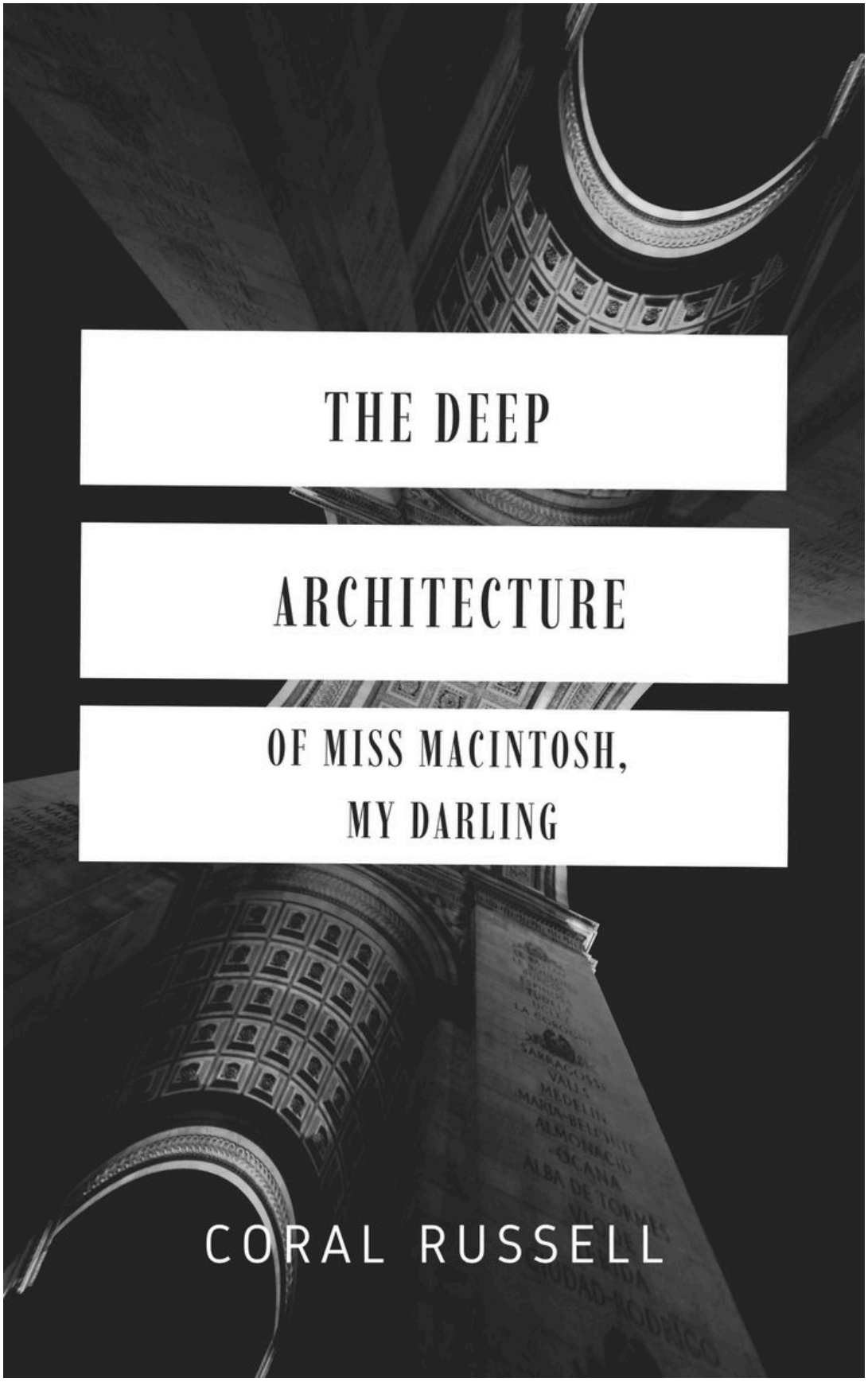
THE DEEP
ARCHITECTURE
OF MISS MACINTOSH,
MY DARLING
CORAL RUSSELL

The Deep Architecture of Miss MacIntosh, My Darling

Coral Russell

The Marguerite Young Society
marguerite-young-society.coralrussellbooks.workers.dev
Updated November 18, 2026
© 2026 Coral Russell

Contents

Reading Miss MacIntosh, My Darling for Its Structure 5

Movement One: The Wheel Itself 9

The Wheel and the Spokes 10

The Wheel of Fortune 13

Each Clock Stopped at a Different Hour: Time, Wound, and the Architecture of the Cartwheel House 16

Movement Two: The Pillars in the Traditions 20

The Problem of Universals 21

Philosophy as Structural Material 24

Flipping the Cave 27

Intertextuality as Construction Method 32

The Poetry as Architecture 35

History as Contested Ground 38

The Feminist Architecture 41

The Religious Architecture 44

The Butterfly's Dream: Zhuangzi, Maya, and the Other Shore 48

The Comic Architecture 53

Movement Three: The Cosmological Layer 56

All Reality Is Musical 57

The Lower World and the Upper World 61

The Garden, the Stream, and the Blind God 65

The World as Will: Schopenhauer and the Architecture of Mr. Spitzer 73

Not the Overman: Young's Corrections to Nietzsche in Miss MacIntosh, My Darling 79

Movement Four: The Formal Devices 84

The Sentence Is the Argument 85

The Grey Goose Bus as Cosmic Vehicle 89

The Windmill in the Flooded Field 94

Nearly Four Thousand Questions 99

The Search for Life, for Love, for Truth That Does Not Fail 103

What the Names Know 109

Birds of Passage, Birds of Omen 115

The Wig, the Umbrella, and the Mirror 119

Movement Five: The Traditions the Novel Absorbs **123**

The Ocean's Love to Cynthia 124

The Glittering Eye: The Ancient Mariner as Structural Model in Miss MacIntosh, My Darling 130

The Thousand Nights: Scheherazade and the Survival Structure of Miss MacIntosh, My Darling 134

Three Journeys Without Arrival: Dante, Bunyan, and the Bus in Miss MacIntosh, My Darling 137

Married to the Movement: Cousin Hannah and the Tradition of the Warrior Woman 142

Childe Roland to the Dark Tower: The Architecture of Arrival Without Entry 145

The Pale Don Juan: Cousin Hannah at the Threshold of Death 149

That Man Who Was Herself: Lady Macbeth and the Theater of Guilt in Miss MacIntosh, My Darling 152

Lovers Never Mated: The Doomed-Love Tradition in Miss MacIntosh, My Darling 156

The Grief You Are Wearing: Mr. Spitzer and the Twin Architecture 160

The Red King's Dream: Alice in the Cartwheel House 164

Nocturnal America: Poe, Melville, Whitman, and the American Writers 168

Movement Six: What the Novel Teaches **172**

The Impossible Artist 173

The Novel as Classroom 176

The Colony Under No Flag 179

Whatever Is Average Is the Dream 181

What Had Become of the Color Line: Society, Class, and Race 184

Survival in the Fragile House 189

Reading Miss MacIntosh, My Darling for Its Structure

Chapters discussed: 1, 2, 6, 19, 65, 70

Reading Miss MacIntosh, My Darling for Its Structure

Marguerite Young was a student of Ronald S. Crane at the University of Chicago. Crane was a professor of English and a leader of the Chicago critics, who read a novel as a made thing, built like a poem. His own essay on Fielding, “The Concept of Plot and the Plot of Tom Jones” (1950), is still one of the best-known studies of how that novel is built. He gave his students an assignment that Young described in two interviews more than twenty years apart: the class read Tom Jones thirteen times to study its structure. Both times the count is thirteen.

From the Dalkey Archive interview:

> *We read Tom Jones thirteen times, doing an intricate study of its structure. Nothing could have been more valuable for my own writing, although it was one time more than I cared to read Tom Jones.*
>
> Marguerite Young, in Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs, “A Conversation with Marguerite Young,” *Review of Contemporary Fiction* (Fall 1989)

From the Roy Newquist interview:

> *We read Tom Jones thirteen times for its poetic structure. I have been grateful all my life for this beautiful discipline, for the adventure of spirit in regarding the novel as a poem and not merely a realistic or naturalistic document of some kind.*
>
> Marguerite Young, in Roy Newquist, *Conversations* (Rand McNally, 1967)

Henry Fielding's Tom Jones (1749) is one of the first great comic novels in English, organized around a structural principle that its surface actively conceals: everything that appears to be a digression is load-bearing, every subplot returns to the main plot, and the apparent disorder of the narrative conceals a meticulous architecture of cause and consequence beneath it. You cannot see this architecture on a first reading. You can barely see it on a third. Crane assigned thirteen readings because the structure of Tom Jones does not become fully visible until the reader has accumulated enough familiarity with every element to see how each element relates to every other.

Young absorbed this principle and spent eighteen years applying it to a novel that looks nothing like Tom Jones. Miss MacIntosh, My Darling has no ironic prefatory essays calling attention to its architecture. It does not announce its structure. It moves in spirals and returns and accumulations that feel, on a first reading, like digression. This is intentional. Young built a novel whose deep architecture is invisible until the reader has spent enough time inside it to begin to see how it is organized.

This series of chapters is the record of one reader spending enough time inside it.

What Young Said About the Structure

Young described the novel's architecture directly in the Dalkey Archive interview. The description is the clearest statement of structural intent she ever made about Miss MacIntosh, My Darling:

> *She is the central character with all the spokes of other characters radiating out from her. I always thought of Miss MacIntosh as the center of the wheel, the hub, then the spokes as the subsidiary, secondary characters, and the wheel as endlessly expanding like a universe.*
>
> Marguerite Young, in Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs, “A Conversation with Marguerite Young,” *Review of Contemporary Fiction* (Fall 1989)

The wheel with Miss MacIntosh at the hub and the other characters as spokes is the architect's description of the blueprint. Young did not offer this as an interpretation of the novel. She offered it as a description of how she built it. The chapters that follow take this description as their starting point and ask what the wheel actually contains: what the spokes are made of, what the hub's absence means when Miss MacIntosh is already gone from Vera's life on the novel's first pages, and what holds the wheel together when the center is gone.

Young also described the novel's structural tradition. When asked in the Dalkey Archive interview whether she considered herself experimental, she said:

> *I see myself as traditional even though I know you see my work as experimental. I don't really consider Sterne, Joyce, and Proust experimental either because the tradition of their writing goes back a long way. Traditional. The Grand Tradition. Clear back to Don Quixote.*
>
> Marguerite Young, in Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs, “A Conversation with Marguerite Young,” *Review of Contemporary Fiction* (Fall 1989)

And when asked why the novel has no beginning, middle, or end:

> *Because life has no beginning, middle or end.*
>
> Marguerite Young, in Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs, “A Conversation with Marguerite Young,” *Review of Contemporary Fiction* (Fall 1989)

These statements together define the project these chapters undertake. The novel is traditional, not experimental: its roots run back through Sterne and Cervantes to the oldest narrative traditions in the language. It has no beginning, middle, or end because it was built on a structural principle, the wheel, the hub-and-spoke, that does not depend on linear progression. And it was built by a writer who had been trained to read a novel thirteen times before she trusted her understanding of how it was constructed.

Tom Jones gave Young the hidden plan of a long book. Her master's thesis gave her its creatures. She finished her master's degree in English at the University of Chicago in 1936 with a study of the “various moral and social meanings of the birds and beasts in John Lyly's Euphues and related works” (Constance Eichenlaub, Review of Contemporary

Fiction, 2000). Lyly's Euphues (1578) and Euphues and His England (1580) gave English the word euphuism: a prose of balanced opposites and heaped comparisons, with moral lessons drawn from stones, plants, birds, and beasts out of the old natural histories. Young told Charles Ruas in the Paris Review, “I had to study the history of every bird and beast there ever was.” She kept the habit all her life: “I am interested in the birds and the beasts for their symbolic value,” “their value as icons, as ways of saying things about people.”

You can hear Lyly in the novel. Chapter 40 uses the proverb often traced to Euphues, “all was fair in love and war,” and the book is full of his kind of creatures: the bus driver who would “rule over the peacocks and the pelicans and the polar bears” (Chapter 8), the Kirtland's warbler of Miss MacIntosh's lessons (Chapter 22). The difference is what Young does with the form. Lyly's balanced opposites close on a moral. Young's stay open. She learned to think in emblems and then built a book in which the emblems never settle into one meaning (see Master Class 15, The Symbolism).

What This Series Does

The Deep Architecture series examines the novel's structural foundations: the philosophical and literary traditions Young embedded in the novel's architecture, the formal devices she used at the sentence and chapter level, and the patterns that become visible only across the novel's full length.

The chapters are organized by layer rather than by the order of the novel's chapters, in six Movements. Movement One looks at the wheel itself. Movement Two follows the pillars through philosophy, history, poetry, feminism, religion, and comedy. Movement Three takes up the cosmic layer: music, Dante's lower and upper worlds, William James, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche. Movement Four looks at the formal devices: the Grey Goose bus, the windmill, the question mark, the quest that runs back four thousand years, and the names Young gave her characters. Movement Five traces the traditions the novel absorbs, from Raleigh and the Ancient Mariner to Scheherazade, Lady Macbeth, and Childe Roland. Movement Six asks what the novel teaches.

The pillars of Radical Immanence are named where the frame calls for them: in Movement Two, which follows the pillars through the traditions, and in the closing Radical Immanence Reading of an essay. Elsewhere the passages speak for themselves, and the pillars each essay touches are listed at the top of its page. For each pillar traced chapter by chapter through the whole novel, see The Wheel and the Spokes.

None of these structural elements are announced in the novel. Young did not label her chapters with their Dantean canticle or their Boethian musical category. She placed the derelict windmill in a flooded field in Chapter 6 and did not return to it explicitly until Chapter 19, and did not name Miss MacIntosh a windmill chaser until Chapter 65. She gave the Egyptian sailor directions through the labyrinth in Chapter 2 and did not name the minotaur as something not to fear until midway through those directions. She put the question mark in the novel nearly 4,000 times and distributed it in patterns that only become visible when counted.

This is what thirteen readings of Tom Jones taught her to do: to build a structure that the reader cannot see on the first encounter, that accumulates across the full length of the work, and that rewards the reader who stays long enough to feel its weight.

A Note on Evidence

Every architectural claim in this series is grounded in the novel. The series draws on Young's interviews and essays throughout, especially the Dalkey Archive interview with Fuchs and Friedman, the Roy Newquist interview, the Charles Ruas interview, and the essays collected in Inviting the Muses. Young spoke clearly about her work when asked the right questions. The interviews are primary sources and are treated as such.

The series also draws on direct analysis of the novel, including counts of the question mark distribution across all 82 chapters, word-by-word searches for motifs and allusions, and close reading of passages whose structural significance became apparent only through the accumulation of related findings elsewhere in the novel.

This is, in other words, an attempt to read Miss MacIntosh, My Darling the way Ronald Crane read Tom Jones with his students at the University of Chicago. Not thirteen times. But enough times to begin to see what Young built.

Young's Own Final Word on How to Read It

In her last conversation with Miriam Fuchs, at St. Vincent's Hospital in New York in June 1993, Fuchs asked Young how she would advise people to read Miss MacIntosh, My Darling. Young said they should not take it so seriously. They should read it for the humor.

Then she said:

> *They can always read it again, if they like it. At different periods in your life you see a different book.*
>
> Marguerite Young, in Miriam Fuchs, “A Brief Conversation with Marguerite Young,” St. Vincent's Hospital, New York, June 1, 1993, in *Marguerite Young, Our Darling* (Dalkey Archive Press, 1994)

The Deep Architecture series is one reader's account of what becomes visible after many readings, at one time of life, in one place. Other readers at other periods will see other books. Young expected this. She built the wheel so that each spoke could be entered from the rim, and the center would look different depending on where you stood.

The door is open. Come in.

Movement One: The Wheel Itself

The Wheel and the Spokes

Pillars: Pillar 1 (Not One Self) · Pillar 11 (The Crossing Point)

Chapters discussed: 13, 49, 51

Young's Own Structural Metaphor and the Novel as Radial Architecture

Young Speaks

Marguerite Young described the structure of Miss MacIntosh, My Darling in her own words, in interviews, and the description is clear: the characters are the spokes of a wheel with Miss MacIntosh at the center. This is not a critic's retrospective metaphor. It is the architect describing the blueprint. And it is a description that, once heard, reorganizes everything about how the novel is read.

Young used the image in her 1988 conversation with Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs, and it runs through Susan Neville's late profile of her, “Where the Landscape Moved Like Waves.” Young returned to this image when asked to explain what she had built. The wheel was her word for it. The spoke was her word for each character. Miss MacIntosh, the practical nursemaid from What Cheer, Iowa, who is already gone when the novel opens and whose walk into the ocean Vera tells only in Chapter 65, is not a character among characters. She is the hub. She is the structural center around which every other life in the novel rotates.

What the wheel metaphor does that linear narrative metaphors cannot: it explains why the novel can be 1,198 pages long without feeling like it is going somewhere in the conventional sense. A spoke does not go anywhere. A spoke rotates. Each character in Miss MacIntosh, My Darling is in motion relative to the center, but the motion is circular rather than progressive. The novel does not build toward a climax. It accumulates revolutions. Each chapter adds another arc of a character's orbit around the absent center.

Radical Immanence borrows the same wheel. Its ideas are named as the Eleven Pillars, but in the novel they move like spokes: ten of them turning through every chapter, and the eleventh, the Crossing Point, at the hub. Young's characters carry those ideas around the wheel.

Hegel and the Circle of Circles

Beside Young's wheel metaphor a second structural image sits: Hegel's description of philosophy as “a circle of circles” (*Encyclopaedia Logic*, section 15). The Hegelian circle of circles describes a philosophical system in which each concept is itself a whole, and the whole is a system of wholes, each internally complete and each in relation to all the others.

This maps onto the novel's structure with remarkable precision. Each character in Miss MacIntosh is a world complete in itself. Catherine Cartwheel's chapters are not

interruptions of Vera's quest; they are their own cosmos, their own accumulation of grief and illusion and history. Mr. Spitzer's meditation on love and death and the silent music he composes for an audience of the dead is not subordinate to any other narrative thread; it is complete in itself. Esther Longtree's perpetual pregnancy and her stillborn children are not a subplot; they are a world, existing fully alongside every other world in the novel.

The wheel and the circle of circles are the same structure described at different scales. The wheel describes the spatial relationship of the characters to the absent center. The circle of circles describes the internal organization of each character's consciousness: each is itself a world, and the novel holds all of them simultaneously, in the same way that Hegel's system holds each concept simultaneously as part and as whole.

Young was not illustrating Hegel. She arrived at the same structural principle through her own eighteen years of building. But the principle has a name in the tradition she was reading, the tradition of the Symposium and Boethius and James, and the name helps a reader see what she built.

What the Hub's Absence Does

The most architecturally significant fact about the wheel metaphor is what it implies about Miss MacIntosh herself. If she is the hub, and she is already gone when the novel opens, with Vera searching for her from the first page, then the novel is a wheel rotating around an empty center. The spokes are in motion. The hub is gone.

This is not a flaw in the structure. It is the structure's central argument. Every character in the novel is organized by their relationship to something that is no longer there. Vera's quest is literally the search for Miss MacIntosh, for What Cheer, Iowa, for the stable reality that Miss MacIntosh represented. Catherine's opium dreams are the inverse: an alternative hub, an imaginary center of her own, built in the same house where Miss MacIntosh held to plain fact. Mr. Spitzer's endless meditations on love and death are the orbits of a spoke that has lost its center and keeps moving anyway, composing music for no one, practicing law in courts that may not exist, faithful to the structural motion of his orbit even though what he orbits is gone.

The wheel with the missing hub is also Young's philosophical argument about the self. The plural self cannot be unified around a single center because the center the self was organized around is always already lost. Miss MacIntosh's certainty rests on her wig. The wig comes off in Chapter 63. The spokes keep rotating because that is what spokes do: they rotate. What they rotate around after the hub is gone is the memory of the hub, the absence of the hub, the shape of the space where the hub was.

This is also where the crossing point sits. With the hub gone, what holds the wheel is the place where the spokes cross. Mr. Spitzer wonders whether he and his dead brother were one and the same, “one and the same shining in the morning, evening, pricking through clouds with star rays which trembled, turning like the wavering spokes of a wheel through light as through darkness.” The self in this novel is not the center of the wheel. It is the crossing, made of what passes through it and passing it on.

Young finds the whole wheel in its smallest part, too. In Chapter 49, as Mr. Spitzer hears bells ringing as if all music might be heard at once, “A great city was enclosed inside a pebble.” Two chapters later he gives a voice “even to a city roaring inside a pebble” (Chapter 51). Gottfried Leibniz, the German philosopher who died in 1716, pictured the world as made of tiny units he called monads, each one “a perpetual living mirror of the universe” (*Monadology*, section 56, translated by Robert Latta, 1898). Young does not name him, and she puts the idea in her own words. But the pebble works the same way: each small thing in the novel holds the whole of it, the way each spoke holds the shape of the wheel.

Esther and Mr. Spitzer as Poles

Young called Esther Longtree, who appears in the novel's last chapters, Mr. Spitzer's “feminine counterpart” and “the mother of us all,” quoting Gertrude Stein (Friedman and Fuchs, 1989). Together they are the wheel's outermost poles: the two spokes that are furthest from each other while remaining attached to the same center.

Esther Longtree is perpetually pregnant, perpetually losing her children to stillbirth, perpetually carrying what cannot be born. Mr. Spitzer is perpetually composing music that cannot be heard, practicing law in courts that may not exist, faithful to a twin brother who is dead and to a love he never declared. Between them: all the other spokes, all the other characters, all the other orbits. The wheel turns. The hub is absent. The spokes keep their distance from each other and their attachment to the missing center.

The novel's last movement is Vera's arrival in Indiana, the heart of the Middle West, where she encounters Esther and the stone deaf man she falls in love with. The quest that began with the loss of Miss MacIntosh ends not with the recovery of the center but with Vera accepting her place as one of the spokes. She has found the mother of us all. She has completed her orbit. The wheel does not stop turning.

Reading with the Wheel in Mind

Knowing Young's wheel metaphor changes what a reader looks for and what a reader notices. The novel is not a linear narrative that has gone wrong by being too long and too circular. It is a radial structure that is exactly the right length for what it is: a system in which each spoke completes enough of its orbit to demonstrate that the orbit is real, and that the center it orbits is gone, and that the motion continues anyway.

The question the novel asks at the level of its whole structure is the same question it asks at the level of every character's interior: how does a consciousness organize itself when the organizing principle has been removed? The spokes answer: by continuing to rotate. By staying in motion relative to the empty center. By accumulating the memory of the hub in the very structure of the orbit.

That is the wheel. That is the novel. Young built it in eighteen years and described it in one word: spokes.

The Wheel of Fortune

Pillars: Pillar 1 (Not One Self) · Pillar 2 (Reality Is Constructed) · Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End) · Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act) · Pillar 5 (Build Anyway, Knowing It's Temporary)

Boethius wrote *The Consolation of Philosophy* in prison while awaiting execution. Lady Philosophy appeared to him and explained, among other things, the nature of Fortune: that she turns her wheel as she pleases, that the high are brought low and the low raised up, and that this turning is not cruelty but the fundamental condition of temporal existence. The wheel does not break the wise person because the wise person does not mistake Fortune's gifts for permanent possessions. What rises must fall. What falls was always going to fall. The wheel keeps turning whether we watch it or not.

Marguerite Young knew this work. She knew the medieval literary tradition that carried it forward, through Dante, through Chaucer, through the long river of Western letters that treated the Wheel of Fortune not as a metaphor but as a diagram of how time actually works. She built that diagram into *Miss MacIntosh, My Darling* from the first page to the last, not as decoration or allusion, but as architecture. The Wheel is not something Young refers to. It is something she constructs the novel around, turning it through each of her philosophical pillars until the wheel and the novel become indistinguishable from each other.

The clearest sign that this is structural rather than ornamental is that Young encodes it in Vera's name in the first chapter. Vera Cartwheel. The name announces the novel's central preoccupation on its first pages: Vera, from the Latin for truth, attached to a wheel. Truth is a wheel. It turns. It does not stay. The self that seeks truth is herself part of the turning, cannot step outside it to observe from a safe distance, cannot stop the wheel to get a better look. Young names Vera after the problem the novel is going to spend 1,198 pages not solving, because the Wheel of Fortune is not a problem that gets solved. It is the condition within which everything else happens.

The wheel does its most obvious work inside the self. In the Boethian framework, Fortune's wheel is impersonal: it does not turn for you specifically, it simply turns, and you happen to be on it. Young extends this logic inward. The self is not a fixed point around which fortune revolves; the self is itself multiple, turning, constituted by contradiction. When Vera, telling of Madge Capehorn shaking the dust out of her coat on the bus, says that life must always have "these double motions like the progressions of delicate planets, circles within circles, wheels within wheels, orbs within orbs," she is not describing the external universe. She is describing the interior one. The self contains its own wheels within wheels, its own orbits that do not resolve into a single center. Mr. Spitzer is the clearest embodiment of this: he is always between two streams, unable to decide which way to turn, "undecided which way to turn, unable to stand still," his identity perpetually suspended in the moment before the wheel completes its revolution. The plural self is not a philosophical position Young's characters hold. It is the mechanical condition they

cannot escape because they are made of the same stuff as Fortune's wheel: turning, multiple, never arriving.

Young also asks what we actually see when we watch the wheel turn. The rusted ferris wheel appears early in the novel, in Catherine's imagined drive toward Alaska with James at the wheel, a journey that never arrives: "the ferris wheel rusted against the sky, wheel which might be only a circle of sea birds." This is not whimsy. It is Young's claim about seeing: the wheel we see is always also something else, always already transformed by the perceiving mind into something the mind needs it to be. The ferris wheel rusted against the poverty sky is the Wheel of Fortune stripped of its grandeur, turned mundane and corroded, and yet still capable of becoming birds, becoming motion, becoming something other than what it materially is. Mr. Spitzer's watch, that jeweled instrument that marks "the hours, the minutes, the seconds, the days, the nights, the years, the revolutions of the planets around the sun," is itself described as "a starry wheel," making the measurement of time and the celestial mechanics of time into the same object, collapsing the practical and the cosmic into one thing held in one hand. Illusion is not the opposite of the wheel's turning. Illusion is how we survive the turning, the layer of perception that translates raw cyclical fate into something livable, something temporarily meaningful, something we can call home before the wheel takes it away.

Grief is where the Wheel of Fortune finds its emotional grammar in the novel. In Boethius, Fortune's wheel produces grief because we attach to what it gives us and mourn when the wheel turns and takes it back. Young does not disagree with this, but she goes further: the grief does not end when we learn detachment. The grief is structural. The wheel broken at the cistern, an image drawn from Ecclesiastes into the fabric of the novel, names the grief not as a response to loss but as a permanent condition inscribed in the universe itself. The golden bowl broken. The wheel broken. These are not events that happened once. They are the description of how things are. The bus-driver's endless rounds through rain and darkness, his fat shoulders sloping over the wheel as he sleeps and drives, are not a metaphor for a life that once had meaning and lost it. They are the image of consciousness itself continuing after the wheel has broken, continuing because it has no other option, because the turning does not stop simply because the mechanism is rusted and the amusement park is empty and nobody is watching. Grief as permanent weather means the wheel keeps turning even when everyone has gone home.

Witnessing is what makes the Wheel of Fortune bearable in Young's novel, and it works here through the distinction between the wheel of chance and the wheel of cosmic order. Mr. Spitzer explicitly distinguishes between them: "the only implacable law was the divine law, the heavenly harmony, that which kept the planets in their course, that which controlled, with mathematical accuracy, the falling stars, the music of the spheres, the silent music, that which was not based on the roulette wheel stopping or games of chance, such as the marked cards, the loaded dice." His dead brother Peron had given himself to "the wastrel wheels of chance, the games of loaded dice, the croupiers," and it destroyed him. The witness does not play the roulette wheel. The witness observes the larger turning, the one that cannot be cheated, the one that produces the silent music rather than the noise of the gambling hall. This is not detachment in the Buddhist sense; it

is a different quality of attention, one that can hold the wheel in view without trying to stop it, without betting on where it will land, without requiring the wheel to validate the self that is watching. The witness position is what allows grief to be permanent weather rather than permanent crisis.

Young's use of the Wheel of Fortune is boldest in the novel's form. The great potter who is looking the other way when some of them are turned upon the wheel, watching a flight of red-winged blackbirds instead of attending to his work, is one of the novel's most devastating images of how creation proceeds: not through deliberate intention but through recursive inattention, through the wheel turning while the maker's gaze is elsewhere. The wheel of blackbirds that becomes a wheel of stars that turns with the turning sun or moon, appearing in the bus-driver's dying vision, is the novel's formal logic made visible: one wheel becomes another becomes another, each image recursively generating the next, the turning structure reproducing itself at every scale from the cosmic to the creaturely. Madge and Homer are on the bus leaving the “dust-colored pottery town”. Madge is distressed over her pregnancy and that Homer “was not shaped by the great potter”. Madge insisted she would have been happier if “she had married the great potter”. Madge recalls the warning “He told me that all were clay, all men and some women.” The wheels within wheels of Catherine Cartwheel's father's factories and the wheels within wheels of the "hidden being" of the feminine nature and the wheels within wheels of the planetary progressions are not separate images. They are the same image at different magnifications, the novel's recursive architecture demonstrating through form what it argues through content: that the Wheel of Fortune is not one wheel but an infinite series of wheels turning within each other, each containing and generating the others, with no original wheel at the center and no final wheel at the edge.

Miss MacIntosh herself, the novel's emblem of stubborn linearity, who approved of nothing "outside of nature's wheel, though it should be a wheel casting foam and spray," is the figure against whom all this turning is measured. Her shoulders at the wheel, helping those who were not the children of fortune. Her straight back. Her plain sense. Her refusal of the infinite. She falls off the wheel entirely when her wig comes off and her bald head is revealed, and the novel never recovers from this, because the novel was always secretly about what happens when the one person who seemed immune to Fortune's turning turns out to have been turning all along, secretly, under her hat, the whole time. The wheel does not exempt the sensible. The wheel does not exempt anyone. That is Boethius's point. That is Young's point. They are, in this novel's long, turning argument, the same point.

Each Clock Stopped at a Different Hour: Time, Wound, and the Architecture of the Cartwheel House

Pillars: Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End) · Pillar 5 (Build Anyway, Knowing It's Temporary) · Pillar 8 (The Past Doesn't Go Away)

Chapters discussed: 4, 12, 48

> *All the other clocks in the house were like enchanted cages, each clock having been stopped at a different hour over that period of time when my mother, retiring from the world, had gone to bed, by slow degrees and not suddenly.*
>
> *Miss MacIntosh, My Darling, Chapter 12*

Miss Havisham and the Single Wound

In Charles Dickens's Great Expectations, Miss Havisham stops all the clocks at twenty minutes to nine: the exact moment she received the letter telling her she had been jilted. Every clock in Satis House reads twenty minutes to nine. The wedding cake rots on the table. The wedding dress yellows on her body. The single wound has stopped all time in the house, and the house enforces the wound's permanence by refusing to let the clocks move. There is one moment, one betrayal, one stopped hour, and the entire architecture of Miss Havisham's existence is organized around it.

Catherine in the Cartwheel house has stopped clocks too. But she has not stopped them all at the same hour. "Each clock having been stopped at a different hour over that period of time when my mother, retiring from the world, had gone to bed, by slow degrees and not suddenly, as if she had hesitated a great deal, as if her decision had not been an easy one to make." This is the architecturally crucial distinction. Miss Havisham's wound is single and fixed in time. The wound in the Cartwheel house is plural, distributed, spread across a withdrawal that happened slowly, over time, without a single hour at which everything stopped. There is no moment of jilting. There is no letter. There is a long, hesitant retreat from the world, each clock stopped at the moment its room was abandoned, its hour the record of one more small departure from ordinary time.

Miss Havisham's stopped clock is an act of will: time shall not move. The Cartwheel house's stopped clocks are an accumulation: time stopped here, and then there, and then in that room, over months or years, as Catherine went to bed and did not get up. The Cartwheel house does not refuse time. It records the shape of a withdrawal. Each stopped clock is a chapter in the history of a person becoming gradually unavailable to the world. The clocks together are a biography told in arrested hours.

The Clock That Starts Up in the Dark

Miss Havisham's clocks do not start. They are stopped and they stay stopped. They are monuments to a fixed point. The Cartwheel house is different: sometimes, in a remote part of the house, especially at night, a stopped clock would suddenly start up, wheezing or musical, seeming to make this one last effort. The stopped clocks in the Cartwheel house are not dead. They retain the potential to start. They occasionally exercise it, wheezily, in the dark, ringing the wrong hour, ringing three bells and then four bells from different corners, and then going silent again.

The stopped clock represents the arrested moment, the wound that has frozen its hour. But it is not permanently inert. It retains, somewhere in its mechanism, the capacity to move again. It does not move reliably. It does not move at the right time. When it starts up in the dark, ringing three dim bells and then four from another corner, the darkness does not lift. The clocks do not return the house to ordinary time. They mark, from their arrested positions, an unreliable and partial attempt at continuation.

Miss MacIntosh has one clock: Old Reliable, the Big Ben alarm clock she winds every day. It does not repeat the hours. A day being gone when a day was gone. It is not enchanted. It does not stop. It is set to ring at the hour for rising up and for lying down, and it will. Miss MacIntosh lives by the one clock in the house that actually keeps time, the one clock that refuses both the enchantment of arrest and the unreliable ambition of the clocks that start up in the dark. She is the only person in the house who knows what time it is, and she walks into the roaring ocean on a cold September morning still knowing exactly what time it is.

Nobody Knew What Time It Was

Stopped clocks are not only about Catherine's withdrawal. They appear in a second context, in Chapter 4, when a woman with icicle ear-rings warns Vera about the place she is going: the old there are deaf, funeral wreaths hang on all the doors, the voice of the turtle-dove is not heard, and "Nobody knew what time it was, for all the clocks were stopped." This is a different register of stopped time: not the biography of a private withdrawal but the apocalyptic suspension of all ordinary temporal reckoning. Golden bowl broken. Wheel broken at the cistern. These are Ecclesiastes: the end of the body, the end of its capacity to receive sensation, figured as the stopping of mechanism.

This second stopped-clock passage makes explicit what the first implies: the novel's stopped clocks are not only about one mind but about the whole world. They are not only recording one woman's slow retreat from the world. They are also registering the world's slow retreat from meaning, the long accumulation of losses that makes any single clock's hour arbitrary. In the Ecclesiastes register, all clocks stop because all mechanisms fail eventually, because the golden bowl is always going to break, because the wheel will always stop at the cistern. Miss Havisham's clock stops because of a specific human cruelty. These clocks stop because that is what clocks do: they stop.

The Bookkeeper Who Keeps Books in a Dream

Mr. Spitzer keeps a different kind of record. In Chapter 48, as the stars go out at dawn, he cannot tell which side of the great argument between life and death he is on, “Mr. Spitzer not knowing, he ever likening himself to an old bookkeeper keeping books in a dream, entering figures in the wrong column, yet still expecting to strike a balance.” Miss Havisham's house keeps one entry. The Cartwheel house keeps many, each in its own room. Mr. Spitzer's ledger puts them all in the wrong places, and he goes on adding them anyway. He “would burst into copious tears whenever he heard that an old bookkeeper or even a young bookkeeper had died.” The books never balance. Nobody in this novel gets to close the accounts, and nobody stops keeping them.

The Radical Immanence Reading: What Many Stopped Hours Do

Pillar 5 (Build Anyway, Knowing It's Temporary) is enacted by the multiplicity of stopped clocks. If Miss Havisham's single stopped clock represents the wound that cannot move past its hour, the Cartwheel house's many stopped clocks at different hours represent the plural self's relationship to time: there is no single wound, no single hour at which everything stopped, no single moment that, if you could only return to it and do it differently, would allow the clocks to start again. There are many such moments. They accumulated. The withdrawal was gradual. The record of it is distributed across the house in arrested hours that no longer correspond to each other.

Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End) is also here. Miss Havisham's stopped clocks are the architecture of a grief that refuses to move. The Cartwheel house's stopped clocks are the architecture of a grief that never had a single starting point to refuse. The grief preceded any specific cause. Catherine went to bed by slow degrees and not suddenly, as if she had hesitated a great deal. The stopped clocks record not a refusal but a hesitation extended over years until it became permanent. Grief as permanent weather is not a storm you could have prevented. It is the slow accumulation of arrested hours in all the rooms of the house, each at a different time, none of them agreeing on when it became too much.

Miss Havisham cannot leave her stopped house. Late in the novel her yellowed dress catches fire there, the cake gone to dust, and she does not survive her burns. The stopped house destroys her because it is a perfect monument to a single wound that she has refused to move past. The Cartwheel house does not destroy its inhabitant in the same way. Catherine lives in it for years, entertaining imaginary guests, entertaining a thousand roaring voices and then a thousand canaries blown here by the storm. The house with many stopped clocks is more livable than the house with one, because it is not organized around a single refusal. It is organized around an accumulation of small withdrawals, each at a different hour, none of them final, some of them occasionally starting up again in the dark.

Pillar 8 (The Past Doesn't Go Away) is the house itself. The stopped hours are not cleared away. They stay in the rooms together, each one marking a different moment of Catherine's long withdrawal, and Vera grows up among all of them at once. The past in

the Cartwheel house does not recede behind its people. It is kept in every room, layer on layer, and the life of the house is lived on top of it.

Movement Two: The Pillars in the Traditions

The Problem of Universals

See also: The Problem of Universals

Pillars: Pillar 1 (Not One Self) · Pillar 2 (Reality Is Constructed) · Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End) · Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act) · Pillar 5 (Build Anyway, Knowing It's Temporary)

The Problem of Universals is one of the oldest questions in Western philosophy: do general concepts exist independently of the particular things that seem to belong to them, or are the particulars all there is, with the general concept being nothing more than a name we apply after the fact? The realist says the universal exists; the nominalist says only the particular exists and the universal is an abstraction we impose. The conceptualist tries to split the difference and says the universal exists but only in the mind. None of these positions has ever conclusively won the argument, because the problem is not actually solvable. It is generative. It keeps producing questions that open into other questions, and those questions are the philosophical engine of Miss MacIntosh, My Darling.

Young did not inherit this problem from a textbook. She inherited it from the whole of the literary tradition she inhabited: Plato, Aristotle, the medieval scholastics, the empiricists who tried to dismantle them. She built it into the novel's architecture not as a theme to be resolved but as a structural condition, the same way a building has load-bearing walls. Remove the Problem of Universals from this novel and the novel collapses, because the question of whether universals are real is also the question of whether any of its characters exist in the way they appear to exist, whether any of its truths hold, whether the novel itself is one thing or many.

The most direct statement of the problem arrives early and nakedly: "Every heart is the other heart. Every soul is the other soul. Every face is the other face. The individual is the one illusion." This is the nominalist position pushed past nominalism into something stranger. The nominalist says only particulars exist. Young says the particular itself, the individual, is the illusion, and what is real is the universal heart, the universal soul, the universal face that every particular merely approximates. This is a Platonic claim but Young gives it no comfort. The universal here is not the ideal form shining behind imperfect copies. It is the dissolution of the boundary between self and other, the erasure of the very distinction that makes an individual a particular rather than a universal. The individual is the one illusion not because there is a truer individual somewhere behind appearances, but because individuation itself is the error.

Pillar 1 (Not One Self) is where this plays out most directly in the novel's characterization. Mr. Spitzer cannot locate himself on one side of a boundary because no reliable boundary exists. He tries, as Young writes, to "separate his being into constituent parts or elements and tried to recognize what was necessary and what was accidental or adventitious, what was real and what was unreal," and he cannot do it, because the categories of necessary and accidental, of essential and adventitious, are the very categories the Problem of Universals puts in question. The scholastics needed those categories: the essence was

the universal, the accidents were the particulars. Mr. Spitzer's inability to perform this separation is not a personal failure. It is Young's argument that the scholastic distinction does not hold, that there is no essence to be separated from the accidents, that Mr. Spitzer is "essentially inessential, having no essence or being—at least, not of his own." The plural self is the character who has lived long enough inside the Problem of Universals to stop pretending it has an answer.

Pillar 2 (Reality Is Constructed) is the pillar that makes the Problem of Universals livable rather than merely devastating. Catherine inhabits a world in which the boundaries between general and particular, between concept and instance, have dissolved entirely: her invisible companion Eustace might be simultaneously "many persons, for he was not confined to any one form by the laws of nature, which had been suspended in his case." He is a mockingbird, an old woman, an old man, Wellington, a Venetian valet, a murdered gentleman, a blind astronomer. These are not delusions in the clinical sense. They are Catherine's mind working correctly inside a universe where the universal and the particular genuinely cannot be separated. The refractions of that "drugged, dazzling atmosphere" produce not chaos but a kind of terrible accuracy: if the individual is the one illusion, then the multiplicity of forms is the truth, and Catherine's opium rooms are more honest than Miss MacIntosh's flat-footed certainty. Young does not choose between them. She holds both. The illusion is primary not because reality does not exist but because the mind's perception of forms is the only access anyone has to whatever existence is.

Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End) finds its expression in the Problem of Universals through the question of what survives particulars. Miss MacIntosh is described as having "the face of every face, the heart of every heart," and this is offered as consolation, as explanation for why her absence cannot be a simple absence. If she was the universal face, the universal heart, she cannot be simply gone the way a particular thing is gone when it ceases to exist. And yet she is gone. The golden bowl is broken. The grief does not dissolve because the universal remains; it intensifies, because the universal is not a thing one can hold or bury or properly mourn. You cannot grieve the face of every face. You can only grieve the particular face you saw walking along the seashore, and that face is irretrievably lost. The Problem of Universals in Young's hands becomes the problem of loss: we love particulars, we lose particulars, but we live inside the general, and the general does not stop. Mr. Spitzer preferring "abstractions and reasonings to the particularities of harsh, incalculable experience" is not a character flaw. It is a survival strategy, and Young treats it with tremendous compassion even as she shows us exactly what it costs him.

Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act) is where Young positions the question of what it means to see clearly in a universe where the boundary between universal and particular is unstable. The mute in the novel "had missed all abstract conceptions and ideas for which there were no images, no nesting spider, hermit crab, wild rose, water wheel, swan, star expressing them." The mute cannot access the universal because he has no language; he lives entirely in the particular, the image, the thing present to the senses. This is presented not as freedom but as a kind of loss, the loss of music and law and justice and all those things that exist only as abstractions, only as universals, only in the

mind that can move from the particular instance to the general concept. The witness in Young is the one who can hold both: who sees the particular thing in front of them and also perceives the universal behind or through or dissolved into it. Vera's role throughout the novel is exactly this double attention, and it is exhausting, because there is no stable position from which to witness when the thing you are witnessing keeps showing you that it is also everything else.

Pillar 5 (Build Anyway, Knowing It's Temporary) is where the Problem of Universals becomes the novel's formal argument about itself. In Chapter 22 the wreckage on the beach is the kind of thing one might find in an old pawn shop "where the end of the creation is also the beginning," and this is not just a cyclical image but a structural claim: the novel is built so that each element contains within it every other element, so that the particular instance is also the universal type is also the next particular instance is also the structure that generates all instances. Mr. Spitzer is described as "the composer of his life, of the secret intuitions others thought were not his, of the faded thoughts he himself could not remember, of the imperial abstractions like the separation of the notion of dimension from space, the dream of space from dimension." The separation of dimension from space and the dream of space from dimension: this is not decorative language. This is Young describing what the novel is doing formally, separating the abstract structure from the particular instances that carry it, then dreaming the abstract structure back out of those instances, then building both together into something that is neither the universal nor the particular but the relationship between them, which is the only place the Problem of Universals has ever actually lived. The problem has never been solved because it was never meant to be solved. It was meant to be inhabited. Miss MacIntosh, My Darling is 1,198 pages of that inhabitation: the universal heart that is every heart, beating inside the particular chest of one unrepeatable person who walked along one specific seashore, bearded with salt crystals, carrying a lamp made of fireflies, refusing the infinite, insisting on the ground under her feet, which was also the ground under all feet, which was also the only ground there was.

Philosophy as Structural Material

Pillars: Pillar 1 (Not One Self) · Pillar 2 (Reality Is Constructed) · Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End) · Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act) · Pillar 5 (Build Anyway, Knowing It's Temporary)

Most novels that invoke philosophers do so decoratively. A character reads Spinoza. A scene is set near a portrait of Kant. The philosopher's name floats on the surface of the prose as a signal of the character's seriousness, or the author's education, or the novel's ambitions. In Miss MacIntosh, My Darling, philosophy does not float. It bears weight. Young uses named philosophers and their specific arguments as load-bearing elements in the novel's architecture: not references but structural materials, each one doing its own kind of work inside each of the pillars that hold the novel together.

The most startling instance of this is not one of the famous names. It is a pair of socks. Mr. Spitzer wears his old socks mended and patched over and over until he finds himself asking "the philosopher's question": his socks have been darned and redarned so many times that "technically, he might be considered to be wearing, made of so many darns and patches covering so many holes, new socks, or that he would be when the last original thread had disappeared." Young is invoking the Ship of Theseus, the ancient paradox asking whether an object that has had all of its components replaced remains fundamentally the same object. She transplants it from the abstract register of metaphysics into the most intimate, domestic register imaginable: the worn sock on a grieving man's foot. Pillar 1 (Not One Self) does not need to announce itself as a philosophical problem when Young has already embedded the paradox of identity and continuity into the fabric of the character's literal clothing. The philosopher's question is not something Mr. Spitzer encounters in a book. It is something he lives inside every morning when he gets dressed.

Aristotle appears twice in the novel and both appearances are carefully placed. The first is through his claim that the ear is the doorway to the soul, which Young takes and builds into one of the novel's most sustained passages: Catherine is "lost for years and years inside her ear, trying to find her way out, out of this vast continent where there were so many doors and porticoes and fallen columns, secret arcades and weird deserts of stone." What Young does here is take Aristotle's philosophical claim literally and then pursue it to its spatial consequences. If the ear is the doorway to the soul, then the soul is a place, and that place has interior architecture, and someone can become genuinely lost inside it. Pillar 2 (Reality Is Constructed) is operating here with full force: Catherine's interior geography is as real and as mappable as any external landscape, and Aristotle's metaphor is not decorative but directional, opening a literal door into the interior world the novel inhabits. The second Aristotle reference, to the old legend that hedgehogs stand with their backs always to the sea, has the same quality: classical authority cited with a gentle uncertainty ("was it not Aristotle who said so?") that puts the entire edifice of philosophical knowledge under the same questioning pressure the novel applies to everything else.

Pythagoras enters the novel through harmony and transformation simultaneously. He appears at Catherine's side as one of her permanent phantom guests, "who had a golden thigh and had discovered heaven's harmony, the symphonious music of the silver-toned spheres," and he appears again when Catherine sees the golden cock at the foot of her bed and recognizes it as "Pythagoras shedding his golden feathers." Young is drawing on two different Pythagorean traditions at once: the mathematical discovery of harmonic ratios that became the basis of the music of the spheres, and the belief in metempsychosis, the transmigration of souls through different forms. Both are essential to the novel. The music of the spheres is the cosmic order that Mr. Spitzer's silent music strains toward; the transmigration of souls is the mechanism by which the novel's characters inhabit multiple identities simultaneously. Pythagoras in Young is not a historical reference. He is the philosophical source of two of the novel's central architectures: the cosmic harmony that grief interrupts, and the plural self that grief makes necessary.

Plato arrives differently, in the servants' argument about whether the blue room is "already occupied by Plato's boat, et cetera," alongside Spinoza in the green room and Shakespeare already installed. The casualness of this placement, the et cetera, the house-keeping practicality of assigning philosophers to bedrooms without regard for century, is Young at her most deliberately disorienting. Plato is given a boat, not a form or a Republic, a boat, because in Catherine's world where the dead attend as freely as the living, what Plato needs is transportation, and the philosophical legacy is as subject to the logistics of room assignment as any other guest. This is Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act) at work: the sustained, undiscriminating attention that sees Admiral Peary assigned to a room already holding Plato's boat with the same calm it applies to the Irish setter and the French poodle that always wore a crown.

St. Augustine enters in a list alongside Charon and Cheops and the Appian Way and the ghost of St. Simeon the Stylite, all described as subjects the head-hunter raises at Catherine's bedside: "St. Augustine in the city of God, all those things which, strictly speaking, were nobody's business." The dismissal is Miss MacIntosh's sensibility filtered through the prose: to the plain-speaking Middle Westerner, the City of God is nobody's business, which is to say that transcendence and metaphysics are exactly the kind of illusion she has spent her life refusing. Miss MacIntosh is herself a philosophical position, a kind of moral realism built from common sense and the rejection of abstraction. "Common sense is the finest sense," she insists, and her ethics, the path of virtue rugged and hard and girt about by rocks, is a pragmatic moral philosophy without transcendental grounding, virtue for its own stubborn sake, virtue as simply what a good housekeeper does. She is the plain, real life against which every Platonic idea in the novel must measure itself.

Boethius appears in the company of Balboa, Columbus, and Hugh Capet, listed among the kings and explorers who populated Catherine's visionary world. His placement here is not accidental. Boethius wrote his Consolation of Philosophy while awaiting execution, and Catherine's mind sets him among discoverers and wanderers, all of them visitors from the realm of the dead. Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End) recognizes this placement:

Boethius is the philosopher of Fortune's wheel, of what it means to think clearly at the edge of ruin, and Catherine's inclusion of him in her intimate circle of the dead is one of the novel's quiet architectural claims that the thinking done in extremity is the most honest thinking there is.

The image of the philosopher collapsing into its opposite: "she saw an idiot who had become a great philosopher, a philosopher who had become a great idiot. She saw one who was both an idiot and a philosopher." This is not a mockery of philosophy. It is Young's statement of Pillar 5 (Build Anyway, Knowing It's Temporary), the principle through which the entire novel operates. The end of the creation is also the beginning. The philosopher who follows knowledge far enough arrives back at unknowing. The idiot who has never known arrives at the same place by different roads. The categories reverse and merge and generate each other, just as the darns in the sock eventually replace the sock, just as Pythagoras the mathematician becomes Pythagoras shedding golden feathers, just as the Aristotle who said the ear is the doorway to the soul becomes a door that opens into a continent that no one has ever completely explored.

Philosophy in Miss MacIntosh, My Darling is not a set of ideas that Young has read and incorporated. It is a set of materials she has understood structurally, each one contributing something specific to one load-bearing pillar: the Ship of Theseus to Pillar 1 (Not One Self), Aristotle's ear to Pillar 2 (Reality Is Constructed), Pythagoras's harmony and metempsychosis to Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End) and Pillar 5 (Build Anyway, Knowing It's Temporary), the practical philosophy of Miss MacIntosh to Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act) as the witness who refuses transcendence, Boethius to grief and Fortune's wheel, the philosopher-idiot to the recursive undoing of every certainty the novel has accumulated. Young handles these materials the way a builder handles different grades of stone: knowing what each one can bear, placing it where its own weight will hold.

Flipping the Cave

Pillars: Pillar 2 (Reality Is Constructed) · Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act) · Pillar 7 (The Margins Reveal the Truth)

Chapters discussed: 1, 3, 7, 17, 18, 19, 65

> *She was bald as the egg or as the rock where nothing grows. She had no hair on her head, no hair at all, not one hair to cast its shadow.*
>
> *Miss MacIntosh, My Darling, Chapter 17*

The House Is the Cave

In the seventh book of Plato's Republic, prisoners sit chained in a cave, facing a wall. A fire behind them throws shadows of passing things onto the wall, and since the prisoners have never seen anything else, they take the shadows for the world. For Plato, philosophy is the work of turning a prisoner around, leading him up out of the cave, and bringing him at last into the sunlight. The cave is the mistake. The sun is the cure. Much of Western thought has kept that shape: there is one true light, the same for everyone who looks correctly, and a good life climbs toward it.

Young builds a cave of her own. The Cartwheel house sits on the New England coast with its drawing rooms shut for years. Catherine lies in bed in a room crowded with visitors no one else can see. The fog comes in under the doors. For Vera, growing up there, the line between the living and the dead, the real and the imagined, was never drawn in the first place.

Into this house walks the guide out of the cave. Miss MacIntosh comes from What Cheer, Iowa, and Young presents her exactly as the old story would want: “Her religion was truth to nature, nothing else, as she would always say with a severity of good humor inviting no argument, no sad or meandering response” (Chapter 1). She is “stoutly girded by her whale-boned corset, plainly clothed, visible to all, one who had kept her head above the waters in Chicago and elsewhere.” Even the corset arrives here as a virtue, the outward sign of an upright mind.

Young does not mock any of this, and neither does Vera. In a house where her mother cannot tell the living from the dead, the child needs something that holds still. Miss MacIntosh holds still. The comfort is real. What the novel will take apart is not the comfort but the claim folded inside it: that there is one plain reality, and this one woman has clean access to it.

The Guide Undressed

Young lets that claim stand for sixteen chapters. Then, in Chapter 17, Vera wakes in the night and sees her: “Miss MacIntosh stood by the blowing curtains, the tall windows, a figure dimly seen, her corset stays sticking out like the quills of an angry porcupine, or were those the rays of the moonlight? Where her head should be, there was another

moon, cold and dented and shining.” The corset that stood for natural uprightness turns out to be a structure, held in place by force. And then Vera sees “that there was something missing from the mortal woman, that all was not right, for she was bald.”

The creed survives the night, which is stranger than if it had broken. In Chapter 18, “Stuff, fiddle, and balderdash—she suddenly exclaimed, the light beam dancing against her chalk-colored head in the dove-colored dawn—what was she saying? What were these angelic rivers to her, these fountains of unholy light, these immortal roses, these golden shores?” With her own head bare, she still waves away the whole furniture of Catherine's dreams in three nursery words.

In Chapter 19 Vera sees the rest. “Her red wig, almost purple as the light shone through its ragged edges, was perched like a rare tropical bird on the hat rack on the marble night stand next to her plain bed.” And beneath the corset: “I observed what I must surely have always known, the fact that one breast had been amputated. What was left was no bigger than a baby’s fist.”

The woman who taught that the soul must never turn from the bare face of reality has been hiding the bare face of her own. This is not a story about a liar. Miss MacIntosh keeps up her certainty in private, in the dark, with no one watching, against the evidence of her own body. That is what makes it sad rather than false. The champion of plain fact turns out to be the most carefully built person in the house. Plain realism, it turns out, is a shelter too, as much as Catherine's opium dreams.

The Figure Without a Shadow

Hold on to one phrase from Chapter 17: “not one hair to cast its shadow.” In Plato's story, shadows are the error. In Young's, they are something closer to proof that a person is a person. The word shadow, in its different forms, appears more than eight hundred times in the novel. The one figure who claimed to stand in the pure light, pointing everyone else out of the cave, is shown at the moment of exposure as the one who casts no shadow of her own. Shadows are what a self throws when it stands somewhere particular, partial, among others. To lose them is not to reach the sun. It is to lose the very medium that grief and love and knowledge pass through.

The Cave as Home

This is not a claim that nothing is real, or that every view is as good as every other. Young is saying something harder. The claim to stand outside all uncertainty, to see reality with no costume on, is itself a costume. The person who sees this about her own certainty is not made weaker by seeing it. She is freed. The stays can relax. The wig can come off. The scarred body can stand in the dawn for what it is, a human body, carrying its history.

So Young does not lead her people out of the cave. She asks us to learn to live in it honestly: to know an illusion as an illusion without demanding that it vanish, and to move through the Cartwheel house with the patient attention it asks of anyone who wants to

understand it. The Garden, the Stream, and the Blind God follows the other half of this turn: what happens to Vera after she has seen.

The Philosopher King in a Nursemaid's Coat

Plato's Republic goes on past the cave. Once the philosopher has seen the sun, what is to be done with those who have not? Plato's answer is the philosopher king, who goes back down into the cave to govern the prisoners, guiding their lives by a vision of reality they cannot check for themselves. He does not ask for their consent. His right to rule comes from the claim that he has seen what they have not.

Miss MacIntosh rules the Cartwheel nursery in that spirit, though with love. In Chapter 3 she allows “no nonsense, no luxury of an endless moment, not even a game of chess as chess was the game of kings, an aristocratic pastime employing kings, queens, pawns upon the board checkered by shadows, all being not equal as they should be in her eyes if the game were to be democratic.” She forbids a game of kings while running a small kingdom of her own. The difference is that her rules are not called rules. They are called the way things are.

Her lessons show how that works. “Man was a poor fish, indeed, in Miss MacIntosh’s opinion. Everything had been put into its place, where everything must stay, not wandering out of its place, nor should the fishes fly above the dark spruce trees tipped by silver lights, nor should the white birds fly under the moving water, nor should we sail in a stone boat with stone sails.” It begins with plain truths. Stone sinks. Apples fall. But the same voice moves, without a break, from stones and apples to people, who must also know their place and stay in it. Vera's own training follows: her fingers must make “a pin-cushion or a pot-holder, a handkerchief with which to dry my foolish tears,” “for life was hard, and it was intended to be hard.” The tears are called foolish before anyone has asked why she is crying.

The deepest part of this rule is that Vera learns to speak it herself. In Chapter 1 she repeats the lesson in her own voice: “Common sense is the finest sense, she had always said, that the soul should not dream of those things far distant and not to be realized, for the way was very plain, quite direct. It was a granite road and not the sea road taken by the ships falling beyond a far horizon.” The guide has taught the child to see her own dreams as the guide sees them.

Hired by a Man of Two Opinions

Miss MacIntosh did not appoint herself. Mr. Spitzer, the estate's lawyer, hired her, and Young gives his reasons at the end of Chapter 3. He asked her no questions, “for none were necessary in such an obvious case, and there had not been a moment’s rapturous doubt in his mind which was usually of two opinions.” Looking back, he says: “He had thought, quite simply, that she would make a good nursemaid, providing a much needed contrast to this environment of phantoms and of shades, of suicidal persons, some only dreaming that they were dead, some only dreaming that they lived, that she would stand

out as a stout-hearted practical woman who could never be fooled by the vagaries of others, including his own vagaries which had certainly fooled him.”

The most uncertain man in the novel hired its most certain woman, to supply the certainty he could not. That is often how such authority comes to be. It is called in by people who cannot bear what they cannot sort. And he never looked closely at what he had hired: “Frankly, he had never noticed precisely what Miss MacIntosh wore.”

The Salesman of the Absolute

Young gives the philosopher king one more face. In Chapter 65, as Vera tells it, Miss MacIntosh remembers a street preacher in Chicago, Mr. Bonebreaker, who walked with her in the rain. He had been “a clerk in a St. Louis shoe store where, when he was kneeling one day, God had shown him the waters of the first creation.” He has seen the source, and so he means to lead those who have not.

But his credentials are borrowed from the dead. “From the body of a dead waiter in a Chicago saloon, he had plucked his long-tailed coat. His broken shoes—they were a dead man’s shoes.” And his mind will not stay with the person beside him: “Mr. Bonebreaker’s mind jumped from the beginning to the end of creation, hardly considering the middle, the present scene.” Young's sentences live in exactly the middle he skips. When he turns Miss MacIntosh's wound into a verse, “Fore we have a little sister,” he recited, sonorously, “and she hath no breasts,” the two of them are not even weeping in the same story: “Miss MacIntosh wept furiously, thinking of Hagar, who had had a child pulling at her breast, but Mr. Bonebreaker was thinking of one who had no breasts, neither the left nor the right.” The Religious Architecture looks at the warmth he also offers her.

Logic Takes the Bus

The old schools taught three basic arts, called the Trivium: grammar, logic, and rhetoric. Logic sat at the top, the art closest to truth, the way a trained mind climbed out of mere words into proof. In Chapter 7, logic buys a ticket on Vera's bus.

Madge Capehorn knows the whole story of a woman who may have turned the key on her husband and left him to burn. Her husband, Homer, asks how she can know so much when she was never there. She answers: “Use your head, Homer Capehorn. Have you no imagination? I didn’t have to be there. If I had been there, I might not have known so well. There are some things you know better through never having been there. You do not live to tell of them.” Homer argues the way the textbooks teach: “She was sleeping, and she never walked in her sleep,” he argued. “You can’t prove she did it. You ought not to say anything you cannot prove. If it is not true, it must be false. It stands to reason, doesn’t it? It cannot be both true and false.”

Madge insists that “Keys never turn by themselves. Somebody always turns them.” And the reply comes back, without a name on it but with Homer's logic all over it: “She could have been asleep. Keys do turn by themselves.” Logic, denied its witness, does not climb into clear light. It talks itself into a house where keys turn with no hand on them. The

town's long talk, held between many people and owned by none of them, keeps the world more answerable than proof could. Young even lets the questions float loose from their speakers, so that the sentences themselves refuse the clean, separate voices logic needs.

The Radical Immanence Reading

In the language of Radical Immanence, the wig on the hat rack is Pillar 2 (Reality Is Constructed): even plain fact is built and kept up by daily effort. Vera's night watch in Chapters 17 to 19, seeing what she must surely have always known, is Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act). And Madge on the bus, with no proof and a whole town's knowledge, is Pillar 7 (The Margins Reveal the Truth). The cave, flipped, is not a prison to escape. It is the only home the soul has, and the work is to live in it with open eyes.

Intertextuality as Construction Method

Pillars: Pillar 1 (Not One Self) · Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End) · Pillar 5 (Build Anyway, Knowing It's Temporary)

Anaïs Nin's preface to Miss MacIntosh, My Darling makes a striking defensive claim on Young's behalf: "Although she accomplishes for native American folklore the same immortality of the myth that Joyce accomplished for Ireland, Joyce was not her inspiration. Her inspiration was America." Nin famously called the novel the "American Ulysses" (Anaïs Nin, "One Writer's Version of a Complete Universe," *Los Angeles Times*, January 9, 1966), yet here she insists that Joyce was not Young's inspiration. The defensiveness is telling. By 1965 the comparison to Joyce was both the most available compliment and the most limiting frame for any writer working at this scale of formal ambition, and Nin tries to redirect the conversation toward the American vernacular rather than the European modernist tradition. What neither Nin nor later criticism has adequately addressed is the more fundamental question: not which tradition inspired Young, but what she does with tradition as such, how intertextuality functions in this novel not as allusion or homage but as primary construction method, the mechanism by which Pillar 5 (Build Anyway, Knowing It's Temporary) actually builds.

The most shocking demonstration of this method arrives early, when Vera describes the bus journey through the Middle West: "We had passed a windmill, a leaning tower, Noah's Ark, the old woman who lived in the shoe." Noah's Ark and the Old Woman in the Shoe are not metaphors here. They are roadside buildings, pieces of rural American architecture dotting the landscape alongside coffee urns and wigwam nightclubs. Young has taken two of the most foundational intertextual resources of Western civilization, one biblical, one from the nursery rhyme tradition, and made them literal objects in the physical world of the novel, sitting alongside the melancholy buffalo tethered under a denuded oak and the faded washing on the line. This is Pillar 5 (Build Anyway, Knowing It's Temporary) at its most methodologically explicit: the novel absorbs the entire Western literary tradition as material, refuses to keep it in the elevated register of allusion, and builds it into the ground-level American landscape as furniture. The sacred text and the nursery rhyme arrive in the same sentence, at the same scale, with the same grammatical weight. This is not irreverence. It is a structural argument about how all inherited texts function: as the architecture of the world we move through, as present and as ordinary as roadside buildings, available to be passed and noted and left behind.

Don Quixote appears early in the novel in exactly this flattened mode. In the first pages Vera wonders whether the old bus driver is "perhaps even some mad Don Quixote chasing windmills," and a few pages later the bus passes a windmill standing in the landscape as literal roadside architecture. The literary windmill comes first and the real one follows, so the Cervantes allusion turns into something you can drive past. The bus driver does not resemble Don Quixote because he is tragic and deluded; he resembles Don Quixote because the windmills are actually there, in the Middle West, just past the Ark and the shoe, and someone has to contend with them.

Pilgrim's Progress is the novel's most sustained intertextual structure, and it operates not as allusion but as inverted architecture. Miss MacIntosh prefers Bunyan to the Word of God itself, "fairly safe even though not altogether trustworthy as a guide through this great wilderness, this mortal life which was a path of thorns." Vera reads it to Miss MacIntosh, "sometimes I would begin at the end, reading straight to the beginning, working from redemption backward," which is Pillar 5 (Build Anyway, Knowing It's Temporary) making its formal argument: the book that promises a linear progress from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City can be read backward, from redemption toward sin, and the journey is identical in either direction because Young's novel does not believe in linear progress. When Miss MacIntosh disappears, her *Pilgrim's Progress* is found "water-logged with marks of sea shells on its pages," left on the beach with her clothes and her broken black umbrella. The book of Protestant virtue's end is not the Celestial City but the tide. Bunyan's pilgrim crosses the River of Death and comes out at the gate of the Celestial City. Miss MacIntosh's copy gets only the crossing: dissolution into the sea, the body of water that throughout the novel represents everything Protestant plain-speaking cannot account for.

The inversion of classical epic runs through the old bus driver, Moses Hunnecker. In Chapter 5, dreaming in the midst of his long hair, he is "Penelope weaving this web, not Ulysses who wandered over the wide seas, he just staying at home and minding his own business." The gender inversion here is not a feminist joke at Homer's expense. It is Young's structural claim about what the novel does with the epic tradition. The man who spends his life on the road thinks of himself as the one who stays home, the one who waits, the one who weaves and unravels. The wanderer's role is given away, and the novel's sympathy goes to Penelope's consciousness, the domestic intelligence that holds everything together in the absence of the adventurer. The Odyssey, filtered through this inversion, becomes not the story of a hero's journey but the story of the one left behind, which is the story the novel tells about grief.

Catherine's canary exemplifies the most intricate intertextual architecture in the novel. She names her canary: Juniper, Tulip, Cellini, Solomon, Methuselah, Marco Polo, Admiral Peary, Shackleton, Dante. The list moves from flower to Renaissance goldsmith to biblical king to biblical patriarch to medieval explorer to polar explorer to medieval poet, running from the Bible's oldest patriarch to a polar explorer who died in 1922, in nine names applied to a single yellow bird that is, unbeknownst to her, actually many birds, each one secretly replaced when it dies. Young embeds the Ship of Theseus paradox inside the intertextual catalog: the bird that accumulates all these names is never the same bird, and the names that were given to one bird now apply to another, which means Dante the canary and Dante the poet share the same condition as the bird and the next bird: continuity asserted in the face of replacement, identity maintained by the refusal to acknowledge the substitution. This is what Young's intertextuality does structurally: it applies the names of the tradition to material that keeps changing underneath the names, and the names both illuminate the material and survive it, outlasting each single instance of the thing they were attached to.

The literary dead appear in Catherine's bedroom as houseguests: "crippled Mr. Alexander Pope, for example, he who had been scorned by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Lord Byron with his club foot, Shelley's bright hair like a comet in the wind, blind Milton dictating Paradise Lost to those indifferent daughters." Three of the four are identified by their physical impairments or personal humiliations rather than their literary achievements, and Paradise Lost arrives not as canonical text but as a domestic situation: a blind man dictating to daughters who do not care. Young does this throughout: the canonical text is always also a human situation, always embedded in a body with a club foot or a scorned love or a progressive blindness, always inseparable from the one life that produced it. This is Pillar 1 (Not One Self) applied to literary history: Pope is not only the author of the Essay on Man, he is the man Lady Mary Wortley Montagu did not love, and both are equally real, equally present in the room where Catherine is dreaming.

Virgil's "sunt lacrimae rerum," there are tears for things, arrives as Catherine counts her pearls: "Sunt lacrimae rerum. But her tears were never for persons. To her, a human personality was a mere appearance, like a shadow upon the water." Young cites the Latin without translation, without footnote, as a fact in the prose the way the bus passes Noah's Ark as a fact in the landscape. Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End) is the translation: tears not for persons but for things, for the whole weight of existence rather than any individual instance of it, which is just what Young's grief-architecture requires. Virgil's line, from the Aeneid, is Aeneas weeping at the sight of a painting of the Trojan War in a foreign land, weeping because sorrow travels, because grief exceeds its origin, because the image of the dead persists in places the dead never reached. Young uses it to describe a woman who feels grief at the cosmic scale but cannot direct it toward any individual. They are the same grief, Aeneas's and Catherine's, which is the claim Pillar 5 (Build Anyway, Knowing It's Temporary) makes: all the grief in the tradition is one grief looking at itself in different mirrors across time.

"Although she accomplishes for native American folklore the same immortality of the myth that Joyce accomplished for Ireland, Joyce was not her inspiration." Nin is right that Joyce was not her inspiration, but it is wrong to limit her intertextual range to folklore. Young did for all of Western literary tradition what the American roadside did for Noah's Ark: made it a building you drive past on the way from here to there, present and weathered and ordinary and still, despite everything, the shape it always was. That is a different achievement from Joyce's. It may be a larger one.

The Poetry as Architecture

Pillars: Pillar 1 (Not One Self) · Pillar 2 (Reality Is Constructed) · Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End) · Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act) · Pillar 5 (Build Anyway, Knowing It's Temporary) · Pillar 10 (The Sacred Is Here)

The copyright page of Miss MacIntosh, My Darling lists Young's previous publications before the novel begins. Two are poetry collections: Prismatic Ground (1937) and Moderate Fable (1944). The novel was begun in 1947 and published in 1965. This means Young was building the novel's philosophical architecture for eighteen years while her two collections of poetry sat on the copyright page as its declared ancestors. Young herself said that all her writing reflected common themes, that she had been thinking and writing about these things since she was nine years old. The poetry is not a precursor to the novel. It is the same project in a compressed form, the pillars in their most concentrated state, before the accumulation of 1,198 pages expanded them to their full structural weight. For a reader who cannot yet commit to the novel, the poems are the door. For a reader who has already entered the novel, the poems are the architectural drawings.

Pillar 1 (Not One Self) is visible in the poems decades before Mr. Spitzer arrives. In "Elegy for the Body," Young writes: "Oh, she was plural; / She multiplied; / All sparrows fell / If once she died." The movement here is identical to the novel's "Every heart is the other heart. Every soul is the other soul. Every face is the other face. The individual is the one illusion." Both make the same claim: the individual is not singular, and the death or disappearance of one particular person carries within it the death of something universal. The difference is scale. The poem compresses the claim into four short lines. The novel gives it Miss MacIntosh: "hers had been the face of every face, the heart of every heart," and then spends the entire remaining narrative in the grief produced by that fact. The poem contains the philosophical position. The novel inhabits it.

Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End) appears in its purest form in "Strange Prophecy": "Only by bees will be visited / The lonely portals of the dead. / They will come intent on trade / Of light within that house of shade." Later in the poem: "The skull's enigma, what it was, / Become a hive for honey bees." Young takes the image of the skull, the most conventional emblem of mortality, and fills it with bees, with the productive hum of living things conducting their ordinary labor inside the space that death has emptied. This is grief as permanent weather made architecturally visible: the skull does not stop. The bees move through it. Life conducts its business inside the house of the dead. The novel's equivalent comes in Chapter 6, when Madge Capehorn, jealous on the bus, pictures the girl her husband Homer still carries a torch for lying dead in the grass: "They will make their honey in her skull. She's sleeping in the grass, and you can hear the dead birds singing." Young published the poem in 1937. She brought the image into the novel she published in 1965 in exactly the same form, because the philosophical claim had not changed. Grief does not empty the house. It fills it with a different kind of life.

Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act) runs through "Dubious Ground," one of the most tightly made poems in Prismatic Ground: a sleepwalker who is "always aware" of his

surroundings, moving "lightly, with the small sound / Of dew stopped in the air," perceived from outside as part of the environment rather than separate from it. The sleepwalker does not interpret what he witnesses. He moves through it with a heightened, intuitive attention that operates below the threshold of analytical consciousness. This is exactly the quality Young gives to Vera as narrator: a consciousness that attends to everything, judges nothing, and allows the full weight of what it perceives to accumulate without premature resolution. The poem establishes the perceptual method. The novel applies it across 1,198 pages of accumulated observation.

Pillar 2 (Reality Is Constructed) appears in "That Apple Was Mental," which Young includes in Moderate Fable: "that apple was mental, a constellation of ideas." The poem asks whether something real can be invisible, whether sound can be inaudible yet exist as harmonious music, whether the mental and the physical are as distinct as we pretend. The poem's answer, worked out in Young's characteristic associative accumulation, is that they are not: "we eat and drink ideas, we are clothed with them." Catherine is the full-scale embodiment of this claim. Her opium house is full of Platonists and cherubim and Pythagoras shedding golden feathers because the mind's constructions are as real as any physical fact, possibly more so, because they are more densely inhabited. The poem states the position in fourteen lines. The novel gives it a bedroom and forty years of accumulated visitors.

Pillar 5 (Build Anyway, Knowing It's Temporary) is the pillar most visible in the formal relationship between the poems and the novel itself. "A Crystal Principle," from Moderate Fable, describes a world where even "accident unknown / And least departure" from crystalline order generates meaning, where "pattern in anomalies" persists, where the "miscreant heart" and the "outlaw rose" are as essential to the design as the crystal's perfect planes. Young is describing her own compositional method: a structure that builds by accumulation, that incorporates its own deviations, that generates patterns from the interplay of order and departure. The novel builds by exactly this method. Each chapter's deviation from what came before is part of the structure. Mr. Spitzer's socks, darned and redarned until they are not the same socks, are a crystal principle: identity persisting through replacement, structure maintained through accumulated change.

The poems also offer the most compressed versions of the novel's major characters. "Lot's Wife" is Miss MacIntosh: the woman who insists on not looking back, for whom the backward glance is the fatal error, whose entire pedagogical project with Vera is to prevent exactly the turning that Lot's wife performed and was punished for. "he who lives / In what has flown / Is less than salt, / Is less than stone," the poem concludes, and this is Miss MacIntosh's argument in miniature, the argument she makes every time she demands that Vera reckon with current facts rather than inherited dreams. "Biography," the chess game with Lucifer in which the player loses not because he is wicked but because he is "distracted by the poetic," is Mr. Spitzer: "an old ballade, a witch's name, / A wraith of smoke," and then, "but not the game." The poems are character studies written before the characters were named.

"Departure" is Esther Longtree: "The snail meanwhile / Drawn cold as she, / Traces her still / Wan Odyssey / Across the purple / Leaves in flood, / Beautiful / Of her heart's blood."

The slow walk, the deformed movement, the beauty inseparable from blood and suffering, the odyssey that is not heroic but simply continuous. Young wrote this poem a decade before Esther Longtree existed as a character. The image arrived first. The character grew to fill it.

"Ballad-Loving Woman," one of the most formally direct poems in the collections, is the novel's description of its own method: "With singing words from long ago / She knew that life will stay." The novel is built from accumulated singing words from long ago, from Boethius and Bunyan and Homer and the Old Woman in the Shoe and the passenger pigeon Martha, all the inherited forms of human knowledge and grief and comedy that Young assembled into a single structure that is also a voice, also a woman, also a long journey by bus through a Middle West that is also everywhere. "Ballad-loving woman / Who lived until she died." That is what the novel is. That is what her poetry always was.

For a reader who begins with the poems, especially the shorter, more formally contained poems of Prismatic Ground, each one is a door into the novel's architecture. "Strange Prophecy" gives you Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End). "Dubious Ground" gives you Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act). "Sky of Grasses," where "Heaven has shrunk to the dim size / Comprehended by insects' eyes," gives you Pillar 10 (The Sacred Is Here). "Lot's Wife" gives you Miss MacIntosh's entire philosophical position in a single image. "Elegy for the Body" gives you Pillar 1 (Not One Self). "A Crystal Principle" gives you Pillar 5 (Build Anyway, Knowing It's Temporary). Enter any of these doors and you are already inside the novel's pillars. The novel is what happens when you refuse to leave.

History as Contested Ground

Pillars: Pillar 2 (Reality Is Constructed) · Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act) · Pillar 5 (Build Anyway, Knowing It's Temporary)

Young does not use history the way most novelists use it: as backdrop, as period texture, as the reliable ground on which invented characters walk. In Miss MacIntosh, My Darling, history is itself a character, and like all the novel's characters it is unreliable, plural, contested, and saturated with grief. The historical record arrives in the novel already interrogated, already doubled, already running against itself, and this is not an accident or irony. It is architecture. Every pillar of Young's philosophy asks for its own relationship to history, and the novel builds that relationship into the tissue of every historical reference it makes.

The clearest statement of the novel's position on history is Miss MacIntosh's own: "History lies, and geography is uncertain, unstable as water or a sick lady's dreams, and we know not who or what we are in these modern times or which star we inhabit." She delivers this immediately after dismissing Julius Caesar: "Who knows that he crossed the Rubicon or that there was a Caesar? What man alive ever saw him?" This is Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act) performing its most provocative function. Miss MacIntosh is the novel's embodiment of practical common sense, the figure who insists on the verifiable and the actual, and here she is dismantling the verifiability of history itself. Not as a philosophical argument but as an impatient, drowsily nodding observation between questions about Kansas and the Bosphorus. The flat pragmatist arrives at the same place as the most radical skeptic: we were not there, we cannot know, history is a story told by those who needed it to go a certain way. That the novel's realist comes to this conclusion is not ironic. It is Young's deepest claim about what honest attention to the world actually produces.

Miss MacIntosh uses history as a pedagogical weapon. Her lessons to Vera arrive as cascading historical catastrophes: the great Chicago fire and how many were unburied, how many unidentified; the date of the sinking of the Titanic; the floods, the fires, the earthquakes, plague or famine or drought. These are not lessons in historical knowledge. They are lessons in historical scale, in the individual's smallness against accumulated catastrophe, in what it means to reckon honestly with how much suffering has already happened before the present moment began. This is grief as permanent weather operating through the historical record: history is not a sequence of events moving toward the present but an accumulated weight of irreversible loss, and every date Miss MacIntosh demands is a demand that Vera hold that weight consciously, that she not look away from the count of the unidentified dead.

The suffrage movement receives more sustained treatment than any other historical force in the novel, and the treatment is architecturally complex. Cousin Hannah, the great suffrage captain, is described as "cuirassed by suffrage," her shield "emblazoned with a cherub carrying a lightning bolt," a figure who had bearded human lions in their dens in Persia and startled great sheiks in their ivory beds and negotiated great torrents of ice

and snow. The suffrage movement in Young's hands becomes simultaneously a genuine historical struggle for political equality and an image of the plural self operating at historical scale: the movement is simultaneously its captain and its cause, simultaneously personal love and collective crusade, simultaneously the battle raging "in heaven and on earth" and the iron girdle worn by a Crusader's wife waiting at home. The historical suffrage movement is real, Young insists: the meetings, the campaigns, the bodies in the field. And it is also something the novel can only approach through accumulated imagery of armor and crusade and celestial battle, because the inner life of anyone who gives everything to a cause is never adequately captured by the historical record, which records the outcomes but not the weather inside the person who made them.

The murdered archduke at Sarajevo appears in the context of Catherine's precognitive knowledge: she had known of the murder "several hours before the news had reached the rest of the world," just as she had known of the murders of the Russian czar and royal family, and of the deaths of Saladin and Solymon the Magnificent and many Babylonian kings. Young collapses historical time here with total deliberateness: the assassination that triggered the First World War sits in the same sentence as Crusade-era sultans and ancient Assyrian kings. Catherine's omniscience is not supernatural. It is the logic of Pillar 2 (Reality Is Constructed) applied to history: if all time is simultaneous in the perceiving mind, if the years collapse to a moment whenever she looks back, then the archduke at Sarajevo and Sardanapalus king of Assyria are equidistant, are equally present, are both available to her third eye. History under this pillar is not a linear sequence but a room all of whose inhabitants are present at once, which is exactly what Catherine's opium house embodies.

The passenger pigeon Martha, who "expired September 14, at one o'clock in the afternoon just as the clock was tolling one, 1918, A.D., at the Cincinnati zoo," receives the most exacting historical precision in the entire novel: a specific date, a specific hour, a specific location. The precision is the novel's, not the record's: the real Martha died at the Cincinnati Zoo at about one in the afternoon on September 1, 1914. Young gives us the date of Martha's death with the careful documentation of a legal record while surrounding it with Mr. Spitzer's grief, his opalescent tears, his weeping walks under drizzling clouds. This precision is not sentiment. It is Pillar 5 (Build Anyway, Knowing It's Temporary) making an argument about the relationship between the historical particular and the universal: she had died "as one passenger pigeon who was all the passenger pigeons who had ever been and much less and much more and would not be again." The death of one is the death of all. The historical record of Martha's death is unique in all of history: "perhaps only once, in fact," had anyone ever known the exact date of the death of an entire species. Young makes this unique historical precision the vehicle for the novel's deepest claim about extinction, grief, and the irreversibility of loss. What history can document exactly, when it finally achieves that exactness, is the moment a kind of being passes from the world forever.

The Marne and the Lusitania arrive tattooed on a man's body: "Remember the Marne," written under a battleship sailing through the hairs of his chest, a bullet still in his leg from the Last War still predicting rain. The official historical record lives, in this novel, in the

flesh of those who survived it. The man is a walking archive, his body the document. This is the plural self carrying history inside it, the living person as contested ground where public event and private survival converge. He was on the Titanic and the Lusitania and the White Star Castle and the Prince Edward. All four went down. He kept surviving. History accumulates in him not as knowledge but as scar, as the wet twinge before a storm.

Miss MacIntosh demands that Vera know the date of the Titanic's sinking, the cause of the Chicago fire, the population of Kansas. Captain Cook goes traipsing off to the North Pole and is accused of "forgery, perjury, simulation, lying, counterfeiting discovery." Catherine knows the archduke will be murdered before the newspapers report it. History in Miss MacIntosh, My Darling is always three things at once: the official record, which lies; the body's memory, which survives; and the grief that outlasts both, which is the only part that cannot be disputed because it is the only part that was never a story to begin with.

The Feminist Architecture

Pillars: Pillar 2 (Reality Is Constructed) · Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End) · Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act) · Pillar 7 (The Margins Reveal the Truth)

Feminist scholarship on Miss MacIntosh, My Darling has tended to focus on Cousin Hannah as its primary feminist figure: the militant suffrage captain, the woman who gave everything to the cause, the pioneer. This is not wrong, but it is incomplete, and the incompleteness matters architecturally. Young does not give us one feminist position. She gives us four, each one embodying a different relationship to the pillars, each one operating as a distinct structural element in the novel's argument about what it means to be a woman inside the conditions of the world Young was examining. The four positions are: Miss MacIntosh (the pragmatist who names the condition), Cousin Hannah (the activist who wages war on the condition), Esther Longtree (the body that the condition moves through), and Catherine (the dreamer who escapes the condition into illusion). To understand any one of them requires understanding all four, because Young built them as a system, a feminist architecture that can only be read whole.

Miss MacIntosh is the novel's most overlooked feminist, because her feminism is so completely naturalized into her common sense that it never announces itself as feminism. She does not fight for women's rights. She embodies them as a daily practice, so thoroughly that the practice becomes invisible. "He is bare whom virtue hath not clothed," she says, and the pronoun is not incidental. Her world is one in which character is the only reliable garment, the only protection against weather, and she teaches this to Vera with the same flat certainty she brings to everything: the Titanic's sinking date, the population of Kansas, the straight line between two points. Her pedagogy is a feminist pedagogy in its deepest structure, even when it is most exasperating: she insists that Vera reckon with catastrophe, with scale, with the count of the unidentified dead, because a woman who has not reckoned with catastrophe honestly is a woman who will be undone by the first catastrophe she meets personally. Miss MacIntosh's practical ethics, "common sense is the finest sense," are not the opposite of feminist ambition. They are its foundation. She is what women can be when they are not required to perform either helplessness or grandeur. Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act) runs through her entire characterization: she sees clearly, she names what she sees, she refuses the consolations of illusion, and she does this as an ordinary practice on an ordinary day, which is the most radical feminist claim Young makes. Clear seeing should not be exceptional.

Cousin Hannah is where the novel's feminist architecture becomes most explicitly structural, and the structure is deliberately paradoxical. She is "cuirassed by suffrage," her shield "emblazoned with a cherub carrying a lightning bolt," a woman who bearded human lions in their dens in Persia, who girded her loins "with suffrage like that iron girdle worn by a great Crusader's wife whose husband was away in Holy Wars." The military imagery is not ornamental. Young is making a clear argument about what the suffrage movement required of its participants: the total mobilization of the self, the same complete

commitment demanded by warfare, and it was waged against an opponent with equivalent resources and equivalent willingness to inflict casualties. "Was not marriage, as that great suffrage captain had always said, the death of a woman's soul, the sacrifice of her finest impulses, the wasting of her shining talents?" This is Hannah's public position, her suffrage argument, her tactical claim. And it is true as far as it goes.

Where Young's feminist architecture exceeds the documentary record of suffrage history is in what she reveals about Hannah's private life: "the confession of this great suffrage captain's personal love, dead love which had prompted her suffrage movement and battles against overwhelming odds." Hannah had loved and lost, and the loss had become the movement. "False modesty killed my love," she cries in her dying, and the grief is as sharp and physical as any battlefield wound, a grief she had channeled into forty years of public activism that never, until the end, she allowed herself to name as grief at all. Young is not diminishing Hannah's public achievement by revealing its private root. She is demonstrating the plural self operating at feminist scale: Hannah is simultaneously the great captain who believed marriage was the death of a woman's soul, and the woman who wept when a snowflake touched her hand because she was thinking of someone she had lost. Both are fully real. Neither cancels the other. The novel holds them both, and holding them both is the only honest account of how feminist history is actually made: not by people who have transcended personal grief but by people who have found a way to make personal grief into public action, which is its own kind of transformation and its own kind of loss.

Esther Longtree is the feminist figure no feminist taxonomy quite fits, and that resistance to category is itself the point. She is "brilliant but dumb," a big-boned slow-moving waitress with a deformed foot and a swollen womb, "known for her everlasting pregnancy and her loving heart which knew no lover and her everlasting loneliness." The men who pass through are the General Electric representative, the soap salesman, the antichrist, the rubber salesman, the toy salesman: the whole commercial apparatus of mid-century American capitalism moving through her body on its way from here to there, leaving her with children she carries to stillbirth while the fathers write years later asking if the child was born, if it was a little Jehovah's Witness, how old now. "Nobody here really knows me as I am," she says, "but the stillborn and the white birds and the blackbirds and the men who are passing through." What she carries is the weight of a grief with no adequate name: not widowhood, not single motherhood, not infertility, but something Young invented a character to contain, the grief of perpetual expectation perpetually unmet, a "hovering expectation of the great bubble which precedes creation."

Young gives Esther more detailed bodily attention than any other character in the novel: the "shape of the head, shadow of the hand, the foot, the little shadow boxer" moving under her heart; the ears without eyes, the eyes without ears, the fingernail, the cobweb, the stillborn who embarrass her because she cannot explain them. This bodily precision is not a naturalistic description. It is Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End) given a specifically female form. A woman's body is the site where the permanent weather of grief manifests most literally and most publicly: the swollen womb visible to everyone, the pregnancy everyone knows about, the birth everyone will eventually ask after. Esther carries her losses in a

form that cannot be hidden or managed or channeled into public action. She carries them as body, "a memory of her stillborn inhabited Esther Longtree's every slow act and awkward motion," which is Young's most direct statement of what grief as permanent weather means when it is lived in a woman's body rather than discussed as a philosophical condition.

Catherine represents the fourth feminist position, and it is the most troubling architecturally because it is the most seductive: the total retreat from the world's conditions into a private interior universe so complete and so populated that the external world becomes irrelevant. Catherine never loved any living being. She chose a dead man for her permanent attachment because the dead cannot disappoint, cannot leave, cannot demand a reckoning. Her opium rooms are full of Platonists of Athens and golden-turbaned Egyptians and cherubim and Pythagoras shedding golden feathers, a world entirely of her own making in which she is omniscient and sovereign and attended by everyone she has ever found interesting regardless of century or existence. Pillar 2 (Reality Is Constructed) flows through Catherine, but so does a feminist critique of what illusion costs: she is beautiful, she is brilliant in her way, she is the most widely travelled person in the novel without ever leaving her bed, and she is also the woman Hannah spent forty years trying to save, the woman whose withdrawal from the world Hannah experienced as a personal defeat.

Esther Longtree carries Pillar 7 (The Margins Reveal the Truth) for all four. She is the waitress the salesmen pass on their way somewhere else, the woman nobody there really knows. The woman at the edge of the counter is not the exception to Young's account of women. She is its evidence.

Young does not adjudicate between these four positions. She does not decide that Hannah's activism is right and Catherine's retreat is wrong, or that Miss MacIntosh's plain practicality is more admirable than Esther's oceanic suffering. She builds all four into the novel's structure as equally necessary, equally true, equally partial. The feminist architecture of Miss MacIntosh, My Darling is not an argument for any one feminist position. It is a demonstration that the conditions women face, the conditions that produce a Hannah and a Miss MacIntosh and an Esther and a Catherine, are so various, so contradictory, so fully capable of generating completely incompatible responses in completely different women, that the only honest account of feminism is the one that holds all four simultaneously. Young's “and” again. Not this or that response to the world's conditions, but this and that and that and that, all of them real, all of them earned, none of them sufficient.

Young built four feminist architectures into a single novel published in 1965, thirty years before her death, in a single act of imaginative construction that feminist theory has not yet fully absorbed. This is the genius claim: not that she wrote about feminism but that she built, in narrative form, a structural argument about feminist experience that exceeds any single theoretical framework because it was built to contain contradiction rather than resolve it. The novel is 1,198 pages long because contradiction at that scale requires that much room.

The Religious Architecture

Pillars: Pillar 1 (Not One Self) · Pillar 2 (Reality Is Constructed) · Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End) · Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act) · Pillar 5 (Build Anyway, Knowing It's Temporary) · Pillar 10 (The Sacred Is Here)

The first sentence Young gives us about God in Miss MacIntosh, My Darling is not a prayer or a theological argument or a scene of worship. It is a statement of condition: "God is the loneliest of all, and there is perhaps no God but what we dreamed, and there is no train." Three clauses, and each one performs a different operation on the religious tradition Young inherited. The first extends Christian sympathy to God as a sufferer rather than a sovereign. The second places the entire theological enterprise inside the framework of Pillar 2 (Reality Is Constructed). The third collapses the metaphysical into the mundane, the God-question and the train-question arriving in the same grammatical space with the same answer: perhaps neither exists except as the dream of the person asking. This is not atheism. It is something structurally more complex: a religious sensibility that has absorbed the full weight of the tradition and refused to either accept or dismiss it, choosing instead to hold it as a question the novel will spend 1,198 pages not resolving.

Young builds her religious architecture on four distinct registers, each one carried by a different character, each one doing different work inside the pillars. The registers are: Miss MacIntosh's practical piety (the religion of the verifiable), Catherine's agnostic mysticism (the religion of the interior), Mr. Spitzer's theological pluralism (the religion of accumulated names), and Mr. Bonebreaker's evangelical Christianity (the religion of salvation and judgment). None of these is the novel's position. All four together constitute the novel's argument about what religion is and what it is for.

Miss MacIntosh's piety is the most plainly rendered and the most interesting because it contradicts itself without embarrassment. She is the woman who insists on truth to nature, rejects illusions and false prophets, refuses the consolations of an imaginary life, and teaches Vera the Pilgrim's Progress alongside the population of Kansas. Her faith is expressed as labor and endurance: "God had been her harness-maker, that He had hung her harness with tinkling bells so that it might always be known where she was, even when she was in the shadows." This is theology as practical ethics, God as the craftsman who makes the harness for the work that must be done, the bells not announcing divine presence but simply making the worker findable in the dark. She also holds, without apparent contradiction, that God "had not created everything," that "He had left many things uncreated," which is the most unsentimental theological statement in the novel: a God with limitations, a creation with gaps, a universe in which the uncreated is as real as the created and the worker's job is to keep working regardless. Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act) runs through her entire religious sensibility: she sees the world plainly, she names what she sees, and she refuses to dress the gaps in creation with illusions she cannot personally verify. "God pity God," she says when confronted with the baldness that is her secret, the bald head that will undo her entire performance of normality, and the

reversal is the point: the God who did not finish creation deserves the same compassionate attention she extends to any other being facing the consequences of its own insufficiency.

Catherine represents the novel's most paradoxical religious figure: she is the agnostic who lives inside a world more densely populated with the sacred than any orthodox believer in the novel. "She was the agnostic, but the angels surrounded her in her opium paradise, their fleecy wings outspreading, shadowing her cheek, and the harpers harped, and the seas were turned to glass." Young is not being ironic here. Catherine's agnosticism is genuine: she does not believe in God as a metaphysical proposition. But her interior world is constituted entirely by the imagery of revelation, by seraphim and cherubim and apocalyptic seas of glass, because the imagery of the Christian tradition, accumulated over centuries, has become the available vocabulary for interior experience at a certain scale of intensity. Her father had set a table for the wandering angel, a salt shaker and a crystal goblet and a plate of gold for whoever might arrive from Tarsus or some far place. She rejected his faith but kept his hospitality: her house is always full, its rooms assigned to Plato's boat and Spinoza and Shakespeare, with the Duke of Wellington expected, all equally welcome, none more real than another. Pillar 2 (Reality Is Constructed) is what permits this: if illusion is the primary mode of experience, then the agnostic's interior world can be more theologically rich than the believer's, because it is not constrained by the requirement of doctrinal consistency. Every figure who arrives is equally invited and equally imaginary and equally present, which is its own kind of sacred.

Mr. Spitzer carries the novel's most formally elaborate religious architecture: the passage in which he catalogs the names of God runs for a full page without pausing, and it is worth attending to as architecture rather than decoration. "God was not God in Himself, Mr. Spitzer believed, but in these pitiful images of God, these images which were but phantoms fading on the air." Then the list: the True Vine, the Bread of Life, the Gate, the Door, the Wine, the Only-Begotten, the Anointed, the Word, the Restorer, the Resurrection, the Great Spirit, the Light of the World, the Man of Sorrows, the Old Man, the King of Glory, the King of Kings, the Prince of Peace, the Good Shepherd, the Narrow Way, the Rose, the Thorn, the Risen, Immanuel, the Word made Flesh, the Advocate, the Intercessor, the Dove. The King of Light opposed "by the necessary King of Darkness, for if there were no darkness, then there should be no conception of light." This is Pillar 1 (Not One Self) operating at theological scale: God is not a single being with a stable identity but a being constituted by the accumulation of every name human longing has ever assigned to the divine, each name a particular, the God behind them all a universal that may or may not exist independently of the names. Young also has Mr. Spitzer extend the catalog beyond Christianity to "the third heaven, the seventh heaven, Valhalla, Nirvana, the happy hunting grounds," collapsing the boundary between traditions with the same gesture she uses to assign Plato and Spinoza to the same house: all of it is equally real, equally imagined, equally necessary.

Mr. Bonebreaker is the novel's only practicing evangelical, and Young gives him the most physically specific presentation of any religious figure in the novel. He is "sallow and tall and stoop-shouldered, a fisherman on the waters of this stormy life, casting his wide net,"

carrying his Bible and his Bible literature and his long black umbrella, raindrops falling from his beaked nose and chin. He finds Miss MacIntosh just after her mastectomy, weak and wandering, and tells her that "for whom the Lord loveth, the Lord chasteneth," and gathers the stray lamb to the fold. Young is not mocking him, exactly. She is showing how evangelical Christianity operates at its most effective: it arrives in the specific moment of maximum vulnerability, it names the suffering as spiritually meaningful, it offers community and certainty and a framework in which the wound becomes evidence of divine love rather than mere biological bad luck. Miss MacIntosh, who has refused every illusion, leans on Bonebreaker's arm in the rain because the wound has undone her ordinary resistance and what he is offering is warmth in a cold district, which is what religion has always offered and what Young never dismisses as simply false.

The preacher in Chapter 10 who slides from the wedding rite into the burial rite in a single ceremony, while "No one seemed amazed," is the novel's most condensed theological statement. He moves from "to love, honor, and obey, forsaking all others" to "Man that is born of woman," then "hath but a short time to live," to "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, brother to brother, deep calling to deep" without the flicker of an eyelid, and then ends with "Amen, amen, amen. Strike up the music! On with the dance." Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End) and Pillar 2 (Reality Is Constructed) converge here in a single liturgical form: the Christian ceremonies for the two great thresholds of human life, marriage and death, are revealed as structurally identical, which is Young's most honest theological claim. Both ceremonies ask the participants to stand before the irreversible and say words that acknowledge it and then continue. Both are performed by someone in a robe who does not know the participants personally. Both end with a meal. The difference between them is the direction of the transition, and Young's preacher, moving through both simultaneously, makes the direction seem less important than the ceremony itself, less important than the standing together in the face of what cannot be stopped.

"We were created by the dragonfly dropping upon its silken cable line. We were created by the images of the uncreated creation. We were created by a falling star singing as it fell. We were created by a shadow moving where the shadow increased." This is Mr. Spitzer's counter-Genesis, his alternative to "In the beginning God created," and it is Pillar 5 (Build Anyway, Knowing It's Temporary) at its most theologically ambitious. Creation in Young is not a single act by a single author but an endless process of being-called-into-being by single moments of beauty and chance, the dragonfly, the star, the shadow. God's absence from this account is not denial but redistribution: the creative force is not concentrated in a single sovereign being but spread through every single thing that has ever been beautiful enough or strange enough to make another being suddenly aware of existing. This is the theological claim the whole novel has been building toward, and it arrives not as argument but as list, as the same recursive accumulation by which Young constructs every truth the novel offers: not this or that explanation, but this and this and this and this, until the weight of the particular instances becomes its own kind of faith.

Every part of Young's religious architecture points the same way, and that direction is Pillar 10 (The Sacred Is Here). Mr. Spitzer finds God not in Himself but in the images people make of Him. Catherine, the agnostic, lies surrounded by angels in her opium

paradise. The counter-Genesis is made of a dragonfly, a falling star, a shadow. None of them looks for the sacred in a beyond. Each finds it here, inside the ordinary and imperfect world, which is where Young keeps it.

The Butterfly's Dream: Zhuangzi, Maya, and the Other Shore

Pillars: Pillar 1 (Not One Self) · Pillar 2 (Reality Is Constructed) · Pillar 10 (The Sacred Is Here)

Chapters discussed: 2, 14, 18, 25, 28, 29, 37, 38, 39, 41, 43, 45, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52

> *Perhaps there had never been actuality. Perhaps this world was the spectre of the spectre, the dream of the dream.*
>
> *Miss MacIntosh, My Darling, Chapter 49*

Sources Without Names

Young rarely names her sources. She takes a saying or an idea and puts it in her own words, often dropping the name and changing the famous phrase. That habit hides some of the oldest thinking in the novel, and much of it comes from China and India. The novel never names Zhuangzi, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, or the Buddha. Nirvana appears once, in a list. Yet when To All My Darlings traced the lines one by one, these traditions turned up in chapter after chapter: Hindu thought in eighteen chapters, Buddhist thought in twelve, Zhuangzi and the Tao in ten.

They deserve the same weight in this book as Plato and Descartes. And they matter for a particular reason. Plato tells us to climb out of the dream into the sun. These traditions say something closer to what Young's people live: the dream and the world are woven together, and wisdom is learning to see that while you go on living in it.

The Butterfly

Zhuangzi was a Chinese philosopher of the fourth century BCE, one of the founders of Taoism. His most famous story is short: “Once upon a time, I, Chuang Tzŭ, dreamt I was a butterfly, fluttering hither and thither, to all intents and purposes a butterfly.” Then he woke. “Now I do not know whether I was then a man dreaming I was a butterfly, or whether I am now a butterfly, dreaming I am a man” (Chuang Tzŭ, translated by Herbert A. Giles, 1889, chapter 2).

That question runs all through Young's novel. In Chapter 2, Vera says of Catherine: “My mother pretended that the real was the dream, that the dream was the real.” Catherine does not think she is alone in this. For everyone, “the dream must suffice, for reality bears with it always an aspect of fateful disappointment.”

Mr. Spitzer is the novel's butterfly man. In Chapter 28, “Sometimes the butterfly perching upon the flower had seemed as identical to the flower as twin to twin, and the flower had seemed to fly away, and the winged petals had remained, much to his bewilderment.” In Chapter 29 he cannot always tell butterfly from moth, “just as it might at times be difficult to distinguish between brother and brother or between the ecstasy of happiness and that

of sorrow.” In Chapter 38 the question is put to him almost in Zhuangzi's own form: “Did he so much as know whether he was a man or a butterfly, a lost psyche drifting down the wind?”

For Mr. Spitzer the butterfly question is also the twin question. Which brother died, and which is dreaming the other? In Chapter 49 he sees “a butterfly pirouetting in a cloud, butterfly which had seemed one butterfly but was always two butterflies conjoining over the suddenly shining wave, one with its image.” And in Chapter 50 he wonders whether he lives “by that dream which might be this extension beyond his death, dream dreamed by another dreamer.” Zhuangzi woke and could not say which one he was. Mr. Spitzer never quite wakes.

Heaven's Net

The Tao Te Ching, the old Chinese book of the Way credited to Laozi, says in chapter 73: “The meshes of the net of Heaven are large; far apart, but letting nothing escape” (translated by James Legge, 1891). In Chapter 18, on the night Vera sees her bald, Miss MacIntosh says it in her own way: “Heaven’s nets are woven very wide,” her voice drifting and high as if she were far away, “but none shall escape them.”

What she says just before it is more startling still. The woman of plain fact tells Vera: “It is all a dream, a poor man’s dream,” her voice common and flat, “and it was always this, but you were living in a fool’s paradise, and now you know there is no answer.” And after it: “We each must die and know that this life was all a dream, and there was nothing.” With the wig off, even Miss MacIntosh speaks the butterfly's language.

The Tao Te Ching also teaches that being comes out of non-being: “All things under heaven sprang from It as existing (and named); that existence sprang from It as non-existent (and not named)” (chapter 40, Legge). In Chapter 41, Catherine's house holds that same turn of thought: “The love which had never come into being was a greater love than love, and there was greater passion in restraint than in passion, greater being in non-being.”

Maya, the World as a Show

In Indian thought, maya is the power that makes the world appear as it does: an illusion, or better, a magic show, where things seem to be present but are not what they seem. The world is not nothing. It is real as a show is real. The scholar Heinrich Zimmer put the old teaching this way: “Life in the cycle of the countless rebirths is like a vision in a dream. The gods on high, the mute trees and the stones, are alike apparitions in this phantasy” (Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization, edited by Joseph Campbell, 1946). In Hindu story the god Vishnu sleeps on the cosmic ocean, and the world is his dream.

Catherine comes to the same thought from her bed. In Chapter 39: “And was not God dreaming, too, dreaming these opium dreams, so who could be right if God was dreaming?” If the maker is dreaming, then no one in the house holds the one true view. The dreamer in the bed is not further from reality than anyone else.

Chapter 41, the long chapter of Catherine's visitors, is full of lines that sit close to the Upanishads, the old Hindu teachings on the self and the world. The Isha Upanishad says of the one reality: “That One, though motionless, is swifter than the mind. The senses can never overtake It, for It ever goes before.” “It moves and It moves not. It is far and also It is near. It is within and also It is without all this” (verses 4 and 5, translated by Swami Paramananda, 1919). Of Catherine, motionless in her bed, the novel says: “She was swifter than her own mind, swifter than her mercurial thoughts. She was far, yet she was near. She was within, yet she was outside. She was life, yet she was also not life. She was everywhere at once because she was nowhere, diffused through starlight.”

The same chapter calls Catherine's dreams “an action in inaction,” close to the Bhagavad Gita: “He who sees inaction in action, and action in inaction, is wise among men” (4.18, translated by Kashinath Trimbak Telang, 1882). She “could be many persons with many heads, limbs, arms,” like the cosmic being of the Rig Veda, “A thousand heads hath Purusha, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet” (10.90.1, translated by Ralph T. H. Griffith, 1896). And she asks, “were there not many roads to the crown of her head?” That is close to a teaching Swami Vivekananda brought to the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, quoting an old hymn: “As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee.”

The Chariot, the Doors, and the Upside-Down Tree

Other pictures from the Upanishads and the Gita turn up across the book. In Chapter 14, Catherine pictures herself this way: “Her body was the carriage, and her soul, now it seemed, was the passenger, and her horses were her will, and the coachman was her conscience.” The Katha Upanishad uses the same picture: “Know the Self to be sitting in the chariot, the body to be the chariot, the intellect (buddhi) the charioteer, and the mind the reins. The senses they call the horses” (translated by F. Max Müller, 1884). Plato's Phaedrus has a charioteer too. Young's carriage belongs to both.

In Chapter 48, Mr. Spitzer thinks that his brother Peron “no doubt had gone through the door of the sun as Mr. Spitzer had gone through the door of the moon.” In the Upanishads the wise depart “through the sun to where that immortal Person dwells” (Mundaka Upanishad 1.2.11, Müller), while those who will be born again go by the path of the moon (Chandogya Upanishad 5.10). In Chapter 50 there is “the door of truth which was covered with a golden disc and was never opened by man,” and the Isha Upanishad prays: “The door of the True is covered with a golden disk. Open that, O Pûshan, that we may see the nature of the True” (verse 15, Müller, 1879).

The Bhagavad Gita (15.1) and the Katha Upanishad describe an eternal fig tree with its roots above and its branches below. In Chapter 37 there are “trees of enormous crystal growing with their roots in the clouded sky, their branches under the earth,” and in Chapter 52 Mr. Spitzer remembers “the tree rooted in clouds with its branches growing downward.” In Chapter 51 he is “some old, dreaming tortoise with the stars upon his

back,” who “upheld the starry universe,” a picture that belongs to Vishnu's tortoise form, which bears the world, and to the Lenape and other peoples for whom North America is Turtle Island, the earth on a great turtle's back.

And in Chapter 45, in the long meditation around Cousin Hannah's death, the novel says: “Perhaps at the deepest depths there is no individual or image, neither bird nor fish nor flower. Thus at the depths of sleep no face is remembered. All things have flowed into all things. A man may die each night, sinking into the drowned depths of sleep. The deepest sleep is dreamless.” The Mandukya Upanishad names deep, dreamless sleep, where the sleeper desires nothing and dreams no dream, as the third state of the self.

The Other Shore

Buddhism grew from the same Indian ground. The Buddha taught that suffering comes from craving, that nothing has a fixed, lasting self, and that freedom is a crossing to “the other shore.” The Heart Sutra ends with a chant for that crossing: “Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone altogether beyond, awakening, hail.”

In Chapter 43, dying, Cousin Hannah cries out: “A light, a light! I see a light upon the other shore.” Mr. Spitzer, listening, has already told himself where he will be when her ship goes down: “For he would be upon the other shore.” Earlier, in Chapter 29, he imagines a time “when conflicts were resolved at every level of thought, when he was divested of desire.” In the same chapter, Nirvana sits in his list of heavens beside Valhalla and the happy hunting grounds, and the list ends: “God was not God in Himself, Mr. Spitzer believed, but in these pitiful images of God.” And in Chapter 25 he asks, “What was this life, this life which was no life but a temporary incarnation, a mistaken embodiment?”

The Buddha's old parable of the blind men and the elephant (Udana 6.4) tells of men who each touch one part of the animal and each swear that the elephant is only that part. Mr. Spitzer knows the feeling. In Chapter 51: “And if reality had been a horse, he would have known no more of reality than the coachman’s little light or the horse’s tail.” In the same chapter comes a line close to the Buddhist teaching that nothing stands alone, that each thing arises from others in a chain: “We lived by an imperfect concatenation, even as we died—by echoes, tremblings, reverberations, sourceless thoughts.”

Why These Traditions Belong Here

The Western story most of this book has followed starts with Plato: the world of the senses is a cave of shadows, and the wise climb out of it. Young turns that story over, as Flipping the Cave shows. The traditions in this essay never needed turning over. For Zhuangzi, waking and dreaming are both ways the Way moves. For the Upanishads and the Gita, the show of maya is how the one reality appears. For the Buddha, the self that clings is the illusion, and seeing through it does not mean leaving the world but living in it without grasping. Young's Catherine, her Mr. Spitzer, even her Miss MacIntosh with the wig off, keep arriving at these old answers in their own words. The novel is in conversation with China and India as fully as with Athens.

The Radical Immanence Reading

In the language of Radical Immanence, maya and the butterfly are Pillar 2 (Reality Is Constructed): the world is real as a dream or a show is real, made and still worth living in. Mr. Spitzer's two butterflies, “one with its image,” and the Buddha's teaching of no fixed self are Pillar 1 (Not One Self). And the net of Heaven, the door of the sun, and the other shore glimpsed from a deathbed in an ordinary house are Pillar 10 (The Sacred Is Here): whatever holds the world is found inside it, not above it.

The Comic Architecture

Pillars: Pillar 1 (Not One Self) · Pillar 2 (Reality Is Constructed) · Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End) · Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act) · Pillar 5 (Build Anyway, Knowing It's Temporary)

In her last conversation with Miriam Fuchs, in June 1993, Young said readers should not take the novel so seriously; they should read it for the humor. The advice has been largely ignored. The critical tradition around Miss MacIntosh, My Darling treats it as a cathedral of grief and philosophical weight, which it is, but this treatment misses something structurally essential: the comedy is not relief from the serious work. It is the serious work, operating through a different register. Young understood, as the best comic writers always have, that comedy is the form that takes the most seriously the gap between what things are and what they are supposed to be, and that this gap is the very ground the pillars are built to inhabit. Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End) requires comedy because without it the grief becomes sentimental, which is the one thing Young never permits. Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act) requires comedy because the only way to sustain full attention to the world's contradictions without flinching is to find them funny as well as devastating. Pillar 2 (Reality Is Constructed) requires comedy because the mechanism by which illusion operates, the straight face that insists on the impossible, is the mechanism of the joke.

The novel announces its comic method in one of its earliest and most sustained exchanges. Catherine asks Mr. Spitzer: "Tell me, is there or is there not an invisible elephant in the corridor leading to this bedroom?" Mr. Spitzer, "smoothing his grey velvet cuffs, his mouth yawning, his eyes dimmed," maintains that the burden of proof rested "not on him but on my mother who had seen the invisible." Catherine's counter: why should an elephant rest on her, such a huge elephant, "a composition of sultry light beams, and with such a long memory, it could remember everything." And then the clincher: "Besides, if there was no elephant, then what was an elephant doing in the house?" This is not absurdism deployed to signal philosophical depth. It is a genuine comic argument about knowing, about who bears the burden of proof for the invisible, structured as a perfect straight-man routine in which Mr. Spitzer is the straight man and the invisible elephant is the premise neither party will abandon. The exchange is funny because it is logically rigorous. Catherine's final question, "what was an elephant doing in the house," is unanswerable within the terms of any theory of knowledge Mr. Spitzer could bring to bear. She has won the argument by the rules of the argument.

The servants of the household have developed, through long proximity to Catherine's opium world, a parallel universe of institutional comedy. One thinks he is waiting on Wellington because they have discussed Wellington so much. He is called Wellington by the other servants, and Catherine asks him how Wellington is, what Wellington's appetites are, as though the conversation has always been about a third party who happens not to be present. Another servant thinks he lives in a forest of cuckoo clocks. One imagines he is Hannibal driving the elephants over the Alps. The second gardener thinks he is "a cosmic praying mantis reaching through miles of starlight." The servants dispute among

themselves whether it is Roman in the morning or Greek in the afternoon. The blue room is already occupied by Plato's boat, et cetera. This is Young at her most fully comic, the "et cetera" doing exquisite work: having established that the household's rooms are assigned to historical and philosophical figures without regard for century, the prose waves away the rest of the list because to continue it would reduce the comedy by over-explaining it. The et cetera is the punchline's perfect punctuation.

Moses Hunnecker the bus driver is the novel's most comprehensively comic character, and his comedy is political satire delivered in a vernacular monologue that never stops, never quiets, and never for a moment loses the internal logic that makes it devastating. He will not cut his hair "until Roosevelt got out of the White House and all those Brain Trusters were busted with their W.P.A. projects and their public parks and their marble bird baths and their rotten roads and their free skating rinks that nobody wants when the river is frozen over and their free kindergartens that nobody wants." The list escalates from large to deliberately small, the marble bird baths arriving with the same indignation as the rotten roads, the free skating rinks positioned as culturally equivalent to governmental overreach, all of it delivered by a man driving a bus while drinking whiskey and invoking "God and all ye angelic choirs" in the same breath. Moses Hunnecker is a comic character in the Dickensian tradition: grotesque, exaggerated, completely himself, and in his very excess a sharp portrait of one kind of American and one kind of American politics. His hair, growing uncut as Roosevelt's terms multiply, is the novel's funniest physical gag and simultaneously a completely serious image of the body as political protest, of the personal as the political before that phrase existed.

The Christian hangman Mr. Weed and the landlord at the hotel provide the novel's most formally constructed comic exchange, a duet of professional non-sequiturs in which each man's area of expertise renders him unable to hear the other's. The hangman ties knots that end lives. The landlord ties knots that join lives. They discuss knots for several pages without either noticing they are talking about incompatible things. The hangman worries he nearly killed a dog. The landlord worries about ships that sink. The hangman wears his Sunday clothes to hangings and to church because they are the same occasion. The landlord notes that the hangman's bow-tie is loose: "Someone else will have to tie it. This is something a wife should do." The comedy is structural: two men in a late-night hotel room, each carrying the weight of his own mortality in the professional form it has taken for him, talking past each other with perfect comic timing across the gap that Pillar 1 (Not One Self) names but cannot bridge. Their exchange is funny in the way that mortality is funny when you look at it directly enough.

The mute with the frog in his mouth is the novel's purest image of comedy as a philosophical method. The mute has trained a frog, through long practice and "labial and laryngeal and dental manipulations," to serve as his voice box, and in this capacity the frog has performed the Lord's Prayer in a thieves' café, advised on betting, and cautioned against pickpockets. When the frog dies, Mr. Spitzer attends its funeral in his "flowing black Englishman's bow-tie and mourning cloak," because there is no one else to share the mute's grief. The comedy is completely earnest: Young is not laughing at the frog's funeral. She is presenting it with the same full dignity she extends to every form of grief

and loss in the novel, which is itself the comedic method. The frog has served as a voice for someone who had none. That this is funny does not make it less true. Pillar 5 (Build Anyway, Knowing It's Temporary) builds here as it always does: the absurd image contains within it a perfectly serious philosophical claim about what voices are, what they cost, and what it means to lose them.

Miss MacIntosh is funny in the way that total consistency is funny when it meets a world that refuses to be consistent. Her responses to the world's philosophical confusions are practical to the point of comedy: she dismisses chess as a game for kings and focuses on navigation and cooking, she prefers Pilgrim's Progress to the Word of God because Bunyan is "fairly safe even though not altogether trustworthy," she laughs wildly when a man at the Stock Exchange invites her to the North Pole with nothing but ear muffs, "her mouth wide and cavernous, a red ridge on her broken nose, her bald head sloping like a snowy cape." Miss MacIntosh laughing wildly, bald, invited over the snowy cap of the world with nothing but a pair of ear muffs, is the novel's definitive image of what Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act) looks like when it is fully inhabited: clear-eyed, practical, absolutely itself, and completely capable of finding the situation hilarious without losing its grip on what the situation actually is.

Young knew that a novel about grief as permanent weather, about illusion as the primary mode of experience, about the plural self and the failure of identity and the impossibility of verification, had to be funny. Not to leaven its seriousness but because seriousness without comedy is sentimentality, and sentimentality is the one form of illusion Young refuses. The comedy is proof that Young was watching the world with both eyes open: one eye for what is devastating about it, and one eye for what is genuinely, structurally, unarguably absurd.

Movement Three: The Cosmological Layer

All Reality Is Musical

Boethius, De Musica, and the Architectural Structure of Miss MacIntosh, My Darling

The Word Count That Matters

The word music, including musician and musical, appears over 1,100 times in Miss MacIntosh, My Darling. The phrase music of the spheres appears nine times, and the silent music that Mr. Spitzer composes appears forty-five times. Dead appears over 1,600 times. Love appears nearly a thousand times, three quarters of them from Chapter 42 on. These are not incidental repetitions. In a novel written over eighteen years by a scholar who controlled every sentence, a word that appears 1,100 times is a structural element.

The philosophical framework that makes this repetition architecturally coherent is Boethius's De Institutione Musica, his sixth-century treatise on the nature of music. Boethius divided music into three categories: musica mundana, the music of the spheres, the mathematical harmony of the cosmos that is inaudible to human ears; musica humana, the internal music of the human body, the harmony between body and soul; and musica instrumentalis, the audible music produced by singers and instruments. He said all reality is musical. His drawings in De Musica appear striking and may be an inspiration for the organization of Young's novel.

That turns out to be one of the most significant architectural observations in the entire project. Young may have taken visual inspiration from Boethius's diagrams. The three-part structure of musica mundana, musica humana, and musica instrumentalis maps onto the three registers in which music operates throughout Miss MacIntosh: the cosmic, the interior, and the absent. The map “All the Darlings,” on the Character Hubs page, shows the novel's whole cast drawn on just such a Boethian diagram.

Musica Mundana: The Music No One Hears

Mr. Spitzer is the novel's primary musical consciousness. He is described as a composer of silent music, music he has written in scraps and fragments all his life, music that no one has ever played. His compositions are intended for an audience of the dead. He wonders whether there is such a thing as a non-aural music, a non-visual language, a reality not dependent upon the ear or the eye.

This is musica mundana translated into the novel's register. Boethius's music of the spheres is mathematically real but inaudible to human ears. Mr. Spitzer's music is compositionally real but unperformed, unheard, written for instruments no merely mortal musician could play. The parallel is exact. Mr. Spitzer inhabits the same structural position in the novel that musica mundana holds in Boethius's system: the highest category, the one that orders everything else, the one that exists most fully because it cannot be directly heard.

> *Though he had added a cautionary phrase as one who knew creation and its void places—remember, he had added to his last will and musical testament, that his musical rags had not covered him, for there was no great tailor, no tailor but that mad tailor stitching in a dream, stitching the clothes that fall apart.*
>
> *Miss MacIntosh, My Darling, Chapter 62*

Had he known what he was doing in the first place, the novel says, "perhaps he never would have done so—but would have allowed his music to write him." The music writes the composer. The cosmos composes itself. Musica mundana is not created by anyone; it exists in the mathematical relationships of the celestial bodies. Mr. Spitzer's silent music exists in the same way: not as a score that could be performed but as the structure of his consciousness, the harmony that organizes his grief and his love and his endless meditation on the dead. He is not the composer. He is the conduit.

Musica Humana: The Body and Soul in Argument

Boethius's musica humana is the harmony, or disharmony, between body and soul. It is the internal music of the human being, the tuning or mistuning of the self's parts. In Miss MacIntosh, the relationship between body and soul is one of the most persistently examined questions in the novel. The word soul appears over 250 times. Body appears throughout in relation to soul, most often in states of division, conflict, or uncertain reunion.

“Two tenants wrangled in an empty house, that which was his body and his soul.” Mr. Spitzer's formulation is pure musica humana: the internal music of a self whose parts are not in harmony, whose body and soul are tenants in the same house arguing over possession. Every character in the novel has a version of this dissonance. Catherine's body lies horizontal in bed while her consciousness travels through opium dreams that are more real to her than the body's location. Miss MacIntosh's body is ordinary and practical and fully present; her secret, her baldness, her history, is a soul that does not match the body's performance of normalcy. Vera's body is on a bus traveling through Indiana; her consciousness is everywhere and nowhere simultaneously.

Musica humana as a structural principle explains why the novel can move so fluidly between exterior event and interior consciousness without those movements feeling like violations of realism. The novel is not a realistic novel that has been interrupted by a stream of consciousness. It is a novel organized around the idea that the interior music of each character is as real and as architecturally significant as anything they do or say. The body and the soul are both instruments in the same composition. The composition requires both.

Musica Instrumentalis: The Sounds That Are and Are Not Heard

Musica instrumentalis is Boethius's category for audible music, the music produced by singers and instruments. In Miss MacIntosh this category is populated with instruments that appear throughout: flutes, pianos, banjo, clarinet, violin, trumpet, the alpenhorn that

Cousin Hannah owns and that Mr. Spitzer steals after her death, the seven-stringed harp whose strings bear the music of soul and spirit and astral body.

But musica instrumentalis in the novel is almost always either silent or heard by the wrong ears. The stone deaf man at the end of the novel, whom Vera falls in love with, has never heard a traffic horn in his travels across America. His musical voice rolls through silence. He hears not with ears but with eyes and fingers. The last reference to music in the novel is Vera's statement about loving this stone deaf man, "he with his musical voice rolling through silence as I heard him who could not hear me." Musica instrumentalis, the category of audible music, ends in silence. The sound reaches only the one who cannot hear it.

This is Boethius inverted, and the inversion is the novel's most serious argument about music. Boethius's three categories are arranged hierarchically: musica mundana is highest, musica instrumentalis is lowest. Young takes the lowest category and makes it the novel's final image: the musical voice that cannot be heard, the love that communicates across the impossibility of shared sound. Musica instrumentalis does not disappear into the higher categories. It persists, imperfect, audible to those who have no ears for it, real because it cannot be contained by the hierarchy that was supposed to organize it.

The Diagrams and the Novel's Visual Architecture

The idea that Boethius's drawings in De Musica appear striking and may be an inspiration for the organization of Young's novel points toward a dimension of the architectural argument that cannot be fully developed without the diagrams themselves. Boethius's visual representations of musical proportion, of the mathematical relationships between the three categories of music, of the hierarchy from the cosmic to the human to the instrumental, are geometric as well as conceptual. They organize space as well as sound.

If Young took visual as well as conceptual inspiration from these diagrams, then the organization of the novel's chapters may follow a spatial as well as a temporal logic. The chapters are not arranged as episodes in a sequence; they are arranged as positions in a structure. Catherine's opium chapters, Mr. Spitzer's legal and musical meditations, Vera's bus journey and her memories, Cousin Hannah's suffrage and her secret love, Esther Longtree's perpetual pregnancy: these may be positions in a Boethian diagram, each occupying a specific place in the hierarchy of musica mundana, musica humana, and musica instrumentalis, each demonstrating a different relationship between the cosmic order and the individual consciousness that cannot quite hear it. This is the architectural argument that most required a return to the novel itself, and the diagrams of De Musica have now been laid beside the chapters. The map “All the Darlings,” on the Character Hubs page, draws every character on a single Boethian staff of 82 chapters. Cousin Hannah's chapters (30 to 52) sit at the exact middle of the book, the place of the mese, the middle string the scale is tuned around, and the movements pair off around her in simple ratios: the bus (8 chapters) against its return (16), and Mr. Spitzer (5) against his grief (10), each an octave. What this chapter establishes is the framework: Boethius said

all reality is musical, and Young built a novel that proves it, at 1,198 pages, by demonstrating all three categories of music in every register of the novel from the cosmic to the corporeal to the finally, beautifully, inaudible.

The Lower World and the Upper World

Pillars: Pillar 10 (The Sacred Is Here)

Chapters discussed: 13

Dante's Divine Comedy as Cosmological Map for Miss MacIntosh, My Darling

Mr. Spitzer's Belief

Mr. Spitzer believes that people need to travel through the lower world to reach the upper world. In Chapter 26 he states it "as if he were overwhelmed by an absolutely new idea": "in order to reach the upper world, one must first travel through the lower world, visiting all streets, lanes, alleys, and the journey might be endless like some of those journeys taken by my mother." It is a cosmological position stated explicitly by one of the novel's two primary consciousnesses. And the cosmological system it draws on is Dante's Divine Comedy: nine circles of Hell, seven levels of Purgatory, nine levels of Heaven, with God in the Empyrean beyond space and time.

Young cited Dante throughout Miss MacIntosh. Dante Alighieri is named directly in the novel three times, the last in Chapter 71, where “an old steel engraving of Dante wooing Beatrice” hangs in a doctor's room in Indiana as the journey nears its end. The poem itself is named once, in Chapter 29, when Mr. Spitzer wonders when he should “come to the last infernal circle of this Divine Comedy of life and death.” The Divine Comedy is referenced as a journey from sin to heaven, like Pilgrim's Progress. Roland appears in the Heaven of Mars. Boethius, whose De Musica the previous chapter addresses, is pointed out by Saint Thomas Aquinas in Dante's Paradiso. The Beatrice of Dante's Comedy, Beatrice Portinari who guides Dante through Paradise and symbolizes divine grace and theology, names a character in the novel's bus sections: Beatrice Fitzgerald, marginal, nearly blind, judged by her community, who may be royal by the bar sinister of her name. Dante's Cleopatra, whom he places in the circle of Lust, is echoed by the elderly Boston lady in Chapter 26, a case Mr. Spitzer took in his youth, who “imagined all her life that she was the reincarnation of Cleopatra,” in the same chapter where he speaks of the lower world.

These are not decorative allusions. Young embedded Dante's structure in the novel's movement. The question is where.

The Three Canticles and the Novel's Three Movements

The Divine Comedy has three books: Inferno, Purgatorio, Paradiso. Dante descends through Hell, ascends through Purgatory, and rises through Heaven. The journey is downward before it is upward, and the downward journey is necessary: without the full knowledge of Hell, the ascent through Purgatory and Paradise cannot be earned or understood.

Miss MacIntosh moves in a structure that rhymes with this even if it does not replicate it exactly. The novel opens with loss: Miss MacIntosh is gone, Catherine is "dead among her dreams," and Vera is on a bus searching for the one who disappeared. This is the beginning of the descent. The first half of the novel, roughly Chapters 1 through 43, moves through the lower world: the house by the sea, Catherine's dreams, Vera's "Farewell to the last certitude" in Chapter 13, Mr. Spitzer's early meditations on his dead twin brother and his unplayed music. These are the nine circles traversed slowly, the full accounting of what has been lost and what was never real.

The second half, roughly Chapters 44 through 82, moves through something that is not exactly Purgatorio but has its quality: the long process of each character arriving at what they actually are rather than what they have been pretending to be. Cousin Hannah's death and the revelation of her secret love. Mr. Spitzer's increasingly explicit meditations on the blind Eros and the love that exceeds the limitations of the individual. Esther Longtree's appearance as the mother of us all. These are not ascending toward Paradise. They are arriving at a kind of honest accounting. Dante's Purgatorio is the place where sin is acknowledged and purged. Young's second half is where illusion is finally named.

The Paradiso equivalent in Miss MacIntosh is not a location but a moment: the final chapter, Vera's declaration of love for the stone deaf man, her recognition of Esther Longtree as the mother of us all, the acceptance of her place in the wheel's rotation. It is not transcendence. It is acceptance. But acceptance, in this novel, is the highest rung available. The Empyrean is wherever Vera stops running and names what she loves.

Mr. Spitzer himself warns against reading the map too neatly. In Chapter 54 he is lost on a street of mirages, looking for an old aunt “in Paradiso if this was Paradiso. Yet it might be Inferno, for Mr. Spitzer's was an escalator psychology,” and he goes up and down “though the upper world was under, and the under world was upper, and everything was probably reversed.” Young keeps Dante's map and turns it over at the same time.

The Seven Sins and the Seven Virtues

Dante's Purgatorio is organized around the seven deadly sins: Pride, Envy, Wrath, Sloth, Avarice, Gluttony, Lust. Each terrace of Purgatory is devoted to the purging of one sin. The corresponding virtues are taught on each terrace as the alternative to the sin being cleansed.

Every major character in Miss MacIntosh carries a dominant Dantean sin as their primary wound. Catherine's sin is closest to Sloth in its Dantean form: the failure to love adequately, the withdrawal from the demands of active engagement with the world, the opium bed as the physical expression of a soul that has abdicated its obligations. Miss MacIntosh's sin is Pride: the performance of a self she is not, the refusal to acknowledge the private reality that contradicts her public presentation. She names it herself in Chapter 63, bald before Vera: “it is my own disgrace of pride, God's hollow pretense of grandeur.” Sloth is the vice she preaches against all through Vera's childhood, “there was nothing to fear but sloth” (Chapter 18), in a house whose mistress never leaves her bed. Mr. Spitzer's sin is Avarice in its emotional form: the hoarding of love never declared, the

refusal to spend the self in relationship, the accumulation of grief and unexpressed devotion that never becomes actual giving. Vera's journey through the novel is the process of encountering these sins in the people who were supposed to teach her how to live, and arriving at something that is not virtue in the Dantean sense but is the honest acknowledgment of what each sin costs.

The seven levels of Purgatory with seven vices and seven virtues: this is the structural skeleton beneath Miss MacIntosh's second half. Young did not map the sins onto characters with academic schematicism. She absorbed the structure and built her own version of it, populated with characters whose wounds match the Dantean categories without reducing to them.

Beatrice Fitzgerald and Beatrice Portinari

The novel's Beatrice is introduced on the bus, near the end of the bus journey section, as a figure of social marginality and judgment. She is nearly blind and losing the other eye. She is called a common prostitute by Madge, who resents her. She is called royal by Homer, who respects her name: Fitzgerald, with its prefix Fitz, meaning born of royalty on the wrong side of the blanket. She hides in darkness by putting out the lights so others will not see her. She has a son in the Navy who still remembers her.

Dante's Beatrice is the guide through Paradise, the figure who symbolizes divine grace and theology, the woman whose death in 1290 prompted La Vita Nuova and whose presence in the Comedy transforms the journey from a descent into Hell into a complete cosmological circuit. She appears at the top of Purgatory to relieve Virgil of his guiding function, which is reason's limit, and guide Dante through the levels of Heaven that reason alone cannot reach.

Young's Beatrice is not a guide. She is barely seen. She is almost blind. She hides. But the name carries its weight deliberately: royal by bar sinister, nearly sightless, marginal to the community that judges her, remembered by a son who has traveled the world. In a novel where Young said there are no coincidences, the name Beatrice attached to a woman who is going blind at the moment Vera's bus approaches the end of its journey is a structural marker. The guide through Paradise is losing her sight as the novel approaches its final reckoning. The Dantean figure who should be most visible is the one who puts out the lights so no one can see her. This is Young's revision of Dante: the divine mediator is not transcendent. She is exhausted and nearly blind and living in a tin house in a flooded yard.

What This Requires from the Novel

What is established here is the framework and the evidence that makes the framework plausible: Young cited Dante directly and repeatedly; Mr. Spitzer explicitly articulates the lower world/upper world structure that is the Divine Comedy's organizing journey; the character named Beatrice carries the weight of her name in ways that are structurally coherent with the Dantean guide function; and the novel's movement from loss through

reckoning to a final acceptance has the shape of the three canticles even if it does not replicate their theological content.

Dante's journey ends in the vision of God, a light that the soul finally apprehends after the full descent and ascent. Young's journey ends in Vera's love for the stone deaf man and her recognition of Esther Longtree as the mother of us all. The light that Vera finally apprehends is not divine but human: the love that persists through the impossibility of shared sound, the mother who carries all the stillborn children, the wheel that keeps turning after the hub is gone.

Dante rises out of the earth toward a light beyond it. Young's paradise stays on the ground: the wedding Vera and the stone deaf man plan as they lie in the long grass under the stars, to which they would invite “all the wild flowers and all the birds” and Esther Longtree, “for she was also our love.” The sacred is reached by going down into the ordinary world, not by climbing out of it.

Mr. Spitzer was right. You have to go through the lower world first.

The Garden, the Stream, and the Blind God

Chapters discussed: 13

Anatole France, William James, and the Philosophical Architecture of Miss MacIntosh, My Darling

William James's Principles of Psychology is the work Young named when she spoke of what shaped her. She studied it “as if it were a Bible” (American Audio Prose Library interview with Kay Bonetti, New York, May 1983).

This chapter argues that the architecture of Miss MacIntosh, My Darling is built on three interlocking foundations that have not previously been described as a unified structure: the philosophical method of Anatole France, the psychology of William James, and the unresolved tension between Epicurus and Plato that both France and the novel hold permanently open. Understanding this structure does not simplify the novel. It explains why the novel refuses to be simplified, and why that refusal is its most serious philosophical commitment.

The Garden: Anatole France and the Method of Irresolution

Marguerite Young was a reader of Anatole France. Through her grandmother he became the writer she loved most as a girl, and she read all of him in French; when her grandmother died, Young's first thought was that "now she can tell Anatole France that she has a little granddaughter on Earth who adores him" (Marguerite Young, interview with Charles Ruas, "The Art of Fiction No. 66," The Paris Review, Fall 1977). France was not merely a favorite; he was, for Young, a model of what literary philosophy could do when it refused to conclude. France won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1921, the year his short tale Marguerite, which he called "this little trifle," appeared in English. He was known for his socialist sympathies, his wit, his deep skepticism of dogma in any form, and his extraordinary gift for holding incompatible ideas in the same hand without crushing either.

The work of France's that bears most directly on Miss MacIntosh is The Garden of Epicurus (1894), not a novel but a book of short reflections, followed in the English edition by a handful of tales and dialogues. One of them, "Aristos and Polyphilos on the Language of Metaphysics," is a conversation between two friends about how philosophers grind words down like old coins until their physical meaning is worn away. Another, "In the Elysian Fields," is set among the shades of the dead, "souls of all times and all countries," great philosophers "side by side with poor savages." But the book is not an Epicurean tract. It is a staging of the encounter between Epicurean materialism and the persistent human longing that materialism cannot satisfy. France was, throughout his career, drawn to the transitional period between paganism and Christianity: the historical moment when a philosophy of the body and its pleasures met a philosophy of the ascending soul and neither could eliminate the other. He staged that encounter rather

than resolving it. His garden is not a place of settled doctrine. It is a place where the argument continues.

France also inhabited the Platonic tradition, not as a believer but as an ironist who found the ladder of Eros both beautiful and unreachable. In The Revolt of the Angels (1914), arguably his most philosophically dense novel, Satan himself discovers that if he overthrew God, he would become God: the same trap wearing a different name. The lesson is not that revolution is wrong but that any system that replaces one authority with another has missed the actual problem. The actual problem is interior. France located it in the self's irresolvable desire for something it cannot name and cannot stop reaching toward. That desire has a name in Plato. It is Eros.

The Revolt of the Angels speaks directly to Miss MacIntosh, My Darling, and it is perhaps the most philosophically compressed of all his works. It tells the story of Arcade, the guardian angel of young Maurice d'Esparvieu. While Maurice, “fordone with the toils of a sensual life,” lies asleep, Arcade reads his way through the vast d'Esparvieu library and comes out saying, “I have learnt. I have thought. I have lost my faith.” He takes human form, without wings, and joins a revolutionary movement of fallen angels. When the revolution is ready, its leader, Satan, dreams of victory and wakes knowing something that stops the revolution entirely: “God, conquered, will become Satan; Satan, conquering, will become God.” If he overthrew God, he would become just like God. The structure he was rebelling against would simply be reproduced under a new name. Arcade understands the lesson. Replacing one authority with another changes nothing unless, as France writes, in ourselves and in ourselves alone we attack and destroy Ialdabaoth. Ialdabaoth, according to France, is God's secret name. It means the child who wanders.

The child who wanders is Vera Cartwheel. This is not a casual correspondence. Vera's entire journey in the novel, from her farewell to Miss MacIntosh in Chapter 13 through the long bus ride that frames the narrative and the accumulated weight of memory and hallucination and grief that constitutes her consciousness, is a wandering. She is not going somewhere. She is moving through the only territory available to her: the interior, where the authorities that once organized the world have collapsed and no replacement authority has arrived. The Ialdabaoth principle, that the problem is not the wrong authority but the assumption that authority resolves anything at all, is Young's deepest philosophical commitment. Vera does not find a new Miss MacIntosh. She finds that the wandering is the life, and that the child who wanders is not lost but is rather the only kind of self that is being honest about what selfhood actually is.

What France gave Young, understood as a structural principle rather than a set of doctrines, is this: the philosophical work happens in the space between the garden and the ladder. Not in the resolution of the tension between Epicurus and Plato but in the sustained inhabitation of it. The novel that takes this seriously cannot end with a position. It can only end when the conversation has been fully conducted. France's novels are long because the conversation is long. Young's novel is longer because she understood that the stream of consciousness is the only medium adequate to the full duration of that conversation. And the child at the center of that stream is Ialdabaoth: the wanderer, the one who cannot be returned to the cave once she has seen what the cave contains.

The Stream: William James and the Shape of Consciousness

Young stated directly, in interviews, that she admired and was influenced by both Henry and William James. She spoke of “the profound influence upon me of William James and Saint Augustine in ‘The City of God’” (Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs, “A Conversation with Marguerite Young,” *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 23, no. 1, Spring 2003 (1989 original)). William James's Principles of Psychology, published in 1890, is the book that gave the phrase stream of consciousness to literature and philosophy.

James's argument in the Principles can be summarized in four propositions: every state of consciousness is personal; states of consciousness are always changing; consciousness is sensibly continuous; and within consciousness there is a shifting and focused attention. Young keeps three of them and breaks with the third. For James, consciousness “does not appear to itself chopped up in bits”; “It is nothing jointed; it flows” (*The Principles of Psychology*, 1890, chapter 9). In Chapter 48 Mr. Spitzer finds otherwise: “Consciousness was ever that which was sporadic, fluttering, not constant even in this life, just as sustained attention was impossible.” Young builds the break out of James's own book. He conceded that “There is no such thing as voluntary attention sustained for more than a few seconds at a time” (chapter 11) and described our mental life as “an alternation of flights and perchings” (chapter 9). Where James holds that consciousness after a gap feels as if it “belonged together with the consciousness before it,” Mr. Spitzer asks whether consciousness could “know when consciousness faded for the last time,” and sees it as “fading, flickering, going out.” That image sits close to the Abhidharma Buddhist account of mind as a series of momentary events, each arising and ceasing, a parallel Young does not name.

But James gave Young more than a model of the mind. He gave her permission to take seriously what the scientific and rationalist traditions had decided to exclude. In Is Life Worth Living?, James makes the point that much of human mental activity is forever closed to other minds in the way that the meaning of a surgical procedure is closed to the dog on the operating table. This is not a counsel of despair for James. It is liberating: it means that the things we cannot prove are not therefore absent, and that the irreducible interior life is not a failure of rigor but a feature of what consciousness actually is. Young's characters, especially Mr. Spitzer, inhabit this insight as their permanent condition. They know they cannot fully know. They continue anyway.

James also described what he called the stream's fringes: the felt sense of relations, the halo of half-formed meaning that surrounds every clear thought, the transitional states that connect one moment of consciousness to the next. These fringes are what most narrative fiction omits because they are difficult to render and seem to impede the plot. Young renders nothing else. The fringes are the novel. They are where the philosophical work is done: in the almost-thought, the remembered-and-not-quite, the grief that is not grief yet but has already begun.

The Blind God: Plato's Eros and the Novel's Two Poles

The Symposium is Plato's most dramatic philosophical work and his most direct treatment of Eros. It is, structurally, a contest of speeches: multiple voices, multiple frameworks for understanding love, none of them finally authoritative. Socrates arrives late, having become lost in thought on the way. Alcibiades arrives drunk and crashes the proceedings. The party ends in disorder with people falling asleep mid-conversation, and Socrates rises in the morning and walks to the Lyceum as though nothing unusual had occurred. The form of the Symposium enacts its argument: no single speech on Eros is sufficient, the truth is approached through the accumulation of competing accounts, and the one who knows most is the one who can hold the most perspectives simultaneously without demanding that they resolve.

This is the formal model for Miss MacIntosh, My Darling. The novel is a symposium at 1,198-page scale. Each major character holds a position on love, on reality, on death, on the self. None of them wins. The structure is the argument.

The specific Platonic concept that surfaces in the novel is Diotima's Ladder, also called the Ladder of Eros: the ascent from love of a particular beautiful body, through love of all beautiful bodies, through love of beautiful souls, through love of beautiful institutions and knowledge, to the final rung, the Form of Beauty itself, beauty as it purely is rather than as it appears in any particular instance. Diotima teaches Socrates that Eros is not a god but a daemon, a spirit intermediate between the human and the divine, born of Plenty and Poverty at Aphrodite's birthday banquet. Eros inherits from his father the pursuit of beauty and from his mother the fact of never having enough. He is perpetually reaching and perpetually lacking what he reaches for. That is his nature. That is love's nature.

Mr. Spitzer, the novel's central consciousness in its second half, is the character who carries this. He is an old lawyer who has never married, never reached his love, never arrived at the rung of the ladder where beauty is finally known. He dreams instead of the blind Eros. Young's exact phrase, in Chapter 51, is this:

> *yet he dreamed of that blind Eros for whom there was no time and no face of love and no act of superficial recognition of subject or object and no love in this flesh and in this body but the love exceeding the limitations of the individual and of life and death*

The blindness is not incidental. The traditional image of Eros is blindfolded, shooting arrows at random. But Young's blind Eros is something else: a love that has moved past the individual body, past the individual face, past the recognition of subject and object, into something that exceeds the limitations of individual life and death entirely. This is Diotima's highest rung, the Form of Beauty itself, but filtered through France's irony: Mr. Spitzer dreams of it. He does not reach it. The dream is real and the ladder is real and the arrival is not.

This is not tragic in the conventional sense. It is Young's philosophical position about what love actually is: the perpetual motion of reaching, not the attainment. And this maps directly onto Epicurus's counterpoint. The Epicurean maxim that death is nothing to us,

that what is good is easy to get and what is terrible is easy to endure, that consciousness simply ceases and therefore the fear of death is irrational: this is the philosophy of the body, of the present moment, of the physical world taken seriously on its own terms. Young did not accept it as sufficient. But she did not discard it. She put it in the same novel as the blind Eros and let them address each other for 1,198 pages.

The Pivot: Chapter Thirteen and the Garden of the Deaf

The moment in the novel where the France-Epicurus-Plato structure becomes most explicitly traceable is Chapter 13, the chapter of the Garden of the Deaf. This is the pivot of the entire novel: the chapter that opens with Vera's "Farewell to the last certitude," her farewell to the Miss MacIntosh she thought she knew, and looks ahead to the night her secret will be seen (Chapter 63); the chapter in which the stable world Vera had organized around Miss MacIntosh as anchor of the real is destroyed. After Chapter 13, Vera enters the novel's long second movement, the search for what was lost.

Chapter 13 opens with the farewell to Miss MacIntosh and passes immediately into the surreal, neglected garden where the ear is dead, sound is absent, communication has failed. Vera wanders through ghostly images: statues, flowers that fly away when touched, chessmen moving invisibly, the presence of historical figures from the history of medicine. The garden is not just a setting. It is the philosophical condition: the world after the loss of the organizing principle that made reality legible.

Young placed Anatole France's garden, Epicurus, and Heraclitus together in this chapter, in her own words rather than their names. Life in Catherine's gardens is "a perpetual garden party omitting the tragic spirit." The life-sized chessmen move "as if played by invisible players who could perceive an order in multiple confusions of movements and sounds, a secret plan," Heraclitus's "Time is a child playing draughts" and "The hidden harmony is better than the obvious" retold in Young's language. His river runs through the whole novel the same way: "That same stream which a child could wade in was that same river which a man could drown in" (Chapter 5); "all things flowed into all things like water flowing into water" (Chapter 52). This is not background. It is the philosophical frame she built into the chapter's foundation. The garden of the deaf is the Epicurean garden stripped of its consolation: not the garden of pleasure and tranquility but the garden after the ear is dead, where even the Epicurean promise that what is terrible is easy to endure has broken down because the person carrying the burden is fourteen years old and has just lost the only thing she trusted.

And beneath it, Heraclitus: the river that is never the same twice, the war that is the father of all things, the opposites in perpetual conflict that produce the only harmony available. Young did not choose Epicurus in isolation. She chose the conversation between Heraclitus and Epicurus, the philosopher who said everything flows and the philosopher who said the flow is all there is and therefore there is nothing to fear. France staged that conversation in his garden. Young staged it again, at greater length, with a fourteen-year-old girl as the witness.

The Structure: Miss MacIntosh as Symposium

The argument of the previous four sections can now be stated as a unified claim about the novel's architecture.

Miss MacIntosh, My Darling is constructed on the model of Plato's Symposium as filtered through the ironic method of Anatole France and informed by the psychology of William James's Principles of Psychology. The novel is a symposium: a sustained multi-voice contest of positions on love, reality, consciousness, and death, in which no single voice prevails and the form of the contest is itself the philosophical argument. The Symposium's structural principle, that the truth about Eros is approached through the accumulation of competing accounts rather than the declaration of a single correct position, is the structural principle of Miss MacIntosh at every level from the sentence to the whole.

The novel's two philosophical poles are Epicurus and Plato. Vera inhabits the Epicurean pole: the body, the present moment, the physical world taken seriously, the garden where pleasure and grief are both immediate and both real. Mr. Spitzer inhabits the Platonic pole: the blind Eros, the love that exceeds the individual, the perpetual reaching toward a form of beauty that is never arrived at, the ladder whose highest rung is always one rung higher than where he stands. Neither pole cancels the other. The novel holds them both for 1,198 pages.

France gives the method. He showed Young that the philosophical novel does not argue toward a conclusion. It stages a conversation that has been going on since Heraclitus and Epicurus looked at the same river and drew different conclusions. The conversation is still going. The novel is not an intervention in the conversation. It is the conversation. James gives the psychology: a consciousness that is always personal and always changing, whose attention will not hold, and which, in Young's hands, flickers rather than flows.

Plato gives the animating question. What is the soul reaching toward when it reaches? Diotima's answer is the Form of Beauty, apprehensible finally only through reason, after the long ascent from body to soul to knowledge to the thing itself. Young's answer is the blind Eros: the dream of a love that exceeds the limitations of the individual and of life and death, held by a man who never arrives, who has spent his entire long life in the approach, and who dreams rather than attains. This is not a failure of the Platonic ladder. It is France's ironic translation of it: the ladder is real, the reaching is real, the highest rung is what the reaching is for, and the reaching is the life.

The Shadow Count and the Symposium Structure

Two numerical facts about the novel support this reading and merit their own brief treatment.

The word shadow appears over 800 times in Miss MacIntosh, My Darling. The two shadows that matter most are the ones that go missing. Vera dances with her shadow in Chapter 9 ("I danced with my shadow"), and after the farewell of Chapter 13 she never speaks of her shadow again. Miss MacIntosh, once Vera has seen her truly, fears that

very loss: "what should I be if I should lose my shadow, if I should have no shadow here?" (Chapter 64). The revelation destroys the stable surface that a shadow requires.

This is Plato's Allegory of the Cave made literal and distributed across 1,198 pages. In the Cave, shadows are all the prisoners can know about the world. The philosopher who escapes the cave and sees the sun directly cannot return to the world of shadows without confusion. Vera's loss of Miss MacIntosh is her forced exit from the cave: she sees Miss MacIntosh as she actually is rather than as the shadow she had been content to accept. The seeing does not liberate her. It destroys the organizing structure of her world. This is Young's revision of Plato: the philosopher who escapes the cave does not arrive at wisdom. She arrives at the garden where the ear is dead. The ascent is real but the landing is not what was promised.

The question mark appears almost 4,000 times in the novel. Young built the entire novel around the Socratic method of relentless questioning. This is the Symposium's formal principle applied at the sentence level: the question is the unit of philosophical inquiry, not the assertion. The novel that questions 4,000 times is not a novel without answers. It is a novel that understands that the answer to a question about consciousness, love, death, and the self is another question, and that the stream of consciousness is the medium in which those questions are continuously posed and never finally resolved, because resolution would require the stream to stop, and streams do not stop.

What This Means for Reading the Novel

Knowing this structure does not make the novel easier to read. Nothing makes Miss MacIntosh, My Darling easy. But it changes what you are looking for and what you are experiencing when you find it.

When Mr. Spitzer thinks of the blind Eros, you are not reading an obscure Platonic allusion buried in a difficult novel. You are at the novel's Platonic pole, the point furthest from the Epicurean garden, the point where the reaching has become so refined and so persistent that the specific face and body of love have dissolved and what remains is the pure motion of desire toward something beyond individual life and death. This is Diotima's highest rung. Mr. Spitzer never arrives there. He dreams of it. The dream is real.

When Vera wanders the Garden of the Deaf in Chapter 13 and Anatole France, Epicurus, and Heraclitus are beside her in that garden, the reader is at the novel's Epicurean pole, the point where the body's grief is immediate and unmediated and the philosophical consolations have not yet arrived, may not arrive, may be irrelevant to a fourteen-year-old whose world has just ended. France is there not as an authority but as a model: this is what it looks like when the conversation between materialism and transcendence is staged honestly, without premature resolution, in a garden where the ear is dead.

And the 1,198 pages give the stream of consciousness, which is personal and changing and broken and flickering and full of fringes and half-thoughts and griefs that are not yet grief, the room it requires to be honest about what it is. Young did not write a 1,198-page novel because she had too much to say. She wrote it because anything shorter would have been a lie about consciousness.

The novel is a symposium. France taught her the method. James taught her the psychology. Plato taught her the question. She spent eighteen years answering it without ever answering it, which is exactly what the question requires.

The World as Will: Schopenhauer and the Architecture of Mr. Spitzer

Pillars: Pillar 1 (Not One Self) · Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End)

> *the beautiful music of the spheres, filling all space with its sound as of the human will, music his dead brother heard but which Mr. Spitzer could not hear, could only imagine in this silence*
>
> *Miss MacIntosh, My Darling, Chapter 38*

The Philosopher of the Will

Arthur Schopenhauer's central claim is that the world we perceive, the world of objects and individuals and events, is a representation: a surface, an appearance, the veil of Maya. Behind it and beneath it and constituting it is the Will, a single blind irrational force that drives all existence without purpose or destination. The Will is not conscious. It does not desire any particular thing. It simply strives, endlessly, and every act of striving produces suffering because striving is by definition the experience of a lack that cannot be permanently filled. The individual self is the principle of individuation: the illusion that you are a separate entity with a separate fate. You are not. You are a temporary form through which the Will expresses itself before dissolving back into the underlying unity from which you were never really separate.

The ethical consequence is compassion. If the other's suffering is the same as your own because the underlying will is one, then the recognition of another person's pain as your pain is not sentiment but metaphysical accuracy. The artist's consequence is music: Schopenhauer placed music at the apex of the arts because unlike painting or poetry, which represent ideas or copies of the world, music bypasses representation entirely and speaks directly from the Will itself. It is not about the world. It is the world's innermost nature made audible.

Miss MacIntosh, My Darling is not a philosophical novel in the sense of dramatizing arguments. But Arthur Schopenhauer's philosophy is woven into the fabric of Mr. Spitzer so completely that it functions less as a reference and more as a diagnosis: the novel is describing what it actually looks like to live inside Schopenhauer's world, inside the Will and its suffering, inside the partial penetration of the veil, inside the impossible position of a man who has glimpsed the unity beneath individuation and cannot unsee it.

The Will-to-Live Kills Itself

Schopenhauer's most counterintuitive claim about suicide is that it is not the denial of the will-to-live but its most extreme expression. The person who kills themselves does so because the will-to-live has found its current circumstances intolerable. They are not negating the will; they are acting from it, trying to escape its suffering by destroying its vessel while leaving the underlying drive intact. Suicide affirms the will because it is the

will refusing to accept its conditions. It is not liberation. It is the will in its most desperate form.

The novel dramatizes this argument through Peron. Mr. Spitzer works through the logic in Chapter 59: "For what was fear, he had often asked himself, but the will to immortality, the aversion to death, either as the idea of an overwhelming fate or the extinction of the individual—and might not a man kill himself simply because of his overwhelming fear of death, his will to live, to live forever—and might he not seek that death which he had feared and embrace her as his love in an everlasting love." A page later he concludes: "Suicide might be—far from the negative impulse it seemed—the most creative act, even like sexual love begetting another person—for suicide might be the desire to live, to live beyond the grave, beyond the limits of this life, to seek that consuming love which he had feared—so Peron had died, had died early."

This is not Mr. Spitzer rationalizing his grief. It is the novel engaging Schopenhauer's argument directly and extending it: what if suicide is not just an expression of the will but its most creative expression, the will's attempt to be born again into a form where it can finally get what it wants? Peron leaps from the tallest building in a cloud as a star flashed. He does not deny the will. He is the will at its most extravagant, most fearful, most reaching. Joachim stays. He is the will denying itself: the hesitant suicide who takes his luxurious time, the musician who writes only silent music, the man who lives on only to prolong the agony or in memory of his dead brother. The twins are not opposites in temperament. They are the will's two modes: the explosive affirmation that destroys its vessel, and the slow negation that outlives everything it loved.

Music as the Will Made Audible

Schopenhauer argued that music does not represent the Will's objects, its desires and their satisfactions. Music directly embodies the Will: the rising melody is striving, the resolution is momentary satisfaction, the dissonance is unsatisfied longing, the minor key is grief without consolation. Hearing music, we hear the Will itself, stripped of its representations, speaking in its own language. This is why music can move us to emotions we cannot name: we are hearing something prior to emotion, the drive from which all emotion comes.

The novel names Mr. Spitzer's music explicitly in Schopenhauerian terms: the music of the spheres, filling all space with its sound as of the human will, music his dead brother heard but which Mr. Spitzer could not hear, could only imagine in this silence. The music as of the human will: Young places the attribution directly. The music that Mr. Spitzer writes but cannot perform, the silent music that no living ear can hear, is music in Schopenhauer's sense: it is the will's direct expression, which is why it cannot be played on any instrument. Instruments play music about the will. Mr. Spitzer's music is the will itself, which has no instrument adequate to it.

The division between the brothers is the division between the will heard directly (Peron) and the will imagined in silence (Joachim). Peron heard the music of the will as of course he did, he who was the will's most extravagant expression, who lit fires wherever he went

so he might follow himself. Joachim can only imagine it. He lives in the silence where the music should be, writing it down in notation that no orchestra can play, listening for it in the space between sounds, in the dying tide, in the lost musician with the withered string and the unuttered word. He is the man positioned one step outside the Will's direct language, the man for whom the world's innermost nature is permanently just beyond hearing.

Compassion Without Limit, Compassion With Limit

Schopenhauer's ethics rests on compassion as the recognition that the other's suffering is the same as your own, because beneath the illusion of separate selfhood, the will that suffers in them is the same will that suffers in you. The person who has partially seen through the principle of individuation, who has glimpsed the unity beneath individuation, feels the other's pain directly, without mediation, not because they are sentimental but because they are accurate.

Mr. Spitzer is described as sheltering by his compassion all the poor creatures incomplete and helpless and unknown: the derelicts, the hobo camp inhabitants, the Lady Macbeth actress drifting through the camps, the banker who does not know he is a banker, the cancer specialist who has crawled away to hide among the faceless ones. His compassion is not charity. It is the recognition that they are him, that he is them, that the differences of identity and history and social standing are the veil and the suffering beneath is one. He pays his dead brother's debts. He attends Catherine for years without requiring anything from her. He cannot stop. Compassion of this kind is not chosen; it is the consequence of having seen, however briefly and incompletely, that the boundary between self and other is an illusion.

The novel also shows compassion with its limit, which is the point at which the veil reasserts itself. Mr. Bonebreaker has accepted Miss MacIntosh with her barren breast, her barren heart. The novel notes his compassion that had accepted her with these absences. But when she reveals her bald head he runs, slamming the door, causing the entire building to shake. His compassion had a bottom, an edge, a point at which the body before him reasserted its own strangeness and he could no longer hold the unity. This is Schopenhauer's description of partial ethical development: the compassion that extends some distance through the veil and then, at some threshold of the strange or the unexpected, snaps back into the principle of individuation. He had counted on that compassion which had already accepted her barren breast, her barren heart. The acceptance was real. The limit was also real. He ran.

Individuation as Illusion: The Characters Who Blur

Schopenhauer argued that the sense of being a separate individual, distinct from all other individuals, is the fundamental illusion. It is not that you are wrong about most things and right about your own existence. The principle of individuation is itself the veil: you are not a separate entity with a separate will. You are the Will temporarily expressing itself through one form that will dissolve. Death is not the end of the Will; it is the end of one of

the Will's temporary individuations. The Will continues in everything else that was ever alive and ever will be.

The novel's characters consistently blur into each other in exactly the pattern Schopenhauer describes. Mr. Spitzer wonders whether he and his brother were one and the same, though recognizing that this might be his own extinction. The heart specialist, testing in a midnight street, fears he might find the beatings of two hearts inside one body. The characters Jock, the Black Coachman, Joachim, and Peron may all be the same person: different individuations of the same underlying figure, the will expressing itself through multiple temporary forms that happen to coincide in one man's history.

Mr. Spitzer often wonders whether his identity has been confused with his dead brother's. Read literally, he is not confused at all; he is too much the literalist for that. But the novel is telling us something the literal man cannot tell himself: he has become his brother because he was always his brother, because the principle of individuation that separated them was always an illusion, because the two hearts the physician would have found beating inside him are the same heart heard from two sides of the veil.

All who had taken their last shot were all the same. The billiard hall characters, the gamblers, the men who have reached the end of their separate lives: at the level of the Will they are all the same, all expressions of the same striving that differs only in its temporary form. "There was a place where all worlds, the highest and the lowest and the middle, should certainly be one, and no one should certainly be able to tell them apart" (Chapter 53). This is the place behind the veil of Maya. Mr. Spitzer has been glimpsing it all his life and cannot quite arrive there and cannot quite leave it behind.

Catherine's Failed Renunciation

Schopenhauer admired the saints and ascetics who achieved genuine denial of the will: who withdrew from desire, who renounced the pleasures the will craves, who reached a state analogous to Buddhist nirvana through the systematic negation of the will's demands. This is the path he thought most worthy, not because it produces happiness but because it is the only honest response to a world that is constitutively suffering.

Catherine looks like a Schopenhauerian denial of the will. She has withdrawn from the world. She lies in her bed behind drawn curtains. She has refused ordinary life, marriage, social engagement, and the demands of the present. She has gone by all other roads rather than the direct renunciation of life, preferring never the immediate moment of realization but an unearthly romance which should suffer no deterioration or change. She has renounced the world of ordinary time and its losses.

But the novel then shows that this is not the denial of the will. It is the will wearing the costume of renunciation. "Surely, my mother had evaded, wherever possible, the direct renunciation of life—going by all other roads—and had preferred never the immediate moment of realization but an unearthly romance which should suffer no deterioration or change brought by harsh experience inasmuch as it was not subjected to these mortal laws of change and chance and these accidents like the great snow avalanches falling over the leaden roofs with the sound of church bells tolling for the lost crystal-hunter, and

surely she had loved that love which never was, yet was more powerful than any love which should be realized in this mortal sphere, the heavenly bridegroom none should see, the lover never to be discovered on this clouded earth—never, unless he should come in death’s guise, carrying her away." The love for the dead husband is the will-to-live at maximum intensity directed toward an object that cannot provide resistance. The will needs resistance; it strives against something. Her ghost-husband provides no resistance, no deterioration, no change, no disappointment. She can want him forever without the wanting ever being satisfied or frustrated in the ordinary sense.

She had evaded, wherever possible, the direct renunciation of life. The key word is evaded. Schopenhauer's renunciation is direct: you confront the will and say no to it. Catherine's apparent renunciation is indirect: she says no to the world by saying yes, endlessly and without limit, to something the world cannot provide. This is not the saint's path. This is the will finding the one strategy that allows it to strive infinitely without exhausting itself. The drugs sustain the dreaming that sustains the love that sustains the will that keeps her breathing for the decades of the novel.

Two Watches: One for the Living, One for the Dead

Mr. Spitzer wears "two wrist watches, one which he wore on his right wrist, one which he wore on his left wrist which had no perceptible pulse beats, less than the quiverings of a dead moth or sparrow, his dead side, one which kept no time and was for the living so that he would miss his appointments, one which kept time and was for the dead so that he would not miss his appointments."

This is grief in its most Schopenhauerian form: the watch that keeps accurate time is the watch for the dead, the watch for Peron, the watch that was Peron's. The will-to-live expressed itself through Peron in time: he kept appointments, he raced, he gambled, he left fires so he could follow himself. The watch keeps time for him still, ticking on Mr. Spitzer's dead wrist, keeping the time of the will's most vital expression on the arm of the will's most subdued one.

The watch for the living keeps no time and is therefore useless for living. Mr. Spitzer misses his appointments. He walks the streets as if on thinnest ice, not knowing what hour it is, arriving too late or too early or at the wrong address. The world of the living, the world of the principle of individuation with its schedules and appointments and social engagements, is the world he has been losing his grip on since Peron died. The world of the dead, the world beneath the veil, the world where the will is one and all hearts beat together: that world he keeps perfect time for.

The Radical Immanence Reading

Schopenhauer's philosophy ends in the denial of the will: the sage who negates the will's demands, achieves equanimity, sees through the veil. Radical Immanence does not end in denial of the will. It ends in the continued movement of the one who remains, still pulled by grief, still extending compassion, still wearing the dead brother's watch on the dead

wrist, still hearing the music as of the human will in the silence where no instrument can play it.

The difference is this: Schopenhauer treats the denial of the will as an achievement, a state one can reach by sufficient philosophical clarity and sufficient ascetic practice. Young's novel treats it as a permanent condition of incompletion. Mr. Spitzer has seen through the principle of individuation far enough to know that the boundary between himself and his brother is illusory, far enough to know that the derelicts in the hobo camps are him, far enough to feel their suffering as his own and to extend his compassion without limit. But he has not reached the saint's total negation. He still wants Peron back. He still asks whether eternal recurrence might be the one law of life. He still wears both watches.

Pillar 1 (Not One Self) is what Young takes from Schopenhauer: the self is not one, the boundary between selves is an illusion the will maintains for its own purposes, and the grief that crosses the boundary between the living and the dead is not pathology but accuracy. Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End) is what Young adds: the partial penetration of the veil is not a stage on the way to full enlightenment. It is the permanent condition. You see through the veil enough to suffer for everyone. You do not see through it enough to stop.

"And he was covered by wild goose barnacles as are those who have dwelled long in the waters, the waters of a dream. And indeed, though Mr. Spitzer had not consulted a physician now for so many years, being his own physician, he believed, and diagnosing his own ills and taking his own medicine, a mixture of several powders, elixirs of secret life, yet a great physician had consulted him in a dark midnight street, under a dim lamp suddenly gleaming like an already extinguished star, had introduced himself and had shown Mr. Spitzer his calling card and several charts of the heart, the upbeat and the downbeat and the movements as of waves, the long surges and the quick steps, and Mr. Spitzer had at first thought he was a musician, but he was this great heart specialist, and he had told Mr. Spitzer that he made his living testing the hearts of minotaurs and sea lions and whales, of all those who had been submerged, and he had asked if he might make a test of Mr. Spitzer’s heart, for he could see that he was only surfacing, coming to the surface of life, that he had been a long time submerged, longer years than anybody knew. And he was only coming up for air. But Mr. Spitzer had naturally refused, for what good would it have done to have tested his heart, and what could it possibly have proved, no matter what the physician had heard, whether he had heard the silence or the murmur? Perhaps he would have found that Mr. Spitzer’s was the beating heart, and perhaps he would have found that his was the resting heart, the eternally resting heart, that which beat no more, or perhaps, and this was what Mr. Spitzer had so greatly feared, he would have heard the beatings of two hearts."

Not the Overman: Young's Corrections to Nietzsche in Miss MacIntosh, My Darling

Pillars: Pillar 1 (Not One Self) · Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End) · Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act)

Chapters discussed: 45

> *Who is that dwarf, a turret on his head, a rose at his collar? It is the rose of consciousness.*
>
> *Miss MacIntosh, My Darling, Chapter 45*

The Philosopher of Overcoming and the Novel That Does Not Overcome

Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy is organized around the figure of the overman: the being who has confronted the death of God, faced the abyss without flinching, borne the heaviest thought (eternal recurrence), overthrown the spirit of gravity that rides the back and whispers you cannot bear this, and arrived at amor fati: the love of fate, the willingness to will the eternal return of every moment of one's life. The overman does not inherit values; he creates them. He does not need the afterlife to justify the present. He does not need the dwarf removed from his back by a doctor or a priest. He overcomes the dwarf himself, in the open air, on the mountain, at the gateway called Moment where two eternal paths meet.

Miss MacIntosh, My Darling contains no overman and is not interested in producing one. What it contains instead are three deliberate changes to Nietzsche's ideas: Young takes three of his most characteristic figures, the Spirit of Gravity, eternal recurrence, and the abyss, and does something specific to each of them that Nietzsche did not do. She does not defeat the dwarf. She does not affirm eternal recurrence. She does not emerge from the abyss strengthened. These are not failures to understand Nietzsche. They are Radical Immanence corrections of him: what happens when you apply the overman's philosophy to a man who is constitutionally incapable of being the overman, and discover that the incapacity is itself the truth.

The Spirit of Gravity Becomes the Rose of Consciousness

In Part Three of Thus Spoke Zarathustra, in the section titled 'On the Vision and the Riddle,' Zarathustra is climbing a mountain with the dwarf, the Spirit of Gravity, sitting on his shoulder. The dwarf is the heaviness of conventional thinking, the weight of the past, the internal voice that says: you cannot bear what must be borne. He rides on Zarathustra and whispers that Zarathustra will fall. They reach a gateway called Moment where two paths stretch in opposite directions to eternity: one path forward into the future, one path backward into the past. This is the gateway at which eternal recurrence must be

confronted. Zarathustra turns on the dwarf, and the dwarf jumps down from his shoulder. He must face the vision alone. The dwarf is the obstacle between Zarathustra and his greatest thought.

Young's novel places a figure climbing through mountains of snow in Chapter 45, a grieving voice searching for a dead love, ascending nakedly through storm clouds, crying that the soul should go with the body, that she lived on when she should have died. It is Cousin Hannah's voice, crying out as she is dying, with only Mr. Spitzer to overhear. She climbs. The dogs bark at her heels. The sea shell roars. And then, mid-climb, mid-storm: Who is that dwarf, a turret on his head, a rose at his collar? It is the rose of consciousness.

The identification is not Nietzsche's. Zarathustra identifies the dwarf as his adversary, the Spirit of Gravity, the thing that must be overcome. Young identifies the dwarf as consciousness itself. She does not tell the dwarf to get off. She does not overcome him. She names him. She gives him a turret on his head, another small tower, another architectural enclosure housing whatever is most guarded, and a rose at his collar: the most mortal and most beautiful of emblems, the thing that is already dying as it opens.

The rose of consciousness: this is Radical Immanence's most compressed statement of what awareness actually is. Not the weapon of the overman. Not the faculty to be honed into philosophical mastery. Consciousness is the small, armored, flowering thing you carry up the mountain with you, not riding your back as an adversary but present at your collar as your own nature. It is turret-headed, it encloses and guards itself, it moves through the storm with you. It is also a rose: temporary, fragrant, in the process of its own dying even as it blooms. You do not overcome it. You wear it.

Cousin Hannah, the novel's greatest figure, is explicitly described as not superhuman: "for she was not superhuman, she had encountered greater dangers than most men know, certainly greater dangers than most women know in this life" (Chapter 35). The qualifier is doing exactly the work Young intends: the greatest human being in the novel, the one who crossed into Mesopotamia and bearded lions in their dens and rode against great turbaned Turks, is not the overman. She is human. Her heart is human. She has the rose of consciousness at her collar like everyone else, blooming and dying, and she carries it up the mountain and climbs naked through the snow, and she does not arrive at the gateway called Moment and confront the eternal return. She arrives at Catherine's dark tower and cannot get in. She dies in her own old tent bed with no aide-de-camp to see her go. The greatest figure is not the overman, and this is not presented as failure. It is presented as the condition of being alive.

Eternal Recurrence as Grief's Deepest Wish

Nietzsche's eternal recurrence is a thought experiment and a test. The question is: if you were condemned to live this life again, exactly as it has been, every moment recurring eternally, would you affirm it? Would you will it? Could you love your fate enough to say yes to its infinite repetition? The test is designed to be almost unbearable. Most people, confronted with it honestly, find they cannot say yes. The one who can say yes, who can

amor fati, who can will the eternal return of their own existence, has become something close to the overman.

In the novel, Mr. Spitzer asks the question differently. "Perhaps he could not say farewell to anyone because he had not bidden good-bye to his brother whose memory was now the only life to him—sustaining him through many weary hours—and surely, as he would often sighingly whisper, his brother had not said farewell to life. Should not eternal recurrence be the one law of life, and should not the great lamp-lighter going his rounds through darkened heavens light that lamp which had gone out and was himself shining through clouds?"

This is not Nietzsche's thought experiment. Mr. Spitzer is not asking whether he would affirm his life's eternal repetition. He is asking whether the dead return. He is asking whether the lamp that went out gets relit. He wants Peron back. He wants Catherine's lamp to be turned on again by some great lamp-lighter who goes his rounds through darkened heavens. He is using Nietzsche's most demanding proposition as a wish: the wish that the universe is organized around return rather than loss, that what has gone keeps going, that the dead brother comes back because that is the law.

Eternal recurrence, in Mr. Spitzer's hands, is not a test of life-affirmation. It is grief's most philosophical form: the refusal to accept that the dead stay dead, dressed in the language of cosmological law. He is not strong enough for Nietzsche's eternal recurrence, which demands that you affirm even the worst moments, even the deaths, even the losses, even the cruelty of what has happened, and will it all to return. He wants only the good parts back. He wants the lamp. He wants his brother. He asks the question not as a hammer but as a lamp-lighter's prayer.

This is not a misunderstanding of Nietzsche. It is Young's deliberate retuning of the concept to the frequency at which Mr. Spitzer actually lives. He is the most philosophical figure in the novel, the one most likely to encounter Nietzsche's thought, and he encounters it as a man of grief encounters a philosophy of affirmation: he takes from it what he can use, which is the structure of the wish that things return, and leaves the demand for affirmation where he cannot reach.

The Abyss That Stares Back Every Day

Nietzsche wrote in Beyond Good and Evil: if you gaze long enough into the abyss, the abyss gazes also into you. The aphorism is a warning about the cost of sustained confrontation with darkness: the person who spends their life investigating cruelty, meaninglessness, or nihilism risks becoming what they study. The abyss does not remain passive under scrutiny. It returns the gaze. The overman, by implication, is the one who can sustain this mutual gaze without being destroyed by it.

“A fat man, well protected by his dreaming flesh, this corporeal body he could not depart from, he was one who, walking always as if on thinnest ice, tread softly where angels feared to rush ahead, for he never knew, wrapped in his many ethereal abstractions, what the next step would bring, whether he would step on nothing, whether it would be a stairway or a dissolving stairway or a chasm filled with the songs of dead birds, whether

he would stare at that wild, precipitous abyss which would stare at him.” The novel's deployment is not a warning and not a test. It is a description of ordinary movement. Mr. Spitzer does not gaze long and deliberately into the abyss. He walks his daily route and does not know if the next step is solid ground or a chasm filled with the songs of dead birds. The abyss is not somewhere he goes to confront his limits. It is the condition of every step.

This is Young's most direct correction of Nietzsche's spatial metaphor. The abyss is not a place you travel to for philosophical confrontation, from which you may return strengthened or destroyed. It is the permanent condition of walking at all. Every step Mr. Spitzer takes is a step on what might be thinnest ice, over what might be the abyss that will stare back. He is not gazing into it. He is living above it. The distinction matters: Nietzsche's warning assumes you have the option of not gazing. Mr. Spitzer has no such option. He cannot choose not to be above the abyss. He can only choose how carefully he walks.

What Young Is Not Doing

It would be easy to read these three deployments as Young simply transposing Nietzsche's philosophy into narrative. The dwarf is an obstacle to consciousness. Eternal recurrence as Mr. Spitzer's philosophical framework. The abyss as the existential condition of the modern novel. These readings are accurate as far as they go but they miss what is most specific about Radical Immanence and Young's use of Nietzsche.

She is not illustrating his philosophy. She is applying it to people who cannot live by it and showing what happens. What happens is not failure. What happens is that the philosophy reveals, under the pressure of actual human beings with actual grief and actual mortality, a different set of truths than the ones it was designed to produce.

The Spirit of Gravity is not overcome; it becomes the rose of consciousness, which is something more accurate and more mortal and more beautiful than what Nietzsche made of it. Eternal recurrence is not affirmed; it becomes the wish that the dead return, which is something more honest about grief than Nietzsche's hammer. The abyss is not confronted for philosophical growth; it is walked above every day, which is something more like actual courage than the dramatic mutual gaze of the aphorism.

Cousin Hannah, the person in the novel who comes closest to Nietzschean heroism, is explicitly not superhuman. She carries her rose of consciousness up the mountain with her. She dies in a domestic war. She is not the overman. She is the greatest human figure the novel can produce, which is something both lesser than the overman and, in Young's terms, more real.

The Radical Immanence Reading

Pillar 1 (Not One Self) is what Young deploys against Nietzsche most directly. Nietzsche's philosophy requires a unified subject: the overman is a singular will that overcomes, affirms, creates values, and bears the heaviest thought. Radical Immanence's self is

constitutively plural, fragmented, distributed across grief and loss and the dead and the past and the body and the spirit and the twin who is gone. Mr. Spitzer cannot be the overman because there is no single Mr. Spitzer to be him. He is Joachim and Peron simultaneously, the living brother wearing the dead brother's watch, the musician of silent music, the hesitant suicide who lives on, the lawyer with his brief-case and his old laundry bills. The overman requires integration. Mr. Spitzer is permanently disintegrated and has found that this is not a problem to be solved.

Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End) is what Young deploys against the eternal recurrence. Nietzsche wants you to affirm the return of everything, including the grief, as part of the life you are willing. Young shows a man who cannot affirm the grief because the grief is not a moment that can be affirmed or refused; it is the weather, the atmospheric condition, the permanent press of the loss that does not resolve. You cannot will the eternal return of something that never left. The grief of the dead brother is not a moment to be returned to. It is the medium in which every moment occurs.

Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act) is what Young deploys against the abyss. Nietzsche's gazer into the abyss is alone: it is the individual will confronting the individual void. Young's witness is always watching something other than themselves. Mr. Spitzer does not gaze into the abyss. He watches Catherine. He watches the mute. He watches the derelicts in the hobo camps. The abyss gazes back at him not because he has looked into it directly but because it is present in everything he witnesses: in the woman who was the greatest Lady Macbeth, in the hobo who does not know he was a banker, in Catherine, "dead among her dreams." The witness is always already above the abyss because the people being witnessed are above it too. It gazes back at everyone equally and no one overcomes it. You only walk carefully, and witness each other, and keep walking.

Movement Four: The Formal Devices

The Sentence Is the Argument

Pillars: Pillar 1 (Not One Self) · Pillar 7 (The Margins Reveal the Truth) · Pillar 9 (Language Shapes What's Possible)

Chapters discussed: 1, 3, 4, 18, 47, 72

> *all images being blurred and all forms flowing into each other like fishes turning into flowers, flowers turning into keyholes, flowers turning into birds, all walls being permeable as sands through which the waters flowed*
>
> *Miss MacIntosh, My Darling, Chapter 47*

A House Built Out of Nouns

The best way into Young's thinking is through one of her sentences. Here is the Cartwheel house as it first appears, in Chapter 1:

> *The great, sea-blackened house with golden spires and cornices and towers peeled by the salt air, dark allées, hidden interiors, the empty drawing rooms where the hostess had not set foot for many years, as many drawing rooms as tideless years, the rooms too many for mortal use, chambers within chambers, the gilded, mirroring ballrooms where no one danced, the hangings of scaly gold and rain-stained velvet, the heathen monsters everywhere, the painted, clouded ceilings illuminated by partial apparitions of the gods, the silken, padded walls, the ropes of rusted bells, the angels and the cherubim and the immortal rose, the dream of heaven, the lily-breasted virgins sporting in fields of asphodel, the water-gurgling gargoyles or those coated by dust, the interior and exterior fountains, the broken marble statues in ruined gardens sloping towards the sea, the disc throwers, the fat cupids, the thin psyches with flowing curls, the mute Apollo Belvedere, the king's horsemen, the life-sized chessmen seeming to move against the moving clouds that moved above the moving waters, the sea light lighting their wooden eyes, the seagulls perched like drifts of snow upon their heads.*

Look at what this sentence does not do. It never gets to its verb. The house never does anything. Thing is laid on thing: the towers, the empty drawing rooms, the ballrooms "where no one danced," the angels and the gargoyles, the broken statues, the gulls. Nothing moves the sentence forward, because nothing in the house moves forward. The hostess "had not set foot" in those rooms "for many years," and there are "as many drawing rooms as tideless years." Time in this house does not pass. It piles up, the way the sentence piles up.

And nothing in the pile outranks anything else. The "dream of heaven" sits beside the dusty gargoyles. The "immortal rose" sits beside the rain-stained velvet. The great statue of Apollo stands in the same line as the seagulls on the chessmen's heads. Every thing gets in.

Miss MacIntosh's Straight Line

The very next sentence turns to Miss MacIntosh: “What could Miss MacIntosh, a simple woman with a broken nose, find to admire in any broken marble statue, that which had been sculptured by man dreaming that he was other than he was or that he was man?” She lives by a different grammar. In Chapter 3 Vera remembers that “She always proceeded directly, straight to the point, never dilly-dallying, not shifting her course with every new blow of the wind.” “Common sense is the finest sense, she had always said” (Chapter 1), and for her “the way was very plain.”

Her sentences have somewhere to go. They have verbs, and the verbs give orders. Even when she admits how much there is in the world, she turns it into a reason to move on: “We must hasten, and we must not loiter nor imagine we could gather up all the broken seashells on this old beach, even though we should gather seashells until the end of time, for some would always be missing.” The broken shells are real to her. She just will not stop for them.

When she walks into the sea, the novel loses its one voice that always knew where it was going. What is left is the other grammar, the one that keeps adding.

“And,” Not “But”

There are two small words that sort the world in two different ways. “But” divides. Say the fog was thick, but the coast was real, and the sentence has made a ruling: the coast counts, and the fog is only something in the way. “And” adds. Say the fog was thick and the coast was there, and both stay in the world together.

Young writes with “and.” Look at how Vera first describes the woman she has been searching for: “Long years, drifting without other purpose, I had searched for that hale companion of my lost childhood, no one but a fusty, busty old nursemaid, very simple-minded, very simple, the salt of common sense, her red hair gleaming to show that quick temper she always had, that impatience with which she would dismiss all shades and phantoms, even herself should she become one, for self-pity was not her meat, not her drink.” Vera does not say Miss MacIntosh was simple-minded but honest, ranking one thing under another. Simple-minded, the salt of common sense, the red hair, the temper, the scorn for phantoms: each is set down beside the others, and each one stays.

This is more than a habit of style. It is how the novel treats its people. Miss MacIntosh's plain facts and Catherine's opium visions get the same weight in the sentence. Neither is marked as the real one. The question marks, nearly 4,000 of them, do the same work from another side, holding each claim open so that none of them hardens into the one fact everyone else must obey (see Nearly Four Thousand Questions).

Where Young Learned It

Young had studied how sentences are built. As the Preface tells, she read with Ronald S. Crane at the University of Chicago, and her 1936 master's thesis there was on the birds and beasts of John Lyly's Euphues. Lyly's prose moves by pairs and parallels, one

comparison from nature set beside another. Lyly's comparisons close on a moral. Young kept the habit of setting things side by side and let go of the closing moral. Her “and” does not lead to a lesson. It leads to one more thing.

Everything Flowing

A sentence made of “and” lets things touch, and once they touch, they can change into each other. In Chapter 47, Mr. Spitzer's memories are “subterranean memories seldom coming to the surface of life, all images being blurred and all forms flowing into each other like fishes turning into flowers, flowers turning into keyholes, flowers turning into birds, all walls being permeable as sands through which the waters flowed.” The same sentence that does not rank also does not wall things off. Fish, flower, keyhole, bird: each turns into the next, and the walls between them are as thin as sand with the water running through.

That is why so much of the novel is water and fog. The sea, the mist, and the long sentence work the same way. Each one lets the edges go soft. Each one carries everything along together, and none of them will hold still long enough to be sorted.

Esther in the Same Sentence as the Sea

The clearest case is Esther Longtree. A doctor or a social worker of the 1940s might have had a file ready for her: the waitress who is always pregnant, whose children are always stillborn, who tells her story to strangers. Young will not let the sentence turn her into a case. In Chapter 72, the men who fathered her children “came as mourners when they came to her. They came to be forgiven by the milky breakers, the generous luminosity, the unforgiven mother, Esther Longtree, great heart beating like a thousand stars.”

Esther is set in the same line as the sea, the light, and the stars. She is not a departure from nature. She is part of it. A file needs a single label, and this sentence will not give one. The grammar has made her too large to be reduced.

What the Sentence Protects

That is the quiet politics of the “and.” Anyone who wants to rule over people needs them sorted: this one belongs and that one does not, this one is real and that one is dreaming, this one is well and that one needs correcting. Miss MacIntosh, for all her love, did a small version of this to Vera, treating the child's dreams as a fault to be fixed. A person who knows she is many things at once, grief and dream and daily work and family history, cannot be fully held by any one description of her. She is always more than the file. That extra is her protection.

The novel turns the same patience on its own past. In Chapter 18, remembering the night she saw Miss MacIntosh bald, Vera says: “Perhaps, in retrospection, every lost event must be changed by the illumination larger than that of any instant, larger than life.” No memory stays fixed. Everything that came after keeps adding to it. And in Chapter 4: “Yet years after she was gone, I had found her ivory knitting needles in the sand.” Not the

woman. Not an answer. Only the needles, one more thing the sea gave back, set down beside everything else.

The Radical Immanence Reading

In the language of Radical Immanence, this essay is Pillar 9 (Language Shapes What's Possible): what a sentence lets in is what a mind can hold, and Young's “and” lets everything in. It is also Pillar 1 (Not One Self): a list without ranking is the shape of a self made of many parts, none of them the boss of the others. And it is Pillar 7 (The Margins Reveal the Truth): the waitress at the lunch counter shares her sentence with the breakers and the stars.

The Grey Goose Bus as Cosmic Vehicle

Chapters discussed: 1

Named Passengers, Symbolic Identity, and the Novel's Opening Constellation

What the Novel Actually Says: The Passenger Roster

At the Opening: Three Passengers

Chapter 1 sets out exactly who is on the bus at the start. Vera is the narrator. The bus-driver is present. In Vera's words, "There were a sleeping couple, a pair of lovers, boy and girl, the only other passengers." The novel opens with four souls on a bus: Vera, the driver, and the sleeping couple. This is the foundational count.

The sleeping girl is described at extraordinary length before she is named. She is pregnant, resistant to her condition, overdressed, not wearing a wedding ring. The boy is broad-faced, innocent, wearing a football sweater with the letter C. Their names come later: Madge and Homer Capehorn.

The Four Evangelists: Not Names but Symbols

The most significant discovery from reading the novel directly is that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are not the actual names of four passengers. They appear in Moses Hunnecker's extended interior monologue as his symbolic identification of his cargo. The passage reads:

> *Only the old bus-driver was rolling in his bed, bringing these four passengers, four angels at four bed-posts, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John. He said that there was no one else.*

This is Moses's vision of what he is carrying, not a census. The four bed-posts with four angels is a reference to the medieval protection prayer: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, bless the bed that I lie on. Moses is dreaming that he is in his deathbed, guarded by the four Evangelists. His four passengers are, in his symbolic imagination, his deathbed angels. He is not driving four people named after the Gospels. He is a dying man who has turned his passengers into the witnesses of his passing.

This distinction matters architecturally. Young is not assigning Gospel names to characters. She is giving Moses a consciousness that reads his own journey as a dying man's vision, his passengers as the four witnesses every soul needs at the end. The bus becomes a deathbed. The journey becomes the last journey. The Evangelists are present not as characters but as the structure of witness that Moses's dying imagination requires.

One as Yet Unborn

Moses counts one passenger who is not yet born, and he says it twice in Chapter 5. The doctor would tell him that he "only thought he was driving this bus with these four

passengers, one as yet unborn," and he is "bringing these four passengers, all four of them, all alive and one unborn."

The unborn passenger is first of all Madge's child, still inside her. But Young lets the phrase reach further, to Vera, unborn as a self: she is the narrator who is in the process of becoming, the consciousness that will hold the entire novel, the self that does not yet know what she is. The novel is the process of her birth. She is the fifth passenger who cannot be counted yet because she is still being created by the journey she is narrating.

This reading is supported by Indiana's identification in the novel as the promised land: "This was only the stopping ground, Indiana, the promised land" (Chapter 4). Vera is traveling toward the place where she will arrive at herself. She has not arrived. She is, for the duration of the journey, the one as yet unborn.

The Named Passengers and Their Names

Moses Hunnecker: The Lawgiver Who Cannot Enter

Moses names himself directly in the novel: "You know me, Moses Hunnecker, the bus-driver, my long hair streaming like a curtain over my eyes, but I can see better when I am drunk than you can see when you are sober, you old fogdog, luminous spot upon a far horizon, and I can see through the windshield, and I can see what’s coming from before, behind, having this rear mirror view." This self-naming is the most explicit symbolic identification in the opening section. Young is not being subtle. The bus-driver is Moses.

The biblical Moses led the children of Israel through the wilderness toward the promised land. He did not enter it. He brought the people to the border and died in sight of the destination. Moses Hunnecker is driving people toward Indiana, the promised land, and his every action signals that he will not arrive with them. He is drunk. He is asleep at the wheel. He believes he may already be dead. He has been driving this route so long he does not know if the journey has ended or is still ongoing.

Moses's hair is his most sustained symbolic attribute. He has taken a vow not to cut it until the Democrats leave the White House, but the novel gives this vow the weight of a Nazarite oath. The Nazarite vow in the Bible, taken by figures including Samson, involved not cutting the hair as a sign of consecration and power. When Moses says "When you cut my hair, I said to him, I will be dead and not the man I was", he is speaking in Samson's register. His uncut hair is his life, his power, his identity. The barber who would cut it is the Delilah figure, the doctor who keeps trying to tell him he is already dead.

The infant Moses sleeping in his little boat among the reeds appears later in the novel in a completely separate context, describing a scene in Cousin Hannah's house. Young uses the Moses image twice: the bus-driver who names himself Moses, and the hidden infant in the bulrushes. Both are Moses in different moments of the same story: the hidden, protected child and the old man who has led the people to the edge of what he cannot enter.

Moses's destination is also significant. He is going home. Moses Hunnecker's "old woman waiting" is, in fact, his mother. He lives with her in what she perceives as a "bridal

chamber," where she considers him her bridegroom, despite her being "old and sick and dying". Moses Hunnecker himself refers to her as "my old mother" and notes her constant "creating again" in this context. The lawgiver who cannot enter the promised land is going home to his old mother, though at first Vera imagines a wife and children waiting. His destination and Vera's destination are not the same destination. He is circling back. She is going forward for the first time.

Dr. Justice O'Leary: The Name That Judges Itself

The old doctor is not on the bus. Vera meets him in Chapter 69, in the village where the bus has brought her, and he introduces himself with his full name: "Dr. Justice O'Leary, for so he called himself, announcing frequently not only his name but the fact that he was the best medical practitioner this country ever saw." The name Justice is not incidental. It is his self-proclaimed title and it is the name he announces frequently, as if repeating it will make it true.

Justice O'Leary practices medicine only in his crazy dreams. He is not practicing on real patients. He is practicing on hallucinated women in labor, on imaginary births, on the dead who need someone to confirm they are dead. He has lost his actual practice. What he has retained is his name, his claim to be Justice, and his conviction that he is still doing the work of justice: delivering the living into the world, releasing the dead into death.

The irony Young has built into this name is layered. Justice is both a title and a concept. Dr. Justice O'Leary administers no justice that the world recognizes. He delivers no babies that anyone else can see. He practices in a world of his own imagination, and in that world he is the most excellent doctor this country ever saw. Justice in the novel is always this: the standard one holds oneself to in the interior world, which has no necessary relation to what the exterior world recognizes as justice.

O'Leary is an Irish name, Ó Laoghaire, "descendant of Laoghaire," a name meaning calf-keeper (Patrick Woulfe, Irish Names and Surnames, 1923). He is depicted as suffering from dementia, believing he is still delivering babies though he is retired. He is the calf-keeper who will not stop delivering what he believes is new life into a world that has stopped needing his deliveries. He is justice without a court. He is medicine without patients.

Madge: The Pearl in the Chaos

Madge is the short form of Margaret, which derives from the Greek margarites, meaning pearl. Madge is dressed in pearls at the novel's opening: "cascades of oblong ten cent store pearls were dripping from her coral-colored ears." She is wearing cheap pearls, costume jewelry pearls, the imitation of the precious thing. She is named for the pearl but wearing the copy.

Madge is pregnant with a child that is not her husband's. She is returning to a small town to live with her mother-in-law. She did not marry the man she wanted. Every element of her situation is the opposite of what her name promises: the pearl is cast before swine, the precious thing is in the wrong setting, the genuine value is hidden under layers of cheap imitation. She sees clearly what Homer cannot or will not see. She is the one who

knows Jacqueline is dying, who knows what Homer feels, who knows her own situation with a cold precision that the novel respects even as it chronicles her suffering.

The pearl has additional resonance in the novel's broader symbolic vocabulary. Pearls appear throughout the novel associated with wisdom acquired through suffering, with the interior life that the exterior world does not recognize. Catherine Cartwheel's lovers, it is said, could not diminish her pearls in their number. The pearl is what the interior life produces through the pressure of its circumstances. Madge, named for the pearl, is producing her wisdom through exactly this pressure.

Homer Capehorn: The Epic Poet at the Edge of the World

Homer Capehorn carries two names, each significant. Homer is the blind poet of the Iliad and the Odyssey, the epic tradition's founding voice, the teller of stories about war and homecoming. Cape Horn is the southernmost tip of South America, the most treacherous navigational passage in the world, the point beyond which ships either make it or go down.

Homer Capehorn is sleeping through the novel's opening miles, his cheek against the cold bus-window, his lips placidly smiling. He is the blind poet who does not see what is in front of him: Madge's suffering, Jacqueline's death, his own marriage's emptiness. He is the narrator of epics who cannot narrate his own situation. He is the dangerous passage that wrecks ships, but he is asleep at it, unaware of the danger he represents or embodies.

Homer's blindness is not physical but moral and emotional. He is described as "all blissful stolidity and broad-faced innocence." His football sweater has the letter C on its front: C for Capehorn, C for the Cape that is the dangerous passage, C for the obliviousness that makes him the most ordinary and in some ways the most devastating figure in the opening section. He is the epic poet who has nothing to say about his own life.

Vera: The True One, Unborn

Vera means true in Latin. She is the novel's narrator, the consciousness that contains all the others, the one as yet unborn who will spend 1,198 pages being born. Her name is the novel's central claim: that the truth is what Vera carries, and that Vera herself is the truth that is trying to emerge.

Vera names herself only once in the opening chapter, almost in passing: "I, Vera Cartwheel." She is the unborn one, the truth that has not yet taken form. The novel is her birth process. She arrives in Indiana, the promised land, without having reached What Cheer, Iowa. She does not find Miss MacIntosh. She finds something else: herself, in the act of loving the stone deaf man, in the recognition of Esther Longtree as the mother of us all. That recognition is Vera's birth. The truth has arrived. The unborn has been born.

The Conversation the Names Are Having

Young named these characters with intention. The bus and the village at the end of its road are not realistic settings populated with realistic strangers. They are a symbolic

assembly: a lawgiver who cannot enter the promised land, a justice who administers justice only in his imagination, a pearl in the wrong setting, a blind epic poet, and an unborn truth. These five are in conversation with each other, and the conversation is about what it means to carry something you cannot deliver.

Moses carries the people to the promised land and cannot enter. Justice O'Leary carries the practice of medicine into a world with no patients. Madge carries a child that is not her husband's toward a life she did not choose. Homer carries the epic tradition and cannot see what is in front of him. Vera carries the truth of all their stories and has not yet been born into the capacity to tell it.

The bus is a vehicle for this carrying. It goes in circles, or seems to: Moses is always on the same road, passing the same landmarks. The journey is endless because the delivery cannot be completed until Vera is born, and Vera is born only at the novel's end. Moses drives until the bus brings Vera into a village by night in Chapter 68, and even there the truth has not yet arrived at itself.

The Grey Goose bus: "The old grey goose is dead. Died in the morning," he sang, "died in the morning, died in the morning with a pillow under her head. He mumbled to himself, his head drooping, 'Oh, let us not marry her. Oh, let us bury her.'" The vehicle carrying these symbolic figures is itself a dead thing, a grey goose that has died in the morning, still flying.

The Windmill in the Flooded Field

Chapters discussed: 1, 6, 8, 19, 37, 49, 52, 65, 70

Don Quixote and the Windmill as Structural Motif in Miss MacIntosh, My Darling

Don Quixote holds a place among the six named quest traditions embedded in this novel, which The Search for Life, for Love, for Truth That Does Not Fail takes up. This chapter addresses something different: the windmill as a motif that Young distributed across 22 appearances in 12 chapters, assigned to every major consciousness in the novel, and used as a structural device that exceeds its source in Cervantes. All passages are drawn directly from the novel.

The Object in the Landscape

Chapter 6 contains the first physical windmill in the novel. It appears in the landscape through which the bus is traveling:

> *A derelict windmill stood in the midst of a flooded and vaporous field, its broken silver arm turning furiously in the wind.*

This windmill is nobody's metaphor. It is an object in a flooded field, broken, turning furiously because the wind is turning it and not because any human intention has set it in motion. Its arm is broken. It is derelict. It turns anyway.

This is the windmill before it becomes anyone's symbol: a piece of machinery that has outlasted its purpose, still responding to external forces, unable to stop because stopping is not something windmills can choose. Young places this object in Chapter 6, after Moses has been called a mad Don Quixote chasing windmills in Chapter 1, and before the windmill becomes entangled with every other major consciousness in the novel. The derelict windmill in the flooded field is the motif's foundation: not a giant, not a delusion, not a metaphor yet. Just the thing itself, broken and still turning.

The Four Characters and What the Windmill Means to Each

The windmill attaches to four characters as an explicit descriptive or comparative device. In each case the attachment is made by a specific consciousness observing another character, or by the character observing themselves. The four attachments are not interchangeable. They say four different things about what a windmill is.

Moses Hunnecker: The Mad Don Quixote

The first explicit windmill attribution in the novel is Vera's assessment of Moses in Chapter 1:

> *Was he, after all, a bachelor, perhaps even some mad Don Quixote chasing windmills, a virgin spirit, nobody—and his family life, an emanation of my over-active imagination, really, my desire for established human relationships?*

Vera is asking herself whether Moses is real. Whether his wife waiting at home is real. Whether the destination he is driving toward exists. The Don Quixote attribution is not an insult. It is a genuine question about the nature of the man at the wheel. Don Quixote's error was that he saw giants where there were windmills: he mistook the ordinary for the extraordinary, the mechanical for the monstrous. Vera is asking whether Moses has made the reverse error: whether he has mistaken the extraordinary for the ordinary, whether the life he believes he is driving toward is itself an illusion, whether he is going nowhere and calling it home.

Moses himself, later in Chapter 8, does not mention windmills. He talks about his hair, his politics, his quarrel with the doctor, Job's leviathan. The windmill attribution is Vera's reading of him, not his own self-image. This matters: Moses does not know he is Quixote. The observer applies the emblem. The character lives without it.

Cousin Hannah: The Human Windmill

Mr. Spitzer applies the windmill to Cousin Hannah twice in Chapter 52, and the application is intimate rather than dismissive. The first time:

> *Mr. Spitzer, turning the pages of old newspapers with almost faded print, had wondered what kind of a skirt this human windmill was searching for.*

The second time, after her death:

> *She had been the human windmill, surely, turning even when the wind blew not—and in his absence had turned a page of the little book she had been reading when she died—had turned a page after she had died.*

This is the most extraordinary windmill attribution in the novel. Cousin Hannah is the human windmill: she turns even when the wind blew not. She is not powered by external force the way the derelict windmill in Chapter 6 is. She generates her own motion. And she keeps turning after death: the page of the book she was reading turned after she died. The windmill does not stop when its operator dies. It has its own momentum.

Where Quixote saw a windmill as a giant, Mr. Spitzer sees Cousin Hannah as a windmill. He is not diminishing her. He is describing the nature of her energy: self-generating, continuous, not dependent on external conditions, still in motion after the body that housed it has stopped. The human windmill is the highest form of the motif in the novel. It is the windmill that has become autonomous.

Miss MacIntosh: The Windmill She Never Knew She Was

In Chapter 65, another character says of Miss MacIntosh:

> *What had Miss MacIntosh been doing in Chicago? Chasing windmills—Miss MacIntosh had always been chasing windmills, she said.*

The windmill cards appear earlier, in Chapter 19, in Miss MacIntosh's own bedroom: "almost translucent playing cards with curled edges and Dutch windmills on their silken backs." She plays with windmill cards and does not notice. She chases windmills and

does not know it. The woman who embodied practical certainty, who trusted facts and geography and the clear reality of simple things, was all along a Quixote: she had a secret that contradicted her entire public performance, and the pursuit of the life she was performing, the sensible, the grounded, the undeceived, was itself the windmill she could never reach because she was not who she presented herself to be.

The windmill on the playing cards in Miss MacIntosh's bedroom sits on the backs of the cards: the side you do not see when you are playing the game. The windmill is on the hidden side of every card she holds.

Mrs. Hogden: The Woman Who Sold Her Windmill

Mrs. Hogden is the novel's fourth and most unexpected windmill figure. She does not chase windmills. She does not embody them. She lived in one. Her home on upper Long Island before she came to work for Catherine was a Dutch windmill. She had sold it, as Chapter 70 says, "the Dutch windmill which was her home on upper Long Island, an old windmill with winking eyes and broken arms," to take the job. Chapter 70 returns to this windmill seven times, more than any other single chapter in the novel, and the returns are increasingly elegiac.

The final windmill reference in Mrs. Hogden's arc is Mr. Spitzer's offer to restore her to her former position: "He called on Mrs. Hogden and, in the course of a long, somewhat painful interview, offered to restore her to her former position. She should have everything that she had lost, her Dutch windmill at a higher price than she had sold it for, a four-postered bed where she might sleep surrounded by effigies, everything, and enough money to last her the rest of her natural life and even perhaps a little longer. He was generous but not sure that Mrs. Hogden, smiling and beaming, had heard him rightly. She was so excited, he could not tell whether she was sad or happy. He believed that she was hardly sober."

While she lived in the windmill, an Arctic tern visited her every year. Young writes that Mrs. Hogden "realized that he was compelled by his own nature to circle the earth from pole to pole as if he were some kind of minor planet on its course in the starry endless heavens." The Arctic tern is one of the great natural questers: it makes the longest migration of any animal on earth, from Arctic to Antarctic and back, every year, without stopping. It visited Mrs. Hogden in her windmill annually for years and she found it distressing. She could not understand why it singled her out.

The windmill inhabitant received the world's greatest quester every year at her door and sold her home to go work in an opium house. The relationship between the windmill and the quest is most compressed here: the person who could have stayed in the windmill left it, and the quester who found the windmill every year kept circling.

The distribution is not random. The windmill is absent from the novel's opening bus chapters after Chapter 6, absent from the chapters in which Vera is most directly addressing her own consciousness, and concentrated in the Mr. Spitzer chapters of the second half, where it appears seven times across Chapters 47 through 61. Mr. Spitzer is the character who sees windmills everywhere in the novel's second movement: in seagull wings, in rain drops, in book pages, in Cousin Hannah.

The windmill appears once in Catherine's vision in Chapter 37: "There would be suddenly a whirling windmill." It materializes without explanation in her opium bedroom and disappears just as quickly. Catherine is the one character for whom the windmill is purely visionary: it is not applied to her as a description, and she does not live in one. It simply appears in her room.

What Cervantes Built and What Young Did With It

Don Quixote's windmill scene is one of the most famous moments in Western literature because it asks a question that never goes away: who is deluded, the man who sees giants or the man who sees only windmills? Sancho Panza sees windmills. Quixote sees giants. The reader is invited to decide which perception is the error. Most readers decide Quixote is wrong. Cervantes arranged the scene so that certainty is harder to sustain than it appears.

Young took this question and distributed it across an entire novel. Every character in Miss MacIntosh, My Darling is making the same determination Quixote made: is this thing in front of me what it appears to be, or is it something else? Miss MacIntosh insisted it was what it appeared to be and was wrong. Moses drove toward a home that may have been imaginary. Cousin Hannah fought for a cause with the energy of a windmill that turned without wind. Mrs. Hogden sold her windmill and went to serve an opium dreamer.

The windmill in Cervantes is a single object in a single scene. In Miss MacIntosh it is a thread woven through the entire novel from Chapter 1 to Chapter 70, touching every major consciousness, appearing in a flooded landscape as a physical object before it becomes anyone's metaphor, and finally resolving not into a symbol but into a home that could have been kept and was sold.

The derelict windmill in the flooded field of Chapter 6 is the novel's answer to both Quixote and Sancho. It is neither a giant nor merely a machine. It is a broken thing still turning. It has no operator and no purpose and it turns furiously anyway. That is not Quixote's delusion. That is not Sancho's practicality. That is what Young found when she looked at the windmill without either of them: a broken arm, a flooded field, and motion that has no reason to stop.

The Novel as Tissues, Not Issues

It could be that Miss MacIntosh, My Darling like Don Quixote is not a book of issues but of tissues: like an onion, layer after layer revealed on subsequent rereadings. The windmill distribution is the clearest demonstration of what this means at the level of a single motif.

On a first reading, the windmill in Chapter 1 is a passing metaphor for Moses's erratic driving and uncertain domestic claims. On a second reading it connects to Chapter 6's broken windmill in the landscape the bus is passing through. On a third reading it connects forward to Miss MacIntosh's playing cards in Chapter 19 and Cousin Hannah's posthumous page-turning in Chapter 52 and Mrs. Hogden's sold home in Chapter 70.

None of these connections are announced. Young does not say: remember the windmill from Chapter 1. She places the windmill and lets it accumulate. By the time Mr. Spitzer is walking through rain in Chapter 49, "the rain drops whirring where he walked like a living windmill," the image has been alive in the novel for forty-eight chapters and has already been attached to Moses and will later be attached to Cousin Hannah and Miss MacIntosh and will appear seven times in Mrs. Hogden's story.

This is the tissue argument demonstrated: the windmill is a thread running through the novel's entire length, gathering meaning with each appearance, never announcing itself as a symbol, never asking the reader to stop and notice it. It turns continuously, like Cousin Hannah. It turns even when the wind blew not.

Nearly Four Thousand Questions

Pillars: Pillar 9 (Language Shapes What's Possible)

Chapters discussed: 8, 11, 22, 29, 43

The Question Mark as Structural Device in Miss MacIntosh, My Darling

The Count

The question mark appears nearly 4,000 times in Miss MacIntosh, My Darling, across about 673,000 words. That works out to about 5.9 question marks for every 1,000 words. For comparison, a count of Project Gutenberg novels found most of them between about 4 and 8 question marks per 1,000 words, with Jane Eyre near 8 (Tatlock, Washington University in St. Louis, 2018). Young's overall rate sits inside that ordinary range. What sets her apart is where the questions gather.

The Distribution Is Not Even

The question marks are concentrated rather than spread. Individual chapters range from a low of 0.9 per 1,000 words to a high of 26.1 per 1,000 words. The chapters at the extremes are not random. They correspond to specific characters, specific moments in the novel's structure, and specific modes of consciousness.

Chapter 11 contains a single question mark across 950 words. It is Vera's chapter, and the question comes in its first sentence: “how should I endure this isolation, for I could not be like my mother, and no mere illusion would suffice me?” One question. The chapter proceeds in statement rather than inquiry. That single question mark in 950 words is not an absence of the device. It is its most concentrated use.

The First Half and the Second Half

Measured by words, the halfway point of the novel falls at the end of Chapter 50. The question mark rate drops between the two halves.

Chapters 1 through 50 ask questions at a rate about 40 percent higher than Chapters 51 through 82, 6.9 against 4.9 for every 1,000 words. The novel becomes less interrogative as it moves toward its ending. This is a measurable formal feature, not an impression. What it means interpretively is a question for the reader to carry into the work. What it shows structurally is that the question mark is distributed with intention across the novel's two halves, not applied uniformly.

The Miss MacIntosh Finding

The most significant single result from the distribution data concerns Miss MacIntosh herself. Chapter 22, in which Miss MacIntosh teaches Vera geography, is the eighth-

highest question mark chapter in the novel at 12.0 per 1,000 words, with 143 question marks across 11,919 words.

This corrects a significant interpretive assumption. Miss MacIntosh has been characterized as the novel's figure of practical certainty: the woman from What Cheer, Iowa who states rather than questions, who grounds rather than speculates, who is the anchor of the real against Catherine's opium world. The data does not support that characterization at the formal level.

Miss MacIntosh's questions in Chapter 22 come one after another through her geography lesson. The passage begins:

> *Where is James Bay? Where is the Sea of Azov? Where is the Coral Sea? Where is the North Pole, and where is the South, and how would you know the difference between them if you were set down at either, by what stars, birds, signs? What is the North equatorial current—and what, the countercurrent which runs the other way, my dear? Where is the Sargasso Sea, a sea of grass that's colored red and gleams with tiny shells like flowers? Sometimes, too, you'll see the lobster, the stinging ray. Sometimes you'll see the dead quail in the sea grass. Where are the world's great oyster beds, and what was the greatest pearl ever grown? Where are the Gilbert Islands, the Falkland Islands, the Shetland Islands, Coronation Island, Henrietta Island, Bay Marguerite, Port Royal, the Suez Canal? You may need to know.*

These questions have answers. What you may need to know is the closing phrase: this is pedagogical questioning, the Socratic drilling of a student who is expected to produce correct responses. Miss MacIntosh's questions are not open-ended meditations on the nature of reality. They are tests. The geography exists. The answers are findable. Miss MacIntosh is not generating uncertainty. She is transmitting a world of facts through the form of the question.

This is a formally distinct use of the question mark from every other high-density chapter in the novel. Moses Hunnecker's questions in Chapter 8 do not have answers: “Who killed the old horse? Who killed the sparrows? Who killed old Jim?” Cousin Hannah's dying questions in Chapter 43 do not have answers: “Oh, have you seen my love, dead love?” “Is that you, Abdullah?” Mr. Spitzer's questions do not have answers: “Or when should he come to the last infernal circle of this Divine Comedy of life and death?” (Chapter 29).

Miss MacIntosh's questions have answers. That is what makes her formally different from every other character who questions at high density in this novel. She is not using the question mark to sustain open uncertainty. She is using it to transmit knowledge that Vera does not yet have but will need.

You may need to know. The novel's figure of practical certainty teaches through questions. She just asks a different kind.

The Question Mark as Formal Unit: The Runs

The question mark becomes a formal device rather than a grammatical one when question marks accumulate in sequences where they function as rhythm rather than as individual interrogatives. The data identifies the longest such runs in the novel.

Chapter 8, Moses Hunnecker's monologue, has the highest rate of questions in the novel, 26 for every 1,000 words. In one stretch of his talk, 32 questions pour out, broken only by a few cries and fragments. The stretch moves from small talk (“Still under the weather, Doc? Roof still leaking? How's tires?”) through questions that have nominal answers (“How many yesterday, did you say, how many last night, those crazy women in labor pains?”) into questions with no possible answers (“Where did I ever see my substratum?” “What's evident?”) and then into questions drawn directly from the Book of Job (“Canst thou draw out leviathan with a hook? Canst thou put a hook into his nose?” “Wilt thou play with him as with a bird, or wilt thou bind him for thy maidens?”).

The stretch starts in ordinary conversation and ends in the unanswerable: 32 questions that cross from the practical to the cosmic without stopping. Moses is not switching modes. He is driving straight ahead, and the road runs from what can be answered to what cannot, and he does not slow down at the border.

Chapter 43 holds the four longest unbroken runs of questions in the novel: 23, 20, 13, and 12 questions in a row, with no other sentence between them. It is the chapter of Cousin Hannah's death and the novel's second-highest question mark chapter overall, with 200 question marks in about 11,400 words. This is not a character asking questions. This is a consciousness that has become, at the moment of dying, almost entirely interrogative.

What the Data Shows and What It Does Not Show

The data shows four things with precision.

First: the question mark is not evenly distributed. It concentrates in specific chapters, specific characters, and specific moments of crisis or intensity. The distribution is structured, not random.

Second: the novel asks more questions in its first half than in its second. The rate drops by nearly 30 percent between the two halves.

Third: Miss MacIntosh's Chapter 22 has the eighth-highest question mark density in the novel. Her questions are pedagogical and have answers. This is formally distinct from the high-density questioning of Moses, Mr. Spitzer, and Cousin Hannah.

Fourth: question marks gather into runs. Moses Hunnecker's chapter has the highest rate and a stretch of 32 questions. Chapter 43, Cousin Hannah's death, holds the four longest unbroken runs, up to 23 questions in a row.

The data does not show why Young made these choices. It does not confirm that the distribution is architecturally intentional rather than the organic result of which characters and situations generated more interrogative prose. What it shows is that the distribution has a shape, and that the shape corresponds to identifiable features of the novel's

structure. Whether that correspondence is cause or coincidence is the interpretive question the data raises but cannot answer.

What the data does rule out is the claim that the question mark is simply a stylistic habit distributed evenly across the novel. It is not. It has a pattern. Miss MacIntosh is in the pattern in a way that contradicts her standard characterization. Moses Hunnecker holds the record. Chapter 43 is the most interrogative sustained section of the novel. These are facts from the work, and the Deep Architecture of Miss MacIntosh, My Darling is built on facts from the book.

A statement closes what it names; a question leaves it open. Young ends nearly 4,000 sentences in a question, and in doing so she keeps open what her characters cannot settle. Even Vera's quest is set out as a question: “What motive in this quest but the search for life, for love, for truth that does not fail?” The reader who has moved through the whole novel has learned to live inside the open sentence.

The Search for Life, for Love, for Truth That Does Not Fail

Chapters discussed: 1, 2, 5, 23, 29, 30, 32, 40, 42, 65

Quest Traditions Across Four Thousand Years in Miss MacIntosh, My Darling

The Frame

Vera states the novel's quest in the first chapter, plainly:

> *What motive in this quest but the search for life, for love, for truth that does not fail?*

This is the frame within which every other quest in the novel operates. Vera's search for Miss MacIntosh, for What Cheer, Iowa, for the stable center of a world organized around practical facts and sensible shoes, is the surface quest. Beneath it, the novel holds nearly every major quest tradition in Western and some Eastern literary history, reaching back approximately four thousand years from Vera's bus journey through Indiana to an Egyptian sailor who arrived in Boston going the wrong way.

A direct search of the novel reveals a more complex architecture: six named literary quests, a second tier of archetypal wandering figures who are not literary titles but named presences in the book, and a structural argument about what quest means that the novel makes through its ending rather than stating outright.

The Foundation: The Egyptian Sailor

The oldest quest narrative embedded in the novel appears in Chapter 2, in Catherine's opium world. A drowned Egyptian sailor, gold-turbaned, his face glistening like clouded water, arrives in Catherine's bedroom. He has sailed from Egypt toward New York, gone off course, and arrived instead in Boston. He is, in the novel's own words, looking for Mr. Spitzer, trying to locate him in space if not in time.

The search ends in a mistake. That evening Mr. Spitzer finds “a gold-headed fellow sitting in the morning room in the evening light,” who greets him as “his old friend of the horse circles” and waves a race dope sheet at him. Mr. Spitzer has to explain that he is the living brother and that the man the Egyptian is looking for is dead, and, as he tells Catherine afterward, “he had nearly had to put him out of the house forcibly, lifting him by his shirt-tail.” The Egyptian has crossed the sea to find Peron, and he finds Joachim.

Catherine receives him and gives him instructions for finding Mr. Spitzer through the house. The instructions are themselves a quest: she describes a shifting landscape, the schools of faceless dolphins which should follow in his wake, the great birds with teeth, the stars not in their places. She tells him: "He should not be afraid of the minotaur, for the minotaur would be afraid of him."

The house has become a labyrinth. Catherine has become the oracle at its entrance. The Egyptian sailor is Theseus given directions by a woman in an opium bed. And the figure he is seeking, Mr. Spitzer, may or may not be findable, in space if not in time.

The Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor is among the oldest narratives in the literary record, dating to Egypt's Middle Kingdom period, approximately 2000 BCE. In it, a sailor is shipwrecked on an island and must find his way home. Young's Egyptian sailor has also been carried off course by misdirection: his captain misread the stars, the winds, the auguries of soothsayers and of birds and of horses' heads. He has arrived in the wrong place and is searching for someone who exists in time rather than in space. This is the quest structure at its most ancient: the traveler who has gone off course, who is looking for something or someone in a world that does not organize itself helpfully, who must navigate by stars that have moved from their expected positions.

Young did not name the Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor. She placed the Egyptian sailor, and the instruction not to fear the minotaur, and the labyrinthine directions, and left the reader to hear the resonance. The foundation is the oldest layer. Everything above it is built on top.

The Six Named Literary Quests

Young named six quest works directly within the novel. They are distributed across different characters and different chapters, and they are not evenly distributed one per character. The distribution is given here as confirmed from the book.

Pilgrim's Progress: Miss MacIntosh's Book

Pilgrim's Progress is the quest work most deeply embedded in the novel's physical texture. Vera describes her reading habits: "I would begin at the beginning, reading straight to the end or skipping only a few passages, and sometimes I would begin at the end, reading straight to the beginning, working from redemption backward, perhaps skipping the same passages, and she would never seem to notice." Bunyan's single-direction journey from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City is being read backwards and forwards simultaneously. The quest is being reversed even as it is being transmitted.

Miss MacIntosh also carries Pilgrim's Progress physically through the novel as one of her personal objects, alongside her black umbrella and her fishnet bag. When she disappears, the novel asks: where was her black umbrella, and where was her Pilgrim's Progress? Her copy is last seen waterlogged, swollen by the sea. The guide through the wilderness has been soaked by the same water that took Miss MacIntosh.

Don Quixote: Two Windmill Chasers

Don Quixote appears in Chapter 1 applied to Moses Hunnecker: "Was he, after all, a bachelor, perhaps even some mad Don Quixote chasing windmills," Vera wonders. The question is hers, asked of the bus driver she cannot quite read. He reappears in Chapter 65, where another character says of Miss MacIntosh: "Chasing windmills—Miss MacIntosh had always been chasing windmills." The windmill is the emblem of Quixote's

error: the giant that was always a windmill, the quest object that was always something more ordinary than the quester believed. Young gives this emblem to both Moses and Miss MacIntosh: the two figures who drive and anchor Vera's journey are both, in someone's assessment, chasers of windmills.

The Odyssey: Two Who Did Not Go

The Odyssey appears inverted in Chapter 5. Moses, in his interior monologue, identifies himself as Penelope, not Ulysses: "he was Penelope weaving this web, not Ulysses who wandered over the wide seas, he just staying at home and minding his own business." Moses is the one who stays, who keeps the home fires, whose hair grows as Penelope's weaving grew: a perpetual maintenance rather than a journey. In Chapter 23, Miss MacIntosh, grumbling about electric lights, has her own say: "Ulysses, if ever he had seen Penelope under electric lights, would never have come home." The Odyssey's homecoming is refused: the destination, seen clearly, is not worth arriving at.

The Odyssey's darkest homecoming is in the novel too. Among Catherine's visions in Chapter 2 are “Oriental hanging gardens where hung the housemaids, their feet twittering like birds.” In Book 22 of the Odyssey, after the suitors are killed, Telemachus hangs the twelve maids who betrayed the house, and Homer compares them to birds caught in a snare: “as thrushes or doves beat against a net that has been set for them in a thicket just as they were getting to their nest, and a terrible fate awaits them, even so did the women have to put their heads in nooses one after the other and die most miserably. Their feet moved convulsively for a while, but not for very long” (Homer, The Odyssey, Book 22, translated by Samuel Butler, 1900). Young folds Homer's birds and the dying feet into one image. The homecoming Ulysses wins is paid for by the women of the house.

Childe Roland: Catherine's Search

Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came, Robert Browning's poem of a knight who searches through a blasted landscape for a tower whose purpose he does not know, appears in Chapter 30 in the context of Catherine's long search for her lost husband Jock. Mr. Spitzer reports that Catherine implored Cousin Hannah to search for him in dark valleys, search for him where Childe Roland had blown his horn before a dark tower and where no other sound had ever been heard. The Dark Tower quest is the quest whose object is unknown even to the quester: Roland does not know what he will find or do when he reaches the tower. He finds it and blows his horn and the poem ends. Catherine's search for Jock has the same structure: she does not know what she would do if she found him. The quest is the motion, not the arrival.

The Divine Comedy: Mr. Spitzer's Self-Placement

In Chapter 29, in the middle of his long meditation on death and the body and his dead twin, Mr. Spitzer asks: "Or when should he come to the last infernal circle of this Divine Comedy of life and death?" He places himself explicitly within Dante's structure. His life is the Divine Comedy. He is descending through the infernal circles. The last circle is where he is headed. In the Inferno the last circle is the frozen lake of Cocytus, where the worst

betrayers are embedded in ice. Mr. Spitzer does not elaborate on what his last circle contains. He asks when he will reach it. The question mark does its work.

The Holy Grail and Jason and the Argonauts: Cousin Hannah

Cousin Hannah receives both the Holy Grail and Jason and the Argonauts in Chapter 42, applied in the same passage: “she had not found the Holy Grail or any object of her quest. She was that Jason who had not found the golden fleece.” Both quest objects are withheld from her. The Holy Grail is the Christian quest object, the cup that holds the blood of Christ; the Golden Fleece is the pagan quest object, the impossible prize that Jason pursued across the known world. Cousin Hannah pursued suffrage for women with the same total commitment that heroes pursued these objects. She did not find either. "No longer was she that beau sabreur of suffrage brandishing her sword—for the sheath had outlived the sword." Young gives Cousin Hannah both the sacred and the classical quest tradition, and both end the same way.

The Second Tier: Archetypal Wanderers

Beyond the six named literary quests, the novel populates itself with archetypal quest figures who are not literary titles but named presences: wanderers who have been going for so long that they have become types rather than characters.

The Wandering Jew

Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew or, as Catherine preferred to think of him, the Everlasting Jew, appears in Chapter 40 as one of Catherine's opium visitors. He is the figure condemned to wander until the Second Coming, having turned Christ away from his door on the road to Calvary. Catherine listens to him for hours. The Wandering Jew is the oldest Christian quest figure: not someone searching for something, but someone condemned to perpetual motion as punishment, unable to stop, unable to arrive. He is the anti-pilgrim: Pilgrim's Progress reaches the Celestial City; Ahasuerus never reaches anything.

The Northwest Passage

Chapter 32 contains the novel's most direct statement about the universal structure of the quest: "For every soul must know finally its Northwest Passage, must find that which cannot be found, the crevice narrow as a thread suddenly opening into those great abysses filled with cities of frozen pinnacles and towers." The Northwest Passage is the quest that killed its questers for centuries: the sea route through the Arctic that explorers searched for and died searching for. Young's use of it here is precise: every soul must "know finally its Northwest Passage." Not find. Know. The finding is not the point. The knowing of the impossibility is what the quest produces.

Polar Explorers and the Real Questers

Admiral Peary, Shackleton, and the polar expedition tradition appear repeatedly across the novel, most densely in Miss MacIntosh's geography chapters, where she asks Vera: Where is Shackleton Shelf, Enderby Land, Keeling Islands? The polar questers are the ones who went to the edges of the known world and came back having failed to reach the pole, or having reached it and disputed whether they had, or having died on the ice. Cousin Hannah, "a great Swiss mountain-climber" (Chapter 30), belongs to the same tradition. Her suffrage quest and the polar quests are held in the same breath because they have the same structure: the journey to an extreme, the attempt to plant a flag at the furthest point, the question afterward of whether anyone actually got there.

The Crusaders

The Crusader figure is applied specifically to Cousin Hannah across multiple chapters. She is "that noble Crusader armored by her pride, her tenacious courage" (Chapter 44). The Crusades were quests organized around recovering a holy city. Cousin Hannah's quest was organized around recovering the rights of women. Young makes the structural parallel explicit without apologizing for it: the Crusader who sets out to take Jerusalem and the suffragette who sets out to take the vote are both questers who organize their entire lives around a single object and pour everything into the motion toward it.

The Labyrinth at the Center

Catherine's instructions to the Egyptian sailor in Chapter 2 contain a structural argument about the novel's entire quest architecture that is worth reading slowly. She tells the sailor he must circle back the way he came, climb the stairs he has already descended. She tells him the doors have changed their places. She tells him not to fear the minotaur, for the minotaur would be afraid of him. The house through which she is directing him is a labyrinth, and the labyrinth does not have a stable architecture: the rooms between the rooms multiply, the doors relocate, the distance between one object and another is illusive.

The Minotaur at the center of the labyrinth is what Theseus was questing for: the thing to be slain at the destination. Catherine tells the Egyptian sailor not to fear it. She does not tell him it is not there. The minotaur exists. It is just afraid of him. The thing at the center of the labyrinth is afraid of the quester who has come all this way to face it.

What is at the center of this novel's labyrinth is the question the quest chapter cannot answer by counting quest references. It is the question Vera has been asking since Chapter 1. The search is for life, for love, for truth that does not fail. The minotaur at the center may be the truth that does fail. It may be Miss MacIntosh's baldness. It may be the realization that the stable center does not exist. Whatever it is, it is afraid of Vera. She has come far enough.

The Ending: Bee Bak in a Whale

The novel's final lines are Esther Longtree's restaurant sign: “Owt to luntsch. Bee bak in a whale. For she could not spell either.”

The sign is misspelled. Back is spelled bak. Whale is spelled whale but means while. Except that it also means whale. Jonah went into the whale and came back. The whale is the place of transformation between going and returning: you go in one person and come out another, if you come out at all. Esther Longtree has gone to lunch. She will be back in a while. She will be back in a whale.

The novel ends not with Vera's arrival at What Cheer, Iowa. She does not find Miss MacIntosh. The quest does not reach its stated destination. Instead the novel ends with a promise of return, misspelled, hung in a restaurant window in Indiana, signed by the woman who is the mother of us all and who cannot spell.

This is the quest's resolution. Not arrival. Not the object found. Not the golden fleece retrieved, the Holy Grail discovered, the Celestial City entered, the last infernal circle passed through. The resolution is a sign on a closed door that says: I have gone somewhere. I will come back. The quest continues. The restaurant is closed. Come back later.

This novel is one in which nothing concludes and everything begins over again. The Egyptian sailor found the wrong Mr. Spitzer and was put out of the house, still looking for a brother who is dead. Moses is still somewhere on his road. His hair is still growing. Vera has arrived somewhere that is not What Cheer. She is going to be married and invite everything alive and dead to the wedding. “Esther Longtree would come.” The sign on the door says she will be back in a whale.

Four thousand years of quest literature are gathered in this novel, from the drowned Egyptian sailor whose captain read the wrong stars to the stone deaf man Vera loves at the end. Every tradition Young drew on ends the same way: the quester finds something other than what they sought, and the finding is the quest's true content. What you were looking for was never the point. The looking was.

What the Names Know

Pillars: Pillar 9 (Language Shapes What's Possible)

Chapters discussed: 4, 5, 8, 16, 17, 29, 33, 44, 47, 48, 69, 73, 82

How the Novel Names Its People, and the Wheel of Fortune

Some names Young explains right in the novel. Others carry their meaning through where the name comes from and how the character lives. Both kinds are real, but they are different kinds of evidence, and this chapter keeps them apart.

Part One: Names Young Glosses Within the Novel

Young was not subtle about names when she wanted to make sure the reader understood them. She glossed five names directly within the novel: sometimes through a character's own statement, sometimes through narrative explanation, sometimes through dialogue. These five are the solid ground the rest of this chapter stands on.

Vera: Truth

Young states this directly in Vera's own voice. The passage is unambiguous:

> *All people would greet me by my name, Vera, that which stands for truth and not merely the fickle promise or dead substitute for that life which was never to be realized.*

Vera tells the reader what her name means. This is not interpretive. The novel announces it. Vera is truth. She is, in her own way, the one still unborn, in the process of becoming what her name already is. The 1,198 pages are truth arriving at itself, the name finally inhabited by the person who carries it.

The qualification Young adds is equally important: not merely the fickle promise. Truth is not what Vera has been living. She has been living inside an illusion, her mother's opium world, the fiction of Miss MacIntosh as a stable center. Her name is the destination she is traveling toward, not the condition she starts from. Vera is truth on the way to being true.

Moses Hunnecker: The Lawgiver Who Cannot Enter

Moses names himself in his own monologue in Chapter 5: “You know me, Moses Hunnecker, the bus-driver, my long hair streaming like a curtain over my eyes, but I can see better when I am drunk than you can see when you are sober.” The self-naming is deliberate and emphatic. He says his name as an announcement of identity, as if reminding himself who he is while driving drunk through a dead country at night.

The novel does not gloss Moses the way it glosses Vera. It does not say Moses means the lawgiver who leads the people to the edge of the promised land and cannot enter. It does not need to. The biblical Moses is part of the English-reading tradition in a way that makes the gloss unnecessary. What the novel does instead is build the Moses pattern

into every element of the character: the uncut hair as Nazarite vow, Indiana, which Vera calls “the promised land” in Chapter 4, the journey that circles back rather than arriving, the driver who will be going home while his passengers go on without him.

The infant Moses appears later in the novel, in Mr. Spitzer's butterfly walks in Chapter 29, in a completely different context: “The old caterpillar sleeping like the infant Moses in his cradle among the bulrushes by a dark stream—would he not beget this future life?” Young uses the Moses image twice, at different scales, in different registers: the bus-driver who names himself Moses, and the hidden infant in the bulrushes who will grow into the lawgiver. Both ends of the same life are present in the novel. Neither reaches the promised land.

Dr. Justice O'Leary: The Name He Announces Frequently

The novel is explicit about this name's weight in Chapter 69: “Dr. Justice O'Leary, for so he called himself, announcing frequently not only his name but the fact that he was the best medical practitioner this country ever saw.” Announcing frequently is the key phrase. Justice O'Leary insists on his name in the way that people insist on titles they fear are being forgotten. He practices justice only in his hallucinated practice. He delivers babies no one else can see. He is justice as it survives in the imagination when the world has stopped recognizing it.

The combination of titles is specific: Doctor and Justice. Both are titles of authority, one medical and one legal. He holds both and neither functions. In a novel where Mr. Spitzer practices law in a court of gold and silver flagstones and moonstones (Chapter 48) and Moses drives a bus that may be going nowhere, Justice O'Leary is the figure who names the novel's attitude toward institutional authority most directly: it continues to announce itself long after it has ceased to operate.

Falada: The Speaking Dead Head

In Chapter 16, Vera passes on what Mr. Spitzer later learned about Falada's name. This is the most elaborate name-gloss in the novel, running to several sentences:

> *Falada, Mr. Spitzer had later ascertained, was the name of the horse in an old Arabic fairy tale which had its parallels in many countries, in many ages, Falada being that horse whose head was cut off and nailed above the city gates and whose head, after its death, had spoken to the people. This horse's head had spoken oracles and parables to the people passing through the gates. He had spoken secrets and perhaps was speaking now.*

Falada speaks after death. Falada's head, nailed above the city gates, delivers oracles to those who pass through. This is the black pony Vera rides home through the moonlit night of her fourteenth birthday, the night she sees Miss MacIntosh's secret in Chapter 17. She is riding a horse whose name means the dead oracle, the voice that speaks after the body has been destroyed.

And “perhaps was speaking now” is Young's own addition to the folk tale's meaning. The horse may still be speaking. The oracle may be active. What Vera learns in Chapter 17,

what Falada carries her toward, may itself be an oracle: the revelation of Miss MacIntosh's secret is the speaking of the dead truth, the thing that was always there and could only be said after innocence was destroyed.

Beatrice Fitzgerald: Royal by the Bar Sinister

Homer glosses this name in dialogue. He does not know he is doing so; he is simply defending Beatrice against Madge's contempt. But the gloss is explicit:

> *They say she's royal, that there's blue blood in her. That's because her name is Fitzgerald. Everything that begins with Fitz is royal in this country. Fitzwater, Fitzsimmon, Fitzhugh, Fitzpatrick, Fitzgerald. I don't care what it is, just so it is Fitz. That was because of some woman that was never married to some old king but had a child by him. It's the bar sinister. It's the bastard line.*

Beatrice is Dante's guide through Paradise. Beatrice Fitzgerald is royal by the bastard line: she carries the blood of heaven but was never legitimized by it. She lives in a flooded tin house. She is nearly blind and losing the other eye. She is the guide who cannot see, the heavenly mediator who has been stripped of her standing by the circumstances of her birth.

This is Young's consistent method with classical allusion: she does not simply reference, she revises. Dante's Beatrice leads the poet upward through the spheres of Heaven. Young's Beatrice, as Homer tells it in Chapter 8, pulls the clean laundry in a wicker basket on a little red sled over the snow in the coldest winter, and the snowflakes fall into her eyes. A little boy once shot at her with his bow and arrow, and that was how she lost an eye. The guide through Paradise is here, royal by the bastard line, nearly blind, washing other people's clothes.

Part Two: Names Whose Meanings Operate Through Constellation

The following names are not glossed within the novel. Young does not explain them the way she explains Vera or Falada or Fitzgerald. What she does instead is build characters whose actions, conditions, and relationships rhyme with what their names carry etymologically and historically. The evidence is cumulative and architectural rather than direct. It is a different order of claim from Part One, and should be read as such.

Catherine Helena Cartwheel, nee Snowden

Three names working at once, all given in Vera's own words in Chapter 4: “I, Vera Cartwheel, daughter of Catherine Helena Cartwheel, nee Snowden, and of a father unknown, perhaps of many fathers.”

Catherine derives from the Greek Aikaterina, associated in the hagiographic tradition with Saint Catherine of Alexandria, whose martyrdom instrument was the breaking wheel: the Catherine wheel. Catherine Cartwheel is the woman broken by the wheel who produced, by that breaking, the cart-wheel that is Vera. The surname is not an incidental decoration. The daughter of the woman named for the breaking wheel is named Cartwheel. The

breaking becomes the vehicle. The instrument of torture becomes the instrument of motion.

Helena is often said to mean light, bright one, or torch in Greek, though the root of the name is uncertain (“Helen (given name),” Wikipedia). Catherine's middle name is Helena, the light she carries even in her opium bed. She is Cartwheel's light, however dimmed by the drugs that sustain her.

Snowden is what Catherine was before she became a Cartwheel. Snow suggests both whiteness and blankness: the original state before the wheel turned. Catherine was born into the blank, the undifferentiated, and married into the wheel. She has been turning ever since, unable to stop, her opium dreams the only thing that slows the rotation.

Jock is a Scottish form of Jack, itself a pet form of John. The name appears only once, in Chapter 33, where a Boston newspaper, mistakenly reporting Catherine dead, calls her “the late Mrs. Catherine Cartwheel, nee Snowden, widow of Jock, the fashionable dog fancier, the fabulous yachtsman, the great mountain-climber who had disappeared when the mountains moved like waves.” Vera herself names no father. Truth's father is everywhere and nowhere, a nickname for John.

Esther Longtree

Esther comes from the Persian word for star, and it may also echo the Hebrew word for hidden or concealed. Some scholars link the name to Ishtar, whose planet Venus is both the morning star and the evening star (“Esther (given name),” Wikipedia). Both meanings fit Esther Longtree. Young sets her beside that very star in Chapter 73: a man sure his wife was two women “like the evening star and the morning star, each shining in the same place but at a different time” tells his story to Esther Longtree, “who knew that the evening star and the morning star were one star.” She is also profoundly hidden: her pregnancies are invisible to everyone who should see them, her grief is carried in silence, her stillborn children are known only to her.

Longtree is the name that carries the most direct structural weight. A tree that is too long, that outlasts its season, that keeps bearing what cannot be born. Esther Longtree is perpetually pregnant and perpetually losing her children. She is the tree whose fruit never reaches the ground as living children. She bears and bears and bears. The tree is long: it has been doing this for a long time and will continue.

Young called Esther Longtree “the mother of us all,” quoting Gertrude Stein (Friedman and Fuchs, 1989). In Chapter 82 Vera says it her own way: Esther Longtree “was also our love, all our loves, and she was the mother of the stillborn clapping their hands in clouds.” The mother of us all is named for the hidden star and the long-bearing tree. She carries what cannot be born and does not stop.

Joachim and Peron Spitzer

Joachim is a Hebrew name meaning God will establish or God has established. In the Christian tradition, Joachim is the name of the father of the Virgin Mary: the man who, with his wife Anna, produced the vessel for the incarnation. Joachim Spitzer is the twin

who survives, who practices silent music and imaginary law, who waits and witnesses and establishes nothing that the world recognizes. He is the father of what will not be born into public acknowledgment, the establisher of a music that will not be played, a justice that will not be administered.

Peron is the twin who dies early, the gambler, the worldly one who loved only the old and ugly and found them beautiful. The name Peron comes from Pierre and Pedro, the French and Spanish forms of Peter, the rock (britishsurnames.uk; Wiktionary). He is the one who went ahead, who took the journey that Joachim could not, who died into knowledge of the darkness that the living twin could only imagine. In the last chapter, as Vera tells it, Mr. Spitzer tells Catherine “that he was Peron—that it was Joachim who was waiting over there where the silence was and where the silence began, that it was Joachim who had died, Peron who had lived all these years in memory of Joachim” (Chapter 82). The names have been performing a shell game throughout the novel: the establisher and the pilgrim have been trading places, and neither can be finally located.

Spitzer comes from the German spitz, pointed or sharp, and one surname guide reads it as the name of a maker of pointed weapons or tools, such as spears or arrows (namecensus.com). A Spitzer is a pointed thing: an arrow, a pencil sharpened to its tip. The twins are pointed at something they never reach. The name names the vector without naming the destination.

The Cartwheel and the Wheel of Fortune

The novel uses the phrase wheel of fortune once, in Mr. Spitzer's meditation: “perhaps the smallest things were indeterminate, that only they escaped this wheel of fortune or these sealed orders of that fate under which man had sailed and which was determined long ago and was inscrutable, that perhaps only some delicate rainbow-colored butterfly gleaming through the mist or far ripple of water streaked by moonlight or snowflake like a web of lace laid upon the mouth of the dead could escape this universal cloud.” It uses "She was turning on this turning wheel. She could not stop. She could not cease. She was dancing." of Madge in the bus section. It describes Mr. Spitzer and his twin as "turning like the wavering spokes of a wheel through light as through darkness"

Cartwheels appear in the novel's imagery twice as shapes among snowflakes: “cartwheels, earth-borne asters, stars, flowers” in Chapter 44, and “whirling multiform snowflakes, snowflakes like roses, cartwheels, moths, stars” in Chapter 47. The cartwheel appears in lists of shapes that the mind perceives in the world's patterning: not as the family name being referenced but as a shape the universe makes.

What this constellation suggests is that Young chose the family name Cartwheel with awareness of both the Wheel of Fortune and the cartwheel as a vernacular shape of turning. The Cartwheels are the family that turns. Catherine turns on her opium bed. Vera turns on the turning wheel of the bus journey. The wheel of fortune turns over them. Their name names the condition they cannot escape.

Boethius's Wheel of Fortune, which the existing Deep Architecture chapters have addressed in connection with the novel's structure, turns without regard for human merit or desire. What goes up comes down. What was high is brought low. Catherine Cartwheel

was once called high: a Boston newspaper remembered her as “a famous beauty of the past.” She is now horizontal in her bed, unable to rise, turned by the wheel to the lowest point. Her daughter is searching for the stability that the wheel keeps denying. Their name is the wheel.

The Architecture of the Naming

Every name in this novel is working. No name is neutral. The question for each is whether Young is telling the reader what the name means, or whether she is trusting the reader to follow the meaning through the character's life and find out what the name already knew about its bearer.

Vera is truth: Young says so. Catherine is the breaking wheel: Young builds a woman broken by the wheel who cannot stop turning and named her child Cartwheel. Falada speaks after death: Young has Mr. Spitzer explain this directly. Justice administers no justice: Young has Justice O'Leary announce his name frequently in a world that has stopped needing what he offers. Moses will not enter the promised land: Young has Moses Hunnecker drive the bus toward Indiana and name himself in his own monologue. Fitzgerald is royal by the bastard line: Young has Homer say so in dialogue.

These are not coincidences. In a novel that Young spent eighteen years building sentence by sentence, with nearly four thousand question marks, with shadow, shadows, and shadowy more than eight hundred times, with the word dead appearing more than sixteen hundred times: in that novel, the names know exactly what they are doing.

The wheel turns. The Cartwheels turn with it. The spokes hold their distances from the absent center. Moses drives. Truth is being born.

A name in this novel is never a neutral label. It shapes what its bearer can become and tells where the novel is speaking from: the Cartwheels turn on the wheel their name carries, and Moses drives a bus through the American wilderness toward Indiana, which Vera calls “the promised land.” Young chooses names that speak from a particular place, and she lets the reader hear where.

Birds of Passage, Birds of Omen

Pillars: Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End) · Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act) · Pillar 7 (The Margins Reveal the Truth)

Chapters discussed: 2, 3, 4, 11, 14, 37, 41, 45, 48, 49, 60, 72, 74, 82

> *We were the nestless birds, even like the seagulls wading before us through lines of surf, even like the baby sandpipers who were the color of the sand which sheltered them and whose mother might have been the sand.*
>
> *Miss MacIntosh, My Darling, Chapter 3*

Every Bird and Beast

Young came to her novel already a student of birds. As the Preface tells, her 1936 master's thesis at the University of Chicago was on the birds and beasts of John Lyly's Euphues, and she told Charles Ruas in the Paris Review, “I had to study the history of every bird and beast there ever was.” She kept the habit all her life: “I am interested in the birds and the beasts for their symbolic value,” “their value as icons, as ways of saying things about people.”

The novel shows it. The words bird and birds appear more than seven hundred times, and the kinds are named one by one: ravens and doves, canaries and gyrfalcons, terns and petrels, loons and bitterns, whooping cranes, mandarin ducks, hoopoes, gannets, lovebirds, and the last passenger pigeon. To All My Darlings traces them through more than fifty chapters. Lyly used a bird to teach a lesson. Young uses a bird to say something about a person that no plain sentence could. This essay follows a few of them.

The Nestless Birds

The first great bird passage belongs to Vera's childhood. In Chapter 3, remembering Miss MacIntosh's teaching, Vera says: “To kiss the rod was better than not to know self-discipline, than to imagine we were free and our own architects, building heaven as the sea builds its shells, as the birds build their nests.” And then: “We were the nestless birds, even like the seagulls wading before us through lines of surf, even like the baby sandpipers who were the color of the sand which sheltered them and whose mother might have been the sand.” Then she adds, “Or so I thought then.”

A sandpiper whose mother might have been the sand is a fair picture of Vera herself, raised by a mother who was mostly absent in her dreams and by a nursemaid who walked into the sea. And Miss MacIntosh has no patience for the other kind of bird: “Little she cared for all these fine-feathered birds of paradise, the dream of heaven as it should be realized on earth.” The birds of paradise came to Europe as trade skins with their feet cut off, and people believed they had no feet and lived all their lives in the air until they fell to earth dead. In Chapter 37, Catherine thinks of sending a message “by the footless messengers.” Miss MacIntosh's birds stand on the sand. Catherine's never land.

The Canary and the Ravens

Catherine's life hangs on a bird. In Chapter 2: “Her only faithful companion had been nothing human, only a plain little bird, only a yellow canary with a glassy eye and ruffled wing, and on this, her life and everything else depended.” It sleeps in a gilded cage at her elbow, “delicate as a puff of opium-colored smoke, its smooth head tucked under its wing,” and “so long as this bird lived, she could not die.” A woman who has shut herself in for good keeps a caged bird as her hold on life. Intertextuality as Construction Method follows the many names Catherine gives her canaries.

The same chapter lists among her ghostly visitors “two sister ravens who had created the universe, the dead creation.” In Chapter 11 they come again with “the sister ravens, the brother doves.” European fairy tales tell of brothers turned into birds and saved by a sister, in the Grimms' “The Seven Ravens” and Giambattista Basile's “The Seven Doves.” Young makes the ravens sisters. And ravens who make the world belong above all to the peoples of the Northwest Coast. In the stories of the Haida, Raven brings the world and its light into being (John R. Swanton, Haida Texts and Myths, 1905). The Haida live on the Queen Charlotte Islands, now called Haida Gwaii, and in Chapter 11 Catherine entertains “Queen Charlotte Islands” too, asking after “a dead, snowy gyrfalcon who had been blown upon that desolate beach, a goldeneye no longer nesting on that rock.” The creator ravens and the islands sit in the same bedroom.

The Red Rooster's Wing

Birds also mark the people Vera loves. Chapter 4 opens: “Long years after her disappearance or death, I had dreamed of no one but Miss MacIntosh, my darling, poor lost soul, her cheeks reddening in the terrible sunlight, her hair red as the red rooster’s wing.” The red rooster is the bird of plain farmyard mornings, and it fits a woman from What Cheer, Iowa. It also fits a wig. In Chapter 14, Catherine sees a grander cock: “Was Mr. Spitzer blind that he could not see the golden cock perched at the foot of her bed, that it was really Pythagoras shedding his golden feathers?” In Lucian's old dialogue “The Dream, or the Cock,” a rooster reveals that it is Pythagoras reborn. The farmyard rooster and the golden cock are the two sides of the novel, the plain and the dreamed, wearing feathers.

Martha, the Last Passenger Pigeon

The novel's deepest bird grief belongs to Mr. Spitzer. Passenger pigeons once flew over North America in flocks of billions; John James Audubon watched one flight pass for three days in 1813. Hunters shot, netted, and clubbed them by the millions, and the last one, a bird named Martha, died at the Cincinnati Zoo on September 1, 1914.

In Chapter 45, Mr. Spitzer is “but an old pigeon-roost himself,” and sometimes there come to him “passenger pigeons now extinct though they had once darkened the heavens over this wilderness, roaring, clanging like church bells in clouds, making a twilight of sunlight.” In Chapter 49, “Whenever he thought of the death of an individual, he wept for the death

to the last passenger pigeon known to earth—Martha, who expired September 14, at one o’clock in the afternoon just as the clock was tolling one, 1919, A.D., at the Cincinnati zoo.” Young's date is not the real one, and the working copy of the novel gives a different year, 1918. What matters to Mr. Spitzer is that “her passage should scarcely have been noted, but he had noted it in a war-torn world. He had written down this date upon his shirt cuff.”

He knows how her kind died: “All others of her kind had been shot down by great guns, trapped by nets like the fishes of the sea, clubbed, killed simply because they were the many, the beautiful, the excessive.” And he does not let the pigeons stand alone. “He would have presented his indictment to the Senate on account of what America had done to passenger pigeons once as thick as stars in the clouds and had done to Indians in their lonely tepees and yet might do to the whooping crane and the lute bird trembling from heaven to earth.” The pigeon's death sits beside what the country did to the Native peoples of the land, in one sentence, with no “but” between them. He would have been thrown out of court, the novel says, accused “of giving a voice to all those beauties which never should have been expressed.” Mr. Spitzer witnesses for those no one else will.

The Lighthouse and the Star

Migrating birds that fly at night are drawn to lighthouse beams and strike the glass, and keepers long found them dead at the foot of the tower in the morning. Young uses that fact twice. In Chapter 48, Mr. Spitzer remembers “that under the lighthouse it is darkest, even though the lighthouse seems a star against which migratory orioles will dash, having mistaken the lighthouse for the star. Even Mr. Spitzer might have done so.” In Chapter 60 he stands still while wild ducks stream past him, he “being like the burning of the lighthouse on the distant rock,” and they “like those poor birds of passage who, with their eyes blinded by the light, are dashed to pieces against a lighthouse looming through the fog, for they have mistaken the lighthouse for the light, the reflection of a star.”

That is the whole novel's danger in one picture. Every person in it is following some light. Some of the lights are stars, and some are only lighthouses, and from the dark no one can tell which. In Chapter 41, Catherine's visitors leave cards with “comments as to ancient shipwrecks and storms and birds of passage, birds of omen.” In this novel the bird of passage and the bird of omen are often the same bird.

Esther's Lovebirds and Cock Robin

At the end of the book, the birds come to Esther Longtree. In Chapter 72, at home, she is “breeding lovebirds for their big brain boxes and their talking and making long sentences with subject and predicate that would spill out in the dawnlight when they wanted their water and their mama and their papa.” The woman whose children are born dead raises birds that call for their mother. The same chapter asks the old nursery question: “Who killed cock robin?” Esther cannot answer it either: “The wind, the night, the day, the child, the little child, the many fathers, the sky.” In Chapter 74, a man she has just slept with

talks of “the poisoned blackbirds falling from the sky upon the picnic grounds,” one more death in his long list of other people's murders.

And the novel ends with a guest list full of birds. In Chapter 82, Vera and the stone deaf man will invite to their wedding “whippoorwill and bluejay and little jenny wren and bobolink and woodpecker and little robin redbreast, all the wild flowers and all the birds and little tommy titmouse.” The robin whose killer no one could name comes back alive, invited.

The Radical Immanence Reading

In the language of Radical Immanence, Mr. Spitzer's mourning for Martha is Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End): he weeps for her whenever he thinks of any death, years after hers. His wish to bring the pigeons and the Indians before the Senate, and the date written on his shirt cuff, are Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act). And the nestless birds, the sandpiper whose mother might have been the sand, and Esther's lovebirds calling for their mother are Pillar 7 (The Margins Reveal the Truth): the smallest creatures at the edge of the surf carry the novel's truth about who is sheltered and who is not.

The Wig, the Umbrella, and the Mirror

Pillars: Pillar 1 (Not One Self) · Pillar 2 (Reality Is Constructed) · Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End)

Chapters discussed: 3, 6, 17, 18, 22, 27, 32, 35, 39, 41, 63, 64, 65, 68

> *because the fog was like feathers, angels protecting this poor angel who had no feathers, and I chose my black umbrella to cast its shadow in my walk, and may I never lose it, for I was but this phantom which would fade into the light.*
>
> *Miss MacIntosh, My Darling, Chapter 64*

Three Things Miss MacIntosh Carries

Some of the most important things in this novel are things you could hold in your hand. A red wig. A black umbrella. A looking glass. Each one belongs first to Miss MacIntosh, and each one passes, in a different form, to the other people in the book. Young built her nursemaid partly from life. She told an interviewer in 1983 that Miss MacIntosh was a composite of Indianapolis spinsters, one of whom wore a wig and kept a spare (American Academy of Poets interview), and Susan Neville's profile names her: a Miss Alexander, who wore a spare wig to keep her head warm (Neville profile).

Flipping the Cave follows the night Vera finds her bald, and Survival in the Fragile House follows her history of the umbrella. This essay looks at the three objects themselves: what each one shelters, and what each one costs.

The Wig as a Mourning Ring

Young called the wig the illusion itself, “the dream by which she lived” (interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT, 1965). In the WNYC interview she went further: Miss MacIntosh “is really a bald prince, disguised with a red wig and the woman's gear” (WNYC interview). And she told Duncan MacDonald that the missing hair was “the symbol of the dream and of the feminine in life” the nursemaid was never given (Observation Point, 1965).

But the novel adds something the interviews leave out. The wigs are also a way of remembering the dead. In Chapter 63, bald before Vera, Miss MacIntosh says of “this poor, burned wig which was purchased from an ordinary wig-maker’s”: “There have been several such, in fact, and of various shades, and I was thinking of the grey. Perhaps my vanity was always too great. The red was my poor brother Richard’s color. You may remember him. It is probable that he lost his head. There was also the black in memory of yet another one who disappeared.” In Chapter 65, as Vera tells it, the black was for Lorena: “Lorena’s hair, Miss MacIntosh said, was black—and Lorena had already left her.” And the red she wore “in memory of her brother Richard who had disappeared among the islands of Oceania.”

So the red hair that stood for plain good sense through the first half of the novel was a mourning color all along, worn for a lost brother, the way people once wore a lock of the

dead in a ring. The woman who told Vera never to dream wore her grief on her head every day. The wig hides one truth and carries another.

And it could not be undone. In Chapter 64 she tells Vera, “I have no hair anywhere on my body. I am a hairless woman,” and “A barber in Chicago told me he could do nothing.” Young took the scene from life. She asked her own hairdresser whether a bald woman had ever come in, and got the answer she gave the barber in the book: “I couldn't grow one hair on your head for a million dollars, and if I could, I wouldn't need a million dollars” (Terkel interview). Miss MacIntosh's own verdict follows: “Bald I came into this world, and bald I will go out of it, little doubt. I will be lucky if I can take my umbrella or have even my shadow where I step.”

The Umbrella and the Shadow

That last line ties the wig to the umbrella. In Chapter 17, when Vera first sees her bald, Miss MacIntosh has “not one hair to cast its shadow.” In Chapter 64 she explains why she carries the umbrella: “So I chose the fog,” she said, “because the fog was like feathers, angels protecting this poor angel who had no feathers, and I chose my black umbrella to cast its shadow in my walk.” Then: “May I never lose my umbrella, for my umbrella is my friend,” she continued, “and what should I be if I should lose my shadow, if I should have no shadow here?”

The woman who casts no shadow of her own carries one with her. Young knew the practical side of this. Light burns a hairless woman's skin, she said, so Miss MacIntosh carries the umbrella even on sunny days, and the umbrella “casts a shadow around her and forbids intimacy” (WNYC interview). She carried it “indoors and out,” as a woman “avidly normal” (Observation Point, 1965). Young called it “a kind of canopy between her and reality” (Terkel, 1965). It is shelter, and it is distance, and it is the borrowed shadow that lets her pass for a woman like any other.

In Chapter 3 the sea gives it back: “her broken black umbrella beating like a bird’s wounded wing at the edge of the sea which had returned it.” Young said she wrote the sea-walk with Virginia Woolf's drowning in mind, and that an editor who had known Woolf told her Woolf “had left her walking stick at the tide's end” (Observation Point, 1965). It comes back once more in Chapter 68: “A torn black umbrella was blowing like a crow against the surf.”

Every Woman's Umbrella

The umbrella is not Miss MacIntosh's alone. Catherine has a white one. In Chapter 39, never leaving her room yet “always travelling,” she is “sometimes raising her white umbrella over her like a cloud.” In Chapter 41, among the things her visitors leave behind, “An emperor’s attendant left the emperor’s white umbrella, billowing like a white bird in the wind.” In the old courts of Siam and Burma, the white umbrella was the sign of the king. Miss MacIntosh's black umbrella keeps the world off. Catherine's white one crowns her in a world of her own making.

Cousin Hannah turns the parasol into a weapon. In Chapter 32 the suffrage captain, looking at the society ladies who used their frilled parasols for flirtation, “had urged woman to use her parasol as her sword or her shield, her greatest weapon of offense or defense,” and “to fly her skirts as her banners in her war against tyrannical man.” And in Chapter 63 Miss MacIntosh gives the umbrella to everyone, in her history of Jonas Hanway, the umbrella that once shaded only an emperor “might now be carried by each man over himself.” Three women, three umbrellas: one for keeping the world away, one for ruling a dream, one for fighting.

The Mirror That Was Not Looked Into

The third object is the one Miss MacIntosh avoids. In Chapter 17, Vera sees her bald head as “a great mirror where one should see one’s self if one looked closely and did not lose one’s mind.” In Chapter 18, Miss MacIntosh tells Vera that what she has seen “was nothing another should see. She had never seen it herself except in a mirror.” And in Chapter 22: “For many years now, she had never looked into a looking glass. She could not remember the last time she had seen herself.”

When the truth is out, in Chapter 63, her first cry is for the mirrors: “Mirrors, mirrors! Drape all the mirrors with black. Cover me over again.” Mirrors in a house of mourning were covered, by Jewish custom and in Victorian homes. Miss MacIntosh mourns herself.

Catherine lives the other way, among mirrors. In Chapter 39 her house “continually extended like the idea of infinity,” “and space was the illusion in a frameless mirror,” “every room being but the partial reflection of every other.” In Chapter 35, her selves are “these many, beautiful, waxen ladies parading in a room of mirrors and phantoms, each but the partial portrait of the other so that each was incomplete.” Cousin Hannah, by contrast, had “seemingly included no such multiple mirror images and imaginary loves.” One woman will not look. One lives inside an endless hall of reflections. One seems to have no reflections at all.

And the mirror can break a person in two. In Chapter 6, on the bus, Madge, pregnant and frightened: “She was breaking into two, herself and the other, this face unknown. She was this sad, unfamiliar reflection in her powdery looking glass, this other face which smiled.” Mr. Spitzer, whose twin is his living mirror, once walked straight through a pane of glass he never saw. In Chapter 27 he is proud “that he had walked through a wall of invisible glass, doing great harm, no doubt, to the wall but none, in the last analysis, to him.”

Young described her own method in the same terms. Late in life she told Susan Neville, “I'm a mirror” (Neville profile). The novel holds up a glass to each of its people, and none of them sees only one face.

The Radical Immanence Reading

In the language of Radical Immanence, the wig and the umbrella are Pillar 2 (Reality Is Constructed): the plainest woman in the book is built and kept up by things bought from an ordinary wig-maker and carried in the hand. The red wig worn for a lost brother and the

black one for Lorena are Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End): she wears her dead on her head every day. And the mirrors, Catherine's rooms each “but the partial reflection of every other,” Madge “breaking into two,” are Pillar 1 (Not One Self).

Movement Five: The Traditions the Novel Absorbs

The Ocean's Love to Cynthia

Pillars: Pillar 1 (Not One Self) · Pillar 2 (Reality Is Constructed) · Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End) · Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act) · Pillar 5 (Build Anyway, Knowing It's Temporary) · Pillar 6 (Unfinished Is Honest)

Chapters discussed: 11, 17, 18, 22, 40, 42, 45, 47, 53, 55, 65, 70, 73, 82

> *She is gone, she is lost, she is found, she is ever fair. Sir Walter Raleigh, The Ocean's Love to Cynthia*

The Entry Point: A Headless Visitor in Chapter 11

Sir Walter Raleigh appears in the novel twice by name. In Chapter 53 he is one of the men who lost their heads and “had played cards with his executioners.” His great entrance is in Chapter 11, among the distinguished visitors Catherine receives in her opium-dream bedroom, as Vera tells it. He arrives in his historically documented seed-pearl suit. He removes his white plumed hat. He also removes his head. He “asked that he be addressed by his intimate name, Ocean or Water, for he had crossed many waters. He was also, as his head explained, the head of a society of night devoted exclusively to atheistic propositions, such as that man had existed before Adam, and God is nothing but an idea in the mind, and God is dog spelled backward.”

This is not a casual literary cameo. Every element is exact. Elizabeth I called Raleigh “Water,” a play on how his name was pronounced. She was his Cynthia, his moon, his organizing principle, and he was her Ocean: the body that could not stop moving toward her. His great unfinished poem, usually dated to his imprisonment in the Tower of London in 1592 after Elizabeth discovered his secret marriage, was titled The Ocean's Love to Cynthia. More than five hundred lines survive of a work he never finished, a meditation on an ocean that has lost its moon, still moving, still pulled, still devoted to something that has withdrawn its light. The poem was written after disgrace. The execution came later, in 1618, fifteen years after Elizabeth's death. Young's Raleigh is headless: already past the end of his story, still carrying it.

The atheism detail also matters. In 1592 the Jesuit Robert Parsons attacked what he called Raleigh's “School of Atheism.” Scholars later named the circle the School of Night, after a line in Shakespeare's Love's Labour's Lost, and placed in it Thomas Harriot, Christopher Marlowe, and George Chapman. The informer Richard Baines charged Marlowe with saying that Moses was a juggler and with reading “the Atheist lecture” to Raleigh. Young's Raleigh leads his society of night from inside Catherine's bedroom, which is also a kind of Tower of London: the place of confinement where the most dangerous thinking happens, where the exiled self keeps writing its unfinished poem.

The Poetic Chain: Marlowe, Raleigh, Williams

There is a three-part poetic exchange behind Raleigh's visit in Chapter 11, traced in To All My Darlings, and it sounds again in Chapter 40, where Cousin Hannah's many languages include the “Greek shepherd singing to his flock.” It forms one of Miss MacIntosh, My Darling's deep literary architectures. Christopher Marlowe wrote The Passionate Shepherd to His Love, an invitation to an idealized pastoral existence: come live with me and be my love. Raleigh wrote The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd, an almost line-by-line refutation: the flowers fade, the rivers rage, a honey tongue hides a heart of gall, time drives the flocks from field to fold. No, the nymph says. Youth fades. Your promises are not adequate to what time does.

Raleigh's reply is the clear-eyed exposure of the illusion. It strips the pastoral fantasy of its timelessness. It does what Miss MacIntosh does: it points to the plain fact underneath the beautiful promise. But The Ocean's Love to Cynthia is something else entirely. It does not stop at exposure. It builds anyway, and it is left unfinished. In that poem Raleigh knows that the pastoral was an illusion, knows that Cynthia has withdrawn, knows that he has been ruined, and keeps writing anyway. He cannot stop. The ocean does not stop moving because the moon has risen behind a cloud.

William Carlos Williams added a third term to the exchange in the twentieth century. His poem Raleigh Was Right opens: 'We cannot go to the country / for the country will bring us no peace.' Williams confirms Raleigh's refutation: the pastoral is not available. The country is not an escape. There is no going back to the idealized elsewhere. But Williams says this as a modern poet, after industrialization has made the pastoral not just philosophically hollow but geographically inaccessible. He has been agreeing with Raleigh across three centuries. The conversation is ongoing. It does not resolve.

Another Raleigh poem may sit behind Chapter 45, where Cousin Hannah has “wandered like some penitential palmer with seashells on his hat to show that he had prayed in the Holy Land.” Raleigh's “The Passionate Man's Pilgrimage” begins its own pilgrimage with “Give me my scallop-shell of quiet,” as To All My Darlings notes for that chapter.

This three-part exchange is the architectural spine underneath the novel's treatment of What Cheer, Iowa. Miss MacIntosh comes from What Cheer: a name that is itself a refutation of the pastoral. What cheer? Not much. She carries the plain Midwestern interior as her credentials against illusion. She is the Nymph's Reply embodied: no, the roses fade, the rivers are just rivers, the time is what the clock says. But she drowns in the ocean anyway. The ocean has the last word, as it always does in Raleigh's unfinished poem.

The Novel as Unfinished Poem: Ocean Imagery as Architecture

The publisher's description of the novel says it directly: “Miss MacIntosh, My Darling is written with oceanic music moving at many levels of consciousness and perception.” Anaïs Nin, in her review “One Writer's Version of a Complete Universe” (Los Angeles Times, January 9, 1966), gives Young's own view: “the author's feeling is that if one is to follow the full swelling of the wave of imagination one must bring back to the shore the

wave which carried you.” The novel does not describe an ocean. The novel is structured as one. What the Raleigh thread reveals is that this ocean structure is not a metaphor Young invented. It is an inheritance: the great unfinished poem of devotion to something that no longer governs you, still moving, still tidal, still pulling toward the shore that is not there.

The Moon and the Ocean: Gravitational Devotion

The key to the Cynthia/Ocean dynamic in the novel is not romance. It is gravity. The moon does not choose to pull the ocean. The ocean does not choose to be pulled. This is devotion that is structural, not willed: the most honest kind, and the most pitiless. The novel returns to this configuration across its entire length.

Chapter 17, as Vera rides Falada on the night of her fourteenth birthday: “the moon, dimly radiant but distant, invulnerable to our assault, the moon which draws the waves in its wake and has no life of its own.” This is the Cynthia figure exactly. Elizabeth governs Raleigh not through will but through what she is. She does not choose to pull him; it is gravitational. And the moon has no life of its own: it is reflective, not generative. The queen is a surface. The ocean is the one doing the moving, the one with the interior life, the one suffering.

Chapter 18, the same night: Miss MacIntosh's head looms above Vera, “that head which was chalk-colored as the dead moon which draws, in collaboration with all the planets, the spring tide in its wake.” The dead moon governs more powerfully than the living one. After Miss MacIntosh disappears into the ocean, she becomes a governing absence. The tides of the novel's consciousness keep moving toward her even when she is gone. This is the exact situation of The Ocean's Love to Cynthia: written after disgrace, still addressed to the moon that has withdrawn.

Chapter 55: half asleep, Mr. Spitzer hears “the buzzing, snoring sound of a distant sea, the winter sea which scarcely moved as if the moon had lost its power to pull the tide,” and only gradually learns that the sound is himself, turning in his sleep. Even the stillest sea in the novel is pictured through the moon's pull, the one thing no one in it can imagine away. Raleigh keeps writing toward a queen who is no longer listening. He cannot stop. He does not finish. The poem ends in a fragment because the pull does not end.

Chapter 82: Mr. Spitzer thinks “of his own circumstance of which he was certainly not the master, just as he was not the master of the tides, the scallop moon drawing the waves.” This is the novel's clearest statement of the Cynthia principle applied to Mr. Spitzer, the novel's central consciousness across its later chapters. He is water. He is pulled. He did not choose this and cannot alter it. The question the novel asks of him is not whether he can stop being the ocean but whether he can do anything generous with that condition.

The House and the Ocean: Mourning as Architecture

The Cartwheel house has its back to the ocean. In Chapter 70, Vera says it plainly: “No wonder my mother had black curtains at the back of the many-windowed house. My mother was in mourning for the ocean.” This spatial arrangement is one of the novel's most compressed Radical Immanence statements. The house turns away from the very

thing it is built next to, which is also the thing that determines everything about it: the salt air, the damp, the tidal rhythm, the light off the water. Mourning for the ocean while living beside it: this is not a contradiction in Young's world. This is the accurate description of what it is to grieve a constitutive loss.

In Raleigh's poem, the ocean mourns Cynthia while Cynthia is still in the sky. The withdrawal of favor is not the same as disappearance. The moon is still there. The ocean can still be pulled. But the relationship is over, and the ocean keeps moving anyway, oriented toward something that no longer acknowledges it. The house with its back to the ocean is doing the same thing: maintaining its orientation in relation to what it has turned away from. The back of a house still knows where the ocean is.

Miss MacIntosh maintains the house's relationship to the ocean in an opposite and equally revealing way. In Chapter 22 she talks as if they are at sea constantly: all hands must be on board, we must plow the ocean, heave ho my hearties, all hands to the ropes. She has never been to sea. She wears a bathing suit she cannot swim in. She stands at the edge of tidal pools with her black umbrella. She uses the ocean as a metaphor for domestic routine while being constitutionally unable to enter it. This is the Nymph's position: knowing the ocean is there, refusing the pastoral invitation to dissolve into it, maintaining the plain dry shore of common sense against the pull. And then she walks in.

The Ocean Floor: We Were What We Mourned

The novel's most devastating ocean passage comes in Chapter 47, in Mr. Spitzer's long night, as his sleep lies upon him “wave upon wave.” The lost souls go down, “all but his own sinking to the ocean's floor.” Then: “this sunken continent for which we mourned, not knowing that we were what we mourned, that we were on the ocean's floor.”

We are not separate from what we are grieving. We are not observers of the loss; we are inside it, on its floor, part of its sedimentation. Raleigh's poem makes the same move: the ocean does not look at itself from outside. The ocean is the grieving. In the novel, the ocean floor is not a destination but a condition. You are already there. You have been there. The mourning is not for something you have lost but for what you are.

The passage continues: “If all were lost, how could one be lost?” This is the logical conclusion of the ocean-as-universal-condition argument. If every soul is on the floor, then the floor is also the world. There is no above from which one could fall. The novel's oceanic structure is not an image of drowning but of already having drowned, which turns out to be the same as living. The ocean floor is where the novel lives.

Miss MacIntosh's Death: The Nymph Enters the Ocean

“The sun and the moon shone in the same pearly sky when she walked into the ocean.” This sentence comes in Chapter 65, the chapter that tells of her walking into the sea. Sun and moon in the same sky: the time of day and the time of night simultaneously present, which is the condition of the novel at all times, which is also the condition of any consciousness holding the living and the dead together without separating them.

Miss MacIntosh is the Nymph throughout the novel: the one who says no to the pastoral invitation, no to illusion, no to the dissolving of the self in oceanic dreaming. She is the reality principle dressed in a black bathing suit. And she walks into the ocean. She gives herself to the undertow. The Nymph's Reply, that careful refutation, ends with the body entering exactly what it refused. Raleigh was right: the country will bring us no peace. But we go anyway. We cannot help it. We are pulled.

In the last chapter, Vera sets the two views side by side. Miss MacIntosh “did not seem then to see what I saw, the beautiful malignancy of the ocean, of always moving waters like the dreams sweeping over the dreams, for from her point of view, the ocean would be safe, the best place for the keeping of treasures, of pearls. No harm could come from the sea if one lay under it, not over it, if one could but give one's self up and be washed clear.” This is the novel's deepest Radical Immanence move. The one who organized Vera's life by pulling it is gone, and Vera is still moving. The grief is not about Miss MacIntosh. The grief is the movement itself, recognized now for what it always was: the ocean's own nature, not borrowed from anything else.

Oceanus: The Ship That Sank with the Evening Star

Among the catalog of lost ships in Chapter 42 is one named Oceanus, which comes right after the ships “sailing into port with no one on board, the table set with plates of gold”: “Oceanus which sank with the evening star, rose not with the morning star though the captain gave good hope.” In Greek cosmology, Oceanus was the primordial river encircling the world, the source of all waters. In the novel's lost-ships catalog, Oceanus is one wreck among many, failing to rise with the morning star despite hope.

This is Raleigh's poem compressed to a single image. The evening star and morning star are both Venus: one name for the same planet seen at different times of day, the “one star” Esther Longtree knows in Chapter 73. The ocean sinks with the evening star and does not rise with the morning star even though the captain gave good hope. The captain gave good hope: Raleigh gave the queen everything, kept faith, waited, gave hope. It did not rise. The ship's name is the thing it could not survive being.

The Radical Immanence Reading: What the Ocean Thread Does

The Ocean's Love to Cynthia thread is not a source study. It is a demonstration of how the first five pillars operate at the level of formal structure, not just content.

Pillar 1 (Not One Self): the ocean is not a single body of water. It is every body of water simultaneously, every consciousness that ever moved toward something it could not stop moving toward. Mr. Spitzer and Vera and Catherine and Miss MacIntosh are all aspects of the same ocean: different surfaces, the same gravitational condition.

Pillar 2 (Reality Is Constructed): the pastoral of Marlowe's shepherd is the novel's clearest example of the beautiful lie. Come live with me and be my love: every character in the novel has been invited into some version of this. Every one of them knows the Nymph's

Reply. All of them go anyway. The illusion does not become less operative when it is known to be an illusion. This is not failure. This is the constitutive condition.

Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End): Raleigh's poem is not a poem about having grieved. It is a poem written inside grief, still grieving, in the Tower, with no end in sight. The Ocean's Love to Cynthia is an unfinished poem because grief of this kind does not arrive at a conclusion. The novel is structured the same way. It does not resolve. It accumulates. It keeps moving.

Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act): Vera is the novel's witness, watching the ocean, watching Miss MacIntosh, watching Catherine behind the black curtains that turn the house from the sea. The witness is not outside the ocean; the witness is on the shore, which is also inside the ocean's reach. Every shore is the ocean's territory in weather. Vera's witnessing does not protect her from the tidal pull. It is the tidal pull: the inability to look away from the thing that has organized your life.

Pillar 5 (Build Anyway, Knowing It's Temporary): the novel builds itself the way the ocean builds itself, by returning. Wave after wave covering the same ground, each pass slightly different, laying down sediment, uncovering it, laying it down again. Raleigh's poem returns to Cynthia obsessively, circling back to the same images of loss from different angles. The 1,198 pages of Miss MacIntosh, My Darling do the same thing. This is not repetition as failure. This is the ocean's formal logic.

The Unfinished Poem

The Ocean's Love to Cynthia was never finished. Whether Raleigh meant it as a fragment, whether he continued and the continuation was lost, whether imprisonment broke the sustained act of composition: we do not know. What survives is a poem that circles its subject without arriving, that names its grief without resolving it, that addresses a moon that is no longer listening in the same formal registers it used when the relationship was intact. It is the most honest love poem in the English language: honest because it does not pretend to be over, honest because it does not pretend to continue.

Young sets this poem inside her novel as its deep water. The novel's oceanic structure, its refusal to resolve, its devotion to characters who cannot stop moving toward what they have lost or never had: all of this flows from the same source. The ocean does not stop because the moon withdraws. The moon has no life of its own. The water has always been what was doing the moving.

Raleigh was right. We cannot go to the country. The country will bring us no peace. But the novel's last word on Miss MacIntosh is not this refusal. It is Vera, in the last chapter, remembering Miss MacIntosh wading through the surf, asking: “And yet shall I not always remember her?” The answer is built into the question. The tide draws the question out whether the question wants to go or not. It was never a choice.

The Glittering Eye: The Ancient Mariner as Structural Model in Miss MacIntosh, My Darling

Chapters discussed: 7, 31, 32, 35, 49, 65, 68, 82

> *It is an ancient Mariner, / And he stoppeth one of three. / 'By thy long grey beard and glittering eye, / Now wherefore stopp'st thou me?'*
>
> *Samuel Taylor Coleridge, The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

The Compulsion to Tell

Coleridge's Ancient Mariner killed an albatross and brought disaster on his ship. All his crewmates died. He survived, cursed to wander and to retell the story of what he did to anyone he encounters, whether they want to hear it or not. The Mariner stops a wedding guest on his way into a wedding and holds him with his glittering eye and tells him everything. The wedding guest cannot move until the telling is complete. He misses the wedding. He rises the next day a sadder and a wiser man. This is the poem's formal structure: one who cannot stop telling, one who cannot stop listening, the wedding interrupted, the wisdom delivered at a cost.

Miss MacIntosh, My Darling is 1,198 pages long and cannot stop telling. This is not a formal failure. It is the poem's structural logic extended to novel length: the compulsion to retell the experience of catastrophic loss in full, without abbreviation, because abbreviation would falsify it. The Ancient Mariner tells the whole voyage. He cannot summarize. He cannot say: I killed an albatross and everyone died and I learned a lesson. He must tell every detail, every dead crewmate's eyes, every degree of the becalmed ocean, every water-snake he blessed. The novel does the same. Young cannot summarize Miss MacIntosh or Catherine or Mr. Spitzer or the bus journey. The 1,198 pages are not excess. They are the formal requirement of the compulsion.

The Glittering Eye

Coleridge's Mariner stops people with his glittering eye. This is not a metaphor for compelling storytelling. In the poem it is literal and possibly supernatural: the eye holds the wedding guest against his will. He cannot choose to walk past. The eye fixes him.

The novel gives the glittering eye to Cousin Hannah twice in Chapter 35: “this old hunter with the glittering eye, the shining spear, the sword of ice,” and “this old New England suffragette with the glittering eye, the pointed silver beard, the lifted sword.” Cousin Hannah is the novel's most compulsive activist, the suffrage captain who cannot stop campaigning, who had “ridden against great turbaned Turks” and “negotiated great torrents of ice and snow and deserts of stone,” and whose rage against man left “loud detonations” that Catherine and Mr. Spitzer would seem to hear even after so many years (Chapter 31). She holds people with her argument the way the Mariner holds the wedding

guest with his eye: not by persuasion but by some quality of the attention itself, a fixing that cannot be escaped.

The glittering eye returns elsewhere. Madge, in Chapter 7, says “I just face the truth when I see it coming,” with “her eyes glittering and hard.” The Gospel salesman in Chapter 65 is “he of the glittering eyeballs and lifted, expectant face,” poking with his black umbrella in dark doorways after souls to redeem. The hangman in Chapter 68 has eyes “especially bright and glittering, as if they were filled with a great distance.” The glittering eye in the novel is always the eye of compulsion: the person who has something to tell and will not let you go until they have told it. The Ancient Mariner, Cousin Hannah, Madge, the Gospel salesman, the hangman: all of them stopping people who are trying to get somewhere else and holding them with an eye that will not release.

Water Water Everywhere

The direct quotation appears in Chapter 68. The hangman has been telling of his first wife, and the landlord remembers piloting a yacht around the world “for a mad rich man who had killed his sweetheart.” The jury excused the rich man, but his conscience did not. He made the yacht into a prison. He kept an extra plate laid at the dinner table for his sweetheart and fed crumbs to invisible birds. “Water, water everywhere, and not a drop to drink,” he would say. He is a man who has done a terrible thing and cannot escape the knowledge of it. He has tried to escape by constant motion: “He travelled around the world, but he never saw it.” The ocean surrounds him everywhere and he cannot reach it. Right after, the hangman asks, “How could my conscience hurt me?” The Mariner's becalmed curse is the rich man's condition: to move through water without being able to use it, surrounded by a world he has cut himself off from by what he has done.

The Mariner's curse is the novel's working description of guilt that has become a permanent atmospheric condition. Water, water everywhere: not a shortage but a surfeit, not deprivation but saturation. Too much of what should sustain you. The Mariner's ocean is not empty; it is full of rotting things, of dead crewmates, of the albatross hung around his neck. The rich man's ocean is the same: full of the weight of what he carries, of the extra plate, of the invisible birds, of the sweetheart he killed and still sets a place for.

In her 1965 radio interview with Studs Terkel, Young spoke of the hangman, Mr. Weed, who on the night his wife hanged herself “had stopped to put on his galoshes” (Chapter 68), and she left the question open: “was he a murderer because he put on his galoshes.” Guilt in this novel does not need a crime to be complete.

The Albatross

Young named the albatross herself. In the same interview, when Terkel guessed that Catherine's hidden birthmark is “the albatross on the neck of the mariner,” Young answered, “you frighten me by being so absolutely right,” and went on: “the secret heart of my novel is the albatross and guilt.” Opium, through Coleridge, meant “guilt and turning away.” Catherine faces Coleridge's own final choice, to be “cured of opium and die or continue with opium and die,” and “like Coleridge, she comes back to reality as she dies”

(Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT, Chicago, October 27, 1965; see The Studs Terkel Interview, 1965).

Near the end of the last chapter, the word appears in a blues-like lament to Lucie Bell, who is leaving with another man: “Oh, you'll be going with him at dawn, little doubts have I. You'll hang around his neck like an albatross when you'll be gone.” The albatross here is love turned to burden: the beloved herself becomes the weight that will hang around the next man's neck, the dead bird the Mariner cannot take off.

This is the novel's deepest use of the Mariner structure. The Mariner kills the albatross out of impulse, without clear motive, and spends the rest of his existence carrying the consequence. He did not mean to destroy what he destroyed. Neither does anyone in the novel mean to destroy what they destroy. Catherine did not mean to disappear into dreams and leave Vera without a mother who was present. Mr. Spitzer did not mean to survive Peron. Cousin Hannah did not mean to lose her one battle, the one against Catherine's withdrawal. The Cartwheel house is full of people carrying albatrosses they did not mean to put on, hanging around necks that did not ask for the weight, marking them as the ones who were present when something beautiful died.

The Wedding Guest Who Misses the Wedding

The Ancient Mariner stops a wedding guest. The guest misses the wedding. He rises the next morning sadder and wiser. The wedding is not recoverable: while he was held by the eye and the story, the feast happened without him, the vows were said without him, the celebration that organized the day went forward without the one who was stopped on the threshold.

The novel's wedding passages enact this repeatedly. In Chapter 32, Catherine remembers her own wedding, when “She had been married to a phantom,” a bridegroom whose face she had never seen. Cousin Hannah is “this uninvited wedding guest,” whom Catherine sometimes thought she had ignored, sometimes “frozen her with her remoteness, her icy chill,” or given “a sidelong glance which might signify much or nothing.” Cousin Hannah had said that Catherine “was in love with no man on earth but with a fleeting shadow, the mere shadow of a man” (Chapter 31). She is the one stopped at the threshold of a wedding that never quite happens. She beat upon the bridegroom with her white umbrella and tried to carry her cousin away. She could not pull Catherine out. She was stopped at the door of a wedding to a ghost, and she died without bringing her cousin back to the ordinary life she wanted for her.

The novel itself is the wedding guest's experience formalized. The reader is stopped at the threshold of ordinary time, held by the glittering eye of the narrative, told the whole voyage before being released. You rise from it sadder and wiser. You have missed, while reading, whatever wedding you were on your way to. The Ancient Mariner does not apologize for stopping you. The novel does not apologize for its length. The wisdom is delivered at the cost of the wedding, and the wedding, as the novel says, was always also a funeral: “For weddings are funerals, and funerals are weddings” (Chapter 32). Mr.

Spitzer says it of himself in Chapter 49: “I am that man who was always on his way to a wedding and came to a funeral, the funeral of himself and all dead days.”

The Thousand Nights: Scheherazade and the Survival Structure of Miss MacIntosh, My Darling

Pillars: Pillar 5 (Build Anyway, Knowing It's Temporary)

Chapters discussed: 4, 11, 39, 68

> *It is an epic of what might be called the Arabian Nights of American life.*
>
> *Publisher's description of Miss MacIntosh, My Darling*

The Frame

The Arabian Nights begins with a premise that is also a death sentence: the sultan Shahryar, betrayed by his first wife, has taken to marrying a new woman each night and executing her in the morning before she can betray him. Scheherazade, the vizier's daughter, volunteers to marry him. Each night she tells him a story and stops at dawn before the story ends. He keeps her alive to hear the ending. She tells him another story the next night and stops again. She does this for one thousand and one nights. By the end, she survived. The sultan has been transformed by hearing. He does not execute her. The structure of survival is the structure of the telling: you live as long as you are still in the middle of the story.

The publisher's description of the novel names this directly: “It is an epic of what might be called the Arabian Nights of American life.” This is not a casual comparison. It is the identification of a structural model. The novel is organized as Scheherazade organizes her survival: by telling everything, by not stopping, by never reaching an ending that would allow the execution to proceed. The 1,198 pages are not a length problem to be edited down. They are the operational logic of the survival strategy. The telling keeps going because stopping the telling means death.

Catherine as Scheherazade

Catherine entertains visitors. This is the novel's central ongoing situation, its recurring condition: Catherine in her bedroom, receiving an endless procession of imaginary guests, keeping them coming through the night. Catherine keeps herself alive through entertaining. When the drugs wear thin, she loses her guests. In Chapter 4 Vera waits for the time “when she would seem to have no memory of a thousand roaring voices, when she would entertain once more her evening guests,” the great faces with eyes that never close, “or perhaps a thousand canaries blown here by the storm and singing in the candle flames.”

This is Scheherazade's situation exactly, inside out. Scheherazade tells stories to keep the sultan from killing her. Catherine keeps visitors coming to keep herself from the alternative, which Chapter 39 names: “if she should ever give up these drugs, those which she had taken for her continued life on this star or another star.” The drugs are the

medium through which the guests arrive. To stop the drugs is to lose the visitors. To lose the visitors is to face the world as it is without the stories. Catherine cannot do this. She does not stop the drugs. She keeps entertaining. She keeps the house full of the dead and the distinguished and the imaginary. The telling goes on for years. This is her survival.

Rimski-Korsakov, composer of the orchestral suite Scheherazade, appears among Catherine's visitors in Chapter 11: “There was Rimski-Korsakov who never came except in Mr. Spitzer's absence.” He is one of the distinguished callers Mr. Spitzer has missed. Young places the composer of Scheherazade, in the exact location of the novel's survival-through-telling: the opium bedroom, the crowd of visitors, the nightly entertainment that keeps the inhabitant alive.

The Stories Within Stories

The Arabian Nights is a frame narrative: Scheherazade's story contains the stories she tells, which contain stories told by characters within them, which sometimes contain further stories. The depth is recursive. There is no bottom level. Every story opens into another story. The frame never fully encloses the content because the content keeps generating new frames.

Miss MacIntosh, My Darling is structured the same way. Vera's narration frames Mr. Spitzer's memories of Catherine, which frame the stories of all the people in Catherine's bedroom, who tell their own histories in the process of being entertained, whose histories open onto further histories: Cousin Hannah's suffrage campaigns, Mr. Spitzer's twin brother's gambling career, the bus driver's monologue, the hangman's story, and the landlord's memory of the yacht voyage. Each story is nested inside another story. The novel does not proceed linearly from one story to the next. It nests. It recurses. It opens inward. The structure is the Arabian Nights structure: you are always already inside a frame, and the frame inside which you are already sitting is itself inside another frame. Anaïs Nin gives the reader explicit instruction in how to navigate this: “The key to the enjoyment of this amazing book is to abandon one's self to the detours, wanderings, elliptical and tangential journeys, accepting in return miraculous surprises.” This is advice about how to read a Scheherazade story. You do not read toward a resolution. You submit to the frame. You let the tangent take you where it goes. The digression is not a departure from the story. The digression is the story. Scheherazade's survival depends on the sultan's willingness to follow the tangent: if he ever reached the ending before dawn, she would die.

What Cheer as Arabian Nights

The publisher's description calls the novel an epic of “the Arabian Nights of American life.” The phrase earns its paradox. The Arabian Nights is the literature of the exotic, the distant, the fantastical: Persian sultans, magic lamps, flying carpets, the city of Baghdad at its most imagined. The American life in this novel is Iowa, a bus journey through the flooded Midwest, a New England seaside house, a Boston lawyer in a black suit. The

exotic and the plain American are the same material. Catherine's bedroom is Baghdad and it is also New England. The bus is Sinbad's ship and it is also a Grey Goose running out of road. The novel's deepest formal claim is that the Arabian Nights structure does not require Arabia. It requires only the compulsion to keep telling, the threatened death that the telling defers, and the listener who cannot leave until the dawn comes.

Radical Immanence's premise that serious ideas belong to everyone is enacted by this structural claim. Scheherazade's survival strategy is not exotic. It is the most democratic of structures: you have a story, you tell it, you do not stop, and this keeps you alive for one more night. Iowa has this. New England has this. Catherine has this. The bus driver has this. The novel has this. The one thousand and one nights of the American interior are not lesser than the Persian original. They have the same formal requirement: keep talking until dawn, because dawn is when the execution happens, and it is always almost dawn.

The Radical Immanence Reading: Survival as Form

The Arabian Nights structure is Pillar 5 (Build Anyway, Knowing It's Temporary) operating at the level of the novel's survival logic. The frame keeps generating new frames. The story keeps generating new stories. This is not structural weakness. It is the operational requirement of the survival strategy. You cannot stop at 400 pages because the sultan is still listening and the dawn has not come and the ending would be death. You continue. The continuation is the form. The form is the survival.

Scheherazade does not tell her stories to instruct the sultan. She tells them to stay alive. The instruction happens as a byproduct of the survival: the sultan is transformed by a thousand and one nights of hearing, by the accumulated weight of all the stories, by the experience of being inside a frame that keeps opening inward. He does not execute her because he has become, through the telling, a different man. This is what Radical Immanence claims for its readers. The transformation is not the goal. The continuation is the goal. The transformation is what the continuation produces when you give it enough time, enough frames, enough stories nested inside stories nested inside stories, enough nights just before dawn.

Three Journeys Without Arrival: Dante, Bunyan, and the Bus in Miss MacIntosh, My Darling

Pillars: Pillar 2 (Reality Is Constructed) · Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End) · Pillar 5 (Build Anyway, Knowing It's Temporary)

Chapters discussed: 3, 5, 6, 8, 23, 25, 40, 49, 51, 54, 62, 63, 71

> *Sometimes I would begin at the end, reading straight to the beginning, working from redemption backward.*
>
> *Miss MacIntosh, My Darling, Chapter 3*

The Structure of the Problem

Miss MacIntosh, My Darling contains three simultaneous pilgrimage structures: Dante's Divine Comedy, John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, and the novel's own bus journey across the American interior. Each is a journey from one state of being toward another. None of them arrive. This chapter asks how they relate: how they work against each other, how Young uses their contradictions as load-bearing joints, and what it means that Pilgrim's Progress is read backward in this novel.

The publisher's description calls the novel “a picaresque, psychological novel—a novel of the road, a journey or voyage of the human spirit,” searching for reality in a world of illusion and nightmare. This framing invokes genre conventions that every one of the three journey structures then subverts. The journey does not educate the traveler. The road does not end at the Celestial City, the Empyrean, or any destination the traveler chose. The bus runs through hell and high water and keeps driving.

Pilgrim's Progress: Read Backward

Miss MacIntosh carries Pilgrim's Progress throughout the novel. It is her book, her portable authority, the book she holds against illusion and opium and Vera's dreaming. She is herself the novel's Pilgrim: plain, directed, committed to the narrow path, though Vera gathers that before she came to the house she had been “wallowing in a Slough of Despond, almost the gutter itself.” When she walks into the ocean, what is left on the beach includes “her Pilgrim's Progress water-logged with marks of seashells on its pages” (Chapter 3). The book that mapped the journey to the Celestial City ends on the shore of “the cold September sea.”

But before this, in Chapter 3, Vera describes reading the book aloud to Miss MacIntosh: “I would begin at the beginning, reading straight to the end or skipping only a few passages, and sometimes I would begin at the end, reading straight to the beginning, working from redemption backward, perhaps skipping the same passages, and she would never seem to notice, perhaps because her ears were filled with nothing but the long, receding tides.”

Miss MacIntosh does not notice because she is listening to the tides, not to Vera's voice. The book is being read in both directions. Miss MacIntosh does not correct the reversal.

A Pilgrim's Progress read from redemption backward is a different story entirely. It begins at the Celestial City and moves toward the City of Destruction. It begins with arrival and moves toward the original condition of sin and loss. This is not a parody. It is Radical Immanence's structural logic applied to a pilgrimage book: both directions are true simultaneously. The journey toward salvation and the journey away from it are the same journey read by different lights. Miss MacIntosh, who embodies the Pilgrim's directional certainty in her waking life, carries a book that demonstrates, in the hands of the child she is supposed to be guiding, that the direction itself is undecidable.

The Slough of Despond appears three times in the novel. Once it is Miss MacIntosh's own past. Twice it is the world itself, the ground everyone stands on rather than an obstacle to be crossed: “this world was a harsh place, a Slough of Despond, and we were put here to be tested, yet though all should fail the test” (Chapter 3), and “a Slough of Despond this life is, in fact” (Chapter 23). The qualification is the key: yet though all should fail. In Bunyan, the Slough is a temporary obstacle. In Young's novel, it is the permanent condition of being alive, and the test is one everyone fails. Miss MacIntosh's practical wisdom cannot redeem this. Her copy of the book drowns with her.

The Divine Comedy: Escalator Psychology

Dante's Divine Comedy organizes the afterlife as a vertical structure: Inferno at the bottom, Purgatorio in the middle, Paradiso at the top. The journey has direction: downward into Hell to understand sin, then upward through Purgatory and Paradise toward God. It is the most architecturally purposeful journey in Western literature. Virgil guides Dante through Hell; Beatrice guides him upward through Paradise. The guide changes as the journey changes. The destination is the Empyrean: the realm of pure light beyond all the spheres.

Mr. Spitzer has what the novel calls an escalator psychology. In Chapter 54: “Mr. Spitzer's was an escalator psychology, he knew, and he continually went up and down, passing through seas of clouds, though the upper world was under, and the under world was upper, and everything was probably reversed, trees rooted in the sky, birds flying under the water, and there were streets under the earth.” He moves through Inferno and Paradiso without distinguishing them reliably, without arriving at either, without a Virgil who knows the way or a Beatrice who represents a destination worth reaching. He is looking for “some old aunt who, he was afraid, might be an old uncle in Paradiso if this was Paradiso. Yet it might be Inferno.” He adds the qualification because he cannot be certain.

In Chapter 40, Dante is among the visitors from the realm of the dead whose language Catherine understands, listed with “Christolpho Colombo who had sailed to extend the boundaries of the known world” and “ageless Dante, revolutionary Diderot, Harold Harefoot, any other visitor from the realm of the dead.” Dante is one of the distinguished dead who pass through Catherine's room on their nocturnal rounds. He has arrived at the

wrong address. The journey that ends in the Empyrean has deposited its author in an opium addict's bedroom in a New England seaside house, one arrival among many undistinguished arrivals, as if the destination of any journey depends entirely on who is doing the dreaming.

The other Dante structural marker is Cocytus: the frozen lake at the bottom of Hell, the ninth circle, where the worst sinners are encased in ice. In Chapter 62, Mr. Spitzer searches the warped drawers of his old roll-top desk “under a water-warped map of the once-believed-in stars and maps of wandering Cocytus,” drawers full of “cancelled postage stamps of exploded monarchies.” The map of wandering Cocytus: not the fixed geography of Dante's Hell but a wandering one, subject to the same drift as the stars it is mapped beside. The underworld has come loose from its location. It wanders. This is what happens to a journey structure when the destination is no longer fixed.

Dante's Beatrice is also present. The doctor's room contains an old steel engraving of Dante wooing Beatrice. The word wooing is Young's: Dante's love for Beatrice in the Comedy is not courtship but something closer to theological aspiration. She represents divine grace and the ascent of the soul. The word wooing domesticates this, returns it to ordinary romantic pursuit, puts it on the wall of the old doctor's room in Chapter 71, among pictures of embryos and near the diploma that hangs above the pillows “where there were indentations made by two heads, his and Sarah's.” This is the novel's treatment of the Beatrice principle: the figure who should draw us upward is available only as an image in a mad old doctor's room.

The Bus: Charon's Ferry Driving Through Hell

The novel's framing journey is Vera's bus ride across the American interior in search of Miss MacIntosh. The bus driver is drunk, asleep at the wheel, somehow still on the road. He drives through hell and high water. In his monologue the doctor's patients have “not a cent with which to pay old Charon when they crossed the river in a leaking boat” (Chapter 5), and in Chapter 8 he asks, “How was old Charon that rowed the boat?” The identification is structural throughout: Charon ferries souls across the Styx; the bus driver ferries passengers across a flooded interior that does not distinguish between the living and the dead.

Even asleep the bus driver keeps driving, “his hands upon the steering wheel even when he slept, his eyes upon the road, feeling as if he were still on the road and driving this bus through hell and high water when he knew he was in his four-postered bed under a heavy blanket” (Chapter 5). He is simultaneously on the road and in bed, driving and dreaming, steering the wheel in both worlds. This is the novel's definition of the guide: someone who cannot stop navigating even when the navigation has come loose from any actual geography. His hands remain on the wheel. In Chapter 6, “somehow he remembered the road, just as old carriage horses, their heads nodding in sleep, remember the road, turning where the road turns.” No destination governs this.

The dead ride too. Mr. Spitzer quarrels with “dead passengers wrapped in their shrouds under the waves” (Chapter 49) and imagines a world “where the dead human pigeon

passengers whirred with winnowing wings” (Chapter 51). The bus driver, rolling in his bed, brings “these four passengers, four angels at four bedposts, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John” (Chapter 5), through a dead country that is nobody's promised land. The bus is going somewhere. It has always been going somewhere. Nobody on it knows where that is, and the driver is asleep.

The American interior through which the bus moves is itself a failed version of the pilgrimage landscape. In Pilgrim's Progress, the landscape through which Christian travels is allegorically charged: every location is a test or a temptation or a station on the journey. The Valley of the Shadow of Death is a real valley, but it is also the condition of the soul confronting its own mortality. Young's American landscape refuses this allegorical function. The flooded roads are just flooded roads. The bus cannot find its way because the landscape provides no allegorical direction. This is the American version of the pilgrimage: the Celestial City replaced by What Cheer, Iowa, which offers no celestial content and very little cheer.

Three Guides Who Cannot Guide

Each journey structure has a guide, and each guide fails in a distinct way that is architecturally meaningful for Radical Immanence.

Miss MacIntosh is Bunyan's Pilgrim become a guide. She knows the path and walks it plainly. “She was forthright, the one form not concealed, the one person given to no excess of imagination” (Chapter 63). She fails not through ignorance or corruption but through the constitutive impossibility of the Pilgrim's role in a world where the Slough of Despond is not a temporary obstacle but the permanent condition of being alive. She cannot guide Vera to a Celestial City that does not exist as a destination. She can only model the walking. And then she walks into the ocean.

Mr. Spitzer has no guide. The escalator goes up and down without a Virgil or a Beatrice. “He, Mr. Spitzer, was this soul divided, for he was this twin, and one was dead, and one lived, this confusion reigning like order in his great heart” (Chapter 25). Without a guide to distinguish Inferno from Paradiso, he cannot organize his vertical movement into a journey. He moves. He does not arrive. He is always in transit through regions he cannot name with confidence.

The bus driver guides without knowing where he is going, without knowing if he is awake, without a map that corresponds to the actual roads. He is the most honest guide in the novel: he does not pretend to know the destination. He drives. The bus moves. That is all he can offer, and it is not nothing. It is exactly what the novel offers its reader: movement without arrival, and what Anaïs Nin heard as Young's own rule, that “if one is to follow the full swelling of the wave of imagination one must bring back to the shore the wave which carried you.”

The Radical Immanence Reading: What Three Failed Journeys Do

The three journey structures do not cancel each other out. They do not produce relativism, the conclusion that since all journeys fail no journey matters. Pillar 5 (Build Anyway, Knowing It's Temporary) is demonstrated by the three journeys running simultaneously: each one builds on the others' failures. Pilgrim's Progress read backward reveals that the direction of salvation is a choice, not a fact. Dante's Comedy turned into an escalator reveals that vertical organization of experience is a projection, not a discovery. The bus journey reveals that the American landscape will not cooperate with allegorical aspiration.

Together they enact Pillar 2 (Reality Is Constructed): illusion is primary and constitutive. The journey is not a lie. Bunyan's Pilgrim, Dante's souls, Vera's bus ride: these are all genuine attempts to organize experience into something with direction. The organization is real. The arrival is not. The act of walking toward something, of driving through the flooded dark, of writing silent music no one will hear: these are the actions the novel presents as worthy even without destination. Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End) applies to journey structure: you do not stop traveling because the Celestial City is not there. You travel because you are a traveler, because your hands are on the wheel, because the road turns where the road turns, and the old carriage horses remember.

Miss MacIntosh's copy of Pilgrim's Progress washes up on the beach, marked by sea shells, waterlogged. It has arrived somewhere. The sea has returned it. It is not intact. But it is still legible, still there, still carrying the impressions of the water it has traveled through. This is what the novel's three journeys produce: not arrival, but the work of the journey itself, marked by everything it passed through, offered back to whoever finds it on the shore.

Married to the Movement: Cousin Hannah and the Tradition of the Warrior Woman

Pillars: Pillar 1 (Not One Self) · Pillar 2 (Reality Is Constructed) · Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End) · Pillar 5 (Build Anyway, Knowing It's Temporary)

Chapters discussed: 30, 31, 32, 35

> *She had been married, it had seemed, to the suffrage movement, even as if she were a bride, as if the suffrage movement were her husband, her lord and master who had carried her away.*
>
> *Miss MacIntosh, My Darling, Chapter 35*

The Captain in Armor

Cousin Hannah Freemount-Snowden appears in the publisher's description of the novel as “Cousin Hannah, the horsewoman, balloonist, mountain-climber and militant Boston feminist,” “known as Al Hamad through all the seraglios of the East.” The novel develops her as a figure who has substituted the entire machinery of war for the domestic life she refused. In Chapter 31 she is the captain “who was cuirassed by suffrage and whose shield, my mother said, was emblazoned with a cherub carrying a lightning bolt,” remembered for “her long winter marches through heavy snows and storms of icicles as sharp as swords and howling winds, her desert treks through sand storms driving like glassy stars against her face, her journeys into forbidden Mecca or Medinah or Fez or sacred citadels of men.” She has ridden against great turbaned Turks. She has battled “with swords of ice and swords of fire.”

This is the tradition of the warrior woman given one of its most fully articulated American forms. The genealogy is long: the Amazons of Greek mythology, who cut off one breast to draw the bow more accurately and founded their civilization on the refusal of the domestic. Boudicca, the British queen who led the revolt against Rome in 60 CE, burning Colchester and London before her final defeat. Joan of Arc, who took up the armor, heard the voices, led the armies, was burned at nineteen. The suffragette militant Emmeline Pankhurst, who called the suffrage campaign a war and conducted it as one. Cousin Hannah is all of these condensed into a single Boston feminist who climbed the Alps and journeyed into forbidden cities and never married any man.

Married to the Movement

The novel's clearest statement about Cousin Hannah is not about her campaigns or her mountains. It is about her marriage. In Chapter 35: “She had been married, it had seemed, to the suffrage movement, even as if she were a bride, as if the suffrage movement were her husband, her lord and master who had carried her away—or she had been this great lord, scythe sword in hand, her head reaching among the stars, this

mighty captain who had rescued so many fair ladies in distress, breaking their invisible chains."

The warrior woman tradition runs through this passage in two directions simultaneously. In one direction, Cousin Hannah is the knight: the rescuer, the one who rides against the chains, the one with the scythe sword. In the other direction, she is also the bride: carried away by the movement as by a lord and master. She is simultaneously the warrior who rescues fair ladies and the fair lady who has been swept into a consuming love. She has not escaped the marriage structure. She has transferred it. The movement is her husband. The battle is her domestic life. The convention she refused in its ordinary form has been adopted wholesale in its militant form: she is married more completely than most married women, to a cause that admits no rival, requires absolute loyalty, demands total sacrifice.

This is building anyway at its hardest. First the world says women cannot vote, cannot hold property, cannot command. Then Cousin Hannah says no: this reality is constructed, and it is unjust, and I will fight it. Then she must build something in its place, and she has no alternative to the structure she is fighting except the inverted form of it: not marriage to a man but marriage to the fight against marriage's constraints, not domestic submission but the submission of her entire life to a cause that has the same formal requirements as a domineering husband. She is free and she is not free. She is the novel's most complicated builder because what she builds is still entangled with the terms of the world she refused.

The One Battle She Lost

Cousin Hannah won enormous battles. She had "bearded human lions in their dens in Persia and startled great shieks in their ivory beds" and "negotiated great torrents of ice and snow and deserts of stone" (Chapter 31). She had gone "carrying her emblazoned suffrage message to the far corners of the earth, even to the unpopulated countries, to countries where there was no man, where there was perhaps not even a male reindeer startled by her coming" (Chapter 35). She had ridden against great turbaned Turks and sacred citadels of men. She had the victories of a general.

And she lost the one battle she most needed to win: Catherine. In Chapter 31: "She had wanted to carry my mother away from this dark tower, to rescue her from opium dreams of the dead love, and so the valiant heart had fought her losing battle with shadows. She had won greater battles than this which she had lost." The precision is devastating. Cousin Hannah, who knew "the Alpine and Himalayan abysses" (Chapter 30) and crossed forbidden cities, could not move one woman from her bed. She could not break Catherine's chains because Catherine did not experience them as chains. She experienced them as her life.

This is the limit of the warrior woman tradition. Joan of Arc was burned. Boudicca was defeated. The Amazons lost their war with the Greeks in most versions of the myth. The warrior woman's story is not finally a story of victory. It is a story of a kind of courage that keeps going in the face of losses it should not be able to absorb. Cousin Hannah is dead

before the novel opens. Her detonations of rage are still shaking the prisms in the Cartwheel house. She lost. She is still there.

The Uninvited Wedding Guest

Cousin Hannah is explicitly identified as “this uninvited wedding guest” in Chapter 32: the one who arrived at Catherine's wedding and was sometimes ignored, sometimes frozen with remoteness, sometimes given a sidelong glance that might signify much or nothing. In Coleridge's poem, the wedding guest is stopped against his will and made to hear the story of catastrophic loss. In the novel, Cousin Hannah is the one who is stopped, who cannot get past Catherine's remoteness, who cannot stop Catherine's wedding to “a phantom.”

She is the guest who comes to the wedding with a counteroffer: here is the world, here is the movement, here is a life that does not require a ghost for a husband. Catherine does not hear her. Cousin Hannah rises from the encounter sadder and wiser. She rises, in fact, already dead, which is the only position from which her story can be told in this novel: dead, still shaking the prisms, still unable to let go of the battle she lost, still married to the movement that was her life.

The Radical Immanence Reading

Cousin Hannah is the novel's figure for Pillar 5 (Build Anyway, Knowing It's Temporary) attempted and not completed. She takes up armor and marches. This is not small. Most people do not take up armor and march. She goes further than almost anyone else in the novel into the terrain of actual change: she goes to Persia, she climbs the Alps, she forces her way into citadels of men, she keeps the suffrage campaign going on fronts no one else has thought of. She is one of the novel's genuinely great figures and the novel loves her for it.

And she cannot build the thing she is trying to build with Catherine. She cannot construct the new reality in which her cousin also gets free. Pillar 1 (Not One Self): Catherine is multiple selves, and the self that needs the ghost-husband is as real as any other self, and what Cousin Hannah builds cannot replace it, only fight it. Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End): Catherine's grief for her lost husband is not a problem Cousin Hannah can solve with campaigns or mountains. It is weather. It is the atmospheric condition of the house. The warrior tradition can win battles and cannot change weather.

This is not a failure of Cousin Hannah. It is Radical Immanence's most honest assessment of what building can and cannot do. It can change laws. It can break invisible chains. It cannot unmake a love or move someone from a bed where they have chosen, by slow degrees, to remain. Cousin Hannah is the novel's proof that the most valiant heart can fight its losing battle against shadows and still not win. She is dead. Her rage is still in the prisms. She is still fighting. This is what the warrior woman tradition actually looks like from the inside: not triumph but persistence, not arrival but continuation, still married to the movement, still shaking the house, still there.

Childe Roland to the Dark Tower: The Architecture of Arrival Without Entry

Pillars: Pillar 2 (Reality Is Constructed) · Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act) · Pillar 6 (Unfinished Is Honest)

Chapters discussed: 3, 30, 31, 43, 47, 55

> *Search for him in dark valleys, search for him where Childe Roland had blown his horn before a dark tower and where no other sound had ever been heard.*
>
> *Miss MacIntosh, My Darling, Chapter 30*

The Poem and Its Ending

Browning was Young's first master. At about eighteen she read all of his poems, The Ring and the Book among them, with her teacher Katharine Merrill Graydon in Indianapolis, who, Young said, had known him in London (The American Audio Prose Library Interview, 1983). She took her creed from him: “I believe with Browning that the poet is a reporter” (The Ruas Interview on Her Life and Miss MacIntosh). Her first prose book began as “a series of 60 ballads in a Robert Browning manner” (The Ruas and Schwartz Interview on Angel in the Forest), and at the end of her life, bedridden, she was writing dramatic monologues “modeled on Browning's monologues” (Susan Neville, “Where the Landscape Moved Like Waves”). At a conference in 1988, after her own reading, what she wanted to talk about was Browning, whose well-thumbed book, she said, had nurtured her (Marguerite Young, Our Darling, Part 2). When Childe Roland blows his horn in her novel, he comes from the poet she loved longest.

Robert Browning's 'Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came' (1855) is a poem about a knight who has been searching for the Dark Tower his entire life. He travels through a landscape of horror and failure: blighted plains, a starved horse, a river where he fears to set his foot upon a dead man's cheek, a field that seems designed to break the spirit of anyone who crosses it. Every knight who attempted this quest before him has failed. Their faces appear to him at the end like witnesses to his arrival. He reaches the tower. He sets his slug-horn to his lips. He blows. The poem ends.

He does not enter. He does not win or lose in any conventional sense. He arrives at the object of his entire quest and the poem stops at the moment of announcement: I am here. The ultimate fate is ambiguous. What matters architecturally is the formal structure: the quest that ends not in conquest or defeat but in the act of arriving and announcing oneself to something that will not answer. The horn blows. No other sound has ever been heard there. The tower does not open. The poem ends.

This is the formal model underlying the novel's treatment of its central impossible rescue: Cousin Hannah attempting to pull Catherine out of her dark tower.

The Dark Tower in the Novel

The dark tower appears eleven times in the novel, in nine chapters, distributed across multiple characters and situations. It is never the same tower twice. It is always the same condition.

Vera lives in a dark tower. In Chapter 3 she dreams of “the dark prince charming who should carry me away and rescue me from this dark tower.” This is the fairy-tale register: the princess in the tower waiting for the rescuer. “But Miss MacIntosh knew not of this nor of anything else which had never happened.” The tower as imprisonment in fantasy, in the self's elaborate dreaming, guarded by a nursemaid who insists on the plain world outside. Catherine lives in a dark tower. Her bedroom is the novel's most consistent dark tower, where Cousin Hannah's tales bring “many Bengal lancers to dazzle my poor mother in her dark tower” (Chapter 30), where she entertains a thousand visitors and cannot be reached by anyone who arrives in the flesh. Cousin Hannah “had wanted to carry my mother away from this dark tower, to rescue her from opium dreams of the dead love” (Chapter 31). The tower here is not imprisonment by an external captor. It is a structure Catherine has built and furnished and inhabited by choice. It is the most comfortable and well-populated tower in the novel. It is also completely inaccessible.

The husband is lost near a dark tower. As Vera tells it in Chapter 30, Catherine's “poor husband” was “lost while walking between two frozen mountain peaks,” and she asks Cousin Hannah, the mountain climber, to “search for him in dark valleys, search for him where Childe Roland had blown his horn before a dark tower and where no other sound had ever been heard.” The lost husband is Childe Roland: the knight who reached the tower and was never heard from again. Catherine is waiting for him to return from the tower, not knowing whether he entered, whether he conquered, whether he blew his horn and was taken, whether he is still somewhere inside the walls.

The dead cry at dark towers. After Cousin Hannah's death, Mr. Spitzer imagines her still searching in Chapter 47: “Perhaps she still must wander, crying at many gates, knocking at many doors, arousing many watchmen in their dark towers, forever crying for the image of her love who had gone before her into the darkness.” The tower multiplies in death: every gate is now a dark tower, every door a place where the dead cry and the watchmen do not answer.

Cousin Hannah as Childe Roland

Mr. Spitzer composes Cousin Hannah's epitaph in Chapter 31: “Here lies the greatest captain who fought against all nations and rescued many ladies from their dark towers and cruel lords but could not rescue herself.” The formulation is exact. She rescued many ladies from their dark towers. Plural. She was a rescuer of prisoners from towers as her life's work. And she could not rescue herself, which means she too was in a dark tower of some kind, though the novel leaves the nature of hers implicit in the military language: “She perished in a domestic war. She died in her own old tent bed set in a windy place with no aide-de-camp to see her go.”

The journey to Catherine's tower has the structure of Browning's poem throughout. Cousin Hannah travels through the failed landscape of the suffrage movement: the long winter marches, the desert treks, the battles against Turkish sultans and African kings, the journeys into forbidden Mecca. She passes, as Roland passes, through a territory littered with the evidence of previous failures: “those great ladies she had tried to carry away from monstrous loves, mirrors, clouds, doors” (Chapter 43). She arrives at Catherine's tower. She sets herself to the task. She blows her horn. No other sound has ever been heard there. The tower does not open. The poem ends.

Cousin Hannah is dead before the novel begins. She reached the tower. She announced herself. She is still announcing herself: her detonations of rage are still shaking the house: “The lace curtains billowed through the vast rooms, and the glass prisms shook with the memory of that wrath which would never spend itself” (Chapter 31). She blew her horn and the poem ended and the ringing is still in the walls.

The Tower That Cannot Be Entered

Browning's Dark Tower does not open when Roland blows his horn because the poem does not grant the tower an interior. The quest leads to arrival at an opaque exterior. What is inside the tower is outside the poem's knowledge. The tower's power is that no one can get inside it: it is the destination that can be reached but not entered, the object of the entire quest that refuses to resolve the quest by being openable.

Catherine's tower is the same structure. It can be visited from outside: many evenings Mr. Spitzer “would sit in the great wing chair which slightly rocked as if he were coming in on a wave and would continue whispering, whispering melodiously to himself” (Chapter 55). The visitors come in their hundreds, the imaginary ones. But no one enters the tower's actual interior: Catherine's inner life, the nature of her love for her dead husband, the content of the grief that has organized the house around her bed. These remain opaque throughout the novel. Vera witnesses from outside. Mr. Spitzer witnesses from outside. The reader witnesses from outside. The tower is described at immense length. It is never entered.

The witness cannot enter the tower. The witness can only blow the horn: announce their presence, offer their attention, record what the exterior looks like. Catherine is not withholding from the witnesses. She is simply in a place that cannot be entered from outside. The love that organized her life is not available for inspection. It is inside the tower. The tower is what it is. The horn rings against the walls and no other sound has ever been heard there and the poem ends and the ringing continues.

The Radical Immanence Reading

The dark tower thread is Pillar 2 (Reality Is Constructed) in its most concrete architectural form. The tower is where illusion lives: the opium dreams, the imaginary visitors, the dead husband who is always about to return from somewhere in the Alps. It is not a lesser reality than the world outside the tower. For Catherine, it is the primary reality. The world outside the tower, the world Cousin Hannah is trying to pull her toward, is the secondary

reality: the place where time passes and people age and the drugs run out and the clocks do not stop.

Childe Roland blows his horn at the boundary between the two realities. He has arrived from the outside world with all its blighted landscapes and failed knights. He has arrived at the place where the quest was always pointing. He announces himself at the threshold. The tower does not open because the threshold cannot be crossed. The two realities are not convertible. You cannot rescue someone from a primary reality by pulling them into a secondary one. You can only stand at the boundary and blow your horn and let the ringing carry through the walls and know that it is heard, even if no other sound comes back, even if the poem ends there, even if the ringing is still in the prisms decades later, still shaking the house.

The ending is also Pillar 6 (Unfinished Is Honest). Browning stops at the threshold: “Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set, / And blew” (Robert Browning, “Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came,” 1855, stanza XXXIV). He does not say what is inside the tower or whether anyone answers, and he does not pretend to know. Young keeps the same honesty at Catherine's door. Vera can tell Catherine's visions, but she cannot bring Catherine out of them, and the novel does not pretend she can.

The Pale Don Juan: Cousin Hannah at the Threshold of Death

Pillars: Pillar 1 (Not One Self) · Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End)

Chapters discussed: 31, 42, 43, 44

> *Was it possible that she had always been this pale Don Juan beneath her mask, this gentleman so frail, changeable, uncertain, evasive that his might have been a lady's trembling heart and tendency to faint, fall, slip into a simulated unconsciousness where all might be permitted which was never permitted by consciousness?*
>
> *Miss MacIntosh, My Darling, Chapter 43*

The Legend and Its Stone Guest

Don Juan is one of the foundational figures of Western literature: the libertine, the seducer, the man who pursues every woman and commits to none, who kills the father of one of his conquests and then, when the dead man's statue comes to dinner and invites him to return the visit, laughs and goes. In the original telling and in Mozart's Don Giovanni, Don Juan meets the statue at the graveyard, takes its stone hand, and is dragged down to hell unrepentant. He could have repented. He refuses. The defining characteristic of Don Juan is not his seductiveness but his refusal of the final reckoning: he will not account for what he has done. He will not change. He is dragged down without yielding.

The Don Juan tradition has a stone guest: the murdered father returned as a monument, as weight, as the inescapable consequence of the seducer's actions made material and permanent. The stone guest comes to dinner. The stone guest invites him to supper in return. Don Juan goes. He is taken. The stone guest is what happens when you refuse accountability long enough: the consequence becomes architecture, becomes something that can grip your hand and pull.

Mr. Spitzer at the Deathbed

In Chapter 43, Mr. Spitzer is at Cousin Hannah's deathbed. She is dying, crying out in the snow and cloud of her last delirium, and he has been “witness to this great lady's screamings, babblings which had revealed so much of vanished life.” Mr. Spitzer is managing his own grief and tactfulness at once. It seemed better to him “that she should speak not of the future but of the problematical past, of cities buried under the desert sand,” and he was “happy that she could not contemplate the great abyss toward which she headed now.” He is doing what he always does: witnessing, accommodating, apologizing for his presence, making himself useful at the edge of something he cannot enter.

And in the middle of this, he wonders: “was it possible that she had always been this pale Don Juan beneath her mask, this gentleman so frail, changeable, uncertain, evasive that his might have been a lady's trembling heart and tendency to faint, fall, slip into a simulated unconsciousness where all might be permitted which was never permitted by consciousness?”

This is one of the novel's most compressed sentences. Cousin Hannah is the great captain of the suffrage movement, the rescuer of fair ladies, the woman who in the East “was Al Hamid” (Chapter 42). Mr. Spitzer is asking whether, beneath that mask, she had always been a frail gentleman with a lady's trembling heart. The next lines take the question further: “If she should sleep, should she not love? Perhaps she had always been more fragile than some of those great ladies she had tried to carry away from monstrous loves, mirrors, clouds, doors.”

The Female Don Juan

The gender inversion is everything. Don Juan is by definition masculine: his project is the conquest of women, his refusal of consequence is coded as male prerogative, his punishment is being dragged to hell by a dead man's stone hand. He moves through the world. He pursues. He refuses to be held.

Cousin Hannah turns the figure inside out. Like Don Juan she rode out, wore the mask, and carried ladies away. She was the cavalier, Al Hamid in the East, “this virgin warrior who would seem to evoke no answering romance” (Chapter 42). But Don Juan pursues women to conquer them, and Cousin Hannah rode out to free them. Beneath the armor, Mr. Spitzer now suspects, the captain was as frail as anyone she ever rescued.

Her dying cries reveal the love behind the campaigns. “Oh, have you seen my love, dead love? Did she lift her veil embroidered with the stars, and did you see her eyes shining through a cloud?” “Then where's my love that disappeared, her hair like the white feathers drifting through snow, her gold eyes staring through a cloud?” (Chapter 43). “False modesty killed my love, she cried, and not I, not I, my love” (Chapter 44). Her epitaph, as Mr. Spitzer composes it, names the same search: “Here lies one who searched all her life for her dead love, a body covered by the snow” (Chapter 31). The love Cousin Hannah cries for is a woman lost in the mountain snow. The pale Don Juan beneath the mask is a woman who loved a woman, and who says so only as she dies.

The Stone Guest Who Never Came

In the Don Juan legend, the stone guest comes. The dead father, whose death was Don Juan's fault, returns as stone, comes to dinner, issues the invitation, arrives at the graveyard supper, takes the hand, drags him down. Don Juan is punished because the stone guest comes.

Cousin Hannah's stone guest never comes. Her dead love does not return as monument and consequence. She returns only in the dying woman's cries, a veiled figure with eyes “shining through a cloud.” She does not grip any hand or drag anyone anywhere. The

same house holds a second love of this kind: Cousin Hannah “had said that my mother's love was dead, but she did not seem to know that death was necessary to my mother's love” (Chapter 31). The captain who fought for years to pull Catherine away from a dead love was keeping one of her own. Mr. Spitzer at the deathbed is watching the pale Don Juan die without ever having been dragged to hell. This is not a triumph. It is not a failure either. The stone guest did not come. The hell was not incurred. The great captain died “in her own old tent bed,” with her faithful witness beside her, still crying for her love, and the stone hand never gripped her wrist, and she went down anyway, because everything goes down, with or without the stone guest, because the abyss is there whether Don Juan laughs at it or not.

The Radical Immanence Reading

The pale Don Juan identification is Pillar 1 (Not One Self) applied to the question of how desire organizes a life. Cousin Hannah has been read throughout the novel as pure force: the captain, the marcher, the rescuer, the virgin warrior. Mr. Spitzer's deathbed question proposes that the armor was also a mask. Beneath the cavalier was a frail gentleman with a lady's trembling heart, and beneath the gentleman a woman grieving a woman she had lost in the snow. She is all of these at once, and none of them cancels the others.

Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End): the love organized around permanent absence is not a failure of love. It is one of the most sustained loves in the novel. She searched for her dead love all her life, and she is still crying for her at the end. The love has not faded. It has not transferred. It has not compromised. It has simply required that its object be unavailable, which the dead are. The rescuer who could not rescue herself dies still in that love, the pale Don Juan whose hell never arrived, whose love was exactly as permanent and exactly as organized around absence as the grief of everyone who loved her.

That Man Who Was Herself: Lady Macbeth and the Theater of Guilt in Miss MacIntosh, My Darling

Pillars: Pillar 1 (Not One Self) · Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End) · Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act)

Chapters discussed: 54

> *He had found an old woman who had been, in her youth, the greatest Lady Macbeth, though she had left the stage because of a nervous disorder, her conviction that she had killed Banquo, and for years had wandered from hobo camp to hobo camp, dressed as a man. Then one night, protecting her honor, defending herself against a man who had believed she was a man, she had killed him, shooting him with a rusted pistol. And she had drifted on, swearing like a drunken sailor, smoking a brown cheroot—perhaps because of that one man she could not kill, that man who was herself.*
>
> *Miss MacIntosh, My Darling, Chapter 54*

The Play and Its Contamination

In Shakespeare's Macbeth, Lady Macbeth is the engine of the murder. Her husband wavers. She calls on spirits to unsex her, to fill her with cruelty, to stop the passage to remorse. She organizes the killing of King Duncan. She comes apart afterward: the sleepwalking, the compulsive handwashing, the cry that all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. She kills herself offstage. The play does not show her death. She simply disappears from it while still alive, broken by the guilt she summoned the spirits to remove and could not finally remove.

Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth is entirely consumed by guilt for what she actually did. She organized a real murder. She cannot wash the blood off her real hands. Her madness is the return of the remorse she tried to block.

The novel's Lady Macbeth is consumed by guilt for what she only performed. She played the role. She was in her youth the greatest Lady Macbeth. And then the role became real to her: she “had left the stage because of a nervous disorder, her conviction that she had killed Banquo.” Not that she had played the role of someone who killed Banquo. Her conviction that she had done it. The performance crossed into reality not through action but through belief. She became Lady Macbeth not by doing what the character does but by experiencing what the character experiences: the guilt that cannot be washed off, the conviction of murder, the nervous disorder that is the form remorse takes when it has no actual crime to attach to.

The Woman Who Became Her Role

She left the stage. This is the first crossing: from representation to belief. The stage is where you perform guilt for an audience and then go home. She could not go home. The guilt followed her out of the theater because it had become real to her, not as performance but as experience. The conviction that she had killed Banquo is not delusion in the clinical sense of having no connection to anything real. It is the actor's occupational hazard taken to its extreme: total identification with the character, the interior life of the role becoming indistinguishable from the actor's own interior life.

She “had wandered from hobo camp to hobo camp, dressed as a man.” This is the second crossing: from guilt to disguise. Lady Macbeth called on spirits to unsex her: make thick my blood, stop up the access and passage to remorse, come to my woman's breasts and take my milk for gall. She asked to be made not-a-woman so that she could do what she needed to do without the passage to remorse that womanhood supposedly carried. The actress, living out the character's logic rather than the character's plot, enacts this unsexing literally: she dresses as a man. She passes out of the category of woman into the hobo camps, the rough male world, the cheroot-smoking drifting life. She has become Lady Macbeth's wish rather than Lady Macbeth's fate.

“Then one night, protecting her honor, defending herself against a man who had believed she was a man, she had killed him, shooting him with a rusted pistol.” This is the third crossing: from performance to actual act. She has now done what Lady Macbeth organized but did not personally execute. She has killed a man. The guilt that had been unearned guilt, guilt for a performance, guilt for Banquo who was never real, has now earned itself a real body. She has done, in her own person, in self-defense, the thing that destroyed Lady Macbeth from the inside.

That Man Who Was Herself

“And she had drifted on, swearing like a drunken sailor, smoking a brown cheroot—perhaps because of that one man she could not kill, that man who was herself.”

This sentence is the novel's plural self at its most compressed and most violent. There is the man she could not kill: herself. The self she could not eliminate is gendered male in the syntax because she has been living as a man, has killed a man, has become through performance and disguise and actual murder something that the original female self could not have contained. She is a man who is also a woman who is also a character she played who is also a murderer who is also the guilty one who cannot wash her hands. She cannot kill the man who is herself because that man is also herself, and you cannot kill yourself without dying, and she has not died, she has drifted on.

Mr. Spitzer finds her in one of the hobo camps he visits in his wanderings among the derelicts in Chapter 54. He catalogs her alongside “a banker who had not known he was a banker, a lawyer who had not known he was a lawyer, a judge who had not known he was a judge,” and an old man who “had not known he had been the world's greatest cancer specialist.” Right after her, Young adds a turn of her own: “But Mr. Spitzer did not say whether, in his wanderings, he had ever met a man disguised as a woman, for he could

not know everything.” All are people who have shed or lost or hidden the identity that the world assigned them. The Lady Macbeth actress is their logical extreme: not someone who has lost an identity but someone who has gained too many, who has crossed from one into another so many times that the original boundary is gone. She is not hiding. She is lost. She has too many selves stacked inside her: the woman, the actress, the character, the murderer, the man.

Shakespeare's Character Become Real

Young takes Shakespeare's character and allows her, through the medium of an actress, to complete the trajectory the play left incomplete.

Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth kills herself offstage and the play moves on to Macbeth's death at Macduff's hand. The guilt that broke her is not resolved, only ended. She exits the play through offstage death before the play reaches its conclusion. Young's actress-Lady Macbeth does not exit through suicide. She exits through transformation: she becomes a man, she kills a real man, she drifts on. She is still alive when Mr. Spitzer finds her. She has survived what Shakespeare's character could not survive, not because the guilt has been resolved but because she has accumulated so many selves that no single guilt can break the whole structure. She cannot wash the blood off Lady Macbeth's hands because she also has the hobo's hands and the man's hands and the killer's hands and the actress's hands and the woman's hands and none of them are the same hands.

The Radical Immanence Reading

The Lady Macbeth passage is Pillar 1 (Not One Self) demonstrated through the mechanism of theatrical possession. An actor does not become a character. An actor uses the character to discover what the character's experience would feel like from inside. The actress who was the greatest Lady Macbeth discovered, from inside, that the guilt felt real. This is not a failure of sanity. This is the actor's craft taken to its fullest and most dangerous extension: the complete inhabitation of an interior life that is not your own, which is also how Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act) defines the witness. The witness inhabits what they are watching. The witness does not observe from outside. The witness feels from inside the thing they are witnessing. The actress who left the stage because she had killed Banquo was not deluded. She was witnessing from inside.

Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End): she drifts from hobo camp to hobo camp because the guilt has no fixed location to attach to. The crime was performed. The conviction is real. The body count has now been made real in self-defense. But there is no house where she can go back to wash her hands. There is no offstage where she can exit. There is only the drifting, the cheroot, the swearing like a drunken sailor, the knowledge of that one man she could not kill.

That man who was herself is the novel's most concentrated statement of the self that grief and guilt and performance and disguise and actual action have produced: a self so plural, so accumulated, so built from crossings and survivals and transformations that it cannot be addressed as a single entity. She cannot kill the man who is herself. She cannot stop

being the woman who is also that man. She drifts on. Mr. Spitzer finds her. He catalogs her. He moves on. She is still there, the greatest Lady Macbeth, in the hobo camp, in the cheroot smoke, in the space between the self she started as and the man she became and the self that survives them both.

Lovers Never Mated: The Doomed-Love Tradition in Miss MacIntosh, My Darling

Pillars: Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End) · Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act)

Chapters discussed: 3, 31, 43, 44, 52, 65

> *He rather had among many impressions casting their shadows the impression that she was reading an old romance of lovers never mated—Eloise et Abelard—but which was she? Was she Tristram, or was she the white Yseult?*
>
> *Miss MacIntosh, My Darling, Chapter 52*

The Four Couples on the Wall

Miss MacIntosh arrives alone at a honeymooners' hotel. She registers as a single person in a free country. The hotel clerk stares. She has a right. She does not take off her wig for the staring clerk. In her room, in privacy, she does, and there is a mirror on the ceiling and there are mirrors on the walls, and the moonlight lights her bald head “which she could see every way she turned” (Chapter 65). On the hotel walls, among the sporting blind cupids with golden arrows and the signs about credit not being allowed, hang portraits of doomed lovers: couples who had been separated from each other in one way or another way, who had never tangled or who had missed their loves or were jerked away from their loves by a cruel fate.

Four couples. Romeo and Juliet: separated by family war, united only in death, the love that cannot exist in the world as the world is currently organized. Paul and Virginia: eighteenth-century French colonial lovers separated by class and convention; Virginia drowns in a shipwreck because she refuses to remove her clothing before the sailors who might save her, choosing death over the exposure of her body. Eloise and Abelard: the brilliant student and the great philosopher-theologian, secretly married, then separated by castration and convent walls, their love conducted thereafter entirely in letters, in words, in the written correspondence that became the foundation of European epistolary literature. Tristram and the white Yseult: the knight and the Irish princess who drink a love potion meant for another and are condemned to a love they cannot choose, cannot refuse, and cannot consummate without betraying the king.

Miss MacIntosh looks at these portraits and finds them a dark note where all should have been optimism. Divorce lawyers are working the hotel, handing out cards. The honeymooners are already planning their escapes. The portraits of doomed lovers on the walls of a honeymooners' hotel are not ironic decorations. They are the hotel's honest statement about what love is: not the beginning of happy domesticity but the inauguration of a kind of suffering, the suffering of people jerked away from what they most want, who never get it except in the moment of losing it.

Miss MacIntosh has never married. She has no bridegroom. She lies in the honeymoon room with her wig off, bald in all the mirrors, and she is not wrong to think these portraits

are a dark note. They show exactly what she has avoided and what she has therefore also missed. The plain, practical woman from What Cheer, Iowa is surrounded by the whole tradition of Western doomed love, alone in the room just after Mr. Bonebreaker has fled from her.

What the Couples Have in Common

Each of the four couples is separated by an external force rather than by failure of love. Romeo and Juliet love without reservation; their families kill them. Paul and Virginia love without reservation; the social order and a shipwreck kill them. Abelard and Heloise love without reservation; the guardians' revenge mutilates one and the Church walls in both. Tristram and Yseult love without reservation or even without choice: the potion decides. In every case the love is total and the world is the obstacle. The love does not diminish. The world does not relent. The couples are destroyed by the gap between the completeness of their love and the impossibility of their situation.

Behind these couples stands the Western tradition of love as incompatible with the world. Courtly love, from which both the Tristan legend and the Abelard correspondence emerged, was structurally organized around impossibility. The troubadour loved the unattainable lady. The knight loved the queen who belonged to the king. The philosopher loved the student he should not have touched. The love was most itself when it could not be consummated without catastrophe. Heloise understood this more clearly than Abelard: she argued against their marriage because marriage would diminish what they had. She preferred to be his mistress, his concubine, his anything but wife, because the formal bond would make ordinary what was extraordinary. The world destroyed their love anyway; but Heloise was right that the love was most perfectly itself in its impossible form.

The Book Opened at Page Seven

In Chapter 52, after Cousin Hannah's death, Mr. Spitzer walks through her chamber. “She had been reading a little book opened at page seven when she died,” and he notes it, “he being a lawyer trained to notice unimportant details which might be important in some other case.” He does not read the book. He does not know its title with certainty. He has “the impression that she was reading an old romance of lovers never mated—Eloise et Abelard.”

Miss MacIntosh carries “two pennies with which, she used to say, her eyes would be closed when she was dead” (Chapter 3), and after she walks into the sea, “The two pennies were in her purse under a rock, and she should never close her eyes.” Cousin Hannah's eyes are closed by Mr. Spitzer: “He had weighted down her eyelids with two pennies, one in memory of the sun, one in memory of the moon” (Chapter 52).

The two pennies are the Charon tradition: coins on the eyes of the dead for the ferryman's payment. But Mr. Spitzer's pennies are differentiated: one for the sun, one for the moon. This is not Charon's undifferentiated toll. This is a cosmological pairing: Cousin Hannah carries the sun and the moon into death on her eyelids, the two governing lights, the day

and the night, each represented by a single penny weighted on the eye that will no longer see.

She died at page seven, early in a story she would never finish. She had been living for years in the aftermath of her own love story, the one her epitaph names: “Here lies one who searched all her life for her dead love, a body covered by the snow” (Chapter 31).

Which Was She?

Mr. Spitzer's question at Cousin Hannah's deathbed is the chapter's center: “but which was she? Was she Tristram, or was she the white Yseult? He asked but dared not look, for he was no physician even to a centaur and never would he awaken the dead only that they might die again.”

The question is not about identification with a character in a story. It is about the structure of her love. Was she Tristram: the active one, the knight, the one who crossed the sea, who fought for the beloved, who was the engine of the tragedy? Or was she the white Yseult: the one sought, the one loved, the one whose fate was determined by others' actions, who was carried to Cornwall to marry a king she did not choose, who loved Tristram without choosing to love him because the potion chose for her?

Young's “white Yseult” could be either woman of the legend: Yseult the Fair, the queen Tristram loves, or Yseult of the White Hands, the wife he marries in exile and cannot love. For Cousin Hannah the question cuts deep. All her life she rode out like the knight, armored, rescuing ladies. Yet her dying cries are for a woman: “Then where's my love that disappeared, her hair like the white feathers drifting through snow, her gold eyes staring through a cloud?” (Chapter 43). Was she Tristram, the one who loved and would cross any sea for the beloved, or was she the lady, the one loved and lost? Mr. Spitzer cannot say, and the novel does not choose. She might be both.

Mr. Spitzer does not answer his own question. He closes her eyes. He places the pennies. He does not look at the book again to determine its title. The title fades in his unretentive mind. No language contained truth. The truth was by its very nature the inexpressible: “the word never written, the name never told, the door which was never knocked upon.” He has weighed down her eyelids with the sun and the moon and left the question open at page seven.

The Book That Turned a Page After She Died

One more detail from Cousin Hannah's deathbed scene comes before the Abelard question. In Mr. Spitzer's absence she “had turned a page of the little book she had been reading when she died—had turned a page after she had died.” The book moved. The pages continued to turn after she was gone.

This is not supernatural. It is formal: the story keeps going even when the reader stops. The love story does not end with the death of the person reading it. The doomed-lovers tradition is marked by this quality: it outlasts every reader, every telling, every death. Abelard and Heloise have been dead since the twelfth century. Tristan and Iseult are

fictional and were always fictional. Romeo and Juliet are a play performed endlessly before new audiences who have never seen it before. Virginia drowned in 1788 and is still drowning. The page turns after the reader dies. The love story does not require its reader to continue.

Cousin Hannah reading Eloise et Abelard, or perhaps Tristram and Yseult, at the moment of her death is in correct company. She has spent her life in the doomed-lovers tradition: loving completely, separated by death and by the “false modesty” she blamed for killing her love (Chapter 44), conducting the rest of her love in campaigns and mountains and dreams because the actual beloved cannot come. Her love does not require her beloved to continue. It does not require her to continue. The page turns after she dies. The rose left by “that beautiful lady who was the imaginary visitor” withers in the storm. The waters grow to still pools forever extending. Mr. Spitzer walks on and on, coming to no end, as the book lies open at page seven with the pennies on her eyes and the sun and the moon weighted shut.

The Radical Immanence Reading

The doomed-lovers tradition is Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End) made literary: the tradition that has named and formalized the human experience of loving what the world will not allow you to keep. Every pair of portraits on the honeymooners' hotel wall is a previous naming of what Cousin Hannah lived. She is not unique in her grief. She is in the longest and most populated tradition in Western literature. Heloise understood this better than almost anyone: love is most perfectly itself when it cannot be consummated, when the world's interference has reduced it to letters, to words, to the inexpressible things that no language contains, the word never written, the name never told.

Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act): Mr. Spitzer at the deathbed is the witness to a life organized around the doomed-lovers structure. He cannot answer his own question about which role she occupied. He cannot determine the book's title. His mind is like a sieve. He places the pennies and walks on and on. The witness in the doomed-lovers tradition is always the one who survives the love story and carries the question forward: which was she? Which were any of them? The question does not resolve. The page turns. The book stays open at seven. The hotel portraits go on hanging. The divorce lawyers keep working the lobby. The honeymooners keep checking in and planning their exits. Miss MacIntosh lies alone in the room with her wig off, bald in all the mirrors, having carried her two pennies all these years for the closing of her own eyes, which were never closed.

The Grief You Are Wearing: Mr. Spitzer and the Twin Architecture

Pillars: Pillar 1 (Not One Self) · Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End) · Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act)

Chapters discussed: 14, 22, 25, 27, 49, 50, 59, 62

> *He, Mr. Spitzer, was this soul divided, for he was this twin, and one was dead, and one lived, this confusion reigning like order in his great heart.*
>
> *Miss MacIntosh, My Darling, Chapter 25*

What the Twin House Was

Mr. Spitzer once lived in a twin house. Not a house with a twin; a house that was twin in its entire nature. In Chapter 22 he “had had to give up the town house with its twin gardens, twin Apollos, twin parlors, twin mirrors with identical frames of acanthus leaves, twin fireplaces, twin hour-glasses and twin musical clocks, sets of twin fire-dogs, twin candlesticks, twin stairways, twin bedrooms,” and in Chapter 62 there are still “the twin ebony pianos inlaid with mother-of-pearl in the twin parlors.” Every element of the house existed as two, and the house only made sense as two. It was not a house with an extra room or a spare bed. It was a structure whose meaning was constitutively dual. You could not remove one side of it and have something smaller. You would have nothing.

Peron and Joachim Spitzer are the novel's Castor and Pollux: the Dioscuri, the divine twins of Greek and Roman mythology, patrons of travelers and sailors, immortalized as the constellation Gemini. In the myth, Castor is mortal and Pollux is immortal: different natures housed in the same bond. Peron is the mortal twin, flesh and gambling and the body's pleasures and errors, the external world in all its appetites. Joachim is the immaterial twin, spirit and silence and music that no living ear can hear. They require each other to be what they are. Peron's vitality gives Joachim's immateriality something to be in contrast to. Without the flesh, the spirit cannot define itself. Without the spirit, the flesh has no one to cover for its debts.

When Castor dies in the myth, Pollux refuses to accept sole immortality. He appeals to Zeus to let them share existence across the border of death: one day in the underworld, one day on Olympus, alternating forever. This is what Mr. Spitzer does after Peron's suicide. He does not ascend. He does not put Peron behind him. He descends into a living underworld of grief and stays there, choosing daily the Pollux option: to remain with the dead rather than ascend alone. He is, in his own words in Chapter 25, “the hesitant suicide who takes his luxurious time and considers, weighs and measures all the lost possibilities and disappointments until life ends upon its own account without anyone's permission or objection or desire.” He survives not because he wants to but because he believes in no afterlife and therefore cannot go where Peron has gone. The immortal twin is trapped in the living world because death offers no credible destination.

Wearing the Dead

After Peron's funeral, Mr. Spitzer puts on his brother's possessions and does not take them off.

In Chapter 14 he wears Peron's cuff links, “double horses' heads carved of mother-of-pearl, he having appropriated these to wear to his brother's funeral,” and carries Peron's ivory-headed cane. He wears “the black suit he had worn ever since his brother's funeral.” “Had he ever paid his brother's gambling debts?” In Chapter 27 he wears Peron's wrist watch on his own trembling wrist, “the crystal unbroken,” the fine timepiece his brother “had most thoughtfully removed” before jumping, now marking on Mr. Spitzer's wrist the course of the inaccurate planets, the recurring years, the backward flow of time.

This is not pathology and it is not denial. It is grief that is not an event you move through but a climate you live inside. Mr. Spitzer does not grieve Peron as a separate activity he undertakes and then concludes. He carries the grief in his wrist, in the watch that ticks on Peron's accurate time, in the cuff links that are Peron's horses, in the cane that is Peron's ivory, in the black suit still on from the funeral. The grief is the material composition of his daily body. He is wearing it. It is the only wardrobe he has had since Peron died.

The novel says it plainly: “he did not know which brother he was, and this was the crux of his mystery” (Chapter 49). This is not confusion in the clinical sense. It is precision. He has absorbed so much of Peron: wears his possessions, carries his obligations, lives in the wreckage of their shared architecture, acts as his representative in the world, keeps his memory alive by inhabiting it. He has also been inhabited by Peron: his brother living through him, the mortal twin animating the immaterial one from beyond the grave, the flesh continuing to press its claims through the spirit's body. The question of which brother he is is not a symptom. It is the accurate description of what the twin structure produces when one twin dies: a self that is constitutively double, permanently at the border between its own identity and the identity of what it lost.

The Binary Star

In astronomy, a binary star system is two stars orbiting a common center of mass. Neither star is primary. Each defines the other's orbit. The relationship is gravitational in both directions: each star pulls the other, each shapes the other's path, each moves along its own arc only because of what the other star is doing. Remove one star and the system does not become simpler. It ceases to be a system. The remaining star drifts. Its orbit has come loose from its center of mass. It continues moving but it no longer circles anything.

The novel says this directly: “There was no twin star to this, moment for moment, leaf falling for leaf falling” (Chapter 50). Mr. Spitzer's sense of time, of self, of location in the world, is a binary star system in which one star has been removed. He continues. He moves through the city in his black cape, “where he carried the coin for Charon” (Chapter 59), writing his silent music in the ruins of a twin architecture. He orbits. But the center of mass is gone. His orbit is no longer a circle. It is a long, slowly diverging arc through a universe that has lost one of its organizing lights.

The old twin house is “now torn down and moved away like the moving stars” (Chapter 62). This is also an astronomical truth: the stars of the constellation Gemini, as seen from earth, are not where they were when the myths were named. They have moved. The twins in the sky are no longer where the map says they are. This does not mean the constellation is false. It means the map was made at one moment and time has passed. Mr. Spitzer's map of himself was made when there were two brothers. Time has passed. The map is still the map he has. He navigates by it. The stars it names are not where the map says they are, but the map is still more useful than nothing, and he still knows where he is going, which is nowhere in particular, along the arc left by the missing star.

The Will That Requires Two Witnesses

In Chapter 62, Mr. Spitzer draws up his will: “he, Joachim Spitzer signing with his clef and writing with his left hand, dead musician and author of the music of the spheres,” late of Boston but now of a better address, “North, Northwest of the Great Bear twinkling among the butterfly stars.” He “gave and bequeathed to the musical world and even to indifferent ears and even to deaf ears and even to dead ears and to sea conches all his musical works and symphonies.” He has died, in his own accounting, and relocated to the star field where Peron is already waiting.

The will is “witnessed and sworn to by his right hand,” the hand “which wore his brother's milky blue stone ring and ticking jeweled wrist watch.” Joachim signing with his left. Peron's ring on his right. Both brothers are present in the document. The will requires two witnesses and a single body provides them: one hand for each brother, one signature for the musician, one ring for the gambler, the whole twin structure compressed into the act of a dying man writing his own death notice from a star field while still alive in Boston.

This is the novel's deepest Radical Immanence statement about the twin: the twin does not end when one brother dies. It persists in documents, in music bequeathed to deaf ears, in the ring worn on the wrong hand, in the will that cannot be executed because the testator is not quite dead yet, in the ongoing conversation between the hand that writes and the hand that witnesses, which are the same hand and are not the same hand, which are one person and are not one person, which are this confusion reigning like order in his great heart.

What Radical Immanence Does With This

The twin architecture is Pillar 1 (Not One Self) at its most structurally visible. The self is not one. It has never been one. Mr. Spitzer demonstrates this not as a philosophical position he holds but as the literal composition of his daily existence. He is Castor and Pollux in one body: the mortal and the immortal, the flesh and the spirit, the gambler and the musician, the one who died and the one who survived wearing the dead one's watch. The plural self is not something he believes in. It is what he is made of.

Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End) applies here not as metaphor but as technical description. Weather is not something that happens to you and then stops. It is the atmospheric condition in which you live. Mr. Spitzer lives inside Peron's death as his atmospheric

condition. It is not the event of Peron dying. It is the ongoing pressure system that has organized every day since. The black suit is still the black suit because the funeral has not ended. The funeral has not ended because Peron is still dead, and Peron will always be still dead, and the twin architecture that required two to be itself will always require two to be itself, and Mr. Spitzer will always be the one left standing in the ruins of a twin house that cannot be rebuilt with one person.

Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act): Vera witnesses Mr. Spitzer throughout the novel. She records the twin grief without being able to resolve it. This is what the witness does in Radical Immanence: not cure, not interpret, not redeem, but hold the knowledge accurately and pass it forward. The Dioscuri requires an audience to alternate between worlds. Someone must see them both and carry the knowledge that they are one. Vera is that audience. The reader is the next audience. The chain of witness is the only ongoing structure available when the twin house has been torn down and moved away like the moving stars.

He lives. That is Radical Immanence's answer to the twin problem. Not resolution, not reunion, not the Empyrean where the brothers meet in clarity. He lives, water-logged, wondering which brother he is on a given day, carrying both answers simultaneously and finding this to be, somehow, not a catastrophe but a condition, not an ending but the ongoing movement of the one who remains. His orbit has come loose from its center of mass and he continues anyway, drawn by the gravitational pull of what is gone, still moving, still tidal, still here, the string missing from the harp of God, the music written for ears that cannot hear it, the watch still ticking on the wrist of the wrong twin, accurate, unbroken, keeping time for both of them.

The Red King's Dream: Alice in the Cartwheel House

Pillars: Pillar 1 (Not One Self) · Pillar 2 (Reality Is Constructed) · Pillar 8 (The Past Doesn't Go Away)

Chapters discussed: 1, 13, 25, 26, 37, 41, 48, 50, 51, 54, 56, 58, 69

> *Ah, and if the dreamer was dead, how should he know—for did not the dream live?*
>
> *Miss MacIntosh, My Darling, Chapter 56*

A Book That Never Says Her Name

Alice never appears in Miss MacIntosh, My Darling. Neither does Lewis Carroll, the Oxford mathematician who wrote Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865) and Through the Looking-Glass (1871). But Young puts her sources into her own words, and To All My Darlings finds Carroll in at least fifteen chapters: in the chessmen, the rabbits, the doors too small to pass through, the trial that comes before the crime, the dreamer who may be dreamed. The Cartwheel house is, among other things, a looking-glass house.

It makes sense that it should be. Carroll's two books are about a girl who falls into a world where the rules of the waking world do not hold, and who keeps trying, politely, to make sense of it. That is Vera's childhood exactly.

The Life-Sized Chessmen

In Through the Looking-Glass, Alice steps into a countryside laid out like a chessboard and becomes a pawn in a game played with living pieces. The Cartwheel garden has its own. In Chapter 1, among the broken statues, stand “the life-sized chessmen seeming to move against the moving clouds that moved above the moving waters, the sea light lighting their wooden eyes, the seagulls perched like drifts of snow upon their heads.” In Chapter 13, as Vera looks out on her mother's imaginary garden party, the board itself moves: “a chessboard of which the squares moved and changed positions in the mathematical wind, the life-sized chessmen seemed, as they emerged from corruscated mist, their rounded eyeballs lighted by the reflection of the absent sea, to be moving, too, as if played by invisible players who could perceive an order in multiple confusions of movements and sounds, a secret plan.”

Carroll's game has a plan; Alice is moving toward the eighth square, where she will be crowned. Young's chessmen move “as if” someone were playing them, and nobody in the novel is sure there is a player. The same Miss MacIntosh who would not allow chess in the house, as Flipping the Cave tells, lived beside a garden full of chessmen as tall as she was.

Too Big for the Door

In Wonderland, Alice drinks and eats and changes size, now too large for the little door into the garden, now too small to reach the key. She feels herself “shutting up like a telescope.” Young gives that trouble to the people in the house. In Chapter 41, Catherine “was fixated for years on the idea that she had swallowed the blue divan with the golden lion hooves and wings and triple golden crowns, so that she could not get through the door, wide though it was, wide enough to admit a longhaired star.” And: “She complained for years that she was the door through which she passed or could not pass.”

In Chapter 48, Mr. Spitzer, trying to find his way out of the house, asks Alice's question: “Did the house expand—or was it shrinking? Was it small as a pea pod?” Later in the chapter, he wonders how he has come to be where he is: “Perhaps he had passed through a keyhole.”

Catherine's visitors behave like the White Rabbit, the first creature Alice follows, “a White Rabbit with pink eyes.” In Chapter 41, in Catherine's dream of the snow, there are “the rabbits wearing lace veils and silver petticoats, walking upright,” and “She saw their pink eyes in the dying light. Sometimes a great rabbit came and talked to her of Caesar’s campaign and the War of the Roses.” The White Rabbit drops his fan as he runs. In the same chapter, Catherine's guests leave things behind too: “Once there was a purple feather fan which one of these imaginary guests had surely left, proving that, though there had been no one, his visit had been real, tangible, self-evident.”

Nonsense Rules

Wonderland has its own laws, and they make a terrible kind of sense. At the trial, the King of Hearts reads out “Rule Forty-two. All persons more than a mile high to leave the court.” In Chapter 25, Catherine has a rule of her own: “that all the people who were more than three miles tall should be put out of the house, as she would say, for fear they should bump their heads into Mr. Chandelier with his candle lights like dim stars in some dim, glassy heaven.”

After the Caucus-race, where everyone runs in circles and no one can say who won, the Dodo rules: “Everybody has won, and all must have prizes.” In Chapter 26, Mr. Spitzer gives the same verdict in the language of his dead brother, the gambler: “All souls should be equal when all were dead, as Mr. Spitzer would say, and all horses should come in first.” In Carroll it is a joke. In Young it is also a hope.

Mad Hatters and March Hares

Carroll's Hatter and March Hare keep a tea party going forever because time has stopped at six o'clock. Young borrows their madness. In Chapter 54, people take Mr. Spitzer for a madman, “as Peron had been mad as a mad hatter.” In Chapter 69, the old doctor in the room next to Vera's is Dr. Justice O'Leary: “He was as mad as a March hare. He said so.” And in Chapter 58, among the many things Mr. Spitzer imagines a man might become

with a change of stick, he “might have been a croquet player knocking his ball through the last wicket,” a game that in Wonderland is played with flamingos for mallets.

The Trial Before the Crime

The White Queen in Through the Looking-Glass lives backward. Of the King's Messenger she says: “He's in prison now, being punished: and the trial doesn't even begin till next Wednesday: and of course the crime comes last of all.” When Alice objects that she can't remember things before they happen, the Queen replies, “It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards.”

Mr. Spitzer lives the same way. In Chapter 48, nothing can surprise him “unless he had somehow lived through it before or had a premonition which had warned him, much like the effect preceding the cause, even like the whisper preceding the voice or the sob preceding the whisper.” In Chapter 51, the whole world runs backward for him: “And thus there was no end but that which had transpired before the end—the withering of the flower before the blooming of the flower—the falling of the snow before the falling of the snow—the wind blowing upon the towers and porches before the wind had ever blown—the song ending before the song began.”

Humpty Dumpty explains to Alice how some of Carroll's made-up words work: “You see it's like a portmanteau—there are two meanings packed up into one word.” In Chapter 48, Mr. Spitzer, who cannot tell whether he is himself or his twin, gives the word a home: “Perhaps he was the portmanteau personality carrying another soul within his soul.”

Who Is Dreaming

The deepest Carroll in the novel is the Red King. In Through the Looking-Glass, Alice finds him asleep under a tree, and Tweedledee asks her what he is dreaming about. “Why, about you!” Tweedledee exclaimed. “And if he left off dreaming about you, where do you suppose you'd be?” “Where I am now, of course,” said Alice. “Not you!” Tweedledee retorted contemptuously. “You'd be nowhere. Why, you're only a sort of thing in his dream!” “If that there King was to wake,” added Tweedledum, “you'd go out—bang! —just like a candle!”

Young's people ask the same thing about themselves. In Chapter 37, Catherine argues that the world is “nothing real except this mistaken dream which knew not its end. For if it ended, there would be no dream. But who was the dreamer? What face, what mask did he wear?” In Chapter 50, Mr. Spitzer wonders whether he lives “by that dream which might be this extension beyond his death, dream dreamed by another dreamer.” And in Chapter 56 he turns Tweedledum's threat around: “Ah, and if the dreamer was dead, how should he know—for did not the dream live?” For Carroll, if the dreamer wakes, the dreamed one goes out like a candle. For Young, even if the dreamer dies, the dream may go on living.

Carroll ends Through the Looking-Glass on the question his whole book has been asking. Alice says to her kitten, “Now, Kitty, let's consider who it was that dreamed it all,” and the

kitten will not answer. The last line of the chapter turns to the reader: “Which do you think it was?” The poem that closes the book ends, “Life, what is it but a dream?” The Butterfly's Dream follows the same question back to Zhuangzi. Young's novel never gives an answer either. It keeps the question open for 1,198 pages.

The Radical Immanence Reading

In the language of Radical Immanence, the Red King's dream is Pillar 2 (Reality Is Constructed): the waking world may be someone's dream, and the dream is still where everyone has to live. Mr. Spitzer's “portmanteau personality carrying another soul within his soul” is Pillar 1 (Not One Self). And the White Queen's memory that works both ways, the flower withering before it blooms, is Pillar 8 (The Past Doesn't Go Away): in this house, the past and the future are never safely behind or ahead.

Nocturnal America: Poe, Melville, Whitman, and the American Writers

Pillars: Pillar 1 (Not One Self) · Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End) · Pillar 10 (The Sacred Is Here)

Chapters discussed: 1, 4, 5, 7, 8, 14, 33, 37, 41, 44, 45, 47, 48, 49, 50, 55, 57, 61

> *Had I not come to a land of eternal night, that of these voices, forever the aberrations, the irregularities, old, amorphous shapes like those which creep through mist and fog, Cyclops, men whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders, dead souls, unsoluble mystery, that fleeting image, that dream within the dream?*
>
> *Miss MacIntosh, My Darling, Chapter 8*

An American Book

Anaïs Nin called Miss MacIntosh, My Darling the voice of “nocturnal America,” as Don Quixote was the voice of Spain and Ulysses of Ireland (the Dowling memoir). Young herself placed the book in what she called “the Grand Tradition, clear back to Don Quixote,” and named Poe among the writers who shaped her (conversation with Friedman and Fuchs). She set the novel near Boston, though she hardly knew New England, because of transcendentalism and “my beloved Emerson,” with Hawthorne and Henry James behind him: “It had to be Boston” (Observation Point, 1965).

The American writers come into the novel the way all Young's sources do, in her own words and mostly without their names. To All My Darlings traces them through more than thirty chapters. This essay follows the four who matter most, Poe, Melville, Whitman, and Emerson, and then the others who pass through.

Poe: The Dream Within the Dream

Young felt close to Poe. Living in Greenwich Village, she said, she saw him at Sheridan Square “any rainy night,” or at least “his astral body” (1983 interview). His best-known lines on dreaming end, “All that we see or seem / Is but a dream within a dream” (“A Dream Within a Dream,” 1849). In Chapter 8, on the bus, Vera asks whether she has come to “a land of eternal night,” of “dead souls, unsoluble mystery, that fleeting image, that dream within the dream?” In Chapter 57, Mr. Spitzer goes one step further: “he only dreamed that he was dreaming—but it was true, this dream of life.”

Poe's tales and poems run under the whole book. Vera's dream of a plain Iowa life in Chapter 4 promises “births and weddings and wedding anniversaries, natural death at the end of a long life, the silver, the golden, never the leaden bells,” the life cycle Poe rang through in “The Bells” (1849), from silver sleigh bells and golden wedding bells to the iron bells of the funeral. The long-haired bus driver of Chapter 5 “had been told of people

buried alive and crying in their graves," the terror of Poe's "The Premature Burial" (1844). In Chapter 44, Mr. Spitzer wonders of the dead Cousin Hannah, "Might there not be heard as in a distant cavern the beating of her dead heart?" Poe's murderer in "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843) cries, "It is the beating of his hideous heart!"

In Chapter 37, Catherine asks of Cousin Hannah, "Had she not gone to the court of the emperor worm?" Poe's "The Conqueror Worm" (1843) ends with the worm crowned as the hero of the human play. In Chapter 41, Catherine is "the whirlpool, but she was also the still center at the heart of the whirlpool," and in Poe's "A Descent into the Maelström" (1841) the one who lives is the one who stops fighting and lets the whirlpool carry him. In Chapter 48, Mr. Spitzer hears his own "plucked heart-strings like the lute in the whirlpool." "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839) opens with a heart that is a hanging lute: as soon as it is touched, it sounds.

Poe is the American poet of mourning that will not end, the lover in "The Raven" asking questions he knows will be answered "Nevermore." In that, he is the nearest American cousin to Catherine's house, where nothing dead is ever quite gone.

Melville: The Whale and the Dead Letter

"Moby Dick is my favorite of all American novels," Young told Studs Terkel in 1965. She lived on Bleecker Street, she said, "in what is probably the exact site of his birthplace," and she agreed that her novel, like Melville's, is "anti-Calvinist" (Terkel interview). The whale surfaces all through her book. In Chapter 47, Mr. Spitzer walks through drowned towns "where the old spouters spouted like the whales they once had caught." Ishmael spends his first night in New Bedford at the Spouter-Inn.

In Chapter 55, Mr. Spitzer's law library includes "Laws Governing Whaling," with its rule "that the man who found the whale was its owner and not the man who put his iron into it—for the man who put his iron into it might be dead a hundred years before the whale was found." In Moby-Dick the whalemen's law runs the other way: "A Fast-Fish belongs to the party fast to it" (chapter 89). Young turns it over. The whale belongs to whoever finds it last, the way the dead belong to whoever remembers them.

Melville's quiet stories are here too. In Chapter 33, a man who writes harp music for the wind on a bridge goes "to the post office day after day to inquire for a dead letter," a letter he mailed to himself years ago. Melville's Bartleby once worked in the Dead Letter Office: "Dead letters! does it not sound like dead men?" In Chapter 48, Mr. Spitzer sometimes feels like "a customs officer at an empty port." Melville was a customs inspector in New York for nineteen years, and Hawthorne before him kept the custom house at Salem.

Whitman: The One and the Many

Young named Whitman directly. Vera, who takes in every stranger she meets until she is all of them, carries what Young called "a Walt Whitman theme, the one and the many," and Young called herself "a sad Walt Whitman" (Terkel interview). Whitman wrote, "Do I

contradict myself? / Very well then I contradict myself, / (I am large, I contain multitudes.)” (“Song of Myself,” section 51).

In Chapter 45, Cousin Hannah, dying, says: “Forgive, too, the self-contradiction of life and death, for both were contained within us.” In Chapter 49, Mr. Spitzer is the multitude: “None knew what the individual was, he being many countries, many times, many dimensions, one of whom no unitary statement could be made.” And in Chapter 50 he is “a handkerchief dropped from the hand of God.” Whitman, looking at the grass, guessed that it was “the handkerchief of the Lord, / A scented gift and remembrancer designedly dropt” (“Song of Myself,” section 6).

The difference is the sadness Young named. Whitman's multitudes are a celebration. Young's are a celebration and a grief at once. Mr. Spitzer contains multitudes because he cannot tell himself from his dead twin.

Emerson and the Transcendental Boston

Emerson is the reason the novel is set where it is. His essay Nature (1836) declares, “I am the lover of uncontained and immortal beauty.” In Chapter 41, Catherine complains that “nature had been unkind to her, an immortal beauty none had ever loved.” In Chapter 49, Mr. Spitzer asks, “Should not the slayer be the slain?” Emerson's poem “Brahma” (1857), drawn from the Bhagavad Gita, begins, “If the red slayer think he slays, / Or if the slain think he is slain.” The transcendentalists taught that the divine lives in nature and in each person, not above them. Young's novel keeps that faith and tests it against grief.

Death the Coachman, and the Others

Emily Dickinson's “Because I could not stop for Death – / He kindly stopped for me –” sends Death to the door as a gentleman caller with a carriage. Young's book is full of carriages, and Death drives them. In Chapter 37, Catherine thinks of Cousin Hannah: “Death had been, at last, her bridegroom.” In Chapter 55, Mr. Spitzer waits calmly, sure “that the oldest coachman will stop and take on another passenger.” In Chapter 61, of the little frog musician: “Death was his coachman.” And when Mr. Spitzer, in Chapter 49, says “For life was itself this indirection, going not by a straight road,” he is close to Dickinson's “Tell all the truth but tell it slant.”

Many others pass through. Vera's images in Chapter 1 pass “like ships in the night,” Longfellow's phrase. Madge's story in Chapter 7 has “the headless horsemen riding with their torches,” out of Washington Irving's Sleepy Hollow. In Chapter 14, “Mr. Spitzer had attended Mr. Spitzer’s funeral,” as Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn watched their own. In Chapter 49, a man “died because of a road not taken,” decades after Robert Frost's poem. Oliver Wendell Holmes's chambered nautilus, his one-horse shay, and his Boston “Hub” all turn up in Mr. Spitzer's chapters. Young treated Twain and Dreiser, she said, as “great thinkers, great dreamers” (Ruas interview), and she let all of them dream in her book.

The Radical Immanence Reading

In the language of Radical Immanence, Whitman's one and many, Mr. Spitzer “being many countries, many times, many dimensions,” is Pillar 1 (Not One Self). Poe's mourning that answers “Nevermore,” the dead heart still heard beating, is Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End). And Emerson's divine in nature, Whitman's grass as the handkerchief of the Lord, Mr. Spitzer as “a handkerchief dropped from the hand of God,” are Pillar 10 (The Sacred Is Here).

Movement Six: What the Novel Teaches

The Impossible Artist

Pillars: Pillar 1 (Not One Self) · Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End) · Pillar 5 (Build Anyway, Knowing It's Temporary) · Pillar 6 (Unfinished Is Honest)

Chapters discussed: 14, 29, 42, 49, 52, 55, 59, 62, 82

There is a figure who recurs in Miss MacIntosh, My Darling with the insistence of a motif and the weight of a philosophical position: the impossible artist. Mr. Spitzer catalogues them in a passage of extraordinary compression: "the blind train conductor, the blind signalman signalling to the blind man, the deaf musician, the deaf conductor of the mute orchestra, the blind portrait painter or he who painted portraits only in water changing its conformation as he painted, perhaps when a bird flew over head, the blind lighthouse keeper with his light shining both by day and by night, seeming a sunken star, star and its ripple, the crippled dancer dancing in the wind, the mute swan singing not even when it died." In Chapter 49 he “trusted all persons who had lost a sense,” and “They were all his loves.” This is not sentiment. It is an architectural necessity. The impossible artist is the figure through which Young builds her deepest claim about what art is for and what the novel itself is doing.

The impossible artist is not someone who overcomes a limitation. That would be an inspirational narrative, which is not what Young is writing. The impossible artist is someone who creates from inside a condition that structurally prevents the creation, and whose work is therefore purest because it cannot be executed in the ordinary way. The blind portrait painter paints in water: each portrait is completed and then immediately unmade by the movement of the medium, altered by a bird flying overhead, returned to formlessness by the current. The painting exists for the moment it is made and then it is gone, but it was made. The mute swan does not sing even when it dies: the song that is supposed to be its greatest utterance never arrives, and the silence is the utterance. The violinist without arms cannot play, which means every performance he imagines is more perfect than any performance he could give. In Chapter 52, Mr. Spitzer sees Cousin Hannah herself as “a type of all those who tried to do that which they could not do—like the violinist without arms, the footless dancer, the blind portrait painter, the mute singer.”

The most elaborated instance of the impossible artist in the novel is a man Mr. Spitzer encounters in Chapter 62 who spent twenty years as a second violinist in the Philadelphia Symphony without once touching his bow to the strings. He played beside the other musicians, moving his bow with "the utmost mathematical precision, the most delicate gestures and knowledge of music," creating "the illusion of music where no music was." He was never discovered. The great conductor complimented him, pointed to him as the perfect example. Then one day, absent-mindedly, "prompted by his instinct for self-destruction, for failure," he touched the strings. He was immediately dismissed. "Was it right that for one false note, he should be driven forth, even as an Ishmael among men—that he should beg upon the streets?" The question is not rhetorical. Young means it. Twenty years of perfect silence, of music so precisely not-played that it was

indistinguishable from playing: this is the impossible artist at his most extreme. The one note that ended his career was the only note that was real.

Mr. Spitzer himself is the novel's central impossible artist: a deaf composer of unwritten music. He writes “his silent music written on his shirt cuffs” (Chapter 29), composing nocturnes, elegies, fugues “without instruments or voices” (Chapter 14), arranging the flight of birds into notes “on the imaginary scale, his scale which had no lines” (Chapter 59). He writes “a dirge for a dead clam, an evening sonata to a dead ear.” The music cannot be heard because he cannot hear it and because it has never been performed and because the instruments and voices it requires do not exist in the world of sound. It exists fully, however, in the world of the novel.

Mr. Spitzer's deafness does not prevent his composition; it transforms its nature. He has, perhaps, “only a deaf man’s memory of sound” (Chapter 42), and in Chapter 55 he plucks at “his dead ear which was the doorway to intricate chambers, his deaf ear.” He hears every sound he has ever heard, preserved intact because no new sound can displace it. The deaf composer's inner world is more densely musical than any hearing composer's, because nothing in it is competing with the external world. The impossible artist does not compensate for the missing faculty. The missing faculty becomes the source. The blind portrait painter cannot be distracted by what the face actually looks like. The violinist without arms cannot be betrayed by technique. The mute singer cannot be limited by what her voice can produce. Each impossibility strips away the interference between the inner vision and its expression, leaving only the vision.

Grief runs through the impossible artist in the form Young gives him: he is always also the survivor. These are "old cripples who had been the kings of speed, or thought they had, and that was the same thing at certain levels of debate." The footless dancer was once a dancer. The blind portrait painter once saw faces. The stone deaf man at the novel's end "could remember how he had drifted into sleep and what were those last sounds he heard—the clatter of the moon vines upon an old, rotted porch—the far baying of a dog—the long white curtains blowing in the wind." The impossible artist carries the permanent weather of what was lost inside the condition that replaced it, and the work is made from both: from the memory of the faculty and from the transformation of its absence into something else.

Here the impossible artist becomes the novel's argument about itself. Young spent eighteen years writing a 1,198-page novel in a literary culture that had no adequate framework for receiving it. The novel was too long, too dense, too uncompromising in its refusal to summarize. It was, in the terms of its own central motif, an impossible work. The violinist who never touched his strings had "succeeded even beyond his own wildest dreams" by creating the illusion of music where no music was. Young created the illusion of a conventional novel's readability, its forward movement, its character and plot, while actually building an entirely different kind of structure underneath, a philosophical architecture that becomes visible only after you have spent enough time inside it to understand what the walls are made of. The novel appears to be doing one thing and is doing another, like the Philadelphia violinist, for twenty chapters, fifty chapters, a hundred chapters, until the reader has learned to hear what is actually being played.

The impossible artist is what the novel enacts about itself: that the work most worth doing is the work that cannot quite be done by the instruments available, that the gap between the vision and the execution is not failure but the space in which the most honest art lives. Mr. Spitzer's silent music will never be performed. It is nonetheless composed. That it exists only in the novel, unheard, written “upon his shirt cuff where his brother had kept the horse scores” (Chapter 59), is not a limitation. It is the form that its truth requires.

The impossible artist is also unfinished. Mr. Spitzer's music is never completed in the world's sense, because it is never played. In Chapter 14 he is pictured at home “writing his silent music, a dirge for a dead clam, an evening sonata to a dead ear, a fugue without instruments or voices.” Young does not count the silence against him. The demand that a work be finished, performed, and heard is the demand the novel refuses, and the refusal is where its integrity lies.

The Novel as Classroom

Pillars: Pillar 1 (Not One Self) · Pillar 2 (Reality Is Constructed) · Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End) · Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act) · Pillar 5 (Build Anyway, Knowing It's Temporary)

Chapters discussed: 3, 9, 12, 62

Marguerite Young taught writing for decades: at the Iowa Writers' Workshop, at the New School for Social Research, at Fordham University. She was, by her students' accounts, a beloved and transformative teacher. When asked in an interview whether she would write a book about writing, she said she would not live long enough. She was wrong about that only in the most technical sense. She had already written it. Miss MacIntosh, My Darling is that book, embedded inside a novel, operational on every page, teaching by example at such a level of sustained mastery that the instruction is invisible to the casual reader and inescapable to the attentive one.

Young said it herself, as Anaïs Nin quotes her: “I just tried to leave pebbles along the road so that no one could get lost” (Anaïs Nin, “One Writer's Version of a Complete Universe,” Los Angeles Times, January 9, 1966). This is a teacher's description of a text. The pebbles are the literary devices, not deployed as ornament but as navigation: here is how you follow this sentence, here is how you track this motif across fifty chapters, here is how you know when a repetition is structural rather than accidental. The devices are the map. What Nin calls “the cellular expansion of the book,” the weaving “of each connecting cell, with unbroken bridges, from word to word, image to image, phrase to phrase,” is the same thing described from the reader's position rather than the writer's. From the writer's position it is architecture. From the reader's position it is instruction. The novel teaches you to read it while you are reading it, which is the only pedagogy that works at this scale.

The first five pillars of Young's philosophy require five different reading skills, and the novel teaches each one through the device it deploys most insistently in the service of that pillar. Understanding this relationship is not an academic exercise. It is the practical argument for why this novel, 1,198 pages long, does not fail its reader despite its scale. Every device is a pebble. The road holds.

The plural self requires the reading skill of tracking identity across discontinuity: following a character who is not the same person on page 900 as on page 14, recognizing the persistence of an identity that has no stable center. Young teaches this through her handling of Mr. Spitzer, using juxtaposition as the primary device. He is placed beside his dead brother, beside Catherine, beside Vera, beside the old clam-digger, beside himself at different ages and states of consciousness, and the reader is never allowed to resolve these juxtapositions into a single coherent portrait. Young said, as Nin quotes her: “If I removed the repetitions I would remove one of the motifs of life itself.” The repetitions are not failures of editing. They are the curriculum. Each time Mr. Spitzer appears in a new juxtaposition, the reader's skill at holding a plural identity in view is tested and developed. By the novel's end, the reader has been trained to inhabit a consciousness that does not

require coherence, which is the philosophical claim the novel makes and the practical skill a writer needs to create characters of genuine complexity.

A constructed reality requires the reading skill of sustained suspension of judgment: the ability to hold two contradictory explanations of a scene simultaneously without resolving them. Young teaches this through her radical use of personification, which in this novel is not a decorative technique but a way of knowing. When Mr. Chandelier becomes Catherine's companion, when the drug bottle Mr. Res Tacamah develops ears to hear her commands, when the invisible elephant in the corridor becomes a perfectly logical subject of legal argument about the burden of proof, Young is not being fanciful. She is teaching the reader that the mind's constructions are real objects in the world of this novel, that there is no safe position from which to dismiss them as mere delusion. The personification trains the reader to treat all perceptions with equal seriousness. This is essential craft knowledge: the writer who dismisses the inner life of a character's imagination as less real than their external actions has already failed. Young's personification teaches otherwise, by practice, over hundreds of pages.

Grief that does not end requires the reading skill of sustained attention to accumulation: the ability to notice that what looks like repetition is actually deepening, that the fifth time a motif appears it is not the same as the first time, that meaning is not stated but deposited. Young teaches this through her anaphora, most concentrated in the passage in Chapter 12 where Miss MacIntosh teaches Vera that when nothing has happened, one is supposed to admit that "not a leaf had fallen, that not a blow had struck, that not a wave had broken, that not a shadow had stirred." The anaphora is not rhetorical amplification. It is the structure of grief itself: the same absence named again and again in different forms, each naming not diminishing the previous but adding to it, until the accumulated weight of "not" becomes the presence it denies. Young said, again as Nin quotes her, that “if I shortened it it would not be an obsession, and obsession is what possesses people.” She understood that grief does not compress. The reader who has been trained by the novel's anaphoric structures has learned to write grief that accumulates rather than grief that summarizes, which is the difference between literature and sentiment.

Witnessing requires the reading skill of attention without intervention: the ability to observe a scene fully without the narrative voice pressing toward a conclusion. Young teaches this through her imagery, which is always concrete and never interpreted within the sentence that contains it. "What was the cause of that great conflagration? What was the date? How many were unburied? How many were not identified?" These are Miss MacIntosh's questions to Vera in Chapter 9, cascading without answer, and the narrative does not resolve them. The images accumulate without a settling commentary. The reader is trained, through hundreds of such sequences, to stay in the act of witnessing rather than rushing to judgment, to let the image do its work without the assistance of the authorial voice explaining what the image means. This is one of the most difficult skills in prose fiction to teach. Young teaches it by enacting it across 1,198 pages without flinching.

Building by return requires the reading skill of recognizing structural echo: the ability to notice that the thing happening now has happened before at a different scale, that the

novel is building a pattern of patterns. Young teaches this through her extraordinary use of motif, which in this novel never stays at a single level of meaning. The umbrella is Miss MacIntosh's practical protection from weather and also her entire philosophical position made portable and also the “broken black umbrella” the sea returns to the beach after she walks in (Chapter 3) and also Mr. Bonebreaker's prophetic instrument and also the novel's recurring emblem of what it means to try to carry common sense through a world that keeps raining illusions. The reader who has been trained by Young's motif-work knows how to build an object in fiction that accumulates meaning across a narrative without being reduced to symbol, that remains itself while also being everything it has gathered. "Anything which was worth happening at all was worth happening twice," Mr. Spitzer reflects in Chapter 62, “that nothing which happened once was real.” This is Young's structural principle stated as philosophy: the novel builds its reality through repetition with variation, and the reader who has learned to track the variations has learned recursive construction from the inside.

Young said she would not live long enough to write the book about writing. She had already written it, structured it, hidden it inside the novel she spent eighteen years building. The book about writing is the novel itself, in the relationship between its devices and its pillars, in the way each device teaches the reading skill the corresponding pillar requires. The pebbles along the road are the literary devices. The road is the pillars. The destination, which the novel never quite arrives at and never stops moving toward, is what Young called the fullness and completeness of the motion, in her words as Nin quotes them: “It is in the fullness and completeness of the motion that one achieves understanding.” She left everything she knew on the page. A writer who reads it carefully enough is reading a masterclass that has been running since 1965 and has not stopped.

The Colony Under No Flag

Pillars: Pillar 1 (Not One Self) · Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End) · Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act) · Pillar 7 (The Margins Reveal the Truth)

Chapters discussed: 2, 47, 72, 82

Midway through Miss MacIntosh, My Darling, Mr. Spitzer, on the beach in Chapter 47, contemplates what his dead brother Peron may have established by dying: “a colony under no flag, perhaps upon the other shore, a community not of this world as now it was but of this world as once it was,” and then, after a long sigh for yesterday, “or of this world as it might become tomorrow when Joachim was no more, when he was where his brother was.” The passage is dense with grief and longing, and it would be easy to read it as only that: a mourning man's wish that death might lead somewhere better than here. But Young is doing something more deliberate. She is embedding a constitutional vision inside an elegy. The community not of this world as now it was but as it might become tomorrow is not a description of the afterlife. It is a description of a just world. And the novel has been building toward it for five hundred pages before it arrives.

The phrase "colony under no flag" is Young's most compressed statement of what Radical Immanence requires politically. A flag represents sovereignty, jurisdiction, the authority of one group to define who belongs and who does not, whose body is protected and whose is expendable, whose voice counts and whose is silence. Young had spent seven years at New Harmony, Indiana, the town where George Rapp's Harmonists and then Robert Owen's followers tried to build a society organized on principles of common ownership, universal education, and the rejection of hierarchy. Angel in the Forest, her book about those experiments, was published in 1945. She began Miss MacIntosh, My Darling two years later, carrying everything she had learned about why utopias fail and what they nonetheless prove. The colony under no flag is what remains when you strip away the specific failures and look at the aspiration that kept generating new attempts. It is the world as it might become tomorrow.

Young's philosophy produces specific constitutional requirements when it is applied to the question of how a society should be organized. No person is reducible to a single identity, which means no constitutional provision that treats a person as only one thing, only a worker or only a citizen or only a body, can be adequate. Every heart is the other heart: the political consequence is that your suffering is my obligation, not because you are like me but because the boundary between us is an illusion the dominant culture uses to manage which grief it will acknowledge and which it will ignore. The margins carry the material side of this: the philosophy requires a material floor as its precondition, and the novel shows that floor giving way in the figure of every person who cannot access what their humanity requires. Mr. Spitzer practices law without fee, "preferring the lost causes." Esther Longtree moves slowly behind the counter with a deformed foot and no one who will bear the cost of her care. The bus driver Moses Hunnecker will retire into nothing. The novel is full of people for whom the economic floor does not hold, and the colony under no flag is the world in which it does.

The political consequence of witnessing is the most direct: a community that cannot see its own dispossessed members cannot address their condition. The novel insists on visibility for everyone it contains: the bus passengers, the pregnant waitress, the deaf man, the stillborn children who embarrass Esther because she cannot explain them. Young gives each of them the full weight of sustained, undiscriminating attention that witnessing requires. The colony under no flag is the community that has learned to witness without hierarchy, in which no life is too ordinary to be seen.

The political consequence of grief that does not end runs through the novel as the question of what happens when grief is collective. Catherine's opium grief, Miss MacIntosh's grief over her mastectomy and her isolation, Mr. Spitzer's grief over his brother, Hannah's grief over the love that became the suffrage movement, Esther Longtree's grief over her many stillborn children: none of these are private sorrows. They are the weather of a society that has not built the structures its members need to survive. The colony under no flag is the world organized around the permanent weather rather than the fiction that grief is temporary and individual and properly kept indoors.

The most unexpected element of the colonial vision in the novel is what Young gives it as a foundation: the stone deaf man at the novel's end, whose deafness became complete when he was fourteen and who was consoled by an old Black woman who told him: "All must suffers for something that be not their fault, you because your skin be white and we because our skin be black." Young gives this woman no name and no story of her own, and she appears only to console the white boy, the pattern of the Magical Negro trope that To All My Darlings traces in Chapter 82. Her words are still her own. This speech, which arrives late in the novel and which Young gives in the woman's own voice without correction or translation, is the closest the novel comes to a direct constitutional statement. It is also the novel's plainest statement that the margins reveal the truth: the woman at the edge of every category is the one who sees how the categories were made. The colony under no flag is the community that takes this woman's understanding as its operating premise: that suffering distributed by circumstances of birth is not natural order but injustice, that the white boy and the Black woman share a condition even when their specific oppressions differ, and that the appropriate response is “Dream on—dream on—for life is imaginary, and this be an imaginary world” (Chapter 82) The imagination is not escapism. It is the faculty by which the world as it might become tomorrow is held in view against the world as now it is.

Young began this novel in 1947. The Civil Rights Act was seventeen years away. The Voting Rights Act was eighteen years away. Radical Immanence, which would set out the constitutional provisions the pillars require, was decades away. But the colony under no flag is already in Miss MacIntosh, My Darling, embedded in an elegy for a dead brother, spoken by a grieving man standing on a beach with music only he can hear, dreaming of a community that has not yet been built and may never be built and must nonetheless be imagined because the imagining is what keeps it possible. This is what Young's philosophy produces when it meets the question of how people should live together. Not a manifesto. Not a platform. A colony under no flag, upon the other shore, in the world as it might become tomorrow.

Whatever Is Average Is the Dream

Pillars: Pillar 1 (Not One Self) · Pillar 2 (Reality Is Constructed) · Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End) · Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act) · Pillar 5 (Build Anyway, Knowing It's Temporary)

Chapters discussed: 1, 3, 4, 6, 82

The novel's last philosophical statement is delivered in two sentences: “Whatever is average is the dream. Whatever is hidden is the revealed.” Vera speaks this near the end, in Chapter 82, reflecting on Miss MacIntosh, on the stone deaf man she has chosen to love, on the entire journey the novel has been on. They are not a resolution. They are the arrival at a paradox that has been building since page one, the paradox at the center of Radical Immanence: the ordinary and the extraordinary are not opposites. They are each other's deepest form.

Miss MacIntosh was the average. She was from What Cheer, Iowa. In Chapter 4 Vera remembers how “She had said that Iowa was very ordinary, that the life was hard and certain and finite, that all but a few atheists went to church and they were very kind people,” “that the winters were cold, that the children's ears were frozen,” and that “One must break through the frosty ground with his hoe.” She was plain, practical, sensible, unremarkable in every way she insisted on being unremarkable. She was "the sensible and average and right." She was the dream. Vera did not understand this until the novel's end because the dream of a grounded ordinary life was what Vera most needed and least recognized, hidden in plain sight behind its own ordinariness. "Had I been less wrapped up in myself, I might always have known her, the other soul, its power, its enchantment."

Young arrives at this paradox first through character. Miss MacIntosh is not one person. She is the practical nursemaid and also the woman with a mastectomy and also the figure who walked into the sea and also the face of every face and the heart of every heart. But none of these other dimensions are available until you have accepted the plain surface first. Young spends the novel's opening chapters insisting on Miss MacIntosh's ordinariness with a kind of aggressive repetition that trains the reader to see her as she presents herself: common sense, flat feet, broken nose, the path of virtue rugged and hard. Only after that training has taken hold does the depth beneath the surface begin to emerge. The average conceals the dream. The ordinary is the door into everything Young is building, but it is a door that only opens if you approach it without impatience, without the desire to skip to the revelation.

The reversal is plainest in Catherine's opium world, which is elaborate, populated, spectacular, inexhaustible in its invention. It is full of Platonists and drowned sailors and centaurs with lilies in their mouths. It is the opposite of average. And yet it is not the dream. It is the escape from dreaming, the place where the dreamer goes to avoid the dream the ordinary world contains. Catherine cannot bear the ordinary, which means she cannot bear the dream. She lives in a world of extraordinary illusions because she has refused the average, and the refusal is what keeps her from the thing she most needs. What is hidden is the revealed: the truth about Miss MacIntosh, who she actually was,

was hidden in her plainness all along. Catherine's spectacular phantoms are visible but opaque. Miss MacIntosh's plain fact is invisible but transparent, once you know how to look.

The stone deaf man carries the paradox further. He lost his hearing at fourteen in “a sleep so near to death that it might almost have been his death or his love” (Chapter 82). He woke into silence. “Perhaps the human voice went first,” then everything else, until there was only the memory of sound and a world of blurred shapes. He became a painter. “He heard what others heard not or what they heard only in their dreams, the fishes whispering at the bottoms of rivers.” A butterfly made a loud noise wheeling around his head. “He had travelled all over America and had never heard a traffic horn,” which is to say he had been spared everything ordinary about the noisy world and had been given instead a world of pure imagination in which silence was his permanent weather and everything he heard was internal. He is the novel's most extreme image of the hidden revealed: his deafness is the condition that reveals what hearing conceals, that the world is more beautiful and more strange than the traffic horn allows.

Vera's choice of the stone deaf man is not resignation and it is not settling. It is the application of the novel's final lesson. She has spent the entire book searching for Miss MacIntosh, for the ordinary world that Miss MacIntosh represented, the world of plain common sense where the dream was supposed to be absent. She arrives instead at the understanding that the ordinary world she sought was always already the dream, that Miss MacIntosh's plainness was itself the extraordinary thing, and that the man she loves is extraordinary through his ordinariness transformed by loss into something else. He is the impossible artist who became a painter when sound died. He is the average, “the stone deaf man whom I saw in the dim corridor at dawn,” swaying back and forth, and he is also the dream.

The novel closes the argument in the figure of the old Black woman who tells the newly deaf boy to dream on. Young gives her no name and no story of her own, the pattern of the Magical Negro trope that To All My Darlings traces in Chapter 82, and yet her speech is the only moment in the novel where Young gives a character the direct authority to name what the novel has been arguing: “Dream on—dream on—for life is imaginary, and this be an imaginary world” (Chapter 82). This is not nihilism. It is the statement that imagination is not the opposite of reality but its deepest form, that the world as it is and the world as it might become are made of the same substance, that the witness who attends fully to what is ordinary will find that what is ordinary is always also everything else. The Black woman in a racist America, speaking to a white boy whose deafness has placed him temporarily outside the protection his skin would normally provide, knows this from the inside of her own condition. Her suffering is different from his. The community they share is made of the fact that both are suffering what is not their fault, and in that shared condition she sees not tragedy but the beginning of imagination, which is the beginning of the world as it might become.

Repetition is the device by which this final paradox lands with the weight it has accumulated across the entire novel. Young has spent 1,198 pages building toward "whatever is average is the dream" by showing us, again and again, the dream hidden in

the ordinary: the honey in the skull (Chapter 6), the bees that make the dead productive, “the salt crystals bearding her cheeks” on the ordinary shore (Chapter 1), the mute swan who does not sing even when it dies, the violinist who touched the strings only once. Each of these is a version of the same claim, deposited one after another into the reader's understanding until the claim has the weight of proof. The novel arrives at its final paradox not as a surprise but as a recognition, the sensation of having always known this without knowing that you knew it. That sensation is what Young spent eighteen years building. It is the deepest form of the ordinary. It is the dream.

What Had Become of the Color Line: Society, Class, and Race

Pillars: Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act) · Pillar 7 (The Margins Reveal the Truth) · Pillar 9 (Language Shapes What's Possible)

Chapters discussed: 2, 14, 19, 22, 26, 30, 35, 38, 49, 65, 68, 70, 71, 77, 80, 82

> *The Negro was hanged for sleeping with a white woman as he surely never did. He never even smiled at her, the hangman believed, that altogether this was the tale of what never happened and yet happened, happened every day in America.*
>
> *Miss MacIntosh, My Darling, Chapter 68*

The Other America in the Novel

Miss MacIntosh, My Darling is a book of dreams, and it is easy to read it as if it floated free of its country. It does not. Under the opium and the fog runs the America of its century: the servant no one paid, the porter everyone called George, the lynching, the sundown town, the hotel that would not take Jews or Black guests, the vote that was won for some women and not for others. Young wrote the novel between 1947 and 1965, through the years of the civil rights movement, and it shows. To All My Darlings follows these threads through more than thirty chapters. This essay gathers them.

Young does not preach about them. She lets them sit in the same sentences as the dreams, which is its own kind of judgment. And she is a writer of her time as well as a critic of it, so the book carries some of the very stereotypes it exposes. Both have to be seen.

The Coachman With No Name

The clearest case is the oldest servant in the Cartwheel house. In Chapter 14, Catherine asks what her coachman's name was. “The name, like so many other things, had slipped her mind, a sieve which could not hold the water—but what was a name?” Then: “The black coachman had had no wages for years, even before his death. Money had meant nothing to him.” She remembers him only as “the black coachman with the white, rolling eyes,” and she wants him buried with “the carriage and the four white horses” so that she “might still go driving” after her own death.

Every piece of this is the history of Black domestic labor in America. The rolling eyes are the stock caricature of the minstrel show. The forgotten name, the unpaid years, and the claim that money meant nothing to him are the old excuses of those who kept Black servants unpaid. And even in death he is to go on serving. Then, a few pages later, Catherine's mind slips. She asks Mr. Spitzer about “the carriage and the white coachman and the four black horses, what had become of the color line?” W. E. B. Du Bois had written in 1903, “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line”

(The Souls of Black Folk). Catherine has turned the coachman white and the horses black, and in her confusion she asks the century's question.

The Men Called George

After the Civil War, the Pullman Company hired Black men, many of them formerly enslaved, as sleeping car porters. They worked long hours for low pay and tips, and passengers called every one of them “George,” after George Pullman, until A. Philip Randolph organized the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in 1925. The porters move through the novel. In Chapter 19, Miss MacIntosh wears in the mornings “the cap of a sleeping car porter.” In Chapter 26, Catherine's visions include “sleeping car porters with golden roosters on their heads.” And in Chapter 49, when the last passenger pigeon is shipped to Washington, “Poor Martha was relegated to the baggage car, only an old night porter riding with her, and he was black as midnight.” The novel adds, “He was black as the ace of spades, that card of chance which was the world.” The simile was a common racist one. Young turns it toward chance and the world, but she uses it, and the porter, who sits up all night with the dead bird, never gets a name either.

What Happened Every Day in America

In Chapter 68, Mr. Weed, the Christian hangman, tells how his calling began. As a young man in Kentucky he saw “the hanging of a Negro, a very inefficient job, for the Negro was cut down a split second too soon. The Negro was hanged for sleeping with a white woman as he surely never did.” The novel goes on: “He never even smiled at her, the hangman believed, that altogether this was the tale of what never happened and yet happened, happened every day in America.”

That one sentence holds the history. In Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases (1892), Ida B. Wells showed that the charge of rape or of relations with a white woman was the usual excuse for lynching Black men, and was usually false. The Tuskegee Institute recorded 4,743 lynchings in the United States from 1882 to 1968, and 3,446 of the dead were Black. The hangman believes the man was innocent, yet his complaint is only that the job was done badly, and the man suffered: “The Negro must certainly have been aware of the fact that, officially dead, he was unofficially alive.” Young lets the horror show through the hangman's pride in his efficiency.

The White Detective

In Chapter 77, Esther Longtree fears a Chicago detective who solves the deaths of children. “But he only dealt with the deaths of little white children, for the deaths of the little black children were not his business, there being so many and so unimportant.” When he finds a murdered Black girl in the same woods as a white one, “He had stopped short then of solving the mystery, seeing that the death of something black was involved.” And then the phrase the whole essay is about: “As he had to draw the line somewhere in a world of so many deaths, he drew the line between the whiteness and the blackness.”

When Young wrote this, the civil rights movement had been going on since 1954. In the same chapter, Esther's accusing alphabet passes through “exhibit N, a Negro, the night, a noose,” and the letter that follows the question is “R was a rope.” Even the alphabet in this novel remembers lynching.

Esther's Son

Esther's first child was Black. In Chapter 80 she tells Vera about Walter, her first-born, and his father: “Her heart had gone out to him all the more because he was black, a Negro.” He did not stay. “He had fled for fear the white people would see him and kill him. He had gone farther North—where, she did not know, or if ever he had reached the point of equality.” Between 1910 and 1970 some six million Black Southerners went north and west in the Great Migration, fleeing lynching and Jim Crow. “Whenever she read, even in these days, of some poor Negro killed by the white people, she did think of him.”

The child did not live. Esther left him at dawn in a dresser drawer, wrapped in a sporting page, and Young told Studs Terkel that Esther had in fact killed “the only real child which was ever hers” (Terkel interview). He haunts her. His voice cries, “Mother, if you had not killed me, I might have been your greatest love!” and then, “Mother, I go to a fine school with the white children now!” In 1954, in Brown v. Board of Education, the Supreme Court struck down segregated public schools. The dead child's dream of a fine school with the white children is the dream of the decade Young was writing in.

Sundown Towns

Vera's journey ends in Indiana, Young's own state, and the novel does not soften it. In Chapter 71, a widow at the hotel rants against the town's Jewish doctor, whom “Hitler ran him out of Germany,” against Catholics, against Roosevelt, and against Black Americans: “There are no Negroes in this county, for the sun will not set on a Negro’s head here, and we won’t have them. We don’t want mulattoes.” Her rant goes on into a slur. Places like her county were called sundown towns: Black people had to be gone by nightfall or risk violence, and Indiana had scores of them. In the 1920s the Ku Klux Klan in Indiana enrolled perhaps a quarter of a million members. Indiana forbade marriage between white and Black people until 1965.

Miss MacIntosh and the Sons of Ham

Miss MacIntosh is better than her time and also of it. In Chapter 22 she reads the paper and worries about “the treatment of the underprivileged”: “How does the other half live? Who clothes the poor prostitute, the tramp, the orphan? Organized charity omits some, I am afraid. There is no money for coal. There is no money for flour.” Her first question is the title of Jacob Riis's book on the New York slums, How the Other Half Lives (1890). Slums were not, as some argued then and since, a stepping stone the poor chose for themselves. Miss MacIntosh knows who is left out.

In Chapter 65, as Vera tells it, she quarrels with Mr. Bonebreaker. He believes Black men should “be shipped back to Africa before the world’s end, as Mr. Bonebreaker said they should so that God should find them where God had put them, the sons of Ham.” The so-called Curse of Ham, from Genesis 9, was preached in the American South as God's warrant for slavery. Miss MacIntosh disagrees, but listen to how: “Why should the black men, the railroad porters, the shoe-shiners, such pleasant people, be shipped back to Africa,” “for she doubted that they could endure the climate in the jungle? They had got used to the cold.” Her kindness has the condescension of its day in it, and Young lets us hear both. She also objects that Mr. Bonebreaker singles out Jews in his heaven, and the novel calls him “in some ways a narrow-hearted man like all Missourians.”

A Hotel for Jews and Negroes

Catherine has her own plan. In Chapter 70, ordering six thousand dollars of damaged linen, “She was starting a hotel, she announced, speaking largely to herself. It would admit both Jews and Negroes. It would also admit sea birds.” It reads like one more of her dreams, and it was a dream: before the Civil Rights Act of 1964, many American hotels openly turned away both Jewish and Black guests. From 1936 Black travelers carried the Negro Motorist Green Book to find where they could sleep. The opium lady imagines, as a joke and a whim, the law the country had not yet passed.

Suffrage for Whom

Cousin Hannah fought all her life for women's votes. In Chapter 35, “She had wished to rescue the slave, not only the economic slave but also the slave of love.” Her old army coat “had seen so many campaigns in India and China, so many foreign and domestic wars for the emancipation of woman” (Chapter 30). But the movement she stands for was led above all by middle-class white women, and its victory was not shared. The Nineteenth Amendment of 1920 covered all women on paper. In practice Black women in the South were kept from the polls by poll taxes, literacy tests, and terror; Native American women were not citizens until 1924; Asian immigrant women could not become citizens until 1952; and the vote was not protected for all women until the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Frederick Douglass had said it plainly in 1869: “When women, because they are women, are hunted down through the cities of New York and New Orleans; when they are dragged from their houses and hung upon lamp-posts,” then, he said, they would have “an urgency to obtain the ballot equal to our own” (History of Woman Suffrage, volume 2, 1882). And in Chapter 38, “The lonely cause of suffrage had seemed to my mother to be quite unworthy of Cousin Hannah’s adventuresome spirit.” Many rich white women of Catherine's class opposed the vote, and racism drove some of them, for they feared it would reach women of color. See Married to the Movement for Cousin Hannah herself.

The Old Woman Down the Road

At the end of the book, the stone deaf man remembers a moment from his boyhood, in Chapter 82: “When the white girls turned their faces away from him, an old Negro woman down the road said to him, And what difference, little boy, for you be a man, don’t you, and you dream on! You be like us now. All must suffers for something that be not their fault, you because your skin be white and we because our skin be black, black as the night when they are no stars like before this world was began.” She ends, “Dream on—dream on—for life is imaginary, and this be an imaginary world.”

Her words carry the novel's deepest teaching. But she has no name and no story of her own, and she appears only to console the white boy. That is the pattern of the Magical Negro trope in film, television, and literature: a Black character with no past who arrives to help a white protagonist, often with wisdom that seems to come from nowhere, and whose purpose is his. Racism historians Francisco Bethencourt and John Beusterien trace the trope back to the Spanish comedias de negros of the late 1400s and early 1500s. Young gives the old woman the book's truth and gives her nothing else. The Colony Under No Flag and Whatever Is Average Is the Dream look at her words; this essay asks the reader to see her too.

Bet on the Black Man

There is one small, telling moment early on. In Chapter 2, wandering the waterfront dives, Mr. Spitzer “had placed a wager upon which boxer would triumph, the black or the white, that he had laid his bet on the black man.” In 1908 Jack Johnson became the first Black heavyweight champion of the world, and white promoters spent years looking for a “Great White Hope” to beat him; when Johnson won in 1910, white mobs rioted across the country. The novel's gentlest, most uncertain man bets on the Black fighter. In Chapter 49, as Birds of Passage, Birds of Omen tells, he would have brought before the Senate what America “had done to Indians in their lonely tepees.” He loses his bet, and he would have been thrown out of court. But he sees.

The Radical Immanence Reading

In the language of Radical Immanence, the coachman, the porter, the old woman down the road, and the Black child in the drawer are Pillar 7 (The Margins Reveal the Truth): the people the house and the country push to the edge are where the truth of both shows. Esther reading of every Black man killed and thinking of her lover, and the hangman's tale “of what never happened and yet happened, happened every day in America,” are Pillar 4 (Witnessing Is the Core Ethical Act). And the forgotten name, the rolling eyes, the ace of spades, “exhibit N, a Negro, the night, a noose,” are Pillar 9 (Language Shapes What's Possible): the words a culture uses decide who can be seen as a person.

Survival in the Fragile House

Pillars: Pillar 1 (Not One Self) · Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End) · Pillar 5 (Build Anyway, Knowing It's Temporary) · Pillar 8 (The Past Doesn't Go Away) · Pillar 11 (The Crossing Point)

Chapters discussed: 1, 2, 3, 12, 24, 63, 65, 72, 82

> *What motive in this quest but the search for life, for love, for truth that does not fail?*
>
> *Miss MacIntosh, My Darling, Chapter 1*

What This Book Has Followed

This book has followed one idea through many doors. What Miss MacIntosh, My Darling does with its sentences is what it believes about the mind, and what it believes about the mind is what it believes about how people should live together. The essays have walked from Plato's cave to Boethius's music, from Schopenhauer's blind will to Nietzsche's overman, from Dante's circles to Esther Longtree's lunch counter. Each time, the novel has done the same thing. It has taken one of the great old claims about reality and turned it down, gently, one sentence at a time.

Turning a claim down is not the same as giving up on truth. The easiest way to misread Young is to think she prefers illusion to reality, or dreams to the world. That is Miss MacIntosh's reading of Catherine, and it is wrong in the way Miss MacIntosh is often wrong: right about the facts and wrong about what they mean. Catherine is not celebrating unreason. She is surviving. The opium bed is not a rejection of the world. It is how one woman lives in a world that has never been big enough for what she needs.

From there comes the novel's quiet politics. Cruelty between people often begins with one claim: that there is a single right way to see the world and a single right kind of person to live in it, and that whoever does not fit is not just different but wrong. Young's sentences refuse to sort people that way. Every thing in her long lists gets its own “and.” Every voice gets a room. Nobody is put in the wrong column.

The novel says so outright in its first chapter: “Every heart is the other heart. Every soul is the other soul. Every face is the other face. The individual is the one illusion” (Chapter 1). Baruch Spinoza, the Dutch philosopher of the 1600s, taught that everything that exists is one substance, which he called God or Nature, and that each of us is a passing shape of it. Young gives him a bed. In Chapter 24, as Catherine's imaginary guests are given their rooms, “Spinoza and Shakespeare and Mrs. Sydington were already in the green.” The philosopher of oneness shares a room with a playwright and a Mrs. Sydington, and none of them outranks the others.

The Morning the Wig Came Off

The book's argument comes to a point on the morning after, in Chapter 63, when Vera finally speaks up to Miss MacIntosh. “What is the use of keeping house when we have no house to keep? You yourself have often asked,” she says. And a little later: “Miss MacIntosh, you are so busy remembering who you are, you forget who I am. And why should you forget me?”

That second question is the novel's plainest challenge to anyone who claims to know what is real. Miss MacIntosh has been so busy being Miss MacIntosh, keeping up the red wig and the plain good sense, that she has not looked at the girl in front of her.

Her answer starts in anger and ends somewhere much more honest. “Nonsense, oh, nonsense which kills us,” she moans. “It is you who dream,” she cries, “my life away. How shall I show my grief? Shall I tear my hair? Shall I scream and rage and cry out for help? Who can help me but God Himself Who has already failed and is not?” And she holds to the belief she has lived by: “imagination is nothing. The life is what counts.”

The life is what counts. But the life she has shown the world, the wig and the good humor, is not the life she has. Her real life is the one she has hidden: the bald head, and the question she asks that same morning, “What’s this salt taste of blood in my mouth this morning and every other morning? Oh, my heart, my poor, poor, poor heart so often cheated!”

An Umbrella for Every Man

Then Miss MacIntosh does something only she could do. She gives Vera a history of the umbrella. Jonas Hanway, she says, found it in the Orient, where it was a sign “of the superiority of one man over his fellowman.” She will have none of that: “Balderdash, nonsense, for none is better than his poorest brother, the beggar in the streets, and there have been many bald kings in mortal annals, though doubtless fewer queens who had no hair and no eyelashes.” The umbrella once held by a servant over an emperor “might now be carried by each man over himself. What a riot there was!” Now “even the poorest man might be his own coach, horse, covering, sail, coachman.”

It is funny, and it is meant to be. It is also the whole argument in a raincoat. Fairness between people does not come down from a throne. It is a small, practical arrangement: each person carrying a roof over their own head, each one entitled to shelter from whatever falls. The woman of plain sense ends up teaching the most generous idea in the book, and she cannot resist adding the one thing better than the umbrella, “the mackintosh raincoat which also covers the poor man and his chill bones.”

The Hint to Go

Then comes her farewell. She has already said, “I shall go with the setting moon.” Now she says: “Here’s the hint we sometimes need to go on. Give but a gentle shove, and all will be right. Let it not be said that I lingered beyond my period of usefulness. When you

invite me to your wedding, dear, when the funeral bells are ringing over the water, invite me not to many more.” In Chapter 65, as Vera tells it, she walks into the sea.

So the going on in this novel belongs to the ones who stay. Esther Longtree names it at her lunch counter: “the way I go on here against all odds” (Chapter 72). The stone deaf man names it by stating his condition: “I am a stone deaf man” (Chapter 82). He does not complain. He has built a life on that fact, a life with a butterfly loud around his head and fishes whispering at the bottoms of rivers.

And Vera names what she is looking for in the first chapter: “What motive in this quest but the search for life, for love, for truth that does not fail?” Her reasons are a crowd of other people: “a dead girl’s love letters scattered on the floor of her empty bedroom,” “a deaf musician,” “a drunkard’s celestial dream of childhood,” and a blind man at an all-night lunch stand who asked his companion, “When shall the light, Peter, enter my soul?” Her search is everyone's search, as The Search for Life, for Love, for Truth That Does Not Fail traces. She carries all of them with her.

Truth That Does Not Fail

The great philosophers each offered a truth that does not fail. Plato's Good does not change. Augustine's City of God does not fall. Boethius's music of the spheres keeps perfect time. But each of these truths stays safe by staying far away from an actual life, from a brother's death, a blind man's coffee cup, a woman's stillborn child.

Young offers a different one: not a truth that escapes loss but a truth that keeps going through it. Each person in the novel holds it in a different way. Esther's way is her heart, as she describes it in Chapter 72: “I seem to have what is known as intuition, understanding, compassion, passion, a great strength to go on, and why no little child?” And: “It is because I have an enlarged heart with ample leakage and great sympathy like the sky which goes everywhere and has no ending.” It is also the seven thick white cups she sets in a row on the counter, “For seven skulls but no coffee for them, the little bird bones.” What these people share is not one belief. It is the willingness to keep living, honestly, with what is not there.

Gentle Disguises and a Fire on the Beach

Each of Young's people lives inside some kind of disguise: Miss MacIntosh's wig, Catherine's opium and her house of imaginary guests, Mr. Spitzer's silent music, Esther's pregnancy that never ends. The novel does not tear these off as lies. It shows them as shelters, the things people build to live in a world that would be too hard without them. Young does want us to see the bald head. She builds a whole chapter toward it. But seeing through a disguise does not leave a clean, clear mind behind. It leaves a person who knows that what she lives in was built, and who still has to live somewhere.

Miss MacIntosh's own plain advice, from Chapter 3, turns out to be the best answer: “One should mind his own knitting, his own cooking, his own household duties even though he had no house. One should learn to build a fire upon the beach, perhaps a signal fire for

some poor sailor clinging to a life raft and searching the darkening waters and not knowing where the land was until he saw this fire or the gleamings of the embers as of the ember stars like ashes in the wind.” When there is no house, build a fire on the beach. Not because it will become a house. Not because the sailor will surely see it. Because that is what there is to do. And the right to a gentle disguise, a wig or a dream or a careful schedule for one's sorrow, belongs to everyone, whether the world thinks the disguise respectable or not.

No Hour to Go Back To

Under every other argument in this book runs one more: there is no perfect hour in the past to go back to.

Karl Popper, the Austrian-born philosopher, wrote The Open Society and Its Enemies in New Zealand during the war, and it was published in London in 1945, two years before Young began her novel. Popper read Plato as a man who saw history as a long fall from a better past and who wanted to stop all change. He gave a name to the unease of living in a free, changing society, where nobody's place is fixed and each person has to decide for themselves: “the strain of civilization.” Leaders who promise to end that strain by taking everyone back to an older, simpler order are offering something that cannot be had. “There is no return to a harmonious state of nature,” Popper wrote (The Open Society and Its Enemies, Routledge, 1945, volume 1, chapter 10).

Young knew people who had paid the price of that promise. Her friend the novelist Marianne Hauser was born in Strasbourg in 1910. In 1944 she married Fred Kirchberger, a concert pianist trained in Berlin and at Juilliard. Kirchberger had left Germany in 1938, when he could not give a recital in Berlin because his mother was Jewish. He served in the United States Army as a German language specialist in the American South. Their son Michael was born in 1945, and Young was his godmother. Young was a founding fiction editor of The Tiger’s Eye, where Hauser's story “The Mouse” appeared in 1949. What Young understood, knowing Kirchberger and Hauser, was how a world like theirs is taken apart: not first by armies but by a claim, that there is one right kind of person and one right kind of music, and that everyone else belongs in the wrong column. (Sources: mariannehauser.com, the Dark Dominion page; Wikipedia, “Marianne Hauser”; Encyclopedia.com; margueriteyoung.site.)

Young answers that claim with her clocks. Miss Havisham, in Dickens, stops every clock at the single hour of her wound. That one stopped hour is the shape of every promise of return: there was a perfect moment before the harm, I know what it was, give me the power to bring it back. In the Cartwheel house, as Each Clock Stopped at a Different Hour shows, each clock was stopped at a different hour, as Catherine went to bed “by slow degrees and not suddenly” (Chapter 12). There was never one pure hour. Catherine's wounds are real, her invisible birthmark among them (Chapter 2), but the time before them was never whole. The past in this novel is not a lost golden room. It is layers laid down one on another, and every layer is mixed.

That is the difference between a monument and a carrying. A monument says: here is the fixed point we lost and can rebuild. Carrying says: there is no fixed point, only the weight of everything handed down to us, which we carry and pass on. Everything in Young's book works against the single stopped hour: the clocks at many hours, the long sentences joined by “and,” the nearly 4,000 question marks left open. A person who knows she is made of many hours cannot easily be talked into going back to just one. The camps were built anyway. The music was driven out anyway. Young does not pretend that her way of seeing protects anyone. It is what remains when protection has failed, and it is still worth doing.

The Wedding and the Sign

In the last pages, Vera and the stone deaf man plan a wedding, and everyone is invited:

> *We would be married and would invite everybody to our wedding, little Johnny-jump-up and little jack-in-the-pulpit and the snapdragon and four o’clock and whippoorwill and bluejay and little jenny wren and bobolink and woodpecker and little robin redbreast, all the wild flowers and all the birds and little tommy titmouse and the waters and the clouds and the moon and the sun and the stars and the old mule that leaned over the fence and Esther Longtree, for she was also our love, all our loves, and she was the mother of the stillborn clapping their hands in clouds, and she loved us all and all things hurt or silent or broken or dead or living, and we were all so much like her little children that we might have been the children of her dreams. Esther Longtree would come.*
>
> *Miss MacIntosh, My Darling, Chapter 82*

Everyone is invited. Not only the ones who meet some standard, but all things “hurt or silent or broken or dead or living.” The old mule. The snapdragon. The stillborn clapping their hands in clouds. And Esther is not just a guest. She is “the mother of the stillborn,” and the guests are so much like her children “that we might have been the children of her dreams.” Then she gets a line of her own: “Esther Longtree would come.”

The novel ends on her sign: “She would hang a sign in the restaurant window—Owt to luntsch. Bee bak in a whale. For she could not spell either.”

The sign is wrong by every rule in Miss MacIntosh's schoolroom. It is spelled the way Esther spells, by someone no school ever served well. And it is a promise: I am going out for a while, and I will be back. Bee bak in a whale. The whale is the great sea of things the novel has gathered for 1,198 pages, “and” by “and,” and Esther will be back inside it, with her seven cups and the stillborn in the clouds. She has only stepped away from the counter for the little while a person needs between one way of going on and the next.

The Radical Immanence Reading

In the language of Radical Immanence, this closing is Pillar 11 (The Crossing Point): each person stands where the daily life of the present crosses everything handed down from the past, made of what passes through and passing it on. The clocks stopped at many

hours are Pillar 8 (The Past Doesn't Go Away): nothing is cleared away, and there is no clean hour to return to. The wig, the umbrella, and the house of imaginary guests are Pillar 1 (Not One Self): “The individual is the one illusion,” and every disguise is one more shelter for a self that was never single. The fire on the beach is Pillar 5 (Build Anyway, Knowing It's Temporary). And Esther's seven cups, set out for children who will never drink from them, are Pillar 3 (Grief Doesn't End).

This Is Not a Consolation

Young does not deal in consolations, and it would be wrong to end this book with one. The crossing point is not a comfortable place to stand. Miss MacIntosh's hint was not a reason to go on. It was a hint to go. The ones who stay are left with very little: no destination, no promise that the next step will settle anything, only the step.

The cave, in the end, is not a prison. It is a house full of clocks stopped at different hours, each one the record of a life that chose many truths over the clean, hard ease of a single one. Young does not ask us to escape it. She asks us to live in it honestly, with the wig off, and to keep house however we can. To build the signal fire on the beach. To set out the cups. To speak to the silence we love, as Vera does under the trees on the last night of the novel: “I spelled out my name upon my lover’s hand, for surely a woman must find some way by which to talk to the silence that she loved.”

The sentence is the argument. The way Young writes is the way she believes people should live together. And that is not a place anyone arrives. It is a practice, done every day: holding all of what is here, building a fire though the house has no roof, and hanging the sign in the window that says, in the spelling of someone no rulebook ever served: I was here. I will be back. The whale is large. I am in it. And I am coming back.