



Ca' Foscari  
University  
of Venice

Corso di Laurea Magistrale in Lingue e  
Letterature Europee, Americane e  
Postcoloniali

European Joint Master's Degree in  
English and American Studies

Final Thesis

Disruptions in the adaptation  
of Alan Bennett's novel  
*The Lady in the Van.*

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**Academic Year**

2016 / 2017

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## *Introduction*

“Living, slightly the opposite of expressing.” The incipit of Camus' *Noctes/Le désert* is quoted in the introduction to the 2015 edition<sup>1</sup> written by Alan Bennett for his novel *The Lady in the Van*. The sentence of the French novelist summarizes the perennial struggle that is part of every writer: the splitting of the self into an interacting duo constituted by an experiencing part and an elaborating one reflecting on the happenings occurred to the other. If one lives, one cannot write and only when the active phase of the experience ends, one can start ponder on it and express oneself: elaboration is needed. For this reason, Alan Bennett, the author, creates two projections of himself: Bennett who experiences, and Bennett who writes. These two halves, as it were, are differentiated but at the same they are essential one to each other

This inseparable and inescapably united duality, expression of the twofold nature of the writer, refers to the literary device called doppelganger. The psychoanalytic research that developed during the XX century promoted this concept to describe the various phases constituting the process of growth and personal development of the individual as well as his/her relationship with the world outside himself/herself and the internalisation of the societal stimulus and obligations. Consequently, in the literary domain, the doppelganger maintains the same, fundamental characteristic, that is, the disquieting and uncanny nature of the double. Poe, Maupassant, and Calvino are some of the authors that exploited in their narratives the potential anguish deriving from the splitting, or doubling of the self. There is no distinction if one is dealing with a vision or a physically perceivable alter ego. The Other being an emanation of the main character's conscience, a phantom haunted psychologically, or the embodiment of the wicked side of Man, when the reader is confronted with the twin of the literary protagonist s/he feels an atavistic uneasiness derived from the rupture of nature's laws.

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Bennet, *The Lady in the Van. The Complete Edition* (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 2015 ), p. 27.

Interestingly, this is not quite the case with the second Bennett of the homonymous filmic adaptation of Alan Bennett's novel *The Lady in the Van*.

Inverting the literary convention establishing that the appearance of the Other should follow the introduction of the main character, Bennett-narrator appears on screen first and introduces the experiencing Bennett to the public. This doubling of characters proves to be very innovative if one considers that this feature is absent in the literary source of the film. As I aim to demonstrate in my analysis, the filmic adaptation has tried to translate not only the narrative dynamics of the memoir, but also the creative process itself that originated it.

In fact, in the first section of my dissertation I am going to present the temporal incongruity of the film as the result of the process of elaboration of Alan Bennett's own diary envisaging its publication. In the adaptation the two “false” starts in medias res echo the episodic structure constituting by definition the literary genre of the journal. Moreover, the elaboration done a posteriori is essential for the organicity of the text, consisting of selection of the pertinent entries scattered throughout the diary. The disruption of time linearity is translated in the doubling of the author into an experiencing character and a narrating character. Such scission is alluded to through the alternate use of present and past tenses, systematically defining different textual sections. The entries of the journal display an extended use of historical present, albeit with some exceptions, due to the need to introduce or expand the topic of the previous or following entry. Conversely, the paragraphs that are not introduced by a date but by a graphic blank space present an almost exclusive use of past tenses, a feature coherent with their nature and function. These are sections added in a later phase, when the narrator has a new awareness concerning the facts narrated since he has the perspective of someone who has already lived and interiorised the events: an hermeneutic retrospective of his life with Miss Shepherd.

### *The journal*

At the end of the sixties, Alan Bennett moves to a terraced house in Gloucester Crescent, near Camden, London. The neighbourhood, recently gentrified, lives with its contradictions and guilt derived from their newly found richness and, for this reason, willingly accepts a number of eccentrics and their habits, as an example, a lady living in a van in front of their houses: Miss Shepherd. The first encounter between Alan Bennett and the old lady, narrated with the subtle irony typical of the writer's style, will start a relationship that is going to last twenty years and that is going to be the subject of the works analysed in this essay. The writer has been keeping a journal for two decades<sup>2</sup> and the very reflections and notes written in that intimate space are going to be the starting point of the novel, once selected and elaborated. To these parts, the author is going to add comments meant to portrait more faithfully and vividly Miss Shepherd's eccentricity and ideas, a source of constant quarrelling. Alan Bennett has recently donated his archives, including published and unpublished manuscripts, his journals and letters, to the Bodleian Library at Oxford University, where he graduated in History.<sup>3</sup> It would be interesting and more than stimulating to analyse the variations and the selection made by the author in order to enlighten the creative process he underwent in the editing phase.

### *The memoir*

The memoir was published only after Miss Shepherd's death, the culminating event of a long process of acceptance of her presence as a creative and literary source. Its ideation began only after her passing, but the seed had already been planted (one of the neighbours' expression to say it)<sup>4</sup> in the author's mind by his friends and colleagues who, when they came

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2 Actually, he always keeps diary and most of them are now published.

3 <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2008/oct/24/alan-bennett-oxford-university> (Last access: 07/06/2017)

4 Bennet, *The Lady in the Van*, p. 118.

to visit him, were forced to squeeze between the van and the wall in order to enter the front yard. “Starting out as someone incidental in my life... She remained on the edge of it so long she became not incidental to it a all.”<sup>5</sup>: it was a long process, in the end, he accepted her as a part of his life and of his works.

The narration starts in medias res. Significantly, the very first words of the novel are Miss Shepherd's: “ 'I ran into a snake this afternoon.' Miss Shepherd said. 'It was coming up Parkway. It was a long grey snake – a boa constrictor possibly. It looked poisonous. It was keeping close to the wall and seemed to know its way. I've a felling that it may have been heading for the van.' ”<sup>6</sup> Then, starting from this anecdote the narrator evokes their first encounter in the late sixties, in which the old lady tries to abuse of Bennett's patience making him push the van for almost a mile. After having explained the presence of such a character in the affluent neighbourhood where the story is set, the novel changes literary genre, as it were, and takes the form of a journal. From October 1969 to the 9<sup>th</sup> April twenty years later, the day of Miss Shepherd's funeral, Alan Bennett recounts his vicissitudes through the pages written years before in his diary. The organicity of the narrative is mainly due to the chronological progression of the entries: being a collection of episodes, the thematic structure is fragmented; however, despite the events lacking an Aristotelian tripartition in beginning, development, end,<sup>7</sup> Miss Shepherd's extravagancies are the red thread. In this sense, the journal shares features with a collection of maxima and aphorisms: Miss Shepherd pronounces her biting and odd opinions on every topic.

The reason behind apparent benevolence that made him shelter her in his yard from 1974 on is quite easily explicable: longing for peace, “kindness didn't really come into it”<sup>8</sup>:

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5 *Ibid.* p. 206

6 *Ibid.*, p. 49.

7 There is no development of a quest, the action is quite static.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

These attacks I'm sure disturbed my peace of mind more than they did hers. [...] But to find such sadism and intolerance so close at hand began actively to depress me, and having to be on the alert for every senseless attack made it impossible to work. There came a day where I suggested that she spend at least the nights in a lean-to at the side of my house. Initially reluctant, as with any change, over the next two years she gradually abandoned the van for the hut.

In giving her sanctuary in my garden and landing myself with a tenancy that went on eventually for fifteen years was never under any illusion that the impulse was purely charitable. And of course it made me furious that I had been driven to such a pass. But I wanted a quiet life as much as, and possibly more than, she did.<sup>9</sup>

As a consequence of this shared, arranged way of living, the necessity to accommodate to their different habits and to develop a functioning compromise is impelling. Various arrangements are made: Bennett gives her electricity, for her to have radio and basic goods,<sup>10</sup> he does the shopping for her (buying whisky and sherbet lemons mainly<sup>11</sup>). Toilet arrangements, however, will remain a delicate and unresolved subject of discussion. Besides these almost technical aspects, some issues arise concerning Bennett's guests, journalists or friends, that Miss Shepherd was used to spy from the van's windows, bizarre propositions, such as a radio programme called *The Lady Behind A Curtain*, or demands, as an example, to check under her van to see if the IRA had put a bomb there. Given her oddity, Alan Bennett feared his readers' reaction. He was afraid of not being believed, so unique she was, and of having pushed his character too far because of the romanesque timing of her death.<sup>12</sup> Miss Shepherd, by the time quite old, agrees to be taken to a day centre following the advice of her social worker. This compliance surprises the writer who, in the previous 15 years, had only witnessed stubbornness and a perennial refusal to leave the van under someone else's

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>12</sup> Alan Bennett, *La signora nel furgone*, ([2003] Milano: Adelphi, 2013), p. 75.

suggestion. The night after her return to the van, washed and clean, Miss Shepherd dies.

*Miss Shepherd's life as a compendium of XX century chaos: religion, war, women's role*

Throughout the novel Miss Shepherd is described as a cantankerous and obstinate woman fervently believing in God as in debatable physiognomic beliefs and whose political ideas were more conservative than Thatcher's.<sup>13</sup> After her death and thanks to a note she left him,, Bennett managed to contact her brother, who told him his sister's life. During the Second World War, when she still was a young girl, Miss Shepherd studied in incognito in Paris. She was the talented pupil of Alfred Cortot, the virtuoso pianist, who wanted her to become a professional performer.<sup>14</sup> In the same period she also drove ambulances in Kensington during the blackouts during the German bombings. She then decided to abandon her musical career to become a nun in convent up Gloucester Crescent. However, because of her everlasting love for music combined with her disputatious attitude, seen as a form of unwillingness to obey to God, the nuns sent her away twice. This failure did not help Miss Shepherd's already unstable mental health, and her brother admits with guilt that he sent her to Hayward's Heath, in a mental institution, because he was unable to manage her behaviour toward their mother, whom she bullied and dictated.<sup>15</sup> The pivotal event in her life, however, was the car accident. She had no fault since the young motorcyclist crashed into the side of her van, but running away she made a criminal offence and became an outlaw. Fearing that the police might find her, she changed her name and lived the rest of her life in her van, around Gloucester Crescent.

Miss Shepherd's life was “a life beside which mine [Bennett's] is just dull.”<sup>16</sup>

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13 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

14 Bennett, *La signora nel furgone*, p. 86.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 84.

16 Bennet, *The Lady in the Van*. p. 202.

Confronted with the multiplicity and the variety of experiences lived by the old homeless lady, it does not come as a surprise that Alan Bennett perceives his quiet, intellectual life as monotonous. Miss Shepherd may rightfully be defined a compendium of the chaos of the XX century, her life having been touched and shaped by many of the events and issues characterising that period. A fervent Catholic, opposed to Communism and the Common Market, interested in contemporary politics in her very personal way, her youth was shaped by the war, that had probably determined her disposition in part, as Bennett speculates reporting that when she drove ambulances she almost died when a bomb exploded near her.<sup>17</sup> Her life was marked by her difficult, impossible attempts to fit into society as well as by impulsive, categorical decisions as quitting her musical studies and her precarious life, as a consequence of this failure. Her harshness reveals itself to be the expression of her endurance and the result of the need to survive:

Miss Shepherd was solipsistic to a degree, and in her persistent refusal to take into account the concerns or feelings of anyone else except herself and her inability to see the world and what happened in it except as it affected her, she behaved more like a man than a woman. I took this undeviating selfishness to have something to do with staying alive.. Gratitude, humility, forgiveness or fellow feelings were foreign to her nature or had become so over the years, but had she been otherwise she might not have survived as long as she did.<sup>18</sup>

### *The play*

“It's the end of the story, it might make a play.”<sup>19</sup> The last question that the experiencing Bennett addresses the narrating Bennett opens up to the future of the novel and the next fruit of his creative labour. In fact, the film directed by Nicholas Hytner was not the first adaptation of the novel: it was preceded by the homonymous play, first performed on 19

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17 *Ibid.*, p. 89.

18 Alan Bennett, *The Lady in the Van* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009).

19 Bennet, *The Lady in the Van*, p. 208.

November 1999, at The Queen's Theatre, London<sup>20</sup> Many features of the film are already present in the theatrical production, for example the splitting of Bennett, his neighbours Pauline and Rufus, and Underwood, the policeman, “invented in order to hint at something unexplained in Miss Shepherd's past.”

It was fundamental to maintain the location of the desk interacting with the van, which reflects one of the principal aspects of the *The Lady in the Van*: the way a writer works and chooses what to write about. Hence, the splitting of Bennett's character into two. This solution did not come up as evident from the beginning; it was in fact the chosen device to untangle the intersection of the two stories: Miss Shepherd's and Bennett's.<sup>21</sup>

The device of having two actors playing me isn't just a bit of theatrical showing off and does, however crudely, correspond to the reality. There was one bit of me (often irritated and resentful) that had to deal with this unwelcome guest camped literally on my doorstep, but there was another bit of me that was amused by how cross this eccentric lodger made me and that took pleasure in Miss Shepherd's absurdities and her outrageous demands.<sup>22</sup>

The episodic structure is preserved as well: the captions clarify that the scenes are short and “flow into one another”<sup>23</sup> in rapid succession. Moreover, there are illuminating guidances on the role and characterisation of the narrating Bennet, that will prove to be functional to the filmic adaptation as well:

To establish the difference in their roles Alan Bennett 2 [narrator] should [...] remain tethered to his desk so that his function as writer and observer is made plain. He is taken to be invisible to the other characters, nor does he talk, except to himself, as it were, and to the audience. It's only after that Miss Shepherd dies that

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20 It was directed by Nicholas Hynter and cast Maggie Smith as Miss Shepherd. The lady in the van play faber and faber.

*Ibid.*

21 Bennet, *The Lady in the Van*, p. 208.

22 *Ibid.*

23 *Ibid.*

he becomes visible to her and available for conversation, whereupon, true to form, she plays him off against his other self.

Certain dialogues too, if preserved, are nearly identical.

### *The film*

Significantly the last event narrated in the memoir, postscript excluded, is the opening scene of the film, that is- the car crash that pushed Miss Shepherd to change her life radically. This first start in medias res introduces Miss Shepherd thanks to the most marking event in her life and subsequently it will reveal itself to be the explanation for her housing arrangement, as it were, of the old lady, ultimately being its cause. After the opening titles, the first image on screen is the van surrounded by plastic bags, while described by Alan Bennett's voice over describes the odour its lodger emanates. Seeing her exiting the house, Bennett, sit until that moment at his desk, stands up and observes what is happening in the garden: a second Bennett suddenly arrives, quarrels with Miss Shepherd, and returns inside his house, defeated by her disarming and fallacious logic. The three main characters, whose intersecting relationships support the narrative structure, are thus introduced to the viewer and their confrontations will outline by contrast their peculiar characterisation. Congruent with the literary and to the direct source (the play),<sup>24</sup> the narrative rhythm is fragmented by the number of episodes constituting the journal and representing the essential form of the intermittent albeit constant relationship between the writer and his neighbour. The following action is set five years before that sequence, in 1970, when Alan Bennett has just moved to Gloucester Crescent and met for the first time his future lodger. The twenty years to come are shown through the subtle irony and the complicit amusement already distinguishing both the novel

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<sup>24</sup> Bennett, *The Lady in the Van*, frontispiece.

and the play. Compared to the literary work, in the filmic adaptation there is a greater multiplicity of characters and variety of places. Thanks to the camera, the viewer can follow Miss Shepherd's trips outside London and the visits to her brother, thus knowing more than the two Bennett.<sup>25</sup>

### *Adaptational challenges*

In this dissertation, my aim is to evaluate the relationship between the literary source and the recent outcome of its latest transmedial adaptation, the homonymous film. Without underestimating the fundamental transition represented by the theatrical play, that establishes the fundamental features of the filmic version, I have preferred to analyse the two mentioned works for personal and functional reasons. In fact, the film permits a deeper understanding of the underlying process by virtue of its recorded nature: it can be paused, rewinded, and fast forward, and thus a scene can be divided into shots to be carefully analysed. The immediacy and uniqueness of the theatrical representation impedes a thorough evaluation of the interpretative details, a kind of assessment that has proven to be essential in the context of this dissertation. In particular, my intent is to prove that the filmic disruptions translate creative writing process. I have identified three disruptions: temporal, identity and reality.

The achronological narration adapts the episodic structure of the diary and its subsequent elaboration. Thanks to the analysis of the filmic macro-punctuation and the comparison between the overall structure of both the film and the memoir, I want to demonstrate that the former adopts the internal subdivision of the novel, structured in six parts deriving from the alternation of different temporal phases. A close analysis of the first sequence after the openings is going to prove useful for the evaluation of the devices of

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<sup>25</sup> As already mentioned, the real Bennett will meet with Miss Shepherd's brother only after her death, and he will eventually discover the truth about her life in that occasion. In the film, on the contrary, the viewer is informed on a number of fact left unclear and is intrigued by this partial disclosure of information.

engagement operated by both works. The same scope, to engage the reader/viewer, is achieved by both works in an opposite way: the memoir pivots on explicit temporal references, while the film relies upon the viewer's ignorance and expectations.

Then, still in the context of a narratological study, I am going to relate the alternating use of past and present tenses to the doubling of Bennett in an experiencing character and in a narrating one. In addition to the ontological value identified and underlined by the author himself, and its functional narrative device, I want to demonstrate that that scission is already hinted at in the literary source in the form of the alternation of the two tenses, whose use reveals an internal coherence: the psychological relevance and *technical* process, experience and elaboration, merge and the I the using present tense in the novel becomes the experiencing character in the film, and the I the using past tense becomes the narrator/character. In order to prove this claim I am going to analyse the textual interchange of the past and present tenses in the entries of the memoir and in the detached paragraphs, and, once dissected into single shots, the filmic sequences where both Bennett are present inform us on the viewer's engagement and his role in the dialogues between “the boys”, as the author calls his two characters.

Finally, I will consider the disruption of reality, this expression meaning the constant challenge of the viewer's credulity, an action going against the need for truthfulness, and truth, dictating the memoir, for which the author assures the fidelity to the facts. Because of a number of narrative choices, such as the final ascension into heaven and the mise en abyme showing the shooting of the film itself, the relationship between the writer and its creation in the dualistic alternation of fiction and reality. The ideological positioning in this perennial question is the favourite quarrel between the two Bennetts; in fact, the author states that:

They call not telling the truth “lying”, but “the imagination” would be a kinder way of putting it, with Alan Bennett the writer finally winning through to make

Miss Shepherd talk of her past (as she never actually did) and even to bring her back from the dead in order to take her bodily up to heaven (also imaginary). These departures from the facts were hard-won and took some coming to, causing me to reflect, not for the first time, that the biggest impediment for a writer is to have had a decent upbringing. Brought up not to lie or show off, I was temperamentally inclined to do both, and though reining me in perhaps improved my character it was no help in my future profession, where lying, or romancing anyway, is the essence of it.[...].<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Alan Bennet, *The Lady in the Van*, (Faber and Faber).

## *I The disruption of time*

«Narrative is in essence a retrospective mode,  
tending toward a finality that offers  
retrospective illumination of the whole.»

Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*.<sup>27</sup>

Both the novel *The Lady in the Van* and its homonymous filmic adaptation start in medias res. The very first line of the novel is an odd sentence pronounced by Miss Shepherd, a character still unknown to the reader; while the first scene of the film is a black screen, where the sound of a crash and a scream are heard. This choice manifestly hinges on the need to engage the reader/viewer with an abrupt beginning of narration. In fact, the concatenation of multiple temporal layers of the story impedes the establishment of any solid knowledge necessary to interpret the events described.<sup>28</sup> These elements of suspense are preponderant, but I am going to take them into consideration in the next sub-chapter. In this section I am going to focus on how time manipulation works both in the memoir and in the film, as to infer that, in the latter, such disruption functions not only as a device to draw the viewer's attention, but also as a representation of the episodic structure of the memoir.

Bennett's memoir is a hybrid. It shares different characteristics of three literary genres: the novel, the journal, and the theatrical play. As already mentioned, the first line is in direct speech, and because of such incipit the reader is led to believe that it is indeed a novel that s/he is going to read. However, after just a few pages the memoir starts following the rules of the journal genre, except for three brief dialogues (one between Miss Shepherd and a social

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<sup>27</sup> Robert Brooks, *Reading for the plot: design and intention in narrative* (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 1992).

<sup>28</sup> Maurizio Ambrosini, Lucia Cardone, Lorenzo Cuccu, *Introduzione al linguaggio del film* ([2003] Roma: Carrocci Editore, 2016), p. 84.

worker,<sup>29</sup> and the other two between her and Bennett himself<sup>30</sup>) evoking theatrical plays in the way they are presented.<sup>31</sup> The diary constitutes the core of Bennett's memoir, being the longest part of the text, nonetheless the novelistic slant given by the narrator's interpolations is equally fundamental: it signals the new elaboration that was needed and done in order to publish the story of the extravagant Miss Shepherd. In his introduction to the complete edition he declares that he decided to write about her only after her death, unifying all the entries of his diary in which she was concerned.<sup>32</sup> I shall now take into consideration the general structure of both the literary text and the film, in order to establish the starting point of my analysis.

The narration starts in the midst of a dialogue: "I ran into a snake this afternoon,' Miss Shepherd said."<sup>33</sup> The improbable story told by the old lady is immediately followed by the narrator's comment introducing the time and place of the story (1971, Camden Town)<sup>34</sup> and briefly describing their first encounter as well as her physical appearance. This narration is spaced out by Bennett's ironic remarks that anticipate his future frustration caused by Miss Shepherd's peculiar attitude, and also by a number of speculations of what could have happened, or what he could have thought at the time, since, by his own admission, he cannot recall the event exactly.<sup>35</sup> The description opens up to include his neighbours and their social context: newly gentrified professionals that feel guilty about their wealth, and therefore tolerate Miss Shepherd's extravagancies as a way to compensate for their unease.<sup>36</sup> After this

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29 Alan Bennet, *The Lady in the Van. The Complete Edition* (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 2015 ), p. 64.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 76-77 and 81.

31 The exchange is presented as in a play:

“MISS S.: I only asked for one coat

MISS B.: Well, I brought three, in case you fancied a change.”

*Ibid.*, p. 64.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 19.

33 *Ibid.* p. 49.

34 *Ibid.*

35 *Ibid.*, p. 50.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 52.

introduction, the recapitulation ends and a date is established: October 1969, from this moment on, the story develops chronologically until the 9th May 1989, the day of Miss Shepherd's funeral.<sup>37</sup>

The start in media res is preserved in its filmic adaptation. In fact, the first sequence is set in an unspecified time, probably the fifties or the sixties, when Miss Shepherd becomes a fugitive following a car accident. After the chase sequence, the openings show a young, talented woman playing the piano accompanied by an orchestra. Again, time is not specified, but this second sequence works as an element of contrast useful for time determination, a number of elements suggesting it is presumably set in the thirties. After the opening titles, the viewer is surprised by a new setting and a new character. The first shot shows a van surrounded by many bags of garbage and Bennett's narrating over-voice describes someone's body odour. Then, he is shown typing at his desk and the description continues, and the viewer is now aware that Bennett is talking about Miss Shepherd. As she exits his house, after having used his toilet, Bennett stops writing and approaches the window: a second Bennet<sup>38</sup> is introduced through an unpleasant dialogue taking place between him and his peculiar neighbour. In the meantime, BNT1, who has been spying the two from behind the curtain, returns to his desks, and the time moves back again to five years before this sequence, when he moved to the house where he is living at the moment of the narration.

Time manipulation is a device that both works openly exploit. The memoir establishes different temporal, and therefore narrative, levels through a sapient interposition of anticipations (“[...] an attitude to which I was to become very familiar”<sup>39</sup>), presumptions (“I

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37 *Ibid.*, p. 87.

38 From this moment on, in the context of filmic analysis, Bennett-narrator/writer is going to be addressed as BNT1, and Bennet-experiencer/character, BNT2.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 50.

suppose I thought”<sup>40</sup>), and comments made *a posteriori* (“They were wiser than I knew”<sup>41</sup>). The alternation between internal analepsis and prolepsis is atypical in all the three aforementioned literary genres with which the memoir shares certain distinctive features. It is, in fact, a deliberate choice, giving emphasis to the narrative timing, and thus captivating the attention of the reader. Furthermore, it is a sign, a trace left to be seen, of the elaboration the author did to reorganise the story and present it to his public. The three quotations reported at the beginning of this paragraph are evocative of the means through which analepsis and prolepsis are signalled: tense shift.<sup>42</sup> However, despite one particular occurrence,<sup>43</sup> the most significant contrast is not to be found in the first pages of the memoir: the striking temporal shift matches the change of literary genre. As the journal begins, tense shifts from past simple to simple present, transporting the reader in the last sixties, where the proper narration begins, as abruptly and efficiently as a time machine would do. The corpus of the diary, nonetheless, remains non-linear from a temporal point of view, since many interventions and explications intervene to analyse in depth a particular event, or to elucidate obscure parts of Miss Shepherd's life that Bennett himself discovered only after her death.

In the first four and a half minutes, the film translates this manipulation with a number of flashbacks that do not follow any chronological order, nor display any internal cohesion: a sequence ensues another without apparent logical explanation for their alternation, until the chronological progress of the narration begins.<sup>44</sup> Conversely to the memoir, where the time is set by rather precise dates, the sole elements the viewer possesses to infer on the extent of temporal manipulations are given by the *mise-en-scène* and the framing. The chase scene

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40 *Ibid.*, p. 51.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 50.

42 Monika Fludernik, *An Introduction to Narratology* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 34.

43 “She must have prevailed on me to push the van [...], though *I recall* nothing of the exchange. What I do remember *was being overtaken* by two policemen in a panda car [...].” (My emphasis.) Bennet, *The Lady in the Van*, p. 50.

44 I am going to linger on this particular aspect in the following sub-chapter concerning the reader/viewer's engagement.

probably takes place during the late fifties or early sixties. This deduction is supported by Maggie Smith's van and costume, coherent with the fashion of that time, as well as by the policeman's suit and the police car model. The latter is particularly famous one used by the British Police between the mid-fifties and mid-sixties: a Wolseley 6/90.<sup>45</sup> However, only a car enthusiast may be able to recognise immediately that car, the average viewer is induced to set the event in the right decade solely thanks to the combination of costume and design. Subsequently, the opening titles transport the viewer in a different period. It can be assumed that the new sequence takes place during the thirties: the blurry contours,<sup>46</sup> the use of sepia, the glimmering light, the young pianist's dress and coiffure accords with the canon of that decade, these elements make the temporal change evident. As already mentioned, this juxtaposition still lacks logical coherence, an aspect which is present in the memoir instead: however intertwined, the temporal continuum between paragraphs is fluid, every element is clearly linked to another.

These two sequences can be categorized as flashbacks. A flashback is a device used to reveal details of the past of a character retrospectively, or to show his/her memories in order to bridge a narrative gap.<sup>47</sup> Its function is thus preponderantly explanatory. Yet, in this case, since the viewer realises that these first two sequences are flashbacks only when the narration starts developing chronologically, and the effect obtained is the increment of expectations and curiosity. Also, because of this irregular pattern of the plot, the sense of immediacy and fluidity that is perceived while reading the memoir, is challenged: the literary flashbacks are followed by an explanatory remarks, while the adaptation makes the audience wait longer to satisfy his/her hunger for information. The viewer must undertake a work of interpretation

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45 <http://classics.honestjohn.co.uk/insurance/articles/top-10-classic-british-police-cars/?image=3> (Last access: 20/03/2017.)

46 A matte-box effect.

47 Ambrosini et alia, *Introduzione al linguaggio del film*, p. 84.

and elaboration which demands a high level of awareness. The same scope, to engage the reader/viewer, is achieved by both works in an opposite way: the memoir pivots on explicit temporal reference, while the film relies upon the viewer's ignorance and expectations. In the following sequence the time when the vent takes place is more difficult to pinpoint. In fact, no clues are given, neither by the *mise en scène* (Bennett's clothes are elegant but not ascribable to a particular decade, and neither Miss Shepherd's clothes give useful hints), nor by the framing, which is again 16/9 format. This indetermination ends during the following sequence, where time and place are precisely set: 1970, Camden Town, London.

An analysis of the macro-punctuation<sup>48</sup> of the memoir reveals that the story is temporally divided into six sections of various lengths, each one corresponding to a different temporal moment of the story. In the very first paragraph Miss Shepherd narrates her encounter with the snake; in the following paragraph this event is said to be set in 1971, Camden Town, and the place of their very first meeting is described as well: the convent up the street which took place a few years before. In the third paragraph Bennett details the peculiar continuation of the encounter, while in the fourth he evaluates the neighbours' attitude. Then, the memoir displays the characteristics of a proper journal, except for some interpolation commenting on what has just been narrated or anticipating future developments. Finally, after the journal entry on Miss Shepherd's funeral, a small section consisting of two paragraphs is devoted to the way in which Bennett discovered fundamental information on her life only after her death, thanks to her brother's confession. In the edition on which I based my research, the 1994 postscript is not included, but I believe it to be fundamental to take into account this concluding part, as it adds fundamental information on Miss Shepherd's life and

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48 Macro-punctuation in literary works is defined by Francis Vanoye as it follows: «Aux signes de ponctuation (point, virgule, tiret, etc.), il faut donc ajouter les divisions en paragraphes ou alinéas [...]. On distinguerait donc une micro-ponctuation (niveau de la phrase) et une macro-ponctuation (niveau du texte).» Francis Vanoye, *Cinéma et récit-I. Récit écrit, récit filmique* (Paris: Éditions Nathan, 1989.) p. 74.

Bennett's attitude towards his peculiar neighbour.<sup>49</sup> This structure is maintained in the filmic adaptation, thus translating the general rhythm of the narrative and exploiting the same engagement devices present in the memoir. The following table depicts the correspondences between the book and the film.

<u>Section</u>	<u>Memoir</u>	<u>Film</u>
T1	First paragraph: unspecified time, 1971 according to T2 indications (p.49).	First scene: unspecified time (0.22-1.45).
T2	Second and third paragraphs: elaboration, 1971 (p. 49-51).	Opening titles: unspecified time, but earlier than T1 (1.46-2.37).
T3	Fourth paragraph: elaboration, late sixties (p.51-52).	First scene after the openings: unspecified time, 1965 according to T4 indications (2.38-4.33)
T4	Journal (with interpolations): from 1969 to 1989 (p.52-89).	Central section of the film: from 1970 until nowadays (4.33-1.35.09)
T5	Final part: rework (p. 89-90)	Mise en abyme: 2015 (1.35.10- 1.36.00).
T6	Postscript: 1994 (p. 272-282).	End titles: the thirties, as in T2 (1.36.01-1.36.00)

Figure 1.1 Comparison between literary and filmic macro-punctuation.

Macro-punctuation in films is the demarcation between sequences.<sup>50</sup> This division is considered to be similar to textual syntax in its function: it signals a self-sufficient section as well as the passage from one part to another.<sup>51</sup> The narrative rhythm of such intervals is not casual. It is interesting to notice that both the memoir and the film develop chronologically starting from the fourth temporal section, that comes after three previous parts where time is disrupted. These three introductory parts are shorter than T4, and their length seems to echo the diary entries (the part constituting of the main body of the memoir), as well as the episodic

49 The postscript is present in other editions. Notably, the London Review of Books (Alan Bennett, *Four stories*, 2006); and in the Italian and French translation for Adelphi (Alan Bennett, *La signora nel furgone*, [2003] 2013) and Folio (Alan Bennett, *La dame à la camionnette*, 2014) respectively.

50 Francis Vanoye, *Cinéma et récit-I. Récit écrit, récit filmique*, p. 74.

51 Ambrosini et alia, *Introduzione al linguaggio del film*, p. 139.

film structure. Finally, time moves forward: to 1994, a second elaboration of the novel, and to nowadays, during the shooting of the film.

Filmic time can be analysed according to three different parameters that may be useful to recall in this context. They are order, duration and frequency.<sup>52</sup> Order refers to the chronological or achronological development of the story. Considering time linearity as the starting point of the *proper* narrative, the two starts analysed are, as a matter of facts, false starts: the story will follow a chronological order only after the reader/viewer's interest in the story is aroused. Duration, instead, concerns the amount of time employed to narrate an event of the plot. It can be told respecting its effective duration, or its narration can be expanded or resumed.<sup>53</sup> A fundamental device linked to these parameter is ellipsis, indicating that a part of the story, or other events linked to the plot, are not described. The period of time passing between the first sequence and the third sequence is not told nor shown: left to the viewer's curiosity, the gap will be filled during the film, as BNT2 himself discovers what happened to Miss Shepherd. Frequency, which refers to the iteration of an action, can be overlooked.<sup>54</sup>

As it appears evident at this point of my analysis, having summarised both starts more than once, the film has rearranged the textual material freely, suppressing many entries for length's sake, or compressing two different events, but, above all, it changed the order of many episodes. Having considered macro-punctuation, I will now analyse an entry from the diary and its filmic adaptation under the micro-punctuational point of view, that is, an examination in detail, scene after scene, of a given sequence, to underline the expressive and rhythmic relevance of the editing and camera movement.<sup>55</sup> Undoubtedly, the first sequence after the openings is of particular relevance, since it introduces the place and the three main

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>55</sup> Francis Vanoye, *Cinéma et récit-I. Récit écrit, récit filmique*, p. 74.

characters. There are twenty-eight shots and four scenes (outside the house, inside the house, outside, and then inside again); here is a table describing in details the camera movements and angles during the mentioned sequence.

<u>N°</u>	<u>Minutes</u>	<u>Scene set</u>	<u>Camera movements</u>	<u>Angle</u>	<u>Plan</u>
1	02.38-02.42	The yard	Still	Eye level	Long
2	02.43-03.05	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium, then close up
3	03.06-03.18	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
4	03.19-03.21	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
5	03.22-03.23	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
6	03.24-03.28	Inside his house	Still, then slightly tilts from right to left	Eye level	Closing up
7	03.29-03.32	Inside his house	The camera tilts from right to left following BNT1's movements	Eye level	Medium
8	03.33-03.34	Inside his house	Still	High angle	Medium
9	03.35-03.36	Inside his house	Still (jump cut)	Low angle	Close up
10	03.37-03.39	Inside his house	Still	High angle	Medium
11	03.40-03.41	The yard	Still	Low angle	Close up
12	03.42-03.44	The yard	Still; then, the camera slightly tilts to the right	Eye level	Medium
13	03.45-03.46	The yard	Still	Low angle	Close up
14	03.47-03.49	The yard	Still	Eye level	Medium
15	03.50-03.51	The yard	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Close up
16	03.52-03.53	The yard	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
17	03.54-03.55	The yard	Still, reverse shot	Low angle	Close up
18	03.56-03.57	The yard	Still; then, the camera slightly tilts to the right	Eye level	Medium
19	03.48-03.59	The yard	Still	Eye level	Close up/Medium
20	04.00-04.03	The yard	Still	Eye level	Medium
21	04.04-04.05	The yard	Still	Eye level	Close up/Medium

22	04.06-04.07	The yard		Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
23	04.08.00	Inside house	his	Still	High angle	Medium
24	04.09-04.11	Inside house	his	The camera tilts from left to right following BNT1's movements	Eye level	Medium
25	04.12-04-15	Inside house	his	Still	Eye level	Medium
26	04.16-04.17	Inside house	his	Still	Low angle	Medium
27	04.18-04.19	Inside house	his	Still	Eye level	Medium
28	04.20-04.31	Inside house	his	Still	Eye level	Medium

Figure 1.2 Micro-punctuation analysis of the third sequence of the film.

In the memoir this episode is narrated in the interposition placed between February 1975 and May 1976. It is related to a narrator's comment on how “The Woman behind the Curtain” project was one her favourites.<sup>56</sup> In fact, if “sense [was] needed”, so did hygiene, according to BNT1,<sup>57</sup> and with this ironic remark, he introduces what possibly was the most unpleasant subject of all: the lavatory. BNT1 could not allow her to use his toilet as frequently as she wanted, her “testimonial for a Clean Room” and her aunt's mention notwithstanding.<sup>58</sup> The hygienic issue is risen by Miss Shepherd herself in the memoir, while in the film it is a defence from BNT2 reprimand. What is mostly interesting, though, is to underline that this sequence, compared with the book, is a particular case of expansion, which is not frequent in this adaptation: the sequence gives more information to the viewer than the short intervention does in the text. A minor episode in the memoir, its positioning just after the opening titles guarantees a greater relevance to the episode.

The reader cannot read the answers given by Alan Bennett to her cantankerous neighbour; consequently, what in the film is explicit in the dialogue, once one approaches the

<sup>56</sup> Bennett, *The Lady in the Van*, p. 61.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

literary text, an explanation must be searched in the narrator's comments. The use of reverse shots (shots n° 15-17) not only adapts the immediacy of the text, but also improves it, visually displaying the rapidity of wit intervening during their numerous exchanges, an aspect that in the book is left to the reader's imagination. Furthermore, the attention given to the BNT1's movement, as in shots n°6, 7, 12 and 18, is an attempt to translate the first person narration, as to let the viewer identify himself/herself as much as possible with the protagonist following his movement quite closely. In this manner, the camera movements represent different textual features that were otherwise impossible to translate in cinema, such as the episodic structure of the diary, its immediacy and the first person narration.

### *1.1 Time manipulation and engagement*

As I have attempted to demonstrate in the previous section, the temporal disruption characterising the filmic adaptation mimics the rhythm and structure of the memoir, thus translating its episodic nature. This rupture, however, is also a narrative pattern on which both works hinge in order to engage the reader and the viewer. The devices exploited are expectation and inference: the attention and participation of the audience is constantly solicited by temporal interruptions as well as by sapiently placed hints on the story.

The lights of the theatre fade out, silence reigns, except probably for the crunch of pop corns or the unwrapping of candies. As titles appear on the screen, the viewer is waiting for the first scenes of the film to appear, yet the screen remains black. Gradually the sound of a car engine becomes audible, then that of a motorbike approaching; the scream of a man, a crash, a woman shrieks as well, and finally silence again. The viewer is puzzled. The black screen challenges his/her senses: films are prominently a visual medium, this unusual choice triggers his/her attention. Furthermore, the following scene, while being obviously related to

the preceding one, does not satisfy his/her curiosity. The identity of the woman running away from the police is unknown, the supposed victim is not shown, and neither other consequences of the crash. Still, major information is missed and the audience are left to infer on what they have just heard happening. Extradiegetic music,<sup>59</sup> soon to become diegetic, is the only element of coherence linking the chase sequence and the openings, which are spaced out by the title: “A Mostly True Story”, where diegetic sounds are fading away in the background, while a piano concerto starts. This sentence is directly addressed to the audience, in an attempt to captivate its attention and to give them some interpretative clues.<sup>60</sup> It adds further uncertainty to the entire narration, since, from this moment on, the audience is led to mistrust the facts just shown as well as those that are going to. In addition, the pressing rhythm of these temporal shifts only allows for a sudden realisation of the untrustworthiness of the story: the viewer is surprised by the openings showing a classical music concert that appears to be completely disconnected from the previous context. The very last note of the concerto coincides with the the first image of the famous van. Contrasts, again, dominate this sequence. Then, a male voice, Bennett's voice, is heard depicting someone's body odour. Initially it is described as “sweet”, thus contrasting with the image of the lurid van; but immediately after the scene changes, the viewer is taken inside Bennett's home and the description adjusts to the real condition of the van (“[...] with urine only a minor component”). The narration finally seems to have *properly* started. One may infer that this part, the discussion between miss Shepherd and BNT2 on personal hygiene, has been chosen to be the the beginning of the chronological narration because it encapsulates the old lady's incongruity, oddity, and desire to always have the last word. This choice echoes the theme present in the first paragraph of the memoir, where the episode of the snake is meant to exemplify her self-confidence and

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59 *Piano Concerto No. 1 in E minor, Op. 11* by Frédéric Chopin.

60 Ambrosini et alia, *Introduzione al linguaggio del film*, p. 100.

elusiveness, as she does not explain what kind of encounter she had with snakes in the past. Another temporal shift, nonetheless, intervenes, and the scene goes back to 1970. This date sets the point of departure of the chronological narration: the viewer can now find answers to his/her questions. The rapid and continuous changes of era and situation, the fragmentation and partiality of the information given, all these ruptures aim to engage the viewer.<sup>61</sup>

A thematic evaluation of the macro-punctuation demonstrates that the film presents a diametrically opposite structure compared to the memoir. The car crash precedes the narration of the years of Bennett and Miss Shepherd's forced coexistence, thus being more coherent to the real chronology of the facts. This way, expectation is created. The viewer longs for a clarification about the still inexplicable events that he has witnessed. It is only at the end of the showing that s/he finally possesses all the knowledge to relate the first sequences to the rest of Miss Shepherd's story. The cinematic structure differs from the literary start in medias res from the point of view of the reader/viewer engagement. In the filmic adaptation flashbacks of Miss Shepherd's past are shown, memories that Alan Bennett has not experienced, but has only apprehended from her brother. The film allows to show them, while in the memoir, where his experiences are generally presented progressively, they are told at the end, in T5 and in the postscript.

The memoir operates differently to achieve the same result: to create suspense until the final disclosure. In the literary version the details concerning Miss Shepherd's identity and past are revealed only in the last pages, the reader, therefore, is not asked to assemble the story with the information given, s/he is left ignorant, as the narrator is, and must wait the end of the book to have the truth revealed. Both the reader and the viewer, then, discover the truth

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<sup>61</sup> Another level of engagement is represented by empathy. Throughout the narration, the reader/viewer might relate to BNT2, vexed by an old lady abusively living in his yard: an arrangement that she seemed to have astutely searched for. However, it is not niceness nor empathy the feeling that describes BNT2's attitude towards his unlikely neighbour. As the epigraph, which is also cited in the film, clearly states, he is not being kind, he is just too lazy to fight Miss Shepherd's strong will.

in the same narrative moment, in sections T5 and T6, albeit through opposite processes. At the end of the film, the *mise en abyme*, showing the shooting of the film itself as well as the real Alan Bennett, shifts time again to the era of the audience. An unexpected turn that captivates the viewer directly: s/he has the privilege to glance inside the meta-filmic reality of the film production<sup>62</sup>. What is at stake, therefore, is a different manipulation of the relationship between cause and effect, the cause being the car accident, and the effect her becoming an homeless person living in a van. In the adaptation, the cause precedes the consequences, nonetheless it manages, thanks to time disruption, to create suspense and to engage the viewer, ignorant of the causal relationship of the various parts (especially of T1-T3). The memoir presents the facts in a more fragmented way, and in this heavy manipulation lies its ability to fascinate.

Pondering the cause-effect relationship, Bordwell underlines an important distinction between story order and plot order that is pivotal for this evaluation. He defines story as “the set of *all* events in a narrative, both the explicitly presented and those the viewer infers.”<sup>63</sup> Plot, instead, depicts “everything visibly and audibly present in the film before us”,<sup>64</sup> “the totality of the film”, and it includes also non diegetic elements such as the soundtrack and the opening titles.<sup>65</sup> Overlapping but not coinciding, what the viewer is allowed to see is arranged in order to draw his/her attention, choosing accurately which event or information should be unveiled and when. The following table proves how identical phases constituting the story are manipulated in various ways to aim at the same objective: engagement.

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62 Ambrosini et alia, *Introduzione al linguaggio del film*, p. 101.

63 David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: an Introduction* ([1979] New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), p. 76.

64 *Ibid.*

65 *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<u>Story</u>	<u>Filmic plot</u>	<u>Plot of the memoir</u>
Miss Shepherd's life before the car accident.	Car accident and consequent flee.	A scene from her life, when she was already living in BNT's yard
Car accident and consequent flee.	Her arrival in Gloucester Crescent.	Her arrival in Gloucester Crescent.
Her arrival in Gloucester Crescent.	Her life in Bennett's yard until her death.	Her life in Bennett's yard until her death.
Her life in Bennett's yard until her death.	Her life before the car accident.	Her life before the car accident and the narration of the latter.

Figure 1.3 Comparison between the story and the filmic and literary plots.

A functional definition of plot is given by Peter Brooks: “plot [...] is the design and intention of narrative, what shapes a story and gives it a certain direction or intent of meaning.”<sup>66</sup> In his search for the motor of novels, the drive that makes the reader keep reading,<sup>67</sup> he puts into relation the beginning and the end of such literary works. If it is only in the end that the reader can find or understand the meaning of a text,<sup>68</sup> the middle is a “dilatatory space”, according to Barthes's definition, where “incidents of narration as 'promises and annunciations' of final coherence [are] enchained toward a construction of significance.”<sup>69</sup> Therefore, the composition and shaping of the plot unveils the text, and the film, as “an intentionally shaped artefact”<sup>70</sup> where the intentional choice to anticipate or postpone an event in the development of the story creates different kinds of suspense and varying degrees of expectations that engage the reader (or the viewer).

66 Peter Brooks, *Reading for the plot: design and intention in narrative* ([1984] Cambridge (Mas.) London: Harvard University Press 1992, p. xi.

67 In his attempt to associate hermeneutic narratology and psychoanalytical theories, Brooks identifies this motor as desire and striving for death, the text being a tension between opposing forces.

68 Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p. 22.

69 *Ibid.*, p. 93.

70 The third mode of reading (point-driven) according to Vipond and Hunt's analysis.

Douglas Vipond and Russell A. Hunt, « Literary Processing and Response as Transaction: Evidence for the Contribution of Readers, Texts, and Situations » in Dietrich Meutsch, Reinhold Viehoff, *Comprehension of Literary Discourse: Results and Problems of interdisciplinary Discourses*, (New York, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989), p. 157.

Plot is arranged to manipulate time as to entertain, and, as already mentioned in the previous section, there are three parameters concerning filmic time that are exploited for this purpose.<sup>71</sup> Order has already been analysed in Figure 1.3. Concerning duration, from the same table and the simple description of the story, it is evident that time is condensed: what is resumed in a few minutes or pages, represents years or decades in Miss Shepherd's life, and in Bennett's as well. Frequency can be taken into account if one examines some of her actions that are repeated, for which no clarification is given, until the end of the film. These three categories can apply to the memoir as well. Again, order has already been discussed; the considerations on duration are still valid in the literary context, and those for frequency as well.

An epigraph introduces the memoir:

“Good nature, or what is often considered as such, is the most selfish of all virtues:

it is nine times out of ten mere indolence of disposition.”

William Hazlitt, 'On the Knowledge of Character' (1822).<sup>72</sup>

This citation comments on the author's attitude towards the bizarre acquaintance that has been on the fringe of his life for 15 years. He does not indulge in self-pity and does not present his patience and helpfulness as a demonstration of his altruistic and generous nature. Conversely, he denounces his temperament as too accommodating and indulgent. At this point, nevertheless, the reader still ignores how to interpret the epigraph. Its meaning is going to be elucidated only at the end of the memoir and in the 1994 postscript. The end sheds light on the beginning. For its interpretative nature, I am going to consider the epigraph not only as an element of explanation, but also as one of anticipation precisely because it is placed before the main body of the text. It does not *narrate* in the sense that it helps developing the story: it just

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<sup>71</sup> Ambrosini et alia, *Introduzione al linguaggio del film*, p. 84.

<sup>72</sup> Bennett, *The Lady in the Van*, p. 49.

opens up to a clarification of the memoir's intent.<sup>73</sup>

In T1, despite the direct speech may suggest that the reader is confronted with a purely narrative section, anticipation and narration are artfully combined together, and the attribution of one of these categories to the paragraph is debatable. Nonetheless, its position in the general economy of the memoir should be taken into account, thus suggesting that its function can be considered mainly anticipatory and tied to the reader's engagement. The differentiation between this two aspects is given by the use of prepositional phrases and adverbs, or by the use of direct speech. As far as anticipation is concerned, here are some examples (my emphasis): “I was relieved that *on this occasion* she didn't demand that I ring the police, as she *regularly* did [...]”<sup>74</sup>; “I ran into a snake this afternoon”, the sentence opening the first paragraph, and “I thought I'd better tell you [...]. I've had some close shaves with snakes”, which closes it.<sup>75</sup> T2, on the contrary, plays on expectations mainly through the variation of tense and modals, as well as the use of peculiar expressions: “She must have prevailed on me”; “[...] these mixed feelings to be the invariable aftermath of any transaction involving Miss Shepherd.”<sup>76</sup> T3 continues along the lines of T2. The paragraph begins referring to the facts narrated in the previous one, pinpointing time and exploiting modals (“It must have been a years or so after this, and some time in the late sixties”; “In those days”<sup>77</sup>). In T5 and T6 the anticipatory feature is preponderant: in first place, it is signalled graphically, being T5 a detached section and T6 a postscript; secondly, because of the information given and the tenses used.

T4 constitutes the main body of the text and displays unique characteristics. “If in the beginning stands desire [...], desire for the end, between beginning and end stands a middle

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73 Every anticipatory and explanatory part narrates in the proper sense of the word, of course, but for the sake of my analysis I make this functional distinction.

74 Bennett, *The Lady in the Van*, p. 49.

75 *Ibid.*

76 *Ibid.*, p. 50-51.

77 *Ibid.*, p. 51.

that we feel to be necessary.” and this section is the deviant, dilatory space constituting the middle of the narration.<sup>78</sup> It develops through the alternation of narrative parts, introduced by a date, and explanatory paragraphs developing an aspect of the story that has just been recounted. The following table summarises the interchanges that occur.

<u>Narration</u>	<u>Anticipation/explanation</u>
October 1969 and April 1970 (p.52-53)	
	p.54
January 1971 and June 1971 (p.55-56)	
	p.56
October 1973 and March 1974 (p.57-58)	
	p.58-59
December 1974 and February 1975 (p.59-61)	
	p.61-63
May 1976- October 1980 (p.63-67)	
	p.67-69
February 1981- April 1985 (p.69-74)	
	p.74-75
March 1987- June 1987 (p.75-77)	
	p.77
July 1987- April 1989 (p.77-83)	
	p.83
27 April 1989- 9 May 1989 (p.83- 89)	

Figure 1.4 The alternation between narrative and anticipatory parts in the T4 section of the memoir.

Initially, the scheme that results is a rigorous alternation: the anticipatory part ensue two diary entries. However, starting from the second half of the memoir, the former becomes less frequent in favour of longer and more numerous narrative parts, that develop chronologically Miss Shepherd's story. This evolution of the pattern of the plot may be attributed to a new

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<sup>78</sup> Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p. 96.

need to tell the story which is more impelling than presenting the character and the diegetic world. Narration takes over anticipation for narrative requirements: many elements have already been introduced and hinted at to set the diegesis and to engage the reader, now they need to be developed, and it is for this reason that time becomes more linear. In this section, as in the other ones, the anticipatory parts are signalled by a variation of tense. A significative<sup>79</sup> shift from present simple to past simple permits temporal jumps in the story, so that narration and anticipation can be distinguished.<sup>80</sup>

Such jumps originate and derive from the very structure of the journal. The entries constitute the metonymic architecture sustaining the development of the plot. Metonymy is a pivotal aspect of narrative as it is the “figure of contiguity and combination [...], of linkage in the signifying chain: precedence and consequence, the movement from one detail to another.”<sup>81</sup> The many episodes scrupulously noted down by Bennett over a span of two decades are an accumulation of details, minor events, and dialogues that are meaningless per se, but which are going to assume their full significance from the very process of accretion. In fact, the reader can evaluate the relationship between Bennett and Miss Shepherd, as well as her mysterious life, thanks to the contradictions and ambiguities emerging from her reluctant speech, to the inferences based on the intromission of BNT1, and to the increasing number of facts at his/her disposal which are unveiled through the reading of more and more entries. The totality of information on the subject is achieved at the end of the memoir: after her death, no other data can be added.

The rhythm of narration hastens as the memoir reaches its end. Dates succeed closer one to another. Initially, Bennett writes only one or two entries per year, but between mid '70s

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79 I am going to discuss the ontological implication of this variation in the next chapter.

80 There are, however, certain entries where the events are narrated in past simple. This should not surprise, since a diary is intrinsically a recollection of the day passed.

81 Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p. 91.

and mid '80s they become more frequent to the point that in 1989 days are noted. This acceleration prefigures the dramatic ending, that is, Miss Shepherd's death, unexpected in its suddenness by Alan Bennett himself. Furthermore, it may also signal Bennett's increasing interest toward his neighbour, their relationship becoming a bit more intimate and similar to a sort of benevolent, albeit distant friendship; a care and curiosity which is ultimately shared by the reader as well. In fact, Miss Shepherd's public, Bennett and the readers of his memoir, is engaged by time. "The meanings developed by narrative take time: they unfold through the time of reading."<sup>82</sup> "It is at the end that recognition brings its illumination, which then can shed retrospective light."<sup>83</sup> Brooks understands the passion for meaning as the desire for the end which he compares to the Freudian striving for death representing the very essence of the human being according to the Austrian psychoanalysts. This affirmation is supported by Walter Benjamin's studies who states "that a man's life 'first assumes transmissible form at the moment of his death'", death being "the sanction of everything a storyteller can tell."<sup>84</sup> Alan Bennett shares this claim and puts it into practice in his refusal to write about Miss Shepherd "until she was dead or gone from the garden, and as time passed the two came to be the same thing."<sup>85</sup>

Narrative is repetition of events that have already happened,<sup>86</sup> "the sjuzet repeating the fabula."<sup>87</sup> "Repetition is mastery, as a movement from the passive to the active [...] an assertion of control over what man must submit to- choice [...] of an imposed end."<sup>88</sup> A parallel may be made between the Bennett's passive attitude as opposed to Miss Shepherd's imposing temperament and strong will. He gains control over her by writing her story. He

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82 *Ibid.*, p. 92.

83 *Ibid.*

84 *Ibid.*, p. 95.

85 Bennett, *The Lady in the Van*, p. 19-20.

86 Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p. 99.

87 *Ibid.*, p. 97.

88 *Ibid.*, p. 98.

tries to testimony and clarify her presence in his life, to understand the meaning of such encounter. “She was very strong-willed,” he admits. “Her will was much stronger than mine. If I would have tried to get her out it would have been such a performance that it just wasn’t worth it really.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Press kit, p. 7.



## *II The disruption of the self.*

«Narrative may first come to life as narration, as the inchoate inter to tell – as Rousseau discovers in the episode of the stolen ribbon the necessity of narrative as the only way to portray an incoherent self - where telling stories becomes the only viable form of “explanation”.»

Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*.

Writers and directors depict the human experience and incoherence thanks to the protagonists who are divided metaphorically and/or physically. Sometimes a doppelgänger is meant to embody the impossible unity of the human being. In this case, it represents “the two minds”<sup>90</sup> of a writer, who experiences and narrates his life, and translates the alternation of past and present tenses in the novel. As Brooks states, “one cannot tell a story without indications of the time of telling in relation to the told: the use of verb tenses, and their relation one to another, necessarily gives us certain temporal place in relation to the story.”<sup>91</sup> Bennett's memoir exploits an alternation of present and past tenses that not only determines the temporal place, but also reveals an internal coherence reflecting two different creative phases: experiencing and elaboration, psychological and technical aspects of writing that are strictly intertwined.

Out of 45 entries, 22 use present tenses only and 19 use both present simple and simple past. They are mainly historical presents, employed to describe past events with a sense of immediacy. This use does not surprise the reader since narrative present is widely

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90 An observation made by Miss Shepherd towards the end of the film.

91 Brooks, *Reading the Plot*, p. 21.

adopted in literature. Quoting Brooks, “preterite tense used classically in the novel is decoded by the reader as a kind of present [...] that we know to be in relation to a future we know to be already in place.”<sup>92</sup> Also, narrative present can be justified by the fact that, being a journal, the narration gains a sense of contemporaneity contributing to the reader's engagement and participation in the facts narrated, as if s/he experienced them with Bennett himself. There are a number of examples of other different uses as well. In fact, the present simple may also express habit as in October 1969 (“When she is not in the van, Miss Shepherd spends much of her day sitting on the pavement in Parkway[...]”); “She generally chawks the gist of the current pamphlet on the pavement”<sup>93</sup>; June 1971 (“Scarcely a day passes now without some sort of incident [...]”)<sup>94</sup>; August 1980 ([...] Miss S. sees me leaving early each morning and returning late.)<sup>95</sup>; February 1981 (“I wait every morning by the side of the window of the van[...]”)<sup>96</sup>; July 1987 (“Then, when she thinks no one is looking, she lifts her feet, pushes herself off, and freewheels the few yards down to the gate [...]”)<sup>97</sup>; and April 1989 (“A staple of Miss S's sopping-list these days is sherbet lemons.”)<sup>98</sup>.

Only 3 entries out of 45 use past tenses exclusively. Nevertheless, almost the totality of explanatory paragraphs use past tenses. Such differentiation can be explained if one takes into consideration the two creative and editorial phases emerging from the text. These paragraphs, as I have already described, are put between two entries and are separated by a graphic blank signalling the passage from a section where the I narrating is also experiencing, to an explanatory one. Another fundamental demarcation is tense. Since, except one case, all

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92 He concludes proposing to define this feature “the anticipation of retrospection” and presenting it “as our chief tool in making sense of narrative.”

*Ibid.*, p. 22-23.

93 Bennett, *The Lady in the Van*, p. 52.

94 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

95 *Ibid.*, p. 67.

96 *Ibid.*, p. 69.

97 *Ibid.*, p. 78.

98 *Ibid.*, p. 83.

these paragraphs are written in past tense, they stand for the older Bennett, rewriting and reconsidering his past experiences.

In the entries presenting both tenses, the sentences presenting past tenses often introduce descriptions written in a present tense. If, as I want to demonstrate, in the memoir past tenses fulfil the function of representing the textual elaboration that preceded its publication, then their role is that of resuming, giving context, further information and possible anticipations on the characters and events narrated. It is, in fact, partially the case, since a few exceptions can be accounted for; nonetheless all these functions are carried out by past tenses only. It can be argued that the historical present is per se a sort of past simple, however, the coexistence of both tenses can be only explained taking into account that Bennett made a deliberate choice to use both as to underline their different functions (narrating and explaining). This expedient is translated in the film through the doubling of Alan Bennett, the two tenses embodying these distinct functions.

The entries where both tenses are present and in which past tenses give context for the following narration are numerous: October 1973; May 1976; October 1980; May 1983; June 1984; October 1984; April 1985; October 1987; and September 1988. April 1970 resumes in one short sentence the subject of the entry: the main fact told using past simple ( “Today we moved the old lady's van.”<sup>99</sup>) and then the rest of the narration is carried out using present simple. June 1980, and March 1987 contribute to enlarge the frame on what is narrated in the entry offering more details, such as Miss Shepherd's clothes<sup>100</sup> and her relationships with others than Bennett.<sup>101</sup> The few exceptions mentioned are the entries dated January 1971, October 1981, May 1983, May 1987. Here, the present tense introduces anecdotes that are

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

going to be narrated using past tenses. Rather than an empowerment of the experiencing Bennett, the inverted order should be seen as an engagement device employed to captivate the reader with the sense of immediacy given by the historical present.

28 April is a unique entry. One of the longest of the memoir, it is divided in 5 sub-paragraphs where past and present tenses are strictly interlaced. Bennett is narrating the discovery of Miss Shepherd's body. She had passed away during the night, and in the morning a social worker finds her in her van and calls the doctor to certify her death. Bennett observes all these comings and going from the window of his studio, apparently incapable of participating in those activities. It is, in fact, in the fourth paragraph that he tells “[he has] been sitting at [his] table for then minutes before I realise that the undertakes have been here all the time [...]”,<sup>102</sup> and in the following one he recounts an anecdote concerning the funeral arrangements. Previously, he described his regret about his conduct toward Miss Shepherd while she was till alive saying: “But still I never quite believed or chose to believe she was ill as she was, and I regret too all the questions I never asked her.”<sup>103</sup> The use of the past simple and the present perfect continuous is a part of the description in the narration, without any explanatory role commenting on the action. The following table will summarise the distribution I have just described.

<u>Present tenses</u>	<u>Past tenses</u>	<u>Both</u>
October 1969 (no use of I)		
		April 1970
	Paragraph p.54	
		January 1971
June 1971		

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102 *Ibid.*, p. 86.

103 *Ibid.*, p. 85.

	Three paragraphs p.56	
		October 1973
		March 1974 (no use of I)
	Three paragraphs p.58-59	
	December 1974 (no use of I)	
February 1975		
	Three paragraphs p.61-63	
		May 1976
		June 1976 (I-simple present)
	June 1977 (no use of I)	
September 1979 (no use of I)		
		June 1980 (no use of I)
August 1980		
		October 1980 (no use of I)
	Three paragraphs p. 67-68	
February 1981		
		October 1981 (I-simple present)
January 1982		
May 1982		
February 1983 (no use of I)		
April 1983 (no use of I)		
		May 1983 (no use of I)
		May 1983 (I-simple present)
		June 1984 ( I-simple present)
		October 1984
		April 1985 (no use of I)
	Two paragraphs p. 74-75	
		March 1987 (I-simple present)
		May 1987 (I-simple present)
	June 1987 (no use of I)	
	Paragraph p. 77	
July 1987		
		October 1987
January 1988		

March 1988 (no use of I)		
April 1988 (no use of I)		
May 1988		
		September 1988
February 1989		
March 1989		
March 1989		
April 1989		
April 1989		
		Paragraph p. 83
27 April 1989		
		28 April
9 May		

Figure 2.1 Analysis of the distribution of simple and past tenses.

Tense alternation cannot be directly translated into a film; however, it can be adapted and, in this context, it must be, being a preeminent and constitutive feature of the memoir. The doubling of Alan Bennett is an expedient chosen to render this temporal disruption. The binary opposition of the two men should not be considered as flat as the apparent simplicity of such solution may lead to believe. In fact, as the use of present and past tenses is not purely dualistic, neither the two characters embody a distinct, singular function.

The first glimpse of Alan Bennett is of him at his table near the window. The voice-off informs the viewer about what he is currently typewriting and the camera tilts as a curious friend would, peeping over Bennett's shoulder and then moving behind him.<sup>104</sup> As the camera stops, it becomes evident for the viewer that s/he is not observing Bennett through the eyes of a character, the camera being semi-subjective and not subjective. After the first view of Miss Shepherd's back,<sup>105</sup> he stands up and approaches the window,<sup>106</sup> and gazing out the window, he

104 Shot n°2 of Figure 1.2 in the previous chapter.

105 Shot n° 6.

106 Shot n° 7.

firmly says: “Tell her.”<sup>107</sup> Suddenly, he appears in the front garden, hastening toward the van.<sup>108</sup> As he reaches it, and he is framed frontally,<sup>109</sup> the viewer realises that he is not the same Bennett s/he saw inside the house a few seconds before; a consciousness given by his clothes, which are different, and by the contemporaneity of actions. Also, the order itself raises instantaneously a number of questions: who is he talking to? What is he supposed to tell her? Who is “her”? The viewer is now aware of the coexistence of two Bennett and their function is soon cleared by the narrating voice: “The writer is double. There is the self who does the writing and there is the self who does the living. And they talk. They Argue. Writing is talking to oneself.” Such statement can be attributed to BNT1, since the voice-off has been associated with him from the beginning of the film, when he is caught writing at his desk; a scene that has opened a new narrative section. The two Bennett maintain a relationship that is complicit and conflictual at the same time. Irony and a sort of benevolent resignation, as the epigraph explains, determine their discussions.

The beginning of T3 is not casual, since the director Nicholas Hytner states:

But as we started to shoot, it became clear that the telling of the story is controlled from the desk. The film emerge from the typewriter; so the writer stays in the study, and only appears in the outside world after Miss Shepherd is dead, when he allows her to take over authorship of her own ending. I hope the movie is as much about how a writer writes, and why he chooses what to write about, as it is about his subject.<sup>110</sup>

Consequently, there are three instances in the film that are echoed by the three main characters: BNT1 (“how a writer writes”), BNT2 (“why he chooses what to write about”), and Miss Shepherd (“his subject”). BNT1 symbolises the work of evaluation, elaboration and

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107 Shot n° 9.

108 Shot n° 10.

109 Shot n° 11.

110 Bennett, *The Lady in the Van*, p. 5.

rewriting essential to arrange the plot and to publish the novel. BNT2, on the other hand, stands for the process of cumulation of ideas, facts and possible inspiration that hide in everyday life and encounters, or, put in Alan Bennett's own words: “[...] whatever happens is grist to some creative mill, though without any certainty as to its eventual outcome.”<sup>111</sup> Miss Shepherd is the canonical subject of the story: the title refers to her and she is the object of both Bennett's attention. Also, it is the episodes of her life that determine the narrative rhythm and her death ends the story and the plot of both works.

Vanoye, analysing Metz's definition of plot (*récit*), that is, “discours clos venant irréaliser une séquence temporelle d'événements”, states that such concept entails a distinction between the temporal sequence of the narrated event and that of the narrative discourse.<sup>112</sup> The two Bennett's appear to embody two different times, or phases, of the memoir. First, the journal: it is written by the I-present simple, or past simple as already discussed, and is depicted by BNT2, who lives the contemporary development of events; secondly, the elaboration: there is a re-writing of the literary material and the creation of the memoir as the reader reads/knows it, a phase manifested by the use of the I-past simple -an ellipsis in the film. BNT1 can be said to embody the role of the voice-off, that, in his analysis of *Journal d'un curé de campagne*, Sabouraud has described as follows: “En l'incarnant, en l'inscrivant dans une réalité concrète, [la voix off] instaure la superposition de deux temporalité: celle du présent de l'acte (l'action du personnage) et celle d'un futur plus distancié et analytique (l'écriture du journal) revenant sur l'acte et lui donnant son sens plus profond, plus complexe.”<sup>113</sup> However, BNT1 embodies a role halfway between elaboration and contemporary experience: he does not live, he notes down the events in order to elaborate the memoir later. There are, then, three phases: BNT2 living, BNT1 writing down the event of the

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111 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

112 Vanoye, *Cinéma et récit-I. Récit écrit, récit filmique*, p. 10.

113 Frédéric Sabouraud, *L'adaptation. Le cinéma a tant besoin d'histoires* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 2006), p. 7.

day that has just passed, and BNT1 revising his journal to publish it. The latter role is implicitly presented to the viewer when a box full of the newly printed copies of *The Lady in the Van* are delivered to Bennett's house, but is more evident in the memoir, as I am going to demonstrate. BNT2 embodies the use of present simple, or rather, to be more precise, historical present: the reader experiences Bennett's life thanks to the immediacy given by such tense, just as the viewer identifies mainly with BNT2, whose point of view is assumed by the camera. The interval between the two roles assumed by BNT1 is a small temporal gap between the lives and the texts placed in the midst of the two temporal sequences. The alternation between present and past tenses testifies this temporal irregularity, but a difference should be made between two functions of the past simple, and past tenses in general, in the context of the memoir. In fact, the observing BNT1 who is almost contemporary to the facts should be retraced in the past tenses used within the entries. As the day ends, Bennett notes down his day and since, it has, of course, just passed, he uses a tense meant to summarise and to contextualise. Conversely, BNT1, reviewing and organising the structure of the memoir, and envisaging a future publication, echoes the detached paragraphs that examine the subject in depth and shed light on it through anticipations and new information. In an interview, Alan Bennett told that this choice was necessary to reflect on his work as a writer and to give the viewer his own perspective on the facts: "I could see how she would make a good character in a play but I couldn't see how I could tell my own story. That made it quite difficult to write [...]. It was only when I thought of splitting myself in two that I could see how I could do it."<sup>114</sup> Therefore, the two Bennett certainly embody a psychological instance of the writer, as it is declared in the film; it could be argued, nonetheless, that the doubling may be mainly justified by the need to emphasise the time needed to accept Miss Shepherd's life as narratable, and even valuable material for a novel, as well as the work the writer made a

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114 Presskit, p. 7.

posteriori to understand what kind of story he wants to narrate and how. In the introduction, Bennett publishes a number of more recent entries concerning the creation and development of the film and narrating some everyday anecdote from the shooting of the film. The 11<sup>th</sup> October he recall his reluctance to conceive Miss Shepherd as the subject of one of his possible literary exploits, a reflection that is worth quoting almost entirely:

There were times too, when it seemed, grimly affianced as we were, that this was the only thing that was worthy of note, even if Miss Shepherd's presence was so prolonged and taken for granted that the idea I would ever be able to turn it into a book, still less literature, seemed absurd. Also absurd was the notion that she was literary raw material and that this was why I'd invited her in to start with...<sup>115</sup>

In the film as well, during one of the discussions between BNT1 and BNT2, the former admits reluctantly that he is keeping “a sodding notebook, but only in the off chance. She's not a project. She's not in the pipeline. I don't want to write about her. She is just something that's happening.” Nevertheless, she revealed herself to be so, even though from the writer's part “still, there was no question of writing or publishing anything about her until she was dead or gone from the garden, and as time passed the two came to seem the same thing.”<sup>116</sup> Time, again, is the key.

### *II.1 Doubling and engagement*

Given the complexity resulting from the different functions, experiencing and narrating, of the “I”, it may be enlightening to consider different narratological theories in order to shed light on their different connotations. Stanzel's typological circle<sup>117</sup> dissolves the ambiguousness of the “I” used in the memoir. The “I” can generally be defined as a

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115 Bennett, *The Lady in the Van*, p. 28.

116 *Ibid.*, p. 19-20.

117 Fludernik, *An Introduction to Narratology*, p. 91.

peripheral first-person narrator, that is, a first-person narrator that is a minor character<sup>118</sup>; However, this circle encourages other definitions. The I-present simple is, in fact, the *narrating and experiencing "I"*, part of the internal-perspective section of the diagram; the I-past simple used in the detached paragraphs can be ascribed to the *narrator of the story within a story*, since the *"I" as editor* would push too far the role of the revisioning and commenting "I" in such parts of the text. Could this schema be applied to the filmic adaptation as well, BNT1 may impersonate the *"I" as witness, the narrator of story within story*, or even the *"I" outside the world of the characters*, in contrast to the *narrating and experiencing I* represented by BNT2.

Todorov outlines the relationship between narrator and character with three equations depending on the level of knowledge demonstrated.<sup>119</sup> The expression *Narrator > Character* indicates that the narrator says more than what every character knows; *Narrator = Character* expresses an egalitarian relationship in which the narrator has the same information as the character; *Narrator < Character* reverses the first rapport: the narrator says less than the character knows. Relating these situations to Bennett's memoir and evaluating how information is transmitted to the reader, a distinction should be made again between the "I" of the entries and the one used in the detached paragraphs. The third relationship seems to suit the relationship between the Bennett writing about his day and Miss Shepherd. In fact, the first-person narrator ignores the motivation and cause behind many of his neighbour's idiosyncrasies and sometimes wonders about her past. Conversely, the narrator of the aforementioned paragraphs speaks a posteriori: he has solved all the mysteries surrounding Miss Shepherd, hence, he can manage her life story entirely, narrating and anticipating many elements in the construction of the plot.

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118 *Ibid.*, p. 90.

119 André Gaudreault, François Jost, *Le récit cinématographique* ([1990] Paris: Armand Colin Cinéma, 2005), p. 128.

A close parallel with André Gardies' theory of polarisation may be venturous, but the principle determining both theories is identical: a hierarchy of knowledge. In Todorov's system the reader is not taken into consideration, while Gardies introduces the viewer as a third element of analysis to account for what he calls “*monstration*.”<sup>120</sup> He contrasts the *ocularisation*<sup>121</sup> theorised by François Jost with a new conception of filmic perspective according to which what is shown to the viewer is the result of explicit choice.<sup>122</sup> Therefore, it becomes fundamental to consider the role of the viewer in the hierarchy. Six configurations exhaust all possibilities and three of them coincide with the three types of polarisation forming the basis of his analysis: when the character shares his/her knowledge with the viewer, one deals with character-polarisation ( $En = Sp = P$ )<sup>123</sup>; when the narrator knows more than the other two poles ( $En > Sp < P$ ), it is a narrator-polarisation; and, finally, when the viewer knows as much as the narrator does, one talks about spectator-polarisation ( $En = Sp < P$ ).<sup>124</sup> The *Lady in the Van* presents multiple polarisations throughout its development, features that are going to be evaluated in the following, close analysis of the sequences in which both Bennett are present.

The analysis of the viewer engagement will benefit from a close analysis of their relationship. I have already considered their first sequence together in Figure 1.2, from shot 25 to 28, and I shall now continue my evaluation of their other shared moments.

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120Gardies, *Le récit filmique*, p. 107-108.

121In his essay *L'oeil-caméra. Entre film et roman* (Lyon: Presse Universitaire de Lyon, 1987), Jost “has defined the representation of the visual viewpoint in films as different from the character’s mental point of view [...] the relationship between how the camera shows the hero and how the hero supposedly sees things.” This synthetic and clear definition is given by Kai Mikkonen in his article *Focalisation in Comics. From Specificities of the Medium to Conceptual Reformulation* (Scandinavian Journal of Comic Art vol. 1.1, Spring 2012, p. 74).

122Gardies, *Le récit filmique*, p. 104.

123 *En* stands for énonciateur (narrator), *Sp* for spectateur (spectator), and *P* for personnage (character). *Ibid.*, p. 108.

124Character-polarisation, narrator-polarisation, and spectator-polarisation are my attempt to translate the original syntagmas polarisation-personnage, polarisation-énonciateur, polarisation-spectateur.

### Sequence n°2

<u>N°</u>	<u>Minutes</u>	<u>Scene set</u>	<u>Camera movements</u>	<u>Angle</u>	<u>Plan</u>
1	07.07-07-21	inside	Tilting	From high to eye level	From close up to medium plan
2	07.22-07.28	inside	Still	Eye level	Medium
3	07.29- 07.32	inside	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium

Figure 2.1 Second sequence analysis.

The second sequence exposes the conflictual acknowledgement of his work as a writer. The voice-off describes his slow acceptance of Miss Shepherd's as a literary inspiration, and it is embodied neither by BNT1 nor by BNT2. It appears to represent the I-past simple used in the detached paragraphs, while the actual BNT1 stands for the I-past tense used in the entries. In fact, the latter is caught writing at his desk and addressing a remark about Miss Shepherd to BNT2, who is complaining about the dullness of their lives. BNT1 concludes exclaiming: “Yeah, you live it, I write it.” The viewer empathises with Bennett's dissatisfaction, made evident by the doubling of his living and noting selves, who, as anticipated in the first sequence together, talk and argue continuously.

### Sequence n°3

<u>N°</u>	<u>Minutes</u>	<u>Scene set</u>	<u>Camera movements</u>	<u>Angle</u>	<u>Plan</u>
1	13.55-14.10	Outside his mother's house	It tilts from left to right	Eye level	From long to medium plan
2	14.11-14.13	Inside his mother's house	Still	Eye level	Medium
3	14.14.-14.15	Outside his house	Still	Slightly low angle	Medium
4	14.15-14.16	Inside his house	Slightly up	Slightly high angle	Medium
5	14.17-14.21	Inside his mother's house	Still	Eye level	Closing up
6	14.22-14.25	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
7	14.26-14.30	Inside his mother's house	Still	Eye level	Medium

8	14.31-14.33	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Plan enlarges
9	14.34-14.35	Inside his mother's house	Still	Eye level	Medium
10	14.36-14.37	Inside his house	Still	Slightly low angle	Medium
11	14.38-14.42	Inside his mother's house	Still	Eye level	Medium
12	14.43-14.45	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Slightly high angle	Medium
13	14.46-14.49	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Slightly low angle	Medium
14	14.49-14.52	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Slightly high angle	Medium
15	14.53-14.59	Inside his mother's house	Still	Eye level	Medium
16	15.00-15.01	Inside his house	Still	Slightly low angle	Medium

Figure 2.2 Third sequence analysis.

As in the previous sequence the two Bennett are quarrelling, in this one the viewer appreciates their complicity at the expense of their naïve mother. It is, in fact, a dialogue with a third participant: BNT2 talks with his mother, who is in Leeds and wishes to see her son soon, and BNT1, sitting on the other side of the living room, is informed of the subject matter of the conversation and comments silently with a few, complicit glances. The viewer alternates between the perspective of BNT1 and BNT2 thanks to the alternation of high and low angles respectively. BNT1 is seen from a high angle, giving the impression of being next to him peeping at his desk, while BNT2 is shown from a slightly low angle, as if the viewer were seat on BNT1 chair.

#### *Sequence n°4*

<u>N°</u>	<u>Minutes</u>	<u>Scene set</u>	<u>Camera movements</u>	<u>Angle</u>	<u>Plan</u>
1	16.04-16.05	outside	Still	Eye level	Close up
2	16.06-16.21	Inside his house	It tilts from right to left	From high angle to low angle	Medium

Figure 2.3 Fourth sequence analysis.

“No, no.” BNT1's voice peremptorily superimposes on the end of the previous

sequence, in which Ms Williams, one of his neighbours has suggested him to write about Miss Shepherd. As the scene changes, the camera movements follow BNT1's movement whilst he is sitting down and the viewer glimpses BNT2 sit on the sofa, reading. Such reluctance has already been hinted at in the second sequence and will be further developed as the lady settles permanently in his driveway. This scene is seen from outside the window. The viewer does not see the glass, but, as the piece has already been shown, s/he is aware of the fact that the desk is placed in front of the window. Consequently, this time the viewer feels like an eavesdropper rather than a silent participant of the dialogue, a friend that has come over, as the camera position and angle in the previous sequence could have suggested.

“I live, you write. That's how it works.”, says BNT2. Yet, BNT1 accuses BNT2 for their “tame” life, that allows for no other literary subjects except for old ladies. With the previous statement, BNT2 underlines the two “I” that constitute the writer ontologically and which are translated in the memoir as the *experiencing I* and the *narrating I* using present and past tenses respectively.

#### *Sequence n°5*

<u>N°</u>	<u>Minutes</u>	<u>Scene set</u>	<u>Camera movements</u>	<u>Angle</u>	<u>Plan</u>
1	21.44-21.50	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
2	21.51-21.56	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
3	21.57-22.00	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
4	22.01-22.07	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
5	22.08.00	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
6	22.09-22.14	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
7	22.14-22.17	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
8	22.17-22.21	Inside his house	Still	Off BNT2 shoulder	Medium
9	22.22-22.23	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
10	22.24-22.25	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
11	22.26-22.30	Inside his house	Follows BNT1 movements as he stands up	Eye level	Medium

12	22.21-21.36	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
13	21.37-21.42	Inside his house	Follows BNT1 movements as he sits down	Eye level	Medium

Figure 2.4 Fifth sequence analysis.

In this sequence the two Bennett quarrel for the umpteenth time. The subject is, again, his literary work, in particular, BNT2's refusal of comparing his mother, of whom he writes extensively, to Miss Shepherd, who is increasingly becoming stimulating, artistic material. BNT1 holds responsible BNT2 for their literary “niche”, old ladies, depicting the frustration that may happen in the creative process, and especially, in finding the right subject. The unwanted parallel between the two old ladies, an issue that is not brought up in the memoir, is functional for the analysis of the struggling creative process and should be considered as constitutive of the the dualistic system sustaining both the novel and the adaptation.

#### *Sequence n°6*

N°	Minutes	Scene set	Camera movements	Angle	Plan
1	24.39-24.47	Inside his house	It tilts from left to right, following her movements in the house	High angle,	Medium
2	24.48-24.50	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
3	24.51-25.12	Inside his house	It tilts from left to right	Eye level	Close up, then still
4	25.13-25.14	Inside his house	Still	Low angle	Medium
5	25.15.00	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
6	25.16-25.20	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
7	25.20-25.22	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
8	25.22-25.23	Inside his house	Still	Low angle	Medium
9	25.23-25.25	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
10	25.25-25.31	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
11	25.32-25.38	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Closing up
12	25.39-25.40	Inside his house	Still	High angle	Close up
13	25.41-25.43	Inside his house	Slightly adjusting to Miss S.'s movements, reverse shot		Medium
14	25.44- 25.47	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Low angle	Medium

15	25.47-25.51	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level, from his shoulder	Medium
16	25.52-25.53	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Low angle, from her shoulder	Medium
17	25.54-25.55	Inside his house	Camera follows Miss S.'s movements, reverse shot	High angle	Medium
18	25.56-25.58	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Low angle	Medium
19	25.58-26.02	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
20	26.03-26.04	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
21	26.05-26.10	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
22	26.11-26.12	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
23	26.13-26.17	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
24	26.18-26.20	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
25	26.21-26.25	Inside his house	It moves from high to low angle, reverse shot	Low angle	Medium
26	26.26-26.28	Inside his house	It tilts from right to left, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
27	26.29-26.31	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
28	26.33- 26.36	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
29	26.37-26.43	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Closing up

Figure 2.5 Sixth sequence analysis.

Miss Shepherd is at the door with an exciting idea she wants to submit to Bennett. This first shot of this sequence engages the viewer by placing his point of view behind BNT2's shoulders.<sup>125</sup> Then, s/he follows her uncertain pace while she enters the house, through a subjective shot that identifies with BNT2 perspective.<sup>126</sup> Also, while she enters the living room, the camera mimics the eye movement that BNT1 should have made, being determined by his usual position near the desk. In the long dialogue between Miss Shepherd and BNT2, BNT1 is a silent listener with whom his living counterpart exchanges some questioning glances, as a result of the old lady's extravagant proposal: a radio series hosted by her. Later on, she will reveal a fundamental information on her past life, namely, that she had been a talented pianist in France. The abundance of reverse shots engage the viewer who is as

<sup>125</sup>A semi-subjective shot.

<sup>126</sup>Gardies, *Le récit filmique*, p. 104.

<sup>126</sup>*Ibid.*

curious as Bennett is.

*Sequence n°7*

<u>N°</u>	<u>Minutes</u>	<u>Scene set</u>	<u>Camera movements</u>	<u>Angle</u>	<u>Plan</u>
1	32.09-32.12	Inside his house	It tilts from right to left	Eye level	Medium
2	32.12-32.15	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
3	32.15-32.16	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
4	32.17-32.19	The driveway	Still	Eye level	Medium
5	32.20-32.24	The driveway	Still	Eye level	Medium
6	32.24-32.26	The driveway	Still	Eye level	Medium
7	32.27-32.29	The driveway	Still	Eye level	Medium
8	32.30-32.33	The driveway	Still	Eye level	Medium
9	32.34-32.36	Inside the van	Still	Eye level	Medium
10	32.36-32.38	Inside the van	Still	Eye level	Medium
11	32.39-32.49	Inside the van	Still	Eye level	Medium
12	32.50-32.52	Inside the van	Still	Eye level	Medium
13	32.53-33.03	Inside the van	Still	Eye level	Medium
14	33.04.00	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
15	33.05-33.09	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
16	33.09-33.12	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
17	33.13-33.15	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Close up
18	33.16-33.18	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
19	33.19-33.22	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
20	33.23-33.24	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Close up
21	33.24-33.36	Inside his house	The camera dolls out	Eye level	Medium
22	33.27-33.32	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	High angle, from his shoulder	Medium
23	33.33-33.35	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
24	33.36-33.37	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
25	33.38-33.40	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
26	33.41-33.42	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
27	33.43-33.45	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
28	33.46-33.51	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
29	33.52-33.53	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
30	33.54-33.59	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium

31	34.00-34.04	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
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Figure 2.6 Seventh sequence analysis.

Some vandals are shaking Miss Shepherd's van and BNT2 intervenes to stop them. BNT1 observes the scene from behind the window,<sup>127</sup> holding a cup of tea and waits for his double to return home. It is from BNT1 perspective that this action is presented to the viewer, and the point of view changes only once BNT2 has reached the van. Hence, the viewer shares the perspective of the two Bennett in a way that seems to translate the use of the past simple in the entries which presented both tenses. In fact, BNT1, is the first to witness the scene, just as the past simple is used to comment on the event that is going to be narrated; and it is only after this introduction from his point of view that the viewer's perspective coincides with BNT2's, who is, therefore, the *experiencing I* expressed by the present simple. As BNT2 enters the living room, he announces that he is allowing Miss Shepherd to put her van in the driveway, so that “[they] can forget about her.” BNT1 is skeptical, and, citing Hazlitt, expresses their position towards this benevolent concession<sup>128</sup> made for the sake of what he believes is a manipulative woman.

### Sequence n°8

<u>N</u> ° -	<u>Minutes</u>	<u>Scene set</u>	<u>Camera movements</u>	<u>Angle</u>	<u>Plan</u>
1	46.20-46.30	Inside his house	Still, then tilts from right to left	Eye level	From a close up to medium
2	46.31-46.37	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
3	46.38-46.41	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
4	46.42-46.47	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
5	46.48-46.49	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
6	46.50-46.53	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	High angle	Closing up

127 It is a case of what Jost called “*ocularisation interne primaire*.” The viewer sees through the eyes of the character, as in a subjective shot, but there is a diegetic element, such as a window frame, that obstructs the view.

*Ibid.*

128 It is the already mentioned epigraph placed at the beginning of the memoir.

7	46.54-00	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
8	46.55-46.59	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
9	47.00-47.01	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
10	47.02-47.03	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
11	47.04-47.07	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
12	47.08-47.12	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Closing up/ medium
13	47.13-47.15	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
14	47.16-47.19	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
15	47.20-47.24	Inside his house	Still	Slightly down angle	Medium

Figure 2.7 Eighth sequence analysis.

The two Bennett plot against Miss Shepherd to force her confessing an enigma linked to her past: her intolerance for music. The viewer waits for her to exit her van together with them, and his/her view is blocked by the blinds as it is for them. The use of reverse shot put at the centre of the sequence BNT2. He argues with the old lady and then he discusses with his noting counterpart whether he should insist or not on Miss Shepherd.

#### Sequence n°9

<u>N°</u>	<u>Minutes</u>	<u>Scene set</u>	<u>Camera movements</u>	<u>Angle</u>	<u>Plan</u>
1	50.48-51.04	Inside his house	Still initially, than tilts from left to right	Eye level	Medium
2	51.03-51.05	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
3	51.06-51.09	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
4	51.10-51.13	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium

Figure 2.8 Ninth sequence analysis.

After an intense argument with Miss Shepherd, BNT2, enraged, walks into the driveway to return home. BNT1 infers that the cause for a similar reaction from the part of his experiencing double should be attributed to their mother's poor mental health. BNT2 hears these allegations and deviates towards the window, behind which BNT1 is sat, to deny such claims. Throughout the sequence, the viewer assumes BNT1's point of view. S/he is detached

from this emotional reaction and, just as BNT1, s/he has the lucidity to find its probable cause.

*Sequence n°10*

<u>N°</u>	<u>Minutes</u>	<u>Scene set</u>	<u>Camera movements</u>	<u>Angle</u>	<u>Plan</u>
1	59.52-1.00.02	The driveway	Still	Eye level	Medium
2	01.00.03	The driveway	Still	Eye level	Medium
3	1.00.04-1.00.09	The driveway	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
4	1.00.10-1.00.13	The driveway	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
5	1.00.14-1.00.17	The driveway	Still	Eye level	Medium
6	1.00.18-1.00.19	The driveway	Still	Eye level	Medium
7	1.00.20-1.00.23	The driveway	Still	Eye level	Medium
8	1.00.24-1.00.27	The driveway	Still	Eye level	Medium
9	1.00.28-1.00.34	The driveway	Still	Eye level	Medium
10	1.00.35-1.00.37	The driveway	Still	Eye level	Medium
11	1.00.38-1.00.43	The driveway	Still	Eye level	Medium

Figure 2.9 Tenth sequence analysis.

The issue tackled is narrative freedom. From his window BNT1 exclaims: “You [BNT2] are scared this may be the end of the story and now I'm going to have to write it. Still, now she's gone I can make it up. Narrative freedom. Whoopee!”<sup>129</sup> The cumulation of facts and ideas, the metonymic part of the creative process comes to an end: with death, Miss Shepherd's life becomes narratable.<sup>130</sup> Also, her passing would free the narrator who can now invent unreservedly without the urge of being faithful to the actual facts, now that his sources of inspiration is dead.

*Sequence n°11*

<u>N°</u>	<u>Minutes</u>	<u>Scene set</u>	<u>Camera movement</u>	<u>Angle</u>	<u>Plan</u>
1	01.02.22-01.02.30	Outside	It tilts from right to left	Eye level	Close up, Medium
2	01.02.31-01.02.33	Outside	Still	Low angle	Medium

129 Bennett, *The Lady in the Van*, p. 174.

130 Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: design and intention in narrative*, p. 95.

3	01.02.34-01.02.36	Outside	Still	Eye level	Medium
4	01.02.37-01.02.41	Outside	Still	Eye level	Medium
5	01.02.42-01.02.43	Outside	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
6	01.02.44	Outside	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
7	01.02.45	Outside	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
8	01.02.46-01.02.48	Outside	Still	Eye level	Medium
9	01.02.49-01.02.50	Outside	Still	Eye level	Medium
10	01.02.51-01.02.52	Outside	Still	Eye level	Medium
12	01.02.53-01.02.59	Outside	Still	Eye level	Medium
12	01.03.00-01.03.02	Outside	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
13	01.03.03-01.03.04	Outside	Still, reverse shot	Low angle	Medium
14	01.03.05-01.03.06	Outside	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
15	01.03.07-01.03.09	Outside	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
16	01.03.10-01.03.13	Outside	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
17	01.03.14-01.03.16	Outside	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium

Figure 2.10 Eleventh sequence analysis.

The eleventh sequence opens with a close up on BNT2 while he is paying his taxi. Since his figure obstructs the view of what is behind him, and the camera closely follows his movements, the viewer sees the arrival of Miss Shepherd together with BNT2 himself, who turns back from the taxi to enter the driveway, and sees her on her wheelchair. This sequence develops the themes touched in the previous one. In fact, now BNT1 is more at ease with the creation of fictional dialogues between BNT2 and Miss Shepherd, knowing her enough to imagine what she could say on a given subject. The reverse shots are meant to exalt the promptness of the verbal crossfire and BNT2's incredulity.

### *Sequence n°12*

<u>N°</u>	<u>Minutes</u>	<u>Scene set</u>	<u>Camera movements</u>	<u>Angle</u>	<u>Plan</u>
1	01.07.20	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
2	01.07.22-01.07.28	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium

Figure 2.11 Twelfth sequence analysis.

BNT2 has stepped on Miss Shepherd's faeces in the driveway. The shoe in his hand, he

is heading downstairs when, as if he was not expecting him to be there, stops and protrudes his head to tell BNT1 what has just happened. BNT1 finds the humour in the unfortunate event with a witty remark, that is nonetheless linked to its literary activity: “If... when I write about all this, people will say there's too much about shit.”

*Sequence n°13*

<u>N°</u>	<u>Minutes</u>	<u>Scene set</u>	<u>Camera movements</u>	<u>Angle</u>	<u>Plan</u>
1	01.08.55-01.09.16	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
2	01.09.17-01.09.18	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
3	01.09.19-01.09.22	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
4	01.09.23-01.09.24	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
5	01.09.25	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
6	01.09.26-01.09.27	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
7	01.09.28-01.09.30	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
8	01.09.31-01.09.33	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium

*Figure 2.12 Thirteenth sequence analysis.*

This sequence shows preponderantly psychological relevance, the subject of the exchange between the two Bennett being BNT2's pretended nice attitude covered up by his timidity.

*Sequence n°14<sup>131</sup>*

<u>N°</u>	<u>Minutes</u>	<u>Scene set</u>	<u>Camera movements</u>	<u>Angle</u>	<u>Plan</u>
1	01.11.55-01.12.00	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
2	01.12.01-01.12.04	In the driveway	Still	Eye level	Medium
3	01.12.05-01.12.17	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
4	01.12.18-01.12.21	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
-	(01.12.22-01.13.29)	-	-	-	-
5	01.13.30- 01.13.31	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
-	(01.13.32-01.14.00)	-	-	-	-
6	01.14.01-01.14.08	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium

<sup>131</sup>I have chosen to avoid reporting my analysis of the shots from 01.12.22 to 01.13.29 and from 01.13.32 to 01.14.00 for length's sake.

7	01.14.09-01.14.12	Inside his house	Still	High angle	Close up
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Figure 2.13 Fourteenth sequence analysis.

Shot n°5 strongly directs the viewer's gaze, while BNT1's voice off comments on her departure to the day centre. The viewer, in fact, adopts the point of view of BNT1, who is behind the window as usual, and Miss Shepherd's is observed through the panes framed by the glazing bars that exalt her central position and role.

### Sequence n°15

<u>N°</u>	<u>Minutes</u>	<u>Scene set</u>	<u>Camera movements</u>	<u>Angle</u>	<u>Plan</u>
1	01.26.20-01.26.26	Outside	It tilts from right to left	Eye level	Medium
2	01.26.27-01.26.36	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
3	01.26.37-01.26.51	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
4	01.26.52-01.26.56	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
5	01.26.57-01.27.00	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
6	01.27.01-01.27.08	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
7	01.27.09-01.27.13	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
8	01.27.14-01.27.16	In the driveway	Still	Eye level	Medium
9	01.27.17-01.27.21	In the van	Still	High angle	Closing up
10	01.27.22-01.27.28	In the van	Still	Eye level	Medium
11	01.27.29-01.27.49	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
12	01.27.50-01.27.54	Inside his house	Still	Low angle	Medium
13	01.27.55-01.27.59	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
14	28.00.00-28.00.03	Inside his house	Still	Low angle	Medium
15	28.00.04-28.00.11	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
16	28.00.12-28.00.16	Inside his house	Still	Low angle	Medium
17	28.00.17-28.00.22	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium

Figure 2.14 Fifteenth sequence analysis.

Creative issues are raised as soon as the sequence begins. BNT1 admits to have invented certain events, “though much of it [he] could not make up.” Finally, Bennet the writer surrenders and resorts to embellish his story. Shots n°3, 5, 7, 11, 13, 15, and 17 present the same marked features as shot n°5 of the previous sequence. BNT1 narrates the events as

voice-off and, in this touching sequence, the complicity between the two Bennett is underlined in shots n°6 and 11. In fact, BNT1 encourages BNT2 to go outside to face Miss Shepherd's death with a small wave of the head, to which BNT2 obeys immediately. Then, after this ascertainment, BNT2 looks sadly and resigned to BNT1, with whom the viewer shares the perspective, in search of understanding. The viewer has experienced the scene through BNT2's eyes, satisfying his/her concern or macabre curiosity, and has observed this very actions as well as the following necessary arrangements from BNT1 viewpoint.

“She kept herself very much to herself,' Bennett explains. 'But when I was writing or trying to write, it was very often just staring out of the window. And the van was in my eye line.’”<sup>132</sup> This statement layers the massive use of eye level plans in the sequences analysed and, more generally, throughout the film. It is not a mere aesthetic choice, apt to engage the viewer as an equal participant to the exchange; ultimately, the pivotal diegetic point of view is BNT1's. The cornerstone of the entire narration is his desk, the eye through which the viewer participates to the story are his eyes, as he testifies the events noting them down in the journal.

### *Sequence n°16*

<u>N°</u>	<u>Minutes</u>	<u>Scene set</u>	<u>Camera movements</u>	<u>Angle</u>	<u>Plan</u>
1	01.30.35	Cemetery	Still	Eye level	Medium/long
2	01.30.36-01.30.38	Cemetery	Still	Eye level	Medium/long
3	01.30.39-01.30.42	Cemetery	Still	Eye level	Medium
4	01.30.43-01.30.48	Cemetery	Still	Eye level	Medium
5	01.30.49-01.30.51	Cemetery	Still	Eye level	Medium
6	01.30.52-01.31.20	Cemetery	The camera dolls out as the characters move forward	Eye level	Medium
7	01.31.21-01.31.47	Cemetery	Still, after the camera dolls out as the characters move forward, then it tilts from left to right	Eye level	Medium/long
8	01.31.48-01.31.56	Cemetery	Still	Eye level	Medium
9	01.31.57-01.31.58	Cemetery	Still	Eye level	Medium/long

<sup>132</sup> Press Kit, p. 7.

10	01.31.59- 01.32.01	Cemetery	Still	Eye level	Medium
11	01.32.02-01.32.07	Cemetery	Still	Eye level	Medium/long
12	01.32.08-01.32.11	Cemetery	Still	Eye level	Medium/long
13	01.32.12-01.32.16	Cemetery	Still	Eye level	Medium
14	01.32.17-01.32.21	Cemetery	Still	Eye level	Medium/long
15	01.32.22-01.32.26	Cemetery	Still	Eye level	Medium/long
16	01.32.27-01.32.30	Cemetery	Still	Eye level	Long
17	01.32.31-01.32.33	Cemetery	Still	Eye level	Medium
18	01.32.34-01.32.46	Cemetery	Still	Eye level	Long
19	01.32.46-01.32.51	Cemetery	Still	Eye level	Medium
10	01.32.52-01.33.07	Cemetery	Still	Low angle	Long

Figure 2.15 Sixteenth sequence analysis.

After Miss Shepherd's funeral, BNT2 goes to the cemetery and is surprisingly joined by BNT1 and the late old lady. She will introduce them to the motorcyclist that crashed into her van decades before and then leaves the two, in a spectacular ascension.

*Sequence n°17*

<u>N°</u>	<u>Minutes</u>	<u>Scene set</u>	<u>Camera movements</u>	<u>Angle</u>	<u>Plan</u>
1	01.33.23-01.33.42	Inside his house	Still, then dolls back	High angle	From medium to close up
2	01.33.43-01.33.52	Outside	It tilts from right to left	High angle	Long plan
3	01.33.53-01.33.55	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
4	01.33.56-01.34.11	Inside his house	The camera goes up	High level	From close up to medium
5	01.34.12-01.34.22	Inside his house	From up to down, following BNT2's movements	Eye level	Medium
6	01.34.23-01.34.29	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
7	01.34.30-01.34.31	Inside his house	Still, reverse shot	Eye level	Medium
8	01.34.32-01.34.44	Inside his house	It tilts from right to left	High angle	Medium
9	01.34.45-01.34.56	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
10	01.34.57-01.35.00	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
11	01.35.01-01.35.05	Inside his house	The camera follows BNT2's movements	High angle	Medium

12	01.35.06-01.35.08	Inside his house	Still	Eye level	Medium
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Figure 2.16 Seventeenth sequence analysis.

In this last sequence the viewer perceives that time has passed<sup>133</sup>: BNT2 recounts the years spent having Miss Shepherd as a neighbour and the newly published novel *The Lady in the Van* has just been dispatched. The final conversation between the two Bennett summarises the reproaches and the creative issues encountered in 20 years of coexistence. As Bennett's partner enters the house and talks to BNT1, the viewer becomes aware that BNT1 presence is now superfluous, but BNT2 still addresses him: "It's the end of a story, it might make a play. What do you think?"<sup>134</sup>

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133 The screenplay establishes that it is 1990.

Bennett, *The Lady in the Van*, p. 207.

134 Bennett, *The Lady in the Van*, p. 208.

### III *The disruption of reality*

«Truth is stranger than fiction, but it is because  
Fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities;  
Truth isn't.»

Marc Twain, *Following the Equator: A Journey Around the World*

The game of disruptions operated by the novel and the film inevitably affects the reader/viewer's trust in the narrator's good faith. The manipulation of time prevents the story from being true-to-life, just as the filmic division of Alan Bennett into two characters does, and the viewer may wonder the reason behind the need to challenge her/his credulous disposition toward the story. This attitude, however, is not evenly shared between the two works. In fact, the film manages to arouse the audience's curiosity concerning the truthfulness of the events and the characters depicted in a more effective way than the memoir. Conversely, the latter explicitly aims to be a faithful account of Bennett's daily quarrels with Miss Shepherd. The writer's inner conflict, emerging from the desire of faithfulness and the urge to invent, is often brought up throughout the film as a reflection on the role and the freedom of the author. In his 1994 postscript Bennett states: "The progression seemed so neat that I felt, when I first wrote it up, that to emphasize it would cast doubt on the truth of my account, or at least to make it seem sentimental or melodramatic."<sup>135</sup>

I shall return briefly to the sequences n°10, n°11 and n°15 analysed in the previous chapter. There, the issue of authorial liberty is explicitly raised by BNT1 who ponders on his agency as in sequence n°10 in which, contemplating Miss Shepherd's death, he exclaims: "[...] Still, now she's gone I can make it up. Narrative freedom. Whoopee!"<sup>136</sup> Also, BNT1 deliberately provokes BNT2 in order to make *him* reflect on the possibility of inventing. Sequence n°11 present a vivid and rapid dialogue that never happened in reality, where Miss

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135 Alan Bennet, *The Lady in the Van*, (London: Profile Books Ltd, 2015) p. 75.

136 Alan Bennett, *The Lady in the Van*, p. 174.

Shepherd accuses BNT2 to exploit his own mother as a source of inspiration for his plays. BNT2, exasperated, bursts: “She didn't say this”, but BNT1's the witty remark leaves him speechless: “No, but why shouldn't she?”<sup>137</sup> As the story develops, BNT1 and BNT2 gain confidence on their narration and they let the viewer know that they may have manipulated or invented altogether certain facts, even though the viewer is not allowed to know where the author has actually intervened and how significantly. In sequence n°15 BNT2 admits to have sometimes invented part of the story, “To tell it I have occasionally had to invent, though much of it one could not make up.”<sup>138</sup> The director Nicholas Hytner sums Bennett's internal ambivalence observing that “Alan has written into the screenplay not just his gradual and reluctant recognition that his best subject was living on his doorstep, but his struggle to tell her story without occasionally inventing it.”<sup>139</sup>

The hesitation felt by the viewer whether to trust or not the filmic facts is constructed from the very beginning of the film. During the transition between T1 and T2, when the twittering of bird fades and the piano sonata becomes audible, the sentence “A Mostly True Story” appears on the screen. The viewer is puzzled. Over the course of the opening sequence s/he followed the chasing and did not questioned the truthfulness and the exactitude of the event; now, this certainty is challenged, the immediate and reflexive acceptance of story as it is presented before his/her eyes has vanished. This implicit pact constituted by the suspension of disbelief is broken and from this moment on the viewer is suspicious and carefully ponders the value of the facts and persons depicted, keeping in mind that a part of what is told is, in fact, the outcome of reasoned artistic choices: the event does not “narrate itself”, there are some unrevealed influences of the writer, or the director, that intervene on the story. Manifestly, there are in any case, but the viewer, as said, willingly accepts to ignore such

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137*Ibidem.*, p. 178.

138*Ibidem.*, p. 199.

139*Ibidem.*, p. 5.

basic truth that underlies and constitutes every film or literary work.

The aforementioned sentence, nevertheless, is not the sole example of deliberate provocation of the audience's credulity. As a matter of fact, the presence of two Alan Bennett, one embodying the canonical character experiencing and interacting and the other personifying the reflective and artistic process that a writer undergoes in order to create, is indeed troubling at first, and inevitably instigates the viewer's skepticism. Again, the same applies to sequences n°10, n°11 and n°15. The increasing sense of untruthfulness that derives from the inventive freedom experienced by BNT1 culminates with Miss Shepherd's ascension. Following her funeral, BNT2 goes to the cemetery for the burial and to homage his eccentric neighbour one last time. Much to his astonishment, Miss Shepherd arrives demanding his attention, momentarily diverted by an attractive undertaker nearby, and she is promptly joined by BNT1. The three, then, walk through the cemetery guided by the old lady who puts forward extravagant proposals of turning the van in a place of pilgrimage and to offer the nun the proceeds of the activity, as her personal form of revenge against them. Finally, she meets with a young biker, who turns out to be the man that crashed into her van years before, and greets the two Bennett with a last laugh, but not before (having made) a final demand: an ascension.

A certain degree of verisimilitude is achieved through the coherent attitude of the characters, the two Bennett contradicting one another and Miss Shepherd being sharp; it is obviously impossible, nonetheless, that a similar situation may ever occur in *real* life. Thus, the importance of this sequence, amusing indeed for the viewer, transcends its role in the structure of the plot and imposes narratological deliberations on its precise function as well as on the purpose of BNT1's arrival in the outside world. In this scene, the writer demonstrates to have finally gained and assumed his freedom of invention, and manages to detach his work

from reality and truthfulness. “Well, it's a thought. She's dead now. I can do what I want with her.”<sup>140</sup> Nonetheless, this statement reveals itself to be not entirely true, or rather, incorrect: he surely can do what he wishes, but he eventually decides to please Miss Shepherd giving her what she demanded. It is also relevant to notice that BNT2 still has no power over the story, in fact, it is BNT1 who acquiesces and concedes the old lady to ascend into heaven (BNT1: “Well, she wanted an ascension. Let's answer her prayers.”<sup>141</sup>). So, if there is a degree of subversion, BNT1's appearance in the outside world and Miss Shepherd paranormal presence, the pivotal structure of relationships constituting the film is maintained. This raises a narratological issue: BNT1 performs the *narrating I*, - the living room is the only place where he can act and this isolation makes him a peculiar heterodiegetic narrator, omniscient but not intervening; however, as he “jumps” in the outside world, BNT1 becomes a homodiegetic narrator, in this case, a character with an agency<sup>142</sup>.

G rard Genette has defined this phenomenon as metalepsis, namely, “any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a meta- diegetic universe, etc.), or the inverse”<sup>143</sup> In *Scene Shift, Metalepsis, and the Metaleptic Mode*, Monica Fludernik evaluates Genette's analysis of the notion and individuates five different types of metalepsis that she subsequently divides in two intersecting categories: authorial, rhetorical and ontological, and real and metaphoric. The first demarcation refers to the opening of “a passage between levels that result in their interpenetration, or mutual contamination”, that constitutes the definition of ontological metalepsis, or, as in rhetorical metalepsis only the opening of “a small window that allows a quick glance across levels, but the window closes after a few sentences, and the operation

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140 *Ibidem.*, p. 203.

141 *Ibidem.*, p. 205.

142 The doubling of Alan Bennett is the device that prevents the narrator from being autodiegetic.

143 Monica Fludernik, « Scene Shift, Metalepsis, and the Metaleptic Mode », *Style*, vol. 37, n 22, winter 2003, p. 382.

ends up reasserting the existence of the boundaries.”<sup>144</sup> Authorial metalepses, on the contrary, refers to the alleged agency of the author into his/her own story. Fludernik also distinguishes between real and metaphoric metalepsis, that is, “between an actual crossing of *ontological* boundaries and a merely imaginative transcendence of narrative levels.”<sup>145</sup> According to Bell and Alber, authorial and rhetorical metalepsis should be considered as metaphoric ones since “no actual boundary crossing takes place.”<sup>146</sup>

The first of the five types identified is the authorial metalepsis: the author is fictitiously considered responsible for the action s/he describes and the sentence “Virgil has Dido die” is taken as an example<sup>147</sup> The second and third types, on the other hand, belong to the ontological category. She defines the second kind as a narratorial metalepsis that consists of “the literal move of the narrator to a lower narrative level of embedded story world, or of a character to a lower (intra)diegetic level.”<sup>148</sup>, while the third one is a lectorial metalepsis that “implicates the narratee on the story level or the protagonist as narratee on a superior (discourse) level”, that is, “an embedded narrative contains characters who are also the narratees listening to the narration of this embedded tale.”<sup>149</sup> The fourth type is described as “a metaleptic move by the narrator during a pause in the discourse”<sup>150</sup> She calls this kind of metalepsis as the “meanwhile” metalepsis. In fact, “the projected simultaneity [that] metaphorically moves the narrator into the realm of the fictional world”, when the action stops and this pause is used to give additional information on the story or the characters, this isochrony, to use her own words, is “where the boundary crossing might be located.”<sup>151</sup> This

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144 Marie-Laure Ryan cited in Alice Bell, Jan Alber, « Ontological Metalepsis and Unnatural Narratology », *Journal of Narrative Theory*, vol. 42, n° 2, Summer 2012, p. 167

145 Fludernik, « Scene Shift, Metalepsis, and the Metaleptic Mode », p. 396.

146 Bell, Alber, « Ontological Metalepsis and Unnatural Narratology », p. 167.

147 Fludernik, « Scene Shift, Metalepsis, and the Metaleptic Mode », p. 383-384.

148 *Ibidem.*, p. 384.

149 *Ibidem.*, p. 385.

150 Fludernik, « Scene Shift, Metalepsis, and the Metaleptic Mode », p. 386.

151 *Ibidem.*, pp. 386-387.

definition could fit the function of the I-past tense of the detached paragraphs of the memoir. Those narrative pauses are taken in order to expand the subject of the previous or following entry with new details. However, it may be inappropriate to define such paragraphs as interferences in the story, as it is in the most striking cases with Sterne and Diderot (two of the cited examples for this type of metalepsis), since the overall rhythm of the story is preserved and the paragraphs have a narrative purpose. Finally, the fifth one is taken into account but she refrains from considering it a proper metalepsis and illustrates this final type quoting Genette's work: it "consists of telling as if it were diegetic (as if it were on the same narrative level as its context) something that has nevertheless been presented as (or can easily be guessed to be) metadiegetic in its principle or, if one prefers, in its origin."<sup>152</sup>

This excursus was a necessary premise for the analysis of the narratological relevance of BNT1's appearance at the cemetery. Miss Shepherd's death triggers two processes: the elaboration of her life that leads to the conception of the memoir, and the possibility to invent or manipulate part of her story. The latter results in BNT1 exiting from his living room. He embodies the critical half of the writer, the one that notes, reflects, composes, orders, and refines, and his exclusive relationship with BNT2 as well as his settlement at the desk under the window seems not only logical, but also necessary. Being BNT1 a projection of BNT2's inner thoughts and conflicts on the writing process, the sole location where their conversation could ever take place is the living room. The disruption of this scheme corresponds to the narrator's intrusion in the narration, that is, a metalepsis. BNT1 presence in the graveyard can only be described using the same metaphorical terms used in the definition of this concept: to move into, to jump, a crossing of boundaries. Firstly, a paramount distinction should be underlined: BNT1 is not a filmic metalepsis, but the embodiment of a literary metalepsis<sup>153</sup>.

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152 *Ibidem.*, p. 388.

153 In his essay "Metalepsis as a Transgeneric and Transmedial Phenomenon", Werner Wolf exemplifies the equivalence of literary metalepsis in films with the mise en abyme of Woody Allen's film *The Purple Rose of*

He is a diegetic character, therefore the move from the extradiegetic to the diegetic level that constitutes the *conditio sine qua non* of metalepsis does not take place. However, one may venture a parallel: he is not a narrator who descends in the character's world, for he is not the filmic narrator; still, fulfilling the role of the literary narrator of the memoir whose development is at the centre of the film, he *is* a narrator that “escapes” his level to meet with the characters he observes and writes about.<sup>154</sup> The verisimilitude of the narration, therefore, is challenged; surprisingly, though, it displays “illusionistic rather than anti-illusionistic effects”, as Fludernik explains, its main purpose being the engagement of the reader (the viewer in this case).<sup>155</sup> Also, the narrating Bennett acting in the real, outside world unveils the fictional nature of the narration and allowing Miss Shepherd to have her ascension, he demonstrates the decisional power over the story and the plot lies in the narrator's, and, ultimately, in the author's hands<sup>156</sup>. Nevertheless, “that he does engage in these dialogues at all and responds to his characters’ criticisms suggest that the characters do hold some power in their relationships with him and that he is not an omnipotent author.”<sup>157</sup>

Miss Shepherd: “This thing you're trying to write, you could pump it up a bit. [...]

Why would you just let me die? I'd like to go up into heaven. An ascension, possibly. A transfiguration.”

BNT1: “Well, that's not my kind of thing”<sup>158</sup>

Despite being unrealistic, this supernatural request is coherent with Miss Shepherd's behaviour throughout her life: despotic, and demanding.

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*Cairo*, a situation that is not comparable to the one taken into account in this paragraph.

Werner Wolf, “Metalepsis as a Transgeneric and Transmedial Phenomenon. A Case Study of the Possibilities of 'Exporting' Narratological Concepts,” in Jan Christoph Meister, Tom Kindt, Wilhelm Schernus (eds.), *Narratology Beyond Literary Criticism: Mediality, Disciplinarity* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), p. 97.

154 It is fundamental to remember the fact that he cannot be seen or heard by anyone except BNT2, until the meeting with Miss Shepherd at the cemetery.

155 Fludernik, « Scene Shift, Metalepsis, and the Metaleptic Mode », p. 384.

156 *Ibidem*.

157 Bell, Alber, « Ontological Metalepsis and Unnatural Narratology », p. 184.

158 Alan Bennett, *The Lady in the Van*, p. 204.

A problem, however, arises as soon as one tries to determine what kind of metalepsis BNT embodies. The attempt to circumscribe its characteristics unveils the ambiguous nature of BNT's presence that shares different traits with more than one type of metalepsis. In fact, the disclosure of the fictive quality of the events is a feature of the authorial metalepsis, whereas the presence of the narrator in the character's world is the definition of the second type of metalepsis. This appearance underlines BNT1's role as a reflection on the role of the writer: s/he cannot escape from reality, he must enter it and live it in order to write about it, despite the manichaeian representation of Alan Bennett, split between an experiencing self and a narrating self.

The last sequence of the film calls into question again the verisimilitude of the film and its relationship with truthfulness and invention. The real Alan Bennett cycles down Gloucester Crescent to join the troupe and the cast ready to shoot the very last scene of the film itself. As a final homage to Miss Shepherd, the filmic BNT2 pronounces a few words to celebrate the laying of a blue plaque dedicated to her, the lady in the van. This filmic *mise en abyme* defies one last time the suspension of disbelief. As in metalepsis, this narrative device consists of different ontological and temporal levels that intersect, and the viewer partakes in the making of the film s/he is watching<sup>159</sup>. This fictive participation enables the viewer to enter the realm of reality while being in a fictional diegesis and to operate a temporal shift back to a moment situated between the facts narrated and the contemporaneity of the cinematic viewing.

The lively game of illusion and disillusion, of reality and fiction played in the film is a feature that is absent in the literary source. Conversely, the author's concern for the fidelity of his account is raised several times, one example being the 1994 postscript. The use of honest

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159 Wolf, "Metalepsis as a Transgeneric and Transmedial Phenomenon", pp. 89-90.

expressions like “I suppose I thought”, “I recall nothing of the exchange. What I do remember [...]” convey to the reader the feeling of a scrupulous description of situations, events and dialogues. Moreover, the journal as a literary genre and the first person narration usually persuade the reader of the trustworthiness of the narrator and to believe that his/her point of view is objective and reliable. This feeling of soundness is accentuated by the knowledge of the inspiration of the story: Miss Shepherd really existed and the author has actually kept a diary during all those years. This element could certainly be belied, nonetheless the concreteness of the information given by the narrator (precise dates, the neighbours as witnesses) and the awareness that his source is his own life induce an immediate trust. In addition, he is a passive onlooker of Miss Shepherd as the reader is. Alan Bennett can only chronicle her daily extravagancies just as the reader is unable to invent the story herself/himself, being his role to read only what is disclosed before her/his eyes.

Miss Shepherd deceives the reader through Alan Bennett's memoir. The narrator tells *his* true story of her, but the old lady is often contradictory in her explanations and her eccentricity does not inspire any confidence. The truly unreliable narrator is Miss Shepherd herself in the “narration” of her life. With this expression I want to underline the active role that the lady took in recreating and reshaping her past through her elusiveness and fragmentary anecdotes, distorted on purpose or by her partiality in evaluating what concerns herself directly. Alan Bennet, the author and the narrator, retraces her life only after her death, thanks to Bennett's encounter with her brother and the cleaning of her van.

### *III.1 Verisimilitude and engagement*

The narratological devices described, metalepsis and mise en abyme, actively affect

the viewer's engagement. The narratorial metalepsis plays with the suspension of disbelief pushing the limit of reader's and viewer's credulity to the point that what should be acknowledge as the supreme disillusion, the appearance of the narrator in the diegetic world that reveals the fictiveness of the entire narration, proves to enhance the illusion instead. The distinction between “real vs fiction and actual present vs evoked past”<sup>160</sup> intrigues the viewer as the disruption of the story in a rearranged plot that exploits temporal shifts to catch the viewer's attention.

This sequence is a unique shot (1.35.08-1.35.58) that follows Alan Bennett's bicycle ride to the set and shows the shooting of the last scene. The viewer sees the real writer approaching while the camera follows her/his eyes moving from a high angle to a eye level angle once he has arrived; then, it tilts to the left and dollies in straight into the house garden, focusing the attention on the scene that the troupe is about to shot. The viewer, therefore, is external to the scene as a curious bystander that has ended up in that street and decided to stop fascinated by the situation.

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160 Wolf, “Metalepsis as a Transgeneric and Transmedial Phenomenon”, pp. 89-90.



## *Conclusion*

To conclude, in this dissertation I have aimed to demonstrate that the filmic disruptions of time, the self, and reality are an attempt to translate the creative writing process along with its ideological choices that every writer, Alan Bennett in our case, faces. The “mostly true story” of the old lady that has been living for fifteen years in her yellow van, parked in Bennett's yard, is the inspiration for a analysis of how a writer works and how s/he chooses her/his subjects.

In the first chapter I have taken into account the temporal disruption present both in the memoir and in its filmic adaptation. An analysis of the macro-punctuation shows that the two works share the same overall structure, subdivided into six sections determined by an equivalent number of temporal shifts. The memoir starts in medias res (T1), then goes back a few years in order to present Miss Shepherd to the reader (T2) and to set the story (T3). As the memoir takes the form of a journal, the narration proceeds chronologically with the exceptions of the detached paragraphs that seldom anticipate events and situations (T4). The last part of the memoir is devoted to the narration of Miss Shepherd life before the car crash and how Bennett discovered this information (T5). The 1994 postscript, where more details on Miss Shepherd's life are given and on his work as a writer, constitutes the sixth and final section (T6). Similarly the film is divided in six parts: the first one is the car crash; the openings, set in the thirties, are the second section, while the third is the second false start in medias res, that is, the sequence that comments on Miss Shepherd's toilet arrangements and odour; then, the narration develops chronologically and section five corresponds to the filmic mise in abyme. The final section is represented by the end titles that bring the viewer back again to the thirties. In addition, time manipulation, more than just translating the episodic

structure of the novel in the film, it effectively engages the reader/viewer through a sapient game of expectations and revelations.

In the second chapter, I undertook the evaluation of the alternation between present and past tenses which results in the division between experiencing and narrating sections. I have then aimed to demonstrate that the I using the present tense in the novel becomes the experiencing character in the film, and the I the using past tense becomes the narrating character. Then, the analysis of the punctuation of all the sequences featuring the two Bennett has shown the engaging relevance of the dialogic duo. In fact, empathy proves to play a determinant role in the viewer's participation to the scene presented and it is achieved through the calculated positioning of the camera and the use of reverse and semi-subjective shots.

Finally, in the third chapter I compared the opposite intentions of the memoir and the film in terms of fidelity. In fact, Bennett confesses his fear of not being believed because the perfect narrative timing of certain events that happened and that described in the memoir. The almost theatrical death of Miss Shepherd may be taken as an example since it seems staged indeed. Conversely, the filmic adaptation constantly challenges the viewer's credulity with many reminders of the fictionality of the story: the title "a mostly true story", the ascension, and the final *mise en abyme*.

Further considerations and analyses should be carried out thanks to a thorough analysis of Bennett's diaries donated to the Bodleian Library. These texts may enlighten us on the creative process he underwent more than a mere evaluation made a posteriori and based on a finite work: the process itself is traceable on the margins of the pages of his manuscripts. Also, it would be interesting to evaluate the theatrical play and to compare this first adaptation to the filmic one, and to its literary source. The comparative study of characters and time manipulation in the dramatic domain, as I have attempted to do taking into account the filmic

medium, should lead to a challenging debate: what are the changes in the representation of Miss Shepherd and the two Bennett if one moves them from the stage to the set and viceversa?



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