



Ian McEwan claims that ‘besides emotional and sensual content’, novels should aspire to ‘have some muscularity of intellect, and engagement with the world’.¹ Consider the aims of twenty-first-century writers in light of this statement.

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In *The State of the Novel: Britain and Beyond*, Dominic Head focuses a portion of his introduction on Rod Liddle’s assertion that twenty-first century fiction, even by novelists as critically acclaimed and established in the modern literary canon as John Updike and Ian McEwan, has been plagued by a ‘desire [to be] relevant and attuned to the times’, showing ‘a tendency towards a safe treatment of the politically current’.² Liddle refers explicitly to McEwan’s novel *Saturday* from 2005, and Updike’s *Terrorist*, published one year later. Indeed, both of these novels are concerned — to varying degrees — with the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11th, 2001. As one might easily guess from his novel’s title, Updike’s engagement with the political turmoil engendered by the event, and the difficult status of Islamic Fundamentalism in Western culture, is perhaps more direct than McEwan’s philosophical ruminations on the power of religion, and relatively subtle expression of London citizens’ paranoia in the wake of 9/11, that a terrorist attack of comparable magnitude would soon befall them. However, Head is right to note that ‘the response to 9/11, and its consequences’ has characterised much ‘contemporary writing’³ since the event, expressing how that ‘haunting historical moment is implicitly present’⁴ in our understanding of contemporary culture. The resonance that that cataclysmic event has had on the novelistic imagination is evident, and the literary institution at large has similarly devoted an enormous amount of attention to 9/11; the inception of the *Journal of 9/11 Studies*, as well as the common usage of the term ‘post-9/11 novel’⁵ might be seen as corroborative of Liddle’s assertion that the contemporary novel desperately strives to be ‘politically current’. In light of this context, McEwan’s statement that literature of the twenty-first century must have ‘engagement with the world’ might seem to be a direct reference to those works of literary fiction — his own *Saturday* included — that predominantly devote their attention to what is arguably the most important historical event of the century, as well as the socio-political fallout that followed it.

Although we evidently cannot discount the event’s significance as a ‘historical marker’, Head is right to note that it may turn out to be ‘misleading’ as a signifier of a

¹ ‘Journeys Without Maps’, interview with Ian McEwan in Sebastian Groes, ed. Ian McEwan, *Contemporary Critical Perspectives* [2009]

² Rod Liddle, ‘Comment’, *The Sunday Times*, ‘Culture’ [14 January 2007], qtd. in Dominic Head, *The State of the Novel: Britain and Beyond* (Oxford; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), p. 13

All reference to Head’s text are from this edition and will be abbreviated henceforth. Footnotes throughout this essay will initially be referenced in full and then abbreviated to include the name of the author and page number, unless multiple texts by the same author are used.

³ Head, p. 27

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28

⁵ Zadie Smith, ‘Two Directions for the Novel’, *Changing My Mind: Occasional Essays* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2009), p. 72

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complete 'shift in cultural mood'.⁶ It is woefully short-sighted to posit that all novels published since September 2001 have been direct responses to those acts of terrorism. Any attempt to apply a universal ideological conviction to the totality of literary output since the historical 'marker' in question automatically relegates other thematic concerns or formal questions to secondary status, and becomes wholly reductive.⁷ Upholding a dichotomous analytical framework wherein a novel's 'engagement with the world' necessarily rests on the extent to which it explores 9/11 and its related political issues, yet if these preoccupations are not discussed then a novel must simply manifest 'emotional' or 'sensual' content, equated with domestic or personal affairs in contradistinction to events of world-historical significance, is an unhealthy future for literary criticism. For critics such as these, narrative fiction's capacity to 'engage with the world' is commonly restricted to how far it embodies 'topicality, social comment [and] preachy presentism'.⁸ I realise the importance of 9/11 in shaping our contemporary culture, but I agree with Head's warning that 'academic critics [are at] risk of overemphasizing the new, and obscuring the link with tradition that continues to anchor literary fiction'.⁹ It is evident that throughout history we have also turned to novels to tell us something that goes deeper than the surface of contemporary culture, and to provide 'vital intellectual nourishment'¹⁰ about the world, and the human condition, more generally. Indeed, narrative fiction's very capacity to 'describe [lived reality with] accuracy'¹¹ and 'engage with the world' in *this* sense of mimetic reflection, has been a point of interrogation for novelists, as well as critics within the whole 'twentieth century linguistic turn...from Ferdinand de Saussure [to] poststructuralism of the late 1960s and early 1970s'¹² and beyond. I think this is one 'tradition' that commentators who are obsessed with political topicality are at risk of overlooking in their considerations of twenty-first century literature. Although I do not align McEwan with the stark polarisation outlined above, in this essay I want to explore how two post-millennial novels — Don DeLillo's short 2007 novel *Falling Man*, and Julian Barnes' 2011 Man-Booker Prize winner *The Sense of an Ending* — display their 'muscularity of intellect' through an interrogation of how far the novel can 'carry the trace of the real'¹³ and 'engage with the world' in the sense of mimetic reflection of reality. With reference to Edward Said's notion of 'late style' and Jesse Matz's essay 'Pseudo-Impressionism?', I want to explore how the style of both novels exhibits a kind of 'perceptual conflict',¹⁴ which exemplifies a 'rejection of certainties about the way reality enters into art'.¹⁵ Both novels explore 'emotional' content through a style that questions traditional ways in which narrative fiction aims to adequately represent lived reality and 'engage with the world'. DeLillo's descriptions of the immediate hours after the attacks on the World Trade Center mix very precise prose with more oblique descriptions which necessarily leave out a lot of information. This manifests a 'tension between the articulate and the silent'¹⁶ that Said notes is characteristic of 'late style'. However, DeLillo's awareness of the inadequacy of language to

6 Head, p. 27

7 Smith seems to lament the continuing obsession with 'the post-9/11 novel' in literary society — both academic and popular — and the search for a work of fiction that wholly embodies the cultural *zeitgeist* in response to the World Trade Center attacks. Speaking of Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland*, she writes, 'it's the post-9/11 novel we hoped for. (Were there calls, in 1915, for the *Lusitania* novel? In 1985, was the Bhopal novel keenly anticipated?)' (Smith, p. 72)

8 James Wood, 'Tell Me How Does it Feel?', *The Guardian* [6 October 2001]

<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2001/oct/06/fiction>> [09/05/12], no pgn

9 *Ibid.*, p. 24

10 Head, p. 12

11 Smith, p. 73

12 James Berger, 'Falling Towers and Postmodern Wild Children: Oliver Sacks, Don DeLillo and Turns against Language', *PMLA*, Vol. 120, No 2 (Mar., 2005), p. 343

13 Smith, p. 79

14 Jesse Matz, 'Pseudo-Impressionism?', *The Legacies of Modernism: Historicizing Postwar and Contemporary Fiction*, ed. David James (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2009), p. 127

15 *Ibid.*, p. 122

16 Michael Wood, 'Introduction' to Edward W. Said, *On Late Style* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2006), p. xvii

fully represent an event like 9/11 paradoxically shows a way of representing a truer ‘engagement’ with it, using what is effectively an ‘anti-representational design’¹⁷ to more faithfully represent ‘immediate experience’.¹⁸ Moreover, both Delillo and Barnes amalgamate concrete, ‘objective’ descriptions with subjective memories and internal impressions which are focalized through the individual consciousnesses of their characters, and continually refuse to distinguish between ‘mental, physical and imaginative’¹⁹ perceptions. They display an experimentation with ‘modes of informational understanding...refusing distinctions between truth and feeling, mind and muscle’,²⁰ which Matz attributes to the legacy of Impressionism. The adoption of such a style by both authors melds ‘subjective and objective’²¹ representation in a way that is ‘uncoopted by a higher synthesis’,²² simultaneously manifesting the tenets of ‘late style’ that Said outlines. *Falling Man* and *The Sense of an Ending* incorporate personal impressions and subjective insights — displaying their ‘emotional and sensual content’ — to create a style that aims to attain a fuller representation of lived reality, and a more thoroughly mimetic ‘engagement’ with the world.

Through the adoption of a style that mixes different modes of perception — wherein ‘immediate perceptions [enable] reciprocity with elemental abstraction’²³ — both *Falling Man* and *The Sense of an Ending* manifest the kind of ‘nonharmonious tension [and] unresolved contradiction’²⁴ that Said writes is representative of ‘late style’. Paradoxically, the kind of ‘unresolved contradictions’ that arise from this kind of stylistic experimentation highlights the ways in which the twenty-first-century novel might more truly ‘engage with the world’ and provide a closer narrative ‘model...to our condition’.²⁵

Admittedly, at the most foundational level, Delillo’s *Falling Man* is a novel that does grapple with the wider issues of ‘historical rupture and [American national] decay induced by 9/11’.²⁶ As a result, my extended discussion of the way that novels have been, in my view, incorrectly compartmentalised as ‘engaging with the world’ insofar as they touch on the issues of terrorism, Islamic Fundamentalism and the ‘ideological landscape of late capitalism’²⁷ might be seen as contradictory (my emphasis). However, in her essay ‘Allegories of Falling’, Elizabeth Anker writes how novelistic attempts to represent 9/11 have ‘thrown literary production into a kind of crisis’.²⁸ It is this very ‘crisis’ of representation in post-millennial fiction on which I want to predominantly focus my attention in this essay. Anker believes that *Falling Man*, as well as the 9/11 novel more generally, might be argued to herald a ‘movement beyond postmodernism’,²⁹ in that it betrays ‘a surprising tribute to the renewed currency of realism and mimetic sincerity’.³⁰

17 Matz, p. 118

18 Ibid., p. 129

19 Ibid., p. 127

20 Ibid.

21 Edward W. Said, *On Late Style*, 12. Matz notes that the classic Impressionism of Woolf, James and others, which ‘undid differences between sight and knowledge, thought and feeling, appearance and reality’ (Matz, p. 117), is referred to as ‘subjective objectivism’ by Peter Stowell (Peter Stowell, *Literary Impressionism: James and Chekhov* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980)). Although tracing the wider legacy of Impressionism to contemporary fiction by Delillo and Barnes might initially seem like a curious critical move, I think that the similarity of terminology applied by both Said and Stowell supports my decision to explore the relationship between the stylistic legacy of Impressionism, ‘late style’, and twenty-first century fiction in this essay. I think Matz further corroborates this idea in his essay: ‘fiction that lays claim to the legacy of Impressionism has not inherited the full wealth of its critical process...Impressionism today runs the broadest possible range of cultural identities...its contemporary migrations do legitimately extend the Impressionist effort to make new spaces for aesthetic judgment’ (Matz, pp. 120-130)

22 Said, p. 12

23 Matz, p. 118

24 Said, p. 7

25 Smith, p. 73

26 Elizabeth S. Anker, ‘Allegories of Falling and the 9/11 Novel’, *American Literary History*, Vol. 23, No. 3, p. 463

27 Anker, p. 474

28 Ibid, p. 476

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid, p. 477

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In his article 'Tell Me How Does it Feel?', published in *The Guardian* shortly after 9/11, Michael Wood wrote that 'the horrid alteration of America's greatest city [will] also alter the American novel'.³¹ In 2000, Wood coined the term 'hysterical realism' to refer to the 'big, ambitious'³² novels — by authors such as Salman Rushdie, Thomas Pynchon, David Foster Wallace, and Zadie Smith — which characterised American and English literary output: 'this is not magical realism, it is hysterical realism...storytelling has become a kind of grammar in these novels'.³³ Wood described Delillo's own 1997 novel *Underworld* as the archetype of this hysterical realist mode, in its 'effort to pin down an entire writhing culture...to work on the biggest level possible...to be a great analyst of systems, crowds, paranoia [and] politics...life is never experienced with such a fervid intensity of connectedness'.³⁴ However, in an example of almost prophetic foresight in 'Tell Me How Does It Feel?', Wood stated that after 9/11 the kind of allusive, ironic and often meta-fictional literature that characterised late English and American postmodernism could no longer suffice as the novelist template for our culture:

it ought to be harder...either to bounce around in the false zaniness of hysterical realism or to trudge along in the easy fidelity of social realism. Both genres look a little busted [and] now [seem] grotesque, a time-stamped scrap of paper...That may allow a space for novels that tell us not 'how the world works' but 'how somebody felt about something'.³⁵

Falling Man is a slight novel of precise language, a literary world apart from the sprawling, self-conscious postmodernism of *Underworld*. Similarly, although Julian Barnes' earlier body of work made heavy use of what Linda Hutcheon calls 'paratextual practice'³⁶ — 'footnotes...subtitles, prefaces, epilogues [and] epigraphs'³⁷ — *The Sense of an Ending* does not seek to 'raise basic questions about the possibilities and limits of meaning in representation of the past'³⁸ using these devices of 'postmodern parody'³⁹ that feature in a novel such as *Flaubert's Parrot*.⁴⁰ Edward W. Said's posthumous publication *On Late Style* posits how during 'the last or late period in life', the work of artists — be they novelists, musicians, or painters — 'acquires a new idiom' which he calls 'late style'⁴¹. Said writes that 'late style' embodies 'not harmony and resolution but...intransigence [and] unresolved contradiction [and] involves nonharmonious, nonserene tension...[it is a] refracted mode [that is] both subjective and objective...late works cannot be reconciled or resolved, since their irresolution and...fragmentariness are constitutive, neither ornamental nor symbolic of something else'⁴². Neither Barnes nor Delillo are at this fatalistic fork in the road as of yet.

31 J. Wood, 'Tell Me How Does it Feel?'

32 J. Wood, 'Human, All Too Human: The Smallness of the "Big" Novel', *The New Republic* [24 July 2000] <<http://www.tnr.com/article/books-and-arts/human-all-too-inhuman>> [05/2009], no pgn.

33 Ibid.

34 J. Wood, 'Tell Me How Does It Feel?'

35 Ibid.

36 Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989 [1995]), p. 80

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid., p. 81

39 Ibid., p. 90

40 Some critics have noted that some thematic common ground is shared between *Flaubert's Parrot* and *The Sense of an Ending*. Michiko Kakutani writes that 'if there is a single theme running through Julian Barnes' work, from his 1985 *Flaubert's Parrot* to *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* (1989), it's the elusiveness of truth, the subjectivity of memory, the relativity of all knowledge. If his earlier books examined our limited ability to comprehend other people and other eras...*The Sense of an Ending* [instead] looks at ways in which people...mythologize their own lives' (Michiko Kakutani, 'Life in Smoke and Mirrors', *The New York Times* [16 October 2011] <<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/17/books/Julian-Barnes-Sense-of-an-Ending-Review.html>> [08/05/2011], no pgn).

41 Said, p. 6. Said mentions that he borrows the term from Theodor Adorno: 'Adorno used the phrase 'late style' most memorably in...a 1964 collection of musical essays, *Moments musicaux*' (Said, p. 7).

42 Ibid., pp. 7-12

However, Michael Wood's introduction notes that Said 'found the same passions...in other places and persons',⁴³ and that 'late style' is not just 'the writing of the end of a life'⁴⁴ or a response to 'the onset of ill health [and] the decay of the body [that might bring] an untimely end'.⁴⁵ As such, I think that it is reasonable to view both *Falling Man* and *The Sense of an Ending* through the lens of Said's 'late style'.

The stylistic changes in the literary output of both Barnes and Delillo have (coincidentally, perhaps) come at a post-millennial moment when the novel at large is undergoing a seeming paradigm shift. I want to argue that the stylistic 'nonharmonious tension' that is prevalent in both *Falling Man* and *The Sense of an Ending* expresses a version of what Anker calls the 'renewed currency of mimesis' in twenty-first-century narrative fiction. Neither novel expresses a regression to a traditionally 'convincing mimesis'⁴⁶ that 'abdicates its rights in favour of reality'⁴⁷ akin to the social realism of the nineteenth-century: 'a narrative time when symbols and mottoes were full of meaning and novels weren't neurotic'.⁴⁸ Both Barnes and Delillo seem fully aware, as Adorno eloquently notes, that 'since the work of art, after all, cannot be reality, the elimination of all illusory features accentuates all the more glaringly the illusory character of its existence'.⁴⁹ However, I want to argue that the tensions that are inherent in the styles of both novels, which Said views as a factor of 'lateness', paradoxically highlights Delillo's and Barnes' attempts to show how literature can, to quote McEwan, embody 'engagement with the world', and reflect it more accurately and 'sincerely' than previous literary models such as postmodern metafiction and 'hysterical realism', which so obviously 'stand in opposition to realism'.⁵⁰

The opening passage of Delillo's *Falling Man* sets the stylistic precedent for the remainder of the novel. Delillo's first paragraphs face the actual event of 9/11 head on, depicting the direct experiences of Keith Neudecker among the 'world [of] falling ash and near night'⁵¹ that was once the site of the World Trade Center. Delillo's language oscillates between very concrete, "direct" description — 'a supermarket cart stood upright and empty'⁵² and 'there were shoes discarded in the street, handbags and laptops, a man seated on the pavement coughing up blood'⁵³ — and more poetic, oblique passages: 'seismic tides of smoke...otherworldly things in the morning pall'⁵⁴ and 'resumes blowing by, intact snatches of business, quick in the wind'.⁵⁵ Although the first set of quotations above show how Delillo's prose evidences a level of sparseness and descriptive precision, the whole scenario is not described in this way. The poeticism of Delillo's language means that some information is inevitably left out, and he seems to 'cradle the rest in silence'.⁵⁶ Practically, 'otherworldly things in the morning pall' provides the reader with little information about the sights and sounds that Keith and the other terrified individuals around him would have experienced; such language is devoid of any concrete visual image. However, Delillo seemingly incorporates glimpses of his own authorial awareness that no matter what way he attempts to describe the event — even if he opted for language as dryly unequivocal as, 'he was walking through rubble and mud and there were people running past holding towels to

43 M. Wood, 'Introduction', p. xvii

44 Ibid.

45 Said, p. 6

46 J. Wood, 'Human, All Too Human'

47 Said, p. 9

48 Smith

49 Theodor W. Adorno, qtd. in Said, p. 19

50 Smith, p. 73

51 Don Delillo, *Falling Man* (London: Scribner, 2007), p. 3

52 Delillo, p. 5

53 Ibid., p. 4

54 Ibid., p. 3

55 Ibid., p. 4

56 Ibid., p. 30

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their faces or jackets over their heads’⁵⁷ — he could not emulate the experience of the event, and make his novel ‘engage with the world’, through a conventional ‘mimetic’ style: ‘things around him...were unfinished, *whatever that means*. They were unseen, *whatever that means*’.⁵⁸ Similarly, in the third chapter, Keith states to Lianne that the event is ‘hard to reconstruct’.⁵⁹ It appears that for Delillo, as Michael Wood points out, ‘silence itself is an aspect of style’.⁶⁰ His descriptions highlight a ‘tension between what is represented and what isn’t represented, between the articulate and the silent’⁶¹ which Said writes constitutes one facet of ‘late style’. His evident awareness of the failure of any narrative style, whether it is documentary style realism or oblique poeticism, to provide an adequate representation of the terrorist event shows Delillo’s adoption of a narrative style characterised by self-aware ‘tension’ that, paradoxically, constitutes a more representative ‘engagement with the world’, and literary reflection of the reality of 9/11.

Delillo does not betray this kind of lamenting authorial awareness — ‘whatever that means’ — through the intrusion of the author’s voice like we might find in one of his earlier, postmodern efforts. Instead, he employs it through the consciousness of Keith. We are presented with notion that the more poetic language and more abstract descriptions of Delillo’s opening description do not come from something ‘outside of all this’,⁶² but are focalized through the consciousness of Keith himself, almost as if he is ‘character and author both’.⁶³ The fact that Delillo veils his observations concerning the limitations of his own language to fully represent the event of 9/11 within the consciousness of one of the story’s characters gives a nod to the mode of literary representation that Delillo thinks *is* able to adequately ‘engage with the world’ and provide a more ‘immediate representation’ of reality through literature.

Throughout his first chapter, Delillo moves back and forth between ‘objective’ representation of the scene, and Keith’s own mental processing of the events:

he saw members of the tai chi group from the park nearby, standing with hands extended at roughly chest level, elbows bent, *as if all of this, themselves included, might be placed in a state of abeyance* [my emphasis].⁶⁴

In his essay ‘Pseudo-Impressionism?’, Jesse Matz writes that this kind of literary style, which is at once ‘mental, physical and imaginative’ — never settling between concrete description and abstract perception in its representation of reality — can be seen to highlight the legacy of Impressionism within contemporary fiction: ‘when cultivated by James, Woolf and others...impressions undid differences between sight and knowledge, thought and feeling, appearance and reality [and therefore created] synthetic acts of understanding designed to position the literary mind right between its different claims to representational value’.⁶⁵ Although both Barnes and Delillo seemingly occupy a place in an entirely different literary tradition to Impressionism, and it might seem unusual to speak of these authors alongside James or Woolf, Matz writes that ‘Impressionism was never merely “impressionistic”... Impressionism’s legacies look and sound nothing like it, while only its betrayals imitate it closely’.⁶⁶ Delillo’s mixture of objective description and subjective perception — ‘he went

57 Ibid, p. 3

58 Ibid, p. 5

59 Ibid, p. 21

60 M. Wood, p. xix

61 Said, qtd. in Wood, ‘Introduction’, p. xvii

62 Delillo, p. 4

63 Ibid., p. 30

64 Ibid., p. 4

65 Matz, p. 117

66 Ibid., pp. 116-23

past a line of fire trucks and they stood empty now, headlights flashing. He could not find himself in the things he saw and heard...everything was, all around him, falling away, street signs, people, things he could not name⁶⁷ — reflects the ‘motives of the original impressionists [because] it questions the role direct contact with reality ought to play.’⁶⁸ Delillo’s stylistic choices show his conviction that the amalgamation of subjective thought and objective description, the constant flux and inconsistency of representational method that creates ‘nonserene tension’ in the narrative, can in fact create a more ‘immediate experience’⁶⁹ of reality, a more tangible ‘engagement with the world’, or ‘the real’ outside of the work of art, which it attempts to reflect.

This same technique is employed by Delillo to provide insight into the consciousness of other characters. Three years after the attacks, Lianne takes Justin to the march in protest of the Iraq war. Here, as in the opening passage wherein the narrative voice shifts between objective, concrete descriptions of the world and the abstract perceptions in the consciousness of Keith, Delillo intermittently focalizes narrative vision through the consciousnesses of Lianne:

people stopped to watch a burning float, papier-mache, and the crowd became dense, collapsing in on itself...there were a dozen police nearby...this is where they would detain the overcommitted and uncontrollable...these half million in their running shoes and sun hats and symbol bearing paraphernalia, were shit-faced fools to be gathered in this heat and humidity for whatever it was that had brought them here.⁷⁰

Here, Delillo’s style provides insight onto the thoughts and feelings of Lianne (and in the passage above, those of Keith) — displaying the ‘emotional’ and ‘sensual’ content of *Falling Man*, exhibiting what James Wood refers to as ‘how somebody felt about something’ — while also showing one way in which the twenty-first-century novel might attain a ‘truer kind of truth’⁷¹ in its literary representation of the world. I would argue that it is the ‘fragmentariness’ that arises from Delillo’s mixture of ‘subjective and objective’ representation, which is characteristic of Said’s ‘late style’, that paradoxically allows him to achieve a truer ‘engagement with the world’, presenting ways in which the novel might more authentically reflect reality and achieve ‘mimetic sincerity’, without attempting to resort to the ‘busted’ mode of social realism.

In *The Sense of an Ending*, Barnes employs similar stylistic techniques to Delillo, amalgamating the seemingly objective observations of Tony Webster with the abstraction of his subjective memories and thoughts. Barnes employment of such a style gives credence to Matz’s assertion of ‘the many telling ways Impressionism has come down to contemporary culture’.⁷² Indeed, Barnes perhaps shows an awareness of how his novel’s style is indebted to the Impressionists: ‘I can at least be true to the *impressions* those facts left’ (my emphasis).⁷³ However, the position of ‘objective’ description, and how the novel ‘engages with the world’ is complicated more so than in *Falling Man*, because Barnes’ narrative is completely focalized through the consciousness of his protagonist, Tony. The protagonist-narrator attempts to be ‘true to the impressions’ that facts have left, although those ‘facts’ in themselves are rendered wholly unreliable, because we have no access to the past events that play such an important role in the unfolding narrative except through Tony’s own version of

67 Delillo, p. 246

68 Matz, p. 120

69 Ibid., p. 129

70 Delillo, p. 182

71 Matz, p. 117

72 Ibid., p. 117

73 Barnes, *The Sense of an Ending* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2011), p. 4

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them. However, Barnes still displays the kind of ‘different claims to representational value’ and ‘perceptual conflict’ that Matz sees as Impressionism’s ‘revolutionary form of aesthetic engagement’.⁷⁴ These competing perceptions still result in the kind of stylistic ‘nonharmonious tension’ as in *Falling Man*. The only difference is that the competing perceptions are within the mind of Tony. We continually flit between Tony’s ‘direct’ recollections of events as he experienced them, and his ‘reading now of what happened then...or, rather [his] memory now of [his] reading then of what was happening at the time’.⁷⁵ *The Sense of an Ending* thus presents how the novel can ‘mediate between ways of taking in the world...always seeming to entail one form of understanding while enabling another’.⁷⁶ For example, Tony describes the memory of when he ‘witnessed the Severn Bore’⁷⁷ with Veronica, his then girlfriend, while at university in Bristol:

Then, one evening at Minsterworth, a group of us waited on the riverbank until after midnight and then we were rewarded...The moon’s intermittent lighting was assisted by the occasional explorations of a few powerful torches....a wave, two or three feet high, was heading towards us, the water breaking across its whole width from bank to bank. It was more unsettling because it looked and felt quietly wrong, as if some small lever of the universe had been pressed, and here, just for these minutes, nature was reversed and time with it’.⁷⁸

Barnes shows that the addition of Tony’s subjective imaginings in the present complicates the way that the work of art ‘engages’ with the world outside of the narrative in the representation of the past event. Tony’s observations at the end of the passage are his ‘impressions’, at the time of telling his narrative, of an experience watching the Severn Bore in the past. Barnes’ choice to segue from a ‘direct’ description of university students waiting on the riverbank, to Tony’s later subjective thoughts on the event, highlights how his ‘abstraction [from the point of hindsight] intervenes at the moment of apparently sensuous engagement’.⁷⁹ Paradoxically, I would argue that the amalgamation of different perceptions — Tony’s first hand descriptions that provide an objective portrayal of waiting for the Severn Bore, against his later thoughts concerning the memory of that event — that shows how Barnes’ narrative style manifests the kind of ‘contradiction’ that Said attributes to lateness, manages to attain a truer reflection of the way memory contributes to our perception of reality, and how this is communicated through narrative fiction. *The Sense of an Ending* attains a truer ‘mimetic sincerity’ than a simple recollection of events would allow, because the continual addition of Tony’s subjective thoughts in the present creates a more accurate assessment of history, moving one step closer to the literary representation of ‘immediate experience’.

As discussed, Barnes’ novel is completely focalized through the vision of Tony. It is evident that *The Sense of an Ending* manifests ‘emotional content’ because we are constantly privy to Tony’s own thoughts and feelings. Moreover, although the entire narrative results from a minor, tragic event of personal significance to Tony and Veronica, it is through the exploration of this ‘emotional’ content that *The Sense of an Ending* stages similar ‘intellectual’ questions of narrative’s capacity to reflect the world of lived reality- and how far the novel ‘engages with the world’ of ‘the real’ — as those explored by Delillo in *Falling*

74 Matz, p. 122

75 Barnes, p. 41

76 Matz, p. 118

77 Barnes, p. 35

78 Ibid., p. 36

79 Matz, p. 119

Man. I would argue that Barnes' novel shows that 'muscularity of intellect' can be expressed through a work that deals with personal tragedy, which might otherwise be deemed solely 'emotional' content. I therefore disagree with David Sexton's assertion that the novel is simply a 'game of knowledge' that lacks 'heart',⁸⁰ as well as Kakutani's statement that '*The Sense of an Ending* is dense with philosophical ideas [and is] more clever than emotionally satisfying'.⁸¹ Much like *Falling Man* provides insight into the thoughts and feelings of Keith and Lianne, in *The Sense of an Ending* the continual focalization through Tony's consciousness provides a glimpse of the psychological workings of the novel's protagonist. Barnes' complete focalization through Tony allows him to stage the wider questions that the novel also interrogates through style, about the way in which the novel can adequately represent the real world outside of it.

To conclude, I have argued that both *Falling Man* and *The Sense of Ending* explore 'emotional and sensual content' at the same time as displaying 'a muscularity of intellect' through their usage of a style that inherits the legacy of Impressionism through its 'rejection of certainties about the way reality enters into art'. I have posited that both novels represent a movement away from the kind of paratextual, 'hysterical realist' fiction that characterised the previous output of Barnes and Delillo, respectively, and which James Wood stated could not endure after the crisis of 9/11. I have viewed both texts through the lens of what Edward Said called 'late style'. However, the kind of 'late style' employed by both Delillo and Barnes inherently questions the merits of social realist mimesis — presenting this mode of representation as 'busted', to quote James Wood — and does not attempt to return to a transparent 'mimetic sincerity' either. The style employed by both Barnes and Delillo attempts to amalgamate objective description with insights into subjective perception through narrative focalization. I have argued how the style of both novels is at once 'subjective and objective', exhibiting a 'nonharmonious tension' that is characteristic of 'late style'. The 'tension' that arises from this 'late style' of literary representation shows one way in which the twenty-first-century novel might represent a truer 'engagement with the world' — a characteristic that I have argued is not solely an attribute of novels that deal with the political or ideological fallout of the attacks on the World Trade Center — and how it might reflect lived reality more accurately using a different kind of mimesis.

80 David Sexton, 'The Revised Version', *The Spectator* [23 July 2011] <<http://www.spectator.co.uk/books/7112043/the-revised-version.html>> [08/05/12], no pgn.

81 Kakutani

Ian McEwan claims that 'besides emotional and sensual content', novels should aspire to 'have some muscularity of intellect, and engagement with the world'. Consider the aims of twenty-first-century writers in light of this statement.

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