Genetic Narratology

Analysing Narrative across Versions

Edited by

Dirk Van Hulle

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14. 'Indolence, interruption, business, and pleasure': Narratological Rupture in *The Last Samurai*

Kaia Sherry

1. The Circle Line Begins

> We are now sitting in front of Bellini's Portrait of the Doge. L is reading Odyssey 18, consulting Cunliffe at intervals—*infrequent* intervals. I have been looking at the Portrait of the Doge—*somebody's* got to. I have brought things to read myself but the room is so warm I keep falling asleep and then jerking awake to stare. In a half-dream I see the monstrous heiskaihekatontapus prowling the ocean bed, pentekaipentekontapods flying before it.
>
> —Helen DeWitt, *The Last Samurai* (2000)

A mother sits in London's National Gallery—she is named Sibylla, after the epigraph from T.S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land'. Barely able to stay awake, Sibylla is even less able to afford the central heating that the National Gallery provides. As her precocious son Ludo reads a Homeric lexicon, a portrait of interruption begins to emerge from the text, balancing a tension between an extraliterary lineage and the conditions that occlude it. Like the tonal gradation of Leonardo Loredan in Bellini's poplar, these disturbances occur both syntactically and from within the narrative: the epistrophe of dashes, the stilted Greek prefixes, Ludo's 'infrequent intervals', Sibylla's half-dreams and 'jerks' of consciousness and Ludo's referent of 'L'—itself an affectionate truncation of his namesake. Later, when Ludo and Sibylla ride the Circle Line for hours on end to keep warm, they are interrupted by a deluge of commentary regarding

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Ludo's prodigy. The novel stochastically maintains this disorder, primarily through what Toril Moi calls a barrage of 'capital letters, broken-off sentences, lists of numbers, and words in many different alphabets' (2021, 34). Together, these constructs reflect Sibylla's internal focalisation: the guilt, disorder and alienation imbued in teaching a five-year-old Greek syllabary from books she cannot afford.

Therefore, painting a metafictional portrait of producing art under capitalism, Helen DeWitt's *The Last Samurai* poses formal rupture as an extension—and attempted remediation of—narrative distress (Konstantinou 2022, 48). DeWitt, often paired with the 'post-postmodernism' of David Foster Wallace and Thomas Pynchon, consciously blocks the ongoing narrative in continuance of an ancillary one—the chaos of capital made real on the page. Spanning throughout the text, these insertions typically manifest as either extramedial references (e.g. Akira Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* and Roemer's *Aristarchs Athetesen in der Homerkritik* as hypotext) or the capricious fits expected of a young child. Although Moi contends that DeWitt is 'fascinated by creativity voluntarily imposing strict yet random rules on it', her formal implosions actually invert the methodologies of avant-garde movements like *l'Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle* [the Workshop of Potential Literature], or OuLiPo (34; Baetens 2019, 408). *The Last Samurai* revels in the dissolution of formal borders, rather than the constraints or procedure of a movement like OuLiPo. In this sense, DeWitt experiments with the duality inhered in twentieth-century 'process-oriented art' as an aesthetic category, '[inviting] us into the workshop to witness the experiment as it unfolds', but also to witness the interruptions that preclude such unfolding (Bray et. al 2015, 2). These interruptions may be as material as a 'genius' child in the form of 'the Infant Terrible', or as diffuse as the exigencies of capitalism; each disruption takes on a quality of self-referentiality, as it necessarily extends to the analysis of the genetic process.

As the genetic dossier reveals, DeWitt's irruptive elisions are the result of 'progressive alteration' rather than initial epiphany (qtd. in Bernaerts and Van Hulle 2013, 282). Like the superseded *pentimenti* of a Bellini, DeWitt's drafts intonate a version of Sibylla's homodiegetic voice that Lee Konstantinou hears as 'linear, coherent, [and] forceful', but 'lifeless on the page' (2022, 4). Although Sibylla is initially named

'Ruth' in earlier drafts, Eliot's allusion to the Sibyl's divine circumstance of Petronius's *Satyricon* is far more fitting: a 'body withered away' by the incessant, capitalist grind, 'leaving behind only her voice' as her first-person narration (Konstantinou 2022, 5). But as seen through the progression of DeWitt's drafts, even this narration is subject to interruption, as DeWitt herself was during the tumultuous publication process with Talk Miramax Books. Sibylla's voice is further diminished by the end of the novel, her internal focalisation replaced by Ludo's burgeoning consciousness. By fictionalising her own circumstance, DeWitt dereifies form as a means of withholding narrative agency.

A genetic narratological approach, in which 'the appeal to versions is [...] one way of reconciling incongruities in a narrative', is thus well-suited for elucidating the formal disjunction of *The Last Samurai* (Bernaerts and Van Hulle 2013, 288). In particular, Bernaerts and Van Hulle emphasise the utility of this framework for examining experimental work that 'emphatically resists or challenges literary conventions', as DeWitt does by resisting literary convention itself. Recently, this approach has been effectively used to re-evaluate DeWitt's 'post-postmodern' contemporary Thomas Pynchon in *Becoming Pynchon: Genetic Narratology and* V., examining genre as performance against the grain of cognitive narratology. In comparison, this essay will construe formal breakage as intervention, postulating DeWitt's alterations of her drafts as a narrative contingency of this intervention.

With regard to the available material, *The Last Samurai*'s extant drafts are on fifty-two floppy discs beginning from the year 1991. A number of the discs are defective, while others contain only downloadable software. Although the original manuscript and accompanying drafts were handwritten, the boxes were stolen from DeWitt's apartment fourteen years ago, owing to a broken cellar lock—but as DeWitt writes in her letter 'LAURA', 'let's not think of boxes'. DeWitt, through Lee Konstantinou at the University of Maryland, College Park, has generously provided what remains of *The Last Samurai*'s drafts. The data, providing the literary-critical foundation for this essay, was extracted at the Oxford Duplication Centre. Available as WordPerfect files, the drafts are divided into seven folders labelled as follows:

Folder Name	**Files**
7S9	*7s9.1, 7s9.4, 7s9.5, 7s9.6, 7s9.7, 7s9.12, 7s9.13, 7s9.21, 7s9.31, 7s9.32, 7s9. 33, 7s9.42, 7s9, and Notes on 7S9*
09-07-96	*7S1.8, 7S3.2, 7S3.2C, 7S3.2E, 7S3.3, 7S3.4, and 7S5.3*
20-04-98	*csm, cv2610, ind, richard2, and woolf*
Backup Liberace 7-6-96 + 1Liberac (Very Early)	*1LIBERAC, 7S1.8, 7S2.2, 7S3.2, 7S4.2A, 7S4.2B, 7S4. 2C, 7S5.3, 7S6.2, 7S7.2, 7S8*
Mary.WPD (Orig. Beg.)	*Notes on Disk Mary Orig Beg*
Notes 17.5.97	*ADVENT, CHIAKI, CHILD, FOREST, INUIT, KUROSAWA, LAURA, LAURA2, NME, SCHOEN, SKARP, SKARP2, WIENER, WITTE*
Story of 7s	*7s2.0, 7s2.0a, 7s2.2a, 7s2.10, Notes on Disk*

According to the metadata of the provided documentation, the genetic lineage of *The Last Samurai* seems to span from September 1991 to July 1996, barring any missing material. Certain files (e.g. Notes on Disk Mary Orig Beg) are corrupt, yielding a blank document with 'file could not transfer', while others are irrelevant to a genetic narratological undertaking—I have become intimately familiar with DeWitt's tax returns, as well as her CVs from 1998. While the files' numerical suffix indicates chapter and subsection, the universal prefix '7S' is in reference to the novel's original title *The Seventh Samurai*, a direct homage to the Kurosawa film it eponymises. Again, signalling interruption as extradiegetic to the text, DeWitt was impelled to change the manuscript title after the Kurosawa estate permitted her to use quotations from the film, but not its title. As such, this essay will comprise two sections, beginning with an evaluation of aesthetic and paternal rupture in '1LIBERAC'. The second section, referencing the drafts '7S3.2' (in *09-07-96*), '7S3.2' (in *Backup Liberace*) '7S3.2c', '7S3.2e', '7S3.3' and '7S3.4', will elucidate two separate scenes: an argument between Ludo and Sibylla regarding his oft-contested paternity, and an encounter at Tesco with a character initially named 'the Meddler'. This section will contend with

interruption as transmedial, examining DeWitt's added interjections with respect to Marie-Laure Ryan's concept of 'narrative across media'.

2. '1LIBERAC'

The first line of '1LIBERAC' reads: 'Precocity is not genius, nor genius precocity'. DeWitt's chiasmus is serviceable, evenly balanced and imbued with a tonal stiffness appropriate of Sibylla (and DeWitt's) Oxford background. The amended line reads quite differently. Punctuated by frantic ampersands and anaphora as interior mantra, Sibylla's thoughts unroll with a dialogic intensity: 'Not every genius is a prodigy & not every prodigy is a genius & at 5 it is too soon to tell' (DeWitt 2000, 27). In Konstantinou's view, the initial version alludes towards Ruth as 'a model of assurance', with a controlled clause balanced on either side (2022, 6). Meanwhile, the parataxis of the second reifies Sibylla's maternal anxieties regarding Ludo's education. By intensifying every phrasal constituent, and using abbreviation in service of elongation ('&' versus 'and'), DeWitt's shift to parataxis allows her to recall what Gerald Bruns sees as 'the freedom of schizophrenic language from operations of instrumental reason', in which 'reason' is literalised as Sibylla's mental faculty (2018, 74). Sibylla, a woman obsessed with reason above all, is made capable of irrationality—and consequently, made to be like the rest of us.

In these lines, the post-postmodernist valence comes through in its intensification of postmodernist tendencies: a hyperfixation upon formal authenticity, a return to 'subjective emotion', and resistance against late-stage capitalism (Smith 2011, 424). Ruth, bolstered by the confidence of her syntax, is high-functioning within this model. Sibylla, in contrast, is swept along by the undercurrent of her own deluge, working as a typewriter while raising, if not a 'genius', a verifiable 'prodigy'. As Jeffrey Nealon contends, post-postmodernism is not 'a difference in kind' from its predecessor, but a 'difference in intensity', viscerally aware of the 'collapse of cultural production into the logic of economic production, and vice versa' (2012, x; 51). Through the avant-texte, this collapse becomes articulated through the logic—or illogic—of DeWitt's interruption.

These fissures are evident through DeWitt's restructuring of the text, the 'structures' and 'patterns' of a Jamesian formalism (Gallagher 2000, 231). '1LIBERAC' is linear in execution: it begins with the incipit of Sibylla's parents' artistic failures, and traces the sequence of events to her one-night stand with Ludo's father (derisively called Liberace) and subsequent pregnancy. The '1LIBERAC' draft ends with Sibylla attempting to gain a work permit to stay in the country as a typewriter, having become disillusioned with Oxford:

> Meanwhile, meanwhile—oh, meanwhile I was living in a bedsit and had to find a bigger place. [...] It was very rundown, and the rent was very low, so it seemed I would not have to type too much.

This passage is not in the final edition. Rather, DeWitt replicates it sporadically, through the bombardment of phrasal elements—'work permit' inhabits the text as it does Sibylla's thoughts, while references to her 'typing' and 'rent' are split up metadiegetically, interrupted by secondary narratives. Again, DeWitt makes lavish use of parataxis:

> I walked up and down and I tried to think of an artist who might need an assistant.
> I walked up and down and I thought that perhaps it would be easier to think of an artist if I were already in London or Paris or Rome. (DeWitt 2000, 25)

In proper post-postmodernist fashion, DeWitt gestures towards the pressure of capital upon the artist through form. The steady, parataxic rhythm mirrors the observance of 'clock and calendar' that governs Sibylla's hourly-waged day, and Ludo's when he is forced to attend school for the requisite five days a week (Anderson 2016, 24). Evoking Walter Benjamin's 'homogenous, empty time', this temporal and rhythmic governing is perpetuated by '1LIBERAC', which itself is a 'complex gloss on the word meanwhile' through its repetition of the word (Benjamin 2019, 261; Anderson 2016, 24). Its linearity is followed through by the repetition of 'meanwhile, meanwhile—oh, meanwhile', embodying the endlessness of capital, even when in resistance to it. In contrast, the final edition is erratic, jumping between temporal instances, resisting reconstruction to represent events as 'fuzzily or indeterminately ordered' (Herman 2016, 62–62). As Christian Metz and Michael Taylor write, 'one of the functions of narrative is to invent one

time scheme in terms of another time scheme' (2007, 18). Accordingly, DeWitt's instantiation of time through the architecture of thought splices together 'the time of the thing told' and 'the time of the narrative' (Metz and Taylor 2007, 18). The two temporal instances are conveyed simultaneously, because Sibylla simply does not have enough time. The looming phrase 'work permit' appears at least once on each page within the sequence, interrupted by interjections that are both internally and externally focalised: dialogue from *Seven Samurai*, a college formal at Oxford, maternal anxieties about Ludo and a tantrum from Ludo himself. In this way, form is simultaneously representation and resistance to Sibylla's anxieties of survival, à la the post-postmodernism of Zadie Smith or Percival Everett (Kowalik 2023, 7).

The next '1LIBERAC' section solidifies this cultural-capitalist anxiety within the lineage of Sibylla's 'geniuses', pontificating upon Albert Einstein, Glenn Gould, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Gianlorenzo Bernini and Paul Cézanne. In the draft, it is proffered as a single, prolonged paragraph, with no breaks beyond the standard indentation. For the purposes of a genetic narratological analysis, I have rendered the '1LIBERAC' draft as unbolded text, while DeWitt's subsequent additions are in bold. In Gérard Genette's terms, the textual genealogy is represented by the 'old analogy' of the palimpsest, in reference to the way DeWitt's changes do 'not quite conceal but allow to show through' (1997, 398–99). Any further deletions are crossed out:

> And Cezanne? Paul Cezanne (1839-1906) was a French painter of genius, associated with the Impressionist
>
> **treiskaihexekontasyllabic**
>
> school of painting ~~[]. He taught himself to paint when in his 20s.~~ He was inarticulate: people called him the Bear. He worked very slowly and with
>
> **oktokaihexekontasyllabic enneakaihexekontasyllabic HEBDOMEKONTASYLLABIC**
>
> difficulty. He is most famous for his landscapes and still lifes. His method was to apply blocks of paint to the canvas, often with a palette knife rather than a brush. He worked so
>
> **heptakaihebdomekontasyllabic**
>
> slowly that even fruit could not

> **OGDOEKONTASYLLABIC**
>
> stand still enough: it rotted
>
> [...][1]
>
> **treiskaiogdoekontasyllabic tessareskaiogdoekontasyllabic pentekaiogdoekontasyllabic**
>
> before he was done. He used
>
> **oktokaiogdoekontasyllabic enneakaiogdoekontasyllabic ENENEKONTASYLLABIC**
>
> wax fruit instead. ~~I don't know why I tht he started to paint at the age of 40. I must have been thinking of someone else, but if I was thinking of someone else it can't be someone I admire as much as I do Cezanne.~~

Key points of critical intervention coincide with DeWitt's formal intervention: Ludo's temperamental, multisyllabic experimentation with Greek prefixation, but less obviously, the syntactic point at which DeWitt chooses to place these interruptions. On a formal level, Ludo's precocity creates what Konstantinou calls 'a tempo of agitation and interruption not only for the mother but also for the reader', invoking the 'mind-relevance' of cognitive narratology (2022, 5). Konstantinou's choice of 'tempo' implies a metronomic stability, a narrative progression that falls forward like the notes on sheet music. Erich Auerbach speaks of this stylistic effect as 'a process of complex and periodic development'; DeWitt's additions confuse this temporal coincidence, with Ludo's indiscernible Greek adjectives signalling 'repeated returns to the starting point' (2013, 105). In Auerbach's terms, DeWitt's 'halting, spasmodic, and juxtapositive' method obscures the 'causal, modal, and even temporal relations' of the text, making progression impossible (2013, 105). Konstantinou interprets this intervention as 'the difference between writing without interruption and writing while having to do other work'—extending this logic to the *avant-texte*, each version is a representation of these subjectivities. Their combined palimpsest creates a mode of simultaneity in which the possibility of the first subjectivity is interrupted by the next one.

1 The bracketed ellipses ([...]) indicate sections I excluded for the sake of brevity. They are not central to this essay's analytical considerations.

Each intrusion is also defined by its placement within the textual economy. Comparing '1LIBERAC' and the final text, she puts Ludo's syllabic cries between the phrases: 'Impressionist school', 'with difficulty', 'so slowly', 'rotted before' and 'used wax'. Ludo's obtrusions slow the act of reading down, as the narrative can only become 'actualised' through the way it is 'consumed' (Genette 1979, 34). In the same way Ludo 'agitates' the reader in tandem with Sibylla, the subjectivity of the reading experience is elongated with respect to its form. Many of the interruptions bifurcate the temporal referent ('slowly', 'before') from the act it is amending, reproducing Cézanne's languid pace in the architecture of the text. Further, Genette's phrasing of 'consumption' conveys the secondary valence of Nealon's 'consumption-based capital' (2012, 90). Forcing a juxtaposition between Sibylla and Cézanne, DeWitt's later version shows the way in which capitalism totalises the working process. While Cézanne's 'genius' is inculcated by his ability to work 'slowly', Sibylla's sense of time is fragmented by her *in*ability to do the same—bound to a typing speed of £6.25 an hour. The question of 'genius' becomes less a matter of innate, 'unparalleled talent' than one of time and who has access to it ('1LIBERAC' 3). As such, '1LIBERAC' is impersonal in narration, with Cézanne's section relayed biographically; functionally, the narrative only becomes Sibylla's once it is interrupted.

As Sibylla continues to deliberate the nature of the 'genius', she veers into a paternal genealogy reflective of the textual one. Considering Bernini and the parental lineage that precipitates his 'genius', Sibylla gestures towards her anxieties about Ludo's father, a 'self-regarding' travel writer with 'a terrible facility and a terrible sincerity' (DeWitt 2000, 77). The faculties of Bernini and Ludo dovetail in this passage:

> You say it, and I ~~tht~~ thought it; but the fact is that a clever man so seldom needs to think ~~that he loses the knack of it.~~
>
> **What's a syllabary? A syllabary is a set of phonetic symbols each representing a syllable**
>
> he gets out of the habit.
>
> [...][2]

2 This bracket is a continuation of Ludo's interrogation on syllabary, and Sibylla's attempts to answer him.

> And who was Bernini? Gianlorenzo Bernini (1598-1680) was 'the greatest genius of the Italian Baroque', who moved to Rome at the age of seven and was taught by his father
>
> **EIKOSASYLLABIC**
>
> Pietro, a sculptor. Rudolf Wittkower (German art historian, refugee from the Nazis [**where to begin?**], author of Art & Architecture (*title italicised in final edition*) in Italy 1600-1750) compares him to Michelangelo ~~((~~ (**[1475–1564]**),
>
> **enneakaieikosasyllabic**
>
> **TRIAKONTASYLLABIC**
>
> painter, poet, sculptor of genius...) in his capacity for superhuman
>
> **oktokaitriakontasyllabic enneakaitriakontasyllabic**
>
> **TESSARAKONTASYLLABIC**
>
> concentration. 'But unlike the terrible and lonely giant of the sixteenth century, he was a man of infinite charm, a brilliant and witty talker, fond of conviviality, aristocratic in demeanour, a good husband and father, a first-rate
>
> **enneakaitessarakontasyllabic PENTEKONTASYLLABIC**
>
> **heiskaipentekontasyllabic**
>
> organizer, endowed with an unparalleled talent for creating rapidly and with ease.

In this case, the placement of each interruption reveals how Sibylla's relationship with Liberace is mapped onto her relationship with cultural production. This is demonstrated by the separation of these phrases in the final edition: 'think he', 'father Pietro', 'Michelangelo ([1475–1564]) painter', 'superhuman concentration' and 'first-rate organizer'. As described by Konstantinou, the interruptions channel the mental duress of Sibylla's 'unpaid reproductive labor'; her 'superhuman concentration' is disrupted on a literal narrative level, as well as a formal one (2022, 5). Sentences ('think he') are visualised as trains of thought incapable of completion. Further, in the same way that 'Impressionism' is split from 'school of painting' in Cézanne's passage, nominal signifiers ('Pietro', 'Michelangelo') are often separated from the clarifying noun.

Maurice Blanchot distinguishes between the act of composition and that of juxtaposition; here, DeWitt defers to the latter by 'respecting and preserving this exteriority and this distance as the principle' (1993, 308). The added syntactic distance between 'father' and 'Pietro', for instance, reflects that Ludo does not know his father's name.

Second, still projecting Sibylla's voice, it formalises the disparity between Pietro and Liberace as father figures, as only the former can fulfil the paternal ideal in '[existing] as an ideal point of reference' (Namiki 2020, 2132). In her view, Liberace's commercial success as a mediocre travel writer, couched in the post-postmodernist 'logics of globalization and capital', is antithetical to the higher artistic providence symbolised in Pietro as a father (Nealon 2012, 42). Yet, as the changes from '1LIBERAC' suggest, Ludo is not subject to the continuity of a bloodline. 'Pietro, a sculptor' can occupy a separate line from Bernini, as Ludo can choose his own father. Even Ludo's name, Latin for 'I play', is at odds with the capitalist motivations of Liberace's career. As such, the interruption of lineation doubles as one of lineage, reinforcing the novel's theme that 'the paternal, or authority, is subjective'—not subject to genealogical determinism or continuity (Namiki 2020, 2137). Or, in Moi's words: 'elective affinities beat biological families every time' (2021, 37). The syntactic difference between versions thus places what Blanchot calls the 'disjunction or divergence' of form as 'the infinite centre from out of which, through speech, relation is to be created'—literally forming the relation of Sibylla's post-nuclear family (1993, 308). On its broadest level, DeWitt's interruption of a paternal lineage extends to the 'favoured hypotexts' of modernity (Genette 1997, 397). In 'emptying the position of the father' from '1LIBERAC', DeWitt negates a literary economy in which this aesthetic lineage is privy to Genette's version of 'the realistic "father" [...] and the invocation of a few privileged uncles and ancestors' (Frow et. al 2020, 1905; 1997, 397). Consequently, DeWitt broadens the text's thematic underpinnings to construe 'genealogy' as double-pronged, having meaning beyond the narrative level of *familial*.

3. '7S3.2'

In the third chapter, Ludo and Sibylla begin to argue about this *familial* paternity: the identity of his father, whom Sibylla will not reveal due to

Liberace's perceived mediocrity. Fed up with Ludo's line of questioning, Sibylla retreats to watch *Seven Samurai*, referred to in facetious longhand as 'one of the masterpieces of modern cinema' (2000, 280). Despite the obvious homage to Kurosawa, the interjections of *Seven Samurai* are not present in the drafts '7S3.2' (in *09-07-96*), '7S3.2' (in *Backup Liberace*) '7S3.2c', '7S3.2e', '7S3.3', or '7S3.4'. DeWitt's notes in the folder *17.5.97*, which include transliterated descriptions of the film in 'KUROSAWA' and 'CHIAKI', indicate that these incursions were added about a year after the 1996 drafts. To best represent the significance of these changes, this section will directly compare DeWitt's earliest draft ('7S3.2' in *09-07-96*) to its final instantiation. Again, DeWitt's additions to the draft are rendered in boldface:

> She said: If you don't need me for anything I'm going to watch ~~7S~~ Seven Samurai for a while.
>
> **She turned off the computer. It was about 11:30. So far she had spent about 8 minutes typing which at £6.25 an hour meant she had earned about 83p.**
>
> **She picked up the remote and pressed ON and PLAY.**
>
> ***40 bandits stop on a hill above a village in Japan. They decide to raid it after the barley harvest. A farmer overhears.***
> ***A village meeting is held. The farmers despair.***
> ***Rikichi leaps to his feet with burning eyes.***
> ***Let's make bamboo spears! Let's run 'em all through!***
> ***Not me, says Yohei.***
> ***Impossible, says Manzo.***
>
> I used to take her word for it. But what if she's wrong? A new book by the author of the magazine article came out last month. According to the reviews he is one of the greatest writers of our time.

DeWitt's additions signal two distinct levels of interruption: the numeric addendum of her hourly wage, keeping with the post-postmodernist authenticity of the text, and the transmedial narrative of *Seven Samurai*. First, DeWitt's added invocation of numerical values yokes Sibylla's experienced time to Benjamin's 'homogenous, empty time'. In contrast, '7S3.2' links leisure (watching *Seven Samurai*) to an abstracted notion of time ('a while') not beholden to the metric of the workday—8

minutes can be quantified as 83p, while 'a while' cannot (2000, 261). By juxtaposing these two temporalities between versions, DeWitt narrativises the way in which capital occludes leisure, representing it on the page anaphorically. The time Sibylla spends watching *Seven Samurai* is now parsed in terms of lost capital. Relatedly, Bernaerts and Van Hulle argue that Cohn and Pountney's integrated approach to Beckett's *Lessness* simultaneously 'applies' and 'exposes' narrativisation through the way they interpret human imposition on time (2013, 310). Extrapolating this critical logic to *The Last Samurai*, DeWitt 'applies' narrativisation by linking it to a casual sequence of events, yet 'exposes' it by indicting the framing of capitalism as a naturalised 'model of coherence' (qtd. in Bernaerts and Van Hulle 2013, 309). Considering *Seven Samurai* within this post-postmodernist framework, the seamless integration of film into text represents the place where cultural and economic production meet. By reducing the filmic valence to the level of text, *pace* Baudrillard's *Simulations* via Nealon, the reality of the narrative 'isn't becoming indistinguishable from the movies; it has become indistinguishable' (2012, 176). DeWitt's conflation of medium (e.g. film and text) further reinforces this interpretative liminality.

As such, on the transmedial level, Marie-Laure Ryan's 'medium-independent definition of narration' is useful in conceptualising DeWitt's repudiation of medium coherence, insofar as it 'relies on literary narrative as a comparative standard but does not limit itself to the literary form' (Bay 2005; Ryan 2004, 721–22). Ryan contends that there are 'other ways of evoking narrative scripts' beyond language; *The Last Samurai* complicates this discursive gap by rendering cinematic media *as* language, both transmedial and not (2004, 13). While '7S3.2' (in *09-07-96*), '7S3.2' (in *Backup Liberace*), '7S3.2c', '7S3.2e', '7S3.3' and '7S3.4' straightforwardly cast watching the film as a narrative action carried out by Sibylla, the later version plays it as if on videotape. *Seven Samurai* forms a dialectic, interrupting the text while continuing its narrative thread. Rikichi's 'burning eyes' become a transmedial motif, reproduced in Sibylla during times of duress. For example, when Ludo pesters her about his father, she looks at him with the same 'burning eyes' (280). The film's line-up of Rikichi, Yohei, Manzo and the other five samurai comprise Sibylla's 'eight male role models' for Ludo. Demanding narrative attention through disruption of the text, they

also parallel the male role models Ludo seeks outside the transmedial space of *Seven Samurai*. As Yuki Namiki points out, Ludo re-enacts these scenes whenever he meets a potential father, resembling Kambei, 'who is recruiting master-less yet authentic Samurai to join his band' (2020, 2136). The hypotext, rather than being mapped beneath the textual economy, is mapped chaotically atop it.

After Ludo's argument with his mother, they take a mundane grocery trip to Tesco, where they run into a 'mild fat woman' whom Sibylla 'had hoped never to see again' (2000, 396). The woman is referred to as 'The Meddler' in earlier drafts, reminiscent of Ludo's nickname 'The Infant Terrible', and later amended to simply 'the woman'. It is revealed the woman once saved Sibylla's life, though the circumstances are unclear. While this scene occurs immediately after Ludo's argument in '7S3.2' (in *09-07-96*), '7S3.2' (in *Backup Liberace*) '7S3.2c', '7S3.2e', '7S3.3' and '7S3.4', it is ultimately moved to the last quarter of the book, after an unsuccessful meeting with the potential father HC. Additionally, the interruption in this passage is excerpted from Hamlet's soliloquy and significantly pared down in the final version from '7S3.2'. Rather than an overt breakage of narrative like *Seven Samurai*, the soliloquy is voiced diegetically through Sibylla, ventriloquising her suicidal ideation. As Konstantinou elucidates, Sibylla, 'a character named after a victim of divine abuse' at the hands of Apollo, '*wants to die*' (2022, 6). Sibylla's chosen Shakespearean verse reflects this ideation:

> If the woman opposite was capable of thought, something for which we had as yet no evidence, her thoughts were certainly opaque to her companions. I could see Sibylla's thoughts circling her mind like goldfish in a bowl. ~~She was fighting a powerful urge to say that I was tubercular, or had sickle-cell anaemia, or leukaemia, or cancer, that my every waking hour was a torment, and that I could not draw breath without anguish.~~ At last ~~my mother~~ she spoke.
>
> > To be or not to be, that is the question:
> > Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
> > The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune
> > Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
> > And by opposing, end them. To die, to sleep—
> > No more and by a sleep to say we end
> > The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
> > That flesh is heir to; 'tis a consummation

~~Devoutly to be wished~~

~~So far she had spoken with a slow, natural gravity, as if there cd be no need for words of her own when the poet had expressed her very thought. But now, as she went on, her voice by its very stress seemed to emphasise her rejection of the words:~~

~~[…]~~[3]

~~If one does not believe in the afterlife, said my mother, one's course wd appear to be clear.~~

The ~~Meddler~~ woman glanced aghast at the small fat crew and was at once relieved, for it was clear enough that they had not understood a word of this.

Well, of course we all have our cross to bear, she said cheerily.

~~My mother~~ Sibylla gazed down, eyes blazing, at a tin of baked beans.

In contrast to the transmedial interjections of *Seven Samurai*, the excerpted soliloquy is fully narrativised as dialogue that Sibylla conveys to another character, creating a tension between diegeses. This tension is foregrounded by the onus of interpretation falling to the woman, in the same way that it falls to the reader with *Seven Samurai*—as if asked to prove we too are 'capable of thought'. In changing her name from 'the Meddler' in '7S3.2' to simply 'the woman', DeWitt further aligns her with a *role*, rather than a character with any focal interiority beyond her capacity to interpret Sibylla's opacity. As David Herman writes, the burden of evaluating meaning in experimental literature 'quite often seems to shift from teller to interpreter' (2016, 49). DeWitt complicates this dichotomy by posing 'interpretation' on the level of both the narrative (why is she reciting Shakespeare in the Tesco bread aisle?) and the text (the soliloquy itself). Through this interpretative tension, DeWitt tests the extent to which her interpolated fragments 'can become a narrative sequence if the spectator supplies common agents and logical connections', as David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson have

3 This bracket, which DeWitt took out in the final iteration of the text, is a continuation of Hamlet's soliloquy beginning from 'to die' and ending at 'puzzle the will'.

contended (qtd. in Ryan 2004, 11). The woman, in responding to Sibylla, inadvertently narrativises what is initially intertextually incompatible.

Further, while '7S3.2' transcribes nearly the entire speech, the final version interrupts itself before its logical and syntactic conclusion—''tis a consummation' stands on its own, while 'devoutly to be wished' is rendered to subtext. Hamlet's deliberation about the afterlife, and any ambiguity that may 'puzzle the will', is conspicuously removed (Shakespeare 2019, 78). Again, Sibylla '*wants to die*', but can only express it obliquely, as the focalisation has shifted to Ludo (Konstantinou 2022, 6). As she expresses in a line cut from '7S3.2', there is 'no need for words of her own when the poet had expressed her very thought', narrativising the two texts into coherence. In Ryan's sense, the soliloquy's hermeneutic utility 'resides neither in the concrete circumstances nor in the particular social function of the narrative act but in the context-transcending nature of this act' (2004, 5). Released from its initial context, the soliloquy resupplies Sibylla her voice.

4. The Circle Line Ends

> I said: Aren't you supposed to be typing *The Modern Knitter*?
> Indolence, interruption, business, and pleasure; all take their turns of retardation, said Sib. I'm up to 1965.
>
> —Helen DeWitt, *The Last Samurai* (2000)

In DeWitt's collection *Some Trick*, her critique of the publishing industry and its larger, institutional fatuity is hardly veiled. In fact, in execution, it is far more overt than *The Last Samurai*. One story, 'My Heart Belongs to Bertie', offers itself as punchline to a cynical set-up: what happens when a mathematician and a literary agent walk into a diner? DeWitt answers: nothing. The mathematician will walk out, and the literary agent will remain a creature of convention, uninterested in accurately publishing his opaque binomials. As Moi writes, *Some Trick* agonises over publishers 'who are only too ready to "love" writers they haven't read and to travesty the artist's vision in order to make money off her creativity' (38–39). *Some Trick* could consequently be called semi-autobiographical, bitterly adducing DeWitt's own battle with Talk Miramax Books.

Similarly, while the extant floppy disks of *The Last Samurai* contribute to an avant-texte of the work itself, they also form one which catalogues

DeWitt's unending struggle to publish it (Ramsden 2022, 39). The folders *Notes 17.5.97* and *20-04-98* feature a slew of letters to editors, friends and employers from DeWitt, seemingly 'nothing but apologies and missed deadlines' ('woolf'). Most of the letters entail work, albeit not work on *The Last Samurai* manuscript, but the exterior work that would allow her to. As endless as the Circle Line itself, DeWitt writes of her secretarial job: 'I'll be working days (and days and days) until the end of the month the way things are going' ('LAURA'). She considers quitting and moving in with her mother to write full time, describing the exigencies of white-collardom as 'like putting my mind in a little box; at the end of the day it hardly seems worth taking it out of the box' ('LAURA'). Meanwhile, the originating conceit of 'My Heart Belongs to Bertie' becomes obvious in DeWitt's dealings with Talk Miramax Books. As Konstantinou details, the publishing company prioritised convention over stylistic expressiveness, changing DeWitt's intentionally experimental use of restrictive clauses, capital letters and rendering of numbers—all choices that consciously inform the mechanics of rupture examined in this essay. After all, in the words of DeWitt herself: 'These rules are not handed down by God', and to experiment with these rules and their interstices is 'what makes literary language literary in the first place' (qtd. in Konstantinou 2022, 58). As the genetic narratological findings of this essay suggest, the diachrony of DeWitt's versions poses *The Last Samurai* as 'more a dynamic work in progress than a static oeuvre' (Bernaerts and Van Hulle 2013, 311). In moving to eschew the standards of copyediting, DeWitt's dynamism is a quest for the originality of language, mirroring Ludo's quest to find a father.

DeWitt supplies one last meditation on language. In a document titled 'How I would improve the Sunday Review' in *20-04-98*, she writes that book reviews should provide extracts, as 'some books don't show to good advantage in reviews, because the best thing about them is the use of language' ('ind'). *The Last Samurai* does not offer itself up for appraisal, extracted or otherwise. Deviating from what easily shows to good advantage, DeWitt aligns herself with a desire beyond that of institutions like Talk Miramax Books or the Sunday Review—choosing instead to break with language to best use it.

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