

# Attentional windowing in David Foster Wallace's 'The Soul Is Not a Smithy'

Harrison, C.

Author post-print (accepted) deposited in CURVE November 2015

## Original citation & hyperlink:

Harrison, C. (2014) 'Attentional windowing in David Foster Wallace's 'The Soul Is Not a Smithy'' in C. Harrison, L. Nuttall, P. Stockwell and W. Yuan (Eds). *Cognitive Grammar in Literature* (pp: 53-68). New York: John Benjamins.

<http://www.jbe-platform.com/content/books/9789027270566-04har>

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1075/lal.17>

**Copyright © and Moral Rights are retained by the author(s) and/ or other copyright owners. A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge. This item cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the copyright holder(s). The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.**

**This document is the author's post-print version, incorporating any revisions agreed during the peer-review process. Some differences between the published version and this version may remain and you are advised to consult the published version if you wish to cite from it.**

**CURVE is the Institutional Repository for Coventry University**

<http://curve.coventry.ac.uk/open>

Harrison, C. (2014) 'Attentional Windowing in David Foster Wallace's 'The Soul Is Not a Smithy'' in Harrison, C., Nuttall, L., Stockwell, P. and Yuan, W. (eds) *Cognitive Grammar in Literature*. New York: John Benjamins.

## CHAPTER 4

### Attentional windowing in David Foster Wallace's 'The Soul Is Not a Smithy'

*Chloe Harrison*

#### 1. 'The Soul Is Not a Smithy'

This chapter looks at the specific linguistic choices made by the producer of literary language; how he has chosen to represent the narrative, and the effects elicited by these choices. As Langacker's (2008a) Cognitive Grammar model lacks a specific counterpart for linguistic gapping, this analysis applies the CG notion of *profiling* alongside Talmy's (2000) theory of the *windowing of attention* to David Foster Wallace's short story 'The Soul Is Not a Smithy', which appeared in his short story collection *Oblivion* (Wallace 2004: 67–113). 'The Soul Is Not a Smithy' is primarily concerned with the windowing of attention – often quite literally. The story focuses on an unnamed narrator, who recounts a traumatic event from his childhood. The event in question was a 'hostage situation' at comprehensive school, which involved a substitute teacher (Mr Johnson) experiencing a mental breakdown which caused him to write '*KILL THEM*' (Wallace 2004: 87) repeatedly on the board. However, the narrator's account describes in greater *specificity* the daydream he was having at the time, which was centred on a blind girl Ruth, her dog Cuffie, and her life with her family. The story concludes by describing through a newspaper account how Mr Johnson was shot by police troops, and finally finishes by outlining the fact that, ultimately, the narrator wanted to recount his relationship with his father, and his fear of entering the workplace as an adult.

This is the story of how Frank Caldwell, Chris DeMatteis, Mandy Blemm, and I became, in the newspaper's words, the 4 unwitting hostages, and of how our strange and special alliance and the trauma [...] bore on our subsequent lives and careers as adults later on. (Wallace 2004: 67)

Although supposedly about a hostage situation in a primary school, like many of the other stories in the collection and indeed in Wallace's other works in general, 'The Soul Is Not a Smithy' seems to focus on the peripheral events of the story – and so digresses almost immediately from the purported narrative arc as outlined in the above abstract (Phillips 2005). What could be termed the main events of the narrative – the shocking events in the classroom – become marginalised as the story of the narrator's childhood relationship with his father takes centre stage, alongside the projected imaginary story unfolding through the window panes of a blind girl called Ruth and her family. Despite the terrifying events occurring in the classroom, the narrator recalls the daydream he was having at the time in much greater depth of detail than the events of the hostage situation itself.

It is this process of displaced attention which leads critics to label Wallace's work as post-postmodernist fiction. Post-postmodernist texts are said to aim to disassemble

Harrison, C. (2014) 'Attentional Windowing in David Foster Wallace's 'The Soul Is Not a Smithy'' in Harrison, C., Nuttall, L., Stockwell, P. and Yuan, W. (eds) *Cognitive Grammar in Literature*. New York: John Benjamins.

constructed representations of the world in order to represent reality (McLaughlin 2012: 218, McHale 1989, 1992). This is achieved in 'The Soul Is Not a Smithy' through its treatment of attention – how it is directed, where it is directed, for how long, and to what effect.

This particular story is thus in line with the general critical view of Wallace's writing style, such as that in his works often 'major plot points are deferred, held out of frame, or ignored altogether' (Phillips 2005: 677), focusing instead on the 'peripheral tableaux' (Wallace 2004: 94), and that consequently the main narrative can constitute a 'jamboree of distraction' (Mason 2004: 17). This 'jamboree of distraction' is apparent in Wallace's other works (1989, 1997: 231–375, 2004), and is often manifested through an extremely high level of world-building information used to describe a particular scene. Frequently there is so much world-building information described and with such a high level of specificity that it can be difficult for a reader to decide which elements require the most attention (Langacker 2008a, Werth 1999; Gavins 2007).

Although the prominence of actual windows in this story arguably means that the framework chosen is particularly well suited, it was chosen for analysis here because of its challenging nature; because the continual shifting of attention constitutes its overarching structure – rather than for the coincidence of windows. The link between visual and cognitive processes is one which has been long established, and represents a close connection between the two modes which is enforced by Langacker's metaphor for construal processes (Langacker 2008a, Chafe 1994: 53).

The nature of 'The Soul Is Not a Smithy' means that the relationship between the narrator's consciousness and the represented visual scene is one which is closely connected. At the production end of construal, the narrator has the power to encode a scene in a particular way. Elsewhere I expand upon this, and apply the framework to a text which windows and gaps information using more than one semiotic channel (Harrison 2013). In this wider research, I argue that particular components of Cognitive Grammar (namely, the reference point model, the current discourse space, force dynamics and the compositional path) can be scaled up from their original clausal application to be adapted as a discourse framework of literary narrative (Langacker 1987, 1991a, 1991b, 1999, 2008a, 2009; Evans & Green 2006; Croft & Cruse 2004; Taylor 2002). Often this involves scaffolding CG concepts onto existing cognitive, narrative or stylistic models (see Harrison & Stockwell 2013), or providing a cognitive turn to more formalist approaches (Herman 2009b; Doloughan 2011; Dancygier 2012).

## **2. Windows, profiles, splices**

Talmy (2000: 255–309) describes the windowing of attention (hereafter termed *attentional windowing*) as the process where one or more portions of a referent scene – where each portion has internal continuity but is discontinued from another selected portion – will be placed in the foreground of attention while the remainder of the scene is backgrounded (Talmy 2000: 258).

Harrison, C. (2014) ‘Attentional Windowing in David Foster Wallace’s ‘The Soul Is Not a Smithy’ in Harrison, C., Nuttall, L., Stockwell, P. and Yuan, W. (eds) *Cognitive Grammar in Literature*. New York: John Benjamins.

Langacker (2008a) applies attentional frames differently to Talmy, using the term instead to refer to marking boundaries of conceptual units in phonological processing specifically, following Chafe’s (1994: 482) notion of *intonation units*. Talmy, however, refers to this intonation delineation as just one facet of attentional windowing (2008). Perhaps the closest point of contact between Talmy’s Cognitive Semantic application of windowing and CG relating to attention is Langacker’s (2008a) reference to profiling, which comes under his rubric of construal. This latter organisational structure can be linked to Talmy’s *conceptual alternativity*, which is perhaps a more neutral term than construal. It gives equal autonomy on the part of the language producer (P) as well as the language receiver (R), whereas construal arguably prioritises the conceptualiser.

Although following Langacker’s framework as the organising structure for this discussion overall, I will be using Talmy’s attentional windowing alongside the concept of CG profiling. This is largely because Talmy’s framework of attentional windowing is a somewhat more comprehensive version of profiling, not least because of the inclusion of gapping which has no conceptual equivalent in Langacker’s scheme.

**Table 5.1.** Attention in Langacker and Talmy

	<i>Directed attention</i>	<i>Omitted attention</i>
Talmy (2000)	Windowing	Gapping
Langacker (2008a)	Profiling	X

Langacker maintains that a negative expression also evokes profiling, which involves the drawing of attention to a profile of a conceptual base. The former relates to the substructure which holds our attention and the latter the particular ‘body of conceptual content’, which may be broad or immediate depending on its contextual use (2008a: 66); and an ‘expression can profile a thing or a relationship’ (Langacker 2008a: 67). In this way profiling is used as one facet of prominence alongside the alignment of trajector and landmark. However, although both Talmy’s windowing and Langacker’s profiling are conceptually very similar, Talmy’s attentional system provides a more detailed framework for what occurs in ‘The Soul Is Not a Smithy’, particularly with regard to what is not said (gapping), and the ordering of events (splicing).

In a sentence or an event frame there can exist initial, medial or final gapping or windowing. This means that some of the sections of the scene are included (*windowed*) or excluded (*gapped*). Typically, the medial section of a sentence is often not as attentionally foregrounded as the other two sections, which can result in conceptual *splicing* (Talmy 2000: 270). In this instance, rather than a sentence delineating the entirety of a concept (A>B>C), the medial portion is instead omitted (A>C). There are different kinds of windowing depending on the inclusion, omission or change of various pieces of textual information. For

Harrison, C. (2014) ‘Attentional Windowing in David Foster Wallace’s ‘The Soul Is Not a Smithy’ in Harrison, C., Nuttall, L., Stockwell, P. and Yuan, W. (eds) *Cognitive Grammar in Literature*. New York: John Benjamins.

instance, an event frame, which is ‘the coherent referent situation with respect to which the windowing must take place’ (Talmy 2000: 257), can have clearly demarcated boundaries between itself and another event frame depending on whether information included is said to lie inside or outside of the frame. Boundaries can also be drawn between and across frames, and to describe this phenomenon Talmy discusses the connectivity versus the disjuncture of a particular concept. These links or disjunctures may be ‘spatial, temporal or causal’ in nature (Talmy 2000: 161). Essentially, then, this windowing of attention outlines how our attention can be drawn from point A to point B (which represent particular locations), and the means by which we get there. Furthermore, it is sometimes possible for the event frame to both begin (named the departure) and end (the return) in the same location. This constitutes what Talmy terms a *closed path*.

A>B>C here label specific locations, or as Evans and Green (2006) point out, correlate directly with the notions of

Initial	SOURCE
Medial	PATH
Final	GOAL

(Evans & Green 2006: 199)

All of the definitions outlined above are applied by Talmy solely to the sentence level of language. This means that much of his original discussion of the effects of attentional windowing also centres on the problems caused by those elements of syntax such as complements and adjuncts (2000: 262). In line with my general discussion, I shall be applying these Cognitive Semantic terms to linguistic units above sentential level.

Attentional-, or path-, windowing is therefore ‘a way of focusing attention on a particular subpart of a path of motion’, and falls within Talmy’s broader attentional system (see Evans & Green 2006: 198). That it specifically ‘allows language users to window (focus attention on) sub-parts of the trajectory associated with the motion of an object’ is important to consider when discussing narrative or discourse trajectory (Evans & Green 2006: 198). In relation to this analysis, I will be exploring motion with regard to the development and progression of the narrative.

Discontinuous windowing occurs when we move from location A>C, with a windowed agent and result, and a gapped path. This is also referred to as conceptual splicing, which is where ‘the medial portion of the path in some hearers’ cognitive representations may reduce to so minimal a state in conscious conceptualization that the discontinuous initial and final phases may seem to run together contiguously, perhaps even seamlessly’ (Talmy 2000: 270). This will be looked at in more detail in the analysis here. In terms of the attentional windowing at the discourse level of this particular short story it can be said that most of the main plot elements are gapped, whereas what we would perhaps term the less significant elements of the story are windowed. This has the unusual effect of foregrounding backgrounded elements and vice versa, creating a somewhat unsettling reading experience. For instance, although we receive brief snapshots of the ‘hostage situation’ in the classroom,

Harrison, C. (2014) 'Attentional Windowing in David Foster Wallace's 'The Soul Is Not a Smithy'' in Harrison, C., Nuttall, L., Stockwell, P. and Yuan, W. (eds) *Cognitive Grammar in Literature*. New York: John Benjamins.

we are not offered much information as to the 'resolution' (Labov 1972) of the event. Ironically, however, although much of the 'real incident' is gapped, inters of the amount of information and full disclosure for many physical descriptions included, frequently the initial, medial and final portions of many viewing frames are fully windowed at the sentential, if not the discourse, level (Wallace2004: 84). This analysis will focus on how the differences between sentential and discourse-level windowing function in this narrative, and to what effect.

### **3. The cognitive turn vs. structuralism**

Moving on from classical and structuralist narratological studies (Barthes 1974, 1977; Culler 2002; Propp 1968; Todorov 1977), Doloughan (2011: 8) describes how post-classical narrative research places 'the focus on process rather than simply on product'. This new approach to structuralist accounts is supported by Dancygier (2007), who describes how the construction of contemporary literary narratives necessitates a rethinking or extension of key narratological concerns. Arguably, the kind of analysis used in this chapter is a cognitive extension of Genette's (1980, 1988, 2002) structuralist work on story, narrative and narrating, and the ordering of events in narrative. Some of the fundamentals are undoubtedly similar: Genette's (1988: 13) work concerns mapping the locations and events of a narrative in chronological order ('story'), which he terms the 'totality of narrated events', and then observing how the particular narrative structures the representation of the events ('narrative'), which, as stated, I will also be observing in this analysis.

However, I argue that scaling up a sentential framework using a cognitive approach is particularly beneficial. Firstly because whereas Genette's original work focuses on plot points and their ordered representation, using Langacker and Talmy's structuring systems here allows for a more fluid scheme. Through observing the cognitive mechanisms of the text we can look at how these events and locations are structured on both a micro- and macro- level in a literary discourse, and the relationship between the event frames of these different levels. Such an analysis should conceptually account for how attention is directed to a particular event or location. Secondly, Genette maintains that 'the sole specificity of narrative lies in its mode and not its content' (1988: 16). Here, I hope that a more cognitive-linguistic approach to these structures will pertain more to the effects that the different attentional windowing has on the reading process itself, and the effect created by profiling different elements of the narrative content.

Although building upon these formalist foundations, the kind of event frame oscillation in 'The Soul Is Not a Smithy' parallels Genette's (1980: 52) notion of 'paralipsis', which he calls a 'kind of lateral ellipsis', or a 'type of gap, of a less strictly temporal kind, created not by the elision of a diachronic section but by the omission of one of the constituent elements of a situation in a period that the narrative does not generally cover'. Paralipsis differs from ellipsis in this way in that it concerns parallel time development; rather than omitting an event or location, the process 'sidesteps a given element' (Genette 1980: 52).

Despite being conceptually rather similar, I suggest that Talmy's conceptual splicing (movement from A>C within an event frame, with a gapped medial path) differs from

Harrison, C. (2014) 'Attentional Windowing in David Foster Wallace's 'The Soul Is Not a Smithy'' in Harrison, C., Nuttall, L., Stockwell, P. and Yuan, W. (eds) *Cognitive Grammar in Literature*. New York: John Benjamins.

paralipsis in that it does not necessarily concern a 'sidestep' in time; splicing can account for a jump to location C in event frame 2, from B in the first event frame, which is a displaced temporal domain. It is not a mere shift in focus within the same temporal frame, but rather a shift in frame, and fundamentally, location – albeit temporal or spatial in essence. Arguably splicing is a more encompassing term than paralipsis because it better accounts for the disruption of the anticipated narrative arc, and better explains discontinuity by extension. Whereas paralipsis 'sidesteps' from the location of the first event frame to the location of a parallel event frame, retaining the same temporal parameters, I argue that conceptual splicing instead accounts in a more general way for the movement between locations of different frames. This movement is not strictly lateral; the process can account for movement backwards, forwards, or parallel to the current time.

It could perhaps be argued that this temporal jumping about may be close to the process of interpolated narrating style, which is described as a 'complex' mode of narrating denoting causality between different points of different event frames, different temporal locations (Genette 1980: 217). Although this is not what happens in this story, the 'entangling' which Genette describes as being central to this latter process does occur in splicing. While Talmy (2000) simply describes conceptual splicing in terms of A>C and gapping in the medial path, I think that applying the term more widely and in a more multidirectional manner is of benefit, particularly in literary applications such as this where the literary text in question challenges the structuring of story and discourse.

#### 4. Discourse event frames

The discourse event frame of the 'hostage situation' is the central event frame: all the other narrative strands are grounded in and developed around it, as the 'real incident' (2004: 84) of the story. It seems to be the most *tellable* (Labov 1972) part of the story, in that it involves a terrifying event. It is not represented as a fully windowed path, however. As a profiled participant in this event frame, the supply teacher Mr. Johnson is frequently established as a referent: 'MR. JOHNSON [...] WAS LATER REVEALED TO HAVE NO RECORD OF MENTAL DISTURBANCE' (p. 73). Conversely, the path and goal of the frame are gapped until a conceptual splice fills in the gapped information by way of a discontinuous path: 'IT WAS CLEARLY MR. JOHNSON'S FACIAL EXPRESSION [...] WHICH PROMPTED THEM TO OPEN FIRE' (pp. 99–100).

Including this central discourse event frame, the various nested narratives of this short story can be grouped into five main narrative strands or discourse event frames (i.e., events which appear throughout the entirety of the story), elements of which are windowed at various points in the narrative.

- the hostage situation – 'the real incident' (Wallace 2004: 84)
- the immediate aftermath of the event
- the present day and 'subsequent lives and careers as adults later on' (Wallace 2004: 67)

Harrison, C. (2014) 'Attentional Windowing in David Foster Wallace's 'The Soul Is Not a Smithy'' in Harrison, C., Nuttall, L., Stockwell, P. and Yuan, W. (eds) *Cognitive Grammar in Literature*. New York: John Benjamins.

- the narrator's childhood more generally and his relationship with his father
- the nested 'split narrative' (Wallace 2004: 79) which details the lives of a blind girl named Ruth, her mother and father, and her dog.

These interrelated strands form a chain of nested narratives (Talmy 2000: 84). The main narrative is the embedded yet predominant daydream: embedded because it is clearly tangential to the narrative trajectory as promised at the beginning, and predominant due to its prevalence in terms of its monopoly on the physical length of the story – or in Genettean terms, the frame has a long duration (1980, 1988, 2002). The nested narrative is an open path event frame because the resolutions of each of the character's narrative strands progress in terms of location, from the daydream's starting point. The backstory to this embedded narrative is very detailed: the daydream has different narrative levels itself, and often portions of the nested narrative which we assume are gapped entirely become windowed during flashbacks or through the inclusion of elements of the backstory of one of the nested characters.

It is important to consider that the chronology of the event frames is problematic in relation to the domain of time.

Profile-base distinctions also exist in the domain of time. The flow of time constitutes (part of) the base of the meaning of verbs. Different lexical verbs may profile different 'slices' of time, backgrounding and foregrounding different features (thus producing different 'aspectual' profiles).

(Verhagen 2007: 50)

With this in mind, we can assign a different spatiotemporal base to each of the above frames. This means that, as well as splicing between locations, the story also splices between temporal bases. However, this often causes confusion in this story; although we can anchor these discourse event frames according to (largely) distinct spatiotemporal domains, at the sentential level there is some disjuncture as to whether the aspectual profile of the speaker is based in the discourse event frame currently being profiled, or whether the profile is anchored elsewhere. This will be explored in more detail in the next section.

Despite the insistence of the narrator to tell us about his daydream, we do see the occasional splice to 'the real incident' (Wallace 2004: 84): 'Meanwhile, in the inception of the real incident, Mr. Johnson had evidently just written KILL on the chalkboard' (2004: 84), as well as capitalised interjections which continue to revert to the main event. These insertions create temporal disjuncture with regard to the main narrative, but are linked thematically with elements from the other event frames. In this way, rather than creating structural or grammatical disjuncture or connection, this narrative uses semantic domains and themes as a cohesive device. As the narrative progresses, the separation between the discourse event frames and the cohesive ties become easier to discern. The demarcation of scope is often marked by a graphological boundary (i.e. by new paragraphs, or the insertion



Harrison, C. (2014) 'Attentional Windowing in David Foster Wallace's 'The Soul Is Not a Smithy'' in Harrison, C., Nuttall, L., Stockwell, P. and Yuan, W. (eds) *Cognitive Grammar in Literature*. New York: John Benjamins.

of capitalised passages); or in terms of the internal content of each frame, as we learn to recognise which characters belong to which event frame.

This means that as the story progresses we can increment world-building information from the particular discourse event frames into a central directory of world-identifying components (Emmott 1997); or, in CG terms, into the ground of the discourse event.

## 5. Micro- and meso-windows

Intuitively, however, it feels as if the narrator of 'The Soul Is Not a Smithy' wants to disrupt the creation of a coherent *central directory* of world-building information, and does so by frequently and somewhat self-consciously making self-reflexive references to the problem of attention at the sentence-level of the text:

In testing, many schoolchildren labeled as hyperactive or deficient in attention are observed to be not so much unable to pay attention as to have difficulty exercising control or choice over what it is they pay attention to.

(Wallace 2004: 97)

Like the narrator, we have little choice over which elements of the story we can pay attention to. In this way we are very much presented with the mind style of the narrator: we are in his head, and are presented with the events as he processed them at the time (Semino 2008; Fowler 1977; see also Stockwell 2009a). Mind style is a useful label for the stylistic representation of the narrative here, for as Semino (2008: 269) highlights, the term captures 'those aspects of worldviews that are primarily personal and cognitive in origin, and which are either peculiar to a particular individual, or common to people who have the same cognitive characteristics (for example, as a result of a similar mental illness or of a shared stage of cognitive development, as in the case of young children)'; and, furthermore, how this world view is represented becomes representative of 'an individual's characteristic cognitive habits, abilities and limitations'. The narrator's mind style makes the reading of the story a somewhat frustrating experience; the tangential nested narrative of the daydream takes centre stage, while the option of shifting focus onto the unfolding events inside the classroom becomes impossible. Ironically, the narrator talks about deprivation of the senses in the daydream in relation to the characters, in that Ruth's classmates comprise blind and deaf children. The readers of this story are placed in this same discourse situation: in reading, I felt a constant desire to change the viewing frame, to see the events in the classroom.

The narrative strand which constitutes the main attentional windowing in the story is the daydream imagined by the narrator. Much of the framing of this narrative is outlined literally, as the narrator frequently describes the physical frame of his daydream:

The wire mesh, which divided the window into 84 small squares [...], was designed in part to make the windows less diverting and to minimize the chances

Harrison, C. (2014) 'Attentional Windowing in David Foster Wallace's 'The Soul Is Not a Smithy'' in Harrison, C., Nuttall, L., Stockwell, P. and Yuan, W. (eds) *Cognitive Grammar in Literature*. New York: John Benjamins.

that a pupil could become distracted or lost in contemplation of the scene outside.

(Wallace 2004: 70–71)

The story is graphologically interspersed with capitalised paragraphs or sentences, which act to summarise what is going on, often splicing to the present in which the narrator is reflecting on what happened. For instance,

ESSENTIALLY, I HAD NO IDEA WHAT WAS GOING ON.

(Wallace 2004: 80)

This occurs after a 31 page-long paragraph outlining the narrator's segue into his daydream, or rather, the nested narrative (Talmy 2008: 84). This quotation also influences literary critical responses to the collection. For example, Mason (2004) states of Wallace's *Oblivion* that,

Perhaps more than anything, the defining quality of these fictions is the degree to which they leave the reader unsure about very basic narrative issues: who is telling this story? Where are we? What exactly is happening?

(Mason 2004: 17–19)

I think it can be argued that the defining quality of 'The Soul Is Not a Smithy' is that the narrator himself, by his own admission, 'had no idea what was going on' (Wallace 2004: 80). Although piece by piece, event frame by event frame, we find out more about the full narrative, much of this information is provided by retrospective account which has been produced by reconstruction through conversations in the aftermath and through the newspaper reports of the event. This makes us question both the reliability of the narrator, and what he considers to be the main point of narrative *tellability* (Labov 1972). What story are they trying to tell? Which story should we pay the most attention to?

## 6. Conceptual splicing

Essentially what occurs in this story – creating the sense of oblivion – is conceptual splicing. Rather than complete each event frame discretely, the splicing between the event frames in this story is not straightforward. Rather than omitting B entirely, the location frequently jumps from A and continues elsewhere – splicing instead where we would expect to read B to a new location: often the A/B/C locations of another event frame. We see this in the following sentences:

[...] later on that day Christ DeMatteis' sled had tripped to one side and struck a tree, and his forehead had had blood all over it while we all watched him keep touching his forehead and cry in fear at the reality of his own blood. I do not remember what

Harrison, C. (2014) 'Attentional Windowing in David Foster Wallace's 'The Soul Is Not a Smithy'' in Harrison, C., Nuttall, L., Stockwell, P. and Yuan, W. (eds) *Cognitive Grammar in Literature*. New York: John Benjamins.

anyone did to help him; we were all likely still in shock. Ruth Simmons' mother, whose name was Marjorie and had grown up admiring herself in different dresses in the mirror [...]

(Wallace 2004: 81)

Graphologically, it seems that the relationship between each narrative frame is one of disjuncture: the narrative consists of numerous capitalised insertions (67, 70, 73, 75, 80, 85, 89, 99, 103, 110–111), and often there are no new paragraph demarcations between two event frames, as discussed below. The lack of formal marking between narrative event frames means that there is frequent conceptual splicing (as outlined above, where the medial part of the frame is missing and the path is presented as A>C in a (near-) fluid conceptualisation – Talmy 2000: (270). The role and transparency of boundaries between and across frames has a direct bearing on the connectivity or disjuncture of the narrative. As also discussed, Talmy identifies these boundaries as being spatial, temporal or causal in nature (2000: 261). The temporal disjuncture is not entirely clearly delineated or signposted at the discourse level of the text: these conceptual splices appear through internal stylistic markers, such as a change in previously established characters as in the above passage. For instance, both Chris DeMatteis and Marjorie Simmons have been introduced prior to this point in the narrative, and therefore we already know they belong to different spatiotemporal frames. Furthermore, there are also some elements of connection across the discourse frames in relation to the particular 'world builders' of the scene: for instance, small details such as the 'burled walnut' table appear as a description the narrator remembers from his childhood home (p. 76) and also as a description of the home in the daydream narrative (p. 81). In this way, the graphology and the minutiae of the world-building details combine to create, as Talmy says, a 'near-fluid conceptualisation'; the boundaries between the ontological levels of the story become weakened, and the discrete event frames appear to blend together.

Thus we can say that in this story, as in most literary narratives, the more the event frames are developed, the more continuities and cohesion can be seen across and between frames. However, whereas perhaps elsewhere in other literary texts these cohesive devices are more immediately apparent, it takes a close reading to observe these connections here.

## 7. Quantitative/ qualitative specificity

Despite the sense of vagueness in relation to the events of the story, Wallace's style has been described as 'inexhaustibly mimetic' (Phillips 2005: 677). It comprises sentences which can span pages at a time, and frequently barrages the reader with descriptions of the minutiae of the scene in such high-grained detail that it becomes problematic to discern which elements of the narrative can be deemed as particularly significant. In other words, elements which are usually backgrounded or schematised in this discourse become foregrounded to the extent that it becomes unclear which of the figures are salient in the narrative trajectory. The levels of *specificity* become upset and unbalanced.

Harrison, C. (2014) 'Attentional Windowing in David Foster Wallace's 'The Soul Is Not a Smithy'' in Harrison, C., Nuttall, L., Stockwell, P. and Yuan, W. (eds) *Cognitive Grammar in Literature*. New York: John Benjamins.

This is particularly true in 'The Soul Is Not a Smithy', in which we encounter narrator who by his own admission is more concerned with the quantitative details of a text or a scene. Although he cannot read, he points out how he could 'supply a certain amount of specific quantitative information, such as the exact number of words per page, the exact number of words on each line, and often the word and even the letter with the most and fewest occurrences of use' (Wallace 2004: 72).

As a result of this, although we receive a lot of very exacting information as to the placement of world builders in the scene ('the total number of words on the chalkboard after erasures was either 104 or 121, depending on whether one counted Roman numerals as words or not' – 2004: 88) we receive very little qualitative response to the events themselves. The only emotional response appears when the narrator discusses his father, and his fear of entering the workplace as an adult (2004: 106–9). Indeed, the resolution of the story is told by a capitalised summary which is spliced from the narrator's current text world (Wallace 2004: 99–100). This demonstrates gapping of the final portion of the discourse event frame, as we do not find out what happened to Mr. Johnson as the police troops arrived directly from the main narrative; rather we receive the resolution through a shift in perspective from the news report which summarised the facets of the scene:

WHICH PROMPTED THEM TO OPEN FIRE. THIS WAS THE ONLY REAL TRUTH – THEY WERE AFRAID.

(Wallace 2004: 99–100)

The act of having conceptual gapping in one event frame but windowing in another displaces the evaluation or emotional response we would perhaps expect to see this event of which the narrator is an eye-, if admittedly oblivious-, witness. Genette terms this kind of retrospective narrative completion as 'completing analepses' (1980: 52). However, it could be argued that the resolution regarding the content of what happened (i.e. that Mr. Johnson was shot) is also a kind of anticipatory viewing frame (Langacker 2001). Although Genette likes to work predominantly on the form of a text and not the content, here it is the content which acts in a similar cohesive way to the completing constituent element. That is, from the very beginning of the story we know what the resolution, the resulting effect, of the story is; we are given a clear abstract in the opening sentence, detailing that the story is about a hostage situation, and that what becomes foregrounded and backgrounded depends greatly upon which event frame is currently profiled, and the locations involved and outlined. 'In The Soul Is Not a Smithy' the conceptual base (maximal scope) of the literary discourse in terms of the physical locations the classroom itself – or, specifically, '4th grade Civics class, second period, at R.B Hayes Primary School here in Columbus' (Wallace 2004: 67). Through this specific world-building information, point A of the classroom event frame, or the SOURCE, is windowed in great detail, and establishes a proximal dual location of the story being recounted and the location of the current speaker. This is encoded in the deictically proximal 'here in Columbus'.

Harrison, C. (2014) 'Attentional Windowing in David Foster Wallace's 'The Soul Is Not a Smithy'' in Harrison, C., Nuttall, L., Stockwell, P. and Yuan, W. (eds) *Cognitive Grammar in Literature*. New York: John Benjamins.

The daydream and classroom events are profiled from the same temporal base. For instance, the window narrative takes a negative turn when the atmosphere in the classroom does, and the narrator describes the events of the nested narrative as though they are unfolding out of his control. In this way it can be seen as some sort of psychological coping mechanism, which indeed is acknowledged as a possibility by the narrator himself: 'I believe that the atmosphere of the classroom may have subconsciously influenced the unhappy events of the period's window's mesh's narrative fantasy, [...] which required tremendous energy and concentration to sustain' (Wallace 2004: 92). This influence between frames progresses throughout the story, and eventually the conceptual overlap of the classroom events over the daydream becomes 'so traumatic that this narrative line was immediately stopped and replaced with a neutral view of the pipe's exterior' (Wallace 2004: 94). Here a conceptual override occurs, which we can label a sort of act of self-preservation. Ironically, however, it is the daydream that becomes more traumatic than the events of 'the real incident' in the classroom – which, arguably is more traumatic, being that it is, ontologically speaking, one level more 'real'.

The blurring between boundaries of the event frames can also be seen at other times in the narrative discourse, where there seems to be a compression of the narrator's fictional reality of the daydream and that of his 'real' fictional reality:

and even though Cuffie was just a dog and didn't have thought bubbles as you or I do...

(Wallace 2004: 83)

In this example, the ontological barriers have become broken down for the narrator so much that he superimposes features of the daydream into his (fictional) reality; or, rather, he self-implicates to such an extent that he does the opposite. By this, I mean that he is so absorbed in his fabricated reality as to situate his *origo* (Green 1995) as belonging there. As in previous quotations, there is no clear signposting to suggest that even the narrator can differentiate between the events.

## 8. Conclusion

The technique of distraction in 'The Soul Is Not a Smithy' is signposted in the very first paragraph. Although comprising multiple narrative strands, the story does not focus on the 'subsequent lives' of the '4 unwitting hostages' – rather, reading this story becomes an exercise in trying to ascertain the main point of *tellability* (Labov 1972) from the perspective of the narrator, of trying to decide where our attention should be directed. Ultimately the narrative profiles a particular macro event frame, but not the one which is expected. Instead, the scope of the story comprises a wider narrative arc than necessarily anticipated. The representation of the discourse in this text demonstrates strong cohesion, or *symbolic correspondence* (Langacker 2008a), between form and effect. This digression and

Harrison, C. (2014) 'Attentional Windowing in David Foster Wallace's 'The Soul Is Not a Smithy'' in Harrison, C., Nuttall, L., Stockwell, P. and Yuan, W. (eds) *Cognitive Grammar in Literature*. New York: John Benjamins.

complicated plot structure in the form of Wallace's writing reflects the internal themes, and means that 'spectators are discouraged, and active readers rewarded' (Mason 2004: 17–19).

In this way Wallace's writing involves an interaction between writer and reader, and Stockwell's (2009a) *READING AS INVESTMENT* metaphor certainly has a direct bearing on how we construe this particular story. *READING AS INVESTMENT* indicates that when you invest in a story, you prime feelings of sympathy or empathy with a particular character. However, because much of 'The Soul Is Not a Smithy' comprises comments or asides which remind us of the fact that we are reading a book, arguably the investment becomes difficult to make, and we are therefore recast in the role of spectator:

You move, gradually, from merely thinking about something to experiencing it as really there, unfolding, a story or world you are part of, although at the same time enough of you remains awake to be able to discern on some level that what you are experiencing does not make sense, that you are on the cusp of true meaning.

(Wallace 2004: 107)

Through these self-reflexive references, the themes of this story are continually foregrounded: we are forced to think about attention, about the reading process, and the impact this has on our interpretation of the events. Similarly to the narrator in the above quotation, we feel that we remain 'on the cusp of true meaning'. What is this story actually about? The 'real incident, the daydream, the narrator's adult life, or his relationship with his father? Each event frame jostles for space and attention here, but the complex windowing and splicing between the frames means that we become close to 'the true meaning' of the strand of one story, before our attention is directed to another window.

The analysis has shown that firstly such a framework opens up possibilities for contemporary texts which are complexly structured in terms of relationships between multiple discourse event frames. Secondly it has been observed that conceptual splicing and notions from cognitive semantics work successfully alongside CG in application to a literary text, as well as pertaining to wider conceptual processes. Finally, such a cognitive approach to the attentional system extends traditional structuralist approaches to event frames, and allows us to discuss and explore the effects that the particular narrative form has on how we interpret it, as well as how we can characterise the narrator and respond to the linguistic cues as construed by the linguistic producer. In the wider application of CG as a literary discourse framework, I argue that such a cognitive discourse grammar can offer new insights into how we can think and talk about contemporary literature, and because CG models language 'in terms of well-attested mental capacities that are not unique to language' (Nesset 2009: 477), this has allowed an exploration of language which is essentially a disassembling of intuitive processes. Consequently, this analysis gestures towards a holistic cognitive discourse grammar for literary texts.