



**UNIVERSITY  
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**The Making and Unmaking of Visual History:  
Ekphrasis and Postmodern Historiographic  
Discourse in Graham Swift's *Out of this World* and  
*Last Orders***

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In my thesis, I examine and compare British author Graham Swift's novels *Out of this World* (1988) and *Last Orders* (1996). The comparison focuses on how the novels employ *ekphrasis*. Ekphrasis in literary theory refers to the verbal representation of the visual, such as artworks and architecture. I maintain that such representations are consequential either in terms of the novel's story or its thematic contribution.

I study ekphrasis in connection with visual history, especially. Both novels conduct discursive historical inquiries; *Out of this World* extensively discusses war photographs, and *Last Orders* has its characters encounter two historical landmarks, a war memorial and a cathedral. A particularly pervading theme in the novels is the Second World War as a phenomenon of history, and I use theories on second-generation postmemory and postwar memorial culture to investigate the ekphrases as materialisations of this phenomenon.

Moreover, both novels doubt the representational abilities of, for example, photographs and memorials, and ultimately subvert the notion that the viewer can attain knowledge or stable meanings from them. This discourse reflects postmodern historicism which centres on scepticism about historical knowledge and argues that history and fiction are written by the same narrative conventions. I refer to Linda Hutcheon's theory (1988) on historiographic metafiction to point out that *Out of this World*, especially, uses ekphrasis together with a controlling narrator to highlight the ways in which history is mediated to the present as a kind of fiction-writing.

The comparative analysis shows that *Out of this World* realises ekphrasis often descriptively to shock the reader with the photographic horrors of war, but, overall, the novel seeks to demonstrate that photographs can represent the past only arbitrarily and often under such ideological forces as propaganda. Ekphrasis is a discourse tool but affects the novel's underlying storyline very little. *Last Orders*, in contrast, incorporates ekphrases as necessary encounters along the character-journeys it depicts. The encounters alter the course of the story, and the ekphrastic objects themselves, as they are viewed through multiple contrasting perspectives, function predominantly as sites for self-reflection.

**Key words:** ekphrasis, narrative, postmodernism, historiographic metafiction, postwar literature, Graham Swift

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## 1 Introduction

History is visual: in addition to reading about it in books, one can encounter it in memorials, architecture, photography, and so on. Late twentieth century postmodern literature widely investigates how history is mediated to contemporary societies and suggests that the way historiography narrativises the past nears fiction-writing. British author Graham Swift is one of the key writers of the era, and here, I study two of his novels, *Out of this World* (1988) and *Last Orders* (1996). The novels exemplify the postmodern intrigue about history as a contestable phenomenon and indeed take specific interest in visual materialisations of history. *Out of this World* is about photographs more than anything else, about a retired war photographer who criticises the way his own photographs distort the reality of the past. *Last Orders*, then, depicts a journey through England's war-battered landscape. Its narrative apexes are an encounter with a war memorial and a cathedral which are both signs of certain past-defining narratives. The name for this phenomenon, representing the visual verbally, is *ekphrasis*, a term derived from ancient rhetoric and adapted to modern literary theory. Ekphrasis is the main topic of my thesis.

The Second World War forms a backdrop against which the novels introduce characters whose present lives and identities appear inconsequential in comparison to recent events in history. In other words, the novels majorly reflect the atmosphere in the late twentieth century when the war in many ways still dominated public discourse and memory. This is an environment where there is a need to pass on war memories from one generation to the next but where the most dominant narratives are often shaped by the collective and nationalist attempts to commemorate the war and, in doing so, create a base for a collective identity. Swift's novels examine the other side of this coin: how the established configurations of twentieth century history obscure individual narratives. The novels exercise the voices of their characters to question the metanarratives of history and to imagine how personal stories might fit into them.

The purpose of this thesis is to study how ekphrasis can be employed and is employed in the novels to investigate history and its various voices. I do this by focusing on the gazes of the narrators. As explained by Koopman (2018, 8), ekphrasis is always necessarily about interpretation because a verbal description of an object follows from the narrator's unique perspective. Therefore, I inspect how the narrators pay attention to the photographs and other

visual objects which are represented in the novels, what specific things they foreground, and how history then appears before them and, consequently, before the eyes of the reader.

Despite their similar themes, the novels employ ekphrasis differently, and, to an extent, for different purposes as well, which is why my analysis is comparative. I argue that *Out of this World* uses ekphrasis specifically to conduct a prototypically postmodern inquiry into the way the past is mediated to the present, whereas *Last Orders* realises ekphrasis as what I call ekphrastic encounters, as indispensable parts of the narrative without which the journeys of the characters would alter significantly. *Out of this World* presents graphic war photographs, on one level to shock and intrigue the reader, but on another to demonstrate the artificiality of these very elements which so grip the attention. This has attributes of historiographic metafiction, a term coined by Hutcheon in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988), as I discuss later on. *Last Orders*, then, avoids any explicit agenda: its ekphrastic objects are not, as in *Out of this World*, examples that the narrator utilises to talk about history. They are instead encountered in the moment, and in that moment, the characters reflect on them, and they reflect the characters.

### 1.1 Context: Postwar and Postmodern

*Postwar* and *postmodern* are two terms which, in many ways, go hand in hand. Born in 1949, Swift is one of the second-generation writers for whom the war, even though he did not partake in it, provides an important subject matter; the aftereffects resonate throughout the twentieth century both for him and his characters. Crosthwaite (2009, 3) has studied the relationship between the late-century novels and the Second World War and states that it is not only novels written during or immediately after the war that can be described as “World War II novels” but rather all “novels that register, gauge, or express the war as traumatic event”. A group of male writers, Swift among them, gained prominence in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s and published novels fascinated with the war of their fathers *because* it was their fathers’, not theirs (Crosthwaite 2009, 6). At the core of these novels, in other words, is the struggle to commemorate and give shape to a war that one did not live through but that still figures in everyday life. The war then haunts Swift’s literary production but as a phenomenon of history.

Hirsch (2012, 106) calls the second generation the generation of postmemory. This refers to the fact that “[s]econd generation fiction, art, memoir, and testimony are shaped by the attempt to represent the long-term effects of living in close proximity to the pain, depression,

and dissociation of persons who have witnessed and survived massive historical trauma” (Hirsch 2012, 112); postmemory thus describes the relationship that the second generation has to these events. The events are remembered through stories, historiography, and historical and commemorative artefacts. I think it is for this reason there is much room reserved for ekphrastic expression in Swift’s fiction.

Postmodern, in relation to postwar, appears as an inquiry into the past from an anxiously coloured present. While from the late 1940s until the late 1960s, according to Crosthwaite (2009, 4), the war was pictured in literature through the modes of realism, the late-century writers tackled it from a different angle. If the realistic, historical novel depicts the war as a linear, chronological event, the great ‘rupture’ in history and a point of change and innovation, then the postwar, postmodern novelists contest that form and “stage the dislocation and dispersal of the moment of originary rupture through an eerie intertwining of their own historical moment with that of the war” (Crosthwaite 2009, 6). ‘Postmodern’, in this sense, does not mean something that comes after the ‘modern’, or after a specific turning-point in history, but rather something that registers that there is no such turning-point: the same experiences of “misapprehension, retroaction, anticipation, and deferral” continue throughout the century (Crosthwaite 2009, 12). Hence, the postmodern novel replaces the narratives of change and progress with a kind of formlessness or fragmented form, as is the case in *Out of this World* and, to some extent, *Last Orders*.

The postwar period also saw the ideological void left behind after religion. Bedggood (2005, 203–204) writes that, in this context, it was quite natural that some of the British postmodern novelists turned their gaze to history in search for meaning, purpose, and truth. What the postmodern writers found, however, is that history, as it is mediated to us, is very much like fiction. Boxall (2013, 12), for example, notes that the postmodern novel widely held a conviction that “there is a fundamental and mutually productive relationship between fiction and history [...] this sense that our past is mediated by narrative, and can thus be reshaped and reconstituted within it”. History’s truth, then, now appeared flexible and modifiable in similar terms than religious truth: something that is subjectively configured and reconfigured depending on the conventions of place and time. Relating to this, I discuss postmodern historicism later on in this paper.

Although the postwar ‘ideological void’ is widely recognised among scholars, this is not to say that religion simply ceased to matter. It is true that, in Europe, the postwar discourse about

Christianity was formulated around notions of disintegration and discontinuity, but the changes might better be understood as shifting perspectives about the *societal role* of religion (Van Dam and Van Trigt 2015, 214). Religious regimes could be, for example, employed under the flag of national unity to combat social disintegration (Van Dam and Van Trigt 2015, 230). At a more individual level, religion could offer a way to come to terms with the trauma of the Second World War. For instance, many might find comfort through the belief that God's presence and 'divine plan' are immanent even in the war's disturbing, comprehension-defying events (Winter 2018, 256). Along these lines, *Last Orders* makes an inquiry into the role of religion with the ekphrastic representation of the cathedral right after the war memorial. The novel asks whether religion is able to offer a way for the individuals to ground and define themselves in a situation where their past and future appear equally obscure.

The coexistence of public and private memories of the war, especially, show why historiography should be seen as malleable as opposed to fixed. Dickason (2022, 5) notes that subjective recollections of the war often contradict the dominant narratives shaped by policymakers who decide how the war is publicly commemorated. Writers such as Swift thus shape their inquiries into the past around the conflicting narratives prevailing in postwar years, and, with an aura of postmodern scepticism, likely deem their search for uniform meaning inconclusive from the beginning.

## **1.2 Primary Materials: Between Emotion and Intellect**

I briefly introduce the two novels in this section, starting with their main narratives or *frame narratives* as far as such things can be cleared from the characteristically postmodern fragmented structures of the novels. In an interview with Craps (2009, 660), Swift himself states that he sees his fiction as a mixture of emotion and intellect, that his goal is to be a writer who can generate touching stories but provoke thought at the same time. So, while his novels carry out in-depth research into the universal and the timeless, they usually also follow underlying personal, character-driven storylines which, for example, explore unconventional family-ties and the lives and concerns of ordinary, working-class people.

In *Out of this World*, this underlying storyline is that of Harry Beech, a former war photographer, and his daughter Sophie. They are the main narrators in the novel. Harry's father and Sophie's grandfather, Robert, was killed in a targeted terrorist bombing, a fate that was brought upon him for his lifetime management of an arms manufacturing company. After

that, Sophie escaped to America and cut all ties to her father with whom she always had a strenuous relationship. The novel follows Harry's efforts to appease Sophie, and Sophie's attempt to make peace with her past trauma, forgive her father, and eventually return to England. No real conclusion is ever reached: in the end, the novel sees Sophie on a plane on her way to England, but whether she ever reconciles with Harry, or indeed ever reaches her destination, is left in the air.

*Last Orders*, then, follows a group of friends who face the death of their wartime comrade, Jack Dodds. Jack's last wish is that his ashes be spread to the sea at the coast of Margate, a city in Kent. The friends undertake to fulfil this wish, and the drive from London to Margate forms the novel's frame narrative, a symbolic "voyage back through Britain's national history to the source of its life and power, the sea" (Kaczvinsky 2024, 142). While the narrative is fragmented by multiple narrators, this linear journey affords the novel a notably traditional narrative structure, the kind of which is missing from Swift's four earlier novels, *Out of this World* included. *Last Orders* gives a semblance of direction, whereas *Out of this World* is arranged like a photomontage, or, as Catană (2015, 83) argues, like snapshots which illustrate that reality can only be captured in bits and pieces. *Last Orders* also has a traditionally conclusive ending, or at least something approximating it, when the story fades away with the ashes of Jack on the stormy pier of Margate's coast.

The novels also differ in how they are narrated. In *Out of this World*, the narration mainly switches between Harry and Sophie. Pesso-Miquel (2007, 138) observes that *Out of this World* has narration that resembles "constructed discourse, a kind of role-playing, and a leaning towards a possible reconciliation". The narrators often address their narration to other characters within the storyworld-setting: for example, Harry often addresses Sophie. By 'constructed discourse', moreover, I think that Pessa-Miquel refers to the sense that the narration is deliberate, self-aware, and discourse-like. I take the term *discourse* to denote a type of communicative narration which is conducted with a listener in mind and has a knowledgeable undertone. This is also potentially narration with an agenda. In *Out of this World*, this agenda might be thought of as Harry's need to make someone (Sophie or the reader) see things in his way, which indeed gives his narrative voice a didactic aura. In contrast, the narration in *Last Orders* consists of inner monologues of its various characters, characters who remain unconscious about narrating anything and therefore have no agenda besides those that have to do with their own personal worries. This, like Pessa-Miquel (2007, 138) notes, becomes close to the modernist 'stream of consciousness' technique. The different

styles of narration also affect the way ekphrasis functions: in sum, I think that, with self-aware narration, the reader has cause to doubt the narrator's motivation to relay the visual in a certain way, whereas with unconscious narration, the reader can more readily accept ekphrases as spontaneous impressions.

These dissimilarities between the novels suggest a kind of evolution at work in Swift's literary production. Even though my perspective on *Out of this World* and *Last Orders* is postmodern, it has been noted that Swift's fiction is not necessarily as easily categorised as that. Craps (2009, 637) writes that Swift himself has never subscribed to any literary school and indeed seems to be "too invested in the traditional concerns of the English novel (like exploration of character and storytelling)" to tick all the postmodern boxes. Some, like Pesso-Miquel (2007, 136), also distinguish that Swift's novels undergo a transformation from postmodern to "more subdued, straightforward conception of novel as story-telling". A perceivable narrative structure, a conclusive ending, and a less self-conscious narrative voice in *Last Orders* all point toward this evolution. If these elements define *Last Orders* as 'more traditional storytelling', the lack of them makes *Out of this World* then, perhaps, 'untraditional', but, more importantly, offers the novel the means to conduct its metafictional discourse, its problematisation of historiography, as I later discuss.

The structure of this thesis is as follows: in chapter 2, I discuss theories on ekphrasis, narrative, and postmodern historicism and historiographic metafiction. Ekphrastic theories relate to narratology in that one of the main questions to arise from the use of ekphrasis is whether or not it constructs narrative. It would make quite a lacklustre study to analyse the ekphrases in *Out of this World* and *Last Orders*, for instance, had they no effect on the narrative and were they completely inconsequential to the story. Ekphrases are indeed effective in these novels either in terms of the journeys the characters undertake or in terms of the overall picture the novels aim to create of the past; for this latter reason, I base their analysis on postmodern theories about history, as well.

I open the analysis with *Out of this World* in chapter 3. I present several examples of its ekphrastic photographs and draw attention to Harry as a more or less typical narrator of historiographic metafiction. In the process, I also investigate such issues as the characteristic tropes through which (war) history is often narrated as well as the ethics of photography itself. There is indeed plenty to discuss in terms of the ekphrastic photographs and the themes that arise from them; in comparison, the analysis of *Last Orders* in chapter 4 seems narrower in

scope. However, the two examples I present there, in my view, also form two of the most significant events in the novel and are worth discussing at length: these are encounters with Chatham Naval Memorial and Canterbury Cathedral, respectively. They affect the narrative structure and the characters themselves, which sets the ekphrases apart from those in *Out of this World*. Along these lines, chapter 5 is dedicated to a side by side comparison of the novels. There, I also draw attention to some ekphrastic war photographs which surface in *Last Orders* but which, contrary to *Out of this World*, are private and familial rather than published ones. Altogether, I conclude that, while the sense of history, the way it is visible and transmits its trauma to the generations that follow the war, pervades both novels, the novels employ ekphrasis very differently to realise this matter.

## 2 Theoretical Background

Here, I map the routes I take to approach ekphrasis in *Out of this World* and *Last Orders* later on. Despite being relatively newly recognised in literary theory, ekphrasis has been studied extensively, and so ekphrasis as a literary technique paints a versatile picture. I begin by introducing ekphrasis and explaining how I use the term, specifically, and then present a narratological viewpoint on it. The focal issue is how ekphrasis might be figured as a narrative technique, whether it is indeed narrative or simply description. Koopman (2018, 39–40) notes that there exists differing schools of thought regarding this, those who see ekphrasis as either all narrative or all descriptive, but he emphasises that both elements may appear within the same ekphrastic passage and that ekphrases are essentially “passages which deal with objects (prototypically associated with description) on which a narrative representation (prototypically associated with narration) is depicted”. It is this intermediate viewpoint that I adopt and adapt to the novels in question.

Finally, in this chapter, I discuss postmodern historicism and historiographic metafiction as Hutcheon presents them. Like Hutcheon, I treat ekphrasis in postmodern fiction as, on one hand, a central way of representing culture and, on the other, a way to challenge the very role of visual artefacts as “documentary sources” (Hutcheon 1988, 121–122). Additionally, I consider how historiographic metafiction plays a part in the postmodern discourses that Swift’s novels carry out.

### 2.1 Ekphrasis: Pictures into Stories

The *Progymnasmata*, a series of Greek elementary exercises in rhetoric, offers the first definition of ekphrasis, according to Webb (2009, 1): “A speech that brings the subject matter vividly before the eyes”. It was mostly a matter of rhetoric, then, and the term was not applied to modern literature until the second half of the twentieth century (Webb 2009, 5). The literary example that is often given of early ekphrasis is the description of the Shield of Achilles in *Iliad*, a passage which lends symbolic significance to Achilles’ character and life. This leads to a simple modern definition of ekphrasis as “a kind of writing that turns pictures into storytelling words” (Heffernan 2015, 48). Heffernan’s definition emphasises the narrativity of such practice: more than description, ekphrastic objects become indispensable parts of the telling of the story.

Clüver (2018, 237) criticises Heffernan's definition of ekphrasis in one aspect: it seems to restrict "the objects of ekphrastic representation to visual representations of the phenomenal world in paintings, graphic works, or sculptures" and therefore overlook such things as architectural monuments, for example. Clüver (2018, 239; italics as in the original) suggests the following: ekphrasis is "*the verbal representation of real or fictive configurations composed in non-kinetic visual medium*". More or less anything one might encounter and appreciate visually could then be understood as an object of ekphrasis when translated into verbal form; this definition includes both real-life and fictive objects. Clüver (2018, 247) refers to this as "intermedial translation", which could also be thought of as a form of intertextuality: the fictional, textual context is shaped by references to (recognisable) visual media. Clüver's definition excludes kinetic artworks, films, video games and so on because their analysis "requires different considerations, terminologies, and methods than the discussion of ekphrastic representations of configurations in 'non-kinetic' visual media" (2018, 239). I think that kinetic media can be considered ekphrases in literary contexts, but, like Clüver says, this would necessitate other kinds of analytic tools: such ekphrases would, for example, employ a different set of senses, and movement could perhaps direct the spectator's gaze in a more determined way. For the scope of this thesis, the restriction to non-kinetic visual medium is sufficient. Clüver's definition allows me to consider that the representations of photographs in *Out of this World* and the war memorial and cathedral in *Last Orders* are examples of ekphrasis.

The ancient sense, 'to bring the subject matter vividly before the eyes', has lost some of its emphasis in literary theory since literary theory recognises the narrator's selective gaze. Koopman (2018, 8), for example, points out that the narrator can hardly "present an object in its totality", their perception of it is always partial and, as such, interpretation. Even further, this interpretation usually suggests the narrator's, even the author's, way of representing the world "according to the semiotic and cultural conventions of the age" (Clüver 2018, 240). Quite naturally then, the reader of such verbal translation finds their interpretation of an object directed by the narrator along these lines. When it comes to ekphrasis as a rhetorical device, as it was in antiquity, I think there must be some of that old sense remaining. For example, *Out of this World* presents several photographs the subject matter of which bring before the reader's eyes the horrors of war and certainly have the rhetorical power to shock. Most scholars agree that ekphrasis must be distinguished from the simple act of description. Ekphrasis creates meaningful units. Karastathi (2015, 94), for instance, proposes that an

ekphrastic passage “can be approached more as a textual fragment; a detachable unit that can be isolated and studied independently”. Mere description of an object offers visual information about the storyworld but does not stand out, whereas ekphrasis usually has an effect: pausing for thought before a nonverbal work of art, as Cunningham (2007, 57) argues. Ekphrasis, then, draws the attention of the narrator, and consequently the reader, and potentially causes meaningful self-reflection.

Cunningham also presents an important term that I adopt for my thesis: *ekphrastic encounter*. Ekphrastic encounters occur within the course of the story, like when the characters in *Last Orders* take detours to the war memorial and the cathedral along their journey. Cunningham (2007, 65) writes that “the ekphrastic encounter is commonly for the good of the fictional character, is morally heuristic”. The encounter, thus, can be spontaneous, and yet it serves a purpose. Cunningham (2007, 59) illustrates this by an example from *Pride and Prejudice*: when Elizabeth Bennett encounters Mr Darcy’s portrait in Darcy’s Pemberley home, it is an encounter which changes her view of Darcy himself. Moreover still, ekphrastic encounters can function as “extended descriptions of people, landscapes, battles, places and objects” (Karastathi 2015, 93), as is the case with the Shield of Achilles and with the war memorial in *Last Orders*, for example: it appears uniquely to each of the characters according to their personalities and experiences.

## 2.2 Narratological Viewpoint on Ekphrasis

Even though it has been widely studied in the field of narratology, narrative remains a concept with no conclusive definition. The most basic requisite for narrative is the occurrence of an event or a sequence of events (Koopman 2018, 15). More specifically, however, a sequence of events can only be called a story; it becomes narrative when it is relayed by a narrator to a narratee, when it becomes discourse (Puckett 2016, 5). Narrative discourse, then, refers to the events as they are relayed and represented. Herman (2009, 9) presents four elements of a prototypical narrative: firstly, narrative is a mode of representation that is situated in a specific occasion for telling; secondly, narrative focuses on a sequence of specific events; thirdly, these represented events somehow relevantly disrupt the storyworld; and fourthly, a prototypical narrative has the effect of conveying what it is like to be in the storyworld. This prototype approach to narrative allows one to determine the degree of narrativity in any textual passage.

Narratologically speaking, the issue is whether the act of ekphrasis is narrative or constitutes a narrative pause, that is, “a passage at the level of narration to which nothing corresponds at the level of story. The plot does not advance, but something is described” (Fowler 1991, 25–26). I have already discussed ways in which ekphrastic passages can be relevant to characterisation, for instance, or even constitute turning points at the level of plot. It is for this reason that many scholars regard ekphrasis as both narrative and descriptive: according to Koopman (2018, 11), they distinguish the visible elements which are typical for pictorial art as description, and non-visible elements, such as the narrator’s insertion of sounds, movements and feelings, as narrative elements. In this view, ekphrasis cannot be separated from the notion that the narrator is looking at an object, evaluating it and somehow relating it to their current experience; “description thereby becomes diegetic and the narrator avoids a pause” (Koopman 2018, 34). It can be understood from this that a prototypically narrative ekphrastic passage likely slows down both narrative time and fabula time: not only does it take time for the narrator to describe an object, but time at the level of story may also move forward if the narrator’s act of looking becomes part of the ongoing event. *Last Orders* demonstrates this last point rather well.

Furthermore, at the heart of the arguments for narrative ekphrasis is simply language. Koopman (2018, 26) writes that “language can easily evaluate what it narrates, and pass judgements on characters. In short, representations in the verbal medium have the highest potential for the highest degree of narrativity”. Thus, the use of language to judge and evaluate increases the narrativity of an ekphrastic passage because it adds to the content matter of the passage, adds to what the object comes to signify. Fowler (1991, 29) gives an example that “[t]he same photograph can be read as a sign of triumph or an indictment of crime, but verbal description has to take a stand, however ‘objective’ it attempts to be”. Moreover, “[a] picture of a cat looks like a cat, the word ‘cat’ does not,” and so, “a literary description necessarily inscribes a point of view more strongly than a plastic one” (ibid.). It is for this reason that ekphrases are rarely neutral, however detached the narrator strives to be.

This non-neutrality has to do with what the linguist W.J.M. Levelt, according to Fowler (ibid.), refers to as the linearisation problem: this means that “when we describe in words a scene, we have to decide the order in which we are to present the details and the duration – which may be zero – of the description of each of them”. In other words, the narrator decides the order in which to represent the visual details verbally, and the things to focus on and highlight, and so “[o]ne cannot distinguish between interpretation and description in an

ekphrasis, since ekphrasis is by definition interpretation” (Koopman 2018, 8). Following the narrator’s particular gaze then reveals things about the narrator perhaps most of all. In fact, ekphrasis is often used as a focalisation tool in the novel, as a way to “afford access to multiple narrative voices or focalisers, whose descriptive musings might be mingled in a common encounter which juxtaposes different levels of aesthetic judgment or varied interpretations and viewpoints” (Karastathi 2015, 96). *Last Orders*, in particular, realises this: presents the same ekphrastic scenes through several different focalisers and thus really foregrounds the significance of the viewer as opposed to the object.

To say that ekphrasis is merely decorative description, static pictures only translated into verbal form, is a dead-end, according to Fowler (1991, 27): even description that appears decorative demands to be integrated with narrative as “the reader is possessed by a strong need to interpret”. This relates to what Abbott (2009, 6) writes about narrative perception: “Even when we look at something as static and completely spatial as a picture, narrative consciousness comes into play”. It may be said, then, that inserting narrative into immobile scenes, such as photographs, is what people tend to do should they have any kind of interest in understanding the stories behind them. This often functions through certain narrative templates or formulas that we have stored in our memory (Abbott 2009, 8). Hirsch (2012, 120) writes that we take these templates, or tropes, to understand history, as well, by way of projecting certain tropes for example onto photographic images. This embroiders “the two-dimensional flatness” of the photographs and gives them symbolic power (Hirsch 2012, 117). All in all, the narrator’s and the reader’s conjoined effort to make events and objects meaningful in relation to each other is what constitutes ekphrastic narrative.

Before I move on to postmodern historicism, I end this section on narratology with a short mention of a distinction of events made by Abbott, a distinction which I use in my thesis: constituent and supplementary events. *Constituent events* “are necessary for the story to be the story it is. They are the turning points, the events that drive the story forward and that lead to other events” (Abbott 2009, 22). This is what ekphrastic encounters in *Last Orders* are. *Supplementary events*, in turn, are removable in that, without them, the story would remain recognisably the same (Abbott 2009, 23). As *Out of this World* does not build itself on plot, there are, in my view, few constituent events. The passages in which ekphrasis plays a part are the narrator’s flashbacks into his own past without which the course of the story would remain unaltered. Nevertheless, despite their supplementary nature, the ekphrases always constitute a part of the thematic whole of the novel.

### 2.3 Postmodern Historicism, Historiographic Metafiction, and Ekphrasis

The postmodern approach to history, although varied, essentially lies in scepticism towards historical knowledge. History's shape and meaning are understood to be "not *in the events*, but *in the systems* which make those past 'events' into present historical 'facts'" (Hutcheon 1988, 89; italics as in the original). Late twentieth century postmodern literature sees that the writing of history and fiction function by the same principles. Its stance is that both "derive their force more from verisimilitude than from any objective truth, they are both identified as linguistic constructs, highly conventionalized in their narrative forms, and not at all transparent either in terms of language or structure" (Hutcheon 1988, 105). This is what Swift is interested in, too; Bedggood (2005, 205), for example, argues that Swift's fictional "detective work" into the realities of the past represents history in discursive modes which conventional historical representations lack. *Out of this World* is a good example of this, but this is not to say that *Last Orders* takes history at face value, either.

Furthermore, postmodern literature shows that recounts of past events are interpretations, or "truth(s) relative to the specificity of place and culture" (Hutcheon 1988, 108). While it seems given that there should exist only one account of events which have, after all, happened and cannot be altered, there in actuality exists countless different versions, to a point that nothing about history is ever completely agreed upon, and there would be only "unresolved contradiction" (Hutcheon 1988, 106). What is doubted, in other words, is the possibility of historical knowledge in the first place. However, an inherent paradox within this discourse is that historical contexts are still thought of as significant and determining (Hutcheon 1988, 89). While the historical 'truth' is dispersed in various shades, that is, it is still the case that postmodern fiction is often predominantly engaged in historical contexts and coloured with historical references.

Hutcheon (1988, 5) coins the term 'historiographic metafiction' to denote "novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages". This often means that historiographic metafiction contains traces of an attempt to collect historical data to create narrative order, an attempt which the reader sees but which eventually ends up in failure to assimilate this data to attain historical verifiability (Hutcheon 1988, 114). The very process of narrating history is highlighted, in other words. The fact that historiographic metafiction is self-aware of the ways in which history and fiction are human constructs allows it to rework the material of the past, to suggest alternative narratives

(Hutcheon 1988, 5). In practice, it is useful to point out, historiographic metafiction can be distinguished from historical fiction in that historical fiction is faithful to historiography in form and content, which grants it its claim to authenticity.

Furthermore, the characters of historiographic metafiction differ from the type-characters of historical fiction: “[T]hey are the ex-centrics, the marginalized, the peripheral figures of fictional history” (Hutcheon 1988, 114). These are the characters who attempt to give coherent accounts of the past. Yet, they have no sense of the universal, quite the opposite: they are, in their response to history, “overtly specific, individual, culturally and familiarly conditioned” (ibid.). This also raises the issue of memory. Namely, historiographic metafiction foregrounds the fact that its protagonists narrate the past while relying on their memory, which generates relatively unstable or unreliable narratives (Hutcheon 1988, 118). In addition, historiographic metafiction typically privileges two modes of narration, multiple points of view or an overtly controlling narrator (Hutcheon 1988, 117). I think that, through these means, any accounts of the past must appear perhaps suspiciously self-assured or otherwise fragmented and unable to believably carry out any overarching metanarratives.

It also comes as no surprise that historiographic metafiction, or postmodern fiction in general, is haunted by the voices that get lost in history. Noakes and Pattinson (2013, 13–15) write about the British cultural memory after the Second World War and maintain that historiography nears myth-making that easily elevates some stories while completely erasing others. Swift himself emphasises that his novels have very common characters because he wants to discover “the extraordinary in the ordinary” (Craps 2009, 652). So, these ‘ex-centrics’ and ‘peripheral figures’ that Hutcheon talks about are the very ones on which Swift builds his novels: *Last Orders* with its working-class butchers, undertakers, car dealers and accountants, and *Out of this World* with its literal peripheral figure, a photographer who makes history but remains outside its frames.

Frames are indeed another issue which concerns postmodern fiction: Hutcheon (1988, 109), for example, notes that history and fiction are narratives distinguished by them, which refers to the fact that both fiction and history are written selectively. Something is left out; certain things are highlighted and elevated, and it is the latter which morph into the metanarratives of history. Historiographic metafiction establishes these frames first and then problematises them, and in doing so, exhibits how conventionally and generically both history and fiction are written (Hutcheon 1988, 109–110). So, the result is a step away from coherent, conclusive

narratives. What is notable then is that, while traditional historiography, history that one can read about in a textbook, strives for clarity, linearity and chronology, postmodern fiction fragments these principles.

Ekphrasis, as far as I know, has not been studied widely as a technique of historiographic metafiction, but I argue that historiographic metafiction may easily recourse to ekphrasis as a way of showing how cultural representations of history, verbal as well as visual, shape one's perception of reality. One might consider the issue of framing and photographs, for example: Böger (2015, 174) writes that, with photographs, "various processes of selecting, framing, printing, and cropping are involved which are highly subjective and greatly affect the reality as represented by any given photograph, not to speak of retouching negatives or prints". So, not only fiction and historiography, but visual documentary sources of history as well, are determined by their frames. Additionally, like Cunningham (2007, 60) notes and like I have already mentioned, ekphrasis is "an intertextual, intermedial genre" and given that postmodern fiction often uses intertextual elements, ekphrasis may be considered a typical occurrence in such contexts. Such intertextuality evokes thematic discourse at various levels relating to, for example, the role of ideologies (such as religion or nationalism) in the constructions of history.

When it comes to postmodern fiction and ekphrasis, moreover, a related issue, according to Hutcheon (1988, 122), is "how those documentary sources are deployed: can they be objectively, neutrally related? Or does interpretation inevitably enter with narrativization?" That is, can the narrator as the viewer give a verbal account that is not affected by their own thoughts, ideas and personal experiences? As I have suggested, the answer is likely (or necessarily) no. This is also because, like Cunningham (2007, 70) writes,

[t]he ekphrastic object actually says nothing. It is the silence of these signs that grants them their ample room for interpretation [...] and actual silence of these considered objects is all at once their glory, the glory of interpretative opportunity, and also their defect, their bar to outright meaning and certain speaking.

This giving voice to silence is indeed a prevalent practice in both of the novels I study, a practice that might be considered symptomatic of postmodern literature in general. Along these lines, I go on to examine the potential of ekphrasis as a postmodern technique next, starting with the analysis of *Out of this World*.

### 3 *Out of this World: Ekphrasis and the Photographer's Gaze*

I study *Out of this World* in this chapter and *Last Orders* in the following. The order is motivated by the time of publication and the notion that Swift's work changes in nature linearly over time. In my analyses, I give examples of ekphrastic passages in the novels and draw conclusions about why the novels employ ekphrasis in the first place. In doing so, I refer back to my theoretical bases on ekphrasis, narrative, postmodern historicism and historiographic metafiction.

*Out of this World* focuses on the idea of photography so much so that it becomes its central theme. It has something to say about photographs of battles, the Nuremberg trials, even photographs that tourists take of famous monuments on a holiday: "They are trying to possess something that doesn't belong to them" (Swift [1988] 2019, 155; further references abbreviated as *World*). My attention is exclusively on the novel's representation of war and postwar photographs. It is also worth noting that I concentrate on analysing Harry's narration even though the narrative space in the novel is more or less equally divided between Harry and Sophie. This is because ekphrasis plays a small part in Sophie's narration; after the trauma related to the death of her grandfather, she has repressed her past and banned cameras from her house, and so there are no visual reminders of the past that the reader can encounter through her perspective.

Griffin (2010, 18) argues that war photographs "assume their role as icons by shedding their historical specificity [...] and resonating within a more enduring structure of myth". In *Out of this World*, myth, and the rhetorical power that goes with myth, constitutes the surface level of the photographs it represents. Craps (2003, 296) claims that the primary purpose of the description of photographs in *Out of this World* is that the novel claims the authority of verisimilitude, "the mimetic authority traditionally attributed to photography". However, more importantly, the novel demonstrates that the kind of photographs it represents have actually extracted reality from themselves. A photograph is, according to Harry, "the separation of the image from the thing. The extraction of the world from the world" (*World*, 141). Whatever the photograph represents, in other words, can never be fully deciphered since the viewer is distanced from the event itself often both temporally and spatially; still, this does not stop the viewer from believing that what they see is the truth. This comes close to the postmodern concept of hyperreality, according to which the real and the fictional blend together, and the challenge of the modern era is to distinguish reality from a copy of reality. *Out of this World*

indeed questions the ends to which one is ready to shape their image of the past based on photographic evidence despite the fact that this evidence limits the ‘truth’ to very small pockets.

The description of photographs in the novel then creates the first level of narrative which conforms to the myth, but the second level is the consciousness of the narrator, Harry, who is both an actual witness to the real events and the one who made the copies. Harry thinks that “[w]hen you put something on record, when you make a simulacrum of it, you have already partly decided you will lose it” (*World*, 54). Yet it is his narration that attempts to create an account of what is lost, what he has witnessed, as a kind of metafictional frame that breaks the frames of the copies. Witnessing is, moreover, one of the carrying themes in the novel, a concept that both extends the limits of what a camera can do and becomes strangely intermixed with the eye of the camera:

[P]hotography should be about what you cannot see. What you cannot see because it is far away and only the eye of the camera will take you there. Or what you cannot see because it happens so suddenly or so cruelly there is no time or even desire to see it, and only the camera can show you what it is like while it is still happening. (*World*, 54–55)

The novel’s stance on photographs, on one hand, is that they lack historical specificity, they are “something without knowledge or memory” (*World*, 84), and thus their stories can only be interpreted by their viewers. On the other hand, the novel contemplates the authority afforded to photographs, to the camera, in contemporary contexts, “[a]s if the camera no longer recorded but conferred reality. As if the world were the lost property of the camera” (*World*, 231). It is through this juxtaposition that I perceive the novel’s discourse and understand the effect of its ekphrastic elements.

In addition to witnessing and seeing, the novel is concerned with telling, but telling here does not mean the same than in *Last Orders*: perhaps the most marked difference between the novels is that *Last Orders* uses its multiple characters and multiple points of view to make its ekphrases into montages of individual stories, but *Out of this World* uses a single narrator to impose a very certain point of view on the photographs, in line with what Karastathi (2012, 95) writes: that in some cases “ekphrasis provides [...] an opportunity to educate the reader, with some texts exhibiting a programmatic and almost didactic tendency in their ekphrastic passages [...] as they advocate a particular way of looking through the ekphrastic act”.

Throughout the novel, Harry recounts his experiences as a war photographer, opens the world beyond the frames of his photographs, and does this by strongly inscribing his point of view on them; his word becomes the authority. In what follows, I give examples of ekphrastic passages that deal with myths, designated monsters of historiography, and ethical dimensions of war photography.

### 3.1 Tropes: Heroes and Sacrifice

With the first instances of ekphrasis I discuss, the novel establishes and then questions certain mythical tropes and criticises the media coverage of war. Harry problematises the nature of recorded data, documentary evidence, which could be read as the one overarching theme in the novel: “The problem is what you don’t see. The problem is your field of vision. [...] The problem is selection [...], the frame” (*World*, 141). To begin with, he gives an example of the ‘tropification’ of his published photographs, their transformation into myth:

There is a picture of mine (one of the ‘famous photos’) of a marine throwing a grenade at Hoi An. His right arm is stretched back, his whole body flexed, beneath the helmet you can see the profile of a handsome face. It’s pure Greek statue, pure Hollywood, pure charisma. And it’s how it was. It must have been. Because the camera showed it. (ibid.)

His description foregrounds and compounds the words ‘famous’, ‘Hollywood’, and ‘charisma’ to signify the myth of heroism, familiar from popular culture or propaganda, perhaps. He suggests that the visual record is necessarily perceived truthful because of the mimetic authority usually afforded to photography. Yet, the photograph is an abstraction, the kind of which Griffin (2010, 18) talks about: a photo that becomes iconic and mythic because of its dramatic aesthetic content and lack of specific historical detail. The photograph has lost the reality of the event and can be reformed freely in the hands of its subsequent viewers. Its inclusion into Harry’s narrative, however, narrativises it in a way that subverts the freedom of interpretation and inscribes a certain narrative as the ‘real event’:

A second later, that marine took a round in the chest and I took two more shots [...]. I wanted the whole sequence to be printed. But you can guess—you know—which single shot they took. [...] And that picture got syndicated everywhere [...] till no one remembered any more, if they had ever known, that this was a picture of a real man. (*World*, 141)

Harry's narrative reaches beyond the established, iconic frames of the static Hollywood image when he gives a crude ending to the immortal myth that he sees in many ways as false. But the other motive for the discourse is perhaps that, by telling what has been scratched off the record, Harry wants to honour the person in the photograph. His sentimental notion of the loss of 'the real man' echoes a particular postmodern anxiety, as pointed out by Hutcheon (1988, 120): the question of whose history it is that survives. When it comes to the role of literature and especially ekphrasis to work around this anxiety, then, Vervaeke (2020, 133) suggests that "[t]he ways in which works of fiction deal with war photography show that literature [...] aims to give back agency to the subjects in the picture". Accordingly, Harry attempts to give the marine back his life and death which the picture, as it is frozen in time, has erased.

At the same time, Harry criticises the selectiveness of media itself, like Pardo-Miquel (2007, 139) argues: "Harry Beech shows how framing and selection can transform the agony and horror of war into heroism and propaganda". Harry describes how, separated from its context, this single image transforms the image of war and, in doing so, shapes postmemory. This is how journalism works, according to him: "Half my pictures, of course, they buried. You aren't supposed to see, let alone put on visual record, *those things*" (*World*, 49; italics as in the original). By 'those things' he refers to "vomit and kerosene and rear gunners turned to meat" (ibid.), the kind of images subjected to censorship as to maintain a certain public perception of the war and not to risk public support. If postmodern theory sees that fiction and historiography operate by the same principles, then *Out of this World* merges the workings of media with a kind of fiction writing, too. Media becomes the authority who decides what kind of image of war is transmitted and survives. Hutcheon (1988, 108) writes, furthermore, that historiographic metafiction often obsessively tests the limits after which "fictitious" becomes "mendacious". Harry's judgement on the selection of his photographs, his 'you can guess' and 'you know what they did', hints that the media coverage of war, the selection and the frame, may not be far from lies.

Another trope which the novel discusses is that of sacrifice, or the kind of absurd toll that war takes. Harry narrates how, during the Second World War, he took pictures of pilots returning from an unspecified mission. Most of the planes had crashed, but there was one pilot who returned, "landed his aircraft with a cannon shell up his arse" (*World*, 120):

The pilot was supported in a cradle formed by the joined arms of two ambulance crew who were walking him from the plane. His arms were round their necks and

he was held in a sort of jammed foetal position, as if his knees couldn't be prised from his abdomen. His lips were curled back and his teeth clamped together, so he looked like some terrible parody of a man straining to void his bowels [...] and his face was green with the pain. (ibid.)

Harry notes that he took several pictures of the scene, but they were only published several years later in a collection called *Aftermaths*, as they were not the kind of pictures the Air Ministry “had in mind” (ibid.) at the time. Once published, however, the photograph titled ‘Lancaster pilot’ became famous and, in its postmemory context, took on tropification of its own. This trope is quite different from those which thrive at the time of war. “When you look at the photo,” Harry says, “you do not think, I think, of heroism. You think of pain and absurdity” (*World*, 121). More interestingly still, Harry proposes that the image evokes a sentimental instinct in the viewer to find a connection with the pilot, an instinct which results in an effective narrativisation of the photograph: “You think of personal things. You wonder who he was. You imagine his home somewhere, his parents, his girl” (ibid.). This echoes what Hirsch (2012, 116) writes: namely, that in postwar contexts, “[w]hen we look at photographic images from a lost past world, especially one that has been annihilated by force, we look not only for information or confirmation, but also for an intimate material and affective connection”. It is an attempt to individualise someone nameless (just a ‘Lancaster pilot’) but still a projection of certain comprehensible tropes on past images in an effort to understand that past. The resulting narratives are incomplete, like Harry suggests: “You do not think—it would seem almost blasphemous to do so—of the many hundreds of men, women and children who were killed or maimed as a result of the raid in which this young pilot took part” (*World*, 121). According to Harry, to imagine this pilot as a person, as a terrible sacrifice, is nevertheless to remain detached from the reality of the event itself.

Yet, even Harry’s insights about the reality of his photograph might be doubted if one considers the historiographic metafiction dimensions of the novel. It is easy to understand what Harry means: that the uninformed viewer’s interpretations of the photograph are impressionistic, perhaps even naive. Harry proposes ways to interpret the picture so that the interpretation gains dimensions: the pilot, for example, could be both good and bad. Here, however, I want to draw attention to the specific way the ekphrasis functions: namely, the way the passage realises the didactic nature of ekphrasis that Karastathi (2012, 95) talks about, its tendency to promote certain ways of looking. The ekphrasis does more than simply lay the photograph of the wounded pilot for the reader to inspect, more than merely describe. It is

notable that the narrator guides the reader by hand, says, ‘you think of personal things’, and ‘you do not think of the many hundreds killed’, and so ensures that those are the things which the reader thinks of and takes away from the scene. More than that, he goes on to suggest that what one probably does not think of (but perhaps should) is “the cannon shell, that particular cannon shell [...]. How it must have passed through the hands of a munitions worker, a girl in a mobcap, imagine. Whether she had relatives who had been killed in air raids” (*World*, 121). As discussed by, for example, Fowler (1991, 29), ekphrasis is about the use of language that inscribes a point of view and directs the viewer’s gaze, and I think that *Out of this World* does this particularly strongly by inscribing certain thoughts and doubts into the viewer’s mind and disturbing the purity of simple photographic contemplation.

In sum, while the narrator demonstrates how arbitrarily history is mediated, at the same time, he promotes himself as the authority of that history. This is the paradox of historiographic metafiction, as stated above: that it is intensely conscious and reflective about the way history is written but still lays claim to historical events (Hutcheon 1988, 5). Harry does this based on his status as a witness and, moreover, claims it as his ethical responsibility to be a witness for the future generations: “Dear Sophie. Someone has to be a witness, someone has to see” (*World*, 197). His determination to tell takes the ekphrases beyond description and makes them narratives of events. To an extent, the reader need not imagine the circumstances of the picture of the marine or the wounded soldier, as Harry knows how to relate those things, and the reader’s freedom of interpretation, the narrative perception that Abbott (2009, 6) states is at work when one views static images, becomes ineffectual in this context. Harry’s judgement on the photograph of the marine renders it from a sign of glory to a white lie, and on the photograph of the wounded pilot from a simple pity-inducing frame to a picture that exceeds the frames one could perceive in physical circumstances.

Even though Harry judges that the photographs are inadequate representations of the past, there still remains a strange sense that perhaps he remembers the events only because he has the photographs to remember them by, that the faces of the soldiers might have been lost even from him had he not captured them; that, in a sense, he uses the photographs as doors to access and discuss his past and thus construct his photomontage-like narrative. In the following section, I explore another such photograph-turned-narrative, but this time it is not just one person Harry has captured, but a whole event derived from the real archives of history.

### 3.2 The Monsters Of Nuremberg and an Alternative Narrative

The Nuremberg trials were held by the Allies against the leaders of Nazi Germany after the Second World War. Harry tells the reader that he was sent to Nuremberg to cover the end of the trials in 1946. His narrative again juxtaposes fact and myth, as he suggests that what his audience demanded from him was a cathartic “conversion of fact into fable” (*World*, 117). In popular imagination, as Hartouni (2017, 3) notes, the trials are regarded as a “historical event representing the victory of justice over evil and the nascent beginnings of a lasting moral enterprise and normative international framework”. This denotes a view of history divided along familiar narrative tropes of right and wrong, good and evil, heroes and villains, and proposes that there is a need to find cathartic, comforting, fable-like resolutions in history: the conquest of evil, the punishment of the villain. Accordingly, Harry states that “I was looking, as my employers were looking, as the whole world was looking, for monsters” (*World*, 115). But he is more shocked, more disturbed, to find instead “this collection of dull, nondescript, headphoned men, thin and pale from months in prison, with faces of people in waiting rooms” (*ibid.*). This distorts his sense of world order and leaves him wondering if there is anything, after all, that he can capture.

I suggest that the novel parodies historical documentation and ‘history in the making’ by showing the uneventfulness of the event itself. The event is emptied of its presupposed substance: “Where was the horror? And where was the sense of the suspended weight of History, which, if it should have hung over any point on earth in September 1946, should have hung over that courthouse in Nuremberg” (*World*, 116). The novel states that the ‘weight of History’ is not something that exists naturally but is only a construction added later on. The Nuremberg narrative thus reflects the postmodern notion that history and fiction are written according to the same conventional narrative forms which give emphasis on certain events while overlooking others, pick and highlight certain narrative points (Hutcheon 1988, 106). Historiographic metafiction, then, intervenes with the novel’s suggestion that this particular narrative could be rewritten from another angle.

In Nuremberg, Harry realises that “[i]t is this ordinariness I must capture. This terrible ordinariness. I must show that monsters do not belong to comfortable tales. That the worst things are perpetrated by people no one would pick out from a crowd” (*World*, 116). I find that this kind of sentiment reflects the postwar atmosphere in which “the war marked an aberrant departure from Enlightenment ideals of reason and progress” (Crosthwaite 2009, 15)

and the extent of the capability of a human being to commit inhumane acts was fearfully realised. The photograph that Harry calls to mind is that of “Rosenberg, being marched from prison to courthouse. He squints, he seems distracted. He looks like a man with a headache, a morning hangover, that’s all. He has nicked himself shaving” (*World*, 116–117). I think that the rhetoric the novel uses here is reserved: to shock with ordinariness, not with monsters, or rather, to shock with the humanness of those monsters.

As to what kind of ekphrasis this is, it is noteworthy that, in contrast to the other photographs, the Nuremberg passage evokes already extant images of a very specific event. Karastathi (2015, 95) states that such images with their “own historical and theoretical associations” enrich narrative discourse, and in this postmodern context, ekphrasis as a layer of intertextuality provides a potentially contradictory reading of an event that the reader perhaps already has their own idea of. To be sure, the ekphrasis, this extant image turned into an evaluative narrative, disrupts the cathartic notion of culprits equals monsters. The novel even goes as far as to blend in the mass of culprits, Rosenberg and Goering among them, with the crowd that followed the executions, a crowd which Harry photographed, too: “[T]heir faces wore a look of murderous exultation. *These too were the faces of ordinary people*” (*World*, 119; emphasis added). If Harry suggests that it is almost blasphemous to think of the heroic pilot as a murderer, he seems to risk an even greater defamation here, as he juxtaposes the convicted Nazis with the audience that, after all, may be considered within its rights to be exultant in the face of ‘justice being served’. This, however, is what postmodern historiographic fiction tackles: the tensions and contradictions in narrativised history. It seems to me that here, the novel wants to emphasise that the notion of the beginning of a ‘moral enterprise’ is too black-and-white, as the capacity of human evil precedes and succeeds this particular moment in history.

Lastly, I want to mention Charlson who has studied postmodern frames in Art Spiegelman’s graphic novel *Maus*. The subject matter of *Maus* (1980–1991) is the Holocaust, but the novel’s metafictional layer, its self-reflexive meta-frames, question the very ambition and right to write about the Holocaust in the first place (Charlson 2001, 105). According to Charlson (2001, 92), there is a need to ask whether “the figurative language of literature [has] any value in the face of concrete facts, documents, and testimonies”. I think that the value of the verbal representations of visual photographs in *Out of this World*, or the Nuremberg trials at all, is impossible to pinpoint, but the purpose seems to be to reach for those things which are not written down in concrete facts; to suggest alternative narratives and weigh

historiography against such things as memory and individual perspective. Charlson (2001, 92–93) indeed proposes that the second and third-generation writers have found postmodern strategies the best way to confront such momentous occasions as the Holocaust or the Second World War because of the ability of postmodern fiction “to cross conventional boundaries and unsettle oppositions”. Certainly, this kind of unsettling is at work in the Nuremberg passage in *Out of this World*, in similar terms as the passages on the heroic soldier and the wounded pilot break the boundaries of conventional ways of framing the past.

This being said, I have now covered the nearly anecdotal ways in which the novel employs photographs to juxtapose events with their representations. In the following ekphrastic passage I analyse, however, ekphrasis is realised differently in terms of how it fits into narrative. The passage also brings in the issue of the photographer himself, his role and his ethics.

### 3.3 The Photographer Observing and Intruding

There is a scene in the novel which I think of as ‘media covering media’: Harry, the invisible part of his photographs who also prefers to stay that way, recounts that “[o]nly once [...] did I consent to present myself as the subject—or should I say object?—of media scrutiny” (*World*, 132). In other words, he agreed to a TV interview in which his war photographs were discussed and displayed on a projector. This is the only occasion in the novel where the photographs are more than just mentions through which the narrator conducts his inquiries into past events: they are encountered within the frames of the embedded narrative. This increases the narrativity of the scene itself: the narrator is not simply discussing the photographs, he is *looking at* them, which means that fabula time is also advancing when he describes them, albeit in past-tense. I mention this because it reminds me of how ekphrasis works in *Last Orders*, although arguably the interview is still a supplementary rather than constituent event as opposed to the encounters in *Last Orders*. It is simply another memory of Harry’s in a novel that is overall shaped by memories, flashbacks, snapshots, or “mental photographs [...] in a simple postmodernist discourse”, like Catană (2015, 82) phrases it.

Also in contrast to the other ekphrastic passages I have covered, in this scene, the photographs are represented descriptively, most of all, as opposed to discursively. Harry’s own narrative instinct seems to be subdued, although the ekphrasis has no less rhetorical power because of it. This has to do with the nature of the photographs as “key images” of war, images which “only evoke the personal/emotional/universal (a generalized impression of pain, anger, terror,

grief, resignation, perseverance, or triumph” (Griffin 2010, 29). The photographs are presented quite interestingly as a series of ‘cuts’, which creates an impression like the reader really is seeing a series of photos switch quickly on a projector:

Cut to Ia Drang valley, South Vietnam, November ‘65. Supine GI, encircled by two anguished buddies [...]. Cut to north-eastern Congo, October ‘64. Three prisoners squatting on ground beneath banana-leaf canopy, hands bound behind backs and necks linked with a rope [...] Cut to Birmingham, Alabama, September ‘63. Bare interior, with family group. A listless-looking man lies, eyeing camera, on a mattress, rear of picture. (*World*, 136–137)

The narrator’s voice is more or less neutralised, and beyond simple contextualisation, he does not venture to explain the events outside the frames of the photographs. He becomes a simple observer of his own pictures. I think this is as objective as ekphrasis gets in the novel, but still, one might consider the problem of linearisation as discussed earlier in this thesis: the fact that the narrator in any case chooses the things to pay attention to, the order in which to present them, and the duration with which to linger on each detail (Fowler 1991, 29). For example, the description under one of the cuts reads as follows:

She is got up in the costume of a whore: tight fake-satin dress, high heels, heavy lipstick, piled-up hair. This superficially makes her look older than she is, but at the same time accentuates her actual youth. You can tell from the angularity of her body she can be no more than twelve. (*World*, 137)

Therefore, even if Harry was not doing it consciously, the narrator lingering on the shocking elements of the pictures is a rhetorical tactic which the novel exploits overall but especially in this scene.

Here, the novel also questions the ethics of photography and the photographer and suggests that the camera is a neutral eye which in certain contexts captures, not people per se, but the humanness or inhumanness which their condition stands for. Vervaeke (2020, 118) gives an example of the questionable ethics of war photography from the Bosnian War when “Western media explicitly espoused a discourse of compassion and human rights” but, arguably, “many photographers behaved as representatives of any for-profit company, not caring at all about the people they photographed”. In similar terms, one of the photographs the interviewer in *Out of this World* hangs onto is “of Vietnamese woman, with contorted face, holding a blood-soaked child” (*World*, 135). The interviewer asks Harry if he did not feel, when he took

the photograph, like an intruder, like he invaded the privacy of that grieving mother. Harry says that “privacy was hardly an issue. The woman’s village had just been destroyed by American rockets. [...] I imagined the fact that her grief was on view was the least important element of it” (ibid.). He means that it is the grief itself that the camera captures and shows, not her individual grief, and this is the crucial function of war photography. In this view, then, the photographer indeed does not ‘care’ about the individual, but becomes a scientific eye whose job is to educate the viewer about the shades of horror that exist somewhere in the world. It seems to be the novel’s stance on the nature of photography, overall, that it delivers ideas and abstractions; yet it is also an aspect that the novel elsewhere grieves, the loss of individuals, the erasure of ‘histories’ from the way of ‘history’ that cameras make.

Finally, the novel also investigates the idea of the *absent* photographer. Crimp (1980, 94) nominates this as the extraordinary quality of photographs: the absence of the artist, the withering away of the authenticity or ‘aura’ of an artwork because the mechanical reproduction of copies that photography allows makes the notion of uniqueness quite unretrievable. *Out of this World* suggests that there is no need to reacquire such an aura; in fact, it is the value of especially documentary photography that the photographer stays quiet. The interviewer asks: “[W]ould you say then that there is no personal element in your work. Nothing of yourself. No bit of Harry Beech?” (*World*, 138) To this, Harry answers: “The point of a photograph isn’t to portray the photographer. If someone looks at a photo of mine and they think of me, the photographer, then I’d say that that photograph has failed” (ibid.). He also claims that “I don’t have intentions. I don’t engineer effects. If my pictures shock it is because their subject-matter shocks” (ibid.). Effectively, Harry paints himself as a neutral observer of history who operates like the camera itself, like perhaps there are no thoughts behind his pictures, only the drive to relate forward knowledge. This reminds me of what Griffin (2010, 14; italics as in the original) recounts about Philip Jones Griffiths, a photographer in Vietnam, who stated, perhaps with misplaced idealism, that “[m]y purpose was to understand the nature of the war, and reveal the *truth* about it, with photographs providing the visual proof”. However, *Out of this World* exposes this idealism as what it is, given that its attitude is that photographs do not relate ‘truths’ but only impressions.

To end this section on *Out of this World*, I give a brief summary of what I have discussed so far. I consider ekphrasis as a technique of postmodern historiographic inquiry in *Out of this World*. The novel presents its photographs as elements which build history but do so in a determined way, by selection and framing and at the will of such forces as propaganda. The

novel fragments their presupposed realism and proposes alternative ways to view historical documentary evidence. It often does this by means of historiographic metafiction. That is, the novel forms its discourse through a narrator who claims to know the reality of the past and so imposes his truth on the photographs: he suggests that they have shades and histories which are otherwise lost in the systems by which history is written. The paradox in the novel is that it sees history as a relative truth, and deems it as an arbitrary construct, but at the same time presents Harry as a narrator who has authority over that truth. His language judges, evaluates, and guides, but is everything but transparent in doing so.

I also point out that not one of these instances of ekphrasis constitute events which are particularly necessary for the overall story; the main storyline, which is obscured in a very fragmented form, is perhaps that which moves towards the reconciliation of Harry and Sophie, but Harry's several musings on the various photographs he has taken at some point in his life have no effect on that journey. In contrast, the ekphrases in *Last Orders*, while they still deal with history, are important events on which the novel builds itself. I go on to discuss this next.

#### 4 *Last Orders*: Personal Ekphrastic Encounters

In *Out of this World*, the visual marks of history are in the photographs it discusses. In *Last Orders*, they are in the landmark of England. The novel's protagonists drive from London to Margate to shed Jack Dodds' ashes but make two detours: first to Chatham Naval Memorial and then to Canterbury Cathedral. As stated, the journey forms the backbone of the novel, its traditional narrative structure, and the two detours are its constituent events. Koopman (2018, 22) maintains that a "narrative which deviates from a script – a story in which something unexpected or out-of-the-ordinary occurs – has more narrativity, i.e. is more prototypically narrative-like". This increased degree of prototypical narrativity is what sets *Last Orders* apart from *Out of this World*. For example, the detours the characters undertake are literal 'deviations to the script' which add substance to the plotline. The detours are also a way to confront the past in the form of encounters with historical objects. As such, ekphrasis in *Last Orders* functions not only to offer material for historical inquiry, as in *Out of this World*, but also to force the characters to meet that history face-to-face and reflect on what it means for themselves, personally.

One notable feature in the novel is its use of multiple narrators. This is essentially, like Bedggood (2005, 210) states, "the postmodern tactic of presenting the narrative through overlapping accounts, erasure and multiplication of 'histories'". I argue that the use of multiple narrators within the ekphrastic passages is a way to juxtapose and highlight the multiple individualities against the fixed metanarratives which the objects themselves stand for; this is because each of the narrators pay attention to different aspects of the objects, and for each of them, the objects signify unique things based on their personalities and experiences. While in *Out of this World*, despite Harry's efforts, the persons in the photographs remain unknown, *Last Orders* brings the unheard individuals into the centre. It places them, as it were, inside the metanarratives and lets them speak out their own stories. The narrators I cover in this section, although the novel has even more, are Jack's friends Ray, Vic, and Lenny, and his adopted son Vince, and to understand their stories, I briefly introduce them next.

The characters in *Last Orders* all belong to the lower-middle class or working-class. Jack, Ray, Vic and Lenny all fought in the Second World War. As Lenny describes, the war's aftermaths for returning soldiers were harsh: "It's like when I got back from fighting for my country and there were more bomb-holes in Bermondsey than there was at Benghazi and they

couldn't find nothing better for us than a pre-fab and a ration book" (Swift 1996, 176; further references abbreviated as *Orders*). Jack was a butcher for most of his life, Ray is a clerk and Jack's best friend, Vic is an undertaker and perhaps the most steadfast person in the group, Lenny is a greengrocer and a former boxer with a very short fuse, and Vince is an upstart car salesman and the only one in the group who belongs to the second generation. Between Vince and the rest, there surfaces generational friction throughout the story. Accordingly, Kaczvinsky (2024, 141) states that the identities in the novel are based on generational consciousness and the ties that exist between the characters "are rooted in a shared memory and a sense of honor". This is certainly the case, but nevertheless, I see the novel mostly as an exploration of individuality rather than group identity. The novel shows, like Swift himself says, that "[t]he difference between any two people, however seemingly alike they may be, however seemingly they may belong to the same socio-economic bracket, is vast" (Craps 2009, 649–650). I think the ekphrastic encounters perhaps more than anything else highlight these differences, and to establish this, I begin by discussing the detour to Chatham.

#### 4.1 Chatham Naval Memorial

The first ekphrastic encounter in *Last Orders* sets the protagonist face-to-face with the history that seems to matter most for the second-generation World War II novelists. It also reflects one of the postwar 'memory booms': in various occasions throughout the twentieth century, the need to remember the dead generated a demand for memorials and other kinds of commemorative works (Winter 2018, 252–253). German philosopher Habermas (1988, 531) investigates the postwar memorial culture and proposes that a kind of historical consciousness came to replace religion as a source of meaning and that "the ritualising recollection of the mutual experience of the nation's triumph and the nation's defeat was then supposed to help stabilise the unity and identity of the community". Habermas is an advocate of human reason as a means of attaining a more humane world; his (1988, 541) contribution to memory studies lies in the argument that historical consciousness should be reflective and flexible. This is imperative "for the cultivation of historical consciousness which is as incompatible with closed and second-hand, non-reflexive images of history as with any shape of conventional *shared* identity, namely one which is unanimously and pre-reflexively shared" (ibid.; italics as in the original). The emphasis on reflective memorial culture means that memory should be built on other grounds than those which, for example, serve nationalistic agenda. Habermas (ibid.) then promotes an open society in which individuals have the opportunity to better understand the ambivalences in the society's identity-forming traditions. Relating to *Last*

*Orders*, first of all, the communal focus of the memorial culture that Habermas talks about is perhaps why Chatham Naval Memorial is, according to Ray, centrally positioned and impossible to miss: “There it is, on top of that hill, see, you can’t miss it, naval memorial, white tower. It’s sticking up *like a lighthouse* for all to see, with a green ball on top instead of a beacon, it’s a landmark” (*Orders*, 119; emphasis added). But there is another side to this: the novel also shows the extent to which individuals are distanced from the collective and national ideas which the memorial stands for, which, in my view, reflects Habermas’ focal argument. I elaborate on this next.

The novel draws a metaphorical picture of the difficult relationship between public and personal memory. Even though the memorial is ‘like a lighthouse’, Ray fumes that “no one says how you get there and there aren’t no signs. It’s a funny memorial that no one remembers the way to” (*Orders*, 119). They have to climb up a “bleeding hill” (*ibid.*) to get there, which is a great effort for the men past their prime. Winter (2006, 4) points out that, if there is such a thing as collective memory in the first place, and it manifests in acts of collective remembrance, then when the people who engage in these acts lose interest or simply move further away temporally, the collective along with the collective acts of remembrance dissolve. “States do not remember; individuals do” (*ibid.*); even a memorial becomes rather more abstract than particular when there are less individuals who can relate actual memories to it. On one hand, then, the arduous search in *Last Orders* indicates that the collective, national past figures little in an individual’s everyday life, so that no one quite knows what it is or how to get to it. On the other hand, the exertion, the bad shape that the novel’s characters are in, and the ashes of their friend they carry with them, juxtapose the depressing mortality of the characters themselves with the tall and enduring monument which stands above them.

The ekphrasis, in other words, invites discourses about public versus private memory and collective versus personal worth into the narrative and does so most of all by investigating what the memorial can possibly represent for each of the characters. In this, I agree with Kaczvinsky (2024, 142) who argues that, through these multiple perspectives, the novel “avoids lapsing into nostalgia or sentimentality or propaganda”. What the ekphrasis also does is function as a mirror for each of the characters, which is in line with what Hirsch (2012, 117) writes, namely that postmemorial work “can tell us as much about our own needs and desires (as readers and spectators) as they can about the past world they presumably depict”. To distinguish this from *Out of this World*, while the photographs Harry reflects on are similarly significant in their contribution to the discourse about private–public memory, they

reveal little about Harry himself (he is, after all, the absent presence in them). The multiple ekphrastic gazes in *Last Orders*, in contrast, provide material for individual character analysis, and I start this analysis with Ray.

Through Ray's narration, the ekphrasis becomes an image of anxiety, self-deprecation and irony. Ray's point of view foregrounds the isolation of the monument itself: "It's white and tall. It looks like it's floating, because you can't see what it's attached to, like when you get near to it, it might shift off somewhere else. [...] It's like it got built then forgotten" (*Orders*, 122). The irony of the memorial is to be built to enhance memory and then to be forgotten. The memorial itself means little to Ray, personally, since he never was in the Navy, but he marvels at its "in-between'ness", like Kaczvinsky (2024, 142) notes, "its intermediate status between remembrance and oblivion". It is indeed as if in theory, the war and its sacrifices must be remembered, but the memory is also slowly fading or transforming from the material event into immaterial abstractions. Ray feels this way about himself and his friends, too, which is evident from the comparison he draws: "It's like it was only half meant to be here and so were we [...]. It's like an effort at dignity, that's what it is, it's like a big tall effort at dignity" (*Orders*, 122). By this, he refers to both the public attempt to dignify the war's victims and the effort from the war's survivors to, firstly, understand what it means that they have survived at all and, secondly, continue their lives even when they are personally sidelined from the more central narratives that configure the war and their contemporary existence. Similarly, Ray is anxious to find that the monument itself dominates over the names that have been inscribed on it: in a way, the individualities of those who died at the war have become just as much of an abstraction than the war itself. Ray thinks that

[a]ll you can tell by looking down the lists, and it don't matter that they're set in bronze on a white wall on top of a hill with an obelisk stuck in front an' all, is that a man is just a name. Which means something to him it attaches to [...] but it don't mean a monkey's beyond that. It don't mean a monkey's to things that live longer, like armies and navies. (*Orders*, 127–128)

The memorial reminds Ray how little an individual's life matters on a large scale, which is also an anxiety likely brought on by the sudden death of his best friend. In other words, the ekphrasis mirrors Ray's conflicted, anxious mental space in the face of a great personal loss that somehow both does not measure up to and exceeds the great national loss which the memorial depicts.

For Vic, in contrast, the names carry concrete substance. The memorial signifies actual memories from his time in the Navy; he is the one who suggested they go see it in the first place. His perspective on the memorial overlooks its actual appearance, grandiosity and all. Rather than contemplate the abstract, he focuses on the names which he turns into a narrative of a memory: “It would rear up howling and hissing, ice like marzipan on the forward deck, the bows plunging and whacking, so it seemed you didn’t need another enemy to fire off shells and torpedoes at you, the sea was enough” (*Orders*, 123). Vervaeet (2020, 130) has studied ekphrastic expression in war literature and states that, when a narrator associatively delves from an object into their memories, this disrupts narrative progression but also draws the reader’s attention to the ways in which memory is constructed. Accordingly, Vic’s memory takes the reader out of the scene where the friends stand on the hill in front of the memorial and into a supplementary flashback event. The reader can trace the web of relations that memory is built on: the interrelations between the abstract and the concrete. Vic’s memory becomes the story which the monument has to tell, the kind of story that is lost from Ray and most onlookers. This reminds me of Harry, who alone as the witness of the events his photographs depict knows to give them a semblance of narrative, although at no point does Vic claim that his story opens up some unseen truth before the eyes of the reader; he simply remembers, so does exactly what the memorial tries to evoke, commemorates.

When it comes to Lenny, the encounter establishes his contempt for the memorial culture overall. The scene that evokes a range of emotions in his friends only evokes bitterness in him, and he only describes the memorial dismissively as “that tower thing” (*Orders*, 131). For him, war, fighting and dying “aint duty so much as orders. Doing your duty in the ordinary course of life is another thing, it’s harder” (*Orders*, 132). Commemoration of the dead in place of those who still live but are ignored and invisible gets to his nerves. He thinks: “You could say Vic’s got a nerve, dragging us up here to look at all these names when it’s Jack’s day, like saying Jack aint special” (*Orders*, 138). It is like the memorial offends him; the way it determines value has little to do with how value is determined in familial contexts, little to do with actual life, even. Consequently, he pays the memorial little heed.

Lastly, Vince’s perspective on the memorial is situated in between Vic and Lenny’s, and it includes only the following words on an otherwise blank page: “Old buggers” (*Orders*, 130). Kaczvinsky (2024, 144) suggests that this blank space between the different narrators in the Chatham passage represents the gap between the two different generations, which I believe to be true. Here, the empty space speaks, kind of like a blank canvas which waits for Vince to

paint his own picture of the war. This is a complicated thing to do. Like Hirsch (2012, 104) states, the postwar generations need to ask: “How can we best carry their stories forward without appropriating them, without unduly calling attention to ourselves, and without, in turn, having our own stories displaced by them?” Vince’s silence in this scene, then, is perhaps a sign of respect, a recognition that he needs to take a step back, to let the first generation fill in the pages with text before carrying on with the journey.

In conclusion, the encounter reveals something about the characters from Ray’s anxiety, Vic’s memories and Lenny’s contempt to Vince’s generational disconnection. It promotes an individual, reflective perspective on the significance of the past rather than a uniform one. Narratively speaking, the encounter represents one of the highlights or deviations in the linear frame storyline, a roadblock on what was supposed to be a straightforward journey to the coast. It is a constituent event, even as impactful as to make Ray reconsider the direction his life is going. He thinks that, if his life truly is as inconsequential as it feels in front of the monument, then “I could forget the larger mathematics and take the gamble. Live a little, live again. See them grandchildren of mine, if there are any, the ones who’ll survive me. In the surviving years of my life” (*Orders*, 128). In contrast to *Out of this World*, moreover, the style of narration that approaches ‘stream of thought’ renders the ekphrasis as a series of spontaneous interpretations which do not attempt to be anything else; the narrators do not present themselves as any kind of authorities. This is what I perceive to be the difference between ekphrasis as a traditional narrative device and as a device of historiographic metafiction.

The characters continue from Chatham as if the encounter was a great delay: Vince drives “like he’s making up for lost time, like he’s late for an appointment” (*Orders*, 141). Still, the detours continue, and the next significant encounter is Canterbury Cathedral which they visit this time at Lenny’s half-joking suggestion.

## **4.2 Canterbury Cathedral**

I like to think of the encounter with Canterbury Cathedral as one of the more obvious metanarratives which the novel tests. In Europe, the societal role of Christianity changed after the Second World War even so drastically that scholars applied metaphors of death and dying to the development (Van Dam and Van Trigt 2015, 214). Here, religion (Christianity) indicates a kind of uniform meaning and a purpose which is what the characters lack and/or are in search of. When the characters step inside the cathedral, I see the occasion as the characters,

the individuals, experimenting with the limits of the metanarrative from within. Karastathi (2015, 97) says that ekphrasis is “not a source of information, but one of interpretation”; this aspect is indeed often what distinguishes ekphrasis from description, the fact that “the narrator is interested in what the work of art represents, rather than in merely registering its physical qualities or properties” (Koopman 2018, 12). In this context, this means that informative descriptions of the cathedral hardly matter as much as impressions. The reader presumably has a basic framework of this kind of building in mind, an idea of its measure and grandiosity, so what the reader looks for are the things which make the scene rich in narrativity, the things which fracture the walls of the place rather than uphold them.

As with Chatham Memorial, finding the cathedral is a struggle:

We get a glimpse of it suddenly, the cathedral tower, popping up over the tops of buildings, and Vince aims as best he can for it, as if he thinks we can drive right up to the front door, in a car like this. But it ducks out of sight, like it’s playing tricks with us, and the streets take you this way and that. (*Orders*, 193)

Even though the cathedral is clearly in sight, it also keeps leading the searchers astray. In the novel, to approach the cathedral is a convoluted task, both literally and metaphorically, perhaps most of all for a few working-class people with only a vague perception of religion. The contrast that the novel creates here is that what was once an obvious part of people’s daily life and life cycle now keeps ‘ducking out of sight’. Bedggood (2005, 214) writes that Swift’s fiction generally opens itself up for possibilities of finding meanings from certain past narratives but that it also usually avoids stating that those narratives are somehow ultimately stable. In the analysis which follows, I ask whether the characters are able to find such stabilities from the cathedral or whether that is what they seek in the first place.

Whatever narrative the characters are in search of, the cathedral does not speak to them in one language. Ray’s point of view foregrounds his anxiety about an individual’s insignificance, so it is easy to draw correspondences between this encounter and the encounter with Chatham Naval Memorial: “It’s a big building, long and tall, but it’s like it hasn’t stretched up yet to its full height, it’s still growing [...] and it makes you feel sort of cheap and titchy. Like it’s looking down at you, saying, I’m Canterbury Cathedral, who the hell are you?” (*Orders*, 194) Ray feels the momentous weight of not just the building itself but all that it represents, something bigger and more enduring than life. In the face of this, even the death of his friend means very little: “[I]t’s a far cry, all this around me, from what I’m carrying in my hand, all

this glory-hallelujah, from Jack and his drips. What's a plastic jar up against this lot? What's the lick and spit of a human life against fourteen centuries?" (*Orders*, 201). Yet, he is not saying that what the place represents is the truth, he is not frustrated because he has no access to that truth; he is frustrated when he measures Jack's plastic urn against the cathedral and finds that his grief is undermined by this pre-settled idea of what is worthy. Moreover, his anxiety rises because the building represents immortality, whereas the urn in his hands is a discouraging reminder of mortality – even of his own.

Ray's perspective demonstrates what I mean when I say that, in a way, the metanarrative immerses the characters. *Out of this World* discusses how certain narratives bury individuals under them, but *Last Orders* opens the door to these narratives and gives its characters room to wander and evaluate. Accordingly, Ray sits down and looks up and thinks:

The pillars go up and up, then they fan out like they're not pillars any more, they've let go of their own weight and it's not stone any more, it's not material. It's like wings up there, arching and reaching, and I know you're supposed to gaze up and think it's amazing and feel yourself being *raised up too*, and I'm gazing, I'm staring, I'm peering hard, but I can't see it, I can't make it out. The next world. (*Orders*, 207; emphasis added)

His description suggests that the materiality of the building morphs into something weightless, ethereal and spiritual. It is like he can understand the point of the "glory-hallelujah" (*Orders*, 201), he can understand what it says, but, nevertheless, what he finds is absence. Winter (2018, 256–257) talks about sacred and secular memory regimes, about whether or not one believes that god is present in both the world and history, and notes that "[i]t is perfectly possible for adherents of a secular memory regime to believe in God [...]. What they do not do, though, is ascribe the course of history and its painful elements as being part of a divine plan". I think that, by presenting both secular and sacred memory sites, as it were, back to back, *Last Orders* takes part in a similar discourse: it juxtaposes the absurdity of the war, its death-toll, with the (perhaps equally absurd) notion that everything that happens happens for a reason. All in all, Ray is unable to find an explanation for his worries and grief; he does not find enough stability of meaning to be 'raised up too' and freed, and it leaves him with a sense of disappointment, even guilt. When they leave the place, Ray muses: "I can feel the cathedral behind me, looking at me" (*Orders*, 225). It is as if he has tested it out, it has tested him out, and now they go their separate ways.

If Ray's character in the face of the cathedral stands for questioning and scepticism, Vic's perspective perhaps points towards something like an agnostic worldview. In the Chatham passage, he claims that, as an undertaker, he knows about death and that humans are "all at sea [...]. All in our berths going to our deaths. *Floating coffins*" (*Orders*, 125; emphasis added). I think that floating coffins at sea is a metaphor that suggests that all humans live and die equally but, moreover, exists equally in the unknown, and only death is certain. This also pertains to the secular memory regime according to which "neither the benevolent hand of God nor the malevolent hand of a social or ethnic group is blamed for initiating the course of events [...] being retold today" (Winter 2018, 256–257). The cathedral, too, makes Vic think about death: "Well it makes you feel humble. It makes a man in my line of business feel humble to think of what they've got in here. Tombs, effigies, crypts, whole chapels. When all I do in the normal course of work is box 'em up and book 'em in for their twenty minutes at the crem" (*Orders*, 196). The difference between Ray and Vic is that Ray keeps anxiously searching for answers from the material existence of this thing he knows to be somehow larger than life, whereas Vic simply sees the cathedral as another resting place for the dead. The building does not humble him because of the ideas it represents, or because he thinks that the people buried there are somehow holier than him, but rather because it elevates the dead in ways that he is unable to do in his everyday work.

So, if Ray is the inquisitor and Vic is the somewhat unworried agnostic, then Lenny is, quite surprisingly, the convert. He begins his account of the place somewhat derisively: "So we shuffle on, down some steps and up some steps, past all these geezers made of stone, lying face up, flat out, out for the count" (*Orders*, 203). His attitude undergoes a change, however. The story goes that Lenny holds a grudge against Vince who got his daughter pregnant, after which Lenny forced the daughter to get an abortion. Before Canterbury, the grudge escalates as Lenny and Vince get into a proper fight. But the encounter with the cathedral makes Lenny reconsider his choices: "It's only now that I think what it might've been. It. He. She. A whole life. All these stony geezers. It might've been the next Archbishop of Canterbury" (*Orders*, 205). For the first time, he admits that there were faults in the way he acted. After the encounter, he muses that coming to visit the cathedral "was for us, to put us back on our best behaviour, to clean up our acts" (*Orders*, 210). Lenny and Vince can move on in relative peace, which suggests that, while Ray is unable to find answers from the place, Lenny does receive some peace of mind and, perhaps, some inexplicable touch of the 'sacred'. Although

this is not to say that he becomes a fully converted believer, the encounter is consequential in similar terms than the encounter with Chatham Naval Memorial is for Ray.

The novel completely lacks Vince's viewpoint on the cathedral. Vince is seen through the others' eyes to be quite excited about the building: he has a guidebook, and he insists on seeing and explaining all there is to look at. He drags the others along with him like tourists. It is difficult to say exactly what motivates the novel to ignore his perspective, but his relative curiosity and enthusiasm nevertheless clash with the rest of the group so that the presence of two different generations becomes highlighted again. Perhaps the novel does not venture to suggest what kind of meaning the walls and ceilings of the cathedral might acquire for the future generations or perhaps, by showing how determined Vince is to find out what is great about the building, it proposes that there is a place yet to be found for such institutions as religion. This is at least in accordance with Van Dam and Val Trigt's (2015, 215) argument that religion should not be "regarded as a fixed entity but as a dynamic one. It changes according to how people have understood and positioned it". In other words, even during its postwar crisis, it would be better to talk about the societal transformation rather than the death of religion.

All in all, the novel places Canterbury Cathedral before the eyes of the reader but rather than its material aspects, the novel foregrounds the tension it creates in the observers. The building only speaks in terms of the thoughts and attitudes of the individual narrators, rather like Cunningham (2007, 70) says: "Urns and ruins and tapestries and so on are silent places". So, when Ray sits down and gazes up, he only hears his own thoughts reflected back at him instead of any existential truths. The encounters in *Last Orders* are immensely personal, and the characters immerse themselves in the visual materialisations of history both physically and mentally. The spontaneous experiences of the narrators, moreover, distinguish the ekphrases from the premeditated ekphrases in *Out of this World*. Both Chatham Naval Memorial and Canterbury Cathedral are encountered in the main narrative and form its constituent events, events which are consequential in terms of plot and even in terms of what the reader learns about the characters and what the characters learn about themselves.

Along the way, I have pointed out some major ways in which *Out of this World* and *Last Orders* differ in terms of their ekphrastic elements. The analysis of the ekphrases indicates that, even though the novels overall conduct similar inquiries into the past, their dissimilar approaches to this task render them very different in terms of composition and tone. In the

next chapter, therefore, I compare the novels side by side, which opens up a clearer view into the evolution at work between them. All in all, the novels themselves provide two distinct modes to look at visual historical objects, so they do what the different characters in *Last Orders* do: show that the point of view matters.

## 5 Parallel Comparison: The Many Uses of Ekphrasis

*Out of this World* and *Last Orders* both employ ekphrasis to bring about the presence of history in their narratives. Ultimately, however, their ekphrases share few similarities. In this chapter, I first compare my findings on the ekphrastic passages which I have discussed so far: Harry Beech's photographs, on one hand, and Chatham Naval Memorial and Canterbury Cathedral, on the other. Then, I raise a new, more specific topic: that *Last Orders*, too, represents some photographs in its narrative, though these are private rather than published ones. Hence, I conclude my analysis on the novels by comparing the ekphrastic photographs in *Out of this World* to those in *Last Orders*.

### 5.1 Ekphrasis: A Matter of Discourse or Storytelling?

The most obvious difference is the ekphrastic content matter in the novels. Ekphrasis in *Out of this World* is about what Armstrong and Langås (2020, 5) call terrorising images. These images reflect traumatic events such as the Second World War, events which can be said to demand a political or ethical response from literature (Armstrong and Langås 2020, 4). Through its ekphrastic photographs, *Out of this World* examines the agitated twentieth century and the way that the present is built on the conflicts of the past. The represented photographs are often familiar in their content, "key images" of war (Griffin 2010, 29), the kind of images which have the power to shock and catch the viewer's eye. *Out of this World* reaches beyond its own medium to utilise this rhetoric and to achieve the same instantaneous attention-grabbing. Key images or not, though, these pictures do not exist in real life (with the exception of the Nuremberg photographs, perhaps). It is for this reason that *Out of this World* often needs to recourse to detailed descriptive ekphrasis; without this, of course, the reader would be unable to imagine the content matter of the photographs, and their rhetorical effect would be lost.

Chatham Naval Memorial and Canterbury Cathedral, too, are arguably familiar sights in that one is a monument built for commemoration of those lost in the war and another a place of worship whose outlook is typical of monumental English Gothic architecture. Moreover, though, they are extant places. Therefore, it is not the description that matters, as such, but the interpretations, the *reactions* of the characters when they encounter them. The ekphrases assimilate into the surrounding narrative. Even though *Out of this World* effectively narrativises the ekphrastic photographs by letting Harry elaborate on their stories, I maintain that *Last Orders* realises narrative ekphrasis more typically. In other words, the ekphrastic

passages are prototypically narrative-like in terms explained by Herman (2009, 9): the ekphrases are inseparable parts of the specific “occasions for telling”, the events during which the character-narrators encounter the objects. The encounters constitute parts of the novel’s sequence of events, and these events are consequential to the characters’ journeys and so ‘disrupt the storyworld’, in a sense.

With the assimilation of the ekphrastic encounters into the narrated events, it is also notable that the objects are described *because* the narrator is looking at and observing them; to put it in another way, description and the act of looking are conjoined, and so fabula time is advancing along with narrative time. With the exception of the interview scene, these kinds of narrativity-increasing elements are missing from the ekphrases in *Out of this World*: the novel builds itself on bits of discourse material which are unrelated at the level of the story and only related at the level of the thematic whole. Majorly, then, Harry as the narrator does not *look at* his photographs but only brings them up.

Furthermore, this difference in the degrees of narrativity of the ekphrastic passages indicates that *Last Orders* is more character-oriented than *Out of this World*. In sum, the characters in *Last Orders* encounter the ekphrastic objects in the course of the story, and these encounters affect the characters themselves most of all. Crucially, I argue that *Out of this World* presents its photographs so that the reader may recognise that what seems familiar is potentially not so. The character-narrator himself already knows this. In other words, what happens in *Out of this World* is that the narrator strives to make the familiar, tropy photographs strange, to “defamiliarize viewers’ perception of war and urge them to contextualize the destruction, death, or suffering that is depicted” (Vervaeet 2020, 133). So, for instance, the narrator reveals the cruel fate of the heroic grenade-throwing soldier and questions whether the pitiful wounded pilot is a victim or a villain. What the narrator suggests, finally, is that history is malleable: it can be edited and alternative narratives can be inserted inside the cracks that appear when the arbitrariness of familiar images is exposed.

This particular style of narration in *Out of this World* has to do with historiographic metafiction, as I have discussed: historiographic metafiction shows that history is “discursively structured” and does this most often through a controlling narrator (or several) who, indeed, discursively restructure history (Hutcheon 1988, 118–120). Harry states that no one can know anything about the past for certain and that even the reality of his photographs is stripped away; yet he, as the witness, has some amount of certain knowledge which he can

relay to the reader. This is often the paradox in historiographic metafiction, that it both heavily doubts historical knowledge but also builds itself on historical frames, events and actors (Hutcheon 1988, 5). What is notable is that its characters, like Harry, are in the margins of history, they are subjective, biased, and rely on memory when they narrate, and so their certainty should be questioned. More so when it comes to ekphrasis: as stated, objects and images can hardly ever be neutrally and fully related. The narrator can “both prolong and reinvest the impact of those images” (Armstrong and Langås 2020, 6); they always interpret, select, and direct the gaze of the reader. Altogether, this sum of a didactic, controlling narrator and a narrative that defamiliarises the reader’s ‘viewing’ experience sets *Out of this World* majorly apart from *Last Orders* which resorts to more traditional, character-driven storytelling.

Traditionality surfaces in *Last Orders* in more ways than one. To begin with, the novel follows rather personal character journeys in its underlying linear narrative structure. The narration consists of inner monologues and streams of thought rather than constructed discourse. Markedly, when the characters encounter the memorial and the cathedral, they strive to build no alternative narratives from them but rather try to make sense of the ones that are already in place. As opposed to Harry, who has some insight knowledge that he can pass on, the characters in *Last Orders* react and interpret spontaneously and have no specific idea how they should perceive the objects they see. They are unknowledgeable where Harry is knowledgeable. This also means that *Last Orders* does not use historiographic metafictional devices: the character-narrators do not construct history and do not aim to teach anyone anything (if not for themselves, quietly inside their heads). Therefore, in my view, the ekphrastic objects are character-mirrors. To be sure, Chatham Naval Memorial and Canterbury Cathedral are spaces of collective memory: places in which “different collectives, from groups of two to groups in their thousands, engage in acts of remembrance together” (Winter 2006, 4). More than anything, though, the novel realises them as blank canvases on which each of the characters can insert some bit of themselves. Considering this, there is cause, like Armstrong and Langås (2020, 5) suggest, to understand ekphrasis as a term that denotes not only art and objects but also a mimesis of the mind.

Another sense in which *Last Orders* can be said to be more traditional than *Out of this World* relates to how the ekphrases build themes. Rather obviously, the ekphrases in *Out of this World* deal with modern technological innovations, innovations which drastically altered the way remembering became possible to begin with. Film and photography, that is to say, can

construct memory itself: when fixed and moving images of war, for example, are exposed to mass populations, they form, preserve, and disseminate memory (Winter 2018, 252). This issue then leads to the fact that *Out of this World* has something like a political undertone: the novel hints that historical canonisation is supported by certain institutional agendas, warns against propaganda, and overall encourages the reader to question normative historiography. In contrast, memory in *Last Orders* is tied to landmarks which are unbound by time and largely indifferent to modernisation. The encounters with these landmarks build one of the novel's core themes: the monuments are timeless, and the individuals who pass by them are specks of dust in comparison, but, ultimately, one must weigh the fear of being forgotten against the intrinsic value of simply being alive in the first place. In front of the memorial, Ray indeed concludes that "there's only one lesson to be drawn, it's as cheery as it's not cheery, and that's that it aint living you're doing, they call it living, it's surviving. But I reckon I could do it, I could still turn it into living again" (*Orders*, 128). Traditional storytelling surfaces when the novel uses ekphrasis to effectuate these profound realisations of the self. The process is, moreover, majorly unpolitical, as this self-reflection is done without any explicit statements about the value of the monuments themselves, about what is right or wrong.

Altogether, *Out of this World* uses rhetorically effective and descriptive ekphrasis to question the metanarratives of visual history; *Last Orders* incorporates narrative ekphrasis seamlessly into the story to give its characters causes for potentially much-needed self-reflection. With all this in mind, I go on to finally address a detail that arises in *Last Orders*: that it has some ekphrastic photographs that can be compared to, and contrasted with, the photographic representations in *Out of this World*. This comparison emphasises some of the points I have already made. My view is that the photographs represented in *Last Orders* should be thought of as extensions of the characters' minds the same as Chatham Naval Memorial and Canterbury Cathedral. Therefore, they are rather more dissimilar to Harry's photographs than might initially appear.

## 5.2 From Published to Personal Photographs

The frame narrative in *Last Orders*, the journey from London to Margate, is constantly interrupted by the musings that the different narrators give of their pasts. The ekphrastic photographs I speak of surface in these accounts in a similar way as they do in Harry's accounts of his past, and, again similarly, they are hardly consequential to the novel's plot.

However, two aspects differentiate these photographs from those in *Out of this World*. First, they are private rather than published ones: one is a picture of Jack and Ray on camelback on a desert during the Second World War, another a happy picture of seemingly carefree Jack as a soldier. Second, *Last Orders* presents these photographs not through the perspective of an authority but through the perspective of viewers who only have personal motivations to look at them and to reflect on them. These viewers are Ray and Vince, respectively. Consequential to the plot or not, the ekphrases tell much about these characters, perhaps even more so than about the content matter of the photographs themselves. Much the same differences can be drawn, then, as I have done above between Harry's photographs and the ekphrastic encounters in *Last Orders*. This repeats the ways in which the novels differ thematically: *Out of this World* deals with public memories and their manipulation, whereas *Last Orders* sticks close to private memories and personal contemplation.

The photograph of Jack and Ray sits "in the brass frame on Jack's sideboard, beside the fruit bowl" (*Orders*, 90). Ray both struggles to place the photograph within the grander narrative of history and takes joy in the fact that there exists proof that he was part of that history.

Contrary to the anonymous soldiers represented in *Out of this World*, Ray obviously knows the full story of the picture. He recounts that, shortly after their first meeting, he went to see the pyramids with Jack, "[a]nd so there's a photo of Jack and me, taken that afternoon, sitting on a camel, with the Pyramids behind us. There must be a thousand bloody photos of old desert campaigners sitting on camels with the Pyramids behind them, but this was Jack and me" (*ibid.*). Yet, despite the pride that the photo evokes, the attempt to understand it in its historical frames stuns Ray. Noakes and Pattinson (2013, 4) note:

On an individual level [...] we select and interpret events from our lives, ordering them and drawing on them in order to create a narrative of who we are [...]. These individual memories, however, do not exist in a vacuum; they are shaped by time and place, by the forces of history, politics, culture, the economy and more that form the worlds in which we live.

In line with this, Ray wonders: "It seems amazing now, like ancient history, that I was ever there, with Jack, in the desert. That I advanced with Jack from Egypt into Libya and retreated with him to Egypt and advanced again into Libya. A small man at big history" (*Orders*, 90). *Out of this World* deals with a universal concern about the mass of names which get lost when history is recorded and written. The photograph of Jack and Ray, then, shows how *Last Orders* shifts the point of view from the phenomenon to the lost individual himself and

presents a new angle: the challenge to know one's own past drawing on both history and memory. To put it in another way, ekphrastic photographs in *Out of this World* present alternative narratives which derive from established ones, whereas *Last Orders* wonders how one might fit oneself into those established narratives so that one could make sense of one's life, identity and past.

As with the ekphrastic encounters, *Last Orders* also presents the photograph of Jack and Ray through more than one perspective. Vince's adoptive mother showed him the photograph when he was a child, as well as the photograph of "Jack all by himself, his shirt undone, chest bare, holding a ciggy" (*Orders*, 136). Vince experiences a lapse of understanding of the content matter of the photographs, which reflects the divide between the two generations. The happy nature of the pictures is likely far from the glummer narratives which he has grown up with and associates with the war, so he thinks: "I couldn't see what sitting on a camel, laughing, had to do with being a soldier" (*Orders*, 136). Contrary to *Out of this World*, it is the personality rather than lack of personality that disturbs: "The sun's in his face and he's staring at you, grinning, still alive, like he knows you don't know who he really is [...] like he knows he's in another world, peeping out at your one. [...] He doesn't look like a soldier, he doesn't even look grown up. He looks like a kid on a beach" (*Orders*, 136–137). Hirsch (2012, 119) states that "familial postmemory works through the transformation and mediations from the father's memory to the son's postmemory". However, *Last Orders* depicts Jack and Vince's relationship to be very strained; there is a crucial lack of communication between them. Vince's perception of the photographs shows that the gap between the father and the son and between memory and postmemory remains.

If in *Out of this World*, the intended viewer whose perception of war photographs becomes defamiliarised is the reader, as I have suggested, then in *Last Orders*, it is Vince. By presenting these photographs, *Last Orders* emphasises its own interest in the individual and the workings of memory in familial spheres. The novel proposes that familial ties make remembering, or postmemory, difficult, given that children not only have to come to terms with how the war forms the past but also how it forms and reforms their parents. Denial and confusion, accordingly, work through Vince's mind when he sees the photographs: "That aint my dad, that aint my dad, laughing" (*Orders*, 136). Reulecke (2008, 123) writes that every generation undergoes formative experiences which make them unique, and that these formative experiences are passed on in the form of narratives to subsequent generations which can accept, reinterpret, reject or erase them. This kind of negotiation is at work when Vince

tries to make sense of Jack's past through the visual evidence that still remains. What happens is that he cannot associate this visual evidence with either his idea of a soldier nor, crucially, Jack as a person.

In short, the personality, happiness and ordinariness which shine through Jack's photographs already challenge the popular ways to depict the war, which is of course what *Out of this World* majorly seeks to do. The difference is that ekphrases in *Out of this World* employ another rhetoric, a more shocking, grimmer one. *Last Orders* unravels fixed narratives by presenting various viewpoints on the same objects and by emphasising how differently they can signify for each individual; *Out of this World* uses one didactic narrator to demonstrate the arbitrariness of documentary evidence. In doing so, it offers a kind of political and/or ethical response to the incomplete ways in which history survives in the twentieth century.

Meanwhile, the narrators in *Last Orders* simply strive to answer questions they themselves struggle with; for example, Vince has a need to find out who his unapproachable father really was. This summarises how *Last Orders* engages with much more traditional storytelling than its predecessor.

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To move this discussion towards concluding remarks, I refer to Harry, who states that once something is put in record, it is bound to be something that will be lost (*World*, 54). Yet, I think that both novels emphasise that the relationship between past and present is continuous and complex, like Charlson (2001, 105) states: “[P]ast and present are linked not by a linear progression but by a far more vexed back-and-forth movement”. The novels employ ekphrasis to study this connection, to ask how people leave parts of themselves in the visual marks of history, how these marks lose or preserve their individuality and humanness, and how people encounter and comprehend them in years to come. This being said, the comparative analysis of the novels ultimately reveals that ekphrasis functions uniquely depending on the literary context, so, in this case, on where the literary text is situated on the scale of postmodern–traditional storytelling.

## Conclusion

*Out of this World* and *Last Orders* are both images of the twentieth century, nowhere as obviously as in their ekphrastic passages. In the twentieth century, Europe saw war after war (history in the making), institutions such as religion underwent crises and transformations, and optimistic faith in human progress steadily waned. Several memory booms occurred in the aftermaths of the Second World War, stemming from the need to remember the ones whose lives the war ended or otherwise disfigured. Crucially, the ways to remember came to affect what was remembered. World War II literature, even that written decades after the fact by subsequent generations, came to play a part in this. Through ekphrasis, *Out of this World* and *Last Orders* explore the visual records which shape both memory and acts of remembrance. *Out of this World* takes photography as its central theme and mirror of the rapidly modernising world; *Last Orders* pictures a quiet journey of a group of friends through England, along which history meets them like it has etched its presence into the land itself.

My perspective on the novels has been postmodern. Postmodern literature investigates the fragmented state of contemporary societies and their search for a stable, unifying meaning which certain past metanarratives no longer offer. It questions whether such meaning can be found in history; history and fiction are seen to be written by the same narrative conventions, selectively and with variable agendas. In this view, historical knowledge is never final but endlessly modifiable and contestable. As I have argued, especially *Out of this World* reflects this both in form and content. Ekphrastic photographs constitute the novel's snapshots into the past. They operate together with a narrator who criticises and indeed modifies the narratives which they stand for. Even though the narrator relies on historical material to construct his discourse, and uses descriptive methods to bring about this materiality into textual form, he still heavily questions the relevance and reliability of the material; this is where the paradox of historiographic metafiction weighs in.

The postmodern discourse that *Last Orders* conducts with its ekphrases also challenges certain fixed metanarratives, but, in contrast, is less formative and didactic. It asks questions but gives no definitive answers. Ekphrasis is realised as meaningful ekphrastic encounters; the several character-narrators do not so much shape the objects anew as let their own minds be shaped by the encounters. When they are confronted by the monumental and the immortal, they are forced to contemplate their own mortality, questions about memory and forgetting, individuality and lack of individuality, the pointlessness of the war, and even the presence of

God in history. Moreover, because this contemplation is inseparable from the depicted events, the narrativity of the ekphrastic passages becomes emphasised. The characters examine the monuments and ask what they mean, not principally to the world, but just to themselves. As such, the encounters are indispensable parts of the character-centred story the novel seeks to tell.

All in all, studying these two novels side by side reveals how differently visual objects, artefacts and artworks can be textually implemented depending, most of all, on the novel's narrative style. When one considers the narrator's gaze in *Out of this World*, for example, it is worthwhile to inspect the things to which the narrator pays attention, the extent to which he does so, and the reasons behind these choices. In *Last Orders*, then, the ekphrases may be understood as unpremeditated impressions the characters form; there is no strive *for* nor claim *of* objectivity. History, and institutions with deep roots in history, are simply faced as important parts of how one constructs one's identity.

Both novels play with the often contradicting notions of public and private memory. They ask how inventions such as photography or ideologies such as religion and nationalism might affect the relationship between these two. Of course, the ways of documentation and remembrance change, as they changed between the end of the Second World War and the decades in which Swift wrote his novels and certainly have changed after that, too. Surely, the age of globalisation, Internet and social media and the rapid and simultaneous spread of information which they make possible all contribute to reform memory regimes and attitudes about historical knowledge. It might hence make an interesting case to analyse the potential ekphrases in Swift's five later novels, as well, and compare the findings to the present study.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Finnish Summary

Tutkielmani käsittelee brittiläisen kirjailijan Graham Swiftin romaaneja *Out of this World* (1988; suom. *Ei tästä maailmasta*, 1989) ja *Last Orders* (1996; suom. *Viimeinen kierros*, 1996). Tutkin romaaneja postmodernista näkökulmasta. 1900-luvun jälkipuoliskon postmoderni kirjallisuus on erityisen kiinnostunut historiasta ilmiönä, joka välittyy nykypäivään fiktion tapaisina narratiivisina konstruktioina: mitään historiasta ei voida tietää varmasti, ja historiankirjoituskin syntyy riippuvaisena siitä, mistä näkökulmasta sitä kirjoitetaan, mitä tapahtumia korostetaan tärkeinä ja mitä jätetään pois. Swiftin romaanit kysyvät, millä tavalla historia välittyy visuaalisesti. *Out of this World* käy laajasti keskustelua sotavalokuvista, jotka aina ensimmäisestä maailmansodasta lähtien välittivät sotaa maailmanlaajuiselle yleisölle. Valokuvia pidetään usein itsestään selvästi autenttisina, mutta *Out of this World* käyttääkin entisen sotavalokuvaajan vahvaa kertojaääntä paljastamaan, että kuvat kertovat menneisyydestä ja sodasta hyvin rajatusti. *Last Orders* puolestaan seuraa erään ystäväpiirin matkaa Englannin maaseudun halki, ja matkan varrella ystävät kohtaavat kaksi tunnettua maamerkkiä, Chathamien laivaston muistomerkin (Chatham Naval Memorial) ja Canterburyn tuomiokirkon (Canterbury Cathedral). Molemmat näistä edustavat tapoja määritellä menneisyyttä tiettyjen (meta)narratiivien mukaan.

Ilmiötä, jossa visuaalinen esitetään verbaalisessa muodossa, kutsutaan ekfrasikseksi (engl. *ekphrasis*). Termi on peräisin antiikin retoriikasta, mutta sittemmin 1900-luvun puolivälin jälkeen se otettiin käyttöön kirjallisuudentutkimuksessa (Webb 2009, 5). Tutkielmassani viittaan termillä minkä tahansa muun kuin tekstuaalisen median kuvaukseen kirjallisessa muodossa, jolloin se voi tarkoittaa valokuvia, muistomerkkejä ja myös Canterburyn tuomiokirkkoa. Oleellista ekfrasiksessa on se, ettei se ole pelkkää visuaalisten asioiden kuvailemista, vaan ekfrastiset kohteet ovat usein merkityksellisiä yksikköjä, joita voi tutkia joko erikseen tai suhteessa siihen, millainen vaikutus niillä on ympäröivään tarinaan, henkilöhahmojen toimintaan tai vaikkapa teoksen teemalliseen kokonaisuuteen (Karastathi 2015, 93–94). Niissä on usein siis sekä deskriptiivisiä että narratiivisia elementtejä.

Vertaan tutkielmassani toisiinsa romaanien tapaa ja tarkoituksperää käyttää ekfrasista. Tavoitteenani on tutkia, millä tavoin ekfrasista voi hyödyntää erityisesti postmodernin

historiakeskustelun toteuttamiseksi. Väitän, että *Out of this World* käyttää ekfrastisia sotavalokuvia nimenomaan paljastaakseen konventionaaliset ja keinotekoiset narratiivit, joita ne luovat. Näin ollen valokuvista tulee diskurssimateriaalia vahvaääniselle kertojalle. Väitän lisäksi, että tällainen vahvaäänisen kertojan käyttäminen ja historiallisen aineiston hyödyntäminen vaihtoehtoisten narratiivien luomiseksi viittaa historiografiseen metafiktion, joka on Linda Hutcheonin luoma termi kirjassa *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988). *Last Orders* sen sijaan toteuttaa ekfrasiksen osana paljon perinteisempää tarinan kaarta: romaanin henkilöhahmot kohtaavat muistomerkin ja tuomiokirkon spontaanisti, ja kohtaamiset vaikuttavat oleellisesti tarinan kulkuun sekä saavat henkilöhahmoissa aikaan merkityksellistä itsereflektiota. Romaani ei niinkään pyri tarjoamaan lukijalle omaa versiotaan siitä, miten kyseiset ekfrastiset objektit pitäisi tulkita, vaan korostaa ainoastaan sitä, että jokainen yksilö tulkitsee ne oman kokemuksensa ja persoonallisuutensa mukaan, eikä kestäviä metanarratiiveja siis ole olemassa.

Huomionarvoista on, että molemmat romaanit sijoittuvat toisen maailmansodan jälkeiselle ajanjaksolle, jolloin Britanniassa monet postmodernit kirjailijat kiinnostuivat sodasta aiheena siitäkin huolimatta, etteivät itse olleet taistelleet siinä: he kirjoittivat isiensä sodasta, joka yhä muokkasi yhteiskuntaa traumaattisena tapahtumana (Crosthwaite 2009, 3). *Out of this World* ja *Last Orders* käyttävät sekä henkilöhahmoja, jotka taistelivat toisessa maailmansodassa, että nuorempia henkilöhahmoja, jotka kuuluvat niin kutsuttuun toiseen sukupolveen. Tätä toista sukupolvea kutsutaan myös jälkimuistin (engl. *postmemory*) sukupolveksi (Hirsch 2012, 106). Asetelmasta syntyy romaaneihin jännitys, jossa sekä ensimmäinen että toinen sukupolvi etsivät identiteettiään sekä paikkaansa yhteiskunnassa peilaten niitä traumaattiseen menneisyyteen ja sen tapahtumiin. Pysin ymmärtämään myös ekfrasikset tämän jännittyneisyyden kautta; erityisesti *Last Orders* nostaa esiin ensimmäisen ja toisen sukupolven välisiä eroja, kun se esittää ekfrasikset monen eri kertojan näkökulmasta ja luo siten tiettyjä vastakkainasetteluja. *Out of this World* puolestaan keskustelee siitä, kuinka ”julkinen muisti”, jota luodaan muun muassa propagandalla, usein vääristää yksityistä muistia sodasta.

Tarkempi *Out of this World* -romaanin ekfrastisten valokuvien tutkimus paljastaa, että ekfrasikset nostavat esiin tiettyjä teemoja; tutkielmassani jaottelen teemat kolmeen osaan, joiden mukaan analyysi etenee. Näitä ovat ensiksi konventionaaliset ja propagoivat troopit (kuten sankarillisuus ja uhrautuminen), joiden avulla sotavalokuvia usein tulkitaan ja joiden perusteella niitä levitetään; toiseksi historiallinen painoarvo, joka tietyille tapahtumille

suodaan ja joka voi samalla tehdä tapahtumista myyttisiä; ja lopuksi sotavalokuvaajan rooli tiedon ja myyttien levittäjänä sekä sotavalokuvaajan etiikka. Troopeista romaanin kertojahahmo, entinen sotavalokuvaaja Harry Beech, nostaa esimerkeiksi kaksi ottamaansa sodanaikaista valokuvaa: toinen kuvaa granaattia heittävää sotilasta ja on Hollywood-sankarillisuuden ikoni, jonka media on huolellisesti valinnut julkaistavaksi; toinen puolestaan kuvaa pahasti haavoittunutta sotilaslentäjää, jonka Harry arvelee herättävän yleisössä sääliä sekä sentimentaalisen reaktion kertoa lentäjän tarina. Analyysini osoittaa, että Harry, joka itse oli paikalla todistamassa näitä tapahtumia, pitää valokuviaan puutteellisina tapahtumien representoijina ja valokuvien yleisöä liki naiiveina katsojina. Siksi Harry pyrkii kertomaan kuvien “todellisen” tarinan. Ekfrasis on tässä toteutettu didaktisesti: Karastathin (2012, 95) mukaan ekfrasis tarjoaa usein mahdollisuuden “opettaa” lukijaa, sillä kertoja yleensä kannustaa katsomaan ekfrastista tietyllä tavalla. Useimpien tutkijoiden mukaan ekfrasis onkin ymmärrettävä ennen kaikkea kertojan tulkintana visuaalisesta kohteesta (Koopman 2018, 8); kertojan katse on valikoiva, eikä siten ole olemassa täysin puhdasta, neutraalia visuaalisen kuvausta. Fowler (1991, 29) esimerkiksi kirjoittaa, että vaikka eri katsojat voisivat vapaasti ymmärtää yhden ja saman valokuvan esimerkiksi voiton merkinä tai rikoksen todisteena – kun puhutaan vaikkapa sotavalokuvista – kirjallisuudessa kertoja todennäköisesti ottaa kantaa suuntaan tai toiseen. Niinpä myös Harry esittää vahvasti, että hänen valokuvansa eivät todellisuudessa ole loistelias kansakunnan merkkejä, vaan esimerkiksi sotilaslentäjässäkään on synkempi puolensa, sillä hän on juuri ottanut osaa tuhansien tappamiseen.

Historiallisen painoarvon asettamisesta ja myyteistä Harry keskustelee, kun hän kuvaa Nürnbergin oikeudenkäyntejä, joissa hän itse oli ottamassa valokuvia. Populaarikuvituksessa oikeudenkäynnit ovat suuri historiallinen tapahtuma, jossa juhlitaan sitä, että oikeus voittaa pahuuden ja uusi moraalinen aikakausi koittaa (Hartouni 2017, 3). Harry kuitenkin kertoo, että vaikka hänen tavoitteenaan oli kuvata natsi-Saksan “hirviöitä”, hän ei löytänyt niitä; sen sijaan hän löysi tavallisen näköisiä ihmisiä, joita tuskin pystyi erottamaan oikeudenkäyntiä seuranneesta yleisöstä. Romaani ottaa käsittelyyn siis hyvin spesifin, jo olemassa olevan kuvakokoelman, mutta käyttää jälleen kertojaaäntään esittääksensä vaihtoehdoisen narratiivin populaarinarratiivin rinnalle. Näin ekfrasis luo romaaniin postmodernille kirjallisuudelle tyypillistä intertekstuaalisuutta ja jännitteistä diskurssia monella eri tasolla. Charlsonin (2001, 92–93) mukaan onkin tyypillistä, että sodanjälkeisen toisen sukupolven kirjailijat turvautuvat postmoderneihin strategioihin historian traumaattisten tapahtumien kuvaamisessa, koska

postmoderni fiktio pystyy hajottamaan konventionaalisia narratiiveja sekä kaikenlaisia binäärijaotteluita, kuten historiallisten henkilöiden jaottelua hyviin ja pahoihin. Kertoja on tässä prosessissa vahvassa asemassa.

Käsittelen *Out of this World* -romaanin kohdalla viimeisenä diskurssia, jota Harry käy valokuvaajan roolista ja etiikasta. Hän kertoo haastattelusta, johon otti osaa vuosia sitten; Harry ja haastattelija keskustelivat Harryn valokuvista samalla, kun valokuvia heijastettiin projektorilla seinälle. Ekfrasis poikkeaa aikaisemmista: sen sijaan, että Harry vain puhuisi valokuvistaan, tässä kohtauksessa hän myös katselee niitä. Tämä lisää ekfrasiksen prototyypistä narratiivisuutta. Prototyypinen narratiivi pitää sisällään tapahtuman tai tapahtumaketjun sekä kertojan, joka välittää nämä tapahtumat tietyssä kerrontatilanteessa (Herman 2009, 9). Ekfrasis, joka muodostuu pelkästään *kuvailusta* eikä niinkään jonkin visuaalisen kohteen *katsomisesta*, on siis narratiivisuudeltaan vähäinen. *Last Orders* sisältää ennen kaikkea narratiivisia ekfrastisia kohtaamisia, kun taas haastattelukohtaus muodostaa poikkeuksen *Out of this World* -romaanin. Kaiken kaikkiaan teemat, joista Harry ja haastattelija kiistelevät, liittyvät siihen, rikkooko sotavalokuvaaja sodan uhrien yksityisyyttä ottamalla shokeeraavia kuviaan, sekä siihen, manipuloiko valokuvaaja kuvia oman visionsa mukaan. Analyysini mukaan Harry väittää, että valokuvaaja on täysin neutraali silmä, jonka tehtävänä on välittää tietoa muulle maailmalle. Siten hän ei oikeastaan kuvaa yksilöitä vaan pikemminkin ideoita ja abstraktioita: hän ei esimerkiksi kuvaa lapsensa pommi-iskussa menettänyttä surevaa äitiä, vaan surua itsessään.

Kuten yllä mainitut esimerkit osoittavat, että ekfrasis toimii *Out of this World* -romaanissa pitkälti historiografisen metafiktion välineenä. Hutcheonin (1988, 5) mukaan historiografisen metafiktion ytimessä on paradoksi: historiografiseksi metafiktioksi laskettavat romaanit pyrkivät paljastamaan historiankirjoituksen konventionaalisuuden ja valikoivuuden eli käytännössä osoittamaan sen epäluotettavuuden, mutta samalla ne myös käyttävät intensiivisesti hyödykseen historiallista materiaalia. Ne siis rakentavat itsensä historiallisten tapahtumien ja henkilöiden varaan, mutta muokkaavat tätä materiaalia luodakseen vaihtoehtoisia narratiiveja (ibid.). Samalla niiden kertojat ovat tavallisesti historian marginaalisia hahmoja, joiden näkökulma historiaan on huomattavan yksilöllinen, spesifi ja kulttuurisesti määrittynyt (Hutcheon 1988, 114). Kerrontatyylillä on usein kontrolloiva tai sitten romaani käyttää useampia kertojia (Hutcheon 1988, 117). Harry niin ikään hyödyntää valokuviaan historiallisena materiaalina, joista keskustelee; hän on marginaalinen hahmo, joka on kyllä "tehnyt" historiaa valokuvilla, mutta jäänyt itse sen kehysten ulkopuolelle; ja

hän pitää itseään auktoriteettina, joka varmemmin kuin useimmat muut tietää kertoa, mitä todella tapahtui. Toisin sanoen romaani rakentaa sisäänsä historiografisen metafiktion paradoksin: vaikka se näkee historian suhteellisena totuutena ja monin tavoin keinotekoisena konstruktiona, samaan aikaan sen kertoja on historiallisen totuuden auktoriteetti, joka ohjaa lukijan näkemään historian tietystä (vaihtoehtoisesta) perspektiivistä.

*Last Orders* -romaanin tarkasteltaessa henkilöhahmojen kohtaamiset Chathamien laivaston muistomerkin ja Canterburyn tuomiokirkon kanssa muodostavat romaanin kaksi kerronnan huippupistettä. Romaani seuraa neljän miehen ajomatkaa Lontoosta Margateen. Heidän ystävänsä ja sotatoverinsa Jack Dodds on vastikään kuollut, ja heidän tehtävänään on sirotella Jackin tuhkat mereen Margaten rannikolla. Chathamien laivaston muistomerkki ja Canterburyn tuomiokirkko ovat suunnittelemattomia mutkia matkassa, mutta tärkeitä sekä hahmojen oman kehityksen että romaanin narratiivin kannalta: ne muodostavat eri muistijärjestelmiä tutkivan kerronnan selkärangan. Romaanissa nousee esiin myös ekfrastisia valokuvia, joita käsittelen pikaisesti. Muistomerkki ja tuomiokirkko ovat kuitenkin tutkimuksen keskiössä. Chathamien laivaston muistomerkki heijastaa 1900-luvun muistikulttuuria ja ”muistibuumeja” (engl. *memory booms*), joiden tarkoituksena oli tavallansa pitää sodassa kuolleet elossa (Winter 2018, 252–253). Lisäksi muistikulttuurin ylläpitämisen tavoitteena oli luoda yhteisölle yhtenäistä identiteettiä (Habermas 1988, 531). *Last Orders* -romaanin osoittaa, että yksilöt ovat jossain määrin vieraantuneet tällaisesta yhteisöllisestä muistista; henkilöhahmot eivät hahmota muistomerkillä stabiilia tarkoitusta, sillä tosiasiasa sen edustamalla kollektiivisella aatteella on hyvin vähän vaikutusta yksilön jokapäiväiseen elämään. Muistomerkestä tulee jokaiselle henkilöhahmole itsereflektion kiintopiste ja eräänlainen peili: se, mitä se merkitsee, riippuu kunkin henkilön omasta historiasta ja persoonallisuudesta.

Ekfrasiksen analyysissä paljastuu jälleen muutamia keskeisiä teemoja. Eri henkilöhahmojen ja kertojaäänien kautta Chathamien laivaston muistomerkki esittää ensisijaisesti muuta kuin visuaalisia ominaisuuksiaan, ja voikin sanoa, ettei muistomerkin fyysisten seikkojen kuvaaminen ole niin tärkeässä asemassa kuin sen, mitä muistomerkki edustaa. Tämä seikka erottaakin ekfrasiksen usein pelkästä kuvailusta (Koopman 2018, 12). Muistomerkki korostaa näkökulmasta riippuen esimerkiksi yksilön omaa pienuutta ja kuolevaisuutta muistomerkin kaltaisten pitkäikäisten ideologisten asioiden rinnalla. Ekfrasis myös näyttää, ettei muistomerkki itsessään ”muista” mitään, vaan muistamisen pystyy suorittamaan ainoastaan yksilö, joka sen edessä seisoo; ylipäänsä samaan tapaan ekfrastiset kohteet eivät oikeastaan itse puhu vaan pysyvät hiljaa, ja vasta niiden tulkinta antaa niille äänen (Cunningham 2007,

70). Koska kohtauksessa on mukana sekä ensimmäisen että toisen sukupolven henkilöihahmoja, kysymykseksi nousee myös, miten jälkimuistin sukupolvi tulkitsee muistomerkin kaltaisia sotahistorian merkkejä. Romaani välttää kuvaamasta muistomerkkiä jälkimuistin sukupolven edustajan näkökulmasta lähes kokonaan. Tulkitseen tämän sitten, että romaani tunnistaa, että ensimmäiselle sukupolvelle on annettava tilaa kertoa omat tarinansa ennen kuin ne tarinat kerrotaan heidän puolestaan.

Muistomerkkiä seuraa kohtaaminen Canterburyn tuomiokirkon kanssa. Toisen maailmansodan jälkeen kristinuskon rooli muuttui Euroopassa niin huomattavasti, että alettiin puhua jopa uskonnon kuolemasta (Van Dam ja Van Trigt 2015, 214). *Last Orders* -romaanissa uskonto merkitsee eräänlaista yhtenäistävää tarkoitusta, jota henkilöihahmoilla ei enää ole mutta jota he ovat etsimässä. Samalla uskonto edustaa metanarratiivia, jonka kestävyyttä henkilöihahmot koettelevat. Lisäksi siirtymästä muistomerkiltä tuomiokirkolle muodostuu ikään kuin siirtymä ”sekulaarista” muistijärjestelmästä ”pyhään” muistijärjestelmään (Winter 2018, 256–257), jossa romaani kenties kysyy, voiko lähihistorian traumaattisille tapahtumille olla olemassa jumalallinen selitys. Jälleen ekfrasiksessa ei niinkään korostu tuomiokirkon kuvailu, vaan tärkeämpää on se, millaisia merkityksiä kukin henkilöihahmo voi siitä löytää. Ekfrasiksessa painottuu myös tapahtuman fyysisyys. Henkilöihahmot ikään kuin astelevat metanarratiivin sisälle ja arvioivat sitä sieltä käsin. Tuomiokirkko näyttäytyy ylhäisenä ja muistomerkin tavoin pysyvänä ja arvokkaampana kuin yksilö, ja tämä lisää yksilön ahdistusta omasta kuolevaisuudestaan. Huolimatta siitä, että he vaistoavat paikan jollain tavalla ”toismaailmallisen” mutta määrittelemättömissä olevan arvon, he eivät suurilta osin kykene löytämään sieltä vastauksia oman elämänsä myllerryksen tasoittamiseksi, vaikka osalle heistä sillä onkin rauhoittava vaikutus.

Kohtaaminen osoittaa hyvin, mitä on prototyypin narratiivinen ekfrasis: tuomiokirkon kuvailua ja sen vaikutusta henkilöihahmoihin ei voi erottaa itse tapahtumasta. Tuomiokirkko piirtyy lukijan eteen, koska henkilöihahmot katselevat ja arvioivat sitä tapahtuman hetkessä. Tarinan kulku ei siis pysähdy ekfrastisen kuvailun takia. Lisäksi molemmat kohtaamiset ovat tarinaa rakentavia tapahtumia (engl. *constituent events*), kun taas *Out of this World* -romaanissa ekfrastisiin valokuviin liittyvät tapahtumat ovat poikkeuksetta vain täydentäviä tapahtumia (engl. *supplementary events*) eli tapahtumia, joilla ei ole suurtakaan merkitystä romaanin tarinan kannalta ja joita ilman tarina näyttäisi jotakuinkin samalta (Abbott 2009, 22–23). Tämä ei tarkoita, etteivät valokuvat olisi romaanin teemojen rakentamisen kannalta tärkeitä.

Romaanien ekfrasisten välillä nousee siis huomattavia eroja. Edellä mainittujen lisäksi korostan kertojaäänien toisistaan poikkeavuutta. *Out of this World* käyttää vahvaa, kontrolloivaa kertojaa, ja ekfrastiset valokuvat nähdään myös ainoastaan yhden kertojan perspektiivistä; kerronta *Last Orders* -romaanissa koostuu sen sijaan usean eri henkilöahmon sisäisestä monologista, eivätkä kertojat Harryn tavoin tiedosta kertovansa tarinaa. Tämä muistuttaa modernistisen romaanin tajunnanvirtatekniikkaa. Näin ollen analysoitaessa ekfrasista *Out of this World* -romaanissa on syytä huomioida, mitä mahdollisia yllykkeitä kertojalla on välittää visuaalinen objekti tietyllä tavalla lukijalle eli mitkä ovat hänen – usein didaktiset – motiivinsa, jotka sitten vaikuttavat lukijankin tulkintaan kohteesta. *Last Orders* -romaanissa ekfrasikset voi puolestaan lukea henkilöahmojen spontaaneina tulkintoina.

*Last Orders* rakentuu huomattavasti perinteisempään tarinamalliin. Molempien romaanien rakenne on postmoderniin tapaan fragmentaarinen, mutta *Last Orders* -romaanissa lineaarinen matka Lontoosta Margateen muodostaa taustalle perinteisen tarinan kaaren. Tämän lisäksi perinteisyyttä saa aikaan se, että romaani tutkii henkilökohtaisia, yksityisiä tarinoita; *Out of this World* puolestaan pyrkii luomaan enemmän universaalia diskurssia. Yksityisen ja henkilökohtaisen painottuminen *Last Orders* -romaanissa näkyy myös ekfrasiksessa. Chathamien laivaston muistomerkki ja Canterburyn tuomiokirkko kertovat ennen kaikkea hahmoista itsestään; näin ollen ekfrasiksen voisi ymmärtää taiteen ja esineiden esittämisen lisäksi myös mielen mimesiksenä, kuten Armstrong ja Langås (2020, 5) ehdottavat. Samalla tavalla toimivat myös ne valokuvat, joita *Last Orders* nostaa esiin. Romaani esittää kahden eri henkilöahmon näkökulmasta kaksi eri sota-ajan valokuvaa Jack Doddsista, mutta toisin kuin *Out of this World* -romaanissa, nämä ovat henkilökohtaisia, perhepiirissä kulkevia valokuvia, eivät julkaistuja ja propagoituja. Niitä tulkittaessa korostuu yhtäältä yksilön haaste ymmärtää oma menneisyytensä sekä yksityisten muistojen että historiankirjoituksen mukaan, ja toisaalta pojan haaste hahmottaa isän menneisyys sekä sotilaana että henkilönä huolimatta ymmärtämyksen kuilusta, joka ensimmäisen ja toisen sukupolven väliin voi jäädä.

Kaiken kaikkiaan voi todeta, että *Out of this World* käyttää ekfrasista ennen kaikkea historiografisen metafiktio tekniikkana, kun taas *Last Orders* hyödyntää sitä tarinansa rakennusosina. Tärkeimmäksi tekijäksi siinä, kuinka ekfrasis toteutuu ja kuinka se välittyy lukijalle ja vaikuttaa lukijan tulkintoihin, nousee kertojaääni. Kertojaääni voi olla hyvinkin harkitseva, valikoiva ja ohjaava, kuten Harry *Out of this World* -romaanissa, tai tiedostamaton ja spontaani, kuten *Last Orders* -romaanin useat eri kertojat. Eroavaisuuksistaan huolimatta

molemmat romaanit ovat sodanjälkeisen yhteiskunnan kuvia ennen kaikkea ekfrastisten elementtiensä puolesta. Ekfrasiksen kautta romaanit tutkivat visuaalista historiaa, joka muokkaa nykypäivän muistia ja muistijärjestelmiä. Valokuvat *Out of this World* -romaanissa ovat paitsi keskeinen teema myös modernisoituvan maailman heijastus; ekfrastiset kohtaamiset *Last Orders* -romaanissa taas ovat merkkejä siitä, miten historia jättää pysyvän jälkensä ihmisen ympäristöön. Erityisesti internetin ja sosiaalisen median kehittyminen on vaikuttanut muistamisen tapoihin ja muistin leviämiseen 1900-luvun loppupuolen jälkeen, joten olisi kiinnostavaa tutkia, kuinka mahdolliset ekfrasikset Swiftin myöhemmissä romaaneissa vertautuvat tässä tutkielmassa analysoituihin. Esiin nousisi varmasti uusia näkökulmia siihen, mitä historia on ja miten se vaikuttaa nykypäivän ihmisen elämään ja identiteettiin.