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Probing Past and Present: How Historicity and Temporality Influence Cultural Narrative

EMILY MORRISON
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Reviewed and approved* by the following:

Tina Chen
Associate Professor of English and Asian American Studies
Thesis Supervisor

Xiaoye You
Professor of English and Asian Studies
Honors Adviser

* Signatures are on file in the Schreyer Honors College.

ABSTRACT

In analyzing two novels, David Bradley's *The Chaneysville Incident* and Sesshu Foster's *Atomik Aztex*, this thesis explores the relationship between historicity, temporality, narrative structure, and culture. In most literary traditions, the standardization of chronology and historical familiarity cause significant challenges to authors who aim to represent non-white cultures. Many narrative forms hope to serve as translations between different cultures, though few have the capacity to do so effectively. This thesis, by examining two novels that succeed at this task, describes the importance of creating cultural narratives as well as the ways in which temporal and historical theory can be useful tools to do so.

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Summary

In aiming to help readers understand the complicated relationship between historicity, temporality, and cultural difference, fiction writers employ several unique narrative strategies. Specifically, this thesis explores the ways that writers can augment reality through their fiction to show the reader that different modes of thinking about both history and temporality can lead one to a more nuanced understanding of a different culture. The key terms of the project - historicity, temporality, and cultural difference - are defined, for the purpose of this thesis, as follows:

Historicity is a means of analyzing the past when considering the way in which perspective always influences the interpretation of history as well as the narrative nature of history itself. *Temporality* relates to the ways in which time does not always function linearly and points to the complicatedness of existence in reality that cannot be accurately represented by traditional, mathematical representations of time while acknowledging the potentiality for the existence of multiple, concurrent realities. *Cultural differences* can fall to the guise of being represented in fiction writing through the lens of a narrative style that abstracts the ideology of a culture, though fiction has the potential to facilitate a more accurate epistemological representation of underrepresented cultures.

To make this argument, I explore two novels: David Bradley's *The Chaneysville Incident* and Sesshu Foster's *Atomik Aztex*. Bradley examines the ways that historicity itself can be narrativized while temporal linearity can be dangerously insufficient when trying to glean information from the events of the past. His narrator, John Washington, engages on a historical quest of his own, and much of the theoretical information of that chapter analyses John's

methods of inquiry to determine the most efficient way to blend personal experience with historical fact. In *Atomik Aztex*, Sesshu Foster employs a world based on astrophysical multiverse theory, writing multiple, simultaneous narratives that challenge the traditional conception of temporal singularity within a narrative. Foster also utilizes traditional historical rhetoric to satirize the particularity of historical record by reversing the roles of European and ancient Mexica cultures.

The thesis' final chapter brings both novels together to tackle the comparison between narrative modes of representing cultures. Both of these works shed light on multiple cultural perspectives that can understand a narrative in relation to historicity, creating a cultural converging point between readers and text that more fully authenticates the interactions between the worlds that each belongs to. While these novels are concerned with both culture and the past, the relationship between the two is slightly different for each work. In *The Chaneysville Incident,* John Washington hopes to elucidate information about his family's past that will give him a better understanding of himself, though he comes to realize that this history is inseparable from the biased and racist culture that his family has encountered throughout several generations. Tackling the relations between historicity and culture with more of a focus on literary structure than plot device, *Atomik Aztex* creates a direct exchange between the readers and the text in such a way that a reader cannot understand the work without engaging intimately with the cultural context it embodies. With this discussion, the final chapter of the thesis explores the in-depth ways that a narrative can be stylistically presented so that the epistemological and cultural interaction between the work and the reader is more genuine and accurate.

Chapter 1

Ownership of the Past in *The Chaneysville Incident*

A story of self-discovery and historical ownership, *The Chaneysville Incident* leads protagonist John Washing through generations of love and loss. John, a history professor in Philadelphia, returns to his hometown of Bedford, Pennsylvania upon hearing that his father's friend, Old Jack, is ill and close to death. Upon returning home, John is forced to confront his troubled past which mostly involves the suicide of Moses, his father. In order to better understand his own past, John begins to investigate the details of his father's life, discovering that his family's history is much more complicated than he originally believed. Primarily, John's endeavors become a quest to understand himself, though he oversimplifies the criteria he will need to do so by hypothesizing that the answer will lie in his father's reason for committing suicide. In Bedford, local legend tells of a group of escaped slaves that was traveling through the region and committed suicide there before their imminent capture; sorting through all of Moses' historical records, John discovers that the leader of this group was none other than his great-grandfather, C.K. Washington. With this realization, John must acquire a deeper understanding of the details behind these specific events and their relationship to the individuals who were there in order to come to a better understanding of the world he grew up in as well as the one he still lives in. The history of his own life, in that moment, becomes much bigger than just Moses' story: it includes an entire history of oppression and racial tension, all of which John must consider when formulating his own personal narrative.

This thesis is concerned overall with examining the narrative strategies that explicate the complicated relationship between historicity, temporality, and cultural difference. In focusing on

The Chaneysville Incident, this chapter looks at the ways that Bradley's novel engages with each of these topics: in terms of history, Bradley's prime motive is to examine the methods of historical inquiry, while other stylistic choices (mostly involving metaphor) reflect Bradley's interest in the ways that thinking about the past chronologically oversimplifies lived reality and experience. The past leaves a lasting impression on both the continuous present and future, and configuring the ways in which these impressions influence day-to-day life is a struggle that *The Chaneysville Incident* interrogates through John's experiences. John looks to the past to answer questions about his present; mainly, he hopes to glean some insight into the complex racial tensions he feels within his own existence. There are many challenges to an endeavor such as this, however; history is predicated by experience in such a way that makes it impossible to ever fully understand an event that happened in the past. Each person has a unique perspective on any given event, and each retelling of a story takes it a little bit farther away from the most accurate representation possible. Bradley's novel suggests that a solution to understanding history more clearly is through a literary interpretation; namely, through the narrativization of events. In *The Chaneysville Incident*, these distinctions arise for John in the form of "intersections between historical knowledge and imaginative narrative" (Wagers, 24). The narrativization of history is a useful tool in including both the "imaginative" and the "historical" facets of the past and would be of use to John in his journey.

"Metahistory" and "emplotment" are two terms coined by literary theorist Hayden White that are useful in understanding the literary nature of history. In essence, White claims that the fluidity of the past can be better understood when reading historical documentation more like a novel than a factual document and admires the literariness of historical evaluation. "Emplotment" is the term White uses to describe the method through which certain experiences

and facts can be woven and blended to create a metahistorical text "by the suppression or subordination of certain [events] and the highlighting of others, by characterization, motific repetition, variation of tone and point of view" that has the interpretational capacity of a narrative. (White, 1539) Such notions highlight the ways in which the analysis of literature mirrors the interpretation of history, such that perspectives and other biases will always influence the final result of such research. In White's view, a "good professional historian" can be identified by "the consistency with which he reminds his readers of the purely provisional nature of his characterizations of events, agents, and agencies found in the always complete historical record," maintaining the impossibility of true actualization (White, 1537). In *The Chaneysville Incident*, the concept of emplotment creates a productive way for John to reflect on the actions of others in a more productive way by providing a process through which he can separate and then reinsert himself into his genealogical history.

White's theory would allow John to cautiously access the perspectives of others since he would have the freedom to examine them on a more distant level; by looking at himself and his emotions literarily, he could start to realize the wider scope of possible explanations for the events so carefully organized in his personal records. In doing so, he takes a step back from his own perspective to examine historical data, and once he does so from a less involved standpoint, can re-integrate whatever meaning he finds into his own life. White theorized that "most historical sequences can be emplotted in a number of different ways, so as to provide different interpretations of those events and to endow them with different meanings," so in allowing for these possibilities, John has the potential to explore interpretations that would be more or less conducive to the narrative he is trying to create about his own selfhood (White, 1543). John believes that the goal of the historian is not entirely to find an absolute truth, but to provide a

narrative close enough to what would generally be accepted as the truth that would allow him to have some sort of personal connection with his past and move forward with a more constructive version of the events of the past.

For John Washington, the search for a historically formulated self-understanding will involve, by definition, an attempt to place himself within a relevant historical context, the core of which will be his familial past. The main issue in interpreting the past stems from the [non]physical nature of the evidence in a greater investigation of self. John cannot fully understand what happened to Moses and C.K. simply because he is not Moses or C.K. Their identities are tightly bound to the metaphysical aspects of their personas, something that John can only access indirectly. Because of this discrepancy, John must find some way to piece together the historical and racial contexts within which they existed so that he can more fully understand with the personal experience of the people he aims to relate to more deeply. Bradley's work insinuates that there both is a contextual and personal version of history, and John serves as an example of the challenges that arise from trying to combine each of these two elements in a complex way.

John's profession as a historian, which superficially seems as though it should be helpful to him in achieving his goals, actually becomes one of his greatest inhibitors. This is no coincidence; with this decision, Bradley illustrates how professional historians can have limited interpretations on the events of the past in trying to look at them objectively. John attempts to use professional techniques of inspection to bring clarity to his past (and subsequently his present), for in the academic historical tradition, "reason not only sets the goal for history but also governs the realization of that goal" (Ankersmit, Carr, 22). His academic training, which focuses on rationality, proves to be one of the most pressing challenges to his endeavors, because his

strategies overlook some of the most important subjective lines of inquiry, including the fusion of emotional motivation with social or political circumstance.

To truly have a better concept of the past, John will have to recognize the motivation behind his own actions in addition to the humanity of a community of people around him in order to achieve some narrative clarity. Paul Ricoeur, a famed French philosopher concerned with phenomenology and hermeneutics, writes that, "the historians' profession, the epistemology of the historical sciences, and genetic phenomenology combine their resources to reactivate that fundamental noetic vision of history which, for the sake of brevity, I have called 'historical intentionality'" (Ricoeur, 229). In this sense, the primary concern of historical inquiry is not just the event itself or the subjective matter surrounding it, but rather the cohesion of both in an intentional way. Historical intentionality requires a historian to have some inquisitive goal in mind, and the "combination of resources" that Ricoeur discusses refers to the fusion of personal and circumstantial information in order to achieve a more holistic representation of events of the past. For John, this includes not only the recorded events that occurred before and during his lifetime, but also the emotional toll that those events had on his family members.

Bradley, Ricoeur, and White are all interested in disassembling the concept of universal history. While there are many ways of conceptualizing universal history, in this chapter, universal history refers to singularity; essentially, it describes the idea that there is one true meaning of history at the heart of all fact and interpretation. This, however, is inherently problematic for both the theorists noted in this chapter and Bradley. White's theory of emplotment implies that there will never be one narrative that can completely explicate all of history; the interpretation of historical texts, while retaining the possibility of being metaphorically read in a productive way, cannot be watered down into one neat analysis of an

event. Ricoeur goes a step further: the creation of historical narratives has an "intentionality" as mentioned above that influences a text in a secondary manner to make it even more complicated to try to parse out some meaning from historical narratives. A historian's intentionality then references the decisions one must include when creating a historical narrative, for example, which perspectives are the most relevant or which facts will be most helpful in understanding the past. Bradley, in having a narrator who is a trained historian who struggles with the distinctions between objective and subjective forms of historical representation, creates a narrative that directly engages with these theories about gleaning meaning from the past. John could narrativize his - or, for that matter, Moses' or C.K.'s - story in multiple different ways, each of which would create a new version of the past; therefore, Bradley makes reference of the multiplicity of historical interpretation.

It is not that John ignores the emotional elements of history entirely; in fact, quite the opposite is true. When first delving into the documentation of his father's research, he describes how Moses believed in what he calls "Historian's Heaven", giving the moment of discovery an almost holy significance. "... If we've been good little historians," he narrates, "just before they do whatever it is they finally do with us, they'll take us in there and show us what was *really* going on. It's not that we want so much to know we were right. We *know* we're not right… It's just that we want to really, truly, utterly, absolutely, completely, finally, know" (Bradley, 264). Even John's mother at the Judge's office recognizes the struggles that Moses and his son face, saying, "...he spent all his time tearing it apart, just like you, and he never did [know]" (Bradley, 196). The obsessive nature that the historian embodies during an investigative journey is one that ironically highlights the gaps that would help him ascertain some truth: by over-concentrating on what he's missing, John makes himself unable to find that link. In this instance, John realizes

that he is essentially starting from a complicated origin in that his father undertook the same endeavor and was seemingly unable to reach a conclusion. This inability, combined with his obsession, drove him to suicide. Moses made some mistakes, John believes, and all he had to do was find them. The research he does, particularly after the discovery of the folio, is little his own; he relies on work previously done by his father, and in doing so makes himself more vulnerable to succumbing to the same fallacies that Moses did. Additionally, using Moses' folio provides John with somewhat abstracted information, since it had belonged to his father previously and had the remnants of his unique mode of researching family and local history. While it does contain some factual information that will be useful, there is a potential misleading of information because the folio had once belonged to someone else.

Not only does the folio provide academically sound evidence that will prove useful in John's investigation, but it serves a dual purpose in that it brings to light a major misconception that he has about his father's character. The folio of Moses' information is the ultimate symbol of historical analysis. Quite brilliantly, the physical object becomes a symbol for *both* the sensory - meaning relating to the subjectivity of experience - and the objective categories of evidence. The judge who gives John the package admits that Moses held a political power in the town throughout his entire adult life and that this control was due to his aptness for extortion. "It was dirt," the judge describes. "Pure and simple. Otherwise known as power, enough of it to hold on to the County for another twenty years" (Bradley, 202). The ways that Moses used this power, however, is described by the judge as "...not like a whip. More like a leash" (Bradley, 200). This carefully planned control parallels the way in which Moses' other research efforts were conducted: quietly, privately, and obsessively. Despite the legends of Moses' dramatic shows of knowledge and power throughout his friend Jack's retellings, the folio represents his primary

belief in the subtleties of control. Moses was a feared man for far more lucrative reasons than John had previously imagined. Here, then, the judge provides John with physical evidence to bring clarification into the day-to-day activity of Moses' life, indirectly revealing his characteristics in the process. John is able to better understand some of the more intimate details of his father's internal life, opening up new possibilities for viewing Moses' socio political power that John finds useful in making decisions about how to place Moses within his personal narrative.

To further illustrate John's inability to effectively communicate or accept the importance of personal perspective to history, John's girlfriend, Judith, acts as a foil to him in several important ways to point out the effects of his emotional distance on his ability to relate to others. Judith's visit to the cabin foreshadows John's eventual acceptance of both his and other's emotions. In congruence with her role as a foil, Judith is a psychologist by profession. She does, in some ways, act as John's provocateur since she frequently urges him to open up and share his past and - more importantly - his feelings with her, much to his dissatisfaction. She begs him to tell her "what happened", though these details are not necessarily of John's concerns, it's the motivations behind them which are causing him the greatest sense of grief. In the end, however, Judith confides in him and acknowledges her perspectival disadvantage. "I'm supposed to understand. But how *can* I understand? You've never told me anything," she says. "… There's something here that terrifies you. But you won't share it either way" (Bradley, 261). Here, she notices John's struggle and obsession and actively tries to get him to realize his grievance, though the scene ends with John telling Judith to leave, another instance of his unwillingness to confront the wrongness of his process or the complicated web of emotions he's feeling. In a somewhat basic way, Judith communicates to John what his main investigative flaw is when she

attempts to get him to reflect subjectively on the information in the folio, though he does not heed her advice at that point in the novel. Emotional perception, the thing that should be combined with factual data when creating a historical narrative, is the piece of the puzzle that John struggles with most throughout the course of the novel, and Judith brings these challenges to the forefront of the reader's attention.

Despite his struggles throughout the course of the novel, John Washington discovers what is most likely the truth. Just as he slowly becomes one with a deer while hunting earlier in the plot, John tracks his father's footsteps through the woods where he hopes to gather either some physical evidence or prophetic insight. Towards the end of the novel, John discovers the graves of several runaway slaves, one of whom he hypothesizes to be his grandfather, C.K. Washington. Through a complex explanation of historical events - the likes of which Judith herself struggles to keep up with - John realizes that his father spent the entirety of his life, including his military career, fatherhood, and, of course, death, hoping to emulate his own grandfather in an attempt to realize what his life's meaning was. In mirroring C.K.'s decisions, Moses had hypothesized that he would be able to fully envelop himself in history to the extent that he would be completely immersed in it, and that that immersion would lead to the most complete understanding of the historical past that he could have. Moses spent and lost his life in the same effort which John finds himself, and in a strange turn of events, John discovers that Moses's efforts were driven by a desire to embody his ancestor as wholly as possible, for Moses understood the importance of perspective in the context of his personal history. In an attempt to more closely understand C.K.'s consciousness, Moses attempted to break the boundary of perspective by imitating him as much as possible, and John's life is, in effect, a result of these actions.

From a structural standpoint, the novel's ending also engages with the uncertainties dealt with throughout the plot. It is unknown if Moses was ever satisfied with the result of his inquiry since it culminated in his demise. When John sneaks out of the cabin to burn the folio, the question arises as to whether he understands Moses' motivations fully, or whether he has accepted his inability to ever truly understand how his life i influenced by the past. Bradley carefully crafts the text so that he never allows "characters or readers to transcend their historicized subject positions… to completely inhabit others' reality" (Wagers, 40). As John fails to shoot the deer when he's hunting, so he also fails to shoot himself (as far as readers are aware). His "hunt" for his historical self leads him to a point that would have led, if he really wanted to follow his father, to his death. While there is no literary evidence that will confirm or deny entirely what John's actions are after the closing lines of the novel, there are certain suggestions that the narration makes which would more likely support one of the given hypotheses.

When considering the evidence presented in this chapter, the end could not include John's suicide because of the philosophical irrelevance that killing himself would have. If John were to truly reiterate his father's actions in an attempt to share some level of his consciousness and reach "Historian's Heaven", he would have had to travel back to the graves near where his father was found, for the tie between the physical earth and the psychological significance of the location are inseparable in this instance. There is a great extension of text here because John, with these actions and hints, places the readers in the same sort of interpretative conundrum that he himself experienced throughout the book. The ending of the novel is just ambiguous enough that readers are thrown into the mystery of John's ending; does John end up in "Historian's Heaven", or does he go back to Philadelphia with Judith and continue with his life? Again,

readers have the literal documentation in the form of the text in order to solve this problem, though the abstraction between character and reader is more of a distinct inhibitor than the consciousness of a father.

In creating an ending to the novel that is somewhat obscure, Bradley effectively facilitates the same opportunity for readers that John encountered throughout the novel. John spent the entirety of the work searching through documentation and events that could have had multiple interpretations, and his challenge was to create a narrative from them that explicated those events satisfactorily for him. Since the novel, too, can be interpreted in several ways (as previously mentioned), then the reader has the ability take what information is provided in the text and create their own narrative interpretation based on the context provided by the novel. While there may be one reading of the ending, like the one presented in this chapter, that is more accurate than others, the ability for others to even exist further illustrates the possibility for understanding history in a variety of ways. While Bradley's work shows the multiplicity of historical interpretation, this chapter also describes the ways in which it is possible to narrativize history - or "emplot" it, to use White's terminology - to create an understanding of the past that includes the subjective motivations behind what happens in the past.

John Washington yearns to uncover the secrets of his past in an attempt to understand not only his father's suicide or his great-grandfather's story, but also the complex nature of his own identity. There will, by the end of the novel, be an opportunity for John to not just recognize the disparity in his own mental capacity, but also to gain insight into the fallacies in his own methods of personal inquiry. His most valuable discovery arises not with the folio, but in the instance when he can realize the historicity of the past and separate, in effect, the factual versus the personal. The folio only contains factual contextualization, not emotional. The study of history

reveals only so much about one's own identity: the past is explicable only through provocative, tendentious disclosure, and the process through which this sort of information can be acquired is one atypical of traditional historical records. John's narrative of his father becomes one that includes the obsession with discovering the secrets behind C.K.'s story and the legend of the slaves who died in Bedford, and also one of Moses' ability to maintain political control through the control of information. Both of these narratives help John to understand why Moses died, and also helps him see the narrative of his own life become one centered around the act of discovery.

Historicity is not the only topic Bradley toys with in his novel, however: in addition to challenging the notion of universal history, *The Chaneysville Incident* explores the ways in which it is impossible to have a complex understanding of the past when employing a linear temporality. Academic tradition normally places events in a chronological fashion on a timeline in an organized and effective way to categorize information. What this does, however, is oversimplify the way that one experiences the world in reality. While it is true that in day-to-day life one event occurs after the other in a somewhat linear way, understanding the importance of some events in comparison to others is when the chronology of time becomes cumbersome. *The Chaneysville Incident* provokes the idea that linear temporalities do not allow for the intricate interpretation of events; by using metaphorical images to represent the reordering of events, Bradley creates a series of stylistic means through which time can be illustrated in a way more complex than linear singularity.

The scene that best illustrates the failings of chronological temporality comes after the discovery of Moses' folio, or the collection of all of Moses' research. When John attempts to order the events described within it, John writes out each individual fact and event on a note card. Much like the folio, John's complex and seemingly inordinate method for writing out

events on cards are symbolic of his academic confusion. He admits their encumbrance to Judith when he says that “The cards don’t really do anything… no suppositions or connections. No cause and effect”. Under a normal inquiry, John tells her that “you can discover connections. If you’re good, there’s a point where all the facts just come together and the ideas come out” (Bradley, 268). Essentially, John hopes that the alignment of events in a chronological fashion - with the help of the index cards - will spark in him a revelation that will give him the answer that he is under the impression that he is looking for. Placing himself within the past will require *his* interpretation of events. And while this is partially true, it is devastatingly incomplete, because it will truly involve his interpretation in combination with the perspectives of everyone relating to Moses’ life and the deaths of the escaped slaves.

The connections that the note cards lack are the underlying motivations and, basically, the collective consciousness of not just John, but of all of his family members. The multiplicity of historical meaning is based in the personal nature of experience: since John can only understand his own motives and feelings, he will not be able to analyze with any accuracy that which came before him. Indeed, this is paradoxical to the point made earlier in this essay; if John’s motivations are historically driven, then he would have to have some sort of historical knowledge to reasonably reflect on himself. There must then be some sort of process or interruption to break the cycle of confusion, and the professionally learned process that John applies, like with the color-coded index cards, provides little aim in this more epistemological conundrum.

In addition to historicity and temporality, Bradley’s novel is written entirely within the context of racial tension and discrimination; starting with the legend surrounding C.K. Washington and the Underground Railroad and ending with John’s relationship with Judith, each

generation of Washington men encounters racism in different ways. Both Moses and John are haunted by the story of C.K., and understanding more about his story was what they both hoped would allow them to understand the racial situations they experienced in their own time. John, in trying to explain his reasons to Judith for being obsessed with the historical legend, says, "I learned that knowing nothing can get you humiliated and knowing a little bit can get you killed, but knowing all of it will bring you power" (Bradley, 284). For both Moses and John, finding out "the truth" of society is attractive considering they believe it to be a way in which they can control their own life circumstances. Each man, however, has different reactions to the prejudices against him, causing a tension of difference between them that would make the historical understanding of C.K.'s story only somewhat effective in satisfying their own intellectual aims.

The main thing that differentiates Moses and John from C.K. in terms of racial prejudice is that Moses and John were able to function, to some extent, like white men in their societies. While C.K.'s only hope was to fight for the freedom of slaves, Moses and John were able to assert power in more direct ways. With his folio of information about the white members of the town, Moses was able to maintain control over the political atmosphere, occupying an intermediary space between the white and black community. John, as previously mentioned, is a history professor who is dating a white woman. While he admits that Judith cannot fully understand his experience because of their racial differences, he too exists in this in-between state of whiteness and blackness that would make his ability to understand C.K. much more difficult. The racial atmosphere of Bedford had changed somewhat over time as well, as John notes that "it's true now and it was true then, only then [hate] was easier to see" (Bradley, 338). As society changes and develops over time, so too does racial prejudice. Again, Bradley is

showing that even in terms of unending racial prejudice, perspective is relative to the point that men of the same family cannot even shed a significant amount of light on the ways in which one's environment predicates their interiority. It is true that environment has a large effect on who one becomes, but the environmental and generational gaps between C.K., Moses, and John is too great for either man to achieve the depth of historical understanding they hope for.

Throughout *The Chaneysville Incident*, John Washington probes the past in the hopes of being able to answer the question of why some things in his life exist as they do, and this journey to understanding is one that the reader is also able to engage in rather directly, though limitedly. As he narrates the story, John also controls the amount of information that the reader would have to analyze the situation; thus, readers have little ability to use their own investigative reasoning as would be possible in, perhaps, detective fiction. Instead, the analysis of the novel on the part of the reader pertains more directly to the act of historical inquiry and the modes through which memories can effectively be translated into useful bouts of information to help clarify issues in the present. The narrative follows John as he uncovers the truth, but the reader can uncover how he could do so more efficiently and sincerely.

Additionally, John must blend his "imaginative narrative" and the factuality of history to create his own interpretation of how the past affects his present life. Historically speaking, emplotment would be the theory through which John would have the most success in finding out more about himself, since the creation of a historical narrative helps to eliminate some of the challenges of sorting through the multiplicity in historical perspective. Bradley also toys with the idea that doing so does not require a linear conception of time, and that the ability to think about history in a more experiential way opposed to a literal one can help bring John to a more nuanced idea of the past. Finally, Bradley centers the plot around the racist nature of the society that this

family belonged to and notes that while history can help one to understand the present, there will always be differences too great to overcome. John does find some answers to his questions throughout *The Chaneysville Incident*, but in the end, the reader cannot be sure to what extent those answers are satisfying to John. In this way, the novel creates a tension within it that mirrors the historical, personal, temporal, and social tensions that it explores.

Chapter 2

The Role of Narrative "Aesthetiks" and Multiverse Theory in *Atomik Aztex*

When looking at examples of narratives that can alter traditional literary temporality, there are few examples more challenging and fascinating than the alternative history work of Sesshu Foster, *Atomik Aztex*. A work that challenges even the most basic tenets of literary structure, *Atomik Aztex* weaves multiple layers of the omniverse through the novel and traces one character, Zenzontli, through two realms that will, for this discussion's sake, be called the "Aztec-verse" and the "Euro-verse". The Aztec-verse reflects one version of history in which the Aztec warriors beat Spanish conquistadors, leading them to becoming a world power that colonized Europe. In this realm, Zenzontli is the Keeper of the House of Darkness and a celebrated warrior, though readers discover through his narration that he suffers from powerfully disruptive, unexplainable visions. These visions form a window into the Euro-verse, a parallel universe that adopts a historical world view similar to the Western one that is accepted today. In this world, Zenzon is a laborer in a meat-packing plant who gets recruited to become a union organizer. The lines between these realms are blurred and can be confusing at times as Zenzontli attempts to narrate while bouncing back and forth between the two dimensions. The secondary characters themselves tend to be mobile throughout the two -verses, creating two worlds that coexist on different spatiotemporal planes.

In *Atomik Aztex,* Foster creates a universe in which the definition of reality itself is questioned as well as satirizing the rhetoric most often used for historical narratives. The argument of this chapter is that this novel achieves those goals by facilitating a style and utilizing

a version of history that require the reader to have a more interactive relationship with the text. Here, an integrated relationship with the text would require the reader to step out of the epistemological bounds of the world they live in in order to fully understand the thematic meaning of the work. *Atomik Aztex* does not thematically insinuate that the world would be a better place if the Aztecs conquered Europe; instead, the book uses the juxtapositions of two drastically different modes of thinking to engage readers in a more complex relationship with the narrative, a relationship directly influenced by the narrator. He is the driver of the text, and his teknology and "kool aesthetiks" are what give him the ability to do so. There are, however, three unique ways in which the traditional lines between author and narrator become blurred throughout the text: by calling into question epistemology through overall narrative complexity, breaks in temporality, and historical multiplicity. The unique blend of narrator and author serves to bring the reader closer to the world of the text and have a more fully incorporated experience of the world Foster creates.

The complications in immediate accessibility for readers stems from the Aztec "aesthetiks", or the cultural values that dictate Aztec life and thought. Zenzontli, as a narrator who struggles with uncertainty, only makes the narrative more complex; additionally, the narrative is further complicated by the astrophysical culture of "teknology" that also grounds the text in an Aztec conception of "eksistence" and temporality which Foster creates based on a religiously-rooted Aztec culture. Foster develops linguistic and rhetorical styles that, while inspired by those of Mexica cultures, are meant to be dramatic interpretations of the ancient culture instead of a direct representation. The "Aztec" spelling of these words, i.e. "aesthetiks," "teknology," and "eksistence," will be used in order to distinguish those concepts that are based in Aztec ideology so they may be compared to the traditional spellings that will refer to the

Western uses of these words. These etymological choices on Foster's part, while not direct representations of ancient languages, infuse formal English with elements that express an epistemological difference. A reader can read the word "effekt" and have some relative idea of its definition, though within the context of the story, it has more refined meanings. There is a level of relativity close enough for the reader to recognize it, but still some ideological work is required to clear up the abstraction surrounding its slightly changed meaning within the text. Foster's manipulation of these cultural concepts and interpretations of reality gives him the power to shape the narrative in a way that forces reader participation in the text, ultimately calling European narrative tradition into question through the defamiliarization of traditional narrative and language. With this novel, Foster creates a narrative that requires readers to pay close attention to the multiverse the story eksists in because of these stylistic choices.

In order to begin to understand *Atomik Aztex,* one must have a basic knowledge of ancient Mexica cultures. The way that these cultures viewed the universe and their relationship to it is the ideology that Foster bases the multiverse theory of *Atomik Aztex* off of. (This, then, is the difference between the universal theory of the previous chapter and its definition here, where it relates to a concept explaining existence in the universe.) Understanding, then, the culture surrounding the premise of the novel helps to clarify some of the structural challenges in reading it. According to Aztec tradition, time is cyclical, so everything that happened in the past will happen again and what will happen in the future has already happened. In *Atomik Aztex*, this relationship allows Zenzontli to make very distinct cultural references like, for instance, to Michael Jackson, that would have occurred after 1942, the year that the main events of the novel take are supposed to take place. These concepts are inseparable from religion, as the gods and spirits that Aztecs believed in were also seen to be the drivers of time and the circular nature of

the chronicles of the universe. As different gods fought for control, each succession of godly power or period of transition brought forth a new era on Earth (Leon-Portilla, 51). Subsequently, the recreation of the world at each of these junctions in combination with the supposed circular nature of time supports the belief in multiverse theory, or perhaps more generally in the existence of an omniverse with multiple possible versions of reality which can be combined into one omniverse (Barrett). The recognition the gods received from humans is the only fuel through which this omniverse could function. Natural inconsistencies in the experience of time - as individuals do not *feel* time in seconds or some other strict mathematical division - is one the Aztecs felt was a pulse, similar to that of a beating heart. These "pulsating, progressive temporal patterns" rely on "the absolute necessity of reciprocity" (Read, 169). Since experience of the universe exists in this pulsating form, the sacrifice of human hearts is the way in which the gods could ignite the unevenness of temporality and stabilize the reciprocity between the nonhuman and human entities (Pharo, Harrig). Zenzontli, in his narrative, focuses on this rhetoric of pulsating time and the sacrifice of human hearts, a tradition typical in Aztec and other Mexica religions, making reference to these broad spiritual concepts.

In a more direct interpretation, Zenzontli refers to these religious practices as "teknology," and it is this concept that forms the basis of all of the traditions and values that follow from it. This does differ from the European realm of science and technology that is based on more physical forms of evidence, but Aztec culture is so inherently based in the metaphysical that this form of scientific inquiry is spiritually irrelevant. Instead of "exist," the Aztecs "eksist," a rhetorical term that implies the religion-inspired temporal theory of the multiplicitous omniverse. Through such terminology, Foster develops a narrative world that challenges European linguistic and technological ideology. By mirroring a rhetoric used in a more modern

scientific sense, he describes “teknospiritual innovations” to outline the superiority of this mode of thought:

> “It was our scientifikness that we Aztex were able to connect with the most teknocratikally advanced spiritual beings refracted in the multitudinous multivalent wheeling planes of the universe, both inside and outside of Time… We invented the krucial teknological advances of Ritual Offering of Heart During Human Sacrifice…” (Foster, 65)

While the idea of a spiritual “teknology” is considered to be primitive by some Eurocentric cultures, *Atomik Aztex* inverts this interpretation as Zenzontli claims the Aztec teknology is superior to European technology. Whereas the traditional European perspective would call such a mode of thinking “irrational” and therefore overly-superstitious, the Aztec tradition finds the European one unimaginative and close-minded. European rationality, in the Aztec perspective, is primitive due to its rational, monist way of considering the world.

In some ways, the subjugation of humanity by some deity or system of deities is a notion common to many religions; the difference with Aztec mythology, however, is that the entire calendar and foundation of existence is defined through this religious science of teknology. This convergence of time space and spiritual knowledge is one of the main projects conducted in Sesshu Foster’s novel, which fully embraces the juxtaposition of spatiotemporal awareness with history by not only relaying between two times, but by crafting a sort of warp that increasingly blends the two through Zenzontli’s narrative. By focusing on the psychologically overwhelming nature of the competition between both the Aztec-verse and the Euro-verse, Foster’s work places more of an emphasis on the theoretical topics of dimensionality - like concepts of the existence of a multiverse or a singular universe - opposed to historical singularity. Monism, or the

singularity of body and mind, is the philosophical groundwork upon which Eurocentric technology and the functional rationality of society are based. Foster instead chooses to focus the work on a more dualistic world-view as Zenzontli frets over the increasing strength of his visions. These concepts, as a groundwork for the text, will be the main key when later determining how the presentation of the narrative relates to reader experience.

Differing from the modern natural science of astrophysics and the topic of multiverse theory, humans were, through religious sacrifice, the sole reason that the omniverse as they knew it was able to "eksist". Because of the tradition surrounding multiverse theory, Zenzontli's visions become more than an interesting mirror of his normal life; instead, both the Zenzontli of the Aztec-verse and the one of the Euro-verse can be the same spirit contained within two conflicting yet simultaneous realities. "Zenzon" is the name given to Zenzontli's Euro-verse alter ego, and each has their own narrative voice and ideology based more closely on the one belonging to the reality in which they exist. Zenzon's function in the text is to demarcate the multiple realities even of identity. There is more than one version of reality, and so there must also be more than one version of Zenzontli, for he could not be the exact same in every universe. *Atomik Aztex* paradoxically has two narrators and one at the same time.

Zenzontli's descriptions of the Aztec religious ideologies necessitate of a form of writing style through which to most accurately embody those complex human experiences, since a more typical writing style would create a disjunction between the text and the narrator's philosophy, a logistical contradiction that would strictly limit the efficacy of the novel. These relativities are crucial when examining *Atomik Aztex,* for these are the theories that inspire Aztec "aesthetiks," or the modes through which their techno-spiritual practices can be translated into society. The style of the narration within the text falls under this category, and includes such features as the

complex sentence structure, syntax, and linguistics of the text. Sentences go on for pages at a time, and text switches to italics for use in flashbacks but also during regular narrative. Additionally, boldface and underline are both used to distinguish important words or phrases, though both seem to be used interchangeably throughout the course of the work. Despite the pure aesthetic effects of these nontraditional modes of narration, the confusion they impart on the reader further blurs the lines between author and narrator. There are times where breaks in the structure of the writing could be a distinction between Zenzontli's Aztec-verse or Euro-verse self, but they could potentially be intervention by Foster and each case is, in some instances, equally possible. Foster's project, then, has stylistic methods through which the reader must pay closer attention to the syntax and meaning of the language in the text. For the purposes of this chapter, these stylistic choices allow the reader epistemological freedom to transcend typical styles of narrative, going as far as to question the representational nature of language itself. Following from this strategic, stylistic information, it is then important to consider how the narration of the novel through his character functions and what the consequences those functions have on the readers.

Teknology and aesthetiks, besides providing terminology for broad religious ideologies, form the basis for a historical belief system that gives Zenzontli the unique ability to narrate in such a way that he can break down the distinction between "accuracy" and "truth". One of the main ways in which Aztec-verse Zenzontli lacks control is by admitting the ways in which a universe with infinite layers would affect the way that the truth could be interpreted. When Maxtla, another Aztek soldier, challenges his family history before the battle at Stalingrad, his response is one that doesn't address the conversation at hand, and some of Maxtla's comments about Zenzontli claiming that he himself conquered the Spaniards is not something that he

mentions or even alludes to anywhere in the text. While it's never proven whether or not Maxtla's claims could be true, Zenzontli's unresponsive answers during the dialogue display make it appear as if he's not even fully aware that the conversation is happening; additionally, since he makes no mention of the conversation either during that scene of the book or anywhere else, it gives the impression that the controversy over his lineage and personal claims are really of no consequence. The scene does, however, illustrate Zenzontli's disillusionment from the reality that he finds himself in, and he is separated from those who exist in that reality - it is, in part, this separation that leads him to think that he may be "krazy."

Despite his inability to control his visions or find a touchstone with one reality, Zenzontli does describe manipulations of time during the course of the novel. If Zenzontli appeared to be clearly in control and aware of his situation, the chaotic structure of the universe would be far less drastic than it is. The chaos of the text makes the dysfunctionality of the plot more characteristic of the world it takes place in, giving the reader a more in-depth experience of what living in Zenzontli's multiverse is like. The entire eighth chapter, immediately following what is assumed to be the victory at Stalingrad, contains a grand vision where Zenzontli charges up temple steps as the hearts of Nazis are sacrificially extracted and the remainder of the corpses tumble down the sides of the temple. Once at the top, he is bound to an altar and is preparing to be sacrificed; instead, he competes against three opponents, the third of which, Maxtla, shoots him several times with arrows. It would seem to readers that at this point in the text, Aztec-verse Zenzontli falls either unconscious or dead. The narrative continues in this manner, however:

> "OK, then they carried me to the chakmool, laid me out on it, opened me up & cut out my heart. *Except that never happened. Let me make that clear, I would never let that happen. That might have happened on some alternate reality when I*

wuzn't looking… But it didn't happen this time" (Foster, 152).

Whether or not it is Aztec-verse Zenzontli or his Euro-verse version writing these lines and from this point on, it does not entirely matter because there will always be one plane of eksistence where those events did happen and simultaneously others where it did not. Essentially, a book based on the multiverse theory - or teknospirituality in this case - can inherently cause problems for narrative clarity, since the existence of so many different realities creates a very nihilistic narrator where the only form of truth with any validity is in the recognition of the multiplicity of the universe. Zenzontli's inability to distinguish one reality from the other forces the reader to make a distinction between what he experiences and what is "real" and determine in what realm a certain portion of the story eksists in. *Atomik Aztex* does not claim to show the Aztec way would have provided a better outcome in history - the point could be made, in fact, that the world would not change much at all except in culture, a prime example of these historical similarities is the mere idea that World War II still happened -, but rather that having a narrator that comes from a society which views the world so differently will change the ways in which that character interacts with the narrative to make it a more engaging or enveloping experience.

This engagement stretches into Zenzontli's use of intrusive narration as well, exactly demonstrating the ways in which his character dictates the spatiotemporal placement of the moment in question. Throughout the story, he speaks directly to the readers, mentioning in the very beginning of the novel that "you should take everything with a grain of salt," to later on in the book narrate that, "I mean probably in *your world* poverty and hunger has disappeared…" and continues as he describes what he thinks the reader's world would look like (Foster, 115-116). Here it can be seen how the narrative is influenced by the character. The narrative sequence itself is not necessarily driven by character; Zenzontli, while aware that there is a dichotomy

between his real world and his visions, cannot control what happens to him or when his visions occur. He, in fact, even fears these visions in recognizing that he may just be going insane or "krazy." The meaning of the plot is controlled, then, by using a literary aesthetic that is entirely unique and based on a system that allows him to provide more than one singular explanation for any event so long as he can relate it back to the ideological system he employs. Because of this, Foster has a very active and present control of the narrative, especially since his narrator is disoriented by the lucidity of his visions.

For an example of this rhetorical manipulation, Zenzontli takes an entire opening of a chapter to convey the reasons that the Aztec system of teknology is better than a European-based temporality and universal theory. "You know, you are lucky you are reading this Codex instead of some other horseshit Propaganda like those written by Nazis… everything I say is completely objective and everything happened exactly like I say," he says, and also admits to the German "aesthetik sensibility," using both of these instances to control the perception of the Germans through teknological failure in the former quote and aesthetik success in the latter (Foster, 111, 124). This, again, exemplifies the ways in which Foster embraces the distinction between a cosmological spatiotemporality and a linear one, calling upon the cultural biases of Eurocentric interpretations of the universe. Here, Foster uses Zenzontli to ironically point out that, though he claims that "everything happened exactly as I say", the readers have had ample evidence that the *last* thing Zenzontli has is control over his world. These moments in the novel hold much more of a significance than those geared towards describing the action of the plot, for these scenes have more of a natural English syntax and are less saturated with the Aztec "dialect" that is utilized more heavily in moments of reflection. By using something closer to real English, Foster allows the reader just enough clarity to more fully grasp the concepts Zenzontli is trying to

communicate. These are not only ways to focus the attention of the reader more subtly, but these tactics also anoint the power to manipulate readers' perception of different people or events by using this form of rhetorical aesthetics. Essentially, Foster can call into focus certain portions of the narration via syntactical choice for purposes of either clarity or thematic significance.

With the teknological reasoning that inspires the aesthetics of the text, the overall significance of the plot(s) prove to be secondary, only further showing the ways in which Foster's textual manipulations are the more important facet of the narrative. Many of the events that take place within the text are somewhat singular, especially in the Aztec-verse where the engagement in the war is not the primary concern. Evidenced by the subdued nature of the actual plot points of the Aztec-verse, the style through which the narrative takes shape is the focal point of the work. The Euro-verse, because of its association with a society more closely related to the one outside of *Atomik Aztex*, has a plot that can be followed more easily, especially with the introduction of Nita the union organizer, for she provides somewhat of a groundwork for a more typical plot structure through the organization of the petitions and her multiple meetings with Zenzon. Xiuhcaquitl, the Aztec-verse wife of Zenzontli, only appears in one scene throughout the whole book. Throughout the Euro-verse, the narration remains somewhat elongated and elaborate, with long sentences, colorful descriptions, and similar spelling choices that resemble, in many ways, the phonetic spelling within the other portions of the novel. Since narrative style is associated most with storytelling, the focus on aesthetiks and the presentation of the material is in this novel more imperative than the plot material itself.

With this in mind, it can be useful to imagine the effects that this form of narration - and, subsequently, this type of narrator - would have on the experience of reading the story. When it comes to a more plot-based narrative, a reader's connection to the character and the story are

somewhat vague, with most of the effort to form a linkage falling onto the responsibility of the reader. The most unique aspect of *Atomik Aztex* as a work is that the author directly engages with the reader throughout the course of the novel in a way that confuses the typical distinction between narrator and author. On some level, a reader's attempt to engage with or question a narrative are limited; Michael Coe himself, the archaeological linguist that is credited with translating ancient Maya glyphs, notes this discrepancy: "if you ask written words a question, you will get the same answer over and over" (Coe, 14). With this novel, the relationship between reader and narrative is driven by the text opposed to many instances where the opposite relationship occurs. While most often narrators can manipulate readers through their telling of events, those events still happen and can be interpreted by the reader in whichever way may be most appropriate. If a narrator is deemed by a reader to be unreliable, they can adjust their interpretations of the narrative accordingly. The abstraction within the text and Zenzontli's inability to control his visions creates a shared level of confusion between reader and narrator in *Atomik Aztex* instead of a distrusting relationship.

In *Atomik Aztex*, the complex omniverse theory, spiritually- driven conception of science, and aesthetic choices all work together to create a style that makes it possible for the characters to dominate the narrative interpretation, since the observational or reflective parts of the narrative are the most dominant. Additionally, if there are questions about the validity of any of the historical claims or otherwise, the existence of multiple realities, both exemplified through the two -verses and even beyond, blockades any attempt by the reader to discredit the narrator. If multiple worlds and realities exist, then the possibility of one account of a situation like the sacrifice of Zenzontli could still be possible even if he comments that it was not. In this sense, readers must rely on this narrator who has the ability to move between realms, though he admits

that he is not fully in control of his own situation. Just as he is not, neither are readers. In other words, the novel's aesthetik foundation, in part manipulated through the concessions allowed by the temporal advantages of the narration, is the key stylistic facet that allows the narrative to function as it does.

While the majority of the culturally significant theoretical work is done in the next chapter of this thesis, the ways in which multiverse theory destabilizes the definition of history also affects the ways in which readers can interpret what happens throughout the novel. The book is prefaced on the notion that the European races were decimated by Aztek forces, a complete reversal of the history that is generally believed to be true today. The previous chapter focuses on the flexibility within historical narratives, and that the interpretations of historical events can help shape their meanings on an individual basis. Foster's work in *Atomik Aztex*, however, completely eradicates the overall definition of historical reality itself by making all notions of the past simultaneously true and false. In using a similar historical narrative with different characters - Mexica cultures becoming a world power instead of Europe and the United States -, the novel embodies the idea that narrative histories are practically useless because of their multiplicity. If no one can ever be entirely sure what happened in the past, or if everything is true and false at the same time, what purpose do those historical narratives even serve? Part of the irony in Foster's novel is wrapped up in the concept of exuding multiple histories to show the instability of reality.

Throughout the text, Zenzontli has visions and experiences for what in every other literary case would be considered narrative illegitimacy. Despite these factors, the heart of the text continues to beat through a rather confusing weave between two realities that are just two of infinitely many more. The temporal, scientific, and spiritual aspects of the theory that forms the

foundation of the text is explained through concepts of teknology and facilitated within the text through aesthetiks. In doing so, readers have a more forced relationship with the text and have only Zenzontli's dictation to mediate the differences between the worlds he directly and indirectly alludes to as well as to go between the reader's world and his. In this sense, *Atomik Aztex* is a project that challenges both the typical aspects of narrative, but also challenges the ways in which readers form relationships with a work. The more questions a reader poses to the text, as Michael Coe suggests, is of little consequence and yields little insight. The limited accessibility of some of the facets of the narrative - including the plot - makes the universal theory surrounding it more comprehendible. Instead, *Atomik Aztex* facilitates a religious, temporally distinct world to influence a character who influences the narrative who, finally, influences the reader.

Chapter 3

Narrative Temporality and Historicity as Tools for Cultural Translation

Throughout the course of this project, the exploration of two novels, *The Chaneysville Incident* and *Atomik Aztex*, led to two independent discussions of the ways in which a focus on temporality and historicity can be thematically pertinent to literary works. In *The Chaneysville Incident*, the John's character showed the ways that perspective can complicate one's views of the past. *Atomik Aztex*, however, showed that certain epistemological and cosmological interpretations of the universe can complicate a narrative-reader relationship. This chapter synthesizes those readings to illuminate how both novels connect interpretations of time with culture in order to generate alternatives to typical European literary temporality. In considering these works in this way, it is possible to note the more intimate ways that a culture can be incorporated into a narrative and given epistemological legitimacy. Since culture is an ingrained part of one's identity, the experience of it is unique from person to person, making one's ability to understand the ideas of another culture somewhat limited. While cultural relatability is still bound by the limitations of experience, certain adaptations of European forms of literature can aid in bridging the gap between cultures by having the narratives mirror that specific culture's epistemological and stylistic ideals. The temporal structure of a narrative can be a successful way for a novel to more fully adopt the ideas of another culture to make that culture more easily accessible to readers who may not be most familiar with it. In this way, the temporal theory of the work along with the narrative elements employed by the author work together to give representation to different cultures while culturally relevant stylistic forms.

Essentially, each of the novels demonstrates ways in which cultural lenses can be helpful in developing a better understanding not just of the cultures presented in the work, but also in obliging readers to engage with means of interpreting history and reality in complex ways that are drastically different than the standard. Cultural lenses, then, are concrete ways to represent different ideologies and experiences and, therefore, an important tool for each novel to explore multiple perspectives on the past and reality. *Atomik Aztex* does this in a more straightforward and somewhat blunt way with its ability to directly interact with its audience. *The Chaneysville Incident*, however, relies heavily on the concept of historiographical projection to achieve its literary goals.

This chapter shows the ways in which a narrative creates a kind of temporality to facilitate a sincerer cultural connection between reader and text. The sincerity of this connection between reader and text is not meant to be a perfect one; rather, novels of this type have the capacity to begin a conversation that crosses cultural bounds without oversimplifying either that culture of the text or of the reader. Each story utilizes different stylistic and thematic elements to discuss cultural topics, using conceptualizations of time as literary devices through which deeper cultural interactions can be made. The way in which one interprets time predicates much of the functionality of day to day life in addition to the functionality of a society in general; so much so that presentations of different forms of temporal reality - like in literature - can be quite jarring, as it the case in the example of *Atomik Aztex* and multiverse theory. The experience of engaging in a nontraditional type of literary temporality, then, creates an exposure to other belief systems and cultural traditions. Foster's work facilitates such a distinctive premise - as discussed in the previous chapter - that a reader would not be able to understand the story without understanding the astrophysical theory of the novel's world. The purpose of using two rather different stories

serves to show the variety of ways that reality can be interpreted and to show the depth of the genre of metahistorical literature. In *The Chaneysville Incident*, part of John's struggle to place himself in a personal, historical narrative lies in the racial confusion of his upbringing, having grown up in a racist community under a father who was successful at strategically balancing aspects of both white and black culture. Therefore, John's sense of identity is complicated and muddled because he was raised by a father who crossed the boundaries between social groups. John's confusion is mirrored in the narrative by his muddled efforts to balance traditional and nontraditional modes of historical emplotment. While John's cultural conflict is a rather internal one, the basis of *Atomik Aztex* is more astrophysical. Even though Foster's work is inspired by Mexica culture and is not a direct representation of it, the novel still serves to discuss a racist, European interpretation of history and heavily relies on a cosmological ideology - multiverse theory - to do so. Each with cultural goals in mind, both *Atomik Aztex* and *The Chaneysville Incident* employ temporal theories to make their discussions more accessible and culturally engaging.

The main types of experience explored in the two novels discussed here are cultural and racial experiences, and while the literary challenge in creating an effectively relatable cultural narrative proves to have both advantages and deficiencies, there are stylistic tools that can assist such trials. As literary theorist F.R. Ankersmit suggests, narrative can "poetically translate" different cultures (Ankersmit, 83). The concept of cultural translation is one that aptly describes the ways in which a narrative can outline certain ideals of a society but still acknowledge some literary and experiential disparities. In any form of translation, a certain level of discrepancy is unavoidable because of the nuances of a language. Cultural translations, to use Ankersmit's terminology, function in the same way. In trying to communicate the intricate details and beliefs

of a cultural or racial experience, there will always be some elements that are unable to cross the boundary between readers from different cultural or racial backgrounds.

The creation of such translations, however, begins to relate cultures in a way that can be beneficial in sparking the conversation around certain cultural or racial issues. The authors who engage in projects of cultural translation, like both Bradley and Foster, are aware of these linguistic challenges, but create these narratives because of the importance and gravity of the task that remains relevant: while language may not be an entirely perfect means of communication because of its need for translation, novels like *The Chaneysville Incident* and *Atomik Aztex* serve an important function to both literature and society by diversifying the literary forms through which cultural themes can be portrayed. Using alternative forms of history, historical exploration, or even cosmic temporality are all basic units of reality that, in their manipulation, can be spaces within a narrative to highlight important differences and begin to provide more complex representation of other cultures in literary communities. Since potential conceptions of time, the state of the universe, and one's own relationship to the past – while some of these may be more immediately obvious than others – are all deeply-rooted elements of experience, creating a reconceptualization of these elements by authors can develop a more active relationship between the reader and the text. In doing so, a reader not only has to actively become aware of the differences to, perhaps, language or narrative structure, but also reflect on their separation from it.

In regards to *The Chaneysville Incident*, John's profession as a historian blends with his personal experience in order to discover the secrets of his past and help him achieve a greater sense of identity. What has not yet been addressed, however, are the ways in which these two inquiries also explore a cultural difference between the white and black communities of Bedford.

Through his historical investigation, John travels through time in the hopes of unveiling the ways in which these communities interact with each other. Since Moses, his father, was able to navigate both worlds with a such a level of proficiency as to have power in both realms, John must find a similarly mutual space through which to understand both his, Moses', and C.K.'s lives. These differing cultural identities between white and black are, in fact, what is missing from John's attempt to narrativize his history through emplotment. The narrative weaves back and forth between these temporal realities as John continues through his journey, and provides the opportunity for each space to become more accessible to readers as they follow along with him.

The towns of Chaneysville and Bedford where the majority of the story takes place have an interesting relationship with the past, as do its inhabitants. The era of history that becomes the cultural focal point of the story is that which follows after the Civil War, and as small Pennsylvania towns, the middle state region shows a complex racial culture, described in the text throughout Jack's retellings of old stories. According to Old Jack, despite the freedoms that slaves were granted in the northern states - rules that reached into Pennsylvania -, many of the social and cultural ideals of the south still existed throughout the region. The black community that lived there subsequently had to live in a nebulous and paradoxical state of freedom and simultaneous "non-freedom," a challenge that still existed in John's father's lifetime. "...We had been scarred by so many of the little assumptions and presumptions that go with dormant racism or well-meaning liberalism," Jack tells John, "that a little overt segregation was almost a relief" (Bradley, 66). When John returns to Bedford, and hears some of the finer details of these race relations, he struggles to come to terms with the severity with which his family was exposed to

racist actions. Additionally, he finds that his family was more involved in the local, underground political scene than he realized.

Moses was able to break these racial boundaries, John discovers, and master the art of the in-betweenness of living in Bedford. He used an illegal moonshine business to gain control over the politics of the town and therefore had to survive in a white society as a non white man. Even though he could have used his political power to destroy the town's social structure, he did not: instead, he attempted to live more quietly, letting his enemies live in constant fear of what damage he could cause to them if he ever decided to. Jack describes these decisions as culturally inflected, as he notes that John's father was able to turn his whiteness - his "white man's act," as he calls it - on and off like a light switch (Bradley, 82). He, like his town, had the ability to embody two different ideologies at once, and confronting this complication is John's greatest challenge in the novel.

One of the greatest challenges to creating a historical narrative, then, arises from trying to accurately represent not just the conflicting racial groups in the town, but also the ways in which Moses was able to participate in both realms. John's attempts to narrativize the past led him to an incomplete sense of selfhood because of his lack of personal perspective, but it is clear now that the personal perspective he needed - that of Moses who, in turn, need the perspective of C.K. - was one wrought with duality and complexity. John admits to some of his academic misgivings, saying that he "fell prey to one of the greatest fallacies that surrounds the study of the past: the notion that there is such a thing as a detached reader, that it is possible to discover and analyze and interpret without getting caught up and swept away" (Bradley, 140). It was impossible for John to create a narrative of his father's past while trying to remain objective, because it is impossible to read or understand history from an entirely objective perspective. The competing

racial cultures of his town and within his own father caused a disturbance in the rather lateral approach he had been taking up to that point. In taking a factual route to his method of discovery, John misunderstood - or perhaps repressed in some cases - the ways in which the racial tensions of the town even in Moses' lifetime drove his father to make many of the decisions that he did, including the decision to kill himself.

While John's original approach was somewhat straightforward, the narrative of the story is far from linear. The emplotted nature of the text itself exemplifies the art of historical inquiry, and the work as a whole functions as what F.R. Ankersmit would call "historiographical projection," or the "translation rules" that allow the past to be narrativized (Ankersmit, 81). John's narration has weaved within it stories that all hope to elucidate a new moment of the past. These stories serve as more than plot-drivers, though, because they also are able in their telling to open the narrative up to the multiple realms that exist in the story, and provide the reader with the opportunity to engage in the investigation themselves. As John collects evidence, the audience gains more perspective about John just as he does about his father. A more recent series of events involving Jack and Moses reaches all the way back to C.K., Moses' grandfather, and each account is necessary in determining the feelings and motivations of other characters. Because of these multiple elements, the narrative of the text often strays from the time period through which the main plot takes place, namely, John's journey from Philadelphia back to Bedford. These breaks in chronology are the primary means that the text utilizes memory and historical record to allow the reader to tag along as John muddles his way through the past.

There is, however, a narrative difference between these elements as well. Many of the folktale-like stories and accounts are described in elaborate retellings, and even John's storytelling capabilities lead to rather grandiose descriptions. While John's style may be a bit

more factual than the emotional stories provided by other characters in the book, the great number of lengthy monologues in the story serves to distinguish these stories from the rest of the narrative which is comparatively cursory in its presentation. In doing so, the novel adopts a sort of temporal duality in that there is both the traditional narrative following John's journey in addition to this second level of history which includes several generations' worth of perspective. There are instances, especially towards the end of the novel, where John will divert from the main storyline to directly explain a situation or event, and these explanations can last up to several pages. For the most part, however, the different temporal units are seamlessly interwoven with the natural flow of the story so that the transition is hardly noticeable to the reader as it occurs. By having John present more than one type of narrative style - whether it be detailing conversations in the present or dictating lecture-like accounts of the past -, *The Chaneysville Incident* displays a variety of ways of immersing the reader into the ideology of one character. This is then one of the techniques Bradley uses in the novel to have a reader engage with a mode of thinking that is unique from their own. John, in detailing his research in these ways, acts as a historical translator throughout the text, and, because the history of Bedford is rooted in racial conflict, a cultural one as well.

These elaborate story-tellings also serve another purpose in that their stylistic details can characterize some of the cultural differences and similarities within Bedford. The use of such a heavy dialect in the hometown immediately differentiates John from his family and friends, and language plays an important role for the different social factions of the town. John, the college-educated professor, has a narration style that is more academic in nature than the generally folkloric ones of other characters. This type of language, also utilized by the judge who gives Moses' folio to John, is associated with the politically dominant - meaning white - populations of

Bedford. Jack uses a dialect quite similar to John's mother, and symbolizes the poorer - and usually black - community. Along with toddies and hunting, there are other ways throughout the story that these racial disconnects are addressed; the linguistic and temporal, however, are the least candid. In exploring the sometimes gruesome past of his hometown and ancestors, John realizes these differences, placing him in a perplexing state of in betweenness that will require him to follow after his father and find a way to coexist within both realms.

The narrative separation between both the past and present temporalities, while arranged in a way as to create a cohesive, flowing story, constructs for the reader an experience that, though simpler, reflects the type of relationship John himself has with time. John's perspective is one focused on totality: he ascribes to the fallacy that "universal time suppresses local differences" in that he attempts to consolidate all of historical knowledge into one clean explanation of history (West-Pavlov, 22). The separation of his narration from the story-telling of other allows for the presentation of those "local differences" in experience. By creating such a distinction, the narrative forces readers to notice the variety of different perspectives and social connections that are intertwined with the main story of the novel. As these viewpoints get collected and juxtaposed throughout the course of the story, the reader gets an increasingly clear image of what the racial and cultural situation within Bedford had constituted over the last several generations. Because of this, the experiences of the people living there as well as some of the more intricate hierarchical phenomena are accessible and relatable. Had John been the only one to provide such detail throughout the course of the work, the reader would have a far greater limit to the scope of their historical understanding of the text, especially considering John's tendency to rationalize the events of the past. The inclusion of multiple characters and storylines, meaning those of C.K. and Moses, serves to chronicle the cultural atmosphere and tradition that

existed in Bedford during the past, and provides a complex presentation of that culture for the reader. John's perspective on these past events emphasizes the difficulty of understanding not just someone else's life story, but also the world in which those people lived.

The Chaneysville Incident, in utilizing differentiable forms of narration, contains what has been determined to be two major temporal epochs: that of John's life experiences and that which is made up of the historical chronicles of others. Dividing the text in such a way serves multiple purposes, all of which relate to the reader having a more complex and intimate relationship with the characters or situations of the story. In having a more complex understanding of these events, a reader more intimately engages with the world of the characters of the past, and John's struggle to fully understand the perspectives of those characters is a reminder of the challenges of relating to other characters, the past, and other cultures. John, in many ways, symbolizes the academic procedures of chronicling time via what has been professionally deemed as "true" or "factual" sources of information. Those around him, however, create a richer story as their records come to light; both John and the reader are able to learn about the complexities of a segregated community, giving both John and the reader more holistic sense of how and why events unfolded in the past. Jack's retelling of his friend Josh's encounter with the Klu Klux Klan is a specific moment where the narrative clearly identifies the complex and heartbreaking nature of living in a community headed by white supremacists (Bradley, 92-98). The particular experiences of these characters enhances the image of the past by personalizing the historical context John is fascinated by, and also creates another mode through which the reader can attempt to experience the cultural atmosphere of that time. The novel shows, then, the relational ways in which a reader can follow along a similar journey as a

narrator, and closes the gap between the experience of community and character as well as the gap between character and reader.

Following similar themes but using drastically different methods, *Atomik Aztex* ventures not just through contrasting spaces of a community, but distinct spaces of the universe as Zenzontli bounces between planes of existence. Zenzontli does, in fact, describe multiple notions of bias against his European enemies, and this rhetoric quite closely relates to sentiments of European histories as presented in the world outside of the novel (meaning that of the reader). In conjunction with the existence of both the Euro-verse and the Aztec-verse, Foster's cosmological theory of the universe creates a platform on which Foster can critically reverse certain racist historical presumptions. Not only does this satirize European bigotry against Mexica culture, the utilization of nontraditional style and culturally representative epistemological tradition makes the comment on historical perspective significantly more powerful and effective.

Throughout the novel, Zenzontli is less than shy about his distaste for non-Aztec cultures, and the way that he expresses his dissent has linguistic similarities to those narratives that exist in the real world outside of the novel. The realm in which Zenzontli lives is one alternate to that of the reader as immediately noted in the first pages of the work. He uses the word "kool" to describe the teknological advancements that his civilization has made to better society and the world, while that of their European counterparts - namely truth and logic - are backwards concepts to base a society off of. Despite being translated in to the dialect Foster creates for this society in the novel, there is a focus on the ideological superiority that mimics that of the rhetoric of imperial times. Zenzontli poses a series of rhetorical questions relating to the disintegration of German culture, asking,

> "Whatever happened to the German civilization? Did they just disappear or did they go away? How could a people who built stirring monuments like kathedrals, autobahns, stadiums, printing presses and draft beer just vanish as a civilization?... How did they live? What were their weird beliefs?" (Foster, 108-109).

Here, Zenzontli uses a similarly mystical type of inquiry about German culture that modern European-based society has for the traditions of ancient Central and South America. The "backwardness" Europeans assigned to the residents of the lands they conquered and the natives' "savagery" is replicated in the way that Zenzontli negatively portrays whiteness. This form of the project, then, mimics the ways in which Aime Cesaire also hopes to reverse this conception in his work *Discourse on Colonialism* in which he means to use the terms such as "barbaric" and "savage" to describe white imperial empires (Cesaire). The familiar rhetoric is defamiliarized by its context, and so the reader is in a space that is both recognizable but distinct from the reality of the world outside of the text. Zenzontli specifically notes the Germans' cultural insufficiency, saying, "primitive Third World kultures around the globe view our scientifik theories thru the barbarous superstitions of their primitive ancient religions, calling our complex conceptualizations 'gods'" (Foster, 109). Religion in this aspect is seen as a simplification of the more complex universal theories that Zenzontli claims the Aztecs believe in. The Europeans were unable to understand their culture, and because they "didn't have an **open mind**," they were surpassed in cultural aspects and defeated in battle (Foster, 108). Again, the imperialist rhetoric explores similar concepts of which civilization has the intellectual dominance over the other, but utilizes the Aztec belief system to show how it would be possible for other cultures to employ such a propaganda style.

Coinciding with this rhetoric's use is not only the way in which it is similar from these

to imperial language, but also how it is different. In using a style that is adapted from a wide range of non-white dialects, the utilization of the "k" and the "z" among other syntactical adaptations form more than just a visual distinction between itself and the European English. The narrative of the text adopts a language that is aligned with the culture it means to represent, meaning that of the Aztec-verse, which serves to illustrate the potential aesthetiks of a futuristic Aztec society. The intensity of the work's message would be significantly less potent if it were not for these linguistic changes, since the repetition of such rhetoric without alteration would be far too similar and would hold little effect. *Atomik Aztex*, as a project, is predicated on the desire to create a narrative that wholly embodies and reflects European ideas through the perspective of a culture entirely different from that of Europe. Once the ideology of such a culture is understood or contextualized, a reader can much more clearly see the fallacy in racist tendencies. The uses of such dialects also serves to make the foreign culture of the text more approachable, since it is entirely disparate from the one the reader exists in. Because of this, the reader's ability to understanding both the past and the world of the text is greatly increased.

Zenzontli's reaction to the assassination attempt on his life would prove to be a good example of these linguistic characteristics:

> "That's the problem with the Aztek way. Our generosity amounts to the sin of self-indulgence, we civilize the world and get the dekadent dregs of failed civilizations like the Mayans and the Spanish - people who didn't have the heart(s) to appease the Sun and therefore never had a batshit chance in a hurricane wind of surviving as a kulture" (Foster, 26).

Here, typical imperialist beliefs are expressed against other Mexica groups as well as Europeans. He calls these civilizations "failed" and describes how it is falls to the Aztec Empire to provide

the “hearts” - referring to human sacrifice - to maintain the balance of the universe. This is an example of a ceremony that has allowed the Aztec culture, according to Zenzontli, to thrive, and it is because of these core ideals that has allowed them to prosper or “survive as a kulture”. Christianity served a similar purpose for European conquistadors, so here Zenzontli paints the picture of what an Aztec conquistador would look like. The belief in Jesus and the threat of Hell were concepts that European imperialist forces imposed upon the groups that they took over, for these were also ideologies and beliefs that they felt made them superior to those cultures as well. The appearance of the “k” throughout the passage is a marker that helps to highlight the differences between the two rhetorics, since this is an instance that attempts to emulate some similar messages of cultural superiority to that of Euro-Christian conquerors.

Zenzontli’s plays on traditional imperialist rhetoric are also satirical, and suggest not just that history could be interpreted differently from the perspective of another culture, but also that the way in which history is determined can be absurd. The singularity in Zenzontli’s understanding of the fall of German culture in the Aztec-verse creates a narrative that predicates that the events of the world he lives in transpired in a very specific way; indeed, the creation of one historical narrative, as happens in the reader’s world, happens just as singularly. History is generally understood from one supposedly objective platform, though Zenzontli’s descriptions show just how flat this would make reality. The overall cosmology of the text functions to a similar end, since the ability for multiple realities to simultaneously exist in truth pushes back against the idea of a singular realistic past or present. In utilizing satire, Foster makes it a point to note the ways in which one narrative interpretation of a culture, event, or even temporality is inherently insufficient.

The cultural background and traditions that are mentioned throughout the text, while many are true to some degree, are drastically hyperbolized in some instances. This does in a way function to highlight the culture and to make its description decidedly visual, though it also serves to normalize that which is degraded by European methods of propaganda. The heart-cutting ceremony, for one, is described in somewhat gruesome detail and Zenzontli climbs the temple wall towards what he assume will be his death as human sacrifice. The lifeless body of Hermann Goering plunders past him and almost kills 3Turkey as he too attempts to scale the side of the temple. This image is interesting in a variety of ways, though generally speaking, it adds a modern element to a real Aztec tradition that has been particularly iconized by European society. This scene in the story is outlandish and seemingly inconceivable to a white-cultured reader. In reality, records indicate that an official Aztec sacrificial ritual would have been entirely more organized, ritualized, and private. Instead, the chaos of the moment conjures a graphic image that would not have been unfathomable to imperial cultures like that of Hermann Goering and Nazism. The dramatization of such a recognizable Aztec tradition, while primarily facilitating the multiverse theory as discussed in a previous chapter, mimics other vivid types of propaganda techniques used particularly by the Nazis during WWII. Degradation of other cultures that were deemed to be subordinate by the Nazi government often showed depictions of other societies that looked cruel, unjust, and miserable. The descriptions of Aztec and German culture within *Atomik Aztex* shows inverse images to the Nazi form of propaganda.

One of the other tasks of the novel is to create a critical reversal of modern historical assumptions. In today's society, the traditional belief is that despite the limits of relationality and the hindrances of experience, there are historical narratives that can be more inclusive than others. This is true in the broad sense. Upon closer examination, however, it can be noted that

there are some dangerous assumptions that a concept such as this is should be forced to confront. The number of ways that narratives can be arranged creates certain "narrative anachronies" that change the potential interpretation of events by altering narrative time space (Martin). The creation of one singular account that can completely inscribe every potential aspect of an event or perspective is metaphysically impossible, since it would require the exact replication of an experience. Language itself is a secondary abstraction, and so *Atomik Aztex* inverts this notion by making not just one chronology possible, but infinitely many.

Instead, then, of thinking about history in a traditional sense, *Atomik Aztex* again relies on an oral and religious tradition that is closely tied to their astrological beliefs. Multiplicity is more apt a characteristic for the Aztec belief system of time, as the layering of time space allows for a wide variety of different histories to be possible at once. This, in its own way, comments on the oppressive singularity of modern European historical understandings: the way that native Mexica peoples are represented in European literature still fails to recognize the cultural impact that colonization left on many areas of the world. The purpose in doing so includes an aspect of reflection of European culture; because of this, the narrative opens up the potential for a more relatable experience of the effects of such a rhetoric.

It is the epistemological and theoretical backbone of *Atomik Aztex* that makes all of the other literary elements discussed here possible. The metaphysical theory that predicates the structure of the novel also is what constitutes the cultural and ideological narrative style that follows. In adopting and facilitating such a basis, the narrative is able to then extend into a series of stylistic aspects that give new power to the anti-imperialist culture. Had the story been told in traditional English and with a more conventional structure, the novel would have been significantly less effective in communicating its argument. This is not to say, of course, that

reading *Atomik Aztex* can create an experience for European Europeans that would equate to that of a colonized Europe. Such a task would not at all be possible inside or out of the realm of literature. As has been discussed, the ways in which experience is limited is too great to overcome, though a narrative of this fashion can still do work to at least begin to describe the cultural experience of colonial racism. What *Atomik Aztex* is able to accomplish, however, is the embodiment of a narrative construction through a conceptual temporality that promotes a new cultural perspective and a new form of cultural critique.

As thematic comparisons between the two novels arise, some major theoretical differences are still noticeable. While Hayden White proved to be a useful (if incomplete) tool in analyzing John's historical understanding of the past, no such topic could be applied to *Atomik Aztex*. Indeed, many typical literary theorists would not be able to apply their concepts to such a story because of its elaborate and ambiguous sense of chronology within time space. In this way, White's theory of emplotment necessitates the creation of a singular truth in that events of the past must be laid out in a certain fashion as to create one cohesive narrative. In crafting one version of history, it is necessary for a writer or history to forgo any other possible perspectives surrounding the event as well as the event's significance in whichever context it is placed in. Such a narrative, then, is inherently fixed and incomplete. Foster's employment of a multiverse would not allow for such a singularity, and it would be epistemologically unsound to try and compare the two.

One of the other immediate differences between *Atomik Aztex* and *The Chaneysville Incident* that is relevant here relates to the ways in which each novel employs its temporal theory to inspire the narrative. For David Bradley's novel, the distinction between past and present is clearly defined because of the rhetorical ways that each character's perspective is written. In this

way, the style of the writing as it appears in the work is the base upon which a more complex literary presentation of time can function. Bradley hopes to create a distinction between two planes of time that can be simply separated into past and present. It is because the two are so distinguishable from each other that the two tiers of time are created. If John simply narrated the whole story or was the only character through which information was discovered, there would still be a difference between past and present, but the differences would be extremely limited in scope and would, essentially, be only chronological distinctions. It would be possible to place events into categories of "John's lifetime" and "before John's lifetime", but these would be very singular classifications that would offer significantly less thematic richness. By making it more complex to place these events into categories of "John's paper trail" and "recollection of others", Bradley is able to diversify the information base, and it would be because of the varying types of character presentation that such a nuanced approach is possible.

The reverse is true for *Atomik Aztex*. As noted previously, the cosmological theories surrounding man's eksistence in the universe are why Foster is able to do as much structural narrative work as he does throughout the book. Much of the plot is predicated on the idea that everything is possible, and the chaotic nature of time as generally adopted by the novel forms the basis of the novel's design. Without the theological and universal background, the dysfunctionality of the text itself would be almost Vonnegutian in nature and would most likely centralize themes of psychology instead of ones of cultural relativity. Since the infinite nature of the universe explains the reasoning behind the fact that Zenzontli can exist on two temporal planes, the story does not have to focus primarily on Zenzontli's mental health. Even though he does wonder throughout the course of the novel whether or not his visions are healthy and is concerned by their strength, it is not his mental capacity that is of primary concern, although it

could still be explored in discussion. Without the ideology to back it up, the story would be better served to focus on Zenzon, the meat factory worker who envisions a world where the Aztec Empire rules Europe. The overarching point behind such a narrative structure, however, is to fully express to the reader a belief system that is most likely quite different from their own.

Another note of importance has been the relationship between history and time, two key concepts that are central to the understanding of both *Atomik Aztex* and *The Chaneysville Incident*. Both terms can be used to describe the complex ways that existence can be experienced and recorded. It is critical to note, however, the ways in which history is dependent on temporality, and subsequently how that relationship has been utilized throughout the course of this work to better understand the relationship between the events of the two novels in question. History as an academic undertaking has to be set upon some kind of foundation of time through which the relationships between people and events can be investigated, and, literarily speaking, the "transgressions of chronological order" are possible outcomes that could arise from narrative temporality's capacity to "emancipate" a work from the bounds of time (Genette, 85). The overall meaning of certain events changes as their arrangement and presentation changes; even Hayden White has highlighted this relationship when writing about the emplotment of historical records. Altering the theory of the core functions of time would, in most cases, alter the ways in which the past, present, and future are distinguished from each other and would therefore would complicate the task of creating a historical narrative.

The Chaneysville Incident and *Atomik Aztex* each have entirely different interpretations of temporality, and therefore their historical contexts are completely different to coincide with these differences. The multiverse theory employed in *Atomik Aztex* essentially destroys the distinctions between past and present, and Zenzontli describes how anything that happened in the future has

happened already and that the past will occur again. In doing so, all universal occurrences can be described as if they are present or past, and so the discussion of events has no true linearity or narrative possibility. Zenzontli's descriptions, then, are rather individual and focus more on the beliefs of individuals or groups; history, in this sense, is more a tradition than a definite chronology. There is a potential for chronology in *The Chaneysville Incident*, though, and so the elements of the actual past culminate with the experiences of individuals in order to create what John discovers to be a historical narrative that he is able to combine with his own in order to clarify certain elements of his identity. With these examples in mind, it can be clarified that while history relies on temporality, its varying relationship with it can be explored and represented literarily.

Narrative form can, as it is well known, take on many different forms in order to achieve whatever venture idealized by an author, though there is a certain philosophically paradoxical nature to the functionality of a text. The whole point of literature since its inception has been to discover ways in which to relay certain concepts, ideologies, or experiences through the telling of a plot-based story. The narrative's true function, then, is to act as a bridge between author and reader in a way that conveys some sort of message whether it be critical, moral, persuasive, etc. That gap the narrative should hope to bridge in most cases would be that between experiences, in the broad sense to relieve the inherent limitations of understanding experience. In a character or story, a reader could see a piece of themselves or a more specific aspect of their own life. Besides the mere comfort of such an experience, a narrative can - intentionally or unintentionally - give to a reader a situation that is strange to them. Perhaps it is a character of the same socioeconomic background who overcomes a great challenge or the experience of others who have suffered similar hardships. No matter the instance, literature creates the opportunity to form

connections between an individual and something greater than the individual. Despite these potential positive outcomes, the practice of relation through narrative forces certain impositions.

Additionally, readers can engage with a literary work in both active and passive faculties. This is a notion that has, on some level, been discussed here already. Readers of *Atomic Aztex* can actively engage with unique, theological temporality while passively noting the creative ways in which the Aztec dialect is used to reflect on European rhetoric and ideas. On the other hand, *The Chaneysville Incident* takes readers alongside John as he journeys through time, all the while underlying social and racial complexities are brought to light. Since written language bases itself on the most common form of communication between individuals (referring to spoken word), the creativity with which it can manipulate this communicative method assigns to the author the power and capability to express with a high level of accuracy the idea, concept, or story they wish to illustrate. And so, while it would not be possible to ever fully transfer onto another a complete instance of experience, literature is a mechanism that has at its disposal an abundance of forms through which it can begin to clarify distinctions and build stronger intercultural and/or interpersonal connections.

The Chaneysville Incident and *Atomik Aztex* both take on this experiential challenge, and both serve as cultural translations. Each novel also shows the ways in which temporality can be used as a tool for translation in that it can stylistically create a more accurate representation of a culture or period of time. Work done in *The Chaneysville Incident* shows the ways in which historical perspective and factual data can give one a better sense of cultural identity in the midst of a complex societal structure while *Atomik Aztex* explores its own translation of imperialist ideologies. These novels, however, are only two examples of cultural narratives that have projects hoping to portray a translation of the cultural sort. These works serve as gateways to

what hopefully can be a better way of communicating and representing the differences between groups, for language is the best tool available to humanity in order to try and relate to one another.

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ACADEMIC VITA
EMILY MORRISON
efm5142@psu.edu

EDUCATION

Pennsylvania State University, University Park
Schreyer Honors College, College of Liberal Arts
Bachelors of Arts: English, Philosophy
Minor: Italian
Dean's List: all semesters

EXPERIENCE

Paterno Fellows Program, January 2017-Present
College of Liberal Arts, Pennsylvania State University

- Honors program including advanced academic coursework, thesis, study abroad and/or internship, ethics study, and leadership/service commitment

Center for American Literary Studies (CALS), Fall 2018-Present
University Park, PA

- *Undergraduate Research Assistant*
  - Coordinate with on- and off-campus groups to host literary-related events including conferences and community events

College of Earth and Mineral Sciences, Penn State University, Fall Semester 2017
University Park, PA

- *Writing Intern, Penn State News*
  - Conduct interviews with students/ faculty
  - Write and edit stories published on EMS website and Penn State News

Make-A-Wish Foundation Philadelphia, Delaware, and Susquehanna Valley Chapter, May - August 2017
Lancaster, PA

- *Development and Communications Intern*
  - Participated with individual donors and corporate partners, as well as in donor outreach, media opportunities, etc.

COMMUNITY SERVICE/LEADERSHIP

Bee House

- Student fundraising organization benefiting Penn State THON
- *Dancer*, THON 2019
  - Required to stand and remain awake for 46 hours
- *President,* April 2018 - Present
  - Conduct executive board meetings
  - Coordinate with other THON representatives and organizations
- *Director of Finance*, April 2016 – April 2017
  - Collection and management of all donations

English Language Mentor Program, Spring Semester 2018
Liceo Scientifico Galileo Galilei, Perugia, Italy

- Weekly English lessons taught to Italian high school students
- Organized lessons plans coordinated with general English curriculum

AWARDS

Penn State Department of English Internship Support Award, Spring 2019