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Mind, Your Own Business:
The Use Of Psychic Distance In Cultivating Authorial Omniscience

I. INTRODUCTION

Psychic distance, that is, the distance the reader feels between himself and the story or character (Gardner 111), is just one tool that an author has when seeking a reader's engagement. However, it is an important tool because managing psychic distance deftly rewards both author and reader and mismanagement can seriously impair the reader's enjoyment. A number of contemporary dystopian novels employ some form of third-person omniscience to various effects.[1] Of these texts, I will analyze four of them[2] to review both traditional and non-traditional uses of psychic distance and to comment on the relative success of each text in achieving the desired effect.

The texts under scrutiny, despite their different uses of psychic distance, share some affinities that make them ripe for this type of analysis. First, each author -- Brockmeier, Chabon, McCarthy, and Whitehead -- are well-known, well-published "literary" authors, meaning not writers of what may be termed genre fiction; each writer has been recognized for outstanding literary contributions to American letters. Second, the dystopian novel brings to the forefront one of any author's fundamental tensions – how to balance world-building with character-development. The dystopian novel requires a near-total reimagining of the world. Third, and finally, all of these novels are products of the twenty-first century, making them relevant for assessing modern literary trends.

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[1] As argued in Section II, third-person-limited, for the purposes of this paper is a type of omniscience.

[2] Brockmeier's *The Brief History of the Dead*; Chabon's *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*; McCarthy's *The Road*; and Whitehead's *Zone One*.

The following section will set up a critical framework for analyzing psychic distance in the context of creating authorial omniscience. Section III then analyzes each text, using not only qualitative indicators but through the limited use of statistical data, and compares the uses and relative degrees of success in managing psychic distance across all texts. A brief conclusion follows in Section IV.

II. CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF PSYCHIC DISTANCE

Managing psychic distance is the key to unlocking a rich narrative perspective called "authorial omniscience" (Gardner 157-58).[3] Authorial omniscience, as defined by Gardner, is used by the "noblest authors" and is defined by the ability to speak in the narrator's voice for the relation of necessary background and objective observations and to dive into the third-person-limited perspective when the narrative presence would be intrusive (76). Robert Boswell is speaking about the same type of omniscience, when he coins the term "third person unlimited," defining it as a narrator with the power to (1) dip into the "head or heart" of any character he pleases; (2) move freely through time; (3) make bold, universal assertions; (4) serve as an arbiter of the story, helping the reader interpret, process, and judge the events that unfold (65). Richard Russo uses a similar definition (11).

Wood (7-8) and Russo (11) acknowledge that third-person-limited is also a form of omniscience. This type of omniscience is more restricted than authorial omniscience in that it restricts the narrator's ability to dip into the consciousness of only one character, a narrative stance that can be seen in the some of the subjects of this paper, namely by Chabon, Whitehead, and Brockmeier.[4]

Authorial omniscience, in the hands of a deft writer, is a powerful tool. It permits the author to be omniscient and partial simultaneously, or, in other words, to draw attention to the narrator-character gap while simultaneously narrowing it (Reiken 10). This gives a pleasing texture to a work that allows for characterization of both the narrator and subject to occur while allowing the author to shape the work from an objective perspective (10). Authorial omniscience offers an advantage over other points of view by allowing the narrative to "rise above the pettiness and unseemly familiarity" of the third-person-limited and to avoid the "savage sparsity" of the third-person-objective (Gardner 157). Still, the narrator retains the benefits of both, borrowing the potential for both efficiency and pleasant digression inherent to the objective perspective and the stylistic freedom to adopt the heteroglossia from the internal thoughts and feelings of the characters (Russo 15), all while enjoying the dramatic irony that results from the juxtaposition of

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[3]This is also the *de facto* conclusion of James Wood, who, through other terms, states that free indirect style is at its best when "barely visible," implying the ideal narrative form gives in neither to pure objective omniscience nor to stream-of-consciousness. James Wood, *How Fiction Works* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008) 10.

[4]Brockmeier uses a close third-person in the Antarctic chapters of his novel but tends toward a more authorial omniscience in the City of the Dead chapters.

the two (Wood 12-26; Boswell 77-79). In short, when done well, the authorial-omniscient perspective provides the author with the benefits of two narrative stances without their attendant limitations.

Psychic distance is a crucial component to authorial omniscience. All of the definitions of omniscience above explicitly list the ability to dip in and out of one or more characters' consciousness as a criterion.   It is a particularly crucial distinction to Wood, who sees the management of psychic distance itself as a kind of narrative omniscience akin to "secret sharing" between the narrator and character (7-8). To Wood, a successful narrative with this kind of omniscience must create and bridge the narrator-character gap. Gardner patently mentions management of psychic distance as an obstacle to successful implementation of the authorial-omniscient narrative stance.

The experts above list (or obliquely refer to) management of psychic distance as a core tenet of successful authorial omniscience because when it is implemented well, it unlocks many benefits for the author, and when mishandled, it can seriously impair a piece of fiction.[5] Perhaps the most immediate benefit of successfully managing psychic distance is the flexibility it affords the author. The author can allow the character's voice to take over when the narrator's presence would be intrusive (Gardner 76), when it would animate the text stylistically (Reiken 8; Russo 15), or when it would simply help to characterize the owner of the voice (Reiken 8). For example, Brockmeier can let his clear love of language fly when subsuming the disparate thoughts and voices of his characters, and Chabon can allow his narrator's hard-boiled voice to aptly characterize Landsman.

A second benefit of layering a text with both narrative and character voices is the potential emergence of dramatic irony, that is where the reader learns something the character cannot know (Wood 12-26). While this is attainable from other perspectives, giving the narrator freedom to reference information the character cannot know clearly makes the task easier.[6] Boswell notes that dramatic irony is a useful tool for raising large questions about personal, community, and cultural values (77-79).[7]

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[5]The benefits and consequences that flow from how well an author has managed psychic distance applies to the third-person-limited perspective as well.

[6]Whether easier is better is outside the scope of this paper. It suffices to say that very pleasing dramatic ironies can arise from effective use of the authorial-omniscient perspective. *See Brief History of the Dead*, where the protagonist's ignorance to the existence of the city of the dead despite her very direct impact on it provides much of the momentum for the novel.

[7]Though Boswell is speaking about the polyphony that arises from narrative shifts in tone, registers, and perspectives, the same benefits arise from shifting psychic distances, which get at the core of Wood's argument in favor of the resultant dramatic irony: it allows the reader to see through a character's eyes, while being encouraged to see more than the character can see. p. 11.

While the dramatic irony that results from the juxtaposition of the narrative and character voices, the existence of the gap, in and of itself, provides a benefit. The author is given greater freedom to follow deeply flawed characters without subsuming the flaws himself (Reiken 8). For example, in *Blood Meridian*, Cormac McCarthy presents a racist borderland, deploying the word "nigger" a number of times. McCarthy's narrator and character are sufficiently distinct from each other, and from himself, that it is unfair to levy the complaint of racism against the author. This distance is also what keeps *Lolita* (though first-person) from becoming pornography (Reiken 8) and Murakami's *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* from devolving into pretentious showiness of cultural awareness.

While successfully executed psychic-distance management provides the narrative with a great deal of textual richness, mishandling psychic distance can sap the life from a story. Gardner points out that uncontrolled shifts in psychic distance distract from the "vivid and continuous dream" (111). He defines "vivid" as a clear picture of what is happening, who is doing what, and how and why they are doing it (31). Without this clear picture, the author risks confusing, dissipating, or blocking the emotions and judgments of the reader. The dream must be continuous because repeated interruption diminishes the flow of a story. Mismanagement of psychic distance can provide a clear break in the continuity of a story, as the reader tries to understand why such a jump was made, and it can muddle the vividness of a piece. As a result, the fiction may be impaired or even ruined (Gardner 112). Brockmeier may impair his story, particularly in the Antarctic section, precisely for this reason: he jumps quickly from the objective perspective to a deeply internal perspective, and the transitions are not always smooth. However, traditional notions of psychic distance[8] can be subverted intentionally for effect (Gardner 112). For example, Whitehead (*Zone One*) and McCarthy (*The Road*) both intentionally choose to remain at a relatively fixed, removed perspective for the duration of their novels. Their reasoning for this is discussed in Section III.

Reiken analyzes failure to create and manage psychic distance (to him, "merger") at great length, concluding that the ultimate result is flat, uninteresting characters. This may be a one of the consequences of Whitehead's narrative choice in *Zone One*. Merger also results in imitative fallacy. However, authors can consciously choose to merge narrator and character for effect, as Chabon does with the uncannily similar voices of *Yiddish Policemen's Union*'s narrator and Landsman.

Psychic distance is important, as the backbone to the traditional use of the third-person-limited perspective, and as a key criterion to unlocking the richness of authorial omniscience. The books that comprise the subject of this paper have consciously used (or consciously not used) psychic distance to varying effect. The next section will attempt to measure and quantify the use of psychic distance in a few of these texts in order to provide a richer analysis of the texts and to find patterns between them.

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[8] Long and medium shots for the beginning of a novel, a little zoomed in for high-intensity scenes, backing up for transitions, and zooming in further yet for the climax.

III. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF DYSTOPIAN TEXTS

This section proceeds in the following order: (1) a brief description of the methodology employed in performing the statistical analysis of the five works under scrutiny, (2) a review of the findings for each of the five works, and (3) a comparative review of the texts.

A. METHODOLOGY

The sample for this study was the first fifty sentences of five texts, each narrated in the third person. The first fifty sentences were chosen on the bases of (1) consistency between samples, and (2) representativeness of the larger text. In order to draw any valid conclusions between texts, the samples had to be of the same size (fifty sentences) and from the same place in the texts, lest my biases influence the sampling. That the fifty sentences came from the beginning of the text instead of some other point was in hopes that the author would set the tone for the entire work, including in the use of psychic distance, at the outset of the novel. Though one of the samples is notably not representative (Chapter Three from *Brief History of the Dead*), the concern for consistent sampling prevails.

This study measured psychic distance on a sentence-by-sentence basis, using the proportion of inflected words as a proxy, inflected words defined for the purposes of this paper as words lifted directly from a character's consciousness. After transcribing the first fifty sentences of each text, I divided the number of inflected words in each sentence by the total number of words in each sentence, resulting in the proportion of inflected words in decimal form. Sentences were then categorized into buckets and assigned what I have termed "Zoom Levels" on the basis of their quotients. Sentences with proportions greater than .67 were assigned a Zoom Level of 3, greater than .33 but less than or equal to .67 a Zoom Level of 2, greater than 0 but less than or equal to .33 a Zoom Level of 1, and equal to 0 a Zoom Level of 0.

In order to track patterns of psychic movement, I then measured the change in Zoom Level from one sentence to the next by recording the absolute value of the difference between a sentence's Zoom Level and the Zoom Level of the sentence prior, the resulting difference called "Zoom Delta." With each sentence assigned a Zoom Level and each sentence starting with sentence two assigned a Zoom Delta, I was able to quantify the metrics with frequencies, averages, and standard deviations. Also, from the transcription, I was able to do some ancillary statistical research by tracking the frequency of polysyllabic words and various sentence lengths.

B. ZOOM-LEVEL ANALYSIS

Zoom-Level analysis revealed several patterns within texts that helped add numerical support to qualitative assertions about the narrative voice. It also revealed some common patterns among texts. However, the limitations of Zoom-Level analysis as a tool to measure an author's success quickly became apparent.

This section will explore the results of the analysis for each text individually and then turn to the implications of the results in the aggregate.

1. Brockmeier - *Brief History of the Dead*, Chapter 2

Brief History of the Dead is a fantastical novel from Kevin Brockmeier that explores the dystopian by imagining a world that is a type of holding place for the dead, a place where the deceased continues to exist until the last person with a memory of the deceased dies. The novel alternates between chapters that explore this fanciful world and chapters that follow the Antarctic expedition of the unwitting last survivor on Earth. The alternating sections each present their own tonal and stylistic differences. They also treat psychic distance quite differently, as this section and the next will show.

Chapter 2 of Brockmeier's book focuses on an isolated character in a barren, static landscape. This presents notable challenges for an author, as the reader must be entertained and the author cannot lean as heavily on character-to-character interaction (including dialogue), character-setting interaction, or pure description of the setting. However, in an introductory chapter -- as Chapter 2 is for the Antarctic portion of Brockmeier's novel -- the latter two of the issues are mitigated since the author must describe the place where the story takes place, no matter how barren and lifeless. In the case of the text at hand, Brockmeier also deftly began this story arc in a deteriorating research station, which provides ample fodder for description. Nonetheless, Brockmeier still must deal with the lack of character-to-character interaction, a problem seen in several of the assigned novels this semester (Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, McCarthy's *The Road* (see analysis, *infra*), and half of the chapters in Murakami's *Hard Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*).

On the book level, Brockmeier compensates for this with a fascinating premise and by alternating with chapters set in a wholly unique and imaginary world and a larger cast of characters. On the chapter level, Brockmeier compensates by exploring the interiority of the main character. He uses her memories and thought processes in several ways. First, he uses interiority to show the circumstances that led to her current predicament (e.g., The wind had driven the temperature above freezing for a day or two -- the same freak wind that was slowly melting the ice shelf out from under them -- and the mass of snow and ice had slipped from the bowl of the array in one giant chunk, taking the antenna along with it . . . That was it. That was all that had happened. The whole thing was unbelievably stupid."). Second, he uses interiority to travel to other landscapes from her memory (e.g., "Wasn't there an old television commercial that showed a family of monkeys sharing a bottle of Coca-Cola at Christmas? She was pretty sure she had remembered seeing something like that when she was a little girl."). Third, Brockmeier uses interiority to answer questions lingering from the alternate world (e.g., in response to the implied question of who the journalist in the alternating chapters is, we have the following sentence: "Her first lover had been a journalism professor, and she was well aware of the subtle ways that newspaper editors contrived to mock the stories they found absurd."). Fourth, he uses interiority to allow the reader to develop a sense of intimacy with her. The example illustrating the second use does double duty here, also giving the reader a sense of her childhood.

The Zoom-Level analysis bears out this focus on interiority. The Averages Table (Exhibit A: Fig. 3) shows that the Antarctica sample has the highest average Zoom Level at 1.54. With the exception of the second Brockmeier chapter, this average is twice that of any other text.

Additionally, the Frequency Table (Exhibit A: Fig. 1) reveals, not surprisingly, that Brockmeier spends more time at Zoom Level 3 in this chapter than any other author.

Another pattern in this chapter emerges from scrutiny of the Frequency Table: over 75% of the sentences are spent at either Zoom Level 0 or Zoom Level 3. This is unsurprising, as it reflects the entire sample's preference to narrate from Zoom Level 0 the majority of the time, with Zoom Level 3 as the second most frequent psychic distance employed. Brockmeier simply reverses this preference and follows suit in using Zoom Levels 1 and 2 sparingly. However, the effect is to give the chapter a bi-polar feel, defined by wide swings from objective description to near stream-of-consciousness narration.

These swings create an odd type of stasis, where little subtlety is felt in the use of psychic distance. When compared against the critical framework laid out in the previous section, we can see two places where Brockmeier's writing in these sections brings up questions. Wood argued for subtlety in using free indirect style, indeed for it to be "barely visible," and as the Movement Chart for Chapter 2 shows, Brockmeier's zooming is quite visible. Additionally, as Gardner warns, unexplained jumps disrupt the continuity of the fictional dream.
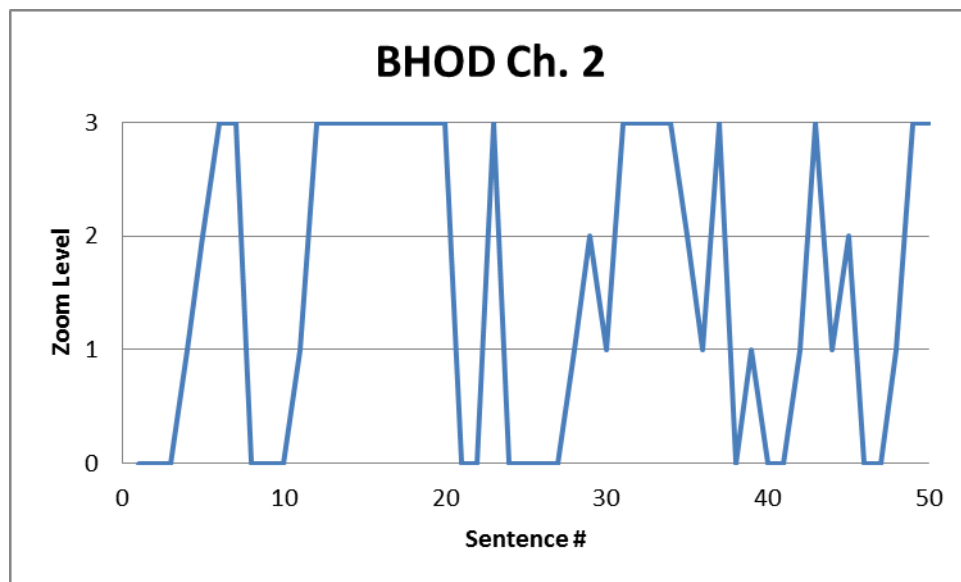

Figure - Movement Chart for Chapter 2

As we'll see, while Brockmeier faces some of the same issues in Chapter 3, he attenuates the wildly swinging feel present in Chapter 2.

2. Brockmeier - *Brief History of the Dead*, Chapter 3

As with the Antarctic Sample, Brockmeier begins Chapter 3 ("COD Sample") with an isolated character, limiting the possibility for character-to-character interaction. However, Brockmeier's obstacles are less imposing, as this chapter is set in a fanciful world that is facing a unique problem (even by the rules of that world). This premise gives Brockmeier more material for description, and the uniqueness of the world distracts the reader from any stasis in psychic distance. But since the main character is isolated, Brockmeier still leans heavily on interiority, in

this case providing background information for the character and the typical goings on of the city. For example, Brockmeier writes, "In all his years in the city, this was the first time such a thing had happened. Who or what had taken everybody he didn't know. But that wasn't the question that was bothering him. The question that was bothering him was, Why hadn't it taken him as well?"

Once again, the analysis reflects this preference toward interiority, with the COD Sample's average Zoom Level of 1.52 more than twice that of any of the non-Brockmeier samples. Following from that, the Frequency Table shows that Brockmeier continues to operate at Zoom Level 3 more than any other author, at the expense of Zoom Level 0. Significantly, Brockmeier has dialed back the in this regard from the previous chapter, logging a 30% reduction in the frequency of sentences at the highest Zoom Level. This reduction, however, is not as large as it seems, as three of the thirteen occurrences of Zoom Level 2 have ratios of 67% (the threshold between Zoom Levels 2 and 3) and another four have ratios at or above 50%. In these cases, an extra inflected word or two would change the classification. Still, the chart shows that closer inspection is warranted, and that inspection reveals that there is a significant reduction in sentences that are 100% inflected, sixteen in the Antarctic Sample compared to only seven in the COD Sample.

The Movement Chart for Chapter 3 shows a markedly different pattern. In place of the wild swinging from the Antarctic Sample, we see a more pleasing shape that reflects a shift from a more psychically distant perspective to one that is nearer. This is not "barely visible" as Wood would prefer, but the shifting motion shows a nuance and continuity that creates the type of trustworthiness (that the author knows what he is doing) and force for which Gardner argues (8-9).
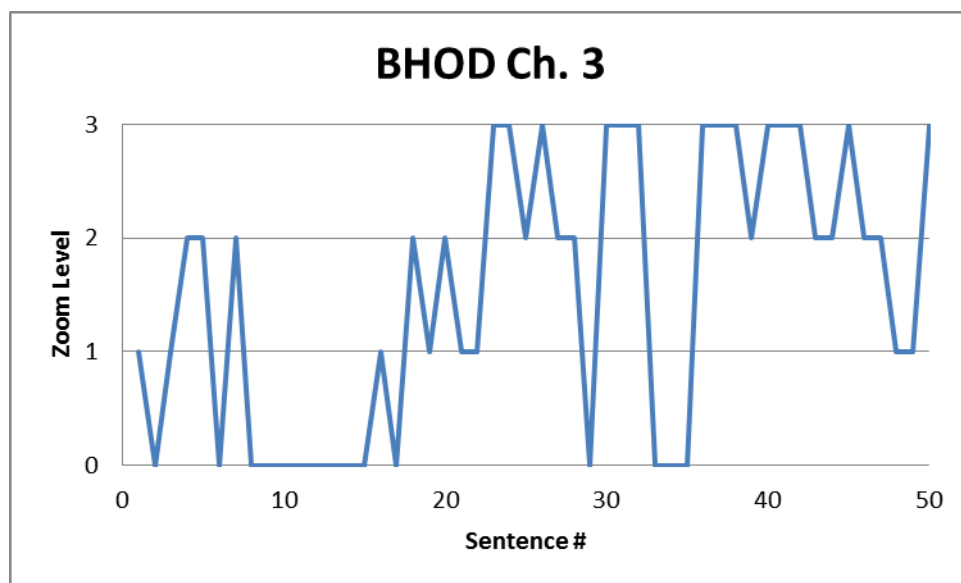

Figure - Movement Chart for Chapter 3

It is important to note that this particular sample is patently not reflective of the other COD chapters in the book. The other chapters almost always present more than one character, which

leads to the types of character-to-character interaction that breaks up the stasis brought on by isolation. However, to mitigate subjectivity in sampling, I had to select the first fifty sentences of the COD story-arc-proper.[9]

We'll see another visually pleasing movement chart in the next section, when we analyze Chabon's *Yiddish Policemen's Union*, another text that favors interiority. However, the statistics will support a few important distinctions between Brockmeier's work and Chabon's.

3. Chabon - *Yiddish Policemen's Union*

Yiddish Policemen's Union is a dystopian novel set in an alternate present-day, one where the post-World War II Jewish diaspora resulted in the temporary colonization of Sitka, Alaska rather than the creation of the state of Israel. The story takes place just before the scheduled closure of the colony and follows a police detective who in the course of unraveling an ostensibly simple murder unwinds a larger conspiracy by Zionist extremists.

Chabon focuses on a character who has the potential to be a loner, much like Snowman in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, but fortunately, through Landsman's line of work and the mystery driving the plot, he is consistently forced into contact with other characters, often to humorous effect. In this way, Chabon's first fifty sentences are representative, as the book opens with a scene where Landsman has been rousted from a drunken stupor by the night manager of the hotel where he "flops" to investigate a murder on the premises. The interaction provides Chabon with opportunities to create dialogue between the two characters and to have Landsman reflect on his history with the night manager ("During his days works Narcotics, Landman arrested Tenenboym five times. That is all the basis for what passes for friendship between them. It is almost enough.") (3). This provides ample opportunity for interiority while also presenting an external stimulus to pull the narrative out of the character's thoughts (e.g., "Landsman has eight hours to go until his next shift. Eight rat hours, sucking at his bottle, in his glass tank lined with wood shavings. Landsman sighs and goes for the tie.") (2). The major difference between this text and the Brockmeier samples is that this external stimulus prevents Landsman from getting to introspective, keeping him tethered to the events occurring in scene. Another significant factor in making the YPU Sample enjoyable is the hard-boiled narrative sensibility, which speaks in a voice much like Landsman's, effectively blurring the distinction between objective narration and Landsman-inflected narration, as reflected in the wonderful opening line, "Nine months Landsman's been flopping at the Hotel Zamenhof without any of his fellow residents managing to get themselves murdered (1)."

Similar to Brockmeier, Chabon has also created a fantastical world, one where Israel was not created after the Second World War, and Jews were instead temporarily housed in Sitka, Alaska. Needless to say, Chabon's Sitka is quite different from the place as it currently exists. With such a world, there is great temptation toward excessive exposition in describing the thousands of ways that this fictional world is different from ours. As the Zoom-Level analysis shows, Chabon

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[9]Chapter 1 is adapted from a short story. Due to wildly unrepresentative perspective shifts and the stylistic incongruities, I made the decision to treat it as a preface and exclude it from the sample. Selection bias, rabble, rabble, rabble. I stand by my decision.

was able to resist this temptation. His Zoom-Level average of .70 was the median of the Samples and the Frequency Table reflects proportions hewing near the average of all of the Samples.

However, even the thirty-three occurrences of Zoom Level 0 sentences is misleading, as fourteen of those consist of unattributed or simply attributed dialogue. This is significant, as dialogue certainly gets at a character's psyche and always uses the character's voice. Categorization of these types of sentences on the numeric scale would be problematic, and since they are technically objective observations of a character's speech, Zoom Level 0 is the appropriate, if imperfect, category for them. Still, temporarily setting aside the dialogue sentences, Chabon has only nineteen sentences of objective description at Zoom Level 0, which is still the median, but much closer to Brockmeier. Further, it demonstrates how well Chabon has resisted the temptation toward exposition.

The Frequency Table also shows that Chabon works comfortably and consistently across all four psychic-distance levels. This is reflected in the Movement Chart for YPU, which shows an even swaying from point to point, rarely staying at the same psychic distance for more than a few sentences at a time. While the latter half of the YPU Sample shows less work in the middle Zoom Levels, conclusions from this should be mitigated, as three of the Zoom Level 0 sentences in the thirties refer to his mental state without actually inflecting in his voice, and the string of 0-level sentences in the forties reflects a quick-moving conversation, something quite different from pure, objective description.

Yiddish Policemen's Union perhaps best exemplifies the ideals of the critical paradigm laid out above, at least as far as traditional usage is concerned.[10] Chabon uses authorial omniscience commendably. Though not Russo's "full-blown omniscience" -- Chabon only goes into one character's thoughts and feelings -- the omniscient narrator does move freely through time and space, make bold assertions, and helps the reader interpret the events of the story. Chabon's narrator allows for ample digression but moves the narrative forward efficiently when necessary. As a result, the novel has a pleasing texture with vivid characters and a memorable narrative voice. This texture has a great deal to do with the subtlety of Chabon's use of free indirect style. Though not "barely visible" at first glance, the conspicuousness of the hard-boiled Landsman's voice is concealed by a narrative voice with the same sensibility. Further, the weaving pattern of the Movement Chart testifies presents the kind of logical swaying required to maintain the continuity of Gardner's vivid, continuous dream.

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[10]The analysis of the next two books focuses on non-traditional uses of psychic distance.
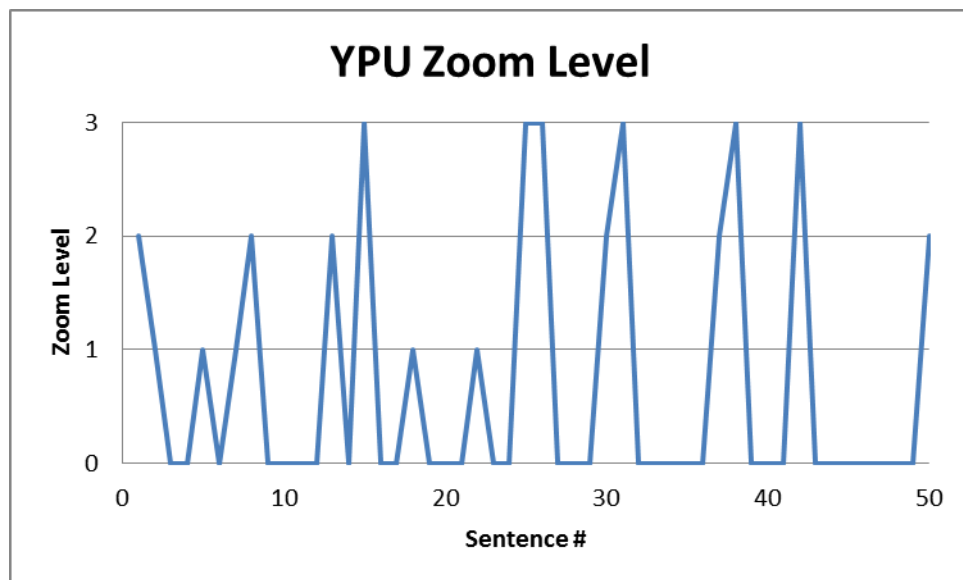
Figure - Movement Chart for YPU

Chabon is the last author in the Samples to work with extensive manipulation of psychic distance, as Whitehead and McCarthy have other narrative aims and other means of getting at a character's psyche. We'll see how this creates quite a different set of statistics than the authors we've just reviewed.

4. Whitehead - *Zone One*

Like the other authors in the Samples, Whitehead has created a fantastical (but not fantastic -- rather, quite gruesome) world. Additionally, Whitehead plays with time in a non-traditional way, nesting stories within memories within memories. Significantly, the entire sample takes place in the main character's head as a memory of his childhood trips to New York. That would seem at first glance to render the sample unrepresentative of the novel as a whole, but such a judgment would be premature. The time line of the present action in the novel is compressed into three days, meaning that a great deal of time is spent in the main character's memory. Further, the narrative voice does not change to adapt to a child's way of thinking, instead offering high-level cultural criticism that is as far beyond the young protagonist as it is the older iterations. And while the memories spend a great deal of time describing a city that no longer exists, Whitehead describes the pre-apocalypse city with very much the same mannerisms as he will describe the post-apocalyptic iteration (e.g., "He liked to watch monster movies and the city churning below. He fixed on odd details. The ancient water towers lurking atop obstinate old prewars and, higher up, the massive central-air units that hunkered and coiled on the striving high-rises, glistening like extruded guts.") (4). In fact, he is setting up the earlier version specifically so that he can contrast the other version with it later in the novel. The consistency of voice and the parallels between the early sentences and those that come later are substantial evidence that the first fifty sentences are indeed representative of the entire novel.

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, Whitehead spends a great deal of time levying cultural criticism against modern-day America. Even in the childhood memory, he incisively notes the

way that the history and beauty of previous eras are razed in order for new, more utilitarian replacements. This is as typical for the novel as it is revealing. Whitehead's aims are not simply to tell a zombie story, an apocalyptic story, or even a character- or plot-driven story. He aims to offer his commentary on modern society (e.g., "Yesterday's old masters, stately named and midwifed by once-famous architects, were insulted by the soot of combustion engines and by technological advances in construction. Time chiseled at elegant stonework, which swirled or plummeted to the sidewalk in dust and chips and chunks.") (6). As one would expect, Whitehead spends the majority of his time at Zoom Level 0, logging thirty-nine sentences at the completely objective level. As would also be expected, his average Zoom Level is low, .32. This creates a kind of psychic stasis, as represented by the Movement Chart for Zone One.
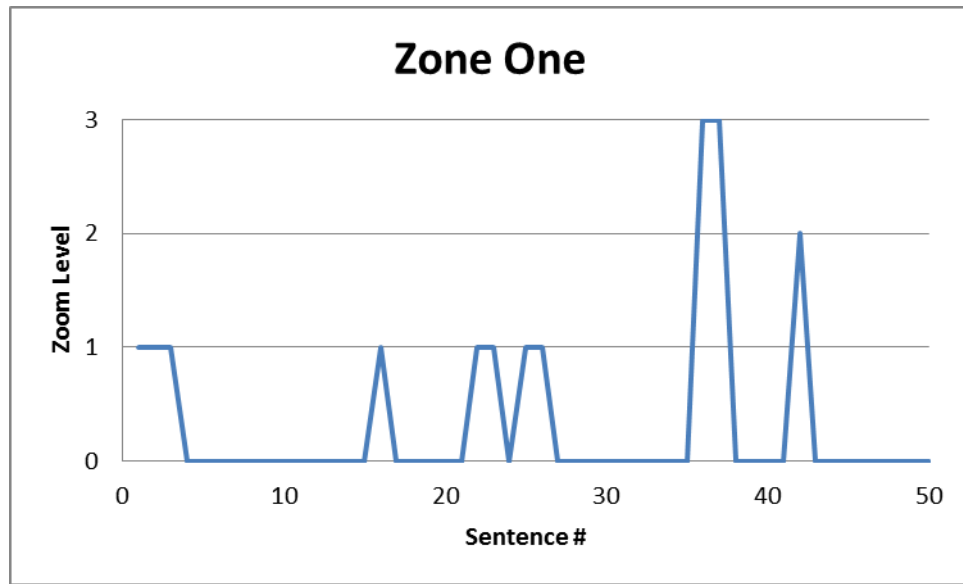

Figure - Movement Chart for Zone One

Gardner recognized that this stasis, while not traditional, is not problematic in and of itself, and that it may be a tool for the author to give the work a distant, "icy" feel (112). This is precisely what Whitehead is doing here, as a certain narrative distance is required for Whitehead's cynicism to have full impact. This stasis can be problematic, however, for readers who enjoy character-driven stories. And while character can be developed (indeed, even character-driven stories can be told) by an objective narrator, the omission of inflection is noticeable in the modern novel. The stasis in psychic distance typically must be compensated for in some way, be it in narrative sensibility, linguistic sensibility, engaging plot, or some other of the myriad ways to engage a reader. Whitehead chooses to do this through his intelligence, wit, and high-register diction.

As we'll see in the next section, McCarthy's writing also presents a type of psychic stasis, an obstacle that McCarthy resolves through completely different means.

5. McCarthy - *The Road*

McCarthy has created a bleak, post-apocalyptic world in *The Road*. Two survivors, a father and a son, wander south toward the ocean with hopes of surviving the winter and perhaps of finding reason to continue hoping that the world may yet heal itself. While not quite left with the loners of *The Brief History of the Dead* and *Oryx and Crake*, we do have a very limited scope of human interaction, primarily between the father and the son. In later sections of the book, dialogue between the two will reveal character traits of both, but no dialogue occurred in the first fifty sentences. We also have a world that is nearly as desolate as Brockmeier's Antarctica. This provides many of the same issues Brockmeier faced in the analysis of the Antarctica Sample. Fortunately, McCarthy is not afraid to repeat himself in describing the setting, hence the omnipresence of ashes. Levity aside, McCarthy's repetition throughout the novel is one way that he cultivates an allegorical feel, and it also provides the type of rhythm that, as we will see later in this section, manifests itself on the sentence level.

McCarthy does not concern himself with interiority, relying instead on action ("He spread the small tarp they used for a table on the ground and laid everything out and he took the pistol from his belt and laid it on the cloth and he just sat watching the boy sleep.") (3), symbolism ("When he woke in the woods in the dark and the cold of the night he'd reach out to touch the child sleeping beside him.") (1), and the aforementioned dialogue to develop his characters. This requires more of the reader, as does the writing of Whitehead, and it may turn off certain of them. However, McCarthy intends to require his readers to fill in the negative space of the story and work their way through to the thesis of it.

Fittingly, McCarthy has the lowest average Zoom Level of all of the Samples (.30) and the highest frequency of Zoom Level 0 sentences (44). The stasis in psychic distance is staggering, and it is clearly visible in the Movement Chart for The Road.
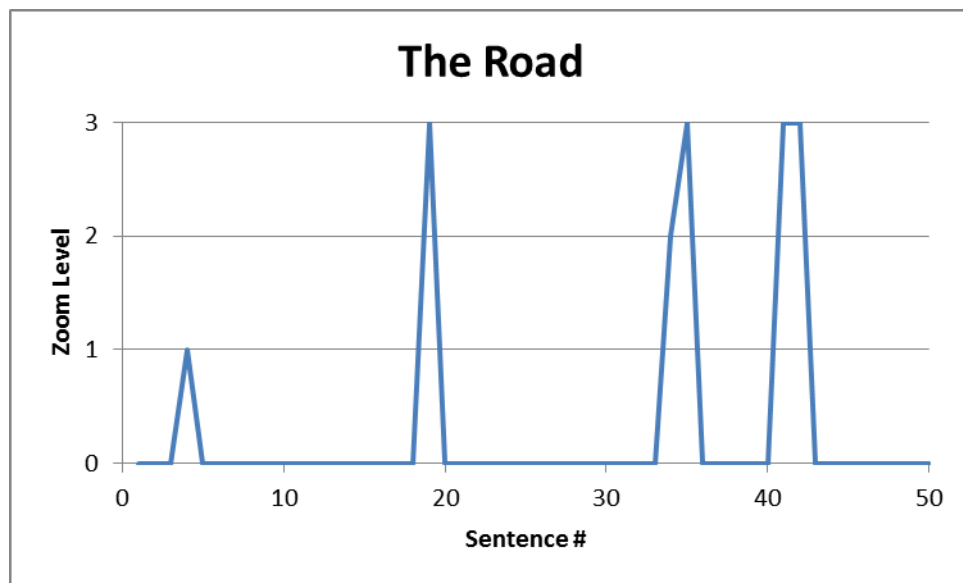

Figure - Movement Chart for The Road

McCarthy uses the stasis for the same effect as Whitehead, to use distance to create an eerie, colder feel. However, McCarthy and Whitehead use the resulting feel to different ends. Where Whitehead uses the space as a platform from which to deliver astute lectures, McCarthy uses it to goad the reader into thinking figuratively, allegorically, or just plain creatively. Accordingly, information travels in different directions across the negative space for the authors.

However, similar to Whitehead, McCarthy must compensate for the stasis. His means are different than those employed by Whitehead. In addition to the symbolism and allegorical tone of *The Road*, McCarthy has a superb sense of rhythm at the sentence level that reads very musically and distracts the reader from concerns about psychic distance. McCarthy deploys syntactical parallelism, lexical repetition, grammatical repetition, alliteration, consonance, and assonance deftly, as demonstrated in the passage appended as Exhibit G. For the reader who prizes the rhythms of language, McCarthy's writing overwhelms a need for psychic dynamism.

C. COMPARATIVE STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

While the Zoom-Level analysis provided some quantitative support to qualitative impressions about the texts under scrutiny, aggregation of the numbers for comparison provides intertextual insights not readily apparent to even the careful reader. More importantly, it demonstrates the limitations of such myopic statistical analysis.

A quick review of the average Zoom Levels (Exhibit A: Fig. 3) reaffirms what the careful reader suspects upon reading the sentences under scrutiny: Whitehead and McCarthy's narrators are more distant from their characters' psyches, Chabon has a fairly "voicy" narrator, and Brockmeier spends a great deal of time in his characters' heads.

Text	Zoom	Delta	Inflected	Total	SL Delta	% Inflected
Antarctica	1.54	0.88	6.28	21.38	15.55	0.46
City of Dead	1.52	0.82	6.58	19.54	13.98	0.41
YPU	0.70	0.98	3.02	15.06	8.41	0.18
Z1	0.32	0.35	0.66	19.94	14.24	0.07
Road	0.30	0.41	0.70	13.24	7.82	0.09

Figure - Averages Table

The frequency with which each Zoom Level occurs within the first fifty sentences of each text (Exhibit A: Fig. 1) provides more insight. While the deductions from the averages are affirmed, the distributions show a general tendency for authors to operate at the outer ranges, at either Zoom Level 0 or Zoom Level 3. Brockmeier's Antarctica chapter is the most pronounced in this respect with 75% of all sentences at one of those two levels. Chabon provides the exception with a marked willingness to work in all three buckets.

Zoom Level	Antarctica	City of Dead	YPU	Z1	Road	Average
0	17	15	33	39	44	29.6
1	9	8	5	8	1	6.2
2	4	13	6	1	1	5
3	20	14	6	2	4	9.2

Figure - Frequency Table

Brockmeier and Chabon's work, particularly, seem to show the traditional usage of psychic distance to create a type of authorial omniscience to varying degrees of success. I would argue that Brockmeier's Antarctic chapter is the least successful in this regard, shifting a bit wildly and still creating a type of stasis, and Chabon's first fifty lines is the most successful, realizing nearly all of the attendant benefits of deft manipulation of psychic distance and the robust narrative stance it unlocks. The statistical analysis that supports this position can be found on the Frequency Table and through a comparison of the movement charts, where we see Chabon's sentences distributed evenly across levels 1, 2, and 3, resulting in a more pleasing pattern for the movement chart.

The frequency distributions also spotlight the authors' preferences to work at Zoom Level 0, particularly Whitehead and McCarthy. Though Chabon appears to be a close third, the numbers are deceptive. All dialogue that is either unattributed or attributed simply is categorized at Zoom Level 0. Fourteen of Chabon's sentences are marked at Zoom Level 0 for this reason. No other author uses a significant amount of dialogue in the sentences under scrutiny so Chabon is uniquely afflicted by this measurement. Dialogue and purely descriptive sentences read differently, as dialogue more readily reveals a character's psychology. Chabon's characters' mannered speech does this, meaning that Chabon actually operates more closely to Landsman's psyche than is reflected in the numbers.

The predilection for operating at Zoom Level 0 allows for inferences about the authors' purposes and execution, however, they cannot explain them. Where Chabon and Brockmeier are very concerned with sharing the psychic state of their characters with readers, Whitehead and McCarthy have different aims. Whitehead is concerned with offering high-level commentary on modern-American society, which is served best by a heightened level of diction that is inconsistent with Mark Spitz's lexical abilities, and McCarthy often requires readers to draw their own inferences about a character's mental state, choosing to rely on a character's action and dialogue as the most revealing hints. Naturally, statistical analysis measuring the movement across various psychic distances is unhelpful in measuring who between McCarthy and Whitehead was more successful in executing authorial omniscience. Nevertheless, the Frequency Chart (Exhibit A: Fig. 2) does help identify that, indeed, their aims are something other than sharing the interior psychology of their characters.

IV. CONCLUSION

As discussed at length, authorial omniscience is a powerful tool, with as many benefits to successful implementation as there are obstacles to implementing it successfully. The benefits make it a popular narrative stance for the dystopian literature we've covered this semester: it has the flexibility required to both build unfamiliar worlds and to create vivid characters. The latter benefit seems be correlated (based on the pitifully small sample size) with successful management of psychic distance. The varying degrees of success measured across the Brockmeier chapters and the Chabon text show this.

However, as Gardner noted, psychic distance may be used non-traditionally in order for the author to achieve a certain effect. The analysis conclusively identified when this was the case, though ultimately whether the author's purpose was successfully achieved must be determined on the basis of other factors.

From the writer's perspective, the most conclusive takeaway from this analysis is that the management of psychic distance is important when working with an omniscient narrator[11], whether the author chooses to navigate it traditionally or not. The manipulation of psychic distance is most noticeable when it is mishandled, even if only slightly, or when it is all but absent. This dooms working with psychic distance to the same fate as so many other writing techniques: when done well, the typical reader won't even notice it enough to appreciate it.

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[11]Though outside the scope of this paper, Reiken's analysis suggests that psychic distance is important in narratives told from the first-person perspective, as well.

EXHIBIT A: COMPARATIVE DATA

Fig. 1. Zoom-Level Frequency Table

Zoom Level	Antarctica	City of Dead	YPU	Z1	Road	Average
0	17	15	33	39	44	29.6
1	9	8	5	8	1	6.2
2	4	13	6	1	1	5
3	20	14	6	2	4	9.2

Fig. 2. Zoom-Level Frequency Chart
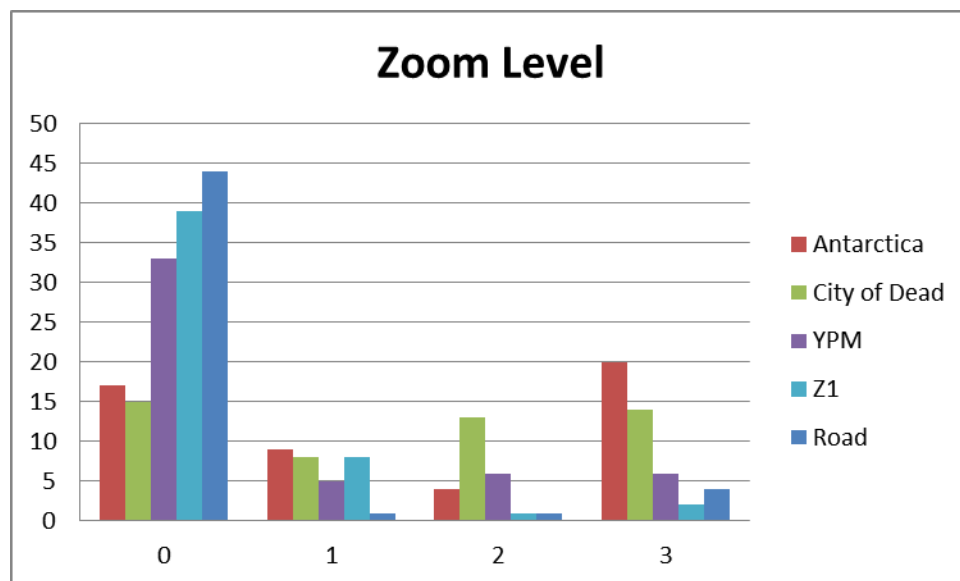
Fig 3. Averages Table

Text	Zoom	Delta	Inflected	Total	SL Delta	% Inflected
Antarctica	1.54	0.88	6.28	21.38	15.55	0.46
City of Dead	1.52	0.82	6.58	19.54	13.98	0.41
YPU	0.70	0.98	3.02	15.06	8.41	0.18
Z1	0.32	0.35	0.66	19.94	14.24	0.07
Road	0.30	0.41	0.70	13.24	7.82	0.09

EXHIBIT B: THE BRIEF HISTORY OF THE DEAD, CH. 2 MOVEMENT CHART
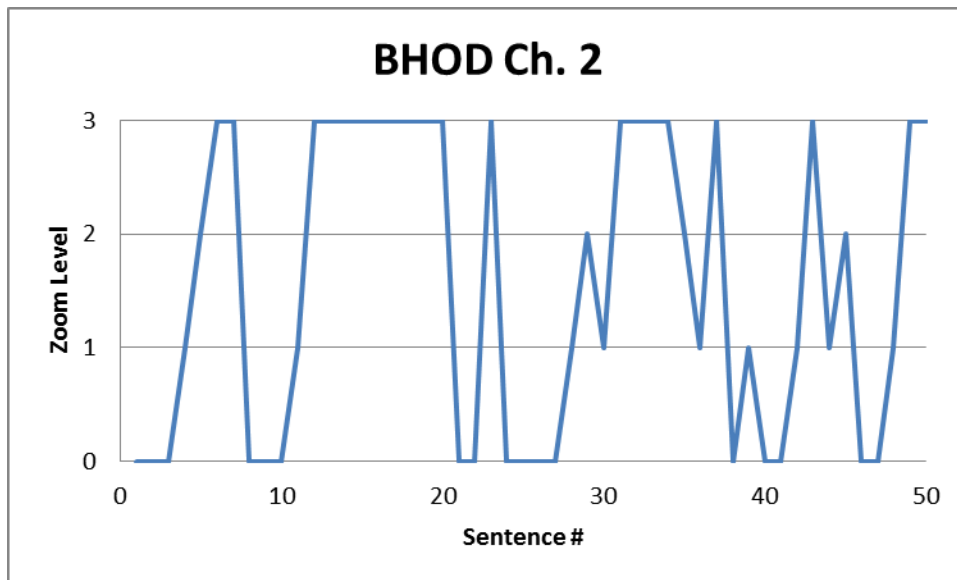
EXHIBIT C: THE BRIEF HISTORY OF THE DEAD, CH. 3 MOVEMENT CHART
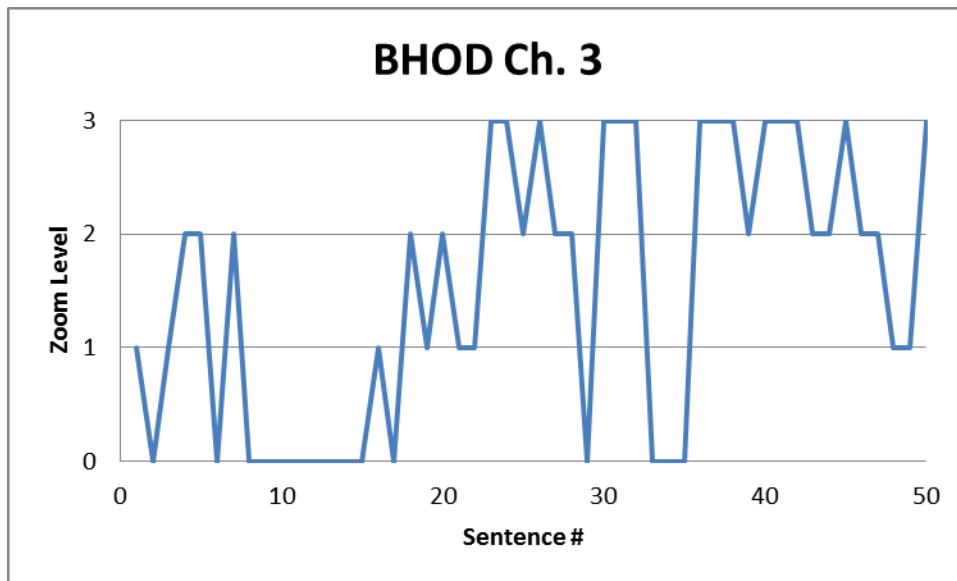
## EXHIBIT D: THE YIDDISH POLICEMEN'S UNION MOVEMENT CHART
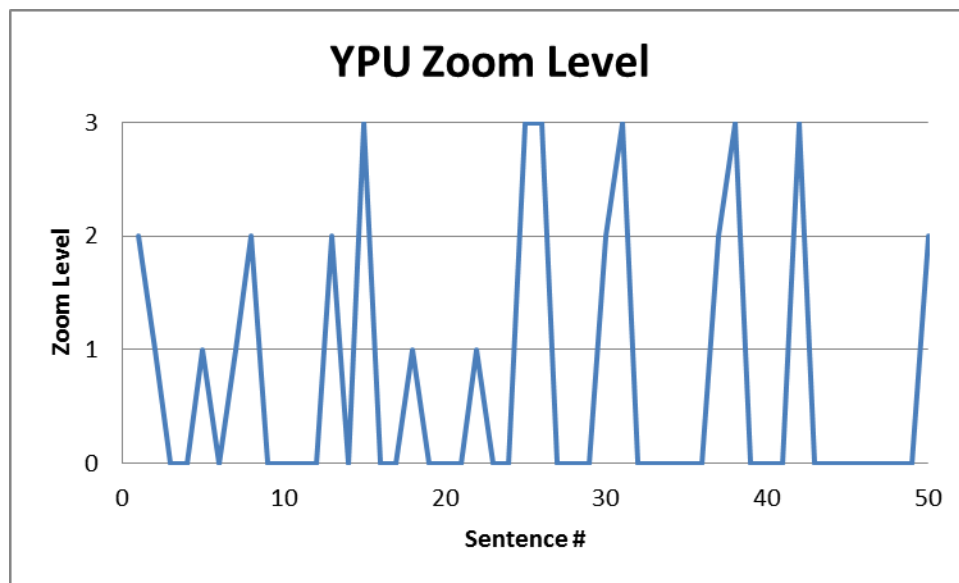
## EXHIBIT E: ZONE ONE MOVEMENT CHART
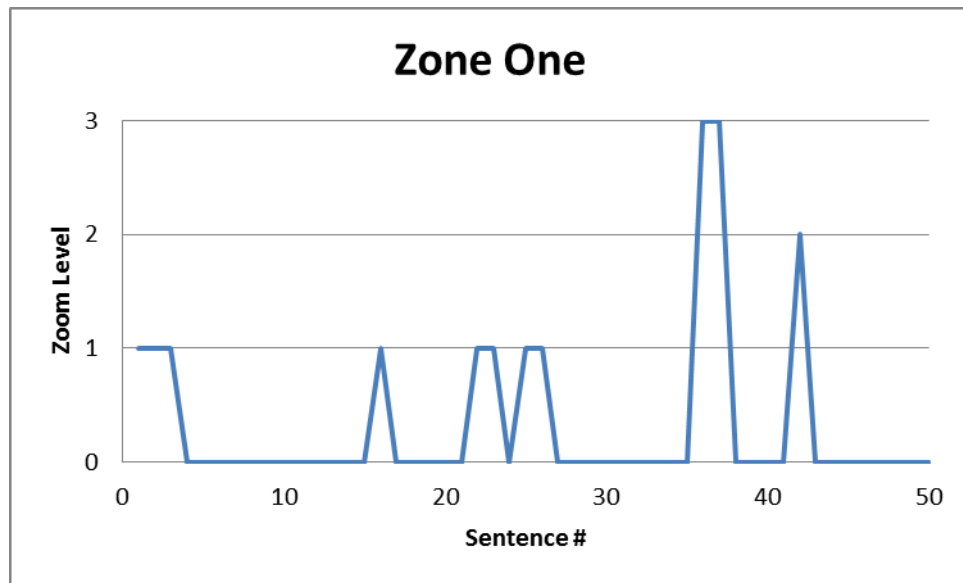
EXHIBIT F: THE ROAD MOVEMENT CHART
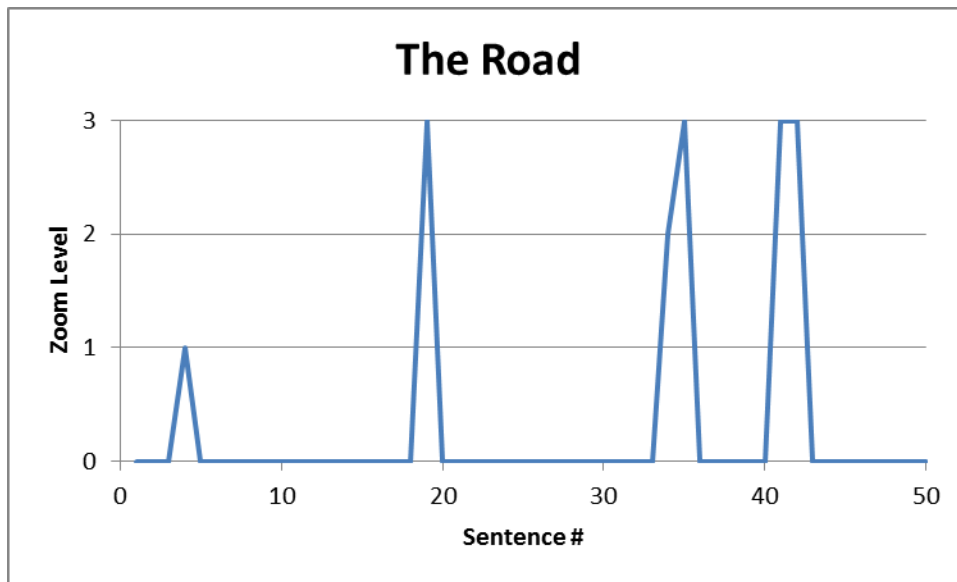
EXHIBIT G: THE ROAD RHYTHM ANALYSIS[12]

Syntactical Parallelism

When he got back the boy was still asleep. He pulled the blue **[**plastic tarp**]** off of him **[**and folded it**] [**and carried it**]** out to the grocery cart **[**and packed it**]** and came back with their plates and some cornmeal cakes in a **[**plastic bag**]** and a **[**plastic bottle**]** of syrup. He spread the small tarp they used for a table **[**on the**]** ground and laid everything out and he took the pistol from his belt **[**and laid it**] [**on the**]** cloth and he just sat watching the boy sleep. He'd pulled away his mask **[**in the**]** night and it was buried somewhere **[**in the**]** blankets.

- *"and xxxx it"*

- "on the"

- "in the"

- PHRASAL: *"plastic xxxx"*

Lexical Repetition

When **he** got back the boy was still asleep. **He pulled** the blue **plastic tarp** off of him and folded **it** and carried **it out** to the grocery cart and packed **it** and came back with their plates and some cornmeal cakes in a **plastic** bag and a **plastic** bottle of syrup. **He** spread the small **tarp** they used for a table on the ground and laid everything **out** and **he** took the pistol from his belt and laid **it** on the cloth and **he** just sat watching the boy sleep. **He**'d **pulled** away his mask in the night and **it** was buried somewhere in the blankets.

- *he*; starts most sentences

- *it*; as object

- *plastic*

- *pulled*

- *tarp*

- *out*

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[12]Analysis taken from the following: Parsons, Alexander. "The Workings of Rhythm."

Grammatical Repetition

When he got back **the** boy **was** still asleep. He pulled **the** blue plastic tarp off **of** him **and** folded it **and** carried it out to **the** grocery cart **and** packed it **and** came back with their plates **and** some cornmeal cakes **in** a plastic bag **and** a plastic bottle **of** syrup. He spread **the** small tarp they used for a table **on the** ground **and** laid everything out **and** he took **the** pistol from his belt **and** laid it **on the** cloth **and** he just sat watching **the** boy sleep. He'd pulled away his mask **in the** night **and** it **was** buried somewhere **in the** blankets.

- *was*; first and last clauses

- *and*

- *the*

- *in*

- *of*

Alliteration

When he got **b**ack the **b**oy was still asleep. He **p**ulled the blue **p**lastic tarp off of him and folded it and **c**arried it out to the grocery **c**art and packed it and came back with their plates and some **c**ornmeal **c**akes in a plastic bag and a plastic bottle of syrup. He **s**pread the **s**mall **t**arp they used for a **t**able on the ground and laid everything out and he took the pistol from his belt and laid it on the cloth and he just sat watching the boy sleep. He'd pulled away his mask in the night and it was **b**uried somewhere in the **b**lankets.

- *back . . . boy*

- *pulled . . . plastic*

- *cornmeal cakes*

- *spread . . . small*

- *tarp . . . table*

- *buried . . . blankets*

Consonance

When he got **b**ack the **b**oy wa**s s**till aslee**p**. He **p**ulled the **b**lue **p**lastic tar**p** off of him and folde**d** i**t** and **c**arrie**d** i**t** ou**t t**o the grocery **c**art and pa**ck**ed i**t** and **c**ame ba**ck** wi**th th**eir plates and some **c**ornmeal **c**akes in a **pl**astic **b**ag and a **pl**astic **b**ottle of **s**yrup. He **s**pread the **s**mall tarp they used for a table on the grou**nd a**nd laid everything out a**nd** he took the pistol from his belt a**nd** laid i**t** on **th**e cloth a**nd** he just sat watching **th**e boy sleep. He'**d** pulle**d** away his mask in the nigh**t** and i**t** was **b**urie**d** somewhere in the **b**lankets.

- *wa**s s**till a**s**leep*

- *aslee**p** . . . **p**ulled . . . **p**lastic tar**p***

- *it*

- *pl . . . b*

- *carried ... cart ... came ... cornmeal cakes*

- *grou**nd** a**nd***

- ***th**e clo**th***

- *he'**d** pulle**d***

Assonance

When he got back the boy w**a**s still **a**sl**ee**p. H**e** pulled the blue plastic tarp off of him **a**nd folded i**t a**nd carried **i**t out to the grocery cart **a**nd packed it **a**nd came b**a**ck with their pl**a**tes and some cornmeal c**a**kes in a pl**a**stic b**a**g **a**nd a pl**a**stic bottle of syrup. He spread the sm**a**ll t**a**rp th**ey** used for **a** t**a**ble on the ground and l**ai**d everything out and he took the pistol from his belt and l**ai**d it on the cloth and he just sat watching the boy sl**ee**p. H**e**'d pulled away h**i**s mask **i**n the night and **i**t was buried somewhere **i**n the blankets.

- *w**a**s . . . **a**sleep*
- *asl**ee**p. H**e** . . . sl**ee**p. H**e**'d*
- ***a**nd p**a**cked it **a**nd came b**a**ck*
- *c**a**me . . . pl**a**tes . . . c**a**kes*
- *pl**a**stic b**a**g **a**nd a pl**a**stic*
- *sm**a**ll t**a**rp*
- *th**ey** . . . **a** t**a**ble . . . l**ai**d . . . l**ai**d.*

Combined Rhythm Indicators

When **he** got **b**ack **the b**oy **was s**till **asleep**. **He p**ulled **the** blue **[plastic tarp]** off **of** him **[and** folde**d it] [and c**arrie**d it] out t**o **the** grocery **c**art **[and** p**acked it] and** came b**ack** wi**th th**eir pl**a**tes **and** some **c**ornmeal **c**akes **in** a **[plastic b**ag] **and** a **[plastic** bottle] **of** syrup. **He s**pread **the s**mall **tarp** they used for **a t**able **[on the]** grou**nd and l**ai**d** everything **out and he** took **the** pistol from his belt **[and** l**ai**d **it] [on the]** clo**th and he** just sat watching **the** boy sl**ee**p. **He**'d **pulled** away his mask **[in the]** nigh**t and it was b**uried somewhere **[in the] b**lankets.

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