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METAFICTION AND B. S. JOHNSON'S ALBERT ANGELO

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METAFICTION AND B. S. JOHNSON'S *ALBERT ANGELO*

By

Olivia Maureen Olson

THESIS

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ABSTRACT

METAFICTION AND B. S. JOHNSON'S *ALBERT ANGELO*

By

Olivia Maureen Olson

As a literary critic, the British writer B. S. Johnson is known for his strong opinions about literature which anticipate a marriage between metafiction and media theory through his discussion of the changing importance of the novel. While experimental in their structure, his novels illustrate the boundaries imposed, and the limitations of communication, on the traditional form by drawing attention to the construction of the novel.

Using the critical theories Johnson articulated in his introduction to *Aren't You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs?* (1973), this essay examines the ways in which the fragmented layout and repetition in his second novel, *Albert Angelo* (1964), illuminate the construction of the novel and the role of the author in this construction. This essay also situates *Albert Angelo* within the common trends of metafictional texts to illustrate the instability and inconsistency representative of the role of reality as addressed in the changes to traditional expectations of the novel genre. By using concepts of media theory Johnson anticipated in his critical works, this essay reflects on the construction of reality in *Albert Angelo* and calls for further application of Johnson's theories to other metafictional works.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my husband, Paul Sheffield, for everything he did to support me in this process.

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INTRODUCTION

A novel is an artificial construct, though many aspects of its construction have been naturalized through repeated exposure. A metafictional novel makes clear that the events in the novel are not real and ultimately calls the idea of reality into question. In *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (1984), Patricia Waugh examines the purpose of such self-referring constructions, claiming that metafictional works critique the medium in which they were created and, as a result, question whether the world, both inside and outside of the text, is fictional (2). Metafiction is not merely a luxurious word game afforded to authors to manipulate the novel form for the sake of manipulation itself. Instead, it exists in order to help create and illustrate the connection between the form of the novel and the reality it is supposed, but ultimately fails, to represent. Metafictional authors write with the knowledge that language frames and dictates the ways individuals perceive the world around them and that language cannot adequately accomplish this goal.

In a somewhat similar fashion, media theory examines the ways in which the medium of a work affects its content and the specific limitations of what a work can communicate within that medium. Joseph Tabbi and Michael Wutz repeat one idea central to the concept of metafiction in their examination of literature's place within a media ecology: the novel, and the language that builds the novel, is insufficient at representing the "reality" of lived experience. In *Reading Matters: Narratives in the New Media Ecology* (1997), they claim that literature is most adept at "mediat[ing] subjective interiority and the object world that in part constitutes it" through the use of language;

yet, this “could be done (and done better) with more ‘truthful’ recording technologies: truthful in that the process of symbolization could be handled directly (not through signs, but through filmic and photographic objects representing only themselves” (5, 5-6). The medium determines what can be communicated, and how it can be communicated; in the novel, the representation of reality is primarily communicated through language, a representation that loses accuracy with translation.

Geoffrey Winthrop Young in “Magic Media Mountain: Technology and *Umbildungsroman*” explains that “the relationship between narratives and media technology can be summed up in three points: (1) narrative is a media technology; (2) narratives depend on media technology; and (3) narratives deal with media technology, particularly their own” (30). As more and more visual- and image-centered media became increasingly popular, writers of all genres became more aware of the physical layout of the printed page and the ways in which this fact could be manipulated to best serve written media as a whole. Young further describes the connection between all different media as constantly influencing each other: “a photo of a tree is not the same as a description or a painting of a tree, but all three deal with trees and, more importantly, the fact that we can photograph trees has influenced the way we describe and paint them” (31). Metafiction acknowledges that images might better serve the purpose of describing a tree but that, on many levels, the fictional illusion of the novel itself and written description are still necessary; otherwise, the novel would have ceased to exist quite some time ago. Neither metafiction nor media theory call for the abandonment of the novel form. They do, however, examine the ways in which the symbolization through different

media impact the representations of concepts across all media, constantly revising the ways that reality can be considered to be accurately represented.

Because conventions of the novel genre have been so fully naturalized, it becomes increasingly important for metafictionalist authors and those interested in the impact of our evolving of media ecology to draw attention to not only these conventions but also the physical layout of the form of the novel – the pages, the available white space, the positioning of text and typeface on the page. Tabbi and Wutz describe a shift in the consideration of the form of the page that began with modernist poetry, explaining that “[a] chief goal for practitioners of modernist poetry was to exploit, in both manuscript and printed text, the visual power of typography on the canvas of the page, and hence to approach writing, and the production of text more generally, with a spatiovisual sensibility” (12).

As a literary critic, the British writer B. S. Johnson is known for his strong opinions about literature which effectively anticipate a marriage between metafiction and media theory. In his Introduction to *Aren't You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs?* (1973), he explains the changing importance of the novel and how his novels and their formats fulfill the need for the novel to evolve to stay relevant. In a close parallel to media theory, he stresses repeatedly that, because film can “tell a story more directly, in less time and with more concrete detail than a novel,” the novel must “evolve to greater achievements by concentrating on those things it can still do best: the precise use of language, exploitation of the technological fact of the book, the explication of thought” (11, 12). Since stories, fictionalized accounts, can be better served in a different medium, it is most important for the novel to focus its attention on how to manipulate

what is already available to it and, by doing so, accomplish the things that filmic representation cannot. Johnson further insists that the evolving form of the novel should be considered “not simply [as] problems of form, but problems of writing. Form is not the aim, but the result” (16). If the novel is not pushed beyond tradition, it “cannot legitimately or successfully embody present-day reality in exhausted forms” because other forms now exists to do what the novel used to do (16). In order to avoid fabrication and anachronism, authors must focus their attention only on what they know, their own lives, and how they can represent that knowledge most completely in the novel format.

Johnson believed that using the novel form to tell of an experience ultimately falsified that experience because of the ways the act of symbolically representing the experience through language altered it. In the introduction to *Aren't You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs?*, he explains the two reasons he fights against the use of the novel as a story telling agent:

Life does not tell stories. Life is chaotic, fluid, random; it leaves myriads of ends untied, untidily. Writers can extract a story from life only by strict, close selection, and this must mean falsification. Telling stories really is telling lies. (14)

In order to represent lived experience in the novel form, authors make conscious choices about what to include and how to represent these choices with language, therefore never translating the events with complete accuracy. Instead of telling stories, Johnson focused his writing on reproducing characters' thoughts, description, and manipulating the form of the novel in order to avoid creating a plot, a level of storytelling he felt no longer had a place in the novel form. He asserts that “[i]f a writer's chief interest is in telling stories... then the best place to do it now is in television, which is technically better equipped and will read more people than a novel can today” (13). The medium ultimately dictates what

kind of information can be most accurately be portrayed and, for Johnson, what information should be portrayed in a given form in order to be most truthful.

Johnson uses these truthful concepts in multiple ways in his second novel, *Albert Angelo* (1964). Briefly, it is the story of the title character who works as a supply teacher. As the novel progresses, the students become more violent towards Albert. At the end of the novel, Albert's students murder him. The layout of the novel is extremely fragmented: small, individualized moments combine in the construct of a novel within each chapter. In total, they tell a story but, as small pieces, they all stand alone without referencing what has already taken place in the story or what will take place. Johnson believed all life to be chaos and, to try representing life with a story that clearly connects together is to falsify. These small, standalone moments are the closest the novel can come to a full representation of truth. In case there could be any question about whether or not the novel is to be considered truth or fiction, B. S. Johnson breaks into the story near the end in order to explain the different aspects of the novel's form and plot, detailing the inconsistencies that come with storytelling attempts.

Within *Albert Angelo*, there are multiple media appearing in these small subsections – pictures, letters, holes in the pages, columns, symbols – that constantly push the limitations imposed on the novel form to allow it to become something else. Ultimately, for Johnson, the concept of truth – and its relative, reality – serves as the purpose for his metafiction. Each formal manipulation, each representation of a different medium, each small unit within a larger chapter all serve to represent the chaos, and subsequent truth, of lived experience that create reality.

The concepts Johnson solidified and treated as fact in the introduction to *Aren't You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs?* were the result of years of work as an author. His first novel, *Travelling People* (1963), is no longer available because, according to Jonathan Coe, Johnson believed it to be “a ‘disaster,’” insisting all copies be returned to him because “he did not want it to be reprinted. . . .he came to dislike it because it mingled fiction with autobiography in a way which he regarded as dishonest” (15). *Albert Angelo* (1964) only exists as truth because of the authorial intervention that comes in the “Disintegration,” where Johnson admits to the fictionalization that has occurred throughout the novel. *Trawl* (1966) focuses intensely on the inside of Johnson’s mind as he goes on a journey but the illusion cannot honestly be represented “because when Johnson himself undertook the voyage in October 1963 he had a second reason for doing so: to provide himself, quite deliberately and specifically, with material for a novel,” which is never acknowledged in the story (Coe 19). *The Unfortunates* (1969), Johnson’s famous book-in-a-box, details Johnson’s experience of losing a friend to cancer, further exploring the question of what it is to know something, including information from only inside his own mind, and pushing the form of the novel. The small, isolated moments to create a larger story used in *Albert Angelo* are taken to the logical next step by no longer binding the sections in the way novels are traditionally bound. *See the Old Lady Decently* (1975), published posthumously and intended to be the first book in a trilogy that was never completed, returned to these fragmentary techniques of truth telling after two fictional novels: *House Mother Normal: A Geriatric Comedy* (1971) – where the same moment is relived ten times by ten different people at exactly the same textual moment – and *Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry* (1973). The

introduction to *Aren't You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs?* allows Johnson to look back upon all of these novels, except *See the Old Lady Decently*, and explain what he sees as the important connections between his works and the ways in which his form became essential to his understanding of what the novel genre needed to accomplish.

In this essay, I intend to closely examine the different ways Johnson exploits – in his own term – “the technological fact of the book” in order to question the purpose of the form of the novel and to illustrate most clearly how *Albert Angelo* accomplishes those things which Johnson claims the novel does best. In addition, I will situate these concepts into the broader context of trends in metafictional works, showing how Johnson’s work examines the role of reality as representative of instability and inconsistency, pushing what the novel does well outside of the clear story telling traditionally expected of novels. Using concepts of media theory that Johnson anticipated in his critical works, I will illustrate these inconsistencies and the specific understanding of the construction of reality as it is presented in the novel form assigned to *Albert Angelo*.

THE STRUCTURE OF *ALBERT ANGELO*: “AN EXPOSITION WITHOUT WHICH
YOU MIGHT HAVE FELT UNHAPPY”¹

Albert Angelo contains five labeled parts: Prologue, Exposition, Development, Disintegration, and Coda (7). The names for each part are extremely significant in that they set an expectation of what each part should do based on the conventions associated with its name, an expectation that is only partially met. Although the labeling of each part with these names gives the indication that each part is a unified narrative tied together through this labeling, each part, except Disintegration, contains multiple subsections, fragmented pieces that are only connected through their shared position under a part’s heading. The naming of each large section as a part instead of a chapter immediately moves *Albert Angelo* away from the traditional structural expectation of a novel because, as much as *chapters* are technically *parts*, these words have different connotations and evoke different meanings. In total there are twenty-six subsections (or, if each individual letter that is not in its own separate section is counted, fifty-three) within these five parts. The parts of *Albert Angelo* resist unification because of the inclusion of multiple subsections only connected through their positions within the bound pages of the book and the repetition of the protagonist within them; they avoid the connections usually implied by a novel’s structure.

The first part, Prologue, contains two subsections. A prologue, according to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (1990), is “an introductory section of a play, speech, or other literary work” (Baldick 179). According to *A Dictionary of Literary*

¹ The title of this chapter comes from Chapter I of Johnson’s *Christie Malry’s Own Double Entry*.

Terms (1953), the term is also used to describe “[a] speech recited by an actor... before the actual beginning of a play” (Duffy and Pettit 96). Both of these understandings of the term are important to *Albert Angelo*’s Prologue. The first subsection of Prologue contains uniquely formatted dialogue where the introduction to the speaker is in the left-hand column while the representation of speech stays in the right-hand column. Through this interaction, information about Albert’s move to Percy Circus and the previous tenant is related. There are three characters discussing pertinent information about the events that occurred before the start of the story, much like a novelistic representation of the dramatic convention Duffy and Pettit describe.

The second subsection of Prologue gives detailed information about Percy Circus’s geography and Albert’s inner thoughts, framing and shaping the book’s focus on the interior of the character’s mind. The dialogue introduces the connection between poetry and architecture. The description introduces Albert’s tendency to accept his life passively and at face value. While Prologue accomplishes the traditional goals of the sections named as such, the specific format – breaking it into two subsections, one with uniquely formatted dialogue and one with extreme repetition and frequent perspective shifts – does not align with these expectations. As a result, the unique construction draws attention to the manipulation of the technological fact of the book and the ways that the form dictates meaning, immediately introducing readers to the fact that they cannot assume a traditional structure from this particular book.

The second part of *Albert Angelo* is Exposition. According to *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, exposition is “[t]he necessary preliminaries to the action of a novel or play or to the emotional intensity of a poem” (Duffy and Pettit 48). M. H. Abrams, in his

discussion of exposition, notes that “[i]n the novel, . . . such exposition is sometimes managed by flashbacks: interpolated narratives of scenes (often justified or *naturalized*, as a memory, a reverie, or a confession by one of the characters) which represent events that happened before the time at which the work opened [emphasis in the original]” (161). Traditional exposition, then, explains necessary background information about characters and their relationships, personal histories, and life events. This is accomplished in *Albert Angelo*’s Exposition, which also serves to frame readers’ understanding of the future events in the novel. Albert’s relationship with his parents, his best friend, Terry, and the family dog; his day-to-day life as a supply teacher – including details about his teaching style – and a struggling, ineffective architect; and his ex-girlfriend, Jenny, and the highlight of their relationship – a weekend in the wilderness – are presented in Exposition. This part also contains the first of two columnal subsections that visually represent the simultaneous occurrence of individual thought and character action. While Exposition meets the expectations of traditional novel exposition, it does so using unique techniques that are neither traditional nor expected, drawing attention to the construction of the novel, the role of language in this construction, and the ways expectations limit the potential structure of the novel.

Development is the novel’s longest part. It contains multiple media – student writing samples, an image of a card, a letter from a mother that contains an excerpt from an antiquated medical text, a verbal duel that visually switches speakers with images of crossed swords, and a biography of Christopher Marlowe – as well as other formatting techniques, like the infamous holes cut into the pages of the text. The part ends with Albert going to his drawing board in order to continue to work on his architecture only to

be interrupted, a depiction that happened in Exposition as well; this time, he is interrupted by the next part of the novel. A new narrator intrudes into the text with the phrase “OH, FUCK ALL THIS LYING!” (163) which disrupts the narrative and prevents the suspension of disbelief that comes while reading a novel in order to remind readers of the construction of the novel and the author behind the characters, plot, and form.

Disintegration removes the fictionality of the novel and acknowledges all the ways in which the previous three parts have been falsifications of reality, or, in Johnson’s words, “lies” (170). Unlike every other part in the novel, Disintegration contains no distinctly-separated subsections. Along with the suspension of the visually marked fragments, expectations of traditional grammar and punctuation are challenged. Disintegration lays bare the foundations of the novel, strips the flesh from the bones of the story, and provides the truth the story previously lacked with its thin mask of representation. According to Waugh, there is a trend in metafictional texts where “the Real Author steps into the fictional world, crosses the ontological divide” (131). This serves to split the levels of consciousness – “real” and “fiction” – “by counting not on the content of the story but on the act of narration itself, on the construction of the story,” (131) making Disintegration a traditional representation of metafiction and a clear attempt to discuss the problematic representation that comes from translating lived experience into the novel form. Disintegration ends with the acknowledgement from Johnson-as-narrator that *Albert Angelo* cannot stop with this intrusion because the plot has too many loose ends that much be tied together in order for the novel to function within traditional expectations.

Coda, the fifth part, is a return to what happened before Disintegration. In literature, a coda is “[t]he final statement of a piece of writing, often a kind of subjective farewell to the imaginative conception” (Duffy and Pettit 27). *Albert Angelo*’s Coda finishes the piece, returning to the plot before Disintegration, and concludes by denying Albert the voice he previously maintained. His “subjective farewell” (Duffy and Pettit 27) is his assault at the hands of his students, after which he is thrown into a river and left to drown. Albert is denied a voice because, as Disintegration makes clear, he is an “imaginative conception,” (Duffy and Pettit 27) a personification of an idea, an argument about the importance of writing, existing only within the construction of the novel. The last subsection of the novel is an excerpt from a student’s written work about funerals and the perceived futility of the process of burying someone, alluding to Albert’s death and leaving a final commentary on the connection between poets and death that was introduced in Prologue.

The layout of the novel into these five parts with multiple subsections is one of the ways in which *Albert Angelo* illustrates a common dilemma of metafiction. As Waugh describes it, “[m]etafictional novels tend to be constructed on the principle of a fundamental and sustained opposition: the construction of the fictional illusion (as in traditional realism) and the laying bare of that illusion” (6). Johnson creates his fictional reality through the fragmented subsections only to remove any ability to maintain the illusion, bringing into question what is real within a story and ultimately settling on the knowledge that nothing can be real because it is a symbolic, fictionalized representation of that reality. For Johnson in *Albert Angelo*, the only way to adequately construct a reality that comes close to representing real, lived experience is to chaotically fragment

the selections, avoiding the temptation to connect them together in a unified way, and to constantly draw attention to the construction of these events through specific manipulations of the form of the novel itself.

COLUMNS OF CONVERSATIONS TO COMMUNICATE CONCURRENCE

Prologue begins with a uniquely structure dialogue between Albert, his neighbor, Joseph, and Joseph's friend, Luke, in which the changing of speakers is signified with "[Character Name] said:" in a left column, roughly one inch wide, and is followed by what the individual says in the right column. The opening sequence of *Albert Angelo* reads as follows:

Joseph said: Cocoa needs cooking in a saucepan.
Luke said: Don't be comic.
Albert said: They put hormones or silicones or stormcones
or something in it now so's it'll mix easily
in the mug. (11)

Although the format is similar to the structure of traditional drama, Johnson includes the dialogue tag "said" each time the speaker switches, a constant reminder of the fact that this conversation takes place in the past and of the construction of this dialogue through nontraditional forms. Johnson also omits any description of setting or action except for what can be gleaned from the dialogue itself. This same structure is repeated in Development. The second time it is used, Albert and Joseph are talking without Luke about Albert's discomfort with his knowledge about his students' sex lives.

In one respect, this is an extremely accurate way of presenting dialogue because it limits the intrusion of the characters' thoughts, which someone hearing dialogue would not have access to. In the introduction to *Aren't You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs?*, however, Johnson claims that one of the things the novel does better than film is "the explication of thought" (12). Because there is no description of the inner thoughts of the characters, these two sections of dialogue are examples of only the "exploitation of

the technological fact of the book” and ignore “the only thing the novelist can with any certainty call exclusively his own” (12). Instead of creating significance through dialogue that illustrates the inner world of the character, this manipulation of traditional dialogue form serves to illustrate what the novel can accomplish when not limited by traditional forms and to draw attention to the lack created in a novel when only one level of reality is represented. This lack adds to the chaotic and fragmented representation of reality that is repeated on all levels of *Albert Angelo* through form changes and nontraditional representations of events, leading to the ultimate question of reality that is central to the novel.

The representation of dialogue in this specific format also serves to establish immediately that the characters only exist to the level at which the language that represents them allows for their existence. Because the only representation of the characters in the two examples of the dialogue is what they say and the authorial note signifying who speaks, their existence is limited to this dialogue. The characters are not, and cannot be, represented beyond their words. Without a clear setting or an inner world for the characters, the expectation that the author will create a full world for the events in the plot is shattered and removes the ability for readers to assume a traditional description of events will be maintained in *Albert Angelo*.

David James, in “The (W)hole Affect: Creative Reading and Typographic Immersion in *Albert Angelo*,” (2007) asserts that “graphic techniques should be deployed purposefully, with affective consequences for the observer” (30) an effect most visible in the “tangible layout of *Albert Angelo*” that this dialogue structure exemplifies. As an observer, readers see a typographic abnormality in these two dialogues, a structure that

avoids traditional symbolic representations of dialogue, and, as a result, readers look to fill in the pieces of what they expect should be there – setting, description of characters, action – but, when those expectations are not met, readers are forced to look closer at the conversation itself for significance. In Prologue, the correlation between architecture and poetry – both leading to fame after death – is the first crack in the mask of Albert Angelo, the character who acts as a replacement for B. S. Johnson in this novel. In Development, there are explicit references to the difficulty of representing dialogue that represents lived experience accurately. Albert tells Joseph, “I know what she’d say if she was a workingclass [*sic*] character in a book.... But what would she actually say?” (145). Readers are left remembering that not a single character presented in the novel exists outside of it, making the knowledge Albert has about what a woman “would” say in a book reflect the exact events of the novel at that moment, as Albert is having a dialogue in a book about what a character in a book would say. This paradox calls into question the certainty with which readers understand the representation of personhood in the novel form.

One of the other ways Johnson attempts to represent the individual’s lived experience and the simultaneous and chaotic nature of this existence is through the use of a column form and italics to separate Albert’s thoughts from the action around him. In the introduction to *Aren’t You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs?*, Johnson explains that these columns exist “[t]o convey what a particular lesson is like, the thoughts of the teacher are given on the righthand [*sic*] side of a page in italics with his and his pupils’ speech on the left in roman” (23). This description attempts to explain the purpose of the columns, but it applies more precisely to the second time the columns appear. The

explanation is only partially complete because, as much as this seems to represent lived experience more completely, the act of reading these columns is fragmented through the process of connecting the representation of experience back to the chaotic nature of that experience.

The use of columns to represent the simultaneous thoughts of Albert and his interactions with his students first appears in Exposition, and it coincides with the first lesson Albert teaches at his first supply job in the novel. The columns appear very subtly. The dialogue in this section continues with traditional formatting: new speakers are introduced in a new paragraph with dialogue surrounded in quotation marks. The appearance of Albert's thoughts in italics does not visually seem to be completely separate from the action because the conversation occurring in the classroom extends across the whole page. The first use of columns serves to introduce the formatting decision before fully immersing the readers in the completely distinct columns later in the novel, allowing this form to make a new, understood meaning that can later be partially applied to a similarly structure unconsciously. Readers, however, may make the connection between this first use and the later columns, but the difference in format and the subsequent understanding is jarring.

The second time Johnson uses the column format to represent simultaneous experience, the thoughts exist in the right-hand column in italics, as before. This time, however, the dialogue only exists in the left-hand column without traditional dialogue makers. When the student speaker changes, the change is represented with a long dash at the start of the paragraph, making the textual space of student conversations flush with

the left margin. When Albert speaks, his words are indented. There are no quotation marks. The left column does not bleed into the right.

While explaining the use of columns, Johnson claims that “though the reader obviously cannot read both at once, when he has read both he will have seen that they are simultaneous and have enacted such simultaneity for himself” (“Introduction” 23). This proposed simultaneity can be achieved in the first instance of columns. The right hand flows with the rest of the dialogue and is almost unnoticeable. Subsequently, this use of columns can be naturalized within traditional expectations of how thought is represented in a novel, allowing readers to perceive the information as occurring at the same time.

In *Development*, as Johnson acknowledges, it is impossible for readers to comprehend the information at the same time despite the fact that the information literally occurs simultaneously. As a result, the thoughts and dialogue cannot be naturalized and perceived as coinciding. The complete separation of the two – action and thought – technically occurs simultaneously; however, its structure forces either constant breaks to read through the pieces of information and build the events as simultaneous through this stopping, or two separate read-throughs are necessary to process the information being presented. The fact that readers are aware that the two things occur at the same time, which Johnson has accomplished with the two columns, is not the same as perceiving and understanding the events as simultaneous. Retroactively understanding the events in this way does not mean that mental recall will allow the events to overlap the way the first column example does. Because Albert’s thoughts are constantly triggered by what happens around him, enacting simultaneity does not automatically lead to the

coherence Johnson, in the introduction to *Aren't You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs?*, implies.

The question then becomes which representation is more true to lived experience. The second example, where thoughts and dialogue occur at the same time textually, is a more accurate representation of the chaotic, fluid life that avoids easy symbolization. If Johnson's goal is "to coerce his readers to 'think a little further' about the cognitive roles they assume when reading narrative fiction," as James asserts (28), or to "depart from convention ... because the convention has failed, is inadequate for what I have to say," as Johnson claims ("Introduction" 19), then this representation of dialogue in a different form does that. As much as it is easier to perceive the simultaneous nature of the events depicted in the first example of column dialogue, it is not far enough away from tradition to call into question the role of the reader and the purpose of the author in the way the second example does, therefore failing to achieve the metafictional form manipulation of the second. Because the construction of the first can be naturalized, there is little attention to be paid to it, which ignores the layers of reality Johnson attempts to call into question through his use of columns.

PATTERNS AND REPETITION, PATTERNS THROUGH REPETITION,
REPETITIOUS PATTERNS

In *Disintegration*, the narrator claims that “—Faced with the enormous detail, vitality, size, of this complexity, of life, there is a great temptation for a writer to impose his own pattern, an arbitrary pattern which must falsify, cannot do anything other than falsify; or he invents, which is pure lying” (170). He continues to discuss this falsification of experience through the imposition of patterns by stating, “[l]ooking back and imposing a pattern to come to terms with the past must be avoided” because patterns, especially the traditional concept of the pattern that the narrative provides, is a part of this falsification (170). In order to illustrate this concept, Johnson includes the false imposition of patterns into his story to expose the patterns as a construct of storytelling. In *Exposition*, Albert catches the number twenty-seven bus with his father. Examining the significance of this bus, Albert thinks of all the other potential, numerated buses available to the two of them, coming to the conclusion that:

The numbers are related: the square root of nine, three, multiplied by nine, gives you seventy-seven; and seven added to three brings you back to nine again, if you take one off. Furthermore, there is a three in seventy-three. The number of these three (again!) buses running along the Hammersmith Road are not related by accident, these things are not coincidences. (26)

The pattern Albert sees in these numbers is a false imposition of a pattern onto chaos. Examples like “seven added to three brings you back to nine again, if you take one off” (26) force an order onto what happens because there is too much stretching to make the pattern work. There is no ease to this pattern. This is an example of the ways this ordering is “Lies, lies, lies” (170).

However, as much as the narrator claims the act of imposing a pattern must be avoided because of the tendency to fabricate the situation, *Albert Angelo* contains repeated fixations on specific patterns, especially evidenced through repetition. These examples add to the form of the novel and comment on the chaos itself in ways that are not falsifying events like the previous ordering.

The level to which ideas and words are repeated within the novel serves to draw attention to the concept itself and simultaneously happens so frequently that the words, sentences, phrases, and structures lose their meaning and power. The arbitrary distinctions between the meanings of words are removed with enough repetition. Words are not enough to describe the lived experience because the repetition, a form of ordering and controlling chaos, makes them lose all meaning. Albert does this to himself in the novel when he has been drinking. While examining the connotations of “plank” in comparison with “block,” Albert “thought about them until the words became meaningless to him, then ludicrous to him, then nothing to him. And he was left with wood. Wood is wood is wood, he said to himself, pleased” (133). The word “wood” repeated three “(again!)” times (26), with a similar feel to repetition throughout the whole novel, becomes meaningless then ludicrous then nothing, especially when Albert is conscious of the pattern.

In Development, the longest section split into columns, beginning on page sixty-six and ending on page ninety-nine – which, while it may be happenstance, displays a fixation on numerical patterning as both numbers are divisible by three “(again!)” (26) and eleven and ninety-nine minus sixty-six is thirty-three, which, when multiplied by three, is sixty-six – begins and ends with Albert angry with his students for disrupting his

book. At the beginning, the students come in from recess. At the end, Albert's students spill ink onto the text, he assumes with malicious intent, making it illegible. The beginning and ending occur solely in the right-hand column, signifying that the events are representations of Albert's thoughts. This repetition brings the whole section back onto itself, especially through blaming the students for Albert's inconvenience, and places an order onto the events that prevents the section from connecting to the previous or following events through this circular construction. This fragment completes itself, displaying not only the fixation on ordering that the narrator believes to be falsification but also the metafictional nature of the section through this ordering which, in its near perfection, becomes too frequent to be happenstance.

During Exposition, Albert walks to his parents' house and sees the Vicar that used to coach his youth football team. The anecdote begins and ends with the lines, "He looks the way he was looking before he saw me. I look the way I was looking before I saw him" (21, 22). This repetition creates a pattern by connecting the story, beginning and end, back onto itself, giving the story an order it would have otherwise lacked. This loop collapses time, allowing Albert to remember a childhood story while the action around him stays still. In between the repeated lines, Albert relives his experience on the team, remembering teammates and the ways he failed to follow through with his intentions as a child. The story is embarrassing. The Vicar "called us a lot of little heathens" (21) – a behavior Albert repeats as a teacher by calling his students "a lot of peasants" (149) – and Albert discusses his inability to perform at trials because he "had a wet dream the night before" (21). The repetition, by freezing time to retell two embarrassing interactions, calls into question the motives behind the physical avoidance the characters exhibit. The

repetition not only frames the encounter, bringing it back onto itself and allowing the description of events to exist outside of time, but also shows the imposition of a pattern onto a random, otherwise unexplained, encounter in the novel.

One of the earliest examples of word repetition comes in the second subsection of Prologue. The narrator describes Luke's presence in the previous subsection:

Luke was a friend to Joseph who happened to be visiting him at the time that the conversation already related took place. Joseph had oh many other friends, but on this particular occasion it happened to be Luke who happened to be visiting Joseph on the first evening of Albert's tenure of this room in Percy Circus. On the very special occasion of Albert's coming to number twenty-nine it happened to be Luke. (14)

The repetition of *happened*, occurring four times in three sentences, draws attention to the fact that no part of this is happenstance. Luke is placed in the story for a specific reason. If it were coincidental, there would be no reason to point out the coincidence with this level of repetition.

Shortly after this description of Luke's presence at Percy Circus, the second subsection of Prologue contains an extremely repetitious account of Albert's tendency to settle when considering other people and his involvement in their lives. The narrator explains that "[s]omeone lived upstairs, above Albert. Albert did not know who lived upstairs, above him. This was enough for Albert, to know that someone lived upstairs but not to know who it was that lived upstairs" (14). Prologue ends with a final repetition that "[i]t was enough, for Albert, to know that someone lived upstairs" (15). The level to which the same information is repeated, consistent with the description of Luke's placement in the novel, draws additional attention to the idea that Albert does not concern himself with identities, choosing to settle knowing the one thing he can know completely: himself and his own mind. This perspective is, for B. S. Johnson as a literary critic, the

only position an author can truthfully take. In the introduction to *Aren't You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs?*, he writes “the only thing the novelist can with any certainty call exclusively his own is the inside of his own skull” (12). For Johnson as a literary critic, the fixation on the truth of lived experience as the only thing the individual can truly reproduce should be considered the ultimately achievement of an author, the standard which he or she continually attempts to meet. In *Albert Angelo*, the same concept is not framed as something to be reached for, instead it is written in such a way as to illustrate Albert’s failures and his inability to move beyond his interest in himself.

Albert’s tendency to settle on less than what he originally aimed for is immediately repeated in the first section of Exposition as he changes his position within his parents’ lives through language, repeatedly allowing himself ways to not live up to his own self-expectations through slight manipulations of repetition phrases. Albert tells himself that he will “visit my parents every Saturday, as a rule, as a habit” (19). He shows a level of certainty in this pronouncement about his resolution by calling it a “rule” and a “habit,” both words that represent concepts that are not meant to be broken. He immediately second-guesses himself, saying, “[o]ccasionally Sundays: instead, though, not as well. But usually Saturdays, as a rule, as a habit almost” (19). The repetition of “as a rule, as a habit” continues the certainty, but he has undermined himself by using the word “almost,” re-imagining his first position and giving himself a way to compromise the position. Much as he settles on not worrying about the identities of others, Albert settles in his relationship with his parents. He settles as a supply teacher even though he professes repeatedly that his true occupation is as an architect. He constantly allows himself to avoid failure by not holding himself accountable; if he never tries, he can

never fail and feel the sting of that failure. The trend of acquiescence is illustrated not only through the repetition in these two connected moments but also in repetition throughout the novel by attempting to impose patterns until all meaning is lost.

The concept of the imposition of patterns as false ordering is not first introduced in *Disintegration*; there, the narrator debunks the concept, claiming it is falsification and unnecessary. Shortly before *Disintegration* bleeds into *Development*, Albert realizes that “[t]here was this tremendous need for man to impose a pattern on life... to turn wood into planks or blocks or whatever” and that this attempt at ordering is “paradox” because “[i]nanimate life is always moving towards disintegration, towards chaos” and that humans are “moving in the opposite direction, towards the imposition of order” (133). Albert’s understanding of the imposition of patterns explains the amount of repetition in the novel. As it progresses towards *Disintegration*, which is necessary because the novel itself and the characters therein are inanimate, there is an attempt from a human, the author, to make the chaos make sense through repetition, an attempt at patterning that becomes so excessive it fails to work. Once *Disintegration* has been reached, the “reintegration of matter” cannot be fully achieved in the story (133). Albert cannot speak and cannot think because he is not real; he is an inanimate object. He can only come back to the story to be killed.

Much like the connection between “real” and “fictional” experience, Albert’s identity is tied to his reality. Once the “realness” of Albert is exposed as false through the imposition of patterns and the meaningless repetition of words, the awareness of the construction of the novel and the role of the author in this artificial construction make it impossible for Albert to return as a “real” character. Johnson’s insistence on keeping the

events of his novels as close to truth as possible does not allow for the false imposition of patterns onto the chaos of life, a necessary evil when attempting to make sense of life to best represent it. Since the method Johnson employs to prevent the fictionalization of events illustrate the symbiotic nature of illusion and reality in the novel, it is not possible for Albert to continue his existence, even with patterns and repetition, once the truth has been exposed.

THE *HOLE* PURPOSE: OR, THE PAST STAYS PASSED

Much like the elision or “hole” in the description of why the novel is structured in the way it is, literal holes are cut into *Development* and last from page 149 to 152. On the right hand side, the “future” of the text, three lines are visible through the holes: “struggled to take back his knife, and inflicted on him a mortal wound above his right eye (the blade penetrating to a depth of two inches) from which he died instantly” (153). Immediately before the holes begin, Albert tells Terry about the rising violence in his classroom and how he intends to allow his students to process their anger. During the sequence of holed pages, Albert and Terry become inebriated, nearly getting into an altercation, and cause general mischief. The section ends with a police officer warning Albert that “any minute a drunken man might rush out of a house with a knife in his hand and stick it into the first person he saw; who might well be [Albert]” (153). This interaction allows readers to imagine another potential cause for the violence that is going to be inflicted on Albert that the holes have alluded to for several pages. The three lines that have permeated the section, however, turn out to be a description of the death of Christopher Marlowe.

While these holes add a considerable amount of tension to the story because they set up the expectation that Albert will be murdered, the relief provided in the excerpt is incomplete and short lived. Christopher Marlowe’s death is its own separate and chaotic segment with no explanation before or after that helps readers to comprehend its involvement in the story. As Waugh explains, “[t]here is also, however, another hole” because there is no explanation as to why the Marlowe passage appears in the book in the

first place (96). The entirety of the traditional narrative suspense that this moment builds toward is false, an attempt to order to chaos. Johnson describes the holes as necessary, stating that “a future event must be revealed” and the holes are “nearer to the truth” of representing this future event “so that the event may be read in its place but before the reader reaches that place” (“Introduction” 23). This explanation makes sense on the surface, but the event in question only exists in the future with respect to the layout of the novel. The death of Christopher Marlowe occurs approximately 370 years before the publication of *Albert Angelo*. In addition, because there is no explanation for why the section is in the novel in the first place, the necessity of including the excerpt is unclear because it does not further the plot in the way that is expected of the novel form.

In a broader sense, the excerpt and the holes exist to force readers to examine and question their understanding of the narrative structure of events in a novel. It is intentional to have these holes and to craft the suspense because tradition dictates that novels move closer and closer to an important, life-altering moment central to the plot; this expectation is not met and therefore forces readers to question the assumption of linearity and narrative plot in a novel.

If the right-hand-side of the novel constitutes the future of a text, the left-hand-side contains the past. Page 149 stops short of a full page even though the subsection continues onto page 150, leaving approximately two inches of white space at the bottom of the page. This typographical manipulation appears before the insertion of the holes, leaving a gap on the left hand side as the narration moves closer and closer to the stabbing. Earlier in the novel, the narrator explains that Albert thinks to himself that “[t]he past of a man’s life could always be controlled in this way, be seen to have a fixed

order because it was passed, had passed. . . . When something was passed, it was fixed, one could come to terms with it; always the process of imposing the pattern, of holding back the chaos” (133). He goes on further to assert that “Albert felt himself always . . . trying to realise in practice his theoretically absolute freedom of will, freedom from the passed” and freedom from the past (134). The sequence with the holes exhibits this freedom from the past and the fixed nature of what has passed because the past of the novel and the events that passed (in the past of the novel) are not given an opportunity to be seen repeatedly through the holes. They have no visual bearing on the present and no connection to the future. This is more than a freedom from what happened before; this is a complete removal. The lack of the past during this sequence illustrated not the tendency to impose order onto events, because the events are not there, but the illusion of the sense of time, of a linear narrative sequence, in the novel. The past cannot overlap the present and the future because the perception of the events in this order is a construct of the narrative sequence that Johnson attempts to leave behind with manipulations like the holes.

In the same way that the subsections contain no context, no past or future connections, leaving the reader to question the role of sequence in the novel, these holes are metafictional because they call into question the role of what has already happened, itself an illusion, on the events yet to be shown. The events will never change their sequence because they are represented on pages bound in a way that cannot be altered. The holes are a reminder of the fragile construct of time, itself a way to impose an order onto chaos with linguistic designations. The holes call into question the traditional construction of the novel and show the inconsistency of expecting consistency in a novel

that has the stated goal of presenting real life, an inherently chaotic and inconsistent experience.

WHERE DO *YOU* FIT IN ALL OF THIS?

As Waugh describes it, there is “a basic dilemma” in the metafictional novel that “if [the author sets out to ‘represent the world, he or she realizes fairly soon that the world, as such cannot be ‘represented’” completely because language does not allow for a complete translation of reality (3). The repeated manipulation of the pronoun *you* in the novel is an attempt to represent the role of the reader and simultaneously illustrates the failure of language to adequately describe this position. One word is used to place the reader in four different positions in the novel with extremely different purposes and expectations, drawing attention to these purposes and expectations through attention to the word’s multiple applications.

The first instance of the pronoun *you* to signify the reader’s involvement in the novel comes in the first sentence of the second section of the Prologue. The section begins by informing readers that “[t]he first thing you see about Percy Circus is that it stands most of the way up a hill, sideways, leaning up against the slope like a practised seaman” (Johnson, *Albert Angelo* 13). This statement assumes that a reader knows of Percy Circus but not necessarily well enough to have his or her own knowledge of the physical construction of it, or to remember the first thing he or she noticed, and that the reader would then need a description to make meaning of the name. The ordering of the description forces the reader’s perception of Percy Circus. Because this is the first part of Percy Circus the novel addresses, it is literally the first and only thing that *you* can see through the language used to describe it.

The section continues to force perception onto *you* as the description of Percy Circus expands. As the walkthrough of the area continues, the buildings are described as “hav[ing] patches where new London stocks show up yellow against the older blackened ones; then you know what happened to the rest of the circus” (13 – 14). This statement and its use of the pronoun *you* assumes knowledge the reader may not have and forces the *you* to understand that Percy Circus was destroyed by bombings during World War II and rebuilt later with different materials. Without this knowledge, *you* cannot have the understanding of Percy Circus that this description commands. Johnson, in his introduction to *Aren't You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs?*, states that he “want[s] [a reader] to see my (vision), not something conjured out of his imagination” (28). The description available in this section of the Prologue meets Johnson’s expectations: the intense ordering of the description of Percy Circus, especially as it directly involves the reader, does not allow for alternate imaginations. This is most effectively achieved through the use of *you* as it appears in this section because of the position within the text the reader takes on, becoming, as Waugh describes it, “an acknowledged fully active player in a new conception of literature as a collective creation rather than a monologic and authoritative version of history” (43). The reader, by being addressed as *you*, takes part in the action through an indirect conversation between narrator and reader.

The second Part of the novel, Exposition, contains a twenty-page section from the second-person perspective. It details a day in the life of Albert as he begins a new supply teaching assignment and ends with the official teacher of the class returning unexpectedly, pushing Albert back outside of the classroom. Because the entire section

takes place in the second-person perspective and the present tense, the actions and thoughts do not belong to Albert. The illusion is that the individual reader owns these and does what is described at that exact moment in the novel. Much like the details given in the Prologue about Percy Circus, this section forces the individual reader to have an interest, a level of knowledge, and a command over a situation that may not be true to the lived experience of the individual. Much of the description forces a singular perspective onto the reader, giving details about not only what *you* do, but how you feel about these actions as they are described.

As this section continues, *you* begin to interact with others in the novel, initially only through paraphrases, being denied a textual voice for a majority of the section. This is especially true as *you* are depicted interacting with adults, forcing an outsider's perspective not only as *you* are outside of the norm of this school system, but *you* as a reader are even further outside these interactions looking in, since this section makes it very clear that *you* are Albert, not the individual reader. When *you* are given a voice, it is to interact with the children in the classroom, given a verbal confidence that is immediately undermined by the internal dialogue about motivation.

The fixation in this section, since it contains primarily summaries of events, is on what Albert/*you* decide to do and the feelings associated with the decisions. The actions have an air of passivity about them, an uncertainty as a teacher being in a position of power over these students but not believing in the power because “[y]ou are not sure enough of your own standards to take the responsibility of imposing them on these children for whom they would probably be quite inappropriate” (40). The original

teacher of the class returns, the assignment ends, and the perspective shifts outside of *you*.

Later again in the Exposition, there is a four page section where *you* are the focus. This time, however, *you* are not the subject. Albert, the *I* in stark opposition to *you*, lectures to his students, a broad audience with multiple subjects described by this *you*. The *you* is no longer a single individual, as it has been treated previously throughout the novel. Albert speaks with authority on the subject of God and how incorrect it is to believe in something “[y]ou cannot, I cannot, no one can *know*, truly *know*” (56). The authority he assumes rings false when contrasted with the inner knowledge the reader gains from the earlier position inside Albert’s mind because Albert doubts himself, his profession, and his appropriateness within this profession. As Albert encourages students to question God, this also “flaunt[s]... the author’s godlike role” in the novel and “establishes the categorization of the world through the arbitrary system of language” (Waugh 24). God’s role in society is arbitrary, much like Albert’s position of power, much like the reader’s placement as an individual student in an audience of students, much like the whole reality of the novel, as it is a stand-in for Johnson’s perceived truth.

The fourth primary shift in the manipulation of perspective as illustrated by the word *you* appears in the Disintegration of the novel. *You* now describes the individual reader who is currently engaged in the act of reading the novel, but it is still a generalized individual without respect to lived experience. Disintegration, and the whole novel as described in this section, exists for the individual reader because Johnson-as-narrator is “trying to tell you something of what I feel about being a poet in a world where only poets care anything about real poetry” (168). The reader, as a disambiguation, has been

the intended audience the whole time, an audience that is perceived as wanting a story while simultaneously seeing how “ill-fitting at many places, many places” the illusion of the story is to the message being conveyed (168). Johnson-as-narrator also acknowledges that ending the novel with the disintegration would be insufficient for the reader, for *you* because “even I (even I!) would not leave such a mess, such a mess, so many loose ends, clear up the mess, bury the loose ends, the lot...” (176). In this section, Johnson-as-narrator attempts to “[break] down the conventions that separate authors from implied authors from narrators from implied readers from readers,” as Waugh describes, but also sees that abandoning the traditions in their entirety would leave everything undone (134). The implication is that, without the final act that completes the story, the reader, *you*, would be dissatisfied with the false story as a whole, even as it has already been pointed out as false.

“OH, FUCK ALL THIS LYING!”: AN EXAMINATION OF REALITY

At the heart of *Albert Angelo* is the recurring connection between architecture and poetry, and as a result the question of what makes something real, pushes the inanimate story towards disintegration. Waugh explains that the concept of “reality” is a central concern of metafictional authors because it “brings the reader up against the paradoxical realization that normally we can read novels only because of our suspension of disbelief” but metafictional texts, “instead of reinforcing our sense of a continuous reality, ... expose the levels of illusion. We are forced to recall that our ‘real’ world can never be the ‘real’ world of the novel” (33). To continually draw attention to this paradox, Johnson introduces a connection between the “real” profession of the protagonist, an architect who uses supply teaching as a means to an end, and the role of poetry in society at a time when Johnson considered himself to be a poet.

Prologue’s opening sequence introduces the difficult concept of defining what is real, a concept that is vital to the book. Albert, when asked what he does for a living, replies that he is an architect. He corrects himself immediately, noting, “I’m a teacher really, but I want to be an architect” (12). This correction stresses the idea of “real” as stemming from what one does to pay the bills, not what one more desires to do. Albert again immediately corrects himself, saying, “No, that’s the wrong way round, I’m an architect but I have to earn my living by teaching” (12). Here, Albert does not qualify his desire by stressing it as real. He simply is an architect. The use of the phrase “have to” stresses the begrudging nature of income-based employment. Albert has no passion for teaching and therefore cannot claim it to be a piece of himself. But he is also not really

an architect, in the way he is “really” a teacher for a brief moment, because this clarification has been willfully omitted in the rephrasing. The issue of what is real undergirds the entire story and becomes more apparent in the Disintegration when Johnson-as-narrator inserts himself into the action.

This perseveration on what is real and what is not continues in this conversation as Albert tries to justify his assertion that he is an architect to Luke. He tells Luke that he has not yet designed any buildings “that have actually been built” (13). He “just design[s] them” (13). The use of the word just can be read both dismissively and, especially taking Albert’s claim that “[y]ou have to do something for its own sake,” positively (13). “Just” implies that there is nothing more, no value to what is being done, much like Albert’s initial claim that he is “a teacher really” because it pays his bills and therefore is more real. Yet, when considered with the assertion that something must be done for the sake of doing that thing, Albert attempts to give value to an act which is otherwise dismissed by his peers in this conversation. The nonmonetary value is key to understanding metafictional texts because, if not done for its own sake at least, there is very little money to be earned from creating a text that has the potential to alienate readers the way this novel does.

The conversation continues to draw in vital concepts later addressed in Disintegration, especially the connection between Albert as an architect being a thin mask for Johnson as a narrator. This is an explicit connection made between Albert’s architecture designs and the role the poet lays. Luke clarifies Joseph’s point that Albert’s buildings will all be built “When you’re dead” by saying “Like poets, after they’re dead” (13). Albert confirms this understanding of his work by saying, “Like poets, just” (13).

Creating buildings in abstraction, drawings, with the faith that they will all be built after the architect is dead is “just” like a poet. This connection, for the most part left alone in the novel until *Disintegration*, indicates the ways “reality” is constructed throughout *Albert Angelo*.

Luke’s follow up comment and Albert’s response to it also illustrate the dismissal of acts that do not serve a monetary purpose and are not as “real” as those that would. Luke points out that it seem useless for a building to be built and, by implication, a poem to be published, posthumously because “when you’re dead you’re fucking dead, aren’t you?” (13). The section ends here. The connection between Albert and poetry, however, implies that passions and actions matter more than just the monetary value they produce for the artist during his life. Much like Albert does his drawings “for [their] own sake” and has faith that “one day they’ll all be built,” (13) so, too, do these acts continue to have significance after death.

Whenever Albert discusses his profession, it is with the insistence that he is really an architect-in-teacher’s clothing. When his mother suggests that he should consider finding a permanent job as a teacher, Albert “answer[s] her question has [he has] answered it many times before: [he is] an architect, not a teacher, and [he] will not tie [him]self to a term’s notice even though it does mean the insecurity and constant changing of schools involved in supply work” (23). To take a permanent position as a teacher would be to accept that his “real” profession is not architect and to admit, on some level, failure and a loss of his identity.

Even when Albert chooses to play with the idea of accepting a new name and persona, he refuses to call himself anything other than architect. He considers the concept

of “play[ing] the identities game,” assuming a different name at each pub he attends and getting “a different identity” in the process, “[b]ut [he] should always want to be known as an architect, to preserve this essential [him]self, [his] identity, [his] character” (115). He further asserts that “[he] must be taken for nothing but an architect; to preserve [him]self” as he places himself in different positions in different establishments (116). Even though he is willing to carry a different name, the act of changing names does not carry with it the same weight on his identity as his calling, his would-be profession. All of this becomes connected to the concept of the “character” he clings to. In the one sense, this character is who he is as an individual and how he behaves as dictated by his beliefs. The secondary meaning of character, a person in a novel or play, is also present in this identity game. Regardless of his name, Albert is constantly presented as an architect, and, without this one connection to a consistent, stabilizing reality, he would not be a recognizable figure in this novel.

Albert’s character is tied to architecture earlier in the novel before he speaks with his mother about being a professional teacher. As he describes his childhood home, he notes that he “used to use it as a permanent set in [his] film day-dreams and acts: [he] would make exists and entrances and imagine a vast audience watching every movement [he] made. This behaving as though an audience were watching has become part of [him], is [his] character, is [him], and on one level [he is] always thinking and acting in a film for such a film audience” (22). Albert maintains a dual life in which he sees himself as behaving in front of a film audience at all times, and the setting of this reality is a specific kind of architecture. There is another layer to this in which Albert only exists because other people view him in the novel. As much as the bound pages of the novel stay bound,

Albert only becomes a moving character in them as the audience of readers consumes the words on the page and “sees” his actions.

At the end of *Development*, this connection between architecture and poetry becomes shattered by the insertion of Johnson-as-narrator into the story. As Albert attempts to use his drawing board once more, there is an interruption, a new voice shouting, “OH, FUCK ALL THIS LYING!” abruptly severing the connection of Albert to the story (163). Disintegration begins with a repetition of this sentiment and the insistence that “what im really trying to write about is writing not all this stuff about architecture trying to say something about writing about my writing im my hero though what a useless appellation my first character then im trying to say something about me through him albert an architect” (167). This new voice, Johnson-as-narrator, insists that “I’m trying to tell you something of what I feel about being a poet in a world where only poets care anything about poetry” but that this connection between architecture and poetry is something “you cannot have failed to see cracking, ill-fitting at many places” (168). He lists many of the perceived differences of architecture and poetry – the ability to earn a living wage and the “functional aspect” of architecture – before settling on the primary distinction: “simply, architecture is just not poetry” (168). Here, Johnson-as-narrator spells out the truth of the novel, the connection between what is “real” and what is illusion manipulated to appear real for the story.

Johnson-as-narrator and B. S. Johnson the author, however, cannot be the same person. On a basic level, B. S. Johnson the author has transformed himself into the symbolic world of the novel, making a version of himself into a character who asserts the reality of lived experience onto another character, all the while constantly drawing

attention to the fact that this narrator is no more real than Albert because, like Albert, he only exists for a duration of pages – Disintegration – and is the linguistic representation of an author who exists outside the text.

The discussion of the idea of reality and, directly tied to it for Johnson, truth in *Albert Angelo* illustrates the ways in which the novel form can never achieve the perfect representation for which he strives. In theory, the closer an author can get to an exact representation of lived experience, the more the novel will be a truthful representation of that experience. In practice, however, the layers of truth only serve to add to the fragmented and incomplete representation, showing how no attempt can be fully naturalized in the novel because of the symbolization inherent in the transcription of reality into text. As much as an author might try to reproduce reality exactly, the representation can never be achieved because, like the most significant difference between architecture and poetry, they are not the same on a basic level. This dilemma cannot be satisfied at any point in *Albert Angelo* since reality and novels are not the same, no matter how many attempts are made to transcribe reality into the novel form.

CONCLUSION

Albert Angelo is a highly metafictional text. Its fixation on the concept of reality, while not unique in the broader context of metafiction, is achieved primarily through Johnson's manipulation of the three things he, as a theorist, claims the novel form does more effectively than film: "the precise use of language, exploitation of the technological fact of the book, the explication of thought" ("Introduction" 12). Using his examinations of his own work and his critical theories, it becomes clear that *Albert Angelo*, Johnson's first novelistic attempt to push the novel form beyond tradition to establish a continued relevance, does not quite accomplish what Johnson states was his goal. Reality can never be entirely and truthfully reproduced in the novel form because reality and novels are not the same; while the product is fascinating, manipulating the structure of the novel cannot fully reproduce the *truth* of lived experience.

For all that Johnson insisted that the lived experience of the individual author is the only available fodder for the representation of truth in the novel, he published two fictional novels – *House Mother Novel: A Geriatric Comedy* and *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry* – that continue to complete the three most important tasks of the novel according to Johnson and call into question the role of reality in the novel form. *House Mother Normal* attempts to represent the instability of individual reality through form manipulations. Each character experiences the same events at the same textual moment on the page but, depending on the individuals' stated ability to process the events, the textual representations vary wildly. *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry* illustrates the layers of reality through the narrator's intrusion at all levels into the story, a technique

Johnson first attempted in *Albert Angelo*. In his career, Johnson never moved away from his central concern: how can the author best represent lived experience in the novel form? As evidenced through his different works, it is a question he was unable to answer satisfactorily before his suicide in 1973.

Further critical study is needed that situates B. S. Johnson's works with less traditional uses of metafiction, especially from authors with multiple cultural experiences. Since the idea of what constitutes reality – and how the author can best represent the multiplicity of lived experience in the novel form – is one unifying trend of metafictional novels, an examination of Johnson's techniques and critical theories that looks beyond his own works would serve to illustrate the success of Johnson's critical perspectives in multiple cultural spaces. In turn, this would allow Johnson's examinations of the failure of the traditional novel form to maintain its relevance in current metafiction, where more and more authors exploit the technological fact of the book for different purposes than those that suited Johnson's lived experience.

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