

‘We Are Mediums’

—Literature, Telepathy and Material Substance in Ann Quin’s *Passages*¹—

Noriko NISHINO

Abstract

1969年に出版された Ann Quin の第三作目の小説 *Passages* は、男女二人の主人公が行方不明となった女の兄を探して旅をする様子を描くものである。語り手でもある彼らはその旅の中でテレパシーによって互いの内面世界を共有し、次第に意識や身体における互いの区別を失っていく。本論文は、その超自然的なコミュニケーション手段によって自他の境界を失っていく主人公を描くこの作品が小説の語りの奇妙な側面をあぶり出す「小説についての小説」であることを論じ、また Quin の文学実験がその自己言及的な表現において重要な役割を果たしていることを明らかにする。この作品は、人称の変化やタイポグラフィを駆使した視覚表現を用いて、超自然的な要素と物質的な要素で成り立つ小説という存在を読者に提示するのである。本稿では Nicholas Royle のテレパシーと小説の語りに関する議論、また Glyn White の戦後小説の視覚的な文学実験に関する議論などを参照しながら、Quin の作品が小説における精神と物質の相互依存を描出するものであることを示す。

Key Words: Ann Quin, English literature, post-war literature, experimental novel, telepathy, graphic surface

Paranormal phenomena such as spiritualism and telepathy are said to have been an influential source or stimulating topic for literature since the late nineteenth century. The influence of the modern occult movement did not fade away in the post-war period. Ann Quin’s third novel *Passages* (1969) includes depictions of supernatural phenomena and reveals overlooked features of literary narration. By describing paranormal communication, or telepathy, it shows interdependence between spirit and matter, and uncovers strange elements in the act of literary narration. Importantly, Quin’s literary experiments play a crucial role in disclosing these hidden features, and this essay will illustrate this by reading the novel in the context of paranormal communication and explaining how her unique experiments contribute to storytelling. Her novels can be a great challenge to readers. None of these readers would be unaware of these novels’

experiments not just because they are too obvious to ignore but also because they make the novels hard to follow, leaving those reading confused and lost. Undoubtedly, it is these literary experiments that characterise Quin's creative writing. In my earlier paper, "The Dead Can('t) Dominate Like This": The Ordinary Life, Cinema, Modernism and Ann Quin's *Three*, I explore Quin as a successor of the literary modernists. Although this essay is a part of my research project to bridge the gap between literary modernism and post-war literature, its focus is on clarifying what is unique in Quin's writing rather than on examining linkages between literature before and after World War II. With the aim to reveal the uniqueness of her text by analysing it in the context of paranormal communication, I will first introduce arguments about telepathy and its relation to literature; then, I will explore *Passages*, showing that it illuminates the secret features of the novel and its narration.

Telepathy and Literary Narration

Telepathy is '[t]he supposed communication of thoughts, mental images, etc., from one mind to another by psychic or other paranormal means; *spec.* the (supposed) ability to read others' minds' ('Telepathy'). According to Roger Luckhurst, this term appeared in 'the new science of psychical research' among the occult movement in the late nineteenth century, which attracted 'men of science as an occasion to dramatize the passage from belief in supernatural agents to rational explanation' (Luckhurst 10, 26).² '[C]oined in December 1882 in the first volume of the house journal of psychical research' by combining 'distant (*tele-*)' with 'intimacy or touch (*pathos*)', it hints at the ambiguous nature of psychic phenomena as an object for positive science (Luckhurst 60, 1). While this 'oxymoronic' term implies the paranormal and so indicates 'the breach of materialist explanations', it still suggests the possibility for scientific study, with the words '*pathos*' or '*physical touch*' denoting its materiality (Luckhurst 1, 70–71). As this name exemplifies, psychic phenomena gesture towards both the natural and the supernatural. This oscillation between the substantial and the paranormal is a crucial topic to literary study, as literature also constantly provokes arguments regarding the real and the imaginary.

Literary scholars have attended to the modern occult movement that has drawn the attention of creative writers from its outset, pointing to the impact the concept of mystical communication had on the literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, or Victorian and modernist creative writings. Those whom I refer to in this essay—Roger Luckhurst, Nicholas Royle, Helen Sword and Pamela Thurschwell—are among them. Meanwhile, they tend to leave room for study on mid-twentieth century literature. One exception is the last chapter of Sword's book, which is devoted to the poems of Sylvia Plath and James Merrill in the 1950s; specifically, the use of the Ouija board motif. As for prose writings, scholars such as Shadia S. Fahim and Müge Galin study the influence that mysticism exerted on the creative writings of Doris Lessing, who is known to

have had a keen interest in Sufism. These studies indicate that occultism did not disappear from society in the post-war period. Rather, it served as a significant theme for British post-war literature.

Indeed, occultism continues to prevail in the post-war era, changing into various forms. As Henrietta L. Moore and Todd Sanders point out, although it might seem that '[s]piritualism in its Victorian and early twentieth-century form died out as something of mass popular interest from the 1950s onwards', it still exists in our societies. In the mid-twentieth century, for instance, successors of the occult movement such as 'flying saucers, New Age Spiritualism, millennial cults, Gaia, crop circles and aliens' enjoyed popularity (Moore and Sanders 1). In his book on occultism and post-war popular culture, *The Dedalus Book of the 1960s: Turn Off Your Mind*, Gary Lachman states that '[t]he 1960s and early seventies saw an "occult revival" the likes of which hadn't been seen in the West since the fin-de-siècle days' (Lachman 6). Occultism was thus resurrected in the middle of the century:

From being the obscure focus of a few individuals on the margins of society, in the 1960s magic, mysticism and unorthodox forms of spirituality had suddenly taken centre stage. Everyone, from anonymous hippies on the street to the most famous people in the world, took a trip through the looking glass, their entrance tickets more times than not coming in the form of meditation, tantric yoga, witchcraft or one of the other weird manifestations of the irrational that saturated the popular consciousness. (Lachman 8–9)

In this 'occult revival', telepathy continued to be researched scientifically as in the late-Victorian era, 'transform[ing] . . . into first ESP, then "Ganzfeld" researches in the 1960s, and then new categories of "Exceptional Human Experiences" in the 1980s and 1990s' (Luckhurst 276–77).

It is in such an age of 'occult revival' that Quin wrote *Passages*, a novel about spiritual perception. She is known to have an interest in spiritual and mythical phenomena, and her concern indicates that her works are worth reading in the context of occultism. According to research by Nonia Williams Korteling, Quin read books on subjects ranging 'from Mormonism, to Pueblo gods and myth, to Jane Harrison's anthropological reading of Greek religion' (Williams Korteling 146). In her third novel, for instance, Quin quotes a number of passages from Harrison's *Prolegomena to the study of Greek Religion* (1903). As well as those ancient myths, telepathic communication was of concern to the author and, importantly, she associated it with storytelling. According to Alan Burns, one of Quin's friends and fellow experimental writers, she gave a storytelling performance without speaking at a public reading organised by B. S. Johnson:

we all gave our readings . . . and then Ann Quin's turn came and she did her Quin thing, that

is to say she came onto the stage and she just sat and looked at people, she wouldn't say a goddam word! She just stared, she either implied or she actually stated that we sort of 'think-communicate', we can communicate more in silence than with someone actually putting the words across[.] (Coe 405)

This episode should not be dismissed as a joke or frivolous conduct, for Quin's creative writing is linked to this concern with the paranormal communication of the author. In all likelihood, her third novel is a reflection of Quin's interest in 'think-communication'. It is a product of her endeavour as a writer to explore the relationship between storytelling and telepathic 'think-communication'.

To analyse *Passages* in relation to psychic communication, the most important idea is what Nicholas Royle calls 'a theory of narrative telepathy': literary narration is based on 'a telepathic logic according to which a narrator—and thus a reader—is "now looking into this mind", now into that' (Royle 259). As he suggests, the narrative of creative writing conceals this 'mad scenario' in itself. In literary narration, '[s]omeone is telling us what someone else is thinking, feeling or perceiving. That someone else may not even be aware of experiencing these thoughts, feelings or perceptions' (Royle 256). This means that the 'someone' narrating can look into someone else's mind secretly and see their personal visions. Due to this hidden system of narration, literature is seen to have a profound connection with spiritual or telepathic communication.

Quin's third novel discloses this 'mad scenario' and raises literary issues concerning the insubstantial spirit and the physical material. While describing paranormal communication between the two protagonists, it reveals the dependence of such supernatural phenomena on the material substance. Through the oeuvre, the author explores the relationship between supernatural events and material details of life. Her second novel, *Three*, for instance, represents the conflict between the revelational and the material (Nishino). Meanwhile, *Tripticks* attends to their interdependence, showing the connection between the spiritual and the material as a key feature of the literary work that consists of both the imaginal perception and the material fact.

Merging Consciousness and Construction of a New Body in Ann Quin's *Passages*

While describing the journey of a woman and a man around Greek islands in an attempt to find the woman's missing brother, Ann Quin's third novel, *Passages*, reveals fundamental features of storytelling that are likely hidden from the reader. It indicates in a unique way that materialism and spiritualism are interdependent and that mystical perception is the basis for literary narration. By conducting radical experiments such as changing perspective and visual expressions, Quin's text raises issues of the narrator's inconsistent identity and the materiality of the text itself. Because of this radicalness, her works have been ignored by critics and scholars for several decades. In order

to fill the gap, I will analyse her third novel and demonstrate how her literary experiments contribute to storytelling.

Passages, which is written using unique literary forms and styles, consists of four sections narrated alternately by two different voices. The first and third sections are written through the female protagonist's first-person narrative, representing her fragmented thoughts and imaginary visions with paragraphs randomly separated. The second and fourth sections present pages of the male protagonist's travel journal with two columns, in which he writes down what he feels and thinks in everyday life. Each type of section is a record of the same experiences that the characters share in travel; therefore, some phrases are repeated, trespassing the boundary between the female and male sections. Another noticeable common feature is inconsistency in the narrative perspective. The narrative easily switches between the first- and third-person, with the narrators seeming to be unchanged: 'I' is suddenly displaced by 'she' in the female sections and 'he' in the male ones. This alteration happens without any clear rule or order.

With these unconventional features, the novel is understandably called experimental. As I will discuss later, literary experiments such as nonlinear narrative, changeability of the narrators' points of view and the two-column form are utilised in order to describe the protagonists' inseparable selves and fusing identities. As Brian Evenson and Joanna Howard suggest, the narrative of this text 'encourages confusion in character and in identity, a swapping of voice and personality . . . at the expense of coherent plot and development' (Evenson and Howard 62). Significantly, this is not unrelated to the central topic of this essay: literary issues concerning spirit and matter. The term *medium* is crucial for this argument.

In this novel, *medium* signifies two things: one is those who can communicate without speaking, like a spiritualist or telepathist; the other is the material substance that mediates the transmitted information. So as not to eliminate the meaning of the former, I will use *mediums* as its plural form. Similarly to the word *telepathy*, this term that denotes both the supernatural and the substantial indicates the interdependence between spiritualism and materialism. As I will illustrate, the protagonists are mediums in these two senses. They are mediums in the spiritual sense of conducting telepathy, yet, at the same time, they are physical mediums on which the received visions are scribed. By describing the spiritual and material mediums, the novel reveals the conditions of literary works—the narrator's capacity for supernatural perception and the materiality of the literary text—and further suggests the narrator's confused identity.

Having as protagonists spiritual and substantial mediums with confused selves, *Passages* casts light on the identity of the narrator and the materiality of the text itself. The distinction between the two narrator-protagonists becomes ambiguous owing to their telepathic communication. This echoes the difficulty in giving any coherent character or identity to the literary narrator: the identity

of the narrator is confused due to the spiritual nature of the literary narration; that is, the paranormal perspective behind the narration. Furthermore, the merged selves of the protagonists are not merely a matter of the mind or consciousness; they affect the physical body and alter its shape. The image of their physical unity leads the reader to a focus on another essential element: the material aspect of the literary work.

Critics often compare the narrative of Quin's novel to that of 'schizophrenia' (Evenson and Howard 63):

the two characters in *Passages* cease very quickly to be discernible individuals. The 'I' form of both sections rapidly begins to alternate with a third person form, suggesting some objectification or depersonalization of self; and sometimes it shifts entirely to the voice of the other character, suggesting not so much a dual perspective as an actual merging of identity into a single mind or single voice. (Mackrell 611)

The narrative oscillates between the first- and third-person, as seen in the following excerpt from the female narrative: 'His [hands] climbed up above my head, clasped the sides. She fell forward, laughing under / trees' (15). The first sentence is narrated by the female from the first-person perspective using the word 'my'; however, in the second sentence, the first-person narrator is replaced by the third-person, and the former 'I' becomes 'she'. According to Mackrell, such a narrative voice of schizophrenia expresses 'not so much a dual perspective as an actual merging of identity into a single mind or single voice'. In the second sentence, the woman merges into the man and sees what he sees through his eyes. This means that the third-person voice is the one that they speak together.

As shown later, these merging selves are a result of telepathy. Spiritual communication destabilises the identity of those who conduct it, or of the narrator that speaks on 'a telepathic logic' in the literary text. Such confusion of selves can be observed, for instance, in the modernist literary narrative of intersubjectivity. As Helen Sword points out, spiritualism echoes 'a central principle of modernist poetics, whereby writers seek to look through the eyes and speak with the voices of numerous speaking subjects, often shifting, like a medium during a seance, from one voice to another with little or no warning' (Sword 22). This narrative system, similar to spiritualism, enables the narration's 'radical intersubjectivity, which disorients the spirits' (Sword 21). What is confused is not merely the boundary between characters, whose consciousnesses fuse within the narrative, but also the boundary between the characters and the medium-like narrator who sees the world through the eyes of the characters. As Royle points out, the voice in the intersubjective narration is 'of *more than one* identity or speaker': one character and another, and, furthermore, the narrator.

Examining the intersubjective text of ‘thought or feeling of *more than one* identity or speaker’ in the context of Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), Royle suggests we can no longer suppose that the single speaker, the ideal narrator with the consistent identity, is speaking:

We move from a restrictive and no doubt restricting notion of telepathy as something that presupposes the identity and unity of a subject (he or she who receives or transmits a telepathic communication) to a writing of distant minds, apprehensions of feeling and suffering in and of the distance, phantom communications, unconscious, absent or ghostly emotions, without any return to stabilized identities. (Royle 268)

Royle criticises ideas presupposing the singleness or ‘unitariness’ of the narrator and ‘leav[ing] unquestioned the unity of the one who sees and of the one who speaks’ (Royle 263–64). When the supposed narrator sees and speaks from a character’s perspective like a telepathist, the voice cannot avoid the duality of the owner; uncertainty about ‘who sees’ and ‘who speaks’. Behind the narrative is a narrator/narrators without any single identity, one with mingling identities which incorporates different voices of different characters into itself through paranormal communication. The narrator-protagonists in Quin’s novel, who dissolve the boundary between them, represent this bizarre nature of the narrator.

I will explore the characters’ ‘schizophrenic’ nature as a matter of literature that is caused by telepathic communication. However, this does not mean that I will dismiss the material side of the novel. As John J. White suggests, the visual format on substantial pages plays a crucial role for expression of the spiritual aspect: ‘For a novel dealing with a schizophrenic, this split page [of the male sections] proves remarkably effective. . . . The aesthetic interference generated by splitting the page . . . is here exploited to conjure up a sense of madness’ (J. White 187). With a focus on mythological motifs in modern literature, White refers only briefly to Quin’s text as ‘another mode of juxtaposition [of mythology and modernity], a rarer sort’; yet his suggestion is important in that it indicates that expression of the imaginary as in myth, madness and mental states actually relies on the material condition of the novel (J. White 186).

Supernatural communication depends on ‘physicality’ or perceptual ‘capabilities of ordinary mortals’; ‘radical intersubjectivity . . . makes them [the spirits] long for the physical anchor of human embodiment’ (Sword 20–21). This can be said about the novel, where an insubstantial voice ‘long[s] for the physical anchor’ or material medium. To be published, circulated and read, a literary text needs to be printed on the pages of books or displayed on the screens of reading devices. Conscious of the material condition, Quin conducts visual experiments such as two-column style and unconventional paragraph changes. This ‘reverse[s] the traditional spiritualist hierarchy of spirit

and matter, which privileges the former and denigrates the latter' (Sword 21). While featuring spiritual communication, her work also shows that matter is equally important to literature.

Glyn White's book, *Reading the Graphic Surface: The Presence of the Book in Prose Fiction*, is a helpful guide when exploring visual experiments on the pages of prose fiction. It examines post-war novels that deploy 'graphic devices'—'an intentional alteration or disruption of the conventional layout of the page of a text which adds another layer of meaning'—on a 'graphic surface' or 'the face of any page of printed text' (G. White 6, 5). According to White, graphic devices make 'the appearance of the page . . . "defamiliarised"' and lead the reader's attention to the visual expression (G. White 11). However, this is not so much to emphasise 'the external reality of the book' as to stimulate 'the reader . . . to absorb it . . . as part of the internal reality of the text': 'the graphic surface does not only make us aware of its presence . . . [It] cannot be divorced from the syntactic capabilities of language . . . and the graphic surface and the text which it mediates can produce meaning concurrently' (G. White 20–21). The reader is given a crucial role in this production of meaning, integrating the text and its visuals and interpreting what they express together. Though White does not refer to Quin, there is no doubt that *Passages* is one of those texts 'foreground[ing] the process by which they are presented to the reader and mak[ing] emphatic use of the visual possibilities' (G. White 1). I will start my analyses by reading the 'graphic surface' of Quin's text and showing that 'the graphic surface and the text which it mediates can produce meaning concurrently'.³

In *Passages*, the two narrator-protagonists communicate in an unusual way. They are telepathists who can send and receive visions and messages through the mind without speaking in the ordinary sense. The following excerpt from the man's diary, where they are watching each other through the glass door inside a train (possibly of a compartment), with the female character standing in a doorway, represents their extraordinary relationship:

eyes wander from mine to the window, and
back again. Rumble of wheels, a sudden stir-
ring of birds rising out of trees. Her laughter
that doesn't come, though her mouth is open.
Maybe she's about to cry. Maybe

What of madness
—can one take on
another's. What

'We are mediums inhabiting each others'
imagination'.

would it be like
to get completely
outside our bodies?

(39)

Here, their supernatural connection is expressed in several ways. First, their ability of channelling is indicated by the fact that the man somehow knows what the woman cries even though he is not able to hear her. Additionally, the phrase he assumes she shouts from behind the glass—‘We are mediums inhabiting each others’ imagination’—functions as an explanation for the situation. Because they are spiritual ‘mediums’ or telepathists who can communicate without speech, he perceives her thoughts even if he is not able to hear her voice. The added note on the left side also provides another hint, as it implies that they might be able to ‘take on’ the visions of ‘madness’ in their minds by ‘getting . . . outside our [their] bodies’ like a ghost haunting the spiritual medium.

Furthermore, the graphic experiment of the split page plays a crucial role in illustrating their spiritual communication visually. In the latter half of the quotation, *his* thought is in the marginal writing and located *outside the main body*, while the right-hand main column is occupied with *her* cry, transmitted without speaking. This representation functions as a visual expression of the protagonists’ conducting telepathy. Once her thought is sent and received, it invades him and takes over his body. This expression, which makes use of graphic design, thus shows that ‘the graphic surface *can* be used to represent in other ways than simply bearing the representational sense of prose’ (G. White 55). In this scene, language and the graphic device indicate correspondingly that the protagonists are mediums and communicate in a supernatural way.

The attention to the material surface of the book further suggests another meaning of the word ‘medium’: the physical substance that receives the message. The message transmitted from the woman might be insubstantial, yet in the above case it gains substance when it is written on a page of the man’s journal with pen and ink. This indicates the precondition of their spiritual communication: it needs the physical body or the substantial medium with which to perceive and reflect the message. Significantly, in this novel it is not only his diary that mediates the message; their bodies are also used as the physical medium. That adds another possible interpretation of the phrase ‘[w]e are mediums’. They are not only spiritual mediums who communicate through telepathy but also substantial ones that have physical bodies on which the message is scribed.

Telepathic communication, which is conducted both on the spirit and body, corresponds to the representation of sexual intercourse: another crucial topic that the author explores throughout her oeuvre. Similar to telepathy, sex functions as a bridge between the imaginal and real worlds. This novel represents sex as a dream, yet it leaves traces of its existence in reality. When the protagonists are talking about ‘a divine madness’, as the man comments in his diary above, the woman perceives

a vision of his having sex: 'I saw him behind glass, his hands round the woman. The whip raised. The sharing of this, though we never spoke of it' (66). The perspective from 'behind glass' gives her a sense of distance, and the 'scene . . . merges with a dream' (24). Similarly for him, it is unreal. He cannot say whether it is his actual experience or not, 'wonder[ing] . . . if [he] had dreamed the whole scene' (60). Meanwhile, the dream-like experience of sex leaves material signs behind such as 'the whip swinging over the rocking chair' seemingly to suggest that it has actually happened (60).

Such oscillation between the real and the imaginary is a central theme for Quin's texts, where the dream and the real play a tug-of-war that never ends. The mystic vision of sex does not lead to rejection of material substance or physical body. Crucially for my argument, sex leaves not only objects like a whip but also marks on the skin: '[t]he bite in her neck, [which] he would remark on later, with a smile' (14). Here, the woman's body functions as a material medium to represent what she has taken. As I will discuss later, their spiritual intercourse also entails visions that are received on the body as if scribed on a piece of paper. In this novel, then, telepathic communication is parallel to having sex, both of which show the interrelation between the imaginary and the material. Quin's interest in telepathy is not surprising; it is pertinent to the crucial theme for her creative writing.

Royle regards the system of literary narrative as '[s]omeone . . . telling us what someone else is thinking, feeling or perceiving' while 'someone else may not even be aware of experiencing these thoughts, feelings or perceptions': a 'seemingly mad scenario' (Royle 256). 'Mad' or 'madness' is a word frequently used in *Passages* and, as in Royle's comments, its usage denotes the unusual conditions caused by spiritual intercourse. In the story, the characters' madness affects their mental and physical states, leading to confusion of consciousness and remodelling of the body. These consequences act as a mirror to reflect the literary narrative of the novel itself.

The 'madness' destabilises the self. The male protagonist is afraid that 'tak[ing] on each other's madness' disturbs his identity: 'How is consistency ever possible I have no sense at all who I was yesterday' (68). Their paranormal connection makes it difficult to have a coherent self-image. After perceiving the woman's vision of 'the cliff edge', the place in her sexual imagination, he writes: 'Then I knew I had experienced a kind of madness. Coming back to my body, a sense that I was perhaps someone else, some drifting thing that at least had found somewhere for inhabiting' (94). Sharing dreams with her through spiritual communication, he loses his sense of self.

The state of being 'someone else, some drifting thing' during spiritual communication does not only cause the destabilisation of the identity or prevent the characters from acquiring autonomous selves; it lets them merge into one mass. Telepathic communication blurs the border that should lie between the two protagonists and let their inner voices stream into one another. Their sharing personal fantasies without talking means that their minds are linked through supernatural

channels. This linkage connects their mental realms, which causes difficulty in establishing a clear boundary between them. The male confesses, 'I don't know whether I'm going more into your mind or you into mine' (66). As this shows, the spiritual bond dissolves the boundary between their minds, letting them merge into each other.

This confusion of their consciousness indicates the weird nature of the narrator. As mentioned above, when the narrator 'is telling us what someone else [, or a character,] is thinking, feeling or perceiving' by using telepathy, we cannot suppose 'the unity of the one who sees and of the one who speaks' (Royle 256, 264). That is, 'there is, from start to finish, no purity or propriety of a single "point of view", no single perspective or position or focus for "focalization". Instead, there is a different logic of identity, voice and knowledge, encapsulated in the structure of "being-two-to-speak"' (Royle 266–267). The duality of minds is a precondition of literary narration. These mingling minds lose any clear distinction, becoming inseparable. The protagonists deprived of their contours thus allude to the strange existence behind the literary narrative, once supposed to be the narrator with the consistent identity.

Importantly, what the merging of selves affects is not only the mind but also the physical body. The 'divine madness' of sharing dreams through telepathic communication makes the characters lose the somatic sense: 'He spoke of a death demon, said he had celebrated a divine madness. His body had not belonged to him, did not know how to occupy it again. Of feeling a victim of my [her] medium at times' (66). Being a 'medium' causes difficulty in belonging comfortably to one's own body, with the unsettled border between the characters' minds refusing the idea of one soul for one body. The body's owner is unclear when it is possessed by two mingling spirits. Consequently, the awkwardness that the man feels about his body is a result of the characters' paranormal communication, which unsettles the mental and physical boundaries between them.

As the characters' sense of self changes, the shape of the body is altered. For them, '[d]ream [is] accompanied with a sense of touch—single and double touch', which the woman feels 'in the identity conjured after midday sleep' (36, 62). Obscuring their identity, dreams that are 'accompanied with a sense of touch' transform their physical bodies. The man recognises this transformation, writing that he is 'plagued by dreams as if they were carved on [him], on a sheet of metal' (34). Telepathic communication inscribes the message on the body of the receiver; hence, when the woman transmits dreams, '[s]he sketches out her dreams on his skin', which reshapes the man's body to be fit for her visions (107). The body thus adopts the partner's thought into itself, reflecting it on its surface. As he mentions, the '[b]ody [is] an outpost, [and] boundaries [become] obscure' (33). The confusion of the two selves can be seen also on the physical medium, which is remodelled to accommodate the partner's visions.

The body of the woman also changes: 'her face [becomes] thinner, slightly flushed (how it can

change!)' (38). As the man's body is a canvas that reflects her dreams, her body is a material for his creation: 'In her nakedness she presents to him the surface of marble, which he slowly begins to cut other shapes from' (88). She does not see her recast body as her own. That is, she is unable to regard her mirror image as herself: 'She sat up, did not recognise this face [in the mirror], changing, patterned with light and shade. Another person. Some other life' (75). The usage of *she* instead of *I* emphasises the distance between her body and herself. With the literary experiment of alternating first- and third-person perspectives, this novel expresses the characters' unstable selves merging into one both mentally and physically.

The merging of consciousness and remodelling of the body bring about the creation of a new self-image, where the two narrator-protagonists are woven into one hybrid presence. The man modifies themselves into 'a creature, a sort of half man, half woman':

He shaped out of the wall a creature, a sort of half man, half woman. Just before he completed this the creature jumped out and began to unshape him bit by bit until only his toe remained

Stretching his hands out over the bed he was surprised at not finding the wall. Imagine it, he thought, that creature I shaped must have eaten it up, and he went back to sleep. (96)

This third-person narrative should not be taken as the *omniscient* third-person narrator.⁴ The third-person paragraphs in the man's diary are written with the two-space indent, which is a feature in the women's sections; hence, it functions in his journal as a sign of the intrusion of her voice into his. The third-person narrative in this essentially first-person novel is therefore made up of their overlapping voices. Here, they 'see' and 'speak' as one narrator-protagonist: this is what the imaginal 'creature, a sort of half man, half woman' represents. The man finds 'the disintegrating creature' is himself; the disappearance of *I* from the narrative voice leads to the birth of the third presence incorporating the individual characters (96).

The 'new perceptions' of the creature provide a new expression for their mingling selves, which are united by spiritual communication that collapses the conventional boundary (96). What is crucial is that the imaginary creature has a substantial body made of the wall. The physicality and the possibility of its modification act as an allusion to the characters reshaping the body through telepathic communication. As mentioned above, the traces of their spiritual intercourse are 'carved' on the body, whose skin is like 'a sheet of metal', as by a sculptor. The wall, the dividing structure that has stood between the woman and the man, disappears in this process; like the creature, they 'eat up' and absorb it into themselves.

This creature also represents *Passages* itself. Although the two different types of narratives, one male and one female, might appear to be separated clearly, the sectional divisions do not work properly. The male and female voices intrude upon one another and, together, form the third-person narrative. This invalidates the sectional divisions and destabilises the assumption of a coherent identity behind the narrative voice. Moreover, as the creature has a physical body like a sculpture, the novel exists as substantial material: a book. The creature, made from the two mingling protagonists with their visions carved on the body, also functions as a mirror of this novel, which is narrated via their mixed voices with the text printed on its pages.

This highly experimental novel is a self-referential work that discloses the fundamental but unnoticed features of the novel itself. The male protagonist states: 'I am constantly amazed by the strangeness of natural things and the naturalness of strange things' (103). This notion expresses the attitude of the work, which uncovers that 'natural' literary narration is conducted with the 'strange' voice of the telepathist-narrator with the unstable identity. Yet that does not mean dismissal of the opposite aspect: the real or material. The messages transmitted through telepathy need to be printed on the substantial medium. In this novel the emphasis falls not on the paranormal aspect but on the alliance between the supernatural and the substantial. The spiritual always calls for the material and vice versa. For literary narration, they are both necessary elements.

Quin's unique literary experiments with both language and typography have allocated her to a position outside literary history. However, these experiments are meant to reveal the significant nature of literary narration itself. *Passages*, with the two telepathists as the protagonists, shows the strange nature of narrative voice. As Nicholas Royle mentions, literary narration is conducted by the narrator perceiving visions in the manner of a telepathist. As the novel illustrates, paranormal communication destabilises the telepathist-narrators' sense of self, leading to their confused identity. Crucially, what the telepathic communication affects is not only their consciousness but also their bodies; as their minds merge, their bodies transform into one creature. This notion casts light on the materiality of the novel in a metafictional way. These issues of paranormal communication and the material text are represented with literary experiments such as inconsistency in the narrative perspective and visual experiments on the pages. With these experiments, Quin's novel illustrates significant aspects of literary narration: the narrator's paranormal perspective and the materiality of the literary text.

Notes

- 1 This paper is based on a presentation given at the 14th Conference of Kanto Branch of the English Literary

Society of Japan, held at Meiji Gakuin University, Tokyo, 17 June 2017.

- 2 In an attempt to scientifically explain supernatural phenomena and psychic forces, telepathy was studied with similar methods of science. What provided the foundation for this research was newly developing sciences at that time, among which one of the most important can be termed 'new ideas about communication technologies'; as Pamela Thurschwell suggests, '[a]s a newly coined word (by F. W. H. Myers in 1882) telepathy is connected to other forms of teletechnology, and often imagined as functioning in the same way that these other technologies do' (Thurschwell 14).
- 3 As Glyn White mentions, novels with 'graphic devices' tended to be neglected 'in Britain, particularly in the three decades after the Second World War, where a traditional criticism, with a strong conservatism in favour of realism and against any writing that might diverge from those conventions, has been dominant' (G. White 2). The antagonism between realism and experimentalism 'produce[d] a rigid critical convention in which the concept of representation (property of traditional criticism) is incompatible with textual self-awareness (property of "formalist" criticism)', and 'graphic devices were seen to be mere formal play' against reality (G. White 52). This attitude is wrong, however, because 'reality and fiction are bound together' in the novel; the graphic surface is 'the text's grounding in the world and the jumping off point for fiction' (G. White 53).
- 4 Nicholas Royle contends that "'[o]mniscience" . . . is a misleading and incoherent term: it "obscures" the "time-bound", "space-bound" particularity of what is going on in literary fiction' (Royle 259). The knowledge and perspective in the third-person narrative of the novel are restricted to the protagonists.

References

- Coe, Jonathan. *Like a Fiery Elephant: The Story of B. S. Johnson*. Continuum, 2004.
- Evenson, Brian, and Joanna Howard. 'Ann Quin'. *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2003, pp. 50–74.
- Fahim, Shadia S. *Doris Lessing: Sufi Equilibrium and the Form of the Novel*. St. Martin's Press, 1994.
- Galín, Müge. *Between East and West: Sufism in the Novels of Doris Lessing*. State University of New York Press, 1997.
- Harrison, Jane Ellen. *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*. Cambridge UP, 1908.
- Lachman, Gary. *The Dedalus Book of the 1960s: Turn off Your Mind*. Dedalus Books, 2010.
- Luckhurst, Roger. *The Invention of Telepathy: 1870 – 1901*. Oxford UP, 2002.
- Mackrell, Judith. 'Ann Quin'. *British Novelists Since 1960 (Dictionary of Literary Biography)*, edited by Jay L. Halio, Gale Research, 1983.
- Moore, Henrietta L., and Todd Sanders. 'Magical Interpretations and Material Realities: An Introduction'. *Magical Interpretations, Material Realities: Modernity, Witchcraft and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa*, edited by Henrietta L. Moore and Todd Sanders, Routledge, 2001, pp. 1–27.

- Nishino, Noriko. “‘The Dead Can(‘t) Dominate Like This’: The Ordinary Life, Cinema, Modernism and Ann Quin’s *Three*’. *Language and Information Sciences*, vol. 17, the University of Tokyo Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, 2019, pp. 103–19.
- Quin, Ann. *Passages*. Dalkey Archive Press, 2003.
- Royle, Nicholas. *The Uncanny*. Routledge, 2003.
- Sword, Helen. *Ghostwriting Modernism*. Cornell UP, 2002.
- ‘Telepathy’. *Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford UP, 2016, [oed.com/view/Entry/198715?redirectedFrom=telepathy#eid](https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/198715?redirectedFrom=telepathy#eid).
- Thurschwell, Pamela. *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking, 1880–1920*. Cambridge UP, 2001.
- White, Glyn. *Reading the Graphic Surface: The Presence of the Book in Prose Fiction*. Manchester UP, 2005.
- White, John J. *Mythology in the Modern Novel: A Study of Prefigurative Techniques*. Princeton UP, 1971.
- Williams Korteling, Nonia. ‘*Designing Its Own Shadow*’: *Reading Ann Quin*. unpublished doctoral thesis, University of East Anglia, 2013.