minimizes the textual frequency of the "I" while simultaneously foregrounding the author's proper name. Thus "Gertrude Stein" becomes a passive object of perception rather than the active voice of narration. At the same time, however, the illusion does not overshadow the reader's knowledge that the "real" person writing the text is in fact the author Gertrude Stein. This strategy provides the author-narrator with a solution to the troubling task of self-representation. The obvious difference between the narrator and the author suggests the extra-textual presence of the creative entity of Gertrude Stein, while at the same time a version of that living personality gets captured within the pages of her text.

In her second autobiography, Stein adopts a new strategy that likewise manages to represent a period in the life of the author while foregrounding the difference between life and literature, author and narrator. The narrator claims in the first sentence of *Everybody's Autobiography* that "Alice B. Toklas did hers and now everybody will do theirs" (3). The choice of writing from the perspective of "everybody," i.e., the public, makes sense given Stein's struggle with and eventual resignation to the necessity of having an authorial identity that has become defined by her public reception. "And so autobiography is written which is in a way a way to say that publicity is right, they are as the public seems them" (69). This cheeky acknowledgement of the public's perception of Stein suggests that, even in the process of self-representation, the view of Stein from the

outside is just as valid as the view she has from the inside. However, this externalization of the act of self-perception is difficult to maintain, and “everybody” is much less successful at narrating than “Alice” is. The “I” returns and dominates the text, beginning on the first page, as the narrator reflects on the nature of autobiography, describing a thought process that becomes linked to personal memories of other people and events. “That is the way autobiography has to be written which reminds me of Dashiell Hammett. But before I am reminded of Dashiell Hammett I want to say that just today I met Miss Hennessy [...]. Which does remind me of David Edstrom but I have been reminded of him after I was reminded of Dashiell Hammett” (3).

Within this reflection emerges the style that truly defines *Everybody's Autobiography*, a more subtle expression of an alternative narrator persona than the obvious ventriloquism of writing as Alice or everybody. This style is characterized by a multi-dimensional perspective that renders the textual persona as multiplicitous, both spatially and temporally. This multiplicity is achieved via overlapping frames of perception, as any spatial position is always depicted in relation to America and any temporal position is depicted in contrast to either the “now” or the “not yet” of other events. The reference to Hammett serves as an example of this spatial technique, as the significance of America is suggested by the detective writer whom Stein met in California. The narrator describes meeting Hammett on the next page, well out of chronological order with the life story she is ostensibly beginning to narrate. America also becomes a time, not just a place, as most references to the nation stand in for the six months during which Stein traveled throughout her home country. As a temporal technique, such references to America or Hammett exemplify the odd variation of

prolepsis that occurs at moments when a future that is suggested but not immediately narrated is contrasted with the present moment of the writing narrator. Thus, the narrator *will be* reminded of Dashiell Hammett and David Edstrom, but “just today” she has seen Miss Hennessy.

This contrast between the *now* and the future that is *not yet* realized persists throughout the text and creates a sense of temporal movement linked to the process of writing and remembering. Many of these suggested prolepses involve Stein’s trip in America, as does this example. As a result, by the time the text gets around to describing the American event, such as the meeting with Hammett in California, it appears that the narrator (or an alternative version of the narrator) has already been there. “We went to dinner that evening and there was Dashiell Hammett and we had an interesting talk about autobiography, but first how did he get there [...]. His hostess but all that will come when the dinner happens later” (4, 5). Within this temporally complex beginning to *Everybody’s Autobiography*, as elsewhere, the narrator seems to get ahead of herself, in the process enacting the experience of returning to a place one has been before, long ago. The narrator describes this odd temporality in the account of her first day in New York: “It was foreign but also it was a memory and it was exciting” (173-174). The overlapping perception of new and old creates a new temporality that the narrator approximates throughout *Everybody’s Autobiography* by positioning herself in the timeless “not yet.”

Here and elsewhere, the narrator seems to describe herself in the act of narrating, an ongoing mental process in which thoughts move in multiple directions at once, rather than in logical, chronological order. In fact, Stein claims that this book is her attempt at

narration, a distinct move away from her earlier, more abstract work, and strikingly different from the other product of her American tour, *The Geographical History of America*, an extended treatise on the nature of identity. Near the end of *Everybody's Autobiography*, the narrator explains this goal: "I would simply say what was happening which is what is narration [...] a simple narrative of what is happening not as if it had happened not as if it is happening but as if it is existing simply that thing. And now in this book I have done it if I have done it" (302-303). Later, Stein would admit that she was not entirely successful at this attempt: "I thought I had done it [narration] in *Everybody's Autobiography*. I worked very hard on that and was often very exhausted, but it is often confused and not clarified" ("Transatlantic Interview" 19-20). The narration becomes "confused" because the narrator's perspective does not remain in the present but multiplies into countless other temporalities, all of which offer an alternative perspective of the present. Trying to capture the temporal experience of writing and remembering, the narrator has to acknowledge what the present writing will look like from the perspective of the future reader as well as how it compares to the past moment the writing is ostensibly describing. Additionally, this confusion results from the attempt to represent a past period in the author's life in which her sense of authorial identity was complicated by her publicity. The narrator becomes, in the process, a doubled figure that functions as both an active perceiver in the process of narration and a passive (public) object that can be seen from an outsider's perspective.

Stein and Einstein: Lectures in America

Although she does not mention it anywhere in her autobiographical account of this time in America, Stein's lectures were performed around the same time as many of the lectures given by Albert Einstein. This coincidence is another manifestation of the link between Stein's identity crisis and Einstein, as it occurs both theoretically and biographically. Theoretically, Stein was grappling with the implications of relativity on the process of self-perception and narration. If one perspective was just as valid as any other, her public reception created an infinite number of competing versions of Gertrude Stein that threatened Stein's unique self-perspective. Biographically, Stein was struggling with the contradictory ways that the press and public were comparing her lectures and ideas with those of Einstein. Both intellectuals were acknowledged as creating difficult theoretical work, but Einstein's physics was held in higher esteem than Stein's writing. Together, these experiences made Stein hyper-aware of a public persona that was threatened by the concept, reception, and implication of Einstein's theories of relativity.

The American press coverage of Stein and Einstein emphasized the similarities between two popular intellectual figures whom audiences treated more as celebrities than as thinkers. In a 1935 *New York Times* article on the popularity of lectures, one journalist notes the fascination that celebrities hold for the American public, citing Einstein and Stein as examples:

A manager who has long surveyed the field explains the American appetite for lectures in part on the ground that we have no royalty and must satisfy our natural craving to gaze upon the great. It was this universal craving that brought a mob to storm the auditorium when Professor Einstein talked on his theory of relativity,

bewildering that modest man, who knew that even if we had got inside we wouldn't have understood the theory. We didn't want to understand it—we wanted to see Einstein. [...] just as now we want to have a look at Gertrude Stein and would flock to see Mahatma Gandhi if he came over. (Mackenzie SM9)

Within the press coverage, there are many other examples of the American desire to “have a look at Gertrude Stein” rather than give a listen to her ideas. This lack of connection between Stein as a literary figure and Stein as a celebrity caused her great anxiety, and was an inevitable result of her lecture tour that she had to make peace with, both before and during the tour. “It always did bother me that the American public were more interested in me than in my work” (*EA* 50). As *Everybody's Autobiography* makes clear, she was also attempting to resolve this anxiety even after the tour was completed, as she reflected on how to represent this experience from a literary perspective. Given her oft-repeated worries about the nature of identity and the difference between one's inside and one's outside, the lecture tour and her public reception reinforced Stein's fears that her authorial persona could be reduced to a celebrity whose body is celebrated while her ideas are misunderstood, belittled, or neglected altogether.

Despite the parallels between the two geniuses, the press accepted the opacity of Einstein's scientific incomprehensibility while rejecting the difficulty of Stein's literary complexity. For example, a 1934 editorial argued that Stein's writing is “harder to understand than the mathematical hieroglyphics of Einstein's theory of relativity, yet she is hailed as a great literary pioneer” (“Fancy Writing,” qtd. in Watson 99). As Dana Cairns Watson points out, editorials and other press coverage of Einstein's lectures showed little irony when reporting that Einstein had “explained” his theories of relativity

to a general audience, even though Einstein himself frequently skipped over challenging points in his lectures with such claims as “this is so elementary I will not trouble you with it” (qtd. in Watson 99). Thus, the press minimized the bewildering nature of his theories and gave the brilliant physicist the benefit of the doubt. This same courtesy was not extended to Stein’s obscurity and literary innovation, despite her explicit attempts to explain herself and her writing. Commenting on this difference in reception, a contemporary journalist noted that Stein was frequently grilled about the meaning of her work whereas “it is a matter of record that Prof. Einstein and other protagonists of slightly baffling theories have entered and left the port for years without being called upon to defend themselves” (McClain qtd. in Watson 99).

Rather than attributing the difficulty of Stein’s writing to an intelligent and purposeful agenda, much contemporary reaction to her lectures and writing struggles to explain why Stein and her work appealed to the American public. Such reports either imagine her popularity as irrational or symptomatic of some identifiable psychological illness. Thus, even when reporters discovered that her conversation was much easier to understand than her writing, it remained vogue to highlight the aspect of this interaction that remained confusing, as evident in the headline, “Gertrude Stein Arrives and Baffles Reporters by Making Herself Clear.” In a subsection of this article, labeled “Denies Writings Are Insane,” Stein defends herself against claims that her writings are the product of a madwoman. This attack on her mental stability is common. Another article overviews a study in which psychiatrists attempted to explain the popularity of Stein’s opera *Four Saints in Three Acts* by imagining that her words portray the cognitive effects of someone with a psychological illness. These psychiatrists attempt to “diagnose”

Stein's writing by reading it as analogous to such symptoms of psychological instability as palilalia, perseveration, and verbigeration. In an article published in the *Journal of the Medical Association*, the psychiatrists "wonder whether or not the literary abnormalities in which she indulges represent the correlated distortions of the intellect or whether the entire performance is in the nature of a hoax" ("Miss Stein Puzzle"). Like so much of the speculation on the value of Stein's work, their article remains inconclusive.

Such reception was surely troubling for an intelligent author who saw her pseudo-scientific experiments with time-sense and language as analogous to the intellectual contributions of Einstein. Within the first chapter of *Everybody's Autobiography*, Stein's narrator declares, "Einstein was the creative philosophic mind of the century and I have been the creative literary mind of the century" (21-22). Both "geniuses" are able to imagine that the generally accepted Newtonian explanation of time is inherently wrong, a flaw that becomes increasingly apparent amid the dramatic social and technological changes of the twentieth century. In fact, E.M. Forster acknowledged the significance of Stein's experimentation with a new sense of time: "Gertrude Stein has smashed up and pulverized her clock and scattered its fragments over the world like the limbs of Osiris, and she has done this not from naughtiness but from a noble motive: she has hoped to emancipate fiction from the tyranny of time" (41). As Forster points out, however, Stein's writing often annihilates the traditional sense of progressive time, often in favor of the "continuous present," and so loses the ability to communicate the meaning and values she sought to isolate. In order to communicate an idea in literature, it must play out against a background and over time. Truly instantaneous communication (like Stein's ideal of a timeless narration) is not really any kind of communication at all.

It may seem that Stein's temporal manipulation and self-representation is largely a solipsistic endeavor, irrelevant to any other person or text. Indeed, much of the criticism of Stein's writing comes from the common perception that it suffers from a fatal combination of egotism and lack of real-world applicability. However, Stein's experimental writing parallels scientific research, especially the more esoteric work of scientists that appears at first glance to be too specialized to be of use, but which is later found to illuminate other, substantial mysteries. Malcolm Cowley described this potential that Stein might one day be recognized as a "word scientist" in a review of her literature written shortly after her death in 1946. Extending this scientific analogy, Cowley explains how her aesthetic experimentation might lead to great, unimagined innovations:

I think of her often not as a writer but as a scientist in his laboratory working at some problem that apparently has no connection with man or society. It would be nothing so great as atomic fission; it would be something humbler like the anatomy of Junebugs. Year after year he would go on working while the world outside his laboratory changed and new groups of students came to hear him lecture; then suddenly it would be found that one or more of his discoveries about Junebugs could be applied to curing or prolonging human life. There is something of this unexpected effect about Gertrude Stein's researches into the qualities of words. [...] Her style is like a chemical useless in its pure state but powerful when added to other mixtures. (150)

Cowley gives Stein the credit that many of her contemporaries do not by valuing her work as part of a bigger sociological and epistemological shift that may be as yet

unrealized. Indeed, Stein's work is both very much of its time, reacting to contemporary trends in psychology, philosophy, visual art, and science, and ahead of its time. Stein's work seems most postmodernist in its attempts to create a "continuous present" that undermines the sense of linear, chronological progress and produces a text in which not only time but the process of perception/representation seems to become decentered.

This decentering is analogous to Einstein's theories of relativity, as poet Charles Bernstein pointed out when Stein was inducted into the American Poets' Corner in 2001.

She found meaning inside the words of which a poem is composed, a discovery and exploration of the wordness of words that has parallels in Einstein's discovery of relativity and Freud's of the unconscious. In Stein's work, every word has a potentially equal weight in a democracy of language. Rather than emphasize nouns or verbs, Stein created a writing in which articles and prepositions, pronouns and conjunctions, would have an equal weight and where the words and phrases are no longer subordinated to received prescriptions of grammar but shimmer in syntactic equality in poems that aver beginnings and endings for the ongoingness of middles and that elide past and future for continuous presents.

(49)

Tellingly, Bernstein uses such scientific terms as "exploration" and "discovery" to describe Stein's writing. Not only was Stein engaged in such exploration throughout her life as a writer, but her work allows future readers to likewise explore and discover their own meaning, as can be evidenced in the portraits in *Tender Buttons*. There is not necessarily one right way to interpret "A Carafe," for instance; but the portrait clearly

invites the reader to attempt some kind of interpretation. Such exploration suggests a certain “democracy” of meaning and representation inherent to Stein’s use of language.

However, this relativity of language creates an irresolvable tension when applied to the task of self-representation, because that relativity places in question the authority of Stein’s representation of self. In several places throughout *Everybody’s Autobiography*, the narrator attempts to produce this relativity of self-perception, but it leads to the possibility of her non-existence, a conclusion she is quick to back away from. An example of this tension comes in the final chapter, when the narrator describes leaving America and reflecting on the end of her journey: “It was all over and we were going back again, of course it was all going on being there there where we had been even if we were not there and *it was as if we had not been*. After all we had been” (296, my emphasis). The narrator here acknowledges that America has an objective existence independent of her being there and her perception of it. This awareness parallels Einstein’s explanation of physical reality as existing independently of human perception, even though one can only know reality through the senses. In Stein’s work, the full implications of this realization lead the narrator to acknowledge that, on the large scale, her time in America effectively changes nothing for America, even though it fundamentally changed Stein’s sense of self and her writing. In her attempt to grasp and communicate this understanding, the narrator concludes that her existence in America is relative, and has meaning only from her perspective. Another perspective on America, such as one that exists without her there, produces an equally valid portrayal of this nation and time. Notably, she concludes that “it was as if we had not been,” without adding a final “there” to limit the possibility of her nonexistence to her time in America.

As in other passages, the attempt to apply a scientific and relative approach to the process of self-perception creates the possibility of the author-narrator's death and nonexistence.

The difficulty that Stein stumbles on in crafting a relative textual persona resembles an odd paradox in Einstein's theories regarding the role of the human observer and the physical nature of reality. This paradox centers around the difference between considering the observer as a passive object in space-time and as an active observer in the act of perception. On one hand, the special theory of relativity explains that the constancy of the speed of light creates an immutability to the laws of the universe that hold true regardless of the observer's motion or spatio-temporal perspective. Thus, the observer as perceiver appears to be irrelevant. One of the main principles of Einstein's theory of reality is that "a reality exists independent of our ability to observe it" (Isaacson 461). Stein objects to this dismissal of the human subject, and her text attempts to depict the unchanging nature of physical reality within a scenario in which the human observer still maintains some authority over her perception and representation of the physical world. On the other hand, the general theory of relativity concludes that there is no objective reality of space or time as a medium in which objects are positioned. Rather, the objects themselves, with their gravitational fields, create their location in the space-time continuum. As Einstein explains, "The concept of space as something existing objectively and independent of things belongs to pre-scientific thought [...]. There is no such thing as an empty space, *i.e.*, a space without field. Space-time does not claim existence on its own" (*Relativity* 139, 155). As an object, with a physical body that has mass and thus gravity, the observer constitutes a specific location in space-time; but as a perceiver, the observer is a disembodied consciousness that has no impact on the nature

of reality. Distressingly for Stein, who wants to emphasize the primacy of internal identity, Einstein's theories give more weight to the self as object than as perceiving subject.

"Stars Are Worlds and Everything is Moving":

Astronomical Relativity, Self-Perception, and the Fear of Death

Despite the unwelcome speculations of her death that result from the narrator's representation of herself as an object within a perceptual system of relativity, *Everybody's Autobiography* nonetheless enacts relativity both stylistically and descriptively. Stylistically, interwoven tenses and temporalities enact a feeling of linguistic relativity, while descriptively, the narrator describes several examples of astronomical relativity that equate the perspective from Earth with an imagined perspective from distant stars. In these passages, the narrator struggles with the odd cultural relativity she experiences when thinking about stars as other worlds and the potential for other civilizations to exist. The vast difference of scale between personal time and astronomical time lead the narrator to question the significance of her life span as well as that of the book she is writing. While it would seem that human life and astronomical life can and should be measured on different scales, the notion of relativity explicitly claims that neither time-scale is better or more appropriate than the other. For Stein's narrator, representing a period in her life when she felt defined by an external perspective that was incompatible with her internal self-perception leads her to accept that other discordant means of self-perception, such as scientific conceptions of the universe, might also offer equally valid means of self-perception and representation.

The first instance of astronomical relativity occurs early, in the first chapter of *Everybody's Autobiography* that is ostensibly a narration of "what happened following the publication of The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas." Just as it sets the tone of astronomical relativity, the passage also establishes the multiplicitous temporalities connected to the acts of writing, remembering, and self-perception.

When I was young the most awful moment of my life was when I really realized that the stars are worlds and when I really realized that there were civilizations that had completely disappeared from this earth. And *now* it happens again. Then I was frightened badly frightened, *now* well *now* being frightened is something less frightening than it was. There are a great many things about that but that will come gradually in Everybody's Autobiography. *Now* I am still out walking. I like walking. (11-12, my emphasis)

The present time of "now" seems to proliferate in this passage, while at the same time calling into question the singleness of any of these present times. Thus, "now" describes (1) the narrator's awareness of astronomical relativity, which has resurfaced in relation to new knowledge, presumably Einstein's theories and the resultant astronomical discoveries; (2) her feeling frightened, but less frightened than before, a modification of an ongoing sensation that began in her childhood; (3) her being out walking, an impossible reality if she is also in the process of writing; and (4) the time of writing that is suggested as a result of this illogical claim that "Now I am still out walking." Taken together, these multiple present moments create the illusion of the mental process of self-representation. Composed for a future audience, this passage also foregrounds the temporal relativity implicit in self-projection, as one version of the narrator persona – the

one who exists in the indefinable “now” – projects a future version of herself who exists in the “not yet,” the future that “will come gradually” in the text.

As the first suggestion of astronomical relativity, this passage makes the personal significance of Stein’s expanded awareness very clearly a “frightening” experience that will be explained more fully as the narrative of *Everybody’s Autobiography* progresses. The passage thus creates a sense of anticipation about a future moment of clarification, while coding that clarification with a sense of foreboding. Directly following this prediction, however, the passage becomes firmly grounded in the “now,” a time in which the narrator describes herself as less frightened. Even though the fear of astronomical relativity is resurfacing as she writes (“now it happens again”), the fact that it is a repetition of a familiar feeling rather than a new sensation makes it feel safer and more controllable. That this “now” is actually not a single time but a collection of multiple possible present moments also alleviates the fear of an unavoidable singular moment of knowledge – when the certainty of the narrator-author’s death will be revealed as just as inevitable as the disappearance of all civilizations on Earth and on the stars. The proliferation of “nows” thus enacts a temporal relativity that minimizes the imminent threat that astronomical relativity poses to the narrator’s temporal self-perception.

The narrator’s fear of death and meaninglessness reacts not only to Einstein’s theories of relativity but also to his belief in determinism rather than free will. In 1932, Einstein illustrated his ideas by comparing human life to the stars, extending his theories from the realm of physics to that of metaphysics. In a statement to the Spinoza Society, Einstein declared, “Human beings in their thinking, feeling and acting are not free but are as causally bound as the stars in their motions” (qtd. in Isaacson 391). Einstein also

connects his belief in a fundamental causality to his religious belief in a God that has ordered the universe in a pattern that remains mysterious to humanity's limited understanding. Stein resists the implications of determinism and causality, preferring to believe that humans have control over their actions and are free to create their own view of reality, or at least their own representation of self.

By illustrating her identity crisis with references to the stars and astronomical relativity, Stein attempts to revise Einstein's theories into a more palatable philosophy of reality and self-representation. In her lecture on "Poetry and Repetition," for instance, Stein argues against relative motion, identifying instead a kind of motion, endemic to America and human life, that is internal and self-contained. Stein begins by making a comparison between existence and motion that acknowledges that the perception of motion depends on another frame of reference: "But the strange thing about the realization of existence is that like a train moving there is no real realization of it moving if it does not move against something" (165). By using the analogy of a train, she strikes a comparison with Einstein's explanation of the special theory of relativity. However, Stein quickly asserts that life is a different kind of motion altogether: if "a movement were lively enough it would exist so completely that it would not be necessary to see it moving against anything to know that it is moving. This is what we mean by life and in my way I have tried to make portraits of this thing" (170). While this lecture focuses on Stein's literary portraits of others, her autobiographical writing shares the same goal of attempting to capture the sense of an individual's life and personality as intrinsically vital and defined by internal motion.

In Stein's work, the recurring tension between internal and external motion as competing indications of identity, coupled with her illustration of these concepts in Einsteinian and relative terms, demonstrate that Stein is struggling to locate a point of demarcation – the dividing line between self and other at which relativity no longer applies to human life. However, the more she sees and represents herself as an object, the more blurred that dividing line becomes. Later in this lecture, Stein returns to astronomical relativity, connecting the motion of stars to repetition rather than to the unique movement of human life. Discussing the difference between repetition (an external quality) and insistence (an internal quality), Stein uses language that again parallels Einstein's formulations: "I became conscious of these things, I suppose anybody does when they first really know that *the stars are worlds and that everything is moving*, that is the first conscious feeling of necessary repetition, and it comes to one and it is very disconcerting" (LIA 168, my emphasis). For Stein, the idea that "everything is moving" suggests that everything is equally alive, a premise that threatens to invalidate the primacy of her personal experience and perceptions. On the flip side, if stars are inanimate objects and their motion is no indication of life, then everything is equally dead. This passage also illustrates repetition by considering that civilizations on Earth have come and gone, suggesting that Stein equates repetition with the inevitability of death and the interchangeability of human life and civilizations.⁴¹

In *Everybody's Autobiography*, these meditations on astronomical relativity continue to blur the distinction between life and literature, especially as the narrator struggles to represent a version of self that is not relative within a text that acknowledges

⁴¹ While many people misread Stein's work as being repetitive, she explains that her work really features insistence, which is repetition with variation. You never say *exactly* the same thing twice, and Stein insists that personality and meaning emerge from the minor variations that occur within iterations.

the validity of the relativity of perception as established by Einstein. Returning to the crisis of self-location and identity brought on by consideration of “stars as worlds,” the narrator demonstrates how Stein’s fear of death is tied to her American childhood and the stunning realization that her birth exemplifies how relativity and interchangeability are, unfortunately, a defining characteristic of human life.

It was frightening when the first comet I saw made it real that the stars were worlds and the earth only one of them, it is like the Old Testament, there is God but there is no eternity. And now that is what everything is there is a God but there is no eternity.

The French have a funny phrase. All these vast sums that everybody votes nowadays to do anything they call astronomical.

Then there was the fear of dying, anything living knows about that, and when that happens anybody can think if I had died before there was anything but there is no thinking that one was never born until you hear accidentally that there were to be five children and if two little ones had not died there would be no Gertrude Stein, of course not. (115)

This passage teases out some of the associations Stein makes between astronomical relativity and death. In her abrupt shift from eternity to astronomical sums, the narrator implies that the former has been replaced by the latter as a structuring concept for impossibly large amounts. However, the plebian application of “astronomical” to refer to the number of votes counted distorts the sense of scale that the word carries in its original denotation. As a figure of speech, it becomes imprecise and finite. But this distortion also shows the ease with which “astronomical” ideas can be applied to human affairs.

The sense of scale steadily shrinks in this passage, moving from stars to the earth to “the fear of dying,” and Stein’s inability to reconcile the arbitrariness of her birth. The implications of astronomical relativity are apparent in the narrator’s conclusion that, much like civilizations, “one [child] was just as good as another one” (243). Stein’s narrator depicts herself as part of a family that functioned like a machine, predetermined to have a specific number of interchangeable components. According to this logic, Stein’s entire existence is an embodiment of relativity.

This problematic self-perception as repetition/relativity is further amplified when Stein encounters mediated versions of herself, especially when she views herself as a film. On arriving in California, Stein and Toklas were invited to visit and lunch with the Warner Brothers, but they declined.⁴² Explaining this decision, the narrator recounts an earlier experience of viewing herself as a film, indicating that Stein’s unease with cinema is linked to the problematic combination of self-projection (for an audience) and self-perception (as an audience):

When we first arrived in New York I did make an actuality of reading the Pigeons on the Grass and taking off my glasses and putting them on again while I was doing that thing, and it was given in the cinema theatres everywhere and everybody said everybody liked it but we had not gone. So finally Pathé asked us when they heard we had not gone to come and see it all alone. We went to their place and there it was and when I saw myself almost as large and moving around and talking I did not like it particularly the talking, it gave me a very funny feeling and I did not like that funny feeling. (280)

⁴² According to Renate Stendhal, Warner Brothers proposed a film deal that Stein rejected (Stendhal 150).

Undoubtedly, the “funny feeling” that Stein experiences is the relativity of self-perception. She finally sees herself – literally – from a new perspective, that of the public or “everybody.” But she can remember having been that person who looked into the camera and out at the unimaginable future audience. In an uncanny moment of self-perception, present Stein meets the gaze of past Stein. For the first time, Stein encounters a lifelike but mediated version of herself and of her writing. Notably, the passage makes a clear distinction between the first person narrator who “did not like it” and the third person “everybody” who liked the film. The illusion of the alternative narrator persona suggested in the title and in a few earlier passages has clearly been abandoned, often because of Stein’s discomfort with replacing her individual perspective (from inside her body, looking out) with everybody’s perspective that sees her only from the outside.

The problem with this perception of self as object comes down to a relativity that makes one spatio-temporal version of self as equally valid as any other: filmed Stein is equivalent to living Stein. Further, the film exemplifies the problem of repetition without variation, as the same film can be shown countless times to a variety of audiences, all of whom can claim to have had the same experience. The pure repetition and relativity of the film suggests that the living Stein may have become irrelevant and replaceable – much like the countless stars in the sky seem from the perspective of Earth – by the infinitely repeatable recorded versions of her physical person. On top of this potentially infinite self-representation, further anxiety results because the audience’s perception of Stein is, according to the theory of relativity, no more or less valid than her own self-perception, a dynamic that throws her whole concept of self and identity into disarray. At such moments, Stein as author and narrator loses the ability to control the various

mediated versions of self and the corresponding spatio-temporal perspectives from which those personas are perceived.

The connection between viewing oneself as a film and contemplating astronomical relativity also reveals that these two modes of perception hinge on the quality and speed of light as a medium of transmission and self-projection. Michael Whitworth notes that other modernist authors including Vita Sackville-West were fascinated with the potential of applying the new possibilities made apparent by Einsteinian science to self-perception and representation, producing “a self imagined like starlight, disembodied and sublime” (176). However, this creation of a disembodied self has a troubling side that parallels the electric light of cinematic projection: “The feeling that events are never quite the same as their images creates a disturbing sense of belatedness when extended to the self: even if we feel firmly installed within our own bodies, light is always taking images of our bodies away from us. [...] If perceptions never quite coincide with the event, we live among ghostly images of each other” (175). Whitworth ties such interpretations of one’s image as one’s past self to other invocations of astronomical relativity, beginning with the popular science writer Camille Flammarion. His 1872 book *Lumen*, which influenced many modernist writers, proposed that the present view of Earth from a distant planet or star would produce a view of the past, specifically the battle of Waterloo (Whitworth 174). Stein’s disorienting self-perception as both a filmed object and an inhabitant of a former version of the Earth suggests that the possibilities of a future determined by science and mediation will create the appearance that her traveler-narrator persona is a lifeless entity.

In the longest and most complex passage on astronomical relativity, Stein's narrator elucidates how her perception of the stars creates an analogy for the process of self-perception as both a temporal and a spatial being. In her detailed formulation of this parallel, the narrator shows a clear attempt to apply Einstein's conception of the universe to her physical embodiment. As in the earlier passages, this attempt leads the narrator to contemplate her death and nonexistence.

There was of course science and evolution and there were of course the fact that stars were worlds and that space had no limitation and still if civilizations always came to be dead of course they had to come to be dead since the earth had no more size than it had how could other civilizations come if those that were did not come to be dead but if they did come to be dead then one was just as good as another one [...] and I I had always been afraid always would be afraid but after all was that what it was to be not refusing to be dead although after all every one was refusing to be dead. (242-243)

This passage repeats and reinforces Stein's problem with the difficulty of applying scientific innovations to human existence. Although Einstein's theories prove that "space had no limitation," this does nothing for the limited space of the Earth and the human body. Civilizations inevitably decline, just as people inevitably die. For the narrator, "to be not refusing to be dead" is to accept that humans and human life are interchangeable, just as civilizations are. Such interchangeability and relativity creates the possibility that reality is arbitrary, as in Einstein's deterministic view, and thus meaningless on an individual level.

This passage also illustrates the multi-dimensional perspective the narrator produces when attempting to represent astronomical relativity in relation to self-representation. The text equates the narrator's perspective from here (on earth, looking at the stars) with her perspective from now (this moment in time, looking at past civilizations). The narrator thus seems to be perceiving both in multiple directions at once and in multiple dimensions at once, as she orients the present moment both spatially, on an astronomical scale, and temporally, on a historical scale. But this apparent confusion is in fact completely logical. Given the vast size and age of the universe, the simple act of looking up at the stars becomes a strange experience of looking back in time. Many of the bright objects in the sky are stars (and potential civilizations) that died long ago, and whose light is reaching Earth only after millions of years of traveling through space. What one sees, therefore, no longer "really" exists. In Stein's words, "there is no there there." Given the concept of relativity, this perspective can be reversed, so that the narrator can imagine herself and Earth as if seen from a distant star. In that scenario, she too may be an entity that is seen long after her demise, a specter of her past self.

This attempt to apply the laws of astronomical physics and perception to the writer's self-perception is not unique to Stein's narration, as Vita Sackville-West also struggled to imagine how Einstein's theories applied to her lived reality. The specter of the traveler's death arises periodically within *Passenger to Teheran*, as when the narrator suggests that given the time delay between her writing and the recipient's reading of her letters, she will not only be in another, unknowable future place and time altogether, but may have died: "but for the recipient of my letter, opening it in England at three weeks'

remove, I am no longer coasting Baluchistan; I am driving in a cab in Bagdad, or reading in a train, or asleep, or dead; the present tense has become meaningless" (9). The relativity of perception and self-perception leads writers such as Sackville-West and Stein to imagine a future perspective from which their writing will be visible, but their bodies will not.

Since Einstein's science leads to this depressing awareness of the relativity inherent in human life, the narrator turns to religion in a search for some system of belief that can reinvest human life with a sense of purpose and meaning. Finding that the Old Testament offers no better promise of immortality, the narrator expresses her frustration at encountering the necessity of her death by stressing the similarities between the limitations of religion and those of science. Both are disappointing systems that can conceptualize eternity but not apply it to human life.

I can remember being very excited when I first read the Old Testament to see that they never spoke of a future life, there was a God there was eternity but there was no future life and I found how naturally that worried me, that there is no limit to space and yet one is living in a limited space and inside oneself there is no sense of time but actually one is always living in time. (243)

Here the major crux of the problem becomes apparent: the limitless nature of astronomical space and time does not apply to the limited and embodied human experience of space and time. The passage clearly connects astronomical infinity and human mortality, as the narrator admits experiencing the same crisis when considering the lack of an afterlife in the Old Testament as she does when considering the astronomical/Einsteinian notion of the ever-expansiveness (infinity) of the universe. The

nature of the universe, in both the Old Testament past and the future Einsteinian era, is determined by a force, whether God or the laws of physics, that exists on a plane fundamentally different from that of the human experience. No matter how well humans may understand the universe, this knowledge does not empower us with the ability to escape the limiting confines of the human body.

By acknowledging that “space had no limitation,” Stein links the process of self-perception to Einstein’s concept of the universe as explained in his general theory of relativity first published in 1915. In this theory, Einstein explains that the structure of the universe is spherical, finite, and unbounded. To illustrate the nature of the universe, Einstein gives the example of a two-dimensional plane that exists on the surface of a sphere. As a three-dimensional object, the sphere, like the globe of the earth, is limited or finite, but the two-dimensional plane or surface along which one can move is unlimited or unbounded because there is no beginning or end. With this analogy, Einstein demonstrates that the four-dimensional universe is finite, like the sphere, but unbounded, as the three-dimensional plane in which we exist, like the continuous surface of the sphere, never ends.

For an author wishing for immortality, this limitless nature of space and time seems intoxicatingly appealing. If a hypothetical space traveler can journey in a straight line to return to his origin without turning around, why can’t the forward progress of human life lead us back to our embodied beginnings, a place from which we can start all over again? In some ways, Stein’s journey enacts this spherical nature of time and space, as her trip to America seems to lead her back to her birthplace and her origins. Thus, her first day in New York is both “foreign,” encountered for the first time in thirty years, and

“a memory.” She does not return to a single time—the past—but rather encounters a single location at which multiple times and versions of self coexist. Far from reassuring her of the unity of identity, however, this multiplicity of self-perception reveals only that every return to a previous self-location renders one even more of an outsider to that original experience.

Stein’s attempt to apply relativity to human life and self-perception may seem to extend Einstein’s theories beyond their original scope, but even Einstein attempted to make this application. In 1923 he wrote to Marie Curie, “Do not think for a moment that I consider my own fellow countrymen superior and that I misunderstand the others—that would scarcely be consistent with the Theory of Relativity” (qtd. in Canales 1168).

However, as for Stein, the full implications of relativity became terrifying in its anticipation of the meaninglessness of postmodernism. In the 1920s and 1930s, Einstein saw his theories taken in new directions by quantum physics, leading to the principles of uncertainty and probability in the work of scientists such as Werner Heisenberg and Niels Bohr. Unable to accept the arbitrariness of reality that such physics suggested, Einstein retreated to determinism and a religious belief in God. Explaining his particular brand of faith, Einstein wrote in 1934 that the scientist’s “religious feeling takes the form of a rapturous amazement at the harmony of natural law, which reveals an intelligence of such superiority that, compared with it, all the systematic thinking and acting of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection” (“The Religious Spirit of Science,” 40). The further science took him into an understanding of the strangeness of the physical world, the more Einstein saw God – and the limitations of the human perspective. Much the same insight comes to Stein when she invokes eternity, the Old Testament God, and the relativity of

identity. To compensate for this disconcerting diminution of the human perspective, Stein creates a narrator who attempts to control her own death by both narrating its possibility and contrasting it with the present, living moment. In so doing, both life and death become relative concepts.

What Happens to Narrative When the Hero is a Dead Person?

Stein wants to believe in the reality of a future life, a potential experience of immortality and eternity that follows one's inevitable death. However, her travels in America, and her subsequent representation of this experience, squash these dreams of immortality by giving Stein the opportunity to see herself as a lifeless entity, already dead. Additionally, Einstein's theories of relativity, taken to their full conclusion, appear to prove that one human life cannot be differentiated from any other and, thus, is meaningless. The publicity Stein encountered as a celebrity intensified her awareness of herself as a physical object, a body that can be perceived as having no connection with the internal life of the mind that defined Stein to herself. In recounting this period in her life, Stein's narrative acknowledges that her time in America made her ponder her mortality. But it also creates a multi-dimensional narrative perspective that distances the narrating persona most closely aligned with the author Stein from the textual version of the narrator-traveler that becomes objectified on this lecture tour.

Not only does Stein's return to America remind her of the arbitrariness of her birth and her potential nonexistence; it also heightens her awareness of herself as a mediated object. The description of Stein's arrival to America aboard the *U.S.S. Champlain* enacts the tension between the narrator's representation of self as perceived,

past object and as acting, present subject. As a result, this passage – as well as a majority of the chapter on America – presents some of the most descriptive narration in *Everybody's Autobiography*, as the narrator describes her past actions largely in sequential order with minimal reflection or anachronies. Because of her celebrity status, Stein's arrival is greeted by numerous newspaper reporters and photographers who have boarded the ship, ferried out by the Coast Guard to document this moment:

Then I went somewhere else on the boat, they were photographing me and then I was taken by the arm by some one else and they said I was broadcasting, and then some one else came later it turned out to be Jo Alsop, *he has not yet read* what I said about him in the Geographical History of America but that did come later anyway he said he really wanted to write something and could he come to the hotel, I said yes of course of course I said yes, and then we were landing. (EA 170, my emphasis)

When the passage depicts events in sequential order, the narrator appears as a largely passive figure being photographed, taken by the arm, or otherwise directed by others. At the one exception to this passivity, the tense shifts from the past progressive to the “not yet,” a moment in which the active narrator suggests her ongoing relationship to journalist Joseph Alsop. In doing so, the narrator locates herself outside the moment of arrival and in the moment of writing. She also becomes attached to the indeterminate future in which Jo Alsop will have read what she has written about him, a time that can never be pinpointed (at least not by anyone other than Jo Alsop) and thus always suggests a broad window in which a multiplicity of temporalities coexist. Depicting an experience in which she felt most like an object and not in control of her own self-representation, as

her words and images were being taken from her in a flurry of activity, the retrospective narrator creates a version of self that takes temporal primacy over the other mediated selves since it occurs last, in the undetermined future. The most recent manifestation of self must be the most authoritative.

Before the narrator “arrives” in America (in the chronology of the book), she establishes the difference between her writing persona who exists in the “now” and her alternate personas, who exist either in the remembered past or in the unrealized future of the story that has yet to be written. This distinction between temporal versions of Stein’s narrator persona sets up the arrival to America to be read as more of a question than a statement. The prevalence of foreshadowing in the first half of the book creates the illusion that the narrator has already been to the places she finally describes as if in the present moment. She therefore exists both inside these descriptions, as a perceived and remembered object, and outside them, as the active consciousness that seems to be in the act of remembering and narrating. Even when the present is not filtered through another time, as in the “not yet,” it becomes an example of repetition with variation of a previous encounter with the same event. As such, these moments of self-representation illustrate not just memory but insistence, Stein’s approximation of the internal motion of life.

The most temporally complex example of this multiply-positioned narrator occurs in a passage from the chapter “Preparations for going to America” in which the writing narrator appears to get ahead of herself. At this point, the narrator emphasizes the difference between her persona as a remembered object (in America) and the extra-textual persona that appears to exist beyond the limits of the narrative and the time in America. This passage comes in a chapter that is largely reflective rather than descriptive,

presenting her thoughts on an assortment of ideas and events, including French food, her many servants and cooks, the possibility of another French revolution, her quarrels with her literary agent, and more. Amidst these discussions, the narrator periodically suggests that she is writing from her present location in France, highlighting the fact that “she” is not in America. At one point, the narrator acknowledges that she has digressed from the chronological account of her life and trip to America, illustrating this digression with a complex temporality that oscillates between the now and the not yet:

Bennett Cerf asks what are we going to do this winter. I would not mind doing something else but very likely we will be watching the revolution if there is going to be one and hoping all the time that we can just go on looking. It might be nice to go to America again where they are not likely to have one at least not just now yet. But now in this book we are not in America yet not yet so of course we cannot yet talk of going again. (125)

Much as earlier passages showcase a proliferation of “nows,” this passage revels in the “not yet” that falls far outside any of the possible present moments. The narrator is located in this oscillation, the “not just now yet” that exists in the difference between memory – in America – and narration – in this book. Additionally, none of these “not yet”s are the same, as the narrator iterates the deferred future temporality rather than simply repeating it. All four variations are different: not just now yet (revolution in America), not in America yet (story time), not yet (in this book), cannot yet talk (writing in France). Thus, “not yet” is not only an indeterminate future time; it has become many possible futures that may exist in relation to any number of competing “nows” or alternate temporalities. This rapid movement between now and not yet enacts insistence,

producing multiple versions of a temporality that are all slightly different and thus analogous to Stein's conception of life. Since all these temporalities reflect back on the narrator, who produces this variety of temporal perspectives, this passage creates a narrator position that is multiplicitous and non-linear, limited by the narrative structure of the story and limitless in her ability to move within it.

In contrast to this multiplicity and movement, the narrator periodically seeks a stable position from which to narrate. Describing this movement in relation to all the traveling Stein experienced in America, at one point the narrator insists that, "Airplanes are nice and automobiles are nice and yet you do have to stay somewhere, the earth keeps turning around but you have to sit somewhere" (132). Faced with her own perpetual motion, the narrator needs to find a stable location at which the multiple versions of self produced by traveling and self-perception can collapse. However, the narrator cannot achieve such stability and singularity of perspective when she feels attached to America, since this country is defined by her as full of motion. In order to narrate, therefore, she must detach herself from all the forces that lead to a sense of relativity and lack of differentiation:

The more I think of everything the more I realize that what worries every one is that the earth is round. [...] I detach myself from the earth being round and mechanical civilizations being over and organization being dull although nobody knows it yet but they will and go on with what happened the summer before we went to America. (122)

The narrator attempts to detach herself both temporally and spatially from an American present that threatens her ability to write about her past experiences as if they are "really

existing.” Such detachment would, theoretically, allow the narrator to become timeless, existing in the vantage point of the ever-deferred future, enacting a textual representation of Stein as a disembodied figure. This future location is suggested by the clause that reads as a knowing aside: “nobody knows it yet but they will.”

However, this position of timelessness and detached stability also resembles death, as the narrator would no longer be a moving subject. Attempting to achieve this detachment, the narrator enacts it on the level of syntax, in the process creating an objectified persona that contrasts explicitly with her intentions: the clause “I detach myself” enacts a dual narrative perspective split between subject (I) and reflexive object (myself). Following this narrative detachment, the pull of the earth’s roundness (i.e., relativity) and Stein’s public identity return to interfere with the narrator’s telling the story of their summer in France. She gets back around to this story for a sentence on the next page before again circling back to the roundness of the Earth and the problematic nature of storytelling in the modernist era.

As in the passages on astronomical relativity, the more the narrator thinks of the Earth as a round planet, the more she encounters relativity, a lack of differentiation, and death. At one point, the narrator speculates on the relationship between narrative and death, since she finds herself so frequently drawn back to this conundrum of repetition and death despite her attempts to detach herself from it:

You have to go on telling something although these days there is always less and less of it, that is what it is, the earth is round and even airplanes have to come back to it. And so naturally there is less of a beginning and a middle and an end than there used to be and novels are therefore not very good these days unless

they are detective stories where the hero is the dead man and so there can be no beginning and middle and end because he is dead. (123)

Stein's narrator here links the roundness of the earth to a lack of linearity, in which there is a clear beginning and ending point. This geographical roundness extends to literary structure via identity, as she implies that the structure of a story comes from the life cycle of the hero. When that hero is dead already – existing in the timeless eternity of the afterlife – the plot can follow a number of different paths through time and space in its search for motives and meaning. Stein's notion of the new narrative again parallels Einstein's conception of space-time as spherical. Later in the text, Stein contrasts this structure with that of the epic, which is linear and determined by the life of the hero: "in epic poetry [...] the death of the man meant the end of everything and now nothing is ending by the death of any one because something is already happening" (213). Taken together, these passages indicate Stein's awareness, albeit reluctant, that meaning now comes from a scale much larger than that of the span of any single person's life. The constant references to the stars and astronomy are the most obvious suggestion of what Stein imagines the true scale of measurement to be in her era. Additionally, it seems unlikely that any one person can identify an authoritative meaning "because something is already happening" on a scale that radically surpasses the limitations of human perception.

The reference to "detective stories" corresponds to the narrator's first mention of autobiography in relation to Dashiell Hammett, suggesting that Stein imagines the ideal form of her self-representation as similarly non-linear and multi-directional. Detective stories create a hero whose life is not contained by narrative structure or defined by a

singular perspective; rather, that life is a puzzle that drives a story that unfolds in a non-linear fashion. This form is also interactive, as the reader joins the narrator in the process of deciphering textual clues that will lead to the discovery of what happened to the absent hero. Given Stein's fear of her own death, she seems to indicate that she will someday be the absent hero who can be reconstituted and discovered within the complex mechanisms of her own detective story. Explaining how she has become popular, Stein suggests that, in an era of information and certainty, people love a mystery: "they do not know it but they get tired of feeling they are understanding and so they take pleasure in having something that they feel they are not understanding" (EA 122).

To remain a mystery and avoid being relegated to the past or functioning only as a *memento mori*, Stein crafts a textual persona that exists in the constantly suggested but deferred future that has "not yet" occurred. This ambiguous future allows the narrator to postpone and frustrate the closure of her text and thus, the author's death. It also creates the illusion of an omnipotent author who transcends the time of the story, existing in a formless, unknowable future that can be compared to the timeless eternity of the afterlife. However, this illusion cannot compensate for the inevitable necessity of concluding this life story. At the end of *Everybody's Autobiography*, the narrator clings to the idea that, even when one narrative ends – as at one's death or the conclusion of a story told for a public audience – the internal life force driving that story goes on: "now nothing is ending by the death of any one." Despite Stein's fear of death, she seems to acknowledge that as a narrative device, a narrator who exists beyond the bounds of earthly life – i.e., is either immortal or already dead – can be a liberating force that ushers in a new, relative version of narrative.

The text of *Everybody's Autobiography* ends, similarly to *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, with the arrival of the present moment and a disclosure that is meant to reveal the "true" author-narrator's identity. In *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, this coy move acknowledges that Gertrude, not Alice, has been the author of this autobiography all along. The final sentence links Stein's claim of authorship to the text that is, with these words, completed: "And she has and this is it" (AABT 237). In *Everybody's Autobiography*, a similar disclosure reveals the temporal location of the narrator, an apparent self-positioning that stands in for the disclaimer of biographical identity found in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. In fact, the final sentence undermines the notion of a singular identity that can be produced by the act of perception. After describing a trip to London and her return flight to Paris, the narrator concludes: "perhaps I am not I even if my little dog knows me but anyway I like what I have and now it is today" (318). The writing "I" seems to have accepted the multiplicitous and relative sense of identity that results from the process of self-perception and public recognition, unable to resolve the difference between inside (I am I) and outside (even if my little dog knows me). However, this final revision of the nursery rhyme takes the problem of identity one step further and allows for the possibility that even internal identity is multiplicitous and relative: "perhaps I am not I." In this formulation, "not I" becomes an identity that is as equally valid as "I." Life and death, or life and non-being, are interchangeable. No longer the articulation of a crisis, however, the narrator finally embraces the multiplicity of self-perception as an ongoing state of awareness.

Everybody's Autobiography raises more questions than it answers. If it works so well for detective stories, can the hero of an autobiography be a dead person? Is death –

or nonexistence – actually liberating for narrative? Is relativity a salvation from too much certainty or the beginning of an era of meaninglessness? As an experiment in relativity, *Everybody's Autobiography* considers the validity of all the potential answers to these questions, situating the narrator at the point at which all these possible answers overlap. In this way, the narrator appears to produce the narrative and to exist outside of its temporal bounds. This authoritative position is by no means stable or sustainable, but it does provide an ideal perspective from which to project, observe, and enact the relativity of self-perception without succumbing to the forces of determinism.

Conclusion: The Future of the Travelogue

One travels to experience the past. (Fussell)

But now in this book we are not in America yet not yet. (Stein)

Because the present canon of modernist travel writing largely consists of British authors, analysis of modernist travel writing focuses heavily on the British perspective on world travel, often filtering it through the lens of the decline of the British empire and the impact of the two world wars. There is little investigation of travel writing from the perspective of America, the land of the future. Thus, Paul Fussell can claim in his useful analysis of British travel books from the 1920s and 1930s that they have an “implicit elegiac tendency [...] a natural retrograde emotion [...] One travels to experience the past, and travel is thus an adventure in time as well as distance” (210). Yet even in his conclusion to *Abroad*, he notes how British writers including Evelyn Waugh, Somerset Maugham, Graham Greene, and Peter Fleming anticipate the coming devastating future of World War II in their 1930s travel books. Fussell agrees with Waugh, who writes in 1946 that the post-war climate has ended an era of easy travel and professional travel writing. But what is replacing this fading tradition? Fussell neglects to answer that question, and in so doing he falls prey to the distracting emphasis on the past that seems prevalent in many modernist travel books. However, this return to the past is what the books often *describe*, not necessarily what they enact. As the travelogues considered in this project demonstrate, much of what they enact is relentless forward motion and the emergence of a future defined by relativity.

The aesthetic tendencies in the modernist travelogues of Holmes, Ford, Sackville-West, and Stein, produce a sense of the future that travel evokes, the infinite possibilities of the time that one is traveling toward, not the known and knowable past that gives the traveler a sense of authority and stability. While the past figures as a subject in these travelogues, it is often portrayed as a complex temporality perceived from the present or the future. This temporal relativity extends to the figure of the traveler-narrator, who enacts the experience of perceiving the present time and persona as the past when seen from the future.

All of the travelogues reflect the experience of both traveling and narrating in an era of massive epistemological transition. The two main changes that produce the most anxiety in these travelogues are the image standard and Einstein's relativity. Both are exciting in their ability to imagine a form of representation and communication that is completely new, non-linear, and tied to a future defined by science, technology, publicity, and global movement available to the masses. These travelogues work to create narratives and narrator personas defined by relativity, but as soon as they achieve it, they find that they have destroyed a singular sense of meaning, place, time, and self.

This project charts a trajectory from the beginning of the travelogue as a proto-modernist concept in Holmes's multi-media performances to a proto-postmodernist concept in Stein's experimental autobiography. The more explicitly the travelogues embrace Einstein's theories, the more the distance between author and narrator increases, ending with Stein's temporally diffuse textual persona that may still have not yet arrived. This progression shows how Einstein's theories became more compelling over the first three decades of the twentieth century, and how the implications of those theories

increasingly seemed to destabilize the position of the traveler-narrator. This destabilization is most disturbing when compared to mass culture and theories of determinism, which remove the illusion of agency from the traveling and narrating subject.

In his exploration of the connection between modernist aesthetics and global travel, Edward Said claims that modernist authors and their fictional styles retreat to a stable subject position that could reassert authority and superiority while simultaneously reflecting the destabilizing influence that the decolonizing world was exerting on the empire: “When you can no longer assume that Britannia will rule the waves forever, you have to reconceive reality as something that can be held together by you the artist, in history rather than geography” (Said 189-190). However, the modernist author/subject is hardly a site of stability, as both Einstein’s theories of relativity and Freud’s theories of psychoanalysis reveal the fundamental malleability, instability, and potential meaninglessness of the subject as perceiver and narrator – a subject who is in many ways determined by outside forces. The irony and self-reflexivity that is prevalent to modernism (and even noted by Said) is a mark of this destabilized subject position. This destabilization extends to narrative as well, and it stands out in nonfiction travelogues since their naturally episodic structure is less cohesive and unifying. Thus the travelogue serves as an ideal illustration of moments of relativity and uncertainty, the moments at which narrative no longer seems to succeed at representation and self-representation.

Burton Holmes would seem to exemplify the imperialist traveler who views other cultures through a lens of superiority, blatantly claiming in his motto that “To travel is to possess the world.” However, his training as a magician suggests that this self-posturing

of mastery is an illusion, a distracting cover for a latent sense of inferiority and dispossession. While travel itself may create the illusion of world possession, representing oneself as a traveler-narrator undermines that illusion of mastery. The traveler-narrator, especially in film or written text, becomes an object that, like the photographs taken on one's journey, can just as easily be possessed by a stranger.

As multi-media performances, Holmes's travelogues reveal that to travel and narrate simultaneously is to see one's powerlessness in the face of a changing world that seems to have an almost inhuman agenda—determined by technology, visual culture, a new sense of narrative, speed, and an astronomical scale of space and time. Describing this phenomenon in his essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin details how the advent of mass reproduction and mass consumption alters the time from which meaning comes, shifting it from the past moment of authorship to the future moment of reception: "Individual reactions are predetermined by the mass audience response *they are about to produce*, and this is nowhere more pronounced than in the film. The moment these responses become manifest they control each other" (234, my emphasis). When art and communication come to be defined by the audience's reception, the freedom to insist on an individual interpretation of that art is lost by both the author and the individual reader or viewer. Holmes's reluctance to identify with his cinematic and written personas shows his awareness of this dynamic as well as his preference for a presentation of self and travel that exists solidly in the present, a moment that he can control and enjoy.

This sense of the future as the time from which meaning will be produced is evident in all the travelogues discussed in this project. All of Holmes's travelogues are

created and performed for his live audiences, evident in the frequent use of “we,” demonstrating that the moment of reception is part of the purpose and meaning of the travelogue. Ford’s travelogue is addressed to a future American audience, hoping that these readers will help redirect the course of American culture, skewing it away from the cultural and military dominance that he fears may be inevitable. Sackville-West is concerned with the future moment in which her travelogue and travel letters will be read, worried that her future persona will overshadow and obliterate her present persona, which is tied to the moment of writing rather than reception. Stein appears to embrace the future as the inevitable source of meaning, enacting it from a deferred position of “not yet” that seems to be occupied by an authorial persona that exists outside the travelogue.

The role of America is significant in all these travelogues except *Passenger to Teheran*. The travelogues of Holmes, Ford, and Stein reveal that the traveler-narrator has become a celebrity or commodity that can be consumed, determined by its mass reception, and then forgotten when the next new thing comes along. While in a different region of the world, Sackville-West likewise finds herself in a position from which she can see a consumerist future developing. From her perspective, Sackville-West’s narrator is viewing and representing the process of Persia becoming modernized, evident by her involvement with and attendance at the coronation of Reza Khan, who modernized Persian culture and oversaw the beginning of the oil industry in his country. In fact, in *Twelve Days* (1927), the written account of an excursion she took a year later, Sackville-West describes seeing the new oil pipelines stretching across the landscape, creating a new geography determined by the global commodity of oil that will fuel increasing numbers of travelers. Similar to the American travelogues, Sackville-West’s traveler-

narrator resists the objectification resulting from both mass culture and the philosophy of determinism by insisting on the immediacy of the travel experience.

While all of these social changes are fascinating backdrops against which the travelogues unfold, this project has foregrounded Einstein's theories of relativity as the primary lens through which to view the aesthetic experimentations with time, self-perception, and narration. Doing so has shifted the focus away from place and onto the texts' performance of instability and relativity. As these traveler-narrators encounter spaces that evoke a sense of the unknown future, they lose their ability to locate themselves in a single temporal or spatial location. America, Japan, and Persia, among other locations, serve to illustrate such feelings of perceptual and narrative dislocation, rather than standing in for the stable ground on which the author journeyed. This project could just as easily have viewed the travelogues as depictions of a real place and time; however, doing so would have dismissed the implicit or explicit sensations of dislocation and relativity that pervade the genre of the travelogue.

Einstein's theories also provide a useful way to talk about the experience of travel and perception, which is always relative. Ever since Galileo, it has been known that motion is relative – there is no sense of movement if one body is not compared to another body at rest. However, Einstein added a single constant to this relativity – the speed of light. With this one constant, the meaningfulness of the individual traveler's perceptions was destroyed, since the speed of the perceiver does not alter the speed of light. Despite this apparent devaluing of the perceiver, Einstein's theories were appealing tools with which to conceptualize modern travel. Within these travelogues, the traveler-narrators often embrace the speed of light by referring to starlight, electric light, or the idea of

travel and communication that can occur very quickly, nearly instantaneously. Such ideas lead to moments of described astronomical relativity, when the traveler-narrators imagine what the Earth looks like from the far reaches of space and time. In an uncanny turn of events, traveling in an era of “global” consciousness produces the strange sensation that Holmes’s motto might be reversed: to travel is to be possessed (or defined) by the world. The invocation of astronomical relativity suggests that meaning now comes from the Earth, both as a planet on which national perspectives are becoming increasingly less differentiated and as a spherical object spinning in space and time, within a spatio-temporal frame of reference that is predetermined and so vast as to be incomprehensible.

Representing the traveler-narrator persona within such a context produces the underlying anxiety that is at the heart of these travelogues. The relativity they enact investigates not just new modes of understanding travel or narration but of life itself—what constitutes it, what makes it meaningful, and what makes one life unique and special. This questioning anticipates the aesthetics of postmodern representation, which often locates meaning in images and surfaces rather than deep structures. The travels in America and the use of media in creating the sensation of travel as immediate and ever-present anticipate the simulacra of Las Vegas, whose superficiality and vacuity prompt Jean Baudrillard to use this American city as an ideal illustration of his theories. The relentless forward motion that propels these traveler-narrators is both fascinating and deeply disturbing, as it presages a future time that is beyond their control and by necessity contains the moment of their death as well as the moment of their travelogue’s consumption by the masses.

In their depiction of the relativity intrinsic to modernist travel and representation, these travelogues enact many of the paradoxes that Einstein's theories produced. The traveler-narrators both embrace the opportunity to produce a fundamentally unique vision of the physical world from their particular spatio-temporal location and resist the possibility that their readers or viewers will likewise have the same authority to recreate the travelogue – or more importantly, the traveler-narrator persona – from a new perspective. By applying Einstein's theories of relativity to the process of self-perception, these travelogues suggest that the traveler-narrator persona may be a relative entity that can be recreated or rendered meaningless by its future reception.

In its temporal multiplicity, the travelogue reveals that the traveler-narrator persona is tied to multiple times and places simultaneously: the location that the traveler-narrator portrays, the location from which she writes, and the location from which the travelogue is received. By enacting these multiple frames of references within the limiting structure of a journey, the travelogue demonstrates the multiple and associative consciousness that is an aesthetic trait of modernist narrative. In its ideal form, the travelogue creates the sensation of an expanded moment that can contain these multiplicitous versions of time, space, persona, and narrative. At the moments at which such multiplicity and relativity is most explicitly enacted, these travelogues strike a tenuous balance between two notions of narrative and of self: one that is relative, atemporal, imagistic, and open-ended; and one that is contained by the frame of the journey, a finite experience with a beginning and end, determined by the authoritative perspective of the traveler-narrator.

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