



Ana Marília Gonçalves Ferreira

In Form: Bibliographic and Narrative Experimentation in B. S. Johnson's Novels

Dissertação de Mestrado em Estudos de Cultura, Literatura e Línguas Modernas, Ramo de Estudos Ingleses e Americanos, orientada pelo Professor Doutor Manuel José de Freitas Portela, apresentada ao Departamento de Línguas, Literaturas e Culturas da Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Coimbra

2018



UNIVERSIDADE D
COIMBRA



Cover picture: Publicity photo for the promotion of the novel *The Unfortunates* (1969), provided by Virginia Johnson to Jonathan Coe for publication in the biography *Like a Fiery Elephant: the Story of B. S. Johnson* (Coe, 2004).

Faculdade de Letras

In Form: Bibliographic and Narrative Experimentation in B. S. Johnson's Novels

Ficha Técnica:

Tipo de trabalho	Dissertação de Mestrado
Título	In Form: Bibliographic and Narrative Experimentation in B. S. Johnson's Novels
Autor/a	Ana Marília Gonçalves Ferreira
Orientador/a	Manuel José de Freitas Portela
Identificação do Curso	Estudos de Cultura, Literatura e Línguas Modernas
Área científica	Literatura Inglesa
Especialidade/Ramo	Estudos Ingleses e Americanos
Data da Defesa Pública	29 de outubro de 2018
Composição do Júri	Jacinta Maria Cunha da Rosa Matos; Manuel José de Freitas Portela; Maria José Florentino Mendes Canelo (Presidente).
Classificação Obtida	18



Agradecimento

À minha Mãe, Maria Isabel Caridade Gonçalves, pelo Amor, Dedicção, Exemplo, e Tudo o Mais para o qual não há Palavras nem Forma que o consigam justamente expressar (contrariamente ao que este trabalho postula – but I am not B. S. Johnson...).

Ao Professor Manuel Portela pela imensa experiência de aprendizagem que me possibilitou, tanto nas suas aulas como no seminário de orientação; pelo apoio, compreensão e paciência ao longo deste ano de escrita; e por me ter feito lembrar algo (vergonhosa e inadvertidamente) esquecido por mim: o privilégio e o prazer que é interpretar uma obra de criação literária - **Vivam As Letras!**

A todos os Meus que me acompanharam ao longo deste percurso e cuja Força foi fundamental para eu alcançar o objetivo de concretizar este trabalho pois, como tantas vezes me recordaram, “o sonho/ é uma constante da vida/ tão concreta e definida” que sempre que se “sonha/ o mundo pula e avança/ como bola colorida/ entre as mãos de uma criança”.

Gostaria de agradecer em particular:

- aos meus Padrinhos, Miguel Pessoa e Fátima Bandeira, por serem o exemplo de que a Vida, por mais adversa, vive-se olhando em frente com Vontade, Esperança, Honestidade e Sem Deixar Ninguém para Trás
- à Isabel Gorgulho (*Bia Luce*) pela Amizade e Solidariedade constantes, pelo seu inestimável contributo logístico e por SEMPRE manter a Fé!

Abstract

Emerging during the 1960s, B. S. Johnson was one of the most innovative writers of his generation in the way he explored narrative techniques, such as the interior monologue, in conjunction with typographic and bibliographic forms. Johnson's novels reflect about the chaotic nature of life and human relationships through a methodical and creative application of bibliographic and typographic devices and a rich use of language. Contrary to other experimental writers of the time, Johnson's use of formal devices aids readers in their creation of not only narrative meaning and emotional empathy but also of a significant and pleasurable literary experience. The aim of this dissertation is to establish how Johnson's ingenious symbiosis between verbal and bibliographic experimentation actively contributes to the emergence of narrative, providing it with additional layers of meaning and acting as an instrument for the reader's immersion in the story. This analysis will be based on the following novels: *Albert Angelo* (1964), *The Unfortunates* (1969), *House Mother Normal* (1971) and *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry* (1973).



Key-words: Bibliographic Form; Typographic Devices; Language Use; Interpretation and Immersion; Meaning.

Resumo

Tendo surgido durante a década de 1960, B. S. Johnson foi um dos escritores mais proeminentes da sua geração no modo como explorou técnicas narrativas, tais como o monólogo interior em conjugação com formas bibliográficas e tipográficas. Os romances de Johnson refletem sobre a natureza caótica da vida e das relações humanas, através de uma aplicação metódica e criativa de dispositivos bibliográficos e tipográficos experimentais e do uso sofisticado de linguagem. Ao contrário de outros escritores experimentais da época, o uso inovador de dispositivos formais por B. S. Johnson auxilia os seus leitores na criação não só de significado narrativo e empatia emocional, mas também de uma experiência literária relevante e prazerosa. O objetivo desta dissertação é o de estabelecer o modo como a engenhosa simbiose desenvolvida por Johnson entre experimentação verbal e bibliográfica contribui ativamente para a emergência da narrativa, fornecendo-lhe camadas adicionais de significação e atuando como um instrumento da imersão do leitor na narrativa. Esta análise será baseada nos romances de B. S. Johnson *Albert Angelo* (1964), *The Unfortunates* (1969), *House Mother Normal* (1971) e *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry* (1973).

Palavras-chave: Forma Bibliográfica; Dispositivos Tipográficos; Uso da Linguagem; Interpretação e Imersão; Significado.

Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
1. FORM, <i>ALBERT ANGELO'S ASSEMBLY LINE</i>.....	9
1.1 Albert.....	9
1.2 An Assembly Line of Meaning.....	11
1.3 Page – a medium of artistic expression	13
1.4 Typography	16
1.4.1 Italics	16
1.4.2 ALL CAPITALS	20
1.4.3 Underlined	24
1.4.4 Alien-ating Spelling.....	27
1.4.5 Symbols 	28
1.4.5.1 Set of Five Six Pointed Asterisks.....	28
1.4.5.2 Swords Pointing Upward 	29
1.4.5.3 Original Markings.....	30
1.5 Diversity	31
1.5.1 Viewpoints and Reports	31
1.5.2 Madam Mae.....	33
1.5.3 “An Eye for” Poetry.....	34
1.6 The Hole of the Matter.....	35
2. <i>THE UNFORTUNATES – A NOVEL OF ABSENCES AND PRESENCES</i>.....	37
2.1 The Absence of Order – Disengage to Engage.....	39
2.2 The Absence of Words and Meaningful Gaps	43
2.3 Presences	54
3. <i>HOUSE MOTHER NORMAL - A LAYER-UPON-LAYER SINGULARITY</i>.....	62
3.1 Uniqueness	63
3.2 Parity	64
3.3 Multiple layers	65
3.4 Additive processes.....	66
3.5 Synergies	77
4. CHRISTIE MALRY'S OWN INTERACTIVE FORM.....	80
4.1 The Form Is Interacting with Christie.....	83

4.2 Christie's Unveiling of the Literary Mechanism	91
4.3 Christie's Filling In the Gaps	95
4.4 Christie's Bookkeeping	102
4.5 Crossing out Christie.....	107
CONCLUSION	110
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	118

Introduction

After 1945, novelists had to find new ways of defining the social, political and cultural orders that emerged during the post-war as well as characterize and account for the point of view of the individuals learning to live in a distinct reality from the one they had previously known. Having in mind the task of portraying Britain's *zeitgeist*, most novelists understood that in order to achieve this they would have to choose between conventional literary formats "that seemed more suitable for transmitting an accurate portrait of the individual in a changing society" or "experimental, Modernist models" that presented themselves as more appropriate for clarifying "the disjunction between the individual consciousness and the problematic flow of contemporary history" (Alegre, 14). Post-modernist writers surfaced from this impasse as authors conscious of their free choice between traditional Victorian models and experimental modernist practices in order to create their literary worlds: "Some" created a fusion between these two "which is what is really (...) post-modernism - while others (...) openly acknowledged their allegiance to either literary tradition or experimentation" (14).

Among those who swore their loyalty to experimentation as the natural next step in literary evolution, there was a group of avant-garde novelists (including Christine Brooke-Rose, Ann Quin, Eva Figes and Wilson Harris, among others) that during the 1960s developed and implemented new and challenging concepts of literary content and form to react against what they considered to be the inflexibility and stagnation of traditional literary formulas. The leading role in this neo-avant-garde movement belonged to B. S. Johnson, whose voice sought to change the literary establishment that he considered obsolete while his novels challenged literary conventions of narrative content and bibliographic form.

Bryan Stanley Johnson was born on 5th February 1933, in Hammersmith, West London, into a respectable but modest working-class family. His childhood was marked by the ordeal of having to be evacuated from London, during World War II, and by failing to pass his eleven-plus¹ exams. After leaving school at the age of 16, Johnson worked in several accounting related jobs,

¹ "The exam was first introduced in 1944, when under the Butler Education Act the schooling system in the United Kingdom was rearranged. All children aged between 5 and 15 were entitled to free education, attending Primary School up to the age of 11 and then on to secondary school. Places in these schools were allocated dependent upon how well children did in the 11+ exam. Children who successfully passed the exam would gain a place in a Grammar School, whereas those who were unsuccessful went on to either a Secondary Modern School or a Technical Schools. While the aims of the examination system was to provide education for all, many politicians felt that it was unfair on the less academically minded children and so in 1976 the Labour Government gave Local Education Authorities the option to discontinue Grammar Schools in favour of a Comprehensive School which treated all children equally- without the use of an 11+ exam."- Transcribed from <https://www.studyelevenplus.co.uk/pages/history-of-the-eleven-plus> - accessed on 9th August 2017.

mostly as a clerk. In the evenings, he taught himself Latin and attended a year's pre-university course at Birkbeck College. With this preparation, Johnson managed to pass the university exam for King's College in London and enrolled for a B. A. in English. After graduating, Johnson aspired to write professionally and started to attend film courses. Although he always fought for the financial acknowledgement of his work as an author, during the first years of his career, Johnson was forced to work as a supply teacher and a sports reporter in order to make ends meet. All these experiences deeply marked him, constituting the departure point for most of his work.

Characterised by an absorbing reflection about the chaotic nature of life and human relationships, Johnson's novels are complemented by his methodical and ingenious use of formal apparatus, like foreseeing holes cut on the pages, an unbound book in a box, narrative supporting and enhancing typographic devices, among others, that elicit the readers' interpretation and engage their immersion into the fictional world. Described as "Britain's one-man literary avant-garde of the 1960's" (Coe, 3), B. S. Johnson was an extremely prolific author, responsible for the creation of poetry, plays, films (the larger part for television), numerous book reviews and articles and seven novels, considered his "crowning achievement" (14) as a writer. Johnson also became known (and even infamous) for fiercely defending the validity and integrity of his innovative literary creations and the imperative urgency of renewing literary forms and conventions as the only way Literature had not only to survive but also to remain relevant. True to their author's principles, Johnson's novels barely fit the canon of this literary category as they do not feature some of its fundamental characteristics, namely the existence of a plot, as, according to the author, life "does not tell stories. Life is chaotic, fluid, random; it leaves myriads of ends untied, untidily. Writers can extract a story from life only by strict, close selection, and this must mean falsification. Telling stories really is telling lies" (*Aren't You Rather Young to Be Writing Your Memoirs?*, 1973, 14). Thus, B. S. Johnson believed authors should remain wary of the "falsehoods" of imagination and the path onto "which it threatens to lead" them (Coe, 5) and write honestly "as though it mattered, as though they meant it, as though they meant it to matter" (Johnson, *Aren't You Rather Young to Be Writing Your Memoirs?*, 1973, 29). Believing that the one true knowledge that is possible to fully and comprehensively achieve is the one about oneself, Johnson considered that "All writing (should be) autobiographical" (quoted in Tew, 2002, 10), hence making himself and his experiences the driving force behind most of his novels as he looked back "for the bulk of his narrative raw material: to childhood, school, adolescence and clerical work, early sexual experiences, student days, and (...) young

adulthood” (18). Marking “a decisive and somewhat surprising change of mode, away from first-person confessional” (Coe, 23), his fifth novel *House Mother Normal* appears as the exception to this “autobiographical” rule as it is anchored in the way one single fictional event is lived by nine different (also) fictional characters. Exception apart, the few concessions Johnson makes to the conventionality of the novel genre, as the creation of characters or the occurrence of dialogue, are uncovered and exposed to serve the author's attempt to remain truthful in some way to actual lived experience. Metaleptic references to the act of writing and to the living self of the writer suggest the tension between fictionalizing and representing actual events as a driving force in Johnson's writing:

Part of the trouble, he thought, was that he lived and loved to live in an area of absolute architectural rightness, which inhibited his own originality and resulted in him being ----- OH FUCK ALL THIS LYING!

(...)

-----fuck all this lying look what im really trying to write about is writing (...) about my writing im my hero though what a useless appellation my first character then im trying to say something about me through him

(Johnson, 1964, 163/167)

And here you see, friend, I am about to step outside the convention, the framework of twenty-one pages per person. Thus you see I too am the puppet or the concoction of a writer (you always knew there was a writer behind it all? Ah, there's no fooling you readers!) (...)

(Johnson, 1971, 203/204)

‘In any case,’ he said, almost to himself, not looking at me, ‘you shouldn’t be bloody writing novels about it, you should be out there bloody doing something about it.’

And the nurses then suggested I leave, not knowing who I was, that he could not die without me.

(Johnson, *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 180)

Characterization and other conventional narrative methods are also pushed aside in favour of the interior monologue technique, “his preferred mode” (Coe, 4) for accounting and representing the complexity of the workings of the character's mind. In addition, B. S. Johnson made the point that his novels did not possess the intention of “destroying the reader's suspension of disbelief” as it would be expected “since such suspension was not to be attempted” (1963, 12). In an unpublished BBC radio interview, Johnson clarifies that he was “not interested in the slightest in writing fiction. Where the difficulty comes in ... where [there exists] the

misunderstanding over terms is that ‘novel’ and ‘fiction’ are not synonymous. Certainly I write autobiography, and I write it, in the form of a novel. What I don’t do is write fiction.” (Johnson quoted in Tew, 2002, 15).

Johnson was dedicated to “experimentalism and challenge” not only as a literary approach and object but also “as an agent of the ongoing change that is life” (20), which he used to accurately represent through his combination of creative formal techniques and rigorous and rich use of language. Controversial and passionate (to the extent of becoming dogmatic) about the path he advocated for the evolution of Literature, Johnson argued that

Whether or not it can be demonstrated that all is chaos, certainly all is change: the very process of life itself is growth and decay at an enormous variety of rates. Change is a condition of life. Rather than deplore this or hunt the chimaerae of stability or reversal, one should perhaps embrace change as all there is. Or might be. For change is never for the better or for the worse; change simply is. (*Aren’t You Rather Young to Be Writing Your Memoirs?*, 1973, 17)

This way, and appropriating himself of Nathalie Sarraute’s metaphor, Johnson understood Literature as a “relay race” in which one generation of authors must hand over the “baton of innovation” to the following generation (Coe, 4). However, according to Johnson, “the vast majority of British novelists (...) dropped the baton, stood still, turned back, or not even realised that there (was) a race” (*Aren’t You Rather Young to Be Writing Your Memoirs?*, 1973, 30), a posture that greatly disappointed him and contributed to his open belittling and antagonistic attitude towards the work of other more conventional novelists. In B. S. Johnson’s perspective, those who decided to choose the way of literary tradition and continued to perpetuate the same nineteenth-century novel conventions and aesthetics, three decades after James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, was as though they were conforming to “the literary equivalent of travelling by horse and cart when there were cars and trains available” (Coe, 4). Thus, for Johnson, it was mandatory to take Literature to its next level of development, something achievable by bringing it closer to “Present-day reality” and presenting it in a form that instead of static or plain, affirmed its existence and its importance by actively complementing the novel’s narrative and being perceived by the readers as, Grzegorz Maziarczyk points out, “the material form need not be merely a transparent, and therefore negligible, element of a given work of fiction but can become an inseparable element of the meaning it is supposed to contain.” (184). This way of envisaging Literature made “most critics of Johnson squirm (...) parodying his stance by

simplifying it out of existence” and classifying it as “either derivative or prosaically mundane” (Tew, 2002, 19). Thus, although B. S. Johnson won several awards throughout his career and received many favourable reviews for his books and films, the lack of recognition by the great majority of the critical mass contributed for his continuous confrontational attitude regarding the literary establishment, which insisted in classifying him as ‘experimental’, a designation that he abhorred as he considered that for the majority of reviewers it was a synonym for ‘unsuccessful’ – “I object to the word experimental being applied to my own work” (*Aren't You Rather Young to Be Writing Your Memoirs?*, 1973, 19). Indeed, ‘unsuccessful’ does not even remotely serve to characterize Johnson’s work, as even if one does not entirely partake of his literary vision there is much to appreciate and acknowledge, like

(...) his command of language, his freshness, his formal ingenuity, the humanity that shines through even his most rigorous experiments, his bruising honesty (...). And above all (...) the simple reason he took himself and his art - craft, vocation, call it what you will – so seriously. Because, in spite of what he said, it’s not the reactionaries or the old fogeys who pose the greatest threat to the novel. It’s the dilettantes (...) because it’s so easy for these people to get published (...) people who haven’t given the form and its possibilities a tenth of the thought B. S. Johnson gave to it before he even set pen to paper. (Coe, 7)

Or, as pointed out by Tew

Johnson is notable because he represents a rare combination in British literary narratives. (...) realistic ambitions, experimental structures and styles, moral honesty, radical class awareness, a notion of an almost ethical ‘truth’ or authenticity, a sense of history in a material rather than narrative sense, and a romantic urge in terms of friendship and bonding. This extends beyond his solipsistic concerns, right from the first tentative novel. (Tew, 2002, 20)

Thus, even if the core of Johnson’s writing is himself, his thoughts, his principles, his emotions, his experiences, and his very particular views of the world, of Literature, of what should constitute a novel:

I . . always with I . . one starts from . .
one and I share the same character . . are one .
. . . . one always starts with I . . one . .
. . . alone Sole
..... . single

Johnson's incursions into this genre are not hermetic or closed on themselves as he continuously calls his readers into action, by either enticing their interpretation or making them participate in the open exploration of the symbiosis between graphic layout, bibliographic structure and narrative meaning. Johnson writes to be read, to share his views of the world and human relationships and he does it in a form that he considers (and works to) not only reflect the honesty of his intentions but also add to it as a complementary source of interpretative meaning for the reader. Contrary to what happens with other contemporaneous authors like Christine Brooke-Rose and her beloved use of the device of omission (in her 1968 novel *Between*, she left out the verb "to be" from the entire narrative and in her autobiographical novels *Remake*, from 1996, and *Life, End of*, from 2006, she omitted the word "I") praised by literary scholars but scarcely comprehensible by readers unaware of her underlining literary theory, B. S. Johnson's implementation of creative bibliographic forms, which complement their narrative content, gave way to the creation of novels that, despite of continuously demanding of their readers' interpretative skills, never have a disaffecting effect on them. The novels' ingenious symbiosis between narrative content, formal experimentation and use of language reaches out to the readers and immerses them in the stories being read, both physically and emotionally. Thus, Johnson's use of formal devices not only assists in the creation of meaning for the readers but it is also essential for the readers' construction of a significant and pleasurable literary experience.

After his death in 1973, most of B. S. Johnson's work became largely ignored and the author practically fell into oblivion, being "almost never taught and (...) rarely included in work in Anglophone literature" (Tew, 2002, 7). In the beginning of the 21st century, this tendency started to reverse with the publication of *B. S. Johnson: A Critical Review* (2001), a study by Philip Tew that analyses the author's prose writing, and the biography *Like a Fiery Elephant: The Story of B. S. Johnson* (2004), by Jonathan Coe, that based on Johnson's vast collection of papers and on the interviews done to those who interacted (more closely or not) with him, reintroduces the author to the 2000's general audience and literary scholars. The success of Coe's biography prompted the creation of the B. S. Johnson Society with the aim of giving

more prominence to the research on the author², while rallying, as stated on the Society's website, "Johnson scholars, readers and *aficionados* alike in their various approaches to the author's life and work". In 2007, Philip Tew and Glyn White edit *Re-Reading B. S. Johnson*, a collection of papers presented at an academic conference dedicated to B. S. Johnson, in 2004.

The aim of this dissertation is to demonstrate how Johnson's formal choices, ranging from book presentation and page layout to typographic devices, serve more than the conventional purpose of physically supporting the narrative. I intend to show how B. S. Johnson's inventive exploration of formal devices actively contribute to the interpretation and comprehension of the narrative, providing it with additional layers of meaning and serving as a vehicle for the reader's immersion in the story. This demonstration will be based on the analysis of the formal devices used by B. S. Johnson in his novels *Albert Angelo* (1964), *The Unfortunates* (1969), *House Mother Normal* (1971) and *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry* (1973). In *Albert Angelo*, my analysis will show that the variety of typographic devices (like the use of different fonts and typographic effects that depict the character's emotional responses or focus, the parallel columns that graphically represent the simultaneousness between exterior dialogue and interior monologue, the proleptic hole cut on the page together with the insertion of the testimonials of Albert's students in all their diversity, among others) provide the novel with a profusion of dimensions that assist the readers in a creation of a more organic account of Albert and his actions that unfold as they are prompt "to think a bit further". In relation to the unbound novel *The Unfortunates*, it will be demonstrated that its out of ordinary form of presentation allows the representation of the randomness of human memory as well as the chaotic nature of life while the array of intentional textual gaps depicts the various emotional and psychological states of the subject, thus giving shape to a more vivid narrative of what it means to lose a friend. In *House Mother Normal*, I will show how through the accurate layering and spacing of page layout, in addition to the combination of different fonts with intentional textual gaps in a precisely choreographed synergy, it is possible to provide the readers with a multidimensional description of the way each character simultaneously experienced the social evening, a translation of diegetic time into the space of the page that the reader gradually apprehends at each turn of the page. In *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, the analysis of the textual references made to the different agents of the literary process together with the occurrence of intentional textual gaps and the use of images as graphic sources of narrative interpretation will

² In <http://bsjohnson.org/about-2/>, accessed on 8th September 2018

be studied to establish how this novel develops a metaleptic frame that lays bare the social and material nature of literary creation at the same time as it provides a dark humoured account of Christie's intentions and experiences.

1. Form, *Albert Angelo's* Assembly Line

Written between the autumn of 1962 and the summer of 1963 in a period during which B. S. Johnson still believed his true calling was poetry, *Albert Angelo*, published in 1964, represents a step forward in his development as an author and the consolidation of his identity as an artist. In *Aren't You Rather Young to Be Writing Your Memoirs* (1973), Johnson notes how important the novel became in his evolution as an author by stating "I really discovered what I should be doing with *Albert Angelo* where I (...) heard my own small voice" (22). In accordance with Johnson, Jonathan Coe notes that, with *Albert Angelo*, the author made an "irreversible breakthrough in terms of his personal aesthetics" (2004, 18) while Philip Tew points out that *Albert Angelo* "advances Johnson's sophistication and experimentation" (2002, 24).

1.1 Albert

The reader encounters Albert transitioning to a new stage of his life. After a failed relationship, Albert moves to a rented room, in the Angel district of north London, and tries to adjust to his recovered though unsolicited bachelor's condition. He seems uneasy with his new circumstance - "I think I shall visit my parents every Saturday, as a rule, as a habit. Occasionally Sundays: instead, though not as well. But usually Saturdays, as a rule, as a habit almost. Yes." (Johnson, 1964, 19). During the day, Albert works as a supply teacher, moving from one school to the other, not fitting in an unwelcoming and predisposed environment set in its own ways where apparently outsiders are not well received:

The woman at the office gives you directions to the school, and you look it up in your *A to Z* to make quite sure. You put in a briefcase those textbooks experience has suggested will cover most of the subjects you are likely to be required to teach (...). The Headmaster is formal, apart, preoccupied. He introduces you to his Deputy Head, Mr Coulter. Mr Coulter does not like you. He does not like any supply teacher. Supply teachers mean inconvenience to him. They upset his timetable and they are often untrained and incompetent (1964, 28-29)

At night, Albert probes after-hours London, accompanied by his friend Terry, who shares with him the anguish of having also been rejected. Both men find solace in their common experiences and seem to encounter a sense of abstract vindication as they discuss together the otherness of women, the annoyance of the traditional educational system and human condition in the neglected districts of postcolonial London. Although both men are quite enthusiastic about their

conversations to the point of emotionally depending on them for mutual support, the awareness of their lack of relevance is always present:

No, Cable Street for us is a place to come to remind us that other people are suffering life when most of London seems dead. It is, too, a place for outcasts, misfits, where we feel something in common, however else we differ. Mostly we talk about women: and mostly about this cow Janine who's done Terry down, as Jenny did me down. This is the chief bond between us: as we have this need to talk and equally as we have this need to listen (...) And we talk about how education is so desperately old-fashioned, of such low productivity, and of the waste, (...) and of what we would ideally do in education. This breeds such frustration in us that in revolt, in desperation almost, we become like delinquent teachers in going to places like the Strasse and doing various other things (or thinking about doing them) which would blight our laughable teaching careers if they were known.

Anyway, we talk, we listen and watch, several nights a week.

(1964, 52)

Throughout the novel, Albert continuously dissects the joys and failures of his past relationship with Jenny, seeming more and more depressed with her rejection and finding himself incapable of understanding women – “I just can't justify women's ways to men. The lot of them beat me” (1964, 144). The lack of opportunities to work as an architect, his true calling, and his own lack of initiative also adds to Albert's inability to move past his disappointment and progress forward to a new state of mind and being – “Why don't you get up, you lazy sod? Today's the day you've been longing for, today you can work at your board, the one thing you really want to do, the one thing you can really do. Right then: arise and change. To live is to change. Put some jazz on. To wake up to. And then crap” (1964, 106). As a teacher, Albert's relationship and interaction with his students deteriorates as the novel advances, developing from a controlled yet comfortable hand over his classes to the resort to violence and increased sense of resentment towards his pupils (and vice-versa) that Albert is unable to manage – “I was giving a bloody brilliant lesson on architecture (...) and the bastards still weren't paying attention and still mucked about, and I lost my temper and said they were a lot of peasants (...) I could feel the resentment in the room” (1964, 149).

Having to perform a job he is not passionate about in an instituted educational system he does not understand or respect, Albert's spirits spiral down as the novel progresses. From the Prologue, through the Exposition and the Development, until reaching Disintegration, Albert's mood becomes darker and more depressive as he is unable to handle his inadequacy and feelings

of dissatisfaction. Incapable of creating new ties or developing new relationships, embittered and obsessed with his past, Albert becomes compliant with and participant in the abuses of the same instituted system he first resented, something that ultimately will be responsible for his demise - “Stupid truculence. Have to hit him now. / All violence rebounds on society. He’ll take it out on another kid. Or on something. / But what hurt did I just now pass on? It must stop somewhere, but why with me? (...) Nor can I, for that matter.” (1964, 70/71).

1.2 An Assembly Line of Meaning

Through the use of typographical disruptive agents, not commonly applied in the novel form, and the adoption of various perspectives, Johnson gives substance to his “small voice”, by infusing the pages of *Albert Angelo* with a breath of authenticity while providing his readers with a fragmented but more accurate account of Albert’s attempts to understand himself and the world around him, as he is in a transitional phase of his life. According to David James, in his article “The (W)hole Affect: Creative Reading and Typographic Immersion in *Albert Angelo*”, through “pursuing the efficacy of typographic devices for conveying the subjectivity” of his voice “Johnson deemed that certain visual devices could intensify his reader’s sense of involvement in the events unfolding” (33). Johnson’s *Albert Angelo* is endowed with typographic and bibliographic devices like holes cut in the text that test readers’ awareness of the events, parallel columns that account for the simultaneousness of real-time interaction between thought and action and different types of printed letter that illustrate and provide the narrative with meaning and dimension, among others.

During the course of the novel, the reader also becomes aware of the events taking place in Albert’s life through the use of different voices and more than one means of reporting speech or use of literary genre. He/ she is provided with first, second and third person accounts of the facts and with more than one writing genre, having to piece together all the voices and perspectives in order to form their interpretation of the events. Johnson’s use of unusual type-setting devices and perspective variations summon the readers to participate in the construction of the novel, as they are “compelled” to interpret not just the meaning of the words but also to compile the diversity of voices and perspectives at the same time as they give meaning to the compositional strategies chosen and implemented by the author. This renders it impossible for the reader to progress and fully understand the narrative of *Albert Angelo* without considering

the meanings being conveyed by the typographic and/ or bibliographic form chosen by the author.

The very process of traversing the textual field and making connections between typographic, bibliographic and narrative codes foregrounds the mediated and filtered nature of the information that readers get. As pointed out by James, according to Johnson, reading should be “an emphatic activity only insofar as it is also critically interactive, self-scrutinizing, foregoing all habits and predispositions” (27). Therefore the use of disruptive typographic devices and diversity of voices display Johnson’s objective to compel readers to abandon their comfort zone and preconceived routines of previous reading experiences and accept other means of conveying significance to the narrative. In *Aren’t You Rather Young to Be Writing Your Memoirs*, B. S. Johnson states that:

I want my ideas to be expressed so precisely that the very minimum of room for interpretation is left. Indeed I would go further and say that to the extent that a reader can impose his own imagination on my words, then the piece of writing is a failure. I want him to see my (vision), not something conjured out of his own imagination. How is he supposed to grow unless he will admit others’ ideas? If he wants to impose his imagination, let him write his own books. That may be thought to be anti-reader; but think a little bit further, and what I am really doing is challenging the reader to prove his own existence as palpably as I am proving mine in the act of writing.

(1973, 28)

Therefore, Johnson does not aim to antagonise the readers through the enforcement of his vision and the restriction of theirs, his purpose is to make his readers see beyond, as James calls attention to, “the cognitive roles they assume when reading narrative fiction, coercing them to scrutinize interpretation itself as a provisional practice replete with cherished methodological habits”. James proceeds by saying that B. S. Johnson’s “strategies for contesting the critical tendencies of his readers offer not so much a prescription than a request” (28). Johnson’s use of off-base typographical strategies and voice, record and genre diversity in *Albert Angelo* have the purpose of presenting a test, but not one with the objective of subduing his readers to his perceptions but of encouraging them to “think a bit further”, broaden their horizons and learn to include other perspectives and ideas in their own, thus growing as individuals inside and outside the literary experience. By accepting B. S. Johnson’s challenge, in *Albert Angelo*, the reader then assumes a part in the interpretative assembling process that allows the novel to be fully constructed.

Though resolute in asserting the rule of his imagery over any other, Johnson consequently recognizes that “each reader brings to each word his own however slightly different idiosyncratic meaning” (1964, 170). Therefore, the need to assemble *Albert Angelo*’s plot pieces in order to build a narrative display not only the author and reader’s substance and importance in the narrative and interpretive process but also give way to the realisation that form becomes an explicit content of the narrative, or in this instance, of the same literary procedure – “form should be exposed, should be honestly exposed” (1964, 81). The perception of this significance allows the conception of a more complex and nuanced narrative that encapsulates the experiences of the different parts and agents that constitute it.

1.3 Page – a medium of artistic expression

Johnson epitomises the page as the canvas in which he is able to organise all the devices and tools he believes will help him express the meanings he aspires to. As he states, the “page is an area on which I place any signs I consider to communicate most nearly what I have to convey” (1964, 176). In *Albert Angelo*, B. S. Johnson uses the page layout to convey the contrast between Albert’s exterior and interior voices, while he calls the register of his class in actual time.

* The quotations presented inside a box intend to call attention to the page layout or typographic device being analysed.

“Now the boys. Christopher Arbor.”

“Yerp!”

“David Bufton.”

“Yerp, Sir.”

“Alan Burdick.”

“Yer-r-r-r-r-p!”

“Look, the next boy who tries to be funny while I’m calling the register is going to regret it. Georgiou Con-stantenou.”

“Yes, sir.”

You look hard at him. You decide to let him get away with it this time.

“James Day. James Day?”

“James Day seems away.”

“Owen Evans.”

“Here, sir.”

You will risk a joke.

Good, they laughed a little.

(1964, 35/36)

The representation of Albert’s interior voice on the page is then achieved through the use of a column that is placed parallel to the real time exchanges between him and his students, with Albert’s inner reaction standing slightly below the direct speech that caused it, in italics. This possibility to glimpse into Albert’s inner thoughts given by the optimization of the page layout provides the readers with a better understanding of how the character feels, thinks and makes decisions during a real time interaction with others – “You will risk a joke”; “Good, they laughed a little”. B. S. Johnson also adopts textual gaps with particular characterising purposes on his page composition, as it happens in:

I feel tired. Breathe deeply, good, yes, sleep for half an hour, then awake refreshed, work like hell, yes.

Pollard. The White Goddess, Mies, my books, aaah...

Hell! What time is it? Seven! You bloody fool! Guilt.

Guilt.

Close the window. Specks of smut on my drawings, hell,

London smut. Smuts. Still.

(1964, 119)

In this instance, the gap depicts Albert’s loss of consciousness while he dozes off and precedes the subsequent and abrupt awakening as he slept beyond what he had planned. Through representing the passage of the time lost by Albert, this gap also materializes on the page Albert’s inability to commit and actively pursue the objectives he has set for himself. Further along the page, another gap is used in:

Three lines. It's not nothing, exactly. Not exactly
nothing.

Perhaps Terry will call this evening. Then that will take
care of another day, send another lousy frittered day about
its miserable business. Yes, I'll phone him, in a minute, yes.

Yes.

Guilt.

Three lines....

* * * * *

(1964, 119)

Here, the textual gap gives way to the character's regret for falling asleep and losing the opportunity to work on his own projects as he so much looks forward to. The gap, together with the one/two word paragraphs and the use of four dots that precede it, can then be seen as depicting Albert's progressive immersion into a state of apathy caused by the bitter remorse of his own lack of action. Therefore, through the use of these devices, B. S. Johnson sets the page to serve a more organic and unusual form of character description and interpretation of the events taking place that goes beyond the conventional mechanisms of the traditional novel format since meaning is not immediately provided but needs to be ascertained by the readers.

Throughout the novel, Johnson then transforms the page into the physical manifestation of his imagery, making it reflect and complement his intentions for the literary world he wants to create. The page, with its full array of typographical and design possibilities, should then be understood as the material support and replication of Johnson's literary ingenuity. The conversion of the page into the reflection of the author's mind, forces the Johnson's reader to, as has been mentioned, "prove his own existence" since the objective embodiment of his imagination in which Johnson has transformed the page requires a deciphering/ interpreting agent in order to become real.

However, at the same time that B. S. Johnson is empowering the reader's presence, through the mise-en-page or typographical choices, he is also "as palpably (...) proving" his "in the act of writing" (Johnson, *Aren't You Rather Young to Be Writing Your Memoirs?*, 1973, 28). The same elements that engage the reader's interaction with the novel, simultaneously prove to be the author's ultimate defence against outside disruptions of his plans for the story he wants to tell. Consequently, the page works as a boundary that looks to limit interpretative creativity as readers can only interpret what the configuration of the page will allow them and any extrapolation that disregards it will not be sustained as viable. As James points out, "Johnson alerts his readers to their sentient transference with the printed page that embodies the very appeal that it voices, both occasioning and advertising the successful end-result of an author remaining in 'command'" (34).

1.4 Typography

According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*³, in its definition of the concept, typography relates to "the design, or selection, of letter forms to be organized into words and sentences to be disposed in blocks of type as printing upon a page". Considering this, typography can then be defined as the style or appearance of a text. In his handling of typographical devices, B. S. Johnson takes this definition and expands it not only to the art of working with text but also to the notion that typography can be a form of complementing the meanings expressed by the author's words. This way, Johnson endows type-setting strategies with the ability of graphically representing his intentions for the story he creates. As Johnson states, in *Albert Angelo*, "every device and technique of the printer's art should be at the command of the writer (...) to dismiss such techniques as gimmicks, or to refuse to take them seriously, is crassly to miss the point." (1964, 175/6). Through Johnson's understanding of the value of typography, the typographical system and all its devices are transformed into the author's ally in the narrative and interpretation process instead of being seen as a mere stylistic instrument.

1.4.1 Italics

The italic type is a cursive font characterised for slanting slightly to the right. It is a typographic method that identifies words and phrases that are used in a different way from the usual standard

³ <https://www.britannica.com/technology/typography/Introduction>, accessed on 1st March 2018

and due to it are highlighted from the rest of the text. In *Albert Angelo*, B. S. Johnson uses italics to introduce the speakers in a dialogue, like the one between Albert and his housemates, when they first meet. In this instance, the adoption of italics focuses the reader's attention not only on the direct speech being produced but also on the frequency with which each of the speakers takes part in the dialogue as well as on how much they speak during the conversation. The succession of introductions in italics illustrates an engaged dialogue between Joseph, Luke and Albert, without interruptions as the conversation progresses with a balanced participation by all speakers. By adopting a typographic convention from the type-setting of plays, B. S. Johnson highlights the theatricality of the verbal exchanges as the focus is placed on the turn-taking of the characters and not only on what they are saying.

Joseph said: All through the bloody night, too.
Albert said: He was certainly unusual...eccentric....
Luke said: Eccentric! He was bleeding round the twist,
mate, straight round the twist, no doubt about
that!
Joseph said: I got used to it.
Luke said: Well, I wouldn't have got used to it. Bleeding
groaning and saying his prayers with beads
– and the music he used to play!
Joseph said: I liked it, I liked it. I didn't understand it,
but I liked it.
Albert said: Well, I shan't make a lot of noise. I like quiet.
I spend a lot of time working at a drawing-
board.
(...)
Luke said: Won't anyone ever build your building, then?
Albert said: Oh, yes, one day they'll all be built, I know.
Joseph said: When you're dead, like.
Luke said: Like poets, after they're dead.
Albert said: Like poets, just. (1964,12/13)

In a similar way, Johnson's choice of italics as the typographical method for the representation of Albert's interior voice is done with the purpose of allowing the reader to immediately distinguish between Albert's interactions with his students and the inner considerations and reactions that these generate in him.

“Roger Lord.”

“Present.”

“Eray Mustapha.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Eray? Which one’s Eray? Can You
understand any
more English, Eray?”

“Yes, sir.”

*Accent like any other North Londoner’s. Must
have been born here.*

“Good. John Nash.”

*John Nash and Regent
Street and the Quadrant and
All Souls’ and the Prince
Regent and the Haymarket
Theatre and bits of Buck-
ingham Palace, you think,
John Nash.”*

“Yes, sir.”

(1964, 36)

I asked you a question!

Did you hear me say 'no
talking'?

---No, but I w ... oh!

You ent spoused to 'it kids on
the 'ead!

*All violence rebounds on
society. He'll take it out on
another kid. Or on some-
thing.*

Just go and sit down
and don't let me hear an-
other word from you unless
I ask for it. And what's your
name?

---Langley.

Langley.

	<p><i>But what kind of hurt did I just now pass on? It must stop somewhere, but why with me? Or is it there a constant quantity of violence in the world, continually circulating?</i></p> <p>(1964, 70)</p>
<p>And you can do it without talking!</p> <p>---Mr Albert, I need a new roughbook.</p>	<p><i>How I hate this perpetual nagging. Ninety percent of teaching is nagging. Someone won't have a pencil.</i></p> <p><i>Thick, virginal, sensuous pile of new hooks. A small pleasure.</i></p> <p>(1964, 74)</p>

Italics are also used by Johnson to provide a glimpse into Albert's inner thoughts during one of his outings with Terry.

(...) Saw whole row of milk bottles. Did not pick them up --- luckily, for policeman just farther on talking to drunk leaning over the wall. Went on. Suddenly had an epiphany on sight of the roofline (*it hit me, it hit me: someone, some people, some humankind, had thought about that roofline, had conceived it; it wasn't brilliant, or graceful, it was just of humankind, man's, sweated from his conscious*) and stopped to write it down. (1964, 152)

In this instance, Johnson opted to insert Albert's reflection inside his description of the night events, with the distinction between these two dimensions being made through the use of brackets and italics in which his thought is represented. Albert's "epiphany" is then distinct from the rest of the narrative being made due to the type of font used by the author so that the reader can immediately identify it because of previous uses in the novel with the same purpose. Thus, the consistent use of similar typographic choices allows them to function with specific narrative and rhetorical functions which become recognizable for readers. While addressing his pupils about the meaning and significance of the human condition, certain words and

expressions of Albert's exposition/monologue are also presented in italics as to represent the emphasis given to them and their meaning. In this case, B. S. Johnson uses italics in a way that may be understood as being the printed equivalent of stress in oral speech.

Can such a God be called good, then, can such a God be called the God of *love*? Perhaps only when he is being good, perhaps only when he is being loving?

You have told, too, that he is a God who knows everything: *omniscient* is the word we use to mean 'knows everything', *om-ni-sci-ent*, it's a Latin word. I'll put it on the board. But does God Know everything? *Everything*? Does he really? (1964, 55)

You cannot, I cannot, no one can *know*, truly *know*, the answers to these questions. (...) being human as you all are means that you are in this 'awkward fix' of enjoying the good things whilst at the same time having to suffer the bad things, whether or not anyone or any God created it. *Whether or not*, remember, whether or not.

Faced with this human situation, then, what do you do? What can you do? The main thing is to behave with dignity, dignity, human dignity is your greater refuge, your greatest comfort. *Accept* the human condition (...). (1964, 56)

Commonly used to represent titles of works, including works of art, italics is also used in the representation of the name of Albert and Jenny's joint architectural creation done during their romantic retreat. The couple's design draws inspiration in a Frank Lloyd Wright's famous work, also put in italics. Both titles are contrary both in the references they evoke ("Falling" versus "Above") and in the recognition (or not, in the case of Albert and Jenny) that their creators have earned for their work. However, the fact that both titles are put in italics ends up, through typographical ingenuity, by physically placing them in the same category, illustrating on the page the characters' unrealistic aspirations towards their creation and their own abilities as designers – "They had designed and drawn a house to be built for them over this stream, founded on the gneiss, inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright but more beautiful than his *Falling Water*, they had thought, and they had called it *Above the Fault*." (1964, 60).

1.4.2 ALL CAPITALS

In type-setting, all capitals ("all caps" for short) refers to a font in which all letters are capital letters and it is normally used to highlight a word or phrase. The use of short sequences of words in capital letters provide a sense of a more assertive and "louder" tone than mixed case, being

considered as the printed equivalent of “shouting”. It is this assertive and “louder” tone provided by the use of all capitals that B. S. Johnson transmits when he represents Albert’s exasperation with his students. This way of ventilating Albert’s frustration occurs in both his outer and inner expressions.

Well, Jeanette Parsons
and Lily Stanley, I shall re-
port this affair to the Head-
master.

---Ooooh, I’m frightened!

Just SHUP UP!
Now, has everyone
looked at the piece of gneiss,
the stone I sent round?
Who’s got ...who has it at
the moment?

(1964, 90)

Oh? Well, in that case I
may be here a week or more
then. Anyway, I’ll see you
tomorrow or the next time
you’re due to have me

Oh, god, the thought!

---Yes, sir. Thank you, Mr.
Albert, sir.

*Now, make sure my pen’s
not on the floor. Or any-
where else. No. One final
look on the table. I didn’t
leave it in the book, did I –
Oh! Fuck! No, fuck the bas-
tards, they’re spattered it
with ink! They’ve befouled
my Frank! Oh, no, no, no!
NO!*

(1964, 99)

A message sent by a student's mother to Albert is also presented in all capitals, graphically depicting the aggressive and threatening tone of the text originated by Albert's refusal to give permission to the student to go to the bathroom.

(...)
ATTENTION! MR ALBERT!
(...)
PLEASE SEE THAT THIS DOES NOT OCCUR
AGAIN ----
I DON'T APPRECIATE THIS ATTITUDE
(...)
YOUS FAITHFULLY
J.PROBBIT (MRS).

(1964, 100)

The violence of the mother's reaction is also intensified by the simultaneous use of the capital letters together with the exclamation marks that accompany them. Another representation of the feeling of hostility existing towards Albert using capital letters occurs in the compositions written by Albert's students about him. The all capitals font amplifies not only the students' low opinion of Albert but also the aggressiveness they feel towards him.

MR ALBERT HAS A POOR OUTLOOK TOWARDS US, CALLING US PEASANTS AND OTHER
INSULTING NAMES OF WHICH WE WOULD LIKE TO CONTRADICT, IN OTHER WORDS TO
CALL HIM A LIAR!
(...)
IN SCHOOL MR ALBERT IS AN AUTHENTIC NIT.
Yours sincerely
AN ADMIRER

(1964, 155)

9 lessons out of ten he gives writing.
I think he is a fat, porky selfish drip.
AND HOW!!!!!!!!!! (...)
Slobbery Jew you fat fomf you soppo rabbi, you are a dog. ON THE WHOLE YOUR STUPID AND
YOU ARE A FAT FOMF OXEN NIT LOLOP RABBI FART-FACE.

(1964, 161-162)

Albert's interactions with people in the pub or the market are also presented using an all capitals font.

(...) one cannot choose too carefully the guvnor of one's pub.

Anyone I know here? Yes, several by sight, one by name, that's how it is. Ah, you know you're a regular when they pull your usual without your having to ask.

THANKS, SID.

A pro in the public, at lunchtime, too. (1964, 112)

---BOTH HE AND HIS WIFE WERE MARRIED, Y'KNOW.

That forerib of beef looks marvellous. And the ham.

SID, I'LL HAVE A BEEF ROLL, PLEASE.

---ONION?

Do I want onion? Yes, lovely raw crisp onion with lovely raw underdone forerib of beef.

YES PLEASE, SID. HEARD ANY GOOD STORIES LATELY? (1964, 114)

---WHAT YOU HAVING, JOHN?

THAT'S NICE OF YOU. BITTER PLEASE.

My name's not John, but I'll do, it's okay, for a pub name, John. (1964,

115)

Out into---it's full, of people, stalls, cabbage, boxes, purple packingpaper, bruised fruit---my Chap.

That brisket looks good. Buy some. Yes. Protein to do something to the beer.

QUARTER OF SCOTCH BRISKET, PLEASE.

Lovely, lean can't wait to eat it, go down by canal then, yes. (1964, 116)

However, the adoption of the all capitals font in Albert's public interactions outside of the school environment does not convey the same idea of animosity seen in the previous instances. In this context, the capital letters depict the need of the participants to speak louder due to the noisy atmosphere that typically characterises these places. Considering Albert's affable behaviour, it is viable to contemplate that Johnson's use of all capitals font in this context looks to graphically transmit the extent to which Albert feels pleasure and comfort in these interactions with the general public (particularly at the pub).

Nonetheless, Johnson returns aggressiveness to "all caps" in the moment he decides to tear off the veil of narrative and reveal himself to the reader as the author/ narrator of the narrative being read – "OH, FUCK ALL THIS LYING!" (1964, 163).

1.4.3 Underlined

To underline is to place a horizontal line immediately below a portion of writing. Single and occasionally double underlining is used in hand-written or typewritten documents as a way of highlighting important text. In the transcripts of the compositions written by Albert's students at his request about what they thought and felt about him, some words or phrases appear underlined.

English

I think Mr Albert on the whole is a good teacher and I have learned a lot with him. But at times he runs round the class like a maniac, and clumps anyone in range of his hand (...). (1964, 155)

Mr ALBERT (...) when he calls me nams his all fat and no bone he has a Bannor nose, and we know he can't play the Panio, sometimes he says he 7000 years old and sometimes he says he 1400 old. I feel sorry for Mr. Albert because we all knows he is Round the Bend (...). (1964, 158)

(...) by som of the Boy's Mick Norm Anglei and mayself (1964, 158)

What I think of Mr. Alburt (SNOTY-NOSE)

(...) And yesterday when he was going out of the door a number of us started cheering, so he immediately hit all the boys, but I saw two girls cheering also. But if you told him he would say shut up and go away (...)
(...) And when he plays other sort of music he goes all funny and starts whistling, and makes out he's a conductor, LIKE A BIG FAT OVER-FED NITT. (1964, 159/160)

In this context, the underlining would appear to be similar to the one done by teachers when correcting students spelling or sentence construction. This way, it is possible to assume that the underlining present is done by Albert while reading and correcting his students' pieces of writing. However, the syntax and spelling mistakes that occur in the compositions are not underlined (with the exception of "mayself"), contrary to what would be expected in these texts that are in some cases full of them. Thus, it is possible to infer that the writing underlined refers to elements that are significant for Albert in a way that goes beyond his role as a teacher. The words "maniac" and "old" are double underlined while the word "mayself" and the phrases "but I saw two girls cheering" and "like a big fat over-fed nitt" are only underlined once. This

difference in number may reproduce a difference in the impact that these words and phrases have on Albert, with the double underlined words causing a bigger impression and probably leading to a greater reflection from Albert's part. The words and phrases highlighted by Albert refer to on one hand how he is personally and physically seen by his students but on the other they also seem to reflect Albert's own self-awareness. This inference can be supported by the association of the word "maysself" (myself) to the rest of the underlined pieces of writing. Supporting this idea that the underlining may mirror Albert's own self-regard are remarks made by him previously. For example, earlier in the novel, Albert had already noted how odd it was for him to see himself as an adult – "I still find it strange to think of myself as a man, as a boy no longer, even at twenty-eight; as when some kid at school says That man, and I think Who? And then realise he means me, and am still surprised." (1964, 118). Likewise, the double underlining of the adjective "maniac" may hint at some consideration from Albert's part about his own behaviour that during a class could shift from obsessive day dreaming about Jenny (the ex-girlfriend that left him for another man) to violent outbursts against his students:

Ah, Jenny, oh god, god, god! My love, that's it, my love, you can never go back, that high, yet how I miss it! The love! Singular, only, only one, the love, the love. Not so much her, jenny, but the love, for there were- were there? –bad things- weren't there?-about her I don't miss. But do I, were they part of the love? They must have been, yes, all part of the love, part of the pain and the pleasure and the joy, the joyous in the rain. And the suffering... (1964, 88)

I shall belt that bastard as hard as I can round the ear. Enjoyably. (1964, 93)

The highlight given to the phrase "but I saw two girls cheering" may mirror Albert's acknowledgement that he treats female students differently from male and this causes him to be unfair. This fact may originate from Albert's inability to understand and/or interact with women, particularly after the failure of his previous relationship, as he mentions before in conversation with Joseph:

Albert said: (...) I just can't justify women's ways to men. The lot of them beat me. Like these birds at school, that I was telling you about just now before I got sidetracked. They come up to me after lunch - them seem to run a lunchtime brothel somewhere – and I can smell it, mate, smell it. They've just had it off somewhere. And they come and stand at my desk as close as possible, probably thinking I know nothing about it or something. Or

seeing if I do, and have got the guts to say something. It's enough to drive you round the twist. (...)

Albert said: It's all connected with Jenny, and therefore with the whole of myself, everything I am.
(1964, 144/145)

This difference in treatment is also clear in the compositions written by Albert's students.

Mr Albert

(...) he goes around hitting people for nothing he only hits the boys so I'm glad I'm not a boy.

He is very morbid and gross and he thinks everybody is seducing him. (...)

Mr Albert

(...) Any way think mr Alburt is nice other wise but think he must not keep on punching the boys on the head for nothing some time the girls need one as well as the boys (1964, 156)

Regarding the comments on Albert's size and appetite, the readers had already been made aware of these through Jenny's first impressions of Albert and the character's own remarks on how his great appreciation of food made him feel guilty and might not be appropriate, particularly for someone with a public job.

That brisket looks good. Buy some. Yes. Protein to do something to the beer. (...)
That's the trouble with being a teacher, you're always afraid someone's going to catch you doing something unteacherly. Didn't I see you in Vincent Terrace by the canal railings, eating a quarter of Scotch brisket? Do it surreptitiously, then, guilty, quickly, bolt it. But it's great, all the same, succulent, yes, succulent is the word I was wanting. (1964, 116/117)

The underlining done of the reference to Albert's body size and appetite made in the phrase "like a big fat over-fed nitt" seems to hint at feelings of inadequacy and guilt from the character due to his bigness. Through using graphic underlining, B. S. Johnson gives his readers the possibility to deduce how the students' comments affect Albert, displaying the portions of text that he considers significant enough to underline while reading. However, this understanding is only possible when considering the events described before the moment during which Albert

reads the compositions. Once again, this strategy forces the readers to interpret the pieces that constitute the novel in order to derive meaning from the graphic tools used by Johnson. Thus, the underlining done by Albert may provide the readers with the notion of what the character considers significant in the opinion of others about him and how this makes him reflect about himself.

1.4.4 Alien-ating Spelling

The mother from one of Albert's female students writes a note to Albert, complaining about the fact that Albert refused her daughter's request to leave the classroom to go to the toilet. The mother's tone is aggressive and graphically represented through the use of all capital letters, implying that she is probably shouting at Albert. Albert replies to the mother's note with an extract from the medical compendium *A System of Anatomy and Physiology: From the Latest and Best Authors as Nearly as the Nature of the Work Would Admit, in the Order of the Lectures delivered by the Professor of Anatomy in the University of Edinburgh*, volume III, page 11, from 1787, in which the reason for the existence of menstruation is considered. In the extract chosen, the "peculiar" monthly bleeding is discussed by considering the effects of the moon, the probability of the existence of "any sharp ferment seated in the uterus or its parts" or how influential sexual desire is. When transcribing the extract from the medical compendium, Albert maintains the representation of the voiceless palato-alveolar fricative - ʃ - as in the original text:

"Since none but the human ʃpecies are properly ʃubject to this menʃtrual flux of blood (although there are ſome animals who, at the time of their vernal copulation, diſtil a ſmall quantity of blood from their genitals), and ſince the body of the male is always free from the like diſcharge, it has been a great inquiry in all ages, what ſhould be the cauſe of this ſanguine excretion peculiar to the fair ſex? (...) where there are none but mild mucous juices, and where venery, which expels all thoſe juices, neither increaſes nor leſſens the menʃtrual flux; and women deny that, during the time of their menſes, they any increaſed deſire of venery (...)." (1964, 100/101)

Albert then answers the woman's complaint by using a piece of writing that is unfamiliar in meaning and form to her (considering Albert's students social and academic excluded background) and that defines women's biological characteristics as strange and incomprehensible. From the union between the choice of content in the reply, which depicts women as possessing an almost alien like nature in comparison to men, and the maintenance of

the original writing the reader is able to infer Albert's prejudice and arrogance, particularly, for the protest addressed by the student's mother and, generally, for his opposite gender.

1.4.5 Symbols

According to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, a symbol may be defined as “a communication element intended to simply represent or stand for a complex of person, object, group, or idea”⁴. One of the ways of representing a symbol is graphically, “as in the cross for Christianity and the Red Cross or Crescent for the life-preserving agencies of Christian and Islamic countries”. Symbols are also among the typographical devices used by B. S. Johnson in *Albert Angelo* with the objective of transmitting or complementing a particular intention that he as author has for his readers.

1.4.5.1 Set of five six pointed asterisks * * * * *

An asterisk is a typographical symbol that earns its name from its resemblance to the traditional representation of a star. In type-setting, asterisks are used to indicate footnotes or as an alternative to indicate the items of a list. In *Albert Angelo*, B. S. Johnson uses sets of five six pointed asterisks to at the same time end and introduce a section in the Exposition and Development parts of the novel.

But there are kippers and hot rolls and English butter and fancy cream cakes. She is being good to me, my mother. I do not know whether it is because she wants to make me feel welcome after missing me or because she wants to make me regret leaving home.

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

* * * * *

You have a phone call from them sometimes, but usually you have to go to the office and wait until someone wants you.

You have a phone call from them this first morning. The woman at the office gives you directions to the school, and you look it up in your *A to Z* to make quite sure. You put in a briefcase those textbooks experience has suggested will cover most of the subjects you are likely to be required to teach. (1964, 27/28)

⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/symbol>, accessed on 1st March 2018

The repetition of the same set of symbols to begin and finish each section creates between the author and the reader an implicit understanding of how the novel is organised and of what to expect after its use – a new piece recreating an experience lived by Albert.

1.4.5.2 Swords pointing upward ✂

Despite the prevailing romantic obsession with Jenny and their failed relationship, Albert develops an attraction for the Physical Education teacher, Marlene Crossthwaite. According to him, Albert's interest is enticed by Marlene but in the end refused to be fulfilled by her. The denial of Albert's sexual intentions causes him to feel frustrated and resentful, lashing out at Marlene, despite continuing to fantasize about her and her particular physical features.

What a cow she is, staying after the others to make it look as though she as sleeping with me, and then not having any. (...) But a cow: I don't mind anyone suspecting I have women here, but it must be with absolute cause. (...)

Ah, why do I lust after Marlene? (...) It's her big tits, her lovely big tits, that's what I lust after, in the first place, anyway, oh let me rest my weary hands on your lovely big tits, Miss Crossthwaite, P.E. mistress, ours from Yorkshire, y'know. (...)

I shall continue to admire, my dear Miss Crossthwaite, your astonishingly big tits, but from well out of armsreach, the while frustrating myself with phantasies. (...) and farewell, Miss Crossthwaite of monumental mammaries, other hands shall know thee, never these.

(1964, 104-105)

The grievance caused by Miss Crossthwaite's refusal leads to the development of a confrontational attitude from Albert's part regarding his colleague. Johnson illustrates this tension between these two characters by using a minute format. This format appears to depict an interaction between Albert and Marlene Crossthwaite occurring during a school meeting, in which Miss Crossthwaite is in favour of the Proposition presented while Albert is against it. The Proposition presented on the statement regards the topic "That These Children's Speech is Bad". If the other meaning of the word "Proposition" - offering to have sexual relations - is considered, then it is possible to infer that the situation represented through the minute format is a hint at the episode that caused Albert's grievance. However, contrary to what happened before, Miss Crossthwaite is not in control during the school meeting and Albert has his revenge by not only opposing her "proposition" but also by discrediting her. The participation of both the characters in this interaction is presented through the use of reported speech introduced by the

expressions in italics “Mr Albert said” and “Miss Crossthwaite said”. The introduction to the characters’ speech is preceded by a symbol of two crossed swords pointing upwards. Traditionally, the symbol of two crossed swords pointing upwards refers to conflict or to the desire for conflict while the symbol of two crossed swords pointing downwards represents peace or the end of conflict. Thus, Johnson’s choice for introduction symbol serves the purpose of graphically illustrating the opposition and tension felt by Albert towards his colleague while highlighting the sense of animosity.

✂ **Miss Crossthwaite** said that they all knew the speech of children at this school to be bad: every time one of them opened his or her mouth to speak the result was almost invariably hideous, an offence to the ears. Their speech was slovenly, like their personal habits.

✂ **Mr Albert** said that (...) Often the different sound produced by these children required more phonetic effort to produce (...) how then could such speech be described as 'slovenly'? The offence to Miss Crossthwaite’s lovely ears, Mr Albert suggested, came about because these children were not speaking as she spoke herself (...).

✂ **Miss Crossthwaite** was nevertheless convinced that she would still object when any child said 'ain't' in her hearing.

✂ **Mr Albert** said that (...) This was an example of the continual progression of sound changes in speech, in the face of which standardisation was quite ludicrous (...)

✂ **Miss Crossthwaite** said that the speech of the children of this school was bad and slovenly. (1964, 138/139)

Once again, Johnson uses all the strategies at his disposal to represent Albert’s emotions, complementing the interpretation that the readers can do of his words with the inferences they are able to draw from the symbols adopted.

1.4.5.3 Original markings

In order to introduce the physical descriptions of the people, particularly students, that Albert encounters, B. S. Johnson creates an original symbol that highlights the occurrence of the descriptive text and calls the reader’s attention to it. This strategy prevents the readers from losing the “picture” the author intends to create for his narrative:

“Five past eleven, sir,” a boy says. ↗ Potato face, potential boxer’s, wide eyes, retroussé nose, well black hair, blue pullover. ↵ (1964, 31)

All right, little one, come out here.
You did hear me say 'no talking',
didn't you?

↗ *Eyes narrowly, skin very white, hands just like
trotters and dirty, nicotine stained.* ↵

I asked you a question! Did you hear
me say 'no talking'? (1964, 70)

In *Aren't You Rather Young to Be Writing Your Memoirs*, B. S. Johnson notes that “(...) a specifically-designed type-character draws attention to physical description which I believe tends to be skipped, do not usually penetrate” (1973, 23). Preventing the readers from missing out on the full comprehension of the narrative by compelling them to assemble all the pieces of meaning put at their disposal is then Johnson’s purpose, as he states that “(...) though the reader obviously cannot read both at once, when he has read both he will have seen that they are simultaneous and have enacted such simultaneity for himself” (1973, 23).

1.5 Diversity

When assembling *Albert Angelo*, B. S. Johnson used a diverse array of “pieces” to form the narrative. Diverse voices, reporting styles and the inclusion of different genres come together to form a cohesive and coherent narrative of Albert’s experiences.

1.5.1 Viewpoints and Reports

Each fragment of the Exposition and Development of *Albert Angelo* uses a different viewpoint to present the events to which it refers to. These different viewpoints are obtained through the uses of first, second and third person (singular and plural) accounts.

I think I shall visit **my** parents every Saturday, as a rule, as a habit. Occasionally Sundays: instead, though not as well. But usually Saturdays, as a rule, as a habit almost. Yes. (1964, 19)

(...) **You** restrain **your** contempt for the union with difficulty.

“It’ll come, Albert, it’ll come,” he says. “Meanwhile-one floor up, at the end of the corridor right above the one we came along.

You are glad he is gone. **You** smile and look at the class. (1964, 31)

(...) **He** walked with **her**, **she** walked with him, along Piccadilly, (...) where **he** would have kissed **her**, there in the wine dark shadows beneath the groined arches before **they** turned out through the garage into Villiers Street, but for **his** need to do so anti-romantically, to prove it, the romance, the love. (1964, 49)

(...) So there **we** sit, Terry and I, in this eighteenth-century cellar, while the smart hairy Cypriot boys preen and look arrogantly in the mirrors, Londoners like **us**.

And **we** talk, talk, talk, talk, talk. As though it could make some difference. (1964, 54)

(...) **They** had spent six days at this place, which had no name on **their** maps: but **they** had called it Balgy, for no reason other than that it had come to **them**, Balgy. (1964, 59)

B.S Johnson also uses more than one form of reporting speech, throughout the novel:

Reported Speech: (...) Mr Albert said that while in his childhood 'ain't' was common, this usage had now shifted to 'ent' in London. (1964, 139)

Direct Speech: 'You're too tense, all of you,' she says. 'Relax, look, go floppy, like this, go floppy.' (1964, 148)

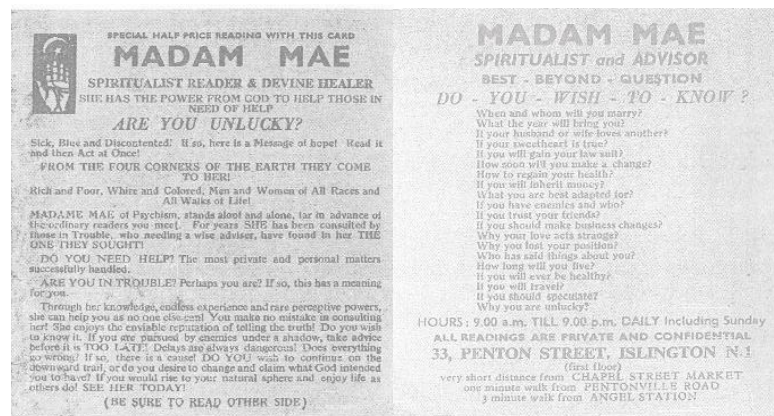
Along with these more traditional ways of reporting speech, Johnson also introduces other alternative forms of reporting speech, like in:

While we stood outside, pro passed and was in a scuffle. Police van immediately drew up, six or eight coppers got out and shoved someone in; negro. Pro shouting He tried to roll me! Take him in! I won't let any one roll me! Saw Terry and me and warned us against trying to roll her, as well. (1964, 151)

Here it is possible to see the author integrating reported and direct speech together in “Pro shouting He tried to roll me! Take him in! I won't let any one roll me!” This combination of both forms of reporting speech provides a more vivid and closer to reality account of the events, as if the readers are present there with Albert and Terry and the events are being explained to them in real-time. The assembling of the different viewpoints and forms of report supplies *Albert Angelo* with a density that leads its readers through an intricate network of perspectives

until they are able to form their own perception of the story being told. According to Tew, the “very technical complexity of the novel’s form renders more than a naturalistic account”, with its diverse viewpoints offering readers “a broader intersection with (the) everyday realities of (...) existence”. Tew also points out that, through the “many variations and perspectives” present in *Albert Angelo*, “London (the setting of the novel) is narrowed to the mundane consciousness of various intersubjectivities rather than any grand narrative” (2002, 24), giving its readers a more truth like and comprehensive description of the experiences being narrated. As noted by Coe, “the variety of styles, voices and techniques are recognizably part of (Johnson’s) lucid attempt to capture the multifaceted nature of empirical reality” (18). Most frequently, people only have access to their own limited and biased viewpoints that in turn restrict the understanding of their collective and interpersonal experiences. Ideally, the assembling and acceptance of different perspectives would create a more accurate comprehension of the reality of events and people. *Albert Angelo*’s apparent fragmented narrative provides its readers with the ability to literarily achieve this comprehension as the novel progresses and more viewpoints are introduced and interpreted. Therefore, the diverse nature of *Albert Angelo* appears not only to mimic the multiplicity of real life experience but also to go beyond it. As Johnson points out, his “aim is didactic: the novel must be a vehicle for conveying truth” (1964, 175/6).

1.5.2 Madam Mae



Johnson inserts in the narrative the business card from the spiritualist reader and “devine” healer Madam Mae, apparently found by Albert after his wanderings through the Chapel Street Market (1964, 120/121). The card announces that those in “NEED” or “IN TROUBLE” have found in Madam Mae “THE ONE THEY SOUGHT” as “through her knowledge, endless experience

and rare perceptive powers, she can help (...) as no one else can". The text proceeds by questioning if its reader wishes "to continue on the downward trail" or desires "to change and claim what God intended you have? If you would rise to your natural sphere and enjoy life as others! SEE HER TODAY!" On the back side of the card, a list of the questions Madam Mae is able to answer ranges from "When and whom will you marry?", "Is your sweetheart true?" to "Who has said things about you?" or "Why are you unhappy?" With the information regarding the opening hours and the location of Madam Mae's office, the card promises that "ALL READINGS ARE PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL!" As it happens with the compositions written by Albert's students, the reader has access to the same perspective as the character. In the case of the spiritualist's card, there is no form of highlighting that suggests any particular focus from Albert's part so it is possible to assume that the whole card was particularly significant for Albert, otherwise it would not have been introduced in the novel. Taking into account Albert's difficulty to overcome his romantic failures, his professional frustration, his feelings of physical inadequacy and social inaptitude, it is viable to consider that Albert reads the card and reflects about how this spiritualist could or not be the solution for all his "TROUBLE" and the answer for "everything" that is "wrong" with his life. Johnson does not provide the readers with the information if Albert visited or not Madam Mae's office but the insertion of the card and the inference of Albert's consideration about it supplies them with the notion that Albert may have pondered that possibility. Johnson's readers can interpret from this perception the character's naivety, narcissism or even desperation for considering this possibility. In any of these cases, the inclusion of this graphic element provides another opportunity to glimpse into the inner workings of Albert's brain, expanding the character's characterization beyond the traditional novel methods at the same time it provides the narrative with a sense of "authenticity" as the it perfectly mimics (real) cards of this type to the extreme of displaying their characteristic syntax and spelling mistakes.

1.5.3 "An Eye for" Poetry

After Albert's sword yielding confrontation with Miss Crossthwaite, the set of five six-pointed asterisks introduces a poem entitled *An Eye for Place*, written by Albert, depicting his romantic experience with Jenny. The poem is very clear in its representation of Albert's ongoing fixation with his failed relationship.

"its certain books you held gaining almost
the character of relics with your leaving;

and the sweet residual reminder of its bed
as I entered it again at night alone”

(...)

“my terror of loss, as, dead in sleep,
you spurned my tenderness:
yet, waking, made sweet recompense
in reassurance”

(1964, 140-141)

Commonly seen as a form of expression of emotions, Johnson’s addition of Albert’s poem hints, once again, to the possibility of providing the readers with one more perspective on the character’s feelings and emotional state. The introduction of the poem is then able to supply the reader with the dimension of how Albert’s experience with Jenny had a profound impact on his emotional self and how deranged the failure of the relationship left Albert. This sense of disconcert is verified in the insertion of Albert’s inner thought (in italics) that interrupts his poetic composition to admonish himself for his obsessive and self-destructive behaviour:

Who never

Knew and hated man.

To make and why do I run my mind up and down the honed edge of memory so constantly hold my brain to the while these shoes did not know her since then I have worn out two and partially a third pair of shoes...

(1964, 142)

1.6 The h□le of the matter

As seen until now, B. S. Johnson infused *Albert Angelo* with several disruptive formal agents whose objective is to complement and expand the meanings intended for the narrative. In *Albert Angelo*, the most notorious of these off-base elements is the rectangular hole cut in the text through pages 147 and 149. The hole allows the readers to glimpse into an extract regarding an event depicted on page 151. As Tew points out “the proleptic holes cut (...) appear to offer a reading of the future, as a textual segment that can be anticipated”. He proceeds by explaining the effects that the holes cause in the readers perception of the events:

On its first encounter after a sectional division, one reads “struggled to take back the knife, and inflicted on him a mortal wound above his right (the balde penetrating to a depth of two inches) from which he died instantly” (from 149, reading in advance 153). This is shocking on first encounter. After turning the page, one reads “Terry” as the apparent subject of the sentence, pointing to an appalling outcome of the street confrontation in which he and Albert are involved

(151). On turning the page one discovers that this is “Frizer” in his barroom brawl leading to the death of “Christopher Marlowe”. (2002, 25)

The use of this device provides the readers with a multiplicity of possible outcomes that destabilizes their pre-assumed ideas about the unfolding of the events being narrated and the characters’ fate, making them assume the worst before realising what actually took place. By causing the readers to ponder about Albert and Terry’s fates, B. S. Johnson not only entices their immersion into the narrative to figure out what happened to the two friends but also presents them with a form of representing on the physicality of the book the principle of uncertainty that governs life, whose consequences are only made known when the moment for that comes, in the same way that the assassination victim of *Albert Angelo* can only be identified when the reader reaches the previously anticipated page.

Concluding, it is possible to ascertain that the array of typographic devices and the multiplicity of perspectives used by B. S. Johnson in *Albert Angelo* enables it with several sources of interpretative meaning that at the same time as they serve the author’s intentions also operate the task of pulling the reader into the narrative, as they constantly look to entice his/ her curiosity regarding Albert’s predicaments, frustrations, prejudices and final demise.

2. *The Unfortunates* – a Novel of Absences and Presences

Written when B. S. Johnson was 34 years old, during the spring of 1967, and first published in 1969⁵, the novel *The Unfortunates* tells an intense first person account of the loss of a friend and the sorrow, frustration and confusion brought by it. Submerging himself in this experience, the novel's narrator provides his readers with the deeply emotional narrative of how he witnessed to the "deterioration" and "disintegration" of his close friend Tony Tillinghast, who became sick with cancer at the age of twenty-seven and died of it only two years later.

My visits (...) were long talks broken only partly by eating, what a generalization, there, more talk on his part than mine, far more, but I learnt, I selected and elected to hear what I needed, what was of most use to me, at that time most use, from his discourse, yes, the word is not too pompous, discourse, a fine mind, a need to communicate embodied in it, too, how can I place his order, his disintegration?

(Johnson, 1969, "First", 3/4)

(...) she phoned me to say that Tony was very low, needed taking out of himself. Did she say, was that her phrase, how a common expression can become so little a philosophical statement, sometimes, in this case, he himself wanted to be taken out of that now alien body, which was not himself, which was no longer under his control, the cells multiplying without reference to his will, destroying him and themselves.

(1969, Section beginning with "Sometime that summer, during", 1)

Not how he died, (...) only the fact that he did died, he is dead, is important: the loss to me, to us

(1969, "Last", 6)

As a reporter with the objective of covering a football match for a newspaper, the narrator arrives at a city (whose name is never mentioned, but whose landmarks and description allow to identify it as Nottingham) and immediately recognises it as being the place where he used to visit his friend Tony, while he was studying. The realization of his whereabouts triggers the narrator's memory and makes the narrative oscillate between the present moment, dedicated to his reporting assignment, and his recollections of the past moments spent with Tony, in that city and elsewhere.

⁵ This interpretation follows the first edition of *The Unfortunates* (1969), published by Panther Books in association with Secker and Warburg.

(...) It's after two! I must get to the ground then, how my mind has been taken off. Now, how to get to the ground, yes, always take a taxi in a strange city, no, not that again, (...) this must lead to the square, I remember this big furnishes, yes, it lies directly the other side (...). These curved windows were modern, now seem dated (...)

(1969, Section beginning with "Time It's after two", 1)

(...) Yet I know this city, I should not feel insecure here, not for that reason, anyway, but for Tony, that insecurity is worse, his terrifying example. And I do not know yet where I am going to eat, that is insecurity, is it not, for me? How the mind can take these things in, calmly, discuss them, hold them, and still be affected, terrified by them. The mind.

(1969, Section beginning with "Cast parapet, pierced rondel", 1/ 2)

The Press Room badly lit (...), cramped under the stand, only two phones, yes, I'll remember the public one near the entrance, convenient, if I need it, five o'clock deadline today, outside though (...) The crowd surges forward to see the corner opposite, a wave in motion, slumps back again. My hand numbs from cold, my mind from this tedium.

(1969, Section beginning with "The pitch worn, the worn patches", 4/ 5)

With the exception of the moments regarding the football match (before, during and after), the focus of the novel is entirely based on Tony, their friendship and the narrator's feelings and thoughts regarding life, sickness and death. Even when the narrator refers to his own personal tribulations, these are always evoked with Tony as the reference that sets them in motion.

(...) again at his parents' house, during the vacation they were down so I saw them (...) with the opera singer I was using or trying to use to try to forget, no, not to forget, to take the place of, Wendy (...) The things Tony's death throws up, throws up.

(1969, Section beginning with "The opera singer the Easter", 1)

(...) very much in love with her, yes, Wendy, then. As not now, in this city memories are not now of her so much, but only of her in relation to him. So his death changes the past: yet it should not.

(1969, Section beginning with "up there, yes, the high mast", 1)

Originated from the promise made by Johnson to his dying friend of getting "it all down", the novel materializes the deeply felt and difficult to accept disappearance and/ or absence of Tony not only through the profoundly intimate inner monologue in which Johnson presents it but also through an erratic formal structure full of its own "disappearances" and/or "absences":

(...) at the rate he was deteriorating, disintegrating, so the last thing I said to him, all I had to give him, alone with him (...), facing those eyes, (...) and I said (...) I'll get it all down, mate. It'll be very little, he said, after a while, slowly, still those eyes. That's all anyone has done, very little, I said.

(1969, Section beginning with "So he came to his parents", 5)

2.1 The Absence of Order – Disengage to Engage

The novel *The Unfortunates* is divided into 27 unbound sections, unnumbered and without any reference regarding order, with the exception of the initial and final sections highlighted with the words "First" and "Last" as a means of setting them apart from the other 25 sections. Being an unbound book, the novel is presented inside a laminated box with the following note/instruction on the left inner side, informing the reader that he/she may read it in any which way or order according to his/ her preferences, with "random" being the key command:

This novel has twenty-seven sections, temporarily held together by a removable wrapper. Apart from the first and last sections (which are marked as such) the other twenty-five sections are intended to be read in **random** order. If readers prefer not to accept the **random** order in which they receive the novel, then they may re-arrange the sections into any other **random** order before reading.

On the right interior side of the box, the reader is presented with a copy of the actual news article written by B. S. Johnson in assignment for the newspaper *Observer* that originated the trip that brought about the memories which anchor the novel:

SUB INSPIRES CITY TRIUMPH

CITY 1 United 0

From B. S. JOHNSON

CITY beat United 1-0 at home yesterday, and only a farcical incident towards the end enlivened the tedium of the match. Phipps had a lucky match in the City goal.

Within the first ten minutes he dropped an easy centre but reached the ball just before two United forwards' feet hit it, he was badly caught out of position by a Thomson shot which landed just

behind his bar, and then, after Holman had successfully hunted for a way through the City defence, he watched Lomax stub the ball over the bar from no more than three yards out. City seemed to believe that, surviving this, they could survive anything, and gradually came out of defence. Furse, after a run by Stevens, brought a fine save from Edson, and in the twenty-seventh minute had the ball in the United net only to be ruled offside.

WASTED CHANCES

But apart from these two chances, the waves of City's attacks broke on Mull, United's sweeper, the relentless destructiveness of whose tackling claimed a casualty just before half-time when Wisdom went off with a suspected broken bone in his foot to give Beresford, the substitute, his first game for City.

Beresford, whose play was at least informed by enthusiasm, stood out in the second half, and his tight control in the minimum of space brought a chance for Furse just on the hour which Edson only just kept out.

In the other goal Phipps' luck continued. Holman blasted a free kick over, Alexander hit the intersection, and anything on target seemed bound to hit some part of the goalkeepers body.

And then farce. Gordon hit a fierce shot, the ball struck Mulls outstretched foot and went over Edson into the goal.

Each section does not present a linear or chronological account either of the news assignment or of the narrator and Tony's relationship, being comprised of loose fragments of memory, whose length may range from one paragraph (occupying one single page) to twelve pages, separated by gaps, which randomly differ in size⁶. Through the removal of the book covers and binding, the singular form of presentation of the novel *The Unfortunates* favours the portrayal of "the way the mind works", more precisely of how memory operates as, just like human recollections, it is apparently organized in an accidental manner, with the exception of the already mentioned "First" and "Last" sections. It is then up to the reader to organize it according to their own randomly chosen order, as clearly pointed out by the indication on the box. This way, the reader is necessarily compelled to physically interact with the novel, shuffling the different sections and holding each one at the time on his/ her hands, thus performing an active role in the development and construction of the narrative and/or of the literary process related to it. At the same time, Johnson, perpetual paladin of truth over fiction, finds the solution for the dilemma of accurately representing in the materiality of the book the arbitrariness and unpredictability of human memory, particularly of the manner through which the recollections

⁶ Particularly in the section marked as "Last", the size of the gaps between the textual fragments starts to become wider as the novel reaches its end and the narrator's perception of the dimension of his loss becomes more evident.

of his friend Tony assaulted and permeated his mind, imposing themselves from the moment they were triggered on his arrival to that city. According to Johnson:

The memories of Tony and the routine football reporting, the past and the present, interwove in a completely random manner, without chronology. This is the way the mind works, my mind anyway (...) this randomness was directly in conflict with the technological fact of the bound book: for the bound book imposes an order, a fixed page order, on the material. I think I went some way towards solving this problem by writing the book in sections and having those sections not bound together but loose in a box. (*Aren't You Rather Young to Be Writing Your Memoirs?*, 1973, 25)

Although Simon Barton considers that the “form of *The Unfortunates* makes it particularly difficult to approach as a reader” (62), it is possible to consider that the technique employed by Johnson to solve the problem of memory representation may act not as a form of alienation or disengagement but as a way of intensifying the reader’s commitment and immersion in the narrative. This assumption is backed up by the fact that, regardless of the order in which *The Unfortunates* is read or of how many times it is read in different orders, after reading the novel, the reader does not feel the impact of this strangeness, instead he/ she is left with the impression of having shared the mind of the narrator in a form that, after getting used to it, almost feels natural as human memories all function randomly and unpredictably, without any chronological order, being anchored in the emotional effect they cause or have on their individuals⁷. One could even argue that the reading act becomes an emulation of the processes of memory: readers experience the fragmentary associations of the various sections of the narrative as their own associative “reading monologue”. So, the reader of *The Unfortunates*, regardless of the order in which he/ she read, will retain the moments of the novel that most resonated with him/ her as it happens with any other narrative, more formally conventional or not. Thus, it is possible to consider that Johnson’s choice to present his novel deprived of linearity, more than a formal device, was a way of preserving the honesty of his account and of attracting the readers into his narrative, the workings of his mind and, ultimately, into his grief, thus allowing (and almost forcing) them to share the truth of his experience. Jonathan Coe points out that the technique used by Johnson to physically portray the “randomness” of “the way the mind works” may not have been especially complex from the technical point of view, thus failing to impress some of

⁷ “How we remember events is not just a consequence of the external world we experience, but is also strongly influenced by our internal states” as argued by Lila Davachi, associate professor in NYU’s Department of Psychology and Centre for Neural Science and senior author of the study *Emotional brain states carry over and enhance future memory formation*. – <http://www.nyu.edu/about/news-publications/news/2016/december/is-there-such-a-thing-as-an-emotional-hangover--nyu-researchers-.html> accessed on 1st June 2018

his peers – “Certainly there is nothing very sophisticated about Johnson’s central conceit: randomly ordered pages as a tangible metaphor for the random interplay of memories and impressions in the human mind” (Coe, 22). However, considering that the drive force behind the novel is to fulfil the promise made to Tony of getting it “all down”, as told to the readers by the narrator, it is admissible to consider, as stated by Coe, that “the book might have been intended to have an emotional impact” (22) and not so much of a technical one. According to this author:

(...) if Johnson’s work stands up better today than most of the writing of his ‘experimental’ peers, this has everything to do with the fact that he refused – or was unable – to sacrifice intensity of feeling on the altar of formal ingenuity, and *The Unfortunates* is the supreme example of this. To read it is to be drawn, inexorably, by the coiled, unyielding threads of Johnson’s prose, into a vortex of shared grief. On this level it is a challenging and deeply affecting novel. (22/23)

Apart from allowing the moving and enthralling presentation of the process of remembering and dealing with the emotional trauma of a loss, the unbound form of *The Unfortunates* also opens up to other interpretative possibilities. Due to the difference in the extension of text, the sections possess different weights, according to the number of pages that composed them. This variation in the weight of the sections may affect and complement the reader’s interpretation of the novel as, contrary to what happens in a traditionally bound book in which all pages are safely held together and share the same weight in the hands of their readers, the disengaged form of *The Unfortunates* allows its readers to become aware of the frailty and transience of the physical medium chosen to accommodate this narrative. This frailty and transience of the unbound medium may be interpreted as a form of physically representing the frailty and transience of the narrative being told and even of life itself, particularly taking into consideration the content of the memories being shared, the sudden and tragic loss of a friend. In the section beginning with “June rang on the Saturday”, the narrator recollects the moment he was informed of Tony’s death in one paragraph accommodated on a single page, leaving the reader with the communication of such a severe and tragic event through a comparatively fragile medium that can be seen as an almost material metaphor for the feeling of helplessness and abandonment felt by the narrator faced with the passing of his close friend. The same will happen with the one page fragment, beginning with “We were late for the funeral”, which describes the narrator’s attendance to Tony’s funeral. Barton points out that:

(...) from *The Unfortunates*, that demonstrates the affect that its unique form can have on the reader (...) for full dramatic effect, it is worth considering the section that begins, ‘June rang on...’. (...) This page has, by far, the least amount of text on it of any of the pages in *The Unfortunates*. The reader holds this single, unbound page and recognises the material fragility of it. The object, the page that is, usually contained within covers, seems so small and delicate in this instance (...) the occasion of Tony’s death. (...) The materiality of the object that the reader holds signifies the fragility of life and the reader is left to consider the potential and the affect of such a unique representation. (63/ 64)

In line with this, Glyn White confirms that “the limits of the bound book are exceeded by this novel and, while we might reflect on the book as an artefact when we read one, *The Unfortunates* is something different” (2005, 116). Thus, it is conceivable to sustain that the loose form of *The Unfortunates* works more as an enabling and appealing factor than an alienating aspect since it compels the readers to interact with it, becoming familiar not only with its content but also with its bibliographic materiality as a narrative signifier. This way, it is possible to believe that the “absence” of linearity in the organization of the narrative of *The Unfortunates* together with the “disappearance” of the conventional book covers and binding help and enhance the emergence of meaning instead of becoming an obstacle to it.

2.2 The Absence of Words and Meaningful Gaps

Several intentional textual gaps punctuate the memory fragments that constitute each section of *The Unfortunates*, permeating the intense emotional charge of Johnson’s prose with yet another form of absence. This way, the reconstruction on the page of the occasions, thoughts or feelings that more profoundly resonated with the narrator throughout the different stages of his relationship with Tony and the events related to them are accompanied by empty spaces between the words and the sentences, which seem to have their own interpretative value as they complement the narrative being presented, adding new dimensions of meaning to what is being read. These new dimensions of meaning depend on the narrative itself and on the interpretative skills of the reader as it is clarified by Barton that states that “an intentional textual gap on the surface of the page must make sense in the context with the main textual narrative” as the “reader can only find legitimate meaning from it if it is confirmed by narrative. Intentional textual gaps can represent content and pauses in thought depending on the context of the narrative and the narrative voice.” (28). In *The Unfortunates*, it is possible to read textual gaps as the physical representation on the page of the moments needed by the narrator to perform the tasks of recognition, observation and perception of place and time:

* The quotations presented inside a box intend to call attention to the page layout or typographic device being analysed.

But, I know this city!	This green ticket hall, the long office half-rounded at its ends, that ironic clerestory, brown glazed tiles, green below, the same, the decorative hammerbeams supporting nothing, above, of course!
	(1969, "First", 1)
This would be	April, I imagine, yes, I do not romanticize, there, April, seven or eight, seven years ago, now.
	(1969, Section beginning with "Up there, yes, the high mast", 6)
Time!	It's after two! I must get to the ground then, how my mind has been taken off.
	(1969, Section beginning with "Time! It's after two!", 1)
(...) our pace hurried, urgent, for some reason, our flow, tide mass, as we go past the buttresses of the bridge, in the eddy of each one seller, of programmes, of favours, or newspapers.	There the towers! You can see them so often now (...)
	(1969, Section beginning with "Time! It's after two!", 4)

The effort to find the most suitable image and words to verbalise the narrator's intentions (a writer's constant fight in the battle for the construction of the literary work) is also depicted on the pages of *The Unfortunates* through the use of empty spaces between the words and sentences. We can read some of these textual gaps not only as intradiegetic gaps that represent the lived experience of the narrator (his hesitations and emotional states), but also as extradiegetic gaps that represent the act of writing as an attempt to invent a verbal and material form. These seem to represent the moments during which the inner workings of the author's brain operate while in pursuit of the perfect image or word:

(...) despite the match, despite Tony, all that this city means, this bridge, to walk across, how wide it seems now, no one about, it begin to rain, the rain thin like	Images for rain are common, I cannot think of one, (...)
	(1969, Section beginning with "Away from the ground, the crowds gone", 1)
The pitch worn, the worn patches, like	There might be an image there, I could use an image, there if I can think of one, at this stage of the season, it might too stand for what these two teams are like, are doing.
	If I can think of one.

(1969, Section beginning with “The pitch worn, the worn patches”, 1)
<p>June was out for Saturday, perhaps all day, certainly for lunch, for lunch Tony came in and said he was cooking fish fingers, he said they tasted okay if they were fried, a curious thing to remember, all memories are curious, for that matter, the mind as a think of and image Two days I was ill (...)</p>
(1969, Section beginning with “The estate That enormous flat”, 5)

The disorienting impact of the assault of memory on the mind is also another of the meanings possible to infer from the textual gaps present in the narrative as the narrator is faced and invaded with an influx of recollections as his afternoon progresses in that city full of the reminiscences of his lost friend:

<p>(...) I know this city! The mind circles, at random, does not remember, from one moment to another, other things interpose themselves, the mind’s The station exit on a bridge, yes, of course, and the blackened gantries rise like steel gibbets above the midland red wall opposite. I should turn right, right, towards the city centre, yes, ah, and that pub!</p>
(1969, “First”,1)
<p>By diesel railcar we went across to Lincoln to see a flat they were thinking of taking. The mind is confused, was it this visit, or another, the mind has telescoped time here, runs events near to one another in place, into one another in time. Walking the heights, the steep stony narrow streets to Lincoln Cathedral (...)</p>
(1969, Section beginning with “Again the house at the end”, 5/6)
<p>(...) I don’t remember, why should I, it doesn’t matter, nothing does, it’s all chaos, look at his death, why? Why not? Is this sort of experience good for students? Not, surely not, for all students? But that was an academic question, ha, for me, now. Until my son is old enough, perhaps.</p> <p>Did I see him, did we see them during that summer? What does it matter?</p> <p>A court off Charing Cross Road, Cecil Court, perhaps, with a pub in it (...)</p>
(1969, Section beginning with “His dog, or his parent’s dog”, 3)
<p>(...), that our love would make Xmas like it was for me before they told me there wasn’t a Father Xmas and I had to start giving other people presents back as well. Or some such rubbish. These melodramatic idiotic moments in which life is completely These stale thoughts, this stale.</p>

(1969, Section beginning with “His dog, or his parent’s dog”, 4)	
<p>(...), he quoted to me the light industries there were, I forget them now, why should I remember them? Yet my mind clutters itself up with so much rubbish, you’d think it would keep this rubbish as well, the which-light-industries? rubbish. Smuts on this cill blow as the buses pass</p>	
(1969, Section beginning with “Cast parapet, pierced rondel design”, 2)	
Tony we first met because	It must have been connected with staying the night or
nights at the university union (...)	
(1969, Section beginning with “That was the first time”, 1)	

Taking into consideration the moving and intimate content being presented in *The Unfortunates*, it is also conceivable to sustain that the gaps placed by Johnson between words and sentences may also be understood as a means of representing moments of pause in the narrative caused by the emotion and consideration that the memories being evoked generate in him:

<p>How did I not realize when he said, Go and do City this week, that this was this city? Tony. His cheeks swallowed and collapsed round the insinuated bones (...), his mouth closing only when he took water from a glass by his bed (...), because of what the treatment had done to his saliva glands, how it had finished them. Him</p>
(1969, “First”, 1)
<p>But they turned us away, the second time, I do recall that, said it was a private social club, or something, it looked just like a café to us, of the ordinary kind, in our ignorance. And we went to the theatre, it had been a long time I think since Tony had been to the theatre, in London at least (...)</p>
(1969, Section beginning with “At least once he visited us at the Angel”, 2)
<p>(...) where does it lead, there we were, students then, there these still are, students now, and so? Here it was when he talked about the RAF. So? So must others, for ever, or talk about something like it, and it does not matter to them, now, it cannot have mattered at any time to me, so why this, if it is so meaningless, anything means something only if you impose meaning on it, which in itself is a meaningless thing, the imposition.</p> <p>Another sherry, it takes so long, a double this time. In another room there is the game with the ring, the horn. Could play, at least go in there and see. No. What point? (...) The fire place rough, piano. They laugh, some look at me. I am bizarre. Both are meaningless. Unfortunately. All</p> <p style="text-align: center;">So?</p>

(1969, Section beginning with "Away from the ground, the crowds gone", 3)
Perhaps there is nothing to be understood, perhaps understanding is simply not to be found, is not applicable to such a thing. But it is hard, hard, not to try to understand, even for me, who accept that all is nothing, that sense does not exist. We must have talked in the pub can't remember anything we said, but something must have been discussed about the novel. The pub was on the cliffs, neon signs, a jukebox. Nothing else? Nothing else. Yes, I drove, he was not strong enough, (...)
(1969, Section beginning with "For recuperation, after the first treatment", 2)
(...) to remember I was his host, my obligations, would get up (...) and make a formal breakfast, Tony liked his food, (...) And he would heave himself from that black divan, and wash as much as he thought appropriate, how can I know how much he washed, and he little late if at all for that breakfast I had prepared for us. I sentimentalise again, the past is always to be sentimentalised, inevitably, everything about him I see now in the light of what happened later, his slow disintegration, his death. The waves of the past batter at the sea defences of my sandy sanity, need to be safely pictured, still, romanticized, prettified. He used to catch a bus, a 73, at least, I told him that one (...)
(1969, Section beginning with "I had a lovely flat then", 2)
And I did my best to take him out of himself, ha, as I remember, but I had no control over the rampant cells either, the one thing that would have been of use to him I could not give him, it was no use, no one could give him. He still looked the same, but was tired, all the time, but we did talk more on this occasion, (...)
(1969, Section beginning with "Sometime that summer, during the first recuperation", 1)
(...) and June, already looking alone, already looking bereaved, lost, her face still showing all the pain she had carried, tall, and her mother was there, helping, I could see, in some way. Someone gave us a lift back to the house (...)
(1969, Section beginning with "We were late for the funeral", 1)
(...), though she said that right until the end she would continue to hope for a miracle. It was obvious to me that even if he was still there the following week, he would be less able to talk, at the rate he was deteriorating, disintegrating, so that the last thing I said to him, all I had to give him, alone with him, with my coat on, about to go (...), facing those eyes, he staring back all the time now, it must have been a great effort for him, yes, and I said, it was all I had, what else could I do, I said, I'll get it all down, mate. It'll be very little, he said, after a while, slowly, still those eyes. That's all anyone has done, very little, I said.

(1969, Section beginning with “So he came to his parents at Brighton”, 5)
<p>At some point he asked me, they asked me to be a kind of secular godfather to the boy, asking not quite apologetically but certainly making it clear I was not expected to be a godfather in any sense I disapproved of (...). To which I hurriedly agreed, sadly, not wanting to discuss it, but seeing in the future the boy coming to me for a job, ha, a reference, advice perhaps, yes, in the long future.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Just in case anything does happen to Tony, they said, he said, she said, no doubt offhandedly.</p>
(1969, Section beginning with “Then they had moved to a house”, 5)
<p>(...) a new feature since my father’s time, then there were no floodlit matches, all games took place in daylight, the winter Saturday afternoon kickoffs used to be at two-fifteen, which meant an early lunch for us, or no lunch if he was working Saturday mornings, taking sandwiches to the match and eating them there.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Ah, the inevitable comic gauntlet. I have to run outside grounds, the photos of my colleagues, on theirs billboards, (...)</p>
(1969, Section beginning with “Time! It’s after two!”, 4)
<p>(...) for Tony? Perhaps he had to believe there was a cause, intellectually, he had to satisfy himself by ratiocination, not believe it was just random, arbitrary, gratuitous, or he could not have gone on, could not have held out hope for himself, though it was pointless, anyway, whether he held hope or not, in the end, though they went through it, yes, both of them, the pattern of hope, holding on to something.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The baby was born just before Xmas, perhaps it was Xmas Eve, which meant Tony was alone on Xmas Day (...)</p>
(1969, Section beginning with “Just as it seemed things”, 3)

The majority of the sections finish with half or a quarter of page blank. These closing gaps may be considered as a form of adding poignancy to the content being presented at the same time as they invite the reader of the novel to, faced with the emptiness of the white space, reflect about the factual and emotional content of the memories he/she has just read in that section:

<p>(...) I had read, and wondered then whether it would work on the stage, as a piece of theatre, but it did, brilliantly, of course, I should have known it would, held one untiringly, in the theatre, that hot, as I remember, night in May would it have been, yes, we moved at the end of that month, when Tony came to stay for the last time.</p>
--

(1969, Section beginning with "At least once he visited us at the Angel", 2)

June rang on the Saturday (...) saying there was no need for us to come down now, on Sunday, for he had died that evening (...) but previously there had been the opposite of a relapse, three days when his mind had been virtually normal, for which she had been grateful, June, it had seemed like a miracle, though he still could not move, his mind had come back and they had talked very seriously about everything, for the first time had talked about death.

(1969, Section beginning with "June rang on the Saturday", 1)

Again I could not understand his tiredness, accepted that he was tired, but he looked the same, he looked the same, for the first time I realized it was serious, it was inside him, unseen, he looked the same, outwardly.

(1969, Section beginning with "For recuperation, after the first treatment", 6)

(...) for I remember the letter I got from June, a separate one from him, too, that told me the news, the whole of the lump removed, June's letter ending in the joy that the sun was shining across this view from their flat, on the mountains in the distance, on the sea, and that she could enjoy it, that she had a future again.

(1969, Section beginning with "Sometime that summer", 4)

(...) I looked down and back at the crematorium, sunny but there was still a blue haze, perhaps from the sea, and there was a straight column rising from the chimney of the crematorium, it went straight upwards, as far as smoke can ever be said to move in a straight line, into the haze, the sky, it was too neat, but it was, it was.

(1969, Section beginning with "We were late for the funeral", 1)

White spaces between the words and sentences also infuse the narrator's descriptions in which he drinks or eats, making it plausible for the reader to interpret them, sustained by the textual elements that accompany them, as forms of depicting on the page the feeling of satisfaction and gratification felt by the narrator in these moments of pause and pleasure:

The ham, a prime consideration, now, greaseproof, unfold, the moist pink and white, ah, the bite the salt satisfaction. Across the square a military caravan, recruiting posters, a loudspeaker unit not very loud, a landrover (...) I enjoy this ham, here, now, in this way, on this bench, in this place, for their own sakes. A boy fires a peashooter accurately at a girl (...)

(1969, Section beginning with "This poky lane by a blackened sandstone church", 6)

(...) but I'll have the Marsala, I think, for no other reasons, but that I need something thick and sweet and comforting, I need comforting, why do I need comforting? Comforting, indeed, sweet, not as thick as I had anticipated, to the palate, as it goes down, good, so good, yes, now I can look around, at people, at the place, having the excuse of a drink in my hand, in my stomach.

(1969, Section beginning with "Yate's is friendly, the first impression going in", 1)

Throughout the novel, Johnson also resorts to textual gaps as tools for illustrating the transience of the human mind and memory, by using them to represent the change of focus or shift between different points and subjects of interest occurring inside a same textual fragment:

(...), ha, and pork pies cut into sections of their circles, ah, a different taste from London pork pies, better, more meat is it, less bland, tastier, more pepper. How ordinary these reporters look, curious lot. I do not talk to them, they do not talk to me. But I hear the news go round that Wisdom has a suspected broken bone in his foot. Pee, yes.

(1969, Section beginning with “The pitch worn, the worn patches”, 5)	
Yes, this narrower part must be older, though it is hard to see it whole, outwardly.	Why do I feel so aggressive toward businessmen and shopfitters today?
(1969, Section beginning with “This poky lane by a blackened sandstone church”, 2)	
Two days I was ill, I must have thought of Wendy a lot, then I was full of her, at that time, for a long time afterwards, my mind registering pain stimuli at those elements of that house which related to her, the black gamesome dog, the woman, even the china into which the luncheon meat had fallen, the garden sloping towards the tiny valley, as it were.	Did they avoid the subject, did we discuss it without embarrassment? What point? In that bedroom where I was ill I could see nothing outside from the bed, when lying, though the windows were large, nothing but the sky.
(1969, Section beginning with “The estate. That enormous flat”, 5/ 6)	
That girl over there, with the sling, so young to be injured, injuries in one so young seem obscene, she can only be about ten or so, yet she has her arm in a sling, looks so vulnerable.	
This braised steak, now I come to considerate, has a gravy distinctly related to the oxtail soup.	
(1969, Section beginning with “Here comes the main course”, 1)	
(...). As what is underneath these damask cloths? What kind of tables? Any kind: plywood, folding card tables even, what kind of excesses?	German family at the next table: what did he do in the war, the middleaged grandfather? Anglicized mother, charming little girl, teeth slightly bucked. No Camembert, never mind, the meal has been a disaster (...)
(1969, Section beginning with “Here comes the main course”, 2)	
(...) In any case it does not matter, now, his death makes so much irrelevant.	
At least this is better than lunch, sometimes they can be good, as this is, or very good, railways meals. And the Maçon honest enough, rough, to my common palate.	
Can any death be meaningful? Or meaningless? Are these terms one can use about death? I don’t know, I just feel the pain, the pain.	
That gross laughter must be from colleagues, ha, yes, I recognize it, have heard it before. Why have they stayed to catch the later train, not having my cause?	

All coloured by rust, affected by the action of oxydization, these textures, from the window, wear of metal on metal (...)

(1969, "Last", 4)

In the absence of more formal types of segmentation between the glimpses of memory that sustain the narrative of *The Unfortunates*, for example through the creation of sections using numbers, letters or graphic elements (like lines or asterisks), Johnson makes use of gaps to perform this task. Considering his search for accurately representing the "way the mind works", the use of gaps as elements of segmentation between the fragments seems to allow a more faithful representation on the page of the unbound and imprecise fluency of human memory:

Wandering around Brighton was enervating for me, too, I could see Tony tired very easily, June, I do not remember how June was, apart from the same as ever, calm, tall, elegantly unglamorous, honest, realistic, infinitely supporting.

In the evening of one of the days we all three went to some too-pretty Sussex village for a drink, drank in a self-consciously old pub where every manifestation of age was coated and preserved that it was undistinguished (...) I had parked the car, the sweet smell, the whole like a film-set, the chimney-stacks, thatched roofs, yes.

I was still then troubled, burdening them with my my troubles, which were Wendy, still Wendy (...) This I remember took place the first night there in his parents' bungalow, in the front room, television room, where I was to sleep on a put-u-up (...) I liked it so much.

One of the mornings, there were only two, as I remember, a short visit, for then, I drove us, just Tony and I, down to a beach he though well of (...)

(1969, Section beginning with "For recuperation, after the first treatment", 3/4)

He was ill when he arrived, I forgot now just what, just a cold, or flu, or headache, or something like that (...) said afterwards there were long periods of the train journey he had no recollection of, a very bad journey, he seemed to think this was responsible for it (...) Not likely, but one does wonder, I do wonder, now.

When he went, he left me a copy he had bought of Connolly's essay inscribed, In lieu of food, or something like that, for staying with me, who did not want anything (...) I do not remember what he said – no, now I think about it, we discussed that on a building site at the university, he was showing me around. I am still not big enough for that one.

Perhaps it was then that I felt relieved when he was gone, not because I had not enjoyed his company, but it meant I could now be alone again with my grief, for Wendy, as ever, then, ha!

(1969, Section beginning with "I had a lovely flat then", 5/6)

Sometime that summer, during the first recuperation, there was another visit, I went down to Brighton again, at June's request, she phoned me to say that Tony was very low, needed talking out of himself (...) in accordance with my supposed reason for being down there, indeed, it was useful to me talking to him about the book (...) I do not remember much more this visit.

To help him, in such a way as I was able, which was not at all, in effect, a couple of weeks later, was it, when I had the use of a friend's cottage, at Winchelsea, not that far from Brighton, really (...) we invited Tony and June down for the Sunday, for a lunch (...) I had not quite finished the second one then, still, it was probably about a month from completion, we must have discussed that, at least (...) we stopped on a road, out in the country, Ginnie loved it, we saw some animal in the distance, perhaps a hare, that's why we stopped, I think.

And when I had finished it, there was another occasion, another trip to Brighton, to his parent's home, I had sent the typescript to him the previous week, (...) Nothing he said after this draft was finished, made me change a word, I was disappointed, but I can see now (...) whether the treatment had succeed or failed, that was all that mattered, would surely have mattered to me, so it was infinitely excusable, but difficult to understand, it all is, again.

Yet he knew by that autumn, when they had gone back to Chester, found a flat (...) I think they told him he was cured (...) June's letter ending in joy (...)

(1969, Section beginning with "Sometime that summer", 1, 2, 3, 4)

For the first time, he really looked ill, there were outward, physical signs of it, he looked different, not himself, worse. (...) His breathing, too, was affected, there were now great pauses in his conversations as he sighed to the limit of his lungs (...), bathos, together with those other pauses when he had to take a drink to moisten his mouth, manually to perform the saliva glands' function.

It is difficult to think of these things without terror, the pity is easy to feel, easy to contain, but so useless.

(1969, Section beginning with "Just as it seemed things", 5)

(...) And **that** he was in hospital nearby, now, then, having this treatment, radiotherapy, which I knew little about, but did know **that** it was drastic, **that** it involved bombardment by radioactive rays, **that that** was dangerous, **that** they had to kill the good as well as the bad cells, in this operation.

(1969, Section beginning with "Just as it seemed things", 5)

June was out for Saturday, perhaps all day, certainly **for lunch, for lunch** Tony came in and said he was cooking fish fingers, he said they tasted okay if they were fried, a curious thing to remember, all memories are curious, for that matter, the mind as a think of and image Two days I was ill (...)

(1969, Section beginning with "The estate That enormous flat", 5)

Perhaps there is nothing to be understood, **perhaps** understanding is simply not to be found, is not applicable to such a thing. But it is **hard, hard**, not to try to understand, even for me, who accept that all is nothing, that sense does not exist. We must have talked in the pub can't remember anything we said, but something must have been discussed about the novel. The pub was on the cliffs, neon signs, a jukebox. **Nothing else?** **Nothing else.** Yes, I drove, he was not strong enough, (...)

(1969, Section beginning with "For recuperation, after the first treatment", 2)

(...), though **she said** that right until the end she would continue to hope for a miracle.

It was obvious to me that even if he was still there the following week, he would be less able to talk, at the rate he was deteriorating, disintegrating, so that the last thing **I said** to him, all I had to give him, alone with him, with my coat on, about to go (...), facing those eyes, he staring back all the time now, it must have been a great effort for him, yes, and **I said**, it was all I had, what else could I do, **I said**, I'll get it all down, mate. It'll be very little, **he said**, after a while, slowly, still those eyes. That's all anyone has done, very little, **I said**.

(1969, Section beginning with "So he came to his parents at Brighton", 5)

At some point he asked me, they asked me to be a kind of secular godfather to the boy, asking not quite apologetically but certainly making it clear I was not expected to be a godfather in any sense I disapproved of (...). To which I hurriedly agreed, sadly, not wanting to discuss it, but seeing in the future the boy coming to me for a job, ha, a reference, advice perhaps, yes, in the long future.

Just in case anything does happen to Tony, **they said, he said, she said**, no doubt offhandedly.

(1969, Section beginning with "Then they had moved to a house", 5)

(...) but I'll have the Marsala, I think, for no other reasons, but that I need something thick and sweet and **comforting**, I need **comforting**, why do I need **comforting**? **Comforting**, indeed, sweet, not as thick as I had anticipated, to the palate, as it goes down, good, so good, yes, now I can look around, at people, at the place, having the excuse of a drink in my hand, in my stomach.

(1969, Section beginning with "Yate's is friendly, the first impression going in", 1)

Again I could not understand his tiredness, accepted that he was tired, but **he looked the same, he looked the same**, for the first time I realized it was serious, it was inside him, unseen, **he looked the same**, outwardly.

(1969, Section beginning with "For recuperation, after the first treatment", 6)

(...) I looked down and back at the crematorium, sunny but there was still a blue haze, perhaps from the sea, and there was a straight column rising from the chimney of the crematorium, it went straight upwards, as far as smoke can ever be said to move in a straight line, into the haze, the sky, it was too neat, but **it was, it was**.

(1969, Section beginning with "We were late for the funeral", 1)

Can any death be meaningful? Or meaningless?
Are these terms one can use about death?

I don't know, I just feel **the pain, the pain**.

(1969, "Last", 4)

Not how **he died**, not what **he died** of, even less why **he died**, are of concern, to me, only the fact that **he did die**, he is dead, is important: the loss to me, to us

(1969, "Last", 6)

(...) despite the match, despite Tony, all that this city means, this bridge, to walk across, how wide it seems now, no one about, it begin to rain, the rain thin like **Images for rain are common**, I cannot think of one, I do not need to think of one, really, for what purpose?

(1969, Section beginning with "Away from the ground, the crowds gone", 1)

(...) the match one remembers and talks about for years afterwards, the rest of one's life. The one moment, the one match. A new beginning, is it? **But already I suspect the worst of these two sides (...)**.

(1969, Section beginning with "The pitch worn, the worn patches", 1)

(...), ha , and pork pies cut into sections of their circles, ah , a different taste from London pork pies, better, more meat is it, less bland, tastier, more pepper.
(1969, Section beginning with “The pitch worn, the worn patches”, 5)
(...) I never knew exactly which, it made me impatient more than once, perhaps unjustifiably impatient, it was difficult to understand, really, and the object of such impatience, anger even, could only be Tony himself, the bearer of the disease, not the disease itself, as for the deity, ha!
(1969, Section beginning with “For recuperation, after the first treatment”, 2)
Yet he knew by that autumn, when they had gone to Chester, found a flat on the Wirral overlooking the sea and the Welsh mountains, ah , and had undergone more surgery, that he was cured, (...)
(1969, Section beginning with “Sometime that summer, during”, 3/ 4)
(...) and she by now was as involved as I was in the magazine, no , that is not true, I am probably romanticizing again, yes , but a week-end together, going up on the Friday (...)
(1969, Section beginning with “Up there, yes, the high mast”, 5)

Syntax and use of punctuation also fulfil an important role in the accurate representation of the narrator’s inner monologue as Johnson’s almost never ending paragraphs and content saturated sentences seem to illustrate the torrent of his discourse and emotion:

We were late for the funeral, through the train being late, I think Tony would have found that amusing, but we caught the train which should have taken us to Brighton at ten, was it, and it did not, it just stopped some miles outside, was held up for some reason or another, no reason was offered us, but when we arrived it was the time the funeral was starting, about, and thought we caught a taxi at once, it was a long way, relatively, to the crematorium, he was cremated, after a simple non-religious service, up somewhere, on the Downs at some point, or another, I assume, but just as we arrived, they were coming out, the party, his mother I see still, tears, one foot on the upper step, the other one step down, caught, I see her as if in a still, held there, fixed. Friends, some of them I had met (...)

(1969, Section beginning with “We were late for”, 1)

His father talked to me, walking round the garden of the bungalow on that windy down, the flowers growing so healthily, saying how Tony had asked them to come up and see them a few weeks before, at the new house on the site near Chester, and had told them how ill he was, perhaps that he was not going to recover, he had successfully kept from them what it was, until then, though they knew it was very serious, but not that serious, he had kept it from them, what nature of deception is that, I wonder, what are the morals of that? I should try to work that out some time, I should try to understand.

(1969, Section beginning with “So he came to his”, 1)

Also to maintain the level of accuracy in the textual representation of the memory fragments, Johnson resorts to the use of a different typeface and font size according to the moment being presented. For example, the narrator uses italics in combination with textual gaps in order to represent on the page surface the moments in which reading and writing are occurring at the same time as the interior monologue. These moments are related with his reporting assignment and with the creation of the news article. The gaps between words and sentences that accompany the textual segments in italics seem to express the effort needed in the creative process. Again, this suggests a parallel structure between reporting the football match and reporting the narrator's lived experience as mediated through his recollections. The act of writing is highlighted through these second-level interpolated comments on his reporting.

City fans at the so-called popular end howled furiously *at the 41st minute*
when Wisdom, picking up a long punt out of defence, tricked the only man between him and goal
only to be two onlys there brought arrested in his progress by being grasped about the neck
arm grabbed by Thomson. And their ire oh! was justified, for the resulting free kick was from 40
35 yards was no adequate compensation for what must have been a near-certain goal.

On the other hand, Thomson's action may be regarded with a certain Machiavellian
justification. I should not be able to see both sides, balls to impartiality, should be furious at being
denied a goal, or relieved at the situation being saved. The referee merely cautioned Thomson, which
seemed a generous let-off for a crime for which City fans *howled for his blood!*

Just before the interval, Wisdom failed to survive *rise after a crunching tackle by Mull, and*
was removed on a stretcher (with a suspected ankle or what?). Mull had his name taken, and
Beresford substituted, fresh grist to Mull's mill or something. Go.

(1969, Section beginning with "The pitch worn, the worn patches", 4)

Devoid of real incident. The match dragged its slow length, no, yes, there's Alexander, earlier, when
he hit the bar. *Alexander, dragging his slow length along from the right back,*
hit a long one which beat Phipps but stuck the intersection, like a wounded snake has to be worked
in somewhere, no it'll never work, too contrived, scrub it.

(1969, Section beginning with "The pitch worn, the worn patches", 6)

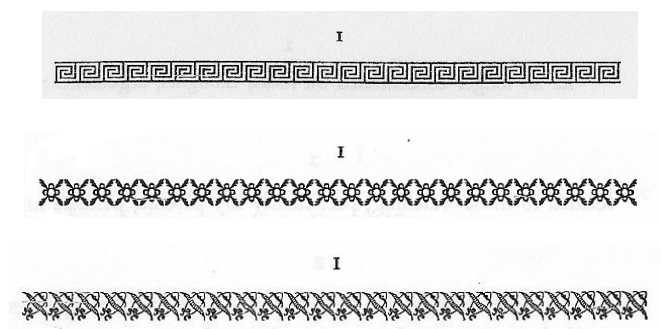
(...) could I face such anger, anyway, would it be worth it, the trouble, the possible embarrassment? Buy a paper, yes, football paper. *City will have to pull out all the stops today to beat United, with their star-studded forward line containing no less than three internationals, but provided City's Furse has his shooting-boots on it may well be that the locals lads will show last year's League runner-up a thing or two before their own loyal crowd at Home Park this afternoon.* Yes indeed. Thank Christ I don't have to write that sort of preliminary speculative meaningless crap. Just my own kind of crap.

(1969, Section beginning with "Time! It's after two!", 2)

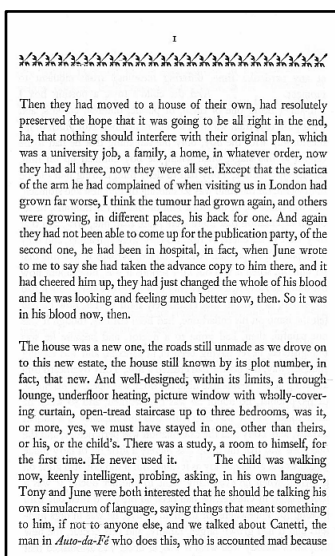
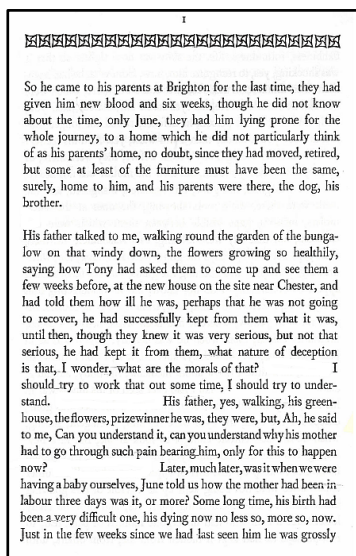
Once more related with his work assignment, the narrator also makes use of a different font size when he represents on the page the moment during which he reads (and spells) his article through the telephone. Due to the apparent lack of understanding from his interlocutor, the narrator is forced to repeat in a louder tone the word "prehensile", this need is then illustrated through the use of a slightly bigger font size. This moment of the oral transmission of a written segment is also permeated by the occurrence of several gaps that illustrate the pauses made by the narrator so as to allow his interlocutor to accurately note down the words and punctuation.

<p>(...) Within the first ten minutes he dropped an easy centre but followed the ball with a prehensile hand prehensile hand just before two United forwards s apostrophe feet hit it comma he was badly caught out of position by a Thomson shot which landed just behind his bar comma and then comma (...)</p>
<p>(1969, Section beginning with "The pitch worn, the worn patches", 10)</p>

Another constant presence in *The Unfortunates* is the repetition of the same image in a sequence that forms a line at the beginning of each section, consistently followed by a small gap before the actual textual fragment:



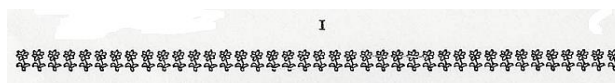
The images, most of them hinting at floral or abstract designs, seem to function randomly as mere decorative elements as they appear not to have any connection to the textual segment they precede. Given that these kinds of decorative elements were used in typography for marking sections within the text, they also contain a reference to typographic conventions of the book form. Like the unbound quires they signal the transformed presence of the book.



However, in the section in which the reader becomes aware of the way the narrator was informed of Tony's death, the image selected to introduce this memory fragment is a line of black squares, which, in some way through their dark colour and rigid form, seems to warn the reader of the bleakness of the message that will follow it:



Another image that seems infused of correlation with the content of the fragment it introduces is the line of single flowers, almost childish like in their simplicity that precedes the narrative of the narrator's attendance to his friend's funeral, as if paying on the page of the novel the same tribute they would on the actual event:



Apart from these two exceptions, it is apparent that no criteria was used in the selection of these images. Then, the use of these randomly selected lines of images as opening decorative elements for each section appears to consist of just another form used by B. S. Johnson of

materialising on the page of the novel the arbitrariness and unpredictability of memory and mind, the cornerstone upon which *The Unfortunates* is based.

The Unfortunates is probably the most well-known piece of writing of B. S. Johnson, “famous – or notorious” (Coe, 21) due to the singularity of its book in a box format. However, the contribution of the novel’s unbound form goes beyond its eccentricity. It is a fundamental contributor for Johnson’s “most extreme attempt to remain faithful to reality” (Coe, 21). Nonetheless, the form of *The Unfortunates* does not only serve the objective of physically representing the *modus operandi* of the human mind and memory. The unbound presentation of the novel together with its empty spaces between words and sentences also allow the representation of the narrator’s emotional and psychological state and can be used by the reader as additional sources of interpretation. The reader is thus compelled to interact directly with the object and content of *The Unfortunates*. The fragmented book and the fragmented text are also a biblioverbal embodiment of the nature of narrative as an assemblage of heterogeneous elements. Its fragmentariness works both as an emulation of the narrative structure of memory and a representation of the difficulties of the writing process faced with the randomness of lived experience. Through an exceptional and meticulous conjugation of bibliographic form and narrative content, saturated of absences and presences, B. S. Johnson was then able to convert *The Unfortunates* in “his faithful and loving fulfilment” of the “promise” (Coe, 23), made to his friend Tony, of getting it “all down”.

3. *House Mother Normal* - A Layer-upon-Layer Singularity

House Mother Normal was written between February and July of 1970, when B. S. Johnson was 37 years old, and first published in 1971, in simultaneous editions, by Trigram Press and Collins. The story of *House Mother Normal* takes place inside an elderly people's home, where eight residents live under the thumb of a ninth character, the House Mother, a cold-hearted middle-aged woman who runs the institution according to her own profit schemes and sadistic rules.

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

(...)

You find our friends dining, first, and later singing, working, playing, travelling, competing, discussing, and finally being entertained.

(Johnson, 1971, *House Mother Introduces*, 5)

(...) You should understand the simple fact that they are all approaching death very quickly; and one must help them to do so in the right spirit. It is what used to be called a holy duty. I did not invent this system: I inherit it. And in the end death will come to me too, probably.

There! They enjoy it. Sometimes for a change I have them doing Travel in the form of bizarre sexual antics. As-if-sexual, that is, in the case of some friends. And now I give you – *SPORT! Yes. it's Tourney Time again, friends! Remember how you enjoyed the last Tourney we had?* *Of course you do! Get the mops, Ivy, please. And Charlie, you wheel Mrs Bowen to one corner, and you, Sarah, wheel George to the opposite corner (...)*

Another hit for Mrs Bowen! Sarah, see if George is still awake, will you? He doesn't seem to be trying very hard. *Last joust, then. Away you go!*

(1971, *House Mother*, 16/17)

Johnson's purpose with the novel is to provide his readers with an in-depth, accurate and multifaceted account of a shared moment. In order to achieve this, Johnson creates a layered narrative that, page by page, using techniques that resemble the present-day procedures of 3D printing, create the illusion of simultaneousness and direct the reader towards a more emphatic and complex comprehension of the characters and events that make up *House Mother Normal*.

Taking into consideration the form of the novel, it is possible to interpret that B. S. Johnson conceived *House Mother Normal* with an intention comparable to Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque's objectives when they created their cubist paintings: "to show different viewpoints at the same time and within the same space"⁸. In B. S. Johnson's case, his objective was to create the image of the "same time (...) within the same space" through the use of the "different viewpoints" present there. In order to accomplish his goal, Johnson provided *House Mother Normal* with singular features that make it distinct among his works and otherwise.

3.1 Uniqueness

The novel portrays a social evening, right after dinner, during which the residents, according to the House Mother's commands, are requested to take part on a series of activities which include completing chores, singing, doing arts and crafts, undergoing a physical work-out, having a one way "discussion session" with the House Mother, followed by her joke-telling, and, in conclusion, watching a "presentation" on stage, performed by the House Mother and her dog Ralphie. Through the use of the interior monologue technique, B. S. Johnson provides his readers with the transcribed account of his characters' thoughts and emotions as the evening progresses. Each interior monologue is introduced by the character's medical history and level of psychological awareness (allowing the readers to assess the characters' degree of dementia and fragility) which becomes more and more incomplete and confused as the character being presented is more physical and mentally incapacitated than the previous one. These accounts create then an effect of "Multiperspectivity" or, as Marcus Hartner refers to, on *the living handbook of narratology*, the "repeatedly portraying [of] the same event from various different angles" (2). In his introduction to the 2013 edition of *House Mother Normal*, Andrew Motion refers to this succession of more and more fragmented accounts as representations of "the inevitable progress of age and decay" (vi). Motion continues, stating that:

(...) each of the novel's eight speakers treat the same events in turn, with varying degrees of comprehension and explicitness (...) These differences of perception give us a slow release of horror, so that by the end of the book when we are hearing from characters who are hardly able to speak, (...), we have acquired sufficient knowledge to sympathize with them despite their inarticulacy – or all the more so because of it.

⁸ As explained in the definition of Cubism Art provided by The Tate Museum Website in <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/c/cubism> - accessed on 14th May 2017

In *Like a Fiery Elephant – the Story of B. S. Johnson*, Jonathan Coe points out that Johnson's fifth novel, *House Mother Normal* marked a "decisive and somewhat surprising change of mode" (23) in the sense that it drifts away from the first-person accounts that characterises his previous works to present a single occasion through the perspective of nine different characters. Coe also states that *House Mother Normal* is "the one book in which he does "characterisation" (albeit through the medium of his beloved interior monologue)" (24). *House Mother Normal* is also the "one book" in which Johnson uses a fictional/ imagined event as the basis for a novel. This provides *House Mother Normal* with a singular identity among Johnson's novels since the writer was adamant in his belief that, as Philip Tew reports in *B. S. Johnson*, writers "should tell the truth and (...) the only true knowledge is [about] oneself" making "All writing (...) autobiographical" (2002, 10). Nevertheless, the unique nature of *House Mother Normal* is not limited to its singularity among Johnson's works.

3.2 Parity

B. S. Johnson organizes the novel in eight sections of twenty-one pages, corresponding to each character's monologue with two exceptions. The first one consists of an introduction by the House Mother in which she presents the characters and sets the scene. This introduction occupies two halves of two pages, beginning half through page five and going up almost to the middle of page six. The second exception occurs in the ninth section corresponding to the House Mother's monologue which will take up twenty-two pages, instead of twenty-one. From Sarah Lamson (with a CQ count⁹ of 10) to George Hedbury (CQ count of 2) or Rosetta Stanton (CQ count of 0), all residents have the same number of pages given to each of their monologues, even if their physical and mental circumstances don't allow them to verbalize their thoughts and experiences. For example, even if the majority of the pages attributed to the monologues of George and Rosetta are either blank or punctuated by bewildered moments of consciousness and disconnected silent cries, permeated by white spaces between the words and sentences, Johnson entitles these characters with the same number of pages as any other. Hence, the assignment of twenty-one pages to each resident can be understood as a form of providing these

⁹ A test for senile dementia with ten questions eliciting "signs of life, self-possession and orientation", explained by Rod Megham in *B S Johnson and Post-War Literature: Possibilities of the Avant-Garde*. As Johnson explains in the House Mother's introduction to the novel, a CQ count is "the total of correct answers (...) given to questions [like] Where are you now? What is this place? What day is this? What month is it? What year is it? How old are you? When is your birthday? In what year were you born? Who is on the throne now –king or queen? Who was on the throne before?" (6).

characters with parity since all have the same number of pages (which would amount to the same duration of narrative time and the same amount of narrative focus), they all possess the same degree of importance and attention, without the usual narrative hierarchy of leading and secondary characters.

3.3 Multiple layers

As the reader progresses along the novel, the different pages portraying the various perspectives on the same events pile up one on the top of the other (both physically and conceptually) as layers that successively shape and make whole the experience of that shared social evening. Although it is a technology ahead of Johnson's time, it is possible to create an analogy between this process of sequentially stacking the monologues in order to build a multifaceted narrative and the present-day process of creating physical objects through the use of 3D printing techniques. 3D printers work by using additive processes. In an additive process, an object is created by laying down successive layers of material until the object is created. Each of these layers can be seen as a delicately sliced horizontal cross-section of the intended object. The layers can be held together through different procedures, being one of the most widely used the method of Fused Deposition Modelling, in which the printer deposits layer upon layer of plastic material that is gradually heated. The layers become soft and adhesive and, as they come into contact with the material in the layer below, they adhere, starting to build the planned object. Comparably, Johnson creates a multi-dimensional representation in *House Mother Normal* by precisely laying out the characters' different perspectives on the same events in a sequence of pages (layers) of thoughts and emotions that are precisely organized on the twenty-one pages of each monologue and (by the time the reader reaches the end of the novel) fused together to form an all-inclusive complete narrative. By doing this, Johnson creates "a novel that can be read 'vertically' as well as 'horizontally'" (Coe 24/25). The "additive" processes, used to bind together these many layers, allow Johnson to build patterns of symmetry that, in turn, are instrumental in creating an illusion of simultaneousness, the idea that the readers are having access to the mind of nine characters that are all sharing a common instant in their lives.

3.4 Additive processes

The fact that all the monologues from the residents have the same number of pages reinforces the idea that this group of people are all partaking in the same moment, a moment with the same palpable “duration” (twenty-one pages). After having occupied page one with the synthesis of the medical history of the resident being presented, every monologue begins exactly half way through page two and finishes precisely on the same place at the beginning of page twenty-one (first top quarter of the page). The repetitive use of an identical page layout to start and finish all the monologues reinforces the idea that the reader is having recursive access to the same instant in the lives of these characters. An instant that is carefully choreographed on the pages that represent it so that the reader may have the account of how every moment shared together during that evening was lived by each of the characters. The level of accuracy employed by Johnson to convey this notion of shared simultaneousness goes to the point that “in every section, the same event (and the characters’ differing responses to it) occurs not just on the same page but at precisely the same point on that page” (Coe 24). This way, each page of the different monologues will mirror the same event according to the perspective of the character to whom they belong. As it is possible to observe in the following examples:

Page 4 of each Monologue – half way through the page – Sioned Bowen drops her plate while attempting to clear up the table.

* The quotations presented inside a box intend to call attention to the page layout or typographic device being analysed.

Sarah Lamson	“Now Mrs Bowen’s knocked her plate down, now she’ll cop it. Yes.”
Charlie Edwards	“- Now there’ll be a fuss. Just over dropping a plate.”
Ivy Nicholls	“- Now she’s dropped it! Now she’ll be in trouble, I’m glad.”
Ron Lamson	“Dropped it, she has Mess, mess, it’s all a mess.”
Gloria Ridge	“She’s in trouble this time, not me, House Mother’ll hit her, not me, this time.”

Sioned Bowen	“Oh no! <i>I didn't mean to drop them, Miss!</i> ”
George Hedbury	(blank)
Rosetta Stanton	“Hael” (welsh for “generous”)
House Mother	“ <i>You dirty old ... person! What a mess, dropped the lot!</i> ”

Page 5 of each Monologue – top of the page – the House Mother tells the residents to sing the House Song.

Sarah Lamson	“Oh not that song again. do?”	What good does it
Charlie Edwards	“- the Song. She wants us to sing, as usual.”	
Ivy Nicholls	“ The joys of life, music while you work, used to listen regularly, (...)”	
Ron Lamson	”Oh, the song, must make effort she must see me singing”	
Gloria Ridge	(blank)	
Sioned Bowen	“No, I won't sing her song. I think it's silly, so she can do the other thing.”	
George Hedbury	(blank)	
Rosetta Stanton	(blank)	
House Mother	“(...) and so now it's time for the House Song. Not to say the House Hymn!”	

Page 6 of each Monologue – top of the page – the residents are requested to work.

Sarah Lamson	“Listen to her now, work, work, I’ve known nothing else all my life, who does she thinks she’s taking in? Good deed indeed, she must make something out of all this”
Charlie Edwards	“Work? I’m retired, I’m not here to work.”
Ivy Nicholls	(gap)
Ron Lamson	“Work, no, that will mean moving”
Gloria Ridge	“Work ! The people must work if they are to earn their daily bread !”
Sioned Bowen	(blank)
George Hedbury	(blank)
Rosetta Stanton	(blank)
House Mother	<i>“Now it’s work, everyone, work, and then play, play later. Our little good deed for the day, work.”</i>

Page 14 of each Monologue – top of the page – the House Mother introduces a game of *Pass the Parcel*.

Sarah Lamson	“Now what’s she want? Pass the Parcel? We used to play that, didn’t we?”
Charlie Edwards	“Now what is it she’s going to get us up to? Pass the Parcel. (...) This is stupid.”
Ivy Nicholls	“What’s she on about? Pass the what?”
Ron Lamson	“Pass the Parcel ! What a waste of time, more movement, but (...)”

Gloria Ridge	“Pass the Parcel, what’s this, I love games. Pass the Parcel and I’m the winner”
Sioned Bowen	“Pass the Parcel. Haven’t played that since I was a child.”
George Hedbury	(blank)
Rosetta Stanton	(blank)
House Mother	<i>“Attention please, everyone (...) we’re going to play Pass the Parcel.”</i>

Page 17 of each Monologue – top of the page – the House Mother announces a Tourney between the residents.

Sarah Lamson	“Sport! She certainly keeps us on the go.”
Charlie Edwards	“Tourney? Right. <i>Right Mrs Bowen, sport now. You won the tourney last time (...)</i> ”
Ivy Nicholls	“Sport! More effort ! No, I’m going to sit this one out”
Ron Lamson	“Ah, yes, that was fun last time, the tourney. I enjoyed it.”
Gloria Ridge	“no twitcher if she’s going to run a tourney, good.”
Sioned Bowen	“Tourney, oh yes, I won the last time (...) <i>hang on a minute Charlie (...)</i> ”
George Hedbury	(blank)
Rosetta Stanton	(blank)
House Mother	<i>“SPORT! Yes, it’s Tourney Time again, friends! Remember how you enjoyed the last (...)</i> ”

Page 18 of each Monologue – initial part of the page – the House Mother introduces a “discussion session”.

Sarah Lamson	“Let her talk away, I’m not interested, it’s a rest for me.”
Charlie Edwards	“I don’t want to listen to all that rubbish again. Who does she think I am?”
Ivy Nicholls	(no reference)
Ron Lamson	(no reference)
Gloria Ridge	“No, shan’t listen ! Bung my ears up !”
Sioned Bowen	(no reference)
George Hedbury	(blank)
Rosetta Stanton	(blank)
House Mother	<i>“So after all our exertions let’s just have a quiet discussion session, shall we?”</i>

Page 21 of each Monologue – initial part of the page – the House Mother ends the social evening.

Sarah Lamson	“Listen to her! No, doesn’t matter”
Charlie Edwards	“Listen to her! No, doesn’t matter”
Ivy Nicholls	“Listen to her! No, doesn’t matter”
Ron Lamson	“Listen to her! No, doesn’t matter”

Gloria Ridge	“Listen to her! No, doesn’t matter”
Sioned Bowen	“Listen to her! No, doesn’t matter”
George Hedbury	“Listen to her! No, doesn’t matter”
Rosetta Stanton	(blank)
House Mother	“And now we must be in just the mood to sing the Jubilee before we all vanish up our own orifices. All together now! One Two Three!”

The same mirror effect is visible in the interactions among the residents that don’t have a House Mother’s request or command as trigger, as exemplified on

Pages 7 and 8 of Sarah Lamson and Charlie Edwards’ Monologues – end of page 7, beginning of page 8 – Sarah Lamson asks Charlie Edwards for a cigarette.

Sarah Lamson	“ <i>Charlie, have you got a fag? - Mean old sod. And I know he smokes</i> ”
Charlie Edwards	“ <i>Now what’s she want? No, Sarah, you know I haven’t got a cigarette.</i> ”

Page 7 of Ivy Nichols and Gloria Ridge’s Monologues, top of the page – Ivy Nichols and Gloria Ridge exchange insults.

Ivy Nichols	“ <i>Here you are. I can’t help it if you don’t want to work, Mrs Ridge! Tell her, not me. She’s the one who makes you, not me. And you! The cheek of it!</i> ”
Gloria Ridge	“ <i>Don’t want this work. Don’t want this work! Or this Ivy, cow she is, slummocky old cow. Slummocky old shit cow! That annoyed her, that’ll teach her to order me about, I’m not here to be ordered about!</i> ”

Page 8 of Ivy Nichols and Ron Lamson’s Monologues – Ivy Nichols and Ron Lamson talk about the work assignment

Ivy Nichols	<i>“Ron, shall we do it the way we did it yesterday? I know all about your arse, Ron, I know, I weep for your poor arse, but what can I do? If you do the gluing at least you don’t have to go reaching all over the table for the roll of paper, do you? Come on now, Ron darling, you know you’ll only dwell on it otherwise, what have you got to lose? That’s it Ro, that’s the ticket. Look, you have this brush and glue, it’s the best one, my one. Yes, the best. You’ll be all right with that, you’ll do a good job, Ron.”</i>
Ron Lamson	<i>“I can’t Ivy, it’s my arse, I’m in constant pain from it. There’s no words to describe it. Whether I work or not I still get it, nothing I can do makes it any the easier. Nothing to lose. You’re right, Ivy, I’ve nothing to lose, nothing. The best one? Can’t think of the state the others must be in, then”</i>

Page 13 of Ivy Nichols and Gloria Ridge’s Monologues, second half of the page – Ivy Nichols and Gloria Ridge exchange insults once again.

Ivy Nichols	<i>“Oh! I would touch you with someone else’s bargepole, you dirty fat git! You say that louder so’s she can hear, and you’ll get the twitcher again!”</i>
Gloria Ridge	<i>“Ivy the creeper- crawlie, can’t touch me! You are a stinky woman! Twitcher’s up on stage, meeeeahr!”</i>

In these small conversations held by the residents and represented through direct speech (in *italics*), Johnson uses gaps to replace the lines of the dialogue that correspond to the interlocutors’ participation. Thus, a gap may represent at the same time the moment in which one of the interlocutors is speaking and the other is listening. The reader will only have access to the reaction to what was said when reaching the monologue of the corresponding interlocutor, thus completing the dialogue. Johnson uses these gaps as another additive process that binds together the successive layers of this novel. If the reader replaced the gaps with holes on the pages and stacked the punctured pages one on top of the other, it would be possible to have access to the uninterrupted flow of these dialogues since there is an immediate correspondence between the lines and the gaps, just like in traditional dialogue representation. Examples of this are:

Page 7 of Charlie Edwards and the House Mother’s Monologues – first half of the page.

Charlie Edwards	House Mother
<p><i>No, I’ll be very careful. I haven’t let you down yet, have I?</i></p>	<p><i>But please be careful not to stain any of the labels with drips, there’s a good trusty, my old Charlie?</i></p> <p><i>No, I know you haven’t. I know, Charlie.</i></p>

Page 12 of Ron Lamson and Sioned Bowen’s Monologues – second half of the page

Ron Lamson	Sioned Bowen
<p><i>Mrs Bowen, can you pass me your glue, please? This one’s finished.</i></p> <p><i>Thanks very much, Mrs Bowen.</i></p> <p><i>Yes, all right now.</i></p>	<p><i>Glue? Yes, here. And have Ivy’s, too, then you won’t have to stretch over and hurt yourself so much. All right now?</i></p>

Page 17 of Ron Lamson and Gloria Ridge’s Monologues – first half of the page

Ron Lamson	Gloria Ridge
<p><i>Mrs Ridge, I’ll bet you my breakfast milk that Mrs Bowen’s wins.</i></p> <p><i>But what will you give me if I win?</i></p> <p><i>Right, you’re on, Shake.</i></p>	<p><i>Your breakfast milk? Yes, I’ll bet you, Ron. All I’ve got that you’d want, Ron, is a quiet feel in the toilet before bed. Shake.</i></p>

Apart from dialogue representation, the white spaces between the words and sentences of *House Mother Normal* may also be understood as depicting the lapses of awareness experienced by all the residents. The more mentally fragile the residents are, the more frequent the occurrence of these white spaces becomes. Thus, it is possible to consider these intentional textual gaps, together with the text layout, as a form of measuring on the page the level of mental disorder that the residents suffer from.

<p>Sarah Lamson 16</p>	<p>Sarah Lamson 17</p>
<p>Was a great one for her Guinness. Sometimes I've seen her knock back thirty in an evening. But she was a quiet drinker. You'd never know she'd had too many till she fell down when she tried to get up. This bloody pushchair needs oiling or something. But she was a good friend to me, we had many a good time together. She pulled me out of many a dark time. Like when Ronnie married that Doris. And after the cat got run over, Maisie.</p> <p>We kids used to run about in felt slippers then, they were the cheapest, a cut above the barefoot kids. It was our way of</p> <p>Tired of pushing. But still carry on. Slog, slog.</p> <p>They were the good old days, it's true.</p> <p>And where were we when we were wanted? Oh, we were there all right, slapping the sandbags on the incendiaries, ducking down the shelters when the HE started. All that sort of thing.</p> <p>That's enough. I can't push any more. i'm going to stop whether she likes it or not, going to stop.</p>	<p>A sit at last, rest my legs. Sport! She certainly keeps us on the go. Tourney. That means pushing someone, I suppose. Up again, Sarah, you can do it. Lean on George's bathchair till I have to move, take the nearest corner, Charlie'll have to go further with Mrs Bowen. George doesn't seem too well. Prop the mop under his arm, keep it steady.</p> <p>Ready! Go!</p> <p>Trundle, trundle, nt as young as I used to be, get up speed. There! Silly old fool let the mop drop and caught hers in the chops!</p> <p>Not so fast this time. <i>Keep up the mop now, George!</i> There, that must have hurt him. <i>You all right?</i> Seems all right.</p> <p>I should think it is the last time! Ooooh! That surely hurt him. But he says nothing, George, just takes it.</p>
<p>(Johnson,1971, Sarah Lamson, 22)</p>	<p>(Johnson, 1971, Sarah Lamson, 23)</p>

George Hedbury 16	George Hedbury 17
<p style="text-align: center;">moving</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">stopped good</p> <p style="text-align: center;">what's this?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Jerk</p> <p style="text-align: center;">moving this</p> <p>stick</p> <p style="text-align: center;">oooooooooh!</p> <p>splashash what was? smell</p> <p style="text-align: center;">mop not this mop</p> <p style="text-align: center;">what?</p> <p style="text-align: center;"> <i>aaaagh!</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">shoulder !</p> <p style="text-align: center;">blank</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>aaaaaaaaaagh!</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;">(Johnson, 1971, George Hedbury, 154)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">(Johnson, 1971, George Hedbury, 155)</p>

In the case of Rosetta Stanton, whose monologue becomes blank from page 17 to its end on page 21, it is conceivable to interpret the white spaces that accompany the content of Rosetta's last words on the page, together with the downward inclination of the page layout, as having a more dramatic meaning as they can indicate either this resident's loss of consciousness or (more probably) her death at that precise moment.

Rosetta Stanton 16	Rosetta Stanton 17
<p>Let me out, or I shall die</p> <p>No, I do</p> <p>not get any lighter, Ivy, I in- tend</p> <p>not</p> <p>to get any- thing any- more</p> <p>no more</p>	
<p>(Johnson, 1971, Rosetta Stanton, 176)</p>	<p>(Johnson, 1971, Rosetta Stanton, 177)</p>

This way, Johnson materialises on the page surface of *House Mother Normal* not only the medical information regarding the mental condition of the residents, which had been previously presented at the beginning of each monologue, but also the occurrence of crucial moments in the narrative – like the probable death of one of the residents during the Social Evening, without anyone realising it or providing assistance. Johnson then provides his novel with a sense of rigorous consistency that goes from bibliographic form to narrative content and vice-versa, in the sense that both complement one another in the readers’ realisation of meaning. In order to achieve this realisation, the readers of *House Mother Normal* are requested to rally the different (textual or non-textual) sources of meaning present on the pages of Johnson’s novel and understand their application and intention. Simon Barton points out that:

The reader of *House Mother Normal* must constantly flick back and forth through the pages of the novel in order to understand the meaning of the blank space, and they must try to understand whether the current narrator is either listening to another character, thinking about another

character's dialogue or is suffering from dementia and simply cannot or does not want to speak at this point in the synchronous narrative. (...) The reader must understand this technique in order to generate meaning from the narrative and understand the representational use of blank space in the novel. (33)

3.5 Synergies

In *House Mother Normal*, the symmetry created by this strategic and accurate positioning of events and reactions throughout the monologues' pages give way not only to an impression of synchronism between any corresponding moments in each characters' interior monologue and interactions but also to the acknowledgement of a sense of coherence and validity to these characters' testimonials and existence. Through the use of the rigid and methodical mapping on the page of their reactions to the same events, Johnson is able to make these characters more realistic. Considering this, Barton states that:

House Mother Normal is one of the most successful texts at realising and representing the complexity, or rather simplicities (...) of the internal state and the simultaneous thoughts and dialogue of several characters at once. (...) *House Mother Normal* was one of the first to actively explore the potential of the printed page and the text that is placed on it and how the page can be used to emulate certain extreme mental states, or just simply represent one character listening to another character (...). (34)

Thus, the verbal and bibliographic form chosen to present the story serves the purpose of making it more believable as the account of these characters' shared experience would not have the same impact if it was not for the form B. S. Johnson chose and strictly outlined to present it. As Coe states "what's even more impressive, to my mind, is that this (...) breadth of human sympathy coexists with – even arises out of – a technical 'experiment' that is as rigorous and audacious as anything he attempted" (24). Coe proceeds by pointing out that:

While with some avant-garde novelists (...) such an experiment might seem chilly and over-calculated, Johnson miraculously avoids this pitfall. His characteristic forthrightness, his inability to mask his emotions at any time (...) here guarantees that technical brilliance is never given precedence over a human and proper response to the characters' pitiable situation (25).

In her March 2017 review of *House Mother Normal*, JC Sutcliffe claims that the novel is a "successful piece of experimental writing ([a] term Johnson disliked) both because of and

despite its explorations in form”. Sutcliffe points out that a more conventional public and critic will argue that “only the more traditional aspects of the novel – the poignant, readable memories of the more cogent residents” (3) are able to demonstrate B. S. Johnson’s gifts as a writer. However, she also fends off this perspective by mentioning that “the framing of the same social evening from multiple perspectives, mostly internal thought, adds up to a much greater result than the single omniscient perspective alone could hope to achieve” and adds that *House Mother Normal* is perhaps “the closest a novel will ever come to the ability to cram everything in, to report in real time, what is actually going on rather than what actually makes a satisfying narrative arc” (3). As mentioned by Hartner, “multiperspective strategies of narration” are “never semantically empty, but always contribute to the overall meaning of the text” (3). This occurs due to the fact that the different “viewpoints employed have to be continually revised, re-evaluated and re-contextualized” (3) by the readers, who have to engage in recursive iterations of the same events perceived through different minds to be able to piece the narrative together. Considering this, the synergy between the story and its verbal and bibliographic form can be stretched to include a third party. Through Johnson’s experiments and choices in *House Mother Normal*, he empowers his readers by making them part of the story’s processes. The readers initiate the procedure of gradually building the narrative at every turn of page and every time they reflect upon the accounts and form presented to them. If the reader (by whatever reason) chooses to interrupt or pause the reading experience, the multi-dimensional “print” of that social evening will remain incomplete or altered for as long as this reader wishes. Consequently, in the same way that the story and the form chosen to present it depend on one another to create meaning and impact, both of them also depend on the reader to prompt their synergy to function. Bearing this in mind, it is possible to consider *House Mother Normal* as a multi-perspective novel that results not only from the layering of events and page organization but also from the combined efforts of internal and external agents of the literary process.

By defying conventional representations, Johnson’s fifth novel, *House Mother Normal* represents a unique synergy between the story that its author proposes to tell, the material embodiment chosen for the narrative and the reader’s action. The ability given to the reader to page after page, layer upon layer, come in direct contact with the characters’ different conditions, thoughts, emotions and reactions to what is occurring to them and around them, allows the development of a clearer, more vivid and believable account of not only the events of that social evening but also of who these characters are and how sincere is their experience. Motion states that “Johnson always insisted that his fictions should contain 'no lies', and he evolved all kinds

of devices (formal and otherwise) to demonstrate his intent” (ix). In line with this, Motion concludes that, in *House Mother Normal*, “the effect of reading their monologues end to end” allows the readers to, for an instance (the instance of a social evening), glimpse into the minds of these characters and “experience a sense of sharing. Sharing the experience of being human (...)” (vii). An experience that B. S. Johnson has the gift and commitment to make more authentic and empathetic in *House Mother Normal*, one page at a time, one layer upon the other.

4. Christie Malry's Own Interactive Form

Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry is B. S. Johnson's sixth novel, written between December 1970 and March 1972. It was published for the first time in 1973. The novel tells the story of Christie Malry, "a simple" young clerk, who initially finds a job at a bank and, after that, in a confection factory.

(...) Christie was a simple person.

At the interview formally granted to all new employees (...), Christie's minimal qualifications were laid bare, his appearance scrutinised, and his nervousness remarked on. Then he was asked why he wished to join the bank. Christie was lost, could not think of his answer.

(Johnson, *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 11)

In the spring Christie accordingly served out his months' notice at the bank, well survived the open contempt of the colleagues (...). And there was (...) no farewell cakes with the last afternoon tea (...).

Christie's new job (...) Tapper's had been manufacturing sweets and cakes for a mere eighty-three years, and they were short of an invoice clearer after all that Time. Christie was the only respondent to their advertisement: he thought it might be just what he needed.

(*Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 17)

Malry contrasts the simpleness of his professional life and the sweetness of his romantic relationship with the bitterness of feeling wronged by the prevailing injustices, small and big, that every day he encounters in his interactions with society in general and some individuals in particular.

In the evenings Christie would work at the correspondence course in Accountancy for which he had enrolled.

(*Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 17)

(...) One of Christie's more menial tasks was to open his section's post in the mornings, and this he had done as usual, sorting it into orders, invoices and enquiries/ complaints. (...) as he made his way back to his Section Christie was annoyed that his Supervisor had been so unfeeling and unsympathetic about his mother's death. The Supervisor had no doubt seen himself as being professional, (...), standing no nonsense from death and suchlike. I have been debited, thought Christie, Double-Entry must apply.

(*Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 40)

‘Every Debit must have its corresponding Credit,’ explained Christie, ‘Perhaps every bad must have its corresponding good. An extension might be called Moral Double-Entry’.

(Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry, 1973, 55)

At once Christie began to try to imagine what this Collector of taxes did with the money he garnered from (...) He no doubt passes it on to the Government, he thought, after keeping a modicum for his trouble. And he could at once think of the innumerable things the Government spent it on of which he disapproved.

‘The buggers!’ said Christie, who I must point out yet again as very simple, ‘And it’s with my money, too! I shall allow no sufflamination in balancing that Debit!’

(Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry, 1973, 104)

The Shrike loved Christie. Then Christie loved the Shrike.

(Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry, 1973, 106)

Amazed by the simplicity and efficiency of the double-entry account system, Christie decides to apply it to his life with the purpose of morally achieving vindication for all the offences society has imposed on him. Thus, Christie considers that every affront suffered confers him the right to a reward, as a debit will correspond to a credit in an accountant’s double-entry book.

I could express it in Double-Entry Term, Debit receiver, credit giver (...) How settle that account? I am entitled to exact payment, of course. Every Debit must have its credit (...) But payment in what form? (...) Debit them, Credit me! Account settled! (...)

But Christie almost shouted aloud at his discovery:

It’s a Great Idea! Eureka! My very own Double-Entry!

(Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry, 1973, 24)

Christie’s one man crusade against unfairness and abuse starts with insignificant acts of defiance, like posting an empty reply-paid envelope from a company that wanted to sell him some flower bulbs. The empty envelope has the objective of making the company employees waste their time and create false expectations about its content as Christie did when first receiving their letter.

When Christie arrived back (...) there was one letter on the mat and it was addressed to him. An organization was hoping to sell him some flower bulbs (...). Christie felt slightly Debited at

the waste of his time, and promptly Credited himself by sealing the envelope without putting anything in it and going out at once to post it.

(*Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 42)

These brat like acts very soon progress to more nefarious actions like the poisoning of a water supply reservoir that ultimately caused the death of 20.000 unaware West-Londoners, as he felt generally misled and exploited by the structures that govern society.

A total of just over twenty thousand people died of cyanide poisoning that morning. (...) Their deaths were not painful, nor prolonged. Virtually all of them (...) were easily replaceable, according to society. What can be wrong?

(*Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 147)

This rapid escalation in aggression and sophistication reveals Christie as the wolf in sheep's clothing whose terrorist actions and incendiary plans remain obscure not only for those few close to him but also for the authorities, who "baffled" by the daredevil and ruthless criminal behaviour are unable to apprehend the culprit. Thus, Christie feels he is above any type of accountability for his actions.

Now, thought Christie, I have everything.

(*Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 172)

However, Christie's feelings of victory over the social system that oppressed him do not last long as Christie is diagnosed with a severely destructive cancer and dies, without accomplishing his final plans (blowing up the Big Ben onto the Houses of Parliament). Thus, in the last reckoning done, a "bad debt" closes Christie's account, leaving him without the credit and/ or the ultimate vindication he felt entitled to for the grievances suffered during his life.

In the content summary of the novel present in his book, Jonathan Coe characterises *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry* as "a brilliant, fast-paced black comedy", whose "gleeful melange of humour and pessimism" makes it "usually the point at which newcomers to B. S. Johnson are encouraged to start" as it is "more approachable for the non-experimentally inclined reader" (26). However, despite not possessing intricate formal devices like the foreseeing holes cut on the pages, the typographical agents of simultaneousness or the unbounded groups of pages present in Johnson's previous novels, *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry* possesses its own

formal experimentation as it is constructed in a continuous metaleptic interaction between the author, narrator, character(s) and reader(s), agents of the literary process made palpable by Johnson through various word-based strategies. Genette describes narrative metalepsis as a “deliberate transgression of the threshold of embedding (...) when an author (or his reader) introduces himself into the fictive action of the narrative or when a character in that fiction intrudes into the extradiegetic existence of the author or reader” (quoted by Pier, 190). In *Christie Malry's*, Johnson transforms the noncompliance with the traditional narrative boundaries into a natural feeling interaction between author/ narrator, character(s) and reader(s) that smoothly accompanies and justifies the progression and results of the events of the novel. Thus, *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry* has more than metaleptic features, it has a metaleptic nature as Johnson, who devotedly dedicated his work to the constant dialogue/interaction between form and content, endows his sixth novel with the form of a continual dialogue/interaction between the different agents of the literary process - author, narrator, character(s) and reader(s). Thus, the extradiegetic world of writing and reading the novel regularly interrupts the intradiegetic world of narration and plot. This bracketing of the world of fictional events in the act of literary communication can be described as a structural element of this novel's form.

4.1 The Form is interacting with Christie

In the title of the first chapter of *Christie Malry's Own Double Entry*, “The Industrious Pilgrim: an Exposition without which You might have felt Unhappy”, B. S. Johnson uses the second person pronoun (singular and/or plural), puzzling his reader (at this point, still unaware of the mechanisms of the novel) in relation to the identity of this “You” being addressed. Genette states that novelists have to choose either “to have the story told by one of its ‘characters’, or to have it told by a narrator outside the story” (quoted in Richardson, 2006, 5). However, this standard position is frequently challenged by contemporary writers, who explore other forms of narration in their novels. Brian Richardson clarifies that “There is a general move away from what was thought to be “omniscient” third person narration to limited third person narration to ever more unreliable first person narrators to new explorations of “you”, “we”, and mixed forms (...). (with) The basic categories of first and third person narrations (...) (being) repeatedly problematized and violated by experimental writers” (13/14). Richardson also states that “Hypertext narrators (...) (create) a series of narrative possibilities that a reader must then convert into a single story, one which, by definition, cannot have been fully known in advance

of its reading” (9), as it happens with *Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry* and other Johnson’s novels. Regarding “you” narration, Richardson considers that it is “particularly devious, since it can refer to the protagonist, the narrator, the narratee, or the readers”. Regarding narration that resorts to first person plural (“we”), Richardson considers it more adaptable as it can “grow or shrink to accommodate very different sized groups and can either include or exclude the reader” (2006, 14). As in most novels, throughout *Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry*, B. S. Johnson makes use of the third person narration to describe characters and report events.

Christie Malry was a simple person.

It did not take **him** long to realise that **he** had not been born into money; (...) and that the course most likely to benefit **him** would be to place **himself** next to the money, or at least next to those who were making it. **He** therefore decided that **he** should become a bank employee.

(*Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 11)

Christie turned and walked back, against the flow of the crowd, past the office block again. **He** stopped and took a coin from **his** pocket and, keeping close to the wall whilst holding the coin down at arms’ length, **he** scratched an unsightly line.

(*Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 24)

Christie was not too late home; **he** liked to be in bed by twelve or so. At the site next Hythe House **he** set the alarm to ring in twelve hours’ time, released the catch which acted as a brake on the simple clockwork mechanism, and perfectly, **his** little goods train ran its moderately-paced way.

(*Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 106)

Christie loved the Shrike’s room, as well. (...) The Shrike kept a photograph of Christie as a schoolboy hung up on it, to remind **her**. (...) The Shrike was not by nature a butcher’s assistant, Christie realised only too well: it was society that forced **her** to be so, or to be always something similar. **She** was as a pearl in her own right, and it was a reflection on society that it could find only inappropriate use for that wit, that nacreous quality that were just two of the things that endeared **her** to **him**.

(*Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 138)

However, the novel is also infused with the presence of other persons, namely “I”, “you” and “we”:

I did tell **you** Christie was a simple person.

(*Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 11)

What Christie thought, however (and how privileged **we** are to be able to know it).

(Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry, 1973, 12)

A man may be defined through his actions, **you** will remember. **We** may guess at his motives, of course; he may do so as well.

(Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry, 1973, 52)

You may look forward to the arrival of a lorry at Tapper's loaded with enough carbon paper to keep them going until the end of the century.

(Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry, 1973, 97)

The use of these forms of narration may, as mentioned by Richardson, be difficult to ascertain in terms of their meaning, as they can carry different and ambiguous connotations or uses. Nonetheless, in *Christie Malry's* this uncertainty is easily resolved as Johnson leaves no doubts regarding who is the "I" addressing the "you" and who the "we" refers to. Taking into consideration the content of the sentences where these pronominal forms are placed, mainly comprised of metaleptic comments on the events being told, it is clear that the "I" refers to the author/ narrator, who is speaking to the reader(s) "holding the book" - "you".

Here is the story promised **you** on page 29, as told to Christie at his Catholic mother's shapely knee. *(Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry, 1973, 79)*

You must be curious about Christie's father. So am **I**.

(Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry, 1973, 81)

And he had contrived a method of throwing these switches by remote control, so to speak, in an unusual way which **I** am not going to bother to invent on this occasion. But **I** will go so far as to tell **you** that it involved a shovel, which was naturally already there and available for use.

(Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry, 1973, 101)

'Where', **you** must be screaming, 'did Christie find this gelignite? **I** can't obtain gelignite. Not that **I** want to, of course.'

And that is **your** answer: if **you** want gelignite seriously enough, then **you** can come by it. (...) Christie wanted it more than enough.

(Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry, 1973, 106)

In the same way, it is evident that Johnson's use of the pronominal form "we" does not work as a way of exclusion. On the contrary, it deliberately works as a method of identification between the author/ narrator and the reader(s). By adding "I" with "you" which equals "we", the author/ narrator consolidates the partnership and the interaction between him and the reader(s), ontological agents of the literary process, in the consorted effort of interpreting the story world of *Christie Malry's Own Double Entry*.

What it does in practice is not what it says it does. It does not care for human life: it shortens that life by the nature of the work it demands, it poisons that life in pursuit of mere profit, it organizes wars from which it is certain mass killing will result ... but **you** know the ways in which **we** are all diminished: I should not need to rehearse them further.

(*Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 116)

This interaction is reinforced along the novel through the several rhetorical questions asked and comments made by the author/ narrator, who colloquially shares with the reader(s) not only his opinions about the events being depicted but also his perspective of the writing process itself.

Christie hoped that the call had been recorded other than by a constable's ear. Were all incoming phone calls to the police taped? Why not?

(*Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 99)

Either it had worked during the weekend, or it had been discovered and dismantled at some other time. Or it had not worked. Christie never knew; this novel is not an unrelieved progression of successes, you know.

(*Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 102)

Next day Christie bought a clock work train set. Already you can see what was in his mind. He was careful to handle nothing but the box. He had not heard about fingerprints in vain, oh no!

(*Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 105/106)

The end came all too quickly, as it does at that age (...).

Meanwhile, they were both perfectly happy. Well, this is fiction, is it not? Isn't it?

(*Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 137)

(...) he went there and gained entrance to the yard through the small door in the gate by means of his plastic bank card (...). The commonest method known to criminal man; I am almost ashamed to repeat it.

(*Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 145)

And Christie returned the lorry whence it came, happy in his evening's work. It seems always he returns to the bosom of the Shrike: but wouldn't you?

(*Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 146)

Radio and television were broadcasting warnings by shortly after ten o'clock the next morning. Many people heard them. Most of the dead were in west London. They had taken it with breakfast, as tea, coffee, reconstituted fruit juice, or squash. (...)

Not a pretty sight, eh? Think what it would have been like if it had been cadmium (twenty-five times more toxic than cyanide) or chromates (fifty times more toxic) or beryllium (two thousand five hundred times!). You may consider it fortunate that Christie did know about beryllium at the time.

(*Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 146/147)

These contributions allow the progressive reduction of the distance between the author/ narrator and his reader(s). Despite inhabiting different space and time frames, the author/ narrator is constantly summoning the presence of the readers onto the pages of the novel. This action can be understood not only as a form of clearly acknowledging the existence of the readers in the literary process as the recipients of the product been made but also of the importance of their participation in the same process. Although Johnson has been adamant in the affirmation of his authority over his creations, he has also been candid in the acceptance that his readers will always infuse their personal interpretation into his novels, regardless of how formally restrictive he is. The interactive metaleptic nature of *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry* then seems to display not only the acceptance of the readers' presence and/ or interference but also (and more importantly) their inclusion in the literary process as an interlocutor, with whom the author/ narrator is able to neighbourly interact. However, *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry* interactive format is not exclusive to the contact established between the author/ narrator and the reader(s) as the author/ narrator of this novel does not shy away from directly addressing the main character. Contrary to what happens with the readers (as there is no access to their reactions), this interaction between author/ narrator and character is not unilateral. Conversations that break the conventional literary boundaries are held between the author/ narrator and his main character about the nature of the novel and of the mechanisms of the literary process.

'Christie', I warned him, 'it does not seem to me possible to take this novel much further. I'm sorry.'

'Don't be sorry,' said Christie, in a kindly manner, 'don't be sorry. We don't equate length with importance, do we? And who wants long novels anyway? (...) The writing of a long novel is in itself an anachronistic act: it was relevant only to a society and a set of social conditions which no longer exist.

'I'm glad you understand so readily,' I said, relieved. (...) 'I've put down all I have to say, or rather I will have done in another twenty-two pages, so surely...'

'So I do go on a little longer?' interrupted Christie.

'Yes, Christie, you go on to the end,' I assured him, and myself went on: 'Surely no reader will wish me to invent anything further, surely he or she can extrapolate only too easily from what has gone before?'

'If there is a reader,' said Christie. 'Most people won't read it.'

(Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry, 1973, 165)

The dialogue between author/narrator and his main character becomes more intimate when it surpasses the discussion of the literary structure and enters into a different plane, in which the author/narrator seems to vent with his main character his exhaustion towards the workings of the literary world or the character reprimands the writer for his lack of action in the ontological world.

'Yes, Christie, you go on to the end,' I assured him, and myself went on: 'Surely no reader will wish me to invent anything further, surely he or she can extrapolate only too easily from what has gone before?'

'If there is a reader,' said Christie. 'Most people won't read it.'

'Politicians, policemen, some educators and many others treat "most people" as idiots.'

'So writers may too?'

'On the contrary. "Most people" are right not to read novels today.'

'You've said all this before.'

'I'm very likely to say it again, too, since it's true.'

A pause. Then suddenly Christie said:

'Your work has been a continuous dialogue with form?'

'If you like,' I replied diffidently.

'Only one of the things it's been,' said Christie generously. 'It's something to aspire to, becoming a critic! Though there are too many exclamations marks in this novel already.'

(Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry, 1973, 165/166)

Christie's eyes remained open, bright. But I cannot say he looked flushed.

'In any case,' he said, almost to himself, not looking at me, 'you shouldn't be bloody writing novels about it, you should be out there bloody doing something about it.'

And the nurses then suggested I leave, not knowing who I was, that he could nod not die without me.

(*Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 180)

Creator and creature then expose the profound link that joins them with the writer apparently finding in his character the comprehension and incentive that he has been lacking from others. Jonathan Coe extends this level of intimacy between author/narrator and his main character by considering that in these interactions it is possible to observe “a valedictory quality (...): a sense that the narrator is saying goodbye not just to Christie, his terminally ill hero, but to something else, more abstract but just as precious” perhaps “his own terminally ill commitment to the novel as a form” (27). Apart from the reflection about the unequivocal bond between writer and character, the metaleptic intersection between literary or frames continues along *Christie Malry's* now with the considerations made by the characters about the readers. These considerations introduce the form “they” to the plurality of narrative pronouns of the novel. During the presentation of her son’s background, right before her death, Christie’s mother points out to him the importance of considering the reader’s need for comprehending the nature of the events of the novel. This way, the reader’s presence and importance for the fictional world is acknowledged not only by the author/narrator but also by the characters of the novel itself.

‘We have not always lived here. It is important for them to bear that in mind, Christie, if they are to understand. Not that I necessarily want them to understand, but it is clearly desirable that you should have the choice of allowing them to understand if you so wish.

(Johnson, *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 28)

Such a thing could hardly fail to influence the pattern of a young child’s future growth, could it? This is an example of the importance to them of geography: who could guess such a start without knowing that we had once lived in a house so near the railway?

The old lady paused for effect, made it, carried out:

‘It was I who first told you the comic story of God, remember, which will no doubt be passed on to readers in due course.’

(*Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 29)

In addition to reflecting about the readers’ needs, according to their ontological position and interpretative requirements, the characters also consider their own fictional nature, acknowledging it and expanding the metaleptic discussion horizontally into their own level of participation in the literary process.

SUPERVISOR: Long enough for you to arrange the funeral for the next day?

CHRISTIE: There wasn’t any more time. It’s a short novel.

And Christie shrugged his way out, knowing there was no answer to that.

(*Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 40)

'Haven't I heard that story before?' said Christie.

'I don't know,' said Headlam, crying into his beer, 'I don't know, how I could? But since I seem to be the comic relief in this novel...'

'It needs it,' said Christie.

(*Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 103)

'I'll see what I can do,' said the goodhearted Shrike, 'but how can we be said to be perfectly happy a few lines back, and now be complaining about the monotony of the diet?' 'Easily,' smiled Christie.

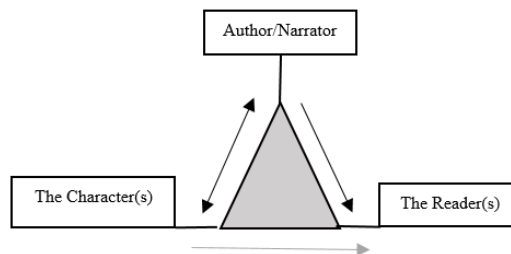
(*Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 139)

Christie nodded, unembarrassed, pleased at this rapport with the Old Mum.

'Aaaaer, it was worth it, all those years of sacrifice, just to get my daughter placed in a respectable novel like this, you know. It's my crowning achievement. And with only one leg, too!'

(*Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 156)

Thus, along the pages of *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, it is possible to establish a triangular connection linking the three agents of the literary process, author/ narrator - character(s) - reader(s), who interact among or make reference to each other (in the case of the characters regarding the readers). However, these interactions and/ or mentions do not have the same nature as the agents of the fictive world (the characters), together with the author/narrator, cannot act directly on the reader. As a result, the communication directed at the reader is always one-sided while the conversations held between author/narrator and his character are reciprocal.



This triangle of the literary process of *Christie Malry's* is clearly represented in the title of Chapter XXI, "In which Christie and I have it All Out; and which You may care to Miss Out", with the three agents being referred to ("Christie", the character; "I", the author/narrator; "You", the reader/s) as well as the nature of their relationship, bidirectional between writer and

character written (who will have an earnest conversation) and unidirectional regarding the readers (who can exclude themselves from reading this Chapter as it does not involve them). Either diagonally (across the different levels of the literary communication) or horizontally (inside the agent's own level of participation), *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry* displays the intricate intersection between all the participants of this literary creation and establishes this interaction as the chosen form of presenting its story, thus consolidating its own peculiar formal structure among B. S. Johnson's novels.

4.2 Christie's Unveiling of the Literary Mechanism

Through the permanent interplay that exists between the novel's participants, Johnson, all in one writer and narrator, continuously bares the mechanisms of his creative and authorial process, conversing with and/ or allowing the reader to gaze into the nature of his work in all its difficulties, requirements and artificiality.

(...) to whom I am myself a debtor for permission to quote. The exposition of this novel would not be complete without an extract from this prime source:

(Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry, 1973, 18)

Christie was the only mourner, economy as to relatives (as to so many other things) being one of the virtues of this novel.

(Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry, 1973, 33)

I shall now attempt a little dialogue between Christie and the Official Supervisor, as if it had happened.

(Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry, 1973, 39)

(..) if he could satisfactorily stabilise his sexual arrangements then he could the more efficiently concentrate on his Great Idea. And so it was to be: nothing happens by accident in this novel. Or almost nothing.

(Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry, 1973, 56/57)

Headlam paused to provide a paragraph break for resting the reader's eye in what might otherwise have been a daunting mass of type.

(Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry, 1973, 100)

I am told one has to put incidents like that in; for the suspense, you know.

(Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry, 1973, 107)

The exact height of Claremont Square escapes for the moment, though I could look it up. Yes, I will. It is just above the hundred foot contour line, say fifteen feet making a height of a hundred and fifteen feet in all. (...) But of course that is not really relevant for our purposes

(Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry, 1973, 155)

In Chapter VI, entitled “Christie Described; and the Shrike Created”, Johnson replicates on the material pages of the novel his introspective process of character creation and description, with the title of the Chapter itself serving as a summary of the metaleptic events that will occur on the subsequent pages. Johnson begins this Chapter by stating his reluctance in describing Christie as he is under the impression most readers will ignore and skip this characterization as they are partial to engaging their imagination and creating their own depiction and interpretation of the characters and story being read.

An attempt should be made to characterise Christie's appearance. I do so with diffidence, in the knowledge that such physical description are rarely of value in a novel. It is one of the limitations; and there are so many others. Many readers, I should not be surprised to learn if appropriate evidence were capable of being researched, do not read such descriptions at all, but skip to the next dialogue or more readily assimilate section. Again, I have often read and heard said, many readers apparently prefer to imagine the characters for themselves. That is what draws them to the novel, that it stimulates their imagination! (...) What writer can compete with the reader's imagination!

(Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry, 1973, 51)

As a solution, the author/narrator concedes a small breach in his authority by granting the readers the possibility of creating their own image of Christie through the generic instructions he provides, thus acknowledging the inevitability of the readers' interference and exposing the contrived nature of the literary device as its participants are aware of each other's presence and relevance. Although he appears to accept this operation, the author/ narrator does not conceal his outrage:

(...) Imagining my characters, indeed! Investing them with characteristics quite unknown to me, or even at variance with such description as I have given! Making Christie fair when I might have him dark, for an instance, a girl when I have shown he is a man? (...) Make him what you will: probably in the image of yourself. You are allowed complete freedom in the matter of warts and moles, particularly; as long as he has at least one of the either.

(Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry, 1973, 51)

Apart from the recognition of the readers' intrusion on his creative process, Johnson also physically represents on the pages of this chapter the precise moment in which one of the characters (The Shrike) comes to life in his author's mind. Johnson's purpose seems to be that of illustrating to the reader how the procedure takes place and how arduous it can be, once more disclosing to his readers the manufactured characteristic of the narrative.

(...) Christie's girlfriend! (...) Come along, what's your name, let's have your name.
It'll come, like everything else. Try.

(*Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 52)

Other titles of chapters created by the author/narrator reveal the workings of the literary creative process and/or his perception of his own production. This way, the title of Chapter IX, "A Promise Fulfilled, and Christie's Younger Life; a Failed Chapter", includes the author/narrator's comments on his own diligence towards the reader - "A Promise Fulfilled" - and on the efficiency and/or relevance of the textual segment it introduces - "a Failed Chapter". Chapter IX presents "the story promised (to the reader) on page 29", namely some background on Christie's early life in order to explain "any vicious development in Christie's character" (80). However, this objective is not thoroughly achieved as the author/narrator sees no point in attempting to explain Christie and his behaviour since, due to the chaotic nature of Life itself, it will no doubt remain incomprehensible. The author/narrator then advances the reflection into his ontological world where any attempt of comprehension is vain as there is also no logic for people's behaviour (just like with Christie's). Under these circumstances, Johnson prompts his reader to accept this fatality as the inability to find a reasonable and satisfying clarification for Christie's criminal actions in his background together with the acceptance of the futility of attempting to "understand anything" at all, which renders this chapter "failed" in the eyes of the author/narrator.

(...): is that significant?

Yes.

No.

Oh, I could go on and on for pages and pages about Christie's young life, investing and observing, remembering and borrowing. But why? All is chaos and unexplainable.

These things happened. He is as he is, you are as you are. Act on that: all is chaos

The end is coming, truly. It is just so much wasted effort to attempt to understand anything.

Lots of people never had a chance, are ground down, and other clichés. Far from kicking against the pricks, they love their condition and vote conservative.

(*Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 82)

The title of Chapter XVII, “The No Doubt Welcome Return of the Shrike”, suggests the careful laying out behind the different moments of the novel as to provide the reader with what he/she needs at the precise time required in order to maintain his/ her interest. After a procession of chapters featuring Christie’s moral vindication double-entry system, Johnson presents a moment of relief from Christie’s murderous plans by providing an insight into Christie and the Shrike’s domestic interactions. The comment “No Doubt” present in the title of Chapter XVII clearly reflects the author’s awareness of the necessity to accurately measure the novel’s rhythm and content as not to unnerve the reader and keep his/her attention. *Christie Malry’s* chapter titles may also be understood as serving as vehicles for the author/narrator’s more ironic and /or humorous comments regarding the events of the novel, thus continuously marking his presence in the story being told. The author/ narrator’s characterization of Christie’s moral vindication double-entry system as a “Great Idea”, accompanied of an exclamation mark, present in the title “Here is Christie’s Great Idea!”, from Chapter II, may be seen as infused with either irony or humour as it contrasts with the criminal nature of Christie’s intentions. In the same way, the title of Chapter XX, “Not the longest Chapter in this Novel”, presents the author/narrator’s witty and straightforward attitude regarding his own performance as this chapter is comprised of only two sentences placed on the first third of the page, leaving the rest blank. Then, the all-in-one writer-narrator seems to use the titles of *Christie Malry’s* chapters to reveal how everything in the novel is subjected to careful reflection and planning, despite appearing effortless, simple and natural to the reader, thus unveiling the artificial essence of the literary creation and the complex nature of his role as creator. In addition, in his transgression of the traditional boundaries between the fictional and ontological levels of his novel, Johnson does not exclude the relevance (and sometimes restrictive role) other external agents, in this case editors and publishing companies, have in the literary process, making clear that a story and its physical embodiment, the book, go through many phases until reaching its final recipient, the reader.

(...) but my editor at Collins says that all this sort of thing has been done before and at a time when it meant something, too. Certainly Rayner’s re-telling was better.

(*Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 80)

As he has expressed in previous novels, Johnson is aware of his limitations when going up against the reader's imagination. Nonetheless, in *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, the presence of the author/ narrator is ingrained in the novel and his authority is visible as he exerts it over the story world being created and over the processes that bring it into being.

From the comparative shelter of his school (of which I shall probably not tell you much) it was a painful transposition.

(*Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 13)

For the following passage it seems to me necessary to attempt transgression into Christie's mind; and illusion of transgression, that is, of course, since you know only too well in whose mind it all really takes place.

(*Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 23)

(...) But of course that is not really relevant for our purposes (...) And I am not going out with theodolite and mate to determine just where she lived in relation to the hundred foot contour line, or to work out how high her flat took her above it in relation to ground level; no, not for you: not for anyone.

(*Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 155)

Thus, the author/ narrator is in charge, conducting and restricting the story world being created, although he reveals and recognizes the importance of the different mechanisms part of the literary device and of all its agents, with whom he interacts.

4.3 Christie's filling in the gaps

Particularly from the second half of the novel to its end, gaps punctuate the text from *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*. However, the role of these gaps goes beyond their traditional function in conventional narratives as they can be understood as meaning auxiliaries and /or intensifiers for the words telling the story. Simon Barton declares that gaps, "lacunae and aporia are ever-present factors during the reading process of prose fiction" (27). According to Barton

An intentional textual gap on the surface of the page must make sense in context with the main textual narrative. The reader can only find legitimate meaning from it if it is confirmed by narrative. Intentional textual gaps can represent missing content and pauses in thought depending on the context of the narrative and the narrative voice. (...) Intentional textual gaps provide a different

challenge to the reading process, forcing the reader to question the time they should take reading these gaps and hypothesising the possible contextual reasons for their appearance (28).

Considering this, Barton proceeds by stating that “intentional textual gaps as extended or additional blank spaces” used by authors contribute to the reader’s “immersion” as he/she is “drawn closer into the text, experiencing what the character experiences to some degree” (42). In *Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry* the purpose of textual gaps is diverse as they can operate different functions that will range from delineating a pause between different moments inside the same chapter:

* The quotations presented inside a box intend to call attention to the page layout or typographic device being analysed.

(...) Then he put in the cards attacking Lucy and two other minor office celebrities, so that he would not himself stand on as the only one except for Wagner to be the subject of attention !

(...)

It certainly made up, Christie thought, for the inconvenience of having to take his lunch an hour earlier.

One day on his way to work Christie read in his newspaper that the home Secretary had dropped dead in the House during a late-night sitting. The cause was so far what the newspaper called a mystery.

As soon as sufficient noisy work was under way in the office for him to speak unnoticed, Christie picked up the telephone, dialled Scotland Yard and spoke as follows:

‘Last night I got the Home Secretary. You do not know how I got him. Next I shall get the Minister for Trade and Industry, the Foreign Secretary, and the Prime Minister. In that order. You will not know how I got them, either.’

(...)

Headlam took Christie out for a drink at lunch time on his first day as Wages Man, in celebration. They both drank bitter, this time.

(*Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 98/99)

to representing the author/narrator’s introspective pauses as he ponders or comments the events being depicted:

(...) and He promptly reveals the existence of some Tribes who have Women with whom two of the sons (one having been prematurely killed) can mate and carry on what they imagine is God's plan for the World (...)

My point is that when Christie first heard it he lisped:

'I believe it! I believe it all!'

As we all do at the age of two.

One would have thought that exposed to that sort of lying tale-telling any vicious development in Christie's character could only too easily be explained.

(Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry, 1973, 80)

(...) Mecca the PE master had them all in a triangle, himself at its apex, on Parents' Day, bent at the knees, arms raised, saluting him in studied unison... I'm going to pack this in soon: both everything and nothing in a person's past and background may be significant.

(Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry, 1973,81)

Guy Fawkes and I together, Christie thought, with the difference that he was caught.

The question should be asked: what did the Shrike see in Christie?

(Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry, 1973,171)

or characterizing his main character's inner workings as he makes his decisions or reflects about them:

For the following passage it seems to me necessary to attempt transgression into Christie's mind;

(...)

Who made me walk this way? Who decided I should not be walking seven feet farther that side, or three points west of nor-nor-east, to use the marine abbreviation?

Anyone? No one? Someone must have decided. It was a conscious decision, as well. That is, they said (he said, she said, I will build here. But I think

whoever it was did not also add. So Christie Malry shall not walk here, but shall walk there

(...).

(*Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, 1973,23)

Christie himself wondered: am I not overdrawn? What wrong has society done me that I can offset more than twenty thousand deaths against it? Everything, he decided after a pause, everything.

The wrongs done to fifty-odd million others, for just a start.

(*Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 147)

The author/narrator of *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry* also uses blank spaces to represent on the page the arduous and/ or straining process of his labour, namely of character creation and story development. By interpreting the combination between content and gaps, it is then possible to observe the authorial process physically reflected on the pages of its own final product, the novel.

But Christie's girlfriend! I shall enjoy describing her! Come along, what's your name, let's have your name. It'll come, like everything else. Try. Where does she work? In a butcher's, say. She could be called the Shrike, then. Which will be too obvious to some, too obscure to others. Ah.

(*Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 52)

Oh, I could go on for pages and pages about Christie's young life, investing and observing, remembering and borrowing. But why? All is chaos and unexplainable. These things happened. He is as he is, you are as you are. Act on that: all is chaos. The end is coming, truly. It is just so much wasted effort to attempt to understand anything.

Lots of people never had a chance, are ground down, and other clichés.

(*Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 82)

In *Christie Malry's*, gaps may also be understood as a tool for emphasis creation, with particular events being highlighted as they are preceded and followed by blank spaces. Placed on the page as if they are hovering over it, small paragraphs of text depicting the outcome of Christie's nefarious actions are pointed out to the reader, drawing his/her attention to them and his efficacy.

'Someone,' said a slatternly Detective Inspector, 'is mucking us about.'

'Scotland Yard may be said to be baffled,' agreed the Assistant Chief Commissioner.

(...)

'If this gets any worse,' warned the Chief Commissioner, piqued, 'We shall have to consider the use of tactical nuclear weapons!'

(Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry, 1973, 111)

A great lorry belched its long bulk into Tapper's delivery bay.

'Sign here', said the driver, 'Your order number 325,765/36.

Five tons of carbon paper.'

(Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry, 1973, 161)

However, as the novel comes closer to its end and its main character to his demise, the gaps become more frequent, dividing the textual elements in the same way as blank frames/ intervals may be used to segment the scenes of a film in order to create dramatic effect and increase the rhythm.

'I do not know what your mission in life,' said the Shrike, 'but I know that I shall do all I can to help you to achieve it!'

‘Darling,’ said Christie, ‘give us a kiss.’

Now, thought Christie, I have everything.

(Christie Malry’s Own Double–Entry, 1973, 172)

Christie felt.

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘I have a lump,’

He felt himself abdominally as a whole. Paused. Then said:

‘In fact, I seem to have an attack of the lumps!’

The Shrike began keening.

‘I have had a certain unwonted lassitude recently. For instance, a certain job has just taken me five days to prepare when normally I would have completed it in three. And now I have this attack of the lumps,’ Christie told the doctor, jokily.

‘Riddled with it.’

The Surgeon saw no reason to use anything but cliché in reporting to the Shrike on the exploratory operation.

The Shrike cried herself blind.

(Christie Malry’s Own Double–Entry, 1973, 176/177)

The pace of the events, from Christie’s discovery and awareness of his terminal condition, past the treatments he undergoes, to his death, rushes across the final pages of the novel with the gaps succeeding one after the other and preceding a darker and grimmer outcome for the story being told up to the moment Christie succumbs and a blank space occupies the remaining of the page.

‘Now I really do have everything,’ said Christie as the Shrike and her Old Mum came to the hospital bedside, ‘including cancer.’ (...)

‘But it was good, wasn’t it,’ Christie went on, ‘the last one, all of them?’

‘There’ll be more,’ hoped the Shrike against hope.

The surgeon had never seen it spread so far, develop so rapidly.

Such people have an infinite capacity for surprise.

(Christie Malry’s Own Double–Entry, 1973, 177)

Defenceless under the cobalt gun, through the terror Christie’s mind worked (...)

all, all pointless

‘At least your Great Idea prevented you from becoming bored to death with life,’ I told Christie when I paid what he must have seen as my last visit to him.

(Christie Malry’s Own Double–Entry, 1973, 178)

In the image of yourself, Christie is, remember.

His average eyes appeared sunken, ringed with yellow-brown; his average cheeks had sunk, too. The general feeling about Christie now is one of sinking. (...)

When pneumonia set in the other patients quickly noticed and called it the death rattle. (...)

Christie they kept unconscious.

Xtie died.

(Christie Malry’s Own Double–Entry, 1973, Chapter The Actual End, leading to...)

Philip Tew points out the fact that not “uncharacteristically in Johnson’s work, (...) narrative lapses into silence (...), foregrounding by a device the failures of expression and language among the experience of life that overwhelms the desire to contain” (2002, 64). This way, it is

possible to infer that Johnson resorts to blank spaces or “narrative lapses” to portray the intensity and/or depth of feelings being expressed and mark the velocity of the events being told as words are unable or lack to do so. The reader is then left with the vertigo of Christie’s passing and the task of “filling in the blanks”, through the intersection between the content of the narrative and his/her interpretation. Thus, the interactive form that B. S. Johnson chose for *Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry* is reinforced by the textual gaps that the author employs, since they can be used not only as additional forms of conveying meaning but also as facilitators of the reader’s immersion as they attract him/her closer to the story.

4.4 Christie’s bookkeeping

Christie Malry’s “Great Idea” is based on the adaptation to his vindictive purposes of the double-entry bookkeeping system invented, in the fifteenth century, by the Tuscan monk Fra Luca Bartolomeo Pacioli, who established that “Every Debit must have its Credit”, as stated by Christie as “the First Golden Rule” (24). Throughout the novel, the reader is continuously informed by the author/ narrator or by Christie himself of not only his intentions and plans to achieve the compensation he considers rightfully his for a life of repeated offences but also of the outcome of his criminal actions. However, apart from the report made by author/narrator and character, the novel also grants the reader full access to the registers of Christie’s account “with them”, used to keep track of the amounts being debited and credited and of the balances carried forward. There are five pages representing the double-entry system used by Christie, each page is introduced by its ordinal number accompanied of the title “Reckoning”, which both conveys the idea of the calculations done by Christie and transmits the notion that this is a document that reflects the settlement of accounts between entities, in this case Christie and society in general and Christie and some individuals in particular, “them”. Every “Reckoning” is joined by a quotation from the Tuscan monk Fra Pacioli credited to have invented the double-entry system, with the exception of the “Final Reckoning” placed at the top of a blank page. The quotes provide general indications about how to keep the registers in order to optimise the efficiency of the system.

- The First Reckoning (*Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 45/46)

THE FIRST RECKONING

Note that the nearer you can place the creditor to his debtor the nicer it will look, though it does not really matter; yet, because of an entry of a different date which is sometimes placed between the first and the second entries where it does not look well, no little trouble is caused in searching for them, as he who has tried knows; you but one cannot speak fully of this here, and must help yourself by making use of your own natural ingenuity.

Pacioli

DEBIT		CREDIT	
AGGRAVATION		RECOMPENSE	
Oct 1 Unpleasantness of Beak General Manager	1 00	Oct - Small kindnesses from Joan	0 28
Nov 1 French atmosphere, as described	4 50	May 1 Scratch on facade of Edwardian Office Block	0 09
Nov 1 Specific lambastings from Chief and Assistant Accountants	2 30	May 2 Undertaker's bill unpaid	1 71
Nov 24 Virtually forced to join Staff Association	0 60	May 2 Letter to Weights and Measures re St. Jude's	0 04
Nov 1 Chagrin at learning no restrictions	0 55	May 3 Destruction of Skater's letter	6 00
Nov 1 Restriction of movement due to Edwardian Office Block	0 09	May 3 Bulb firm's reply - said envelope returned empty	0 01
Nov 2 Suffering and loss due to Undertaker	1 71	May 3 Balance owing to Christie carried forward to next Reckoning	8 67
Nov 2 Unpleasantness felt by presence of Reverend	0 04		
Nov 3 Office Supervisor's lack of sympathy	6 00		
Nov 3 Bulb importuning	0 01		
	16 78		16 78

- The Second Reckoning (*Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 83/84)

THE SECOND RECKONING

... you should always see that you have proper evidence of debits and credits in the proper manner and clearness, if possible, and in the handwriting of the clerks of such places. In these offices the clerks are often changed, and each of these desires to keep the books in his own way. They always blame the previous clerks, by saying that the books have not been kept in good order, and are always persuading you to believe that their way is better than that of any of the others, and for such reason they sometimes mix up the accounts of the said offices in such a manner that they do not correspond in any way. . . .

Pacioli

DEBIT		CREDIT	
AGGRAVATION		RECOMPENSE	
Nov 4 Balance brought forward	8 67	May 5 Skater's legal action	1 30
Nov 5 Verbal aggression by Stegginson (indirect)	0 02	May 5 Four mishaps	0 01
Nov 7 Revelation of Holy storytelling	60 00	May 31 Balance owed to Christie carried forward to next Reckoning	106 61
Nov 7 Bernie Berberich's trouble (indirect)	0 23		
Nov 7 Injury to left knee at school	4 00		
Nov 7 General educational trauma	35 00		
	107 92		107 92

- The Third Reckoning (*Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 117/118)

THE THIRD RECKONING

... and many other things about which I will not extend myself too much here, because I have given you sufficient explanation above, and now you will be able to understand by yourself how to carry on, for accounts are nothing else but a due order of the fancy of a merchant, by which means he will have news of all his affairs, and he will easily know whether his business is going on well or not. As the proverb says: he who does business without knowing all about it sees his money turn into flies.

Pacioli

DR AGGRAVATION		CR RECOMPENSE	
1 Balance brought forward	106 61	June 2 Torn poster	0 50
2 General diminution of Christie's life caused by advertising	50 00	June 2 Streetlamp glass	0 30
8 Wagner's savage work-loads	7 00	June 2 Aldwych Theatre bomb hoax	5 81
8 Wagner's tongue-lashing	3 90	June 5 Paper clips removed	0 01
9 General Wagner - unpleasantness	6 30	June 6 Rubber stamp pad removed	0 02
10 General exploitation by Tapper's for month	200 00	June 7 General removal of small items of stationery	0 06
		June 13 Cabinet Minister call hoax	0 70
		June 21 Hyde House and the Little Veriscope /	110 10
		June 30 Balance owing Christie carried forward to next Reckoning	257 91
	373 41		373 41
		/ Seven bottles, calculated at the rate of 1.30 each being an allowance for the commercial value of the chemicals contained therein plus damage to property etc.	

- The Fourth Reckoning (*Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 149/150)

THE FOURTH RECKONING

... otherwise, not being a good accountant in your affairs, you will have to feel your way forward like a blind person, and much loss can arise therefrom; therefore with deep study and care make efforts above all to be a good accountant. The manner in which to become one with ease I have fully and sufficiently described to you in this sublime work, with all its rules duly given in their correct places so that you will be able to find everything in the present treatise which without doubt will be very useful to you; and remember to pray to God for me that, to His praise and glory, I may proceed by working from good to better.

Pacioli

DR AGGRAVATION		CR RECOMPENSE	
July 1 Balance brought forward	257 91	July 5 Bank Eia Purvayora Ltd. bomb hoax	2 40
July 7 Socialites not given a chance	311 398 00	July 10 Ready availability of non-returnable bottles	0 07
July 9 The Shrike not give a chance commensurate with her abilities	40 734 60	July 27 Death of 20,429 innocent west Londoners /	26 622 70
		July 31 Balance owing to Christie carried forward to next Reckoning	325 765 36
	352 390 51		352 390 51
		/ Calculated at the same rate 1.30 per head as in Third Reckoning; negligible damage to property involved; you will be relieved to hear.	

- The Final Reckoning (*Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 185/186)

... THE FINAL RECKONING

FINAL

DR		CR	
AGGRAVATION		RECOMPENSE	
Aug 1	Balance brought forward	325,765	
Aug 3	Aug 3		Orerordered carbon paper OO 51
Aug 7	Beetle in curry	4 00	Aug 7 Call to Public Health Department 0 75
			Aug 7 Stronghold bomb base 1 20
			Aug 13 Balance written off as Bad Debt 352,392
		325,765	
		33	
		325,765	
		33	
		325,765	

ACCOUNTS CLOSED

The insertion of the facsimiles belonging to Christie's account book provides the reader with the possibility of analysing first-hand and empirically the character's reasoning and set of values as he/she has the possibility to not only ascertain the correlation between the causes (debits) and consequences (credits) of Christie's actions in an immediate table format but also to know how much money Christie attributes to each debit and credit. The reader is then faced with the brutality of the "rate at" which the value of the dead bodies caused by Christie's criminal actions is calculated, considering the "commercial value" of the products used in the implementation of the plan.

	carried forward to		
	next Reckoning	257	91
75		372	41
	/ Seven bodies, calculated at the rate of 1.30 each being an allow- ance for the commercial value of the chemicals contained therein; plus damage to property etc.		

July 27	Death of 20,479 innocent west Londoners		
		26,622	70

Besides allowing the reader to draw his/her conclusions about Christie's personality without the subjective approach of either the author/narrator or the character himself, the facsimiles presented may also be understood as a form of revealing the fictional nature of the events being

told. Although these copies are supposedly the register of Christie's criminal activities, this appears to be filled in by someone else than Christie as he is always mentioned in the third person.

May 3	Bulb firm's reply-paid envelope returned empty	0	03
May 3	Balance owing to Christie carried forward to next Reckoning	8	67

1	Balance brought forward	106
2	General diminution of Christie's life caused by advertising	50
8	Wagner's savage work-	

This fact collides with Christie's principle of acting "alone" – "I am a cell of one" (89) – so it is plausible to assume that it is the author/narrator that is writing this register, as no one else has access to Christie's implementation of his "Great Idea". Considering this, it is also acceptable to speculate that it is the author/narrator that closes Christie's account in "the Final Reckoning" and rules his death as "Bad Debt". Bearing in mind that at the end of the story only the author/narrator remains, it is also apparent that it is him that handwrites "Account closed" across the last page of Christie's register. This may be understood as functioning as an extradiegetic element that provides an evidence of the author/ narrator's existence, since the manuscript note seems to have been put after the novel was typed and completed, as a final remark from the its creator.

Aug 17	Balance written off as Bad Debt	352,392
352,394	53	352,394 53

ACCOUNTS CLOSED

A final indication of the fictional essence of *Christie Malry's* devious enterprise is provided by the recognition of the presence of the reader, ontological agent of the literary process, that is noted down in the register through the use of the pronominal form “you”, thus assuming that this ledger of Christie’s murderous activities is to be or is going to be read by someone.

				✓ Calculated at the same rate (1.30			
				per head) as in Third Reckoning;			
				negligible damage to property involved.			
				you will be relieved to hear.			

Besides the tabular columns and lines of the double-entry form, the simulation of the documentary nature of the account book is enhanced by the use of typewriting, which was the usual means of registering this type of information within the recording practices of the banks. However, because the fictional nature of the story is also expressed within the bookkeeping entries, the facsimile representation introduces a tension between providing a material evidence of the referentiality of the story world (as a world that is independent from its telling) and its fictionality (as a world that is exists only through its telling). Thus, the facsimiles of Christie Malry’s account book that would in principle validate the “material” existence of this story world is actually used as a strategy to expose its artificiality as it was not written by Christie for his eyes and his accounting needs but, on the contrary, it was arranged by the writer so that it can be read by the reader, who this way has the possibility to objectively and immediately analyse Christie’s actions and their impact.

4.5 Crossing out Christie

As mentioned previously, *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry* does not possess any eccentric formal singularity as other of B. S. Johnson’s novels, both in terms of page arrangement or typographical tools. In relation to typography, as happens in *Albert Angelo* (1964), Johnson uses italics to represent his character’s inner thought:

For the following passage it seems to me necessary to attempt transcursion into Christie’s mind;

(...)

But I think whoever it was did not also add, So Christie Malry shall not walk here, but shall walk there. If he chooses. Ah! And there I have him/her/them! If I choose so. (23)

Here is something like what Christie thought: *It goes on, then, does it? I have exacerbated, I am building up too great a Credit, if I am not careful I shall owe Tapper's a debt, I shall be overdrawn...*

(Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry, 1973, 61)

But his principles stayed him: *I am a cell of one!* In that way he could not be betrayed.

(Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry, 1973, 100)

and capital letters as a form of representing loud sounds:

(...) where four great machines were relatively slowly going DOOM, DOOM, DOOM, DOOM, as if in imitation of the marine engines in that MacNeice poem.

(...)

A ventripotent Foreman expanded towards them:

'Hallo, DOOM, who's DOOM this, DOOM Head DOOM lam DOOM eh? DOOM'

'Mr DOOM Malry DOOM Tiny DOOM Mr DOOM Parsons DOOM is DOOM...'

(Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry, 1973, 64/65)

Regarding page layout, apart from the already mentioned textual gaps, the chapters begin within the second third of their first page and, with some exceptions, the majority finishes within the first third of their last page. All pages are numbered with the exception of the pages bearing the title of the chapters as well as the Reckonings and their introduction pages. Another exception to the page numbering occurs with the content of the last Chapter, "The Actual End, leading to ...", which describes Christie's progressive and rapid demise. It is then possible to infer that the lack of number page as well as the title of chapter itself reflect the fact that for the author/ narrator the story ended in the moment that he and his character talked to each other for the last time, in the previous chapter, "Now Christie really does have Everything" (XXIII).

'Will the Shrike go on?' he asked.

'I don't know. I've grown very fond of her. Perhaps another time,' I answered, as honestly as I could. (...)

‘And I’m very fond of you, too, by now, Christie,’ I told him. But he gave no sign of having heard, had moved on one stage nearer. (...)

And the nurses then suggested I leave, not knowing who I was, that he could not die without me.

(*Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry*, 1973, 179/180)

In the final chapter of *Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry*, the reader is then informed of Christie’s death through the sentence “Xtie died.” singled out from the rest of the textual content of the page through the use of blank spaces. The change of the spelling of the character’s name may be understood as also highlighting his death. While having existed along the novel with the name “Christie”, Johnson’s main character finishes as “Xtie”. The use of the “X” comes from the Greek letter *Chi*, which in English is “Christ”. In English, first names containing “Christ” are sometimes shortened either as “X” or “Xt”. To some interpretative extent, this abbreviation can be seen as alluding to both the simple nature of Christie mentioned frequently along the novel and the writer’s desire of bringing his novel to an end. However, it is also possible to infer that this choice can reflect a correlation between the character’s fate (his death) and its representation on the page, as the “X” that substitutes part of Christie’s name in the final part of the novel may be interpreted as symbolizing Christie’s funerary cross, with B. S. Johnson expressing through spelling the narrative content of his novel.

Despite Christie being a murderous egocentric terrorist, who reduces the nature of human interactions to a debit and credit balance table, the metaleptic nature that B. S. Johnson attributes to his novel, through the use of the above analysed typographic devices and language use, causes the creation of an empathic relationship not only between the author/ narrator and his main character but also between these two agents of the literary process and the readers, who cannot prevent themselves from enjoying Christie’s rise as the social avenger of those (particularly of himself) wronged by the carelessness and arrogance of prevailing society and feeling for his rapid and unforgiving death.

Conclusion

My basic problem was that of all novelists: *how to embody truth in a vehicle of fiction*. Truth, that is, as personally observed and experienced reality, and not of course autobiographical literalness. (...) I occupy my mind with statements the truth of which interests me, such as *Form follows function*, or it might be on another occasion Everything is merely or exactly the absence of its opposite. Or sometimes I will tell myself *You can't have it all ways: at least at once*.

(Johnson quoted by Tew, 2002, 17/ 18)

“Form follows function” - Taking into consideration the analysis done on B. S. Johnson’s novels *Albert Angelo* (1964), *The Unfortunates* (1969), *House Mother Normal* (1971) and *Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry* (1973) presented above, it is possible to observe the way the author uses typographic devices in accordance with the objectives he has set for the narrative in his mind. These typographic devices are adapted as they follow each novel’s narrative context, being fitted to the “function” they are supposed to perform. The change of function sometimes results in the same typographic device being used with a different purpose from novel to novel. In order to demonstrate this, it is possible to consider B. S. Johnson’s use of italics in all the four novels here analysed. In *Albert Angelo* and *Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry*, Johnson uses italics to represent Albert and Christie’s inner monologues, thus demarcating on the page the difference between their thoughts and their verbal interactions with others, presented in normal font. Italics are then used in these novels as a form of signalling to the reader that he/ she is having access to the character’s mind, thus contributing to the construction of a more accurate character description. However, in *House Mother Normal*, italics are used to represent the verbal exchanges occurring between the novel’s characters, while their inner monologues are presented using normal font. In *House Mother Normal*, the verbal interactions occurring among the characters are scarce as the whole novel focuses on the individual perceptions of the social evening and on the recollections of their lives before entering the retirement home. This exceptional attribute of the verbal exchanges in the narrative context of this novel is then characterised and differentiated by the use of italics, while the characters’ inner monologues (the standard narrative mode for this novel) are presented using normal font. In *The Unfortunates*, italics represent the moments during which the narrator is either reading or writing, thus flagging the change from inner monologue to the performance of these cognitive tasks and allowing the reader to comprehend how these are done by the narrator. The application of italics in all the novels presented then appears to indicate to the reader that the text he/ she is reading belongs to a different dimension that provides him/ her with a distinct interpretative

perspective on the character and the narrative being read. It is also possible to infer that the reader becomes aware of this extraordinary dimension even before being knowledgeable of the narrative content as the change in mode is typographically distinguishable.

Intentional textual gaps also serve particular functions in the novels analysed. For instance, the gaps in *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry* appear to represent not only the rapid progression of Christie's disease, thus serving the creation of narrative rhythm and emphasis, but also the emotional vertigo to which the character is subjected as he becomes aware of the disintegration of himself and his plans of vindication against society. In *The Unfortunates*, intentional textual gaps also serve the purpose of providing emotional depth and poignancy to the novel as they attempt to mimic on the pages the discontinuous discourse of someone grieving the death of a loved one. In *House Mother Normal*, gaps represent the loss of cognitive ability and/or consciousness by the house residents, emerging as a portrayal of the characters' physical and psychological fragility, materially embodied on the novel's pages through the frequency of their occurrence. This frequency also allows the reader to ascertain the degree of physical and mental impairment of each resident, as the more gaps a discourse possesses, the more physical and mentally weak that character is, thus graphically providing the reader with information in advance of the narrative content. In *House Mother Normal*, gaps also function as a binding mechanism that brings together the different individual perspectives, as a gap on the interior monologue of a character will correspond to the other character's intervention, urging the reader to assemble them and build a multidimensional narrative. Apart from the intentional textual gaps, Johnson also makes use of non-textual gaps used to carry out particular tasks within the novel's narrative. In the case of *The Unfortunates*, the absence of binding and covers in the bibliographic presentation of the novel constitutes a bibliographic intervention that operates as a tool for emulating the randomness of human memory and the chaotic nature of life, thus supplying the readers with a physical model of these abstract conceptions that compels them to share the experience of the novel's narrator and narrative. In *Albert Angelo*, the non-textual gap occurring is presented to the reader in the form of a rectangle cut through pages 147 and 149. The gap (not only visible but also palpable to the reader) operates the task of anticipating a future event in the novel, the assassination of someone. The prospective and violent disappearance of a character leads the reader into a succession of interpretative possibilities that are only put to rest when he/ she reaches the previously anticipated page and discovers that the assassination is part of a story being told and does not immediately involve the main character or any of the secondary. Thus, *Albert Angelo's* cut rectangle attempts to mimic on its pages the

realisation of the uncertainty of life, whose outcomes are not always the ones desired or anticipated. A perception that is given to *Albert Angelo*'s reader not through the cognitive comprehension of textual content but by making the reader experience that uncertainty during his/ her reading experience. This way, Johnson's intentional textual and non-textual gaps despite their absence of form are able to transmit a multitude of meanings that bring readers closer to the experiences being represented in the narrative content in which these gaps are placed.

Page layout is also among the typographic devices recurrently used by B. S. Johnson to serve a particular "function" in the process of complementing the narrative content of his novels. In *Albert Angelo*, readers are compelled to "think further", expanding their interpretative skills as they are introduced to the representation, through the use of parallel typographic columns, of the simultaneous occurrence of inner thought with direct verbal exchanges. The concurrent depiction of what is being said and thought allows the reader to have a deeper perception of the character's nature as the page layout unveils the hidden correlation between his interior and exterior personas. Although this type of characterisation is possible to be achieved through the use of textual content, its graphic representation may be understood as a more efficient way of transmitting this connection to the readers, as they have an immediate access not only to the two dimensions of the character's personality but also to their interaction. In *The Unfortunates*, the page layout is presented unnumbered, unbound and permeated with intentional textual gaps that become more frequent as the narrative content becomes more emotionally charged. The pages of the novel then become a material representation of not only the fragmentation and randomness of human memory but also of the sentimental reaction it claims from the one remembering. An emotional response contained in the disengaged limits of the novel's pages, whose readers can palpably perceive in their materiality the fragility and emotional density of the story being told. In *House Mother Normal*, Johnson's treatment of page layout acquires the importance of not only complementing the novel's textual content but, in some instances, becoming fundamental for the readers' understanding. This happens with the carefully laid out placement on the exact position on the same page (each of the residents' monologues has twenty-one numbered pages) of the interactions and events being shared by all the characters. This meticulous typographic arrangement allows the reader to, as he/ she progresses in the story, become aware of the reactions each character has to the same occurrences, thus adding complexity to the narrative and to the characterisation. In addition, page layout in *House Mother Normal* also contributes for the realisation of the level of mental and physical impairment of

each resident. Despite having the exact same number of pages as the ones more lucid and physically fit, the monologues of the more mental and physically afflicted residents present disconnected phrases or words that hover over the page until disappearing and leaving it completely blank. This way, the page graphically depicts the character's progressive absorption into a mental void, whose absence of awareness can be interpreted as loss of consciousness or even death, an interpretation that cannot be ascertained through textual content as it does not exist. Thus, Johnson explores the full potential of his novels' page layout in order to constitute it as a diagram of his characters' minds and/ or event description, from which the reader can obtain an additional source of interpretative meaning that will enhance his/ her reading experience.

Considering this, it is undoubtedly clear that B. S. Johnson's use of typographic devices (these and others observed in the novels analysed) and bibliographic experimentation in his novels are never naïve or simply aesthetically oriented. Johnson's application of these elements does not intend to make the pages of his novels look appealing, they are designed or tasked with the responsibility of conveying layers of meaning to their readers, and through these appeal to them and their immersion in the narrative being told.

“How to embody truth in a vehicle of fiction” - As defined by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, a novel is “an invented prose narrative of considerable length and a certain complexity that deals imaginatively with human experience, usually through a connected sequence of events involving a group of persons in a specific setting”¹⁰. Considered during the classic era as a deviation and/ or innovation from the conventional verse epics or lyric poetry, with its name originating from the Latin word *novellus*, meaning “young and tender”¹¹, the novel is characterised by numerous adaptations throughout the centuries that lead to the creation of a broad extension and diversity of types and styles that continuously places this literary genre as an adaptable and evolving form..

One of B. S. Johnson's biggest conundrums as a novelist was then to materialize in a genre characterised by its “invented” nature the complexity and veracity of his autobiographically based narratives. The solution for representing in a literary genre oriented to the prevalence of imagination the candid, random and subjective account of the personal experiences in which he

10 In <https://www.britannica.com/art/novel/Style#ref503971>, accessed on 1st September 2018

11 In <https://latin-dictionary.net/definition/28016/novellus-novella-novellum>, accessed on 1st September 2018

bases the psychological states of his narrators and characters came from the realisation of the need to formally take the novel to its next stage of development, thus remaining true to the novel's origin as a noun and as a genre, its innovative character. Working based on the principle that "form follows function", B. S. Johnson then solves this predicament of truth representation through the application of typographic devices and language use that supply and assist the emergence of narrative content endowed with a sense of authenticity that serves the author's intentions for the literary worlds he creates and that he considers difficult to achieve following conventional and outdated bibliographic models.

The pages of B. S. Johnson's novels then become the foundation for the stories he intends to tell, on which he methodically applies the tools or devices for him considered more suitable for building and/or fulfilling the narrative in his mind. This way, it is possible to assume that the pitiable account of Albert's frustrations and prejudices, the understanding of the touching tribute paid to friendship and the accurate description of the randomness of human memory in *The Unfortunates*, the realisation of the level of fragility and personal tragedy intrinsic to the condition of each of the residents in *House Mother Normal*, and Christie's darkly humoured rise and desolate fall as a terrorist social avenger would lack in significance and poignancy if they were not embodied by Johnson's integration of bibliographic and linguistic experimentation for narrative purposes. Thus, B. S. Johnson's work with bibliographic form cannot not be dismissed as mere aesthetic artifices or literary marketing stunts, as it is IN FORM and in its creative application that B. S. Johnson finds the ally for his quest of truth representation in the novel, discovering the way to complete and enhance the significance of his words and infusing them with the genuineness of his experiences and intentions. It is also in this entanglement between bibliographic and verbal form that readers discover an augmented sense of empathy towards the novels' narrators, characters and, ultimately, the narrative the author wishes to share with them. As Johnson's creative use of bibliographic form and narrative techniques (such as the interior monologue) immerses his readers in the story being told, these are allowed not only to cognitively apprehend the narrative but also to *feel* it since they are often placed in a position in which they can acknowledge the narrator's non-textual expressions as the physical embodiment on the page of his emotion or the page layout as the representation of the heart-breaking and progressive loss of oneself to disease and disintegration. By partaking of the sense of fragility, uncertainty, connection and awareness conveyed through the devices and mechanisms he deploys in the narrative construction, B. S. Johnson's readers have access

to a different but compelling reading experience, an experience that brings them closer to whatever truthfulness is being evoked through fiction.

“You can’t have it all ways: at least at once.” - Typographic experimentation started to acquire particular relevance during the 1960s and 1970s, earning dedicated admirers among small fringe literary groups, as, at the time, writers that endowed their novels with multi-modal elements and experimental typographic devices were largely dismissed by general public and literary scholars as these were not familiar and accustomed with innovative and interactive forms of literary expression and/ or representation. During his short but prolific working career, B. S. Johnson vehemently defended his view of a symbiosis between narrative content, bibliographic experimentation and language use as the next step in literary evolution while relentlessly fighting for the recognition of the validity of his work against the inflexibility and opposition of the literary establishment and the lack of literary awareness from general public. Regretfully, Johnson died with the perception of having failed in the achievement of this recognition.

Particularly due to the advent of electronic media that incorporate mixed and interactive forms of communication, post-2000 readers and literary critics have become receptive to the inclusion of elements and/or devices that challenge their interpretation skills and conventional expectations. Thus, as a small group of “aficionados” (including literary academia) progressively rediscovers and brings into the 21st century spotlight his work, B. S. Johnson appears to have been given a second chance to present his outlook on what should constitute literary innovation, particularly in the novel genre. By drawing attention to the importance of bibliographic form and language use in the emergence of his novels’ narratives, this dissertation aims at being part of this movement of restoring B. S. Johnson to his rightful place among the literary pioneers of the second half of the 20th century, who were not afraid to stretch the limits of conventions in order to transmit what they considered to be the honesty and complexity of human nature and interactions through the use of new and more complex forms of communication.

Although it is impossible, it is interesting to contemplate the possibility of the creations B. S. Johnson would have conceived if he only had at his disposal not just the full array of the typographic devices that exist today but also all those of the internet... However, as this is nothing more than a conjectural exercise, let us keep in mind B. S. Johnson’s principle of

synergy creation between different agents and formats, and continuously aim for the next step, while remaining true to oneself and one's principles and beliefs. Perhaps this is the best way to honour and, ultimately, validate Johnson's passion and commitment to literary art because "it mattered", because he "meant it", and because he "meant it to matter" (Johnson, *Aren't You Rather Young to Be Writing Your Memoirs?*, 1973, 29).

Thus,

B. S. Johnson

may
not
have had
"it all ways"
he wanted
"at once",
but
his
work
appears
to be
starting
to, more
than
thirty years
after
his death,
just like he
predicted...

Bibliography

- Alegre, Sara Martín. "Post-War English Literature 1945-1990". *UOC: Universitat Oberta de Catalunya* - P08/04540/02135.
<http://gent.uab.cat/saramartinalegre/sites/gent.uab.cat.saramartinalegre/files/Post-War%201945-1990.pdf>. Access date: 3rd September 2018
- Barton, Simon. (2016). *Visual Devices in Contemporary Prose Fiction: Gaps, Gestures, Images*. UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Coe, Jonathan. (2004). *Like a Fiery Elephant – The Story of B.S. Jonathan*. London: Picador.
- "Cubism Art". *Tate*. <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/c/cubism> Access date: 14th May 2017.
- Davachi, Lila. (2017) *Emotional brain states carry over and enhance future memory formation*.
<http://www.nyu.edu/about/news-publications/news/2016/december/is-there-such-a-thing-as-an-emotional-hangover--nyu-researchers-.html>. Access date: 1st June 2018.
- Drucker, Johanna. (2013). *Diagramming Writing*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform
- Hartner, Marcus (2012). "Multiperspectivity" in Hühn, Peter et al. (eds), *the living handbook of narratology*. Hamburg: Hamburg University. URL =<http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/Multiperspectivity>. Access date: 28th June 2017.
- "History of the Eleven Plus". <https://www.studyevenplus.co.uk/pages/history-of-the-eleven-plus>. Access date: 9th August 2017.
- James, David. (2007). "The (W)Hole Affect: Creative Reading and Typographic Immersion in B. S. Johnson", in Philip Tew and Glyn White (eds), *Re-reading B. S. Johnson*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 27 – 37.
- Johnson, B. S. (1963). *Travelling People*. London: Constable hardback.
- Johnson, B. S. (1969). *The Unfortunates*. London: Panther Books in association with Secker and Warburg.
- Johnson, B. S. (1973). *Aren't You Rather Young to Be Writing Your Memoirs?* London: Hutchinson.
- Johnson, B. S. (1985). *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*. [1973]. New York: New Directions

- Johnson, B. S. (2004). *Albert Angelo*. [1964]. London: Picador – as part of *B. S. Johnson's Omnibus*.
- Johnson, B. S. (2004). *Trawl*. [1966]. London: Picador – as part of *B. S. Johnson's Omnibus*.
- Johnson, B. S. (2013). *House Mother Normal* [1971]. London: Picador – introduction by Andrew Motion.
- “Latin definition for: novellus, novella, novellum” *Latin Dictionary & Grammar Resources*. <https://latin-dictionary.net/definition/28016/novellus-novella-novellum>. Access date: 1st September 2018.
- “Literature: Novel”. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/art/novel/Style#ref503971>. Access date: 1st September 2018
- Maziarczyk, Grzegorz. (2011) “Print Strikes Back: Typographic Experimentation in Contemporary Fiction as a Contribution to the Metareferential Turn”, in Werner Wolf (ed), *The Metareferential Turn in Contemporary Arts and Media: Forms, Functions, Attempts at Explanation*. New York: Editions Rodopi B.V., Amsterdam – New York, 169-187
- Pier, John (2009). “Metalepsis”, in Peter Hühn, et all (eds), *Handbook of Narratology*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co, 190-203
- Richardson, Brian (2006) *Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.
- Richardson, Brian (ed). (2008). *Narrative beginnings: theories and practices*. USA: University Of Nebraska Press: Lincoln and London.
- Sutcliffe, J.C. (2017). “House Mother Normal – B. S. Johnson” *Full Stop – Reviews. Interviews. Marginalia - Site of Arts and Humanities*. URL = <http://www.full-stop.net/2017/03/23/reviews/jc-sutcliffe/house-mother-normal-b-s-johnson/>. Access date: 20th June 2017.
- “Symbol: Definition”. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/symbol>. Access date: 1st March 2018.
- Tew, Philip (2001). *B. S. Johnson: A Critical Reading*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Tew, Philip (2002). “B. S. Johnson” in *Review of Contemporary Fiction*. Spring, Vol. 22.1: 7-57.

Tew, Philip and White, Glyn (eds). (2007). *Re-reading B. S. Johnson*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

The B. S. Johnson Society. <http://bsjohnson.org/about-2/>. Access date: 8th September 2018.

“Typography: Definition”. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

<https://www.britannica.com/technology/typography/Introduction>. Access date: 1st March 2018

“What is 3D Printing” - *3DPrinting.com* - global source for everything about 3D printing. URL = <https://3dprinting.com/what-is-3d-printing/>. Access date: 20th June 2017.

White, Glyn (2005). *Reading the Graphic Surface: the Presence of the Book in Prose Fiction*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.