بحوث قسم اللغة الإنجليزية

David Markson's *Vanishing Point*: A Mosaic of Bricolage

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Abstract

David Markson's novel, *Vanishing Point*, offers a significant example of postmodern literature that utilizes the bricolage technique, a method of juxtaposing disparate ideas or fragments to create a new narrative structure. This technique disrupts traditional narrative forms and challenges literary conventions, shifting the focus from the author to the language itself, and creating a multi-dimensional narrative space where various writings from different cultural sources interact in new and unexpected ways. The narrative coherence in Markson's work is achieved through the repetition of themes and motifs, inviting the reader to actively engage in piecing together the fragments into a meaningful pattern, thereby transforming the reading experience into a dynamic interplay between the text and the reader.

Key words: Markson, postmodern literature, bricolage technique, disparate ideas, fragments, literary conventions, narrative coherence, meaningful pattern, reading experience, text, reader

الملخص باللغة العربية:

رواية "نقطة الاختفاء" لديفيد ماركسون: فسيفساء من البريكولاج

تقدم رواية "نقطة الاختفاء" لديفيد ماركسون مثالاً مهماً على أدب ما بعد الحداثة الذي يستخدم أسلوب البريكولاج السردي الذي يقوم على تجاور وإعادة ترتيب المقتطفات المتباينة وغير المتجانسة لإنشاء هيكلا سرديا جديدا يقوض الأشكال السردية التقليدية ويدعو القارئ إلى استخلاص العلاقات والمشاركة في بناء المعنى الكلي، محولا بذلك دائرة الضوء من الكاتب إلى فن الكتابة ذاتها وخلق مساحة سردية متعددة الأبعاد حيث تتفاعل مقتطفات غير متصلة وغير متجانسة من مصادر ثقافية متنوعة بطرق جديدة وغير متوقعة، ويتحقق التماسك السردي واتساق المقتطفات غير المتجانسة في عمل ماركسون من خلال بناء أنماطا سردية تقوم على تكرار مجموعة واسعة من المواضيع والأفكار التي تستدعي نهجًا جديدًا للقراءة يتجاوز النص نفسه ويدعو القارئ إلى المشاركة النشطة في بناء سياق يحول تجربة القراءة إلى تفاعل ديناميكي بين النص والقارئ

الكلمات الرئيسية: ماركسون، الأدب ما بعد الحداثة، تقنية البريكولاج، أفكار متباينة، مقتطفات، التقاليد الأدبية، ترابط السرد، تجربة القراءة، نص، قارئ

David Markson's *Vanishing Point*: A Mosaic of Bricolage

"Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different."**— T.S. Eliot**, **The Sacred Wood** (182)

Many modern and postmodern writers of experimental fiction such as William S. Burroughs, Steve Tomasula, David Markson, Kathy Acker, Paul Auster, and Michael Martone—to name only a few—strive to enhance their craft by creating new literary techniques, forms, and modes of expression, thereby creating a new reality that transcends the fragmented world of modernity. In a world that seems to have undergone a huge cataclysmic reversal, these writers believe that it is time to take a postmodernist stance that subverts accepted notions of the novel and creates a work of art that is new, experimental, and conspicuously unique. In all their diverse endeavors, some postmodern writers have gone so far as to claim, each independently, that the traditional novel had become an obsolete literary form whose techniques are too restricting to convincingly portray the reality of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Ronald Sukenick asserts that "the traditional novel is a metaphor for a society that no longer exists" (3). Moreover, David Shields urges postmodernist writers to innovate and move beyond traditional novels which he perceives as "moribund.... they're ignoring the culture around them, where new, more exciting forms of narration and presentation and representation are being found (or rediscovered)" (91: 262).

Indeed, postmodernism is characterized by a departure from "grand narratives" or ideologies that offer definitive or universal truths; it signifies "a crisis in representation and a shift in what

constitutes reality and truth" (Armstrong 98). Not surprisingly, writers of postmodern experimental fiction believe that "reality in literature need not be thought of as the representation of contemporary conditions" (Lemon and Reis 75). One of their primary objectives is simply to enhance or alter the readers' understanding of reality by creating a new mode of writing that "ostentatiously deviates from the received ways of representing reality—either in narrative organization or in style" (Lodge 105). This is an attempt to recreate a reality in which the work of art "was not a representation of reality as realist art was, but a representation of the processes of representation: a work that explored its own structure" (Armstrong 19).

David Markson (1927-2010), an influential figure in American postmodernist fiction, was renowned for his efforts to deconstruct old artistic forms and develop innovative writing styles. He is recognized as one of the most experimental, the most challenging, and certainly the most mysterious or enigmatic writers of his time. His tetralogy, *Reader's Block* (1996), *This Is Not a Novel* (2001), *Vanishing Point* (2004), and *The Last Novel* (2007), is a boldly experimental work that is not only hard to understand but also hard to be labeled or categorized. Markson's novelistic innovations were born out of a desire to "transcend the randomness he inherits" (Berry 139), create "his own personal genre" (Tabbi 684), and thereby make a unique contribution to contemporary fiction.

This article suggests that the bricolage technique provides a useful and powerful tool for enhancing our understanding of Markson's third volume of the tetralogy *Vanishing Point* (2004). Markson's use of bricolage in this novel serves a dual purpose: it not

only disrupts traditional narrative techniques and structures, thereby challenging literary conventions, but also becomes a self-referential element drawing attention to the bricolage's intrinsic role within the novelistic mechanism and emphasizing its significance as a fundamental component of the narrative. Markson uses the bricolage technique as a postmodern literary practice to promote a new mode of writing where—to use Barthes' words— "the language speaks, not the author" (145). Significantly, Markson's *Vanishing Point* presents a new form of writing in which the meaning of the text is no longer fixed, immutable, or determined by the author, but rather "a multi-dimensional space" where various writings from different cultural sources come together and are skillfully juxtaposed in new and unexpected ways.

To fully appreciate Markson's bricolage technique, it is crucial to explore its historical context. The history of the bricolage technique is often traced back to French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009) who suggests that bricolage "builds up structured sets…by using the remains and debris …or odds and ends…of the history of an individual or a society" (21-22). In reconstructing the different combinations of these remnants, referred to as "odds and ends" of history, the bricoleur makes up structures by arranging or weaving the scraps of historical events into a new narrative thread. Of crucial importance to this practice is the bricoleur's examination of "all the heterogeneous objects of which his treasury is composed to discover what each of them could 'signify'" (18). In the process of rearranging and shaping these disparate ideas to pose new possibilities, "it is always earlier ends which are called upon to play the part of means: the signified changes

into the signifying and vice versa" (21). Thus, during the process of reorganizing and transforming different ideas, there is a reciprocal relationship between the intended meaning (signified) and the expression or representation of that meaning (signifier). This pattern of shifting signification, which represents a major aspect of bricolage, suggests a continuous cycle of knowledge creation and reinterpretation, where meanings and their representations are not fixed but evolve in the context of new ideas and perspectives.

According to Levi-Strauss, bricolage is precisely the ability to use the tools and materials at hand and orchestrate them together "so as to produce a meaning" (211). The meaning of these materials or components "derives only from the contexts in which they are framed and the perspectives from which they are viewed" (Sussman124). Levi-Strauss argues that these components "form a system which can be employed as a grid that is used to decipher a text, whose original unintelligibility gives it the appearance of an uninterrupted flow" (75). The components create a cohesive system that can serve as a framework for interpreting a text. This system, likened to a grid, aids in deciphering the text, which may initially seem incomprehensible due to its uninterrupted flow. By utilizing this grid-like system, the underlying structure and meaning of the text can be revealed.

Therefore, grid-reading not only explains the text but also provides insight into how the bricoleur reconstructs his materials into a cohesive whole. Levi-Strauss describes the bricoleur's task as follows:

His first practical step is retrospective. He has to turn back to an already existent set made up of tools and materials, to consider or

reconsider what it contains and, finally above all, to engage in a sort of dialogue with it and, before choosing between them, to index the possible answers which the whole set can offer to his problem. He interrogates all the heterogeneous objects of which his treasury is composed to discover what each of them could 'signify' and so contribute to the definition of a set which has yet to materialize but which will ultimately differ from the instrumental set only in the internal disposition of its parts. (18)

This combination or synthesis of "the heterogeneous objects" is thus characterized as the composition of a mosaic that "melds multiformity and rich diversity of colors with harmony and complexity into a pattern that conveys a unified image without sacrificing variety" (Olson 12).

Although the concept of bricolage can be traced back to Lévi-Strauss's structural anthropology, it seems to cut across a wide range of disciplines including science, art, and literature. Bricolage in art refers to the practice of creating new works from a diverse range of pre-existing materials or elements, a technique that finds its origins in the collage or montage methods used in painting during the latter half of the 19th century. Following the lead of Dada and Surrealist movements, the Dadaist poet Tristan Tzara was the first to apply the collage or montage technique to literature in his 1920 poem entitled "To make a dadaist poem" which reads:

Take a newspaper.

Take a pair of scissors.

Choose from this an article as long as you are planning to make your poem.

Cut out the article.

These lines describe the process of creating a "cut-up" poem, a technique that involves taking a pre-existing text, in this case, a newspaper article, cutting it up into fragments, and then rearranging and reassembling these fragments to create a new text or poem.

Since the 1960s, there has been a significant increase in interest in the collage or montage technique in American literary criticism. The Dadaist poet and painter Brion Gysin took this technique to an entirely new level by introducing the cut-up, or fold-in technique, which has become widely used in postmodern novels. Gysin's practice of the cut-up technique inspired such writers as William S. Burroughs, Kathy Acker, Donald Michael Thomas, Donald Barthelme, Lyn Hejinian, Ben Marcus, and many others. The novels of Burroughs are among the earliest noteworthy instances of the cut-up technique. For Burroughs, "life is a cut-up…We cut up the Bible, Shakespeare, Rimbaud, our own writing, anything in sight. We made thousands of cut-ups. When you cut and rearrange words on a page, new words emerge" (*The Adding Machine* 65).

This tendency to recycle and recombine materials from existing works through collage and cut-up is often identified as one of the key distinguishing features of postmodernism. Barthes remarks that every novel can be viewed as a "tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture" (*Image* 146). Similarly, Julia Kristeva asserts that "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (37). Thus, a writer's true originality is no longer possible. "It is not possible any longer," Allen contends "to speak of originality or the uniqueness of the artistic object, be it a painting or a novel, since every artistic object is so clearly assembled from bits and pieces of already existent art" (5).

The postmodern fondness for incorporating other texts in a work of fiction manifests itself in a variety of techniques including collage, montage, cut-up, pastiche, intertextuality, and bricolage.

In his remarkable tetralogy, David Markson makes an inward journey in an effort to create experimental, "self-reflexive" novels in which the process of writing itself becomes the subject matter of the novels. In an attempt to "write writing" (*Reader's Block*, 163), Markson creates a "writerly" text, to borrow Roland Barthes' term, that invites the reader to engage in the text's construction. According to Barthes, there are two types of texts: the "*lisible"* (readerly) text and "*scriptable"* (writerly) text. The "writerly" represents a style of writing that focuses on the process and act of writing itself. In other words, it is a form of writing that embodies the essence of a novel, poetry, or essay, but without the conventional structures associated with each. Barthes defines "the writerly" thus: "the writerly is the novelistic without the novel, poetry without the poem, the essay without the dissertation, writing without style, production without product" (S/Z 5). In essence, "the writerly" text represents the precedence of artfulness over the content. The Russian formalist theorist Viktor Shklovsky similarly argues that while art is a medium to demonstrate the genuine artistry of an object, this object becomes less important because it does not have to point to anything outside itself: "Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important" (Lemon and Reis 12).

Indeed, Markson's bricolage novels embody the fragmentation and non-linearity often associated with postmodern literature which is characterized as "arbitrary, eclectic, hybrid, decentred, fluid, discontinuous, pastiche-like" (Eagleton 201). In *This is Not a Novel*,

Markson has the protagonist, Writer, struggle to write a novel with "no intimation of story whatsoever," "no characters. None," "no plot or action," "no conflicts and/or confrontations," "no overriding central motivations," "no setting or descriptions," "no sequence of events," "no indicated *passage of time*," "no social themes, i.e., no picture of society," "no depiction of contemporary manners and/or morals" and "no politics" (15-17). According to Markson, these characteristics are typical of the bricolage technique and fundamental to many experimental works of fiction that seek to explore new forms of literary expression.

Markson's laborious tendency to recreate or reconstruct cultural heterogeneous components (including facts, allusions, anecdotes, and quotes from numerous historical figures) becomes the hallmark of his novel, *Vanishing Point,* in which he contemplates the form of the work, questioning whether it should be "Nonlinear. Discontinuous. Collage-like. An assemblage?" (161). While sharing similarities with the collage-like works, Markson's work cannot be strictly categorized as such or aligned with authors like Kathy Acker and William Burroughs who are known for this style. Instead, Markson's work utilizes bricolage as a self-referential approach that blurs the boundaries between form and content. According to Allen, the author, as a bricoleur, selects and arranges elements from the existing literary system or structure to create a new work, often obscuring the work's inherent connection to the original system (96).

Indeed, the distinction between collage and bricolage is blurred, as both involve disparate assemblage of materials. Yet, in collage, the author relies heavily on appropriated and restructured content, a technique reminiscent of T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land"

and Ezra Pound's "Cantos." Thus, collage primarily focuses on the juxtaposition and the aesthetic integration of disparate materials such as newspaper clippings or magazine ads, as in Burroughs' works, to create "a new possibility for seeing what could not be seen before" (Bolton 157). In addition, the arrangement of the text's elements into their full signifying relations depends on "hypotaxis" which uses subordinating and coordinating conjunctions to establish hierarchical relationships between ideas and clauses.

Bricolage, on the other hand, is more process-oriented, focusing on how "found objects" are recontextualized and transformed into a fragmented text that is new in form and meaning. In other words, the existing heterogeneous objects are often transformed or altered by the artist and are typically used to create a dynamic interplay of ideas and perspectives, thereby challenging traditional narrative structures. Moreover, in bricolage, the arrangement of found materials relies on "parataxis" where "two units of equivalent status"—ideas or clauses—"are juxtaposed" (Quirk 919) without the use of explicit coordinating and subordinating conjunctions to articulate their interrelation. Thus, the arrangement of content appears to be arbitrary, with no clear logical connections between consecutive sections. The absence of explicit connectives can create a sense of immediacy or urgency, and can also be used to establish parallelism or balance, thereby enriching the text's stylistic and semantic complexity. According to Allen, "the structure created by this rearrangement is not identical to the original structure, yet it functions as a description and explanation of the original structure by its very act of rearrangement" (96).

Understanding Markson's *Vanishing Point* begins with an understanding of the dynamics of the bricolage process. With the skill of a bricoleur, Markson skillfully weaves seemingly disparate, bizarre fragments together, "reflecting a fragmentary contemporary world full of miscommunication and disconnection" (Karnicky 23). Indeed, Markson's disjointed style of narration is an expression of the fragmented realities of contemporary life. He compares and contrasts the structured, predictable nature of conventional fiction with the chaotic, fragmented reality of life. Shields asserts that while conventional fiction often presents life as "a coherent, fathomable whole that concludes in neatly wrapped-up revelation," real-life experiences such as "standing on a street corner, channel surfing, trying to navigate the web or a declining relationship," are presented as disjointed, unpredictable "bright splinters" that fly at us (Fragment 319). If Milan Kundera compares the construction of the novel to "the way a house is built on its pillars," Markson's novels are made up of a loosely discontinuous series of building blocks or minimal narrative units.

Markson's *Vanishing Point* is made up of approximately two thousand "notes," or heterogeneous, fragmentary thoughts, often one or two sentences long separated by a one-line space. These snippets are a mixture of anecdotes about famous artists and philosophers from the classical period to modernists and postmodernists. The novel starts with the main character named Author, the narrator, who represents every writer including Markson himself, intending "to put his notes into manuscript form" (153). Hence, Author serves as a model for writers who draw on a wide variety of sources and materials to create a rich and complex tapestry

of ideas that readers can interpret and connect in their own unique ways. Indeed, Author adopts an experimental attitude toward art, an attitude that opens up new avenues for creative exploration and interpretation.

A compilation of notes rather than a traditionally linear narrative, Markson's *Vanishing Point* serves to disrupt the conventional boundaries between fiction and reality, and between the author, the narrator, and the reader. The following offers a striking example of Markson's narrative method which is characterized by a loose or arbitrary narrative structure of disconnected passages, quotations, and anecdotes:

The Egyptians appear never in their history to have enjoyed one day of freedom.

Said Josephus, ca. 95 ad.

Beguiled by the romance of Gauguin's removal to Tahiti.

Until remembering that the man deserted a wife and four young children at home.

I suppose all my books are gone.

Some, Dilly said. We had to.

These unrelated and heterogeneous snippets, ranging from historical observations ("The Egyptians appear never in their history to have enjoyed one day of freedom") to personal reflections ("I suppose all my books are gone"), are juxtaposed to create a rich tapestry that invites the reader to draw connections and participate in "the active construction and consideration of meanings" (Green 57).

Vanishing Point opens with an epigraph from Willem de Kooning, emphasizing the transformative impact certain artists, like Cézanne, Picasso, and Pollock, have had on the conventions of painting.

Every so often, a painter has to destroy painting.

Cézanne did it. Picasso did it with cubism. Then Pollock did it.

He busted our idea of a picture all to hell.

The novel's epigraph is about painters who created a new style of painting called the abstract expressionist movement, a revolutionary style that expressed the dynamism of the age. Kandel argues that "de Kooning, more than any other American artist of the twentieth century, altered the vocabulary of painting and even the notion of what painting is about" (101). However, it soon became obvious that Pollock was more capable, realistic, and progressive than de Kooning. According to Kandel, Pollock "proved to be, by far, the strongest personality of his generation" (101). Indeed, Cézanne, Picasso, and Pollock revolutionized the art world by challenging and destroying the established norms of their time.

Obviously, it is through the novel's epigraph that Markson points out how he shares Pollock's concerns and interests in inventing new techniques that show remarkable artistic creativity. If Pollock's work is so important in the history of modernism, Markson's experimental work makes him a great innovator who is perfectly attuned to the spirit of postmodernism. On the one hand, the novel's epigraph confirms "Markson's reputation as a highly experimental, 'difficult' postmodern writer 'who writes writing' instead of stories, and who aims to rebuild the novel, in form and content, from scratch" (Sims 59). On the other hand, it suggests that

Markson's *Vanishing Point* "busts our idea of a novel all to hell" (Malin 132). As Paul Rudolph explains,

It's the business of art to always question, to always turn everything upside down so that one sees it anew. It seems to me that this is the real business of art, though it is very disconcerting to most people; it gives them nothing to hold onto. (qtd. in Domin 127)

Although Markson's unconventional approach to the novel can often be shocking to some readers who are accustomed to more traditional forms, and cause their inability to understand his innovative techniques, it may help many others reevaluate their earlier lives and see things from different perspectives. If Markson's fiction seems difficult to comprehend, it may be because he focuses on the process of writing itself by interspersing his text with historical facts and anecdotes to create a sense of richness and depth in his work. Moreover, the novel's multiple references to other works and authors create a sense of freedom on the part of the attentive reader to make his/ her own connections and associations. However, the coherence of these references is not explicitly provided but is contingent on the reader's active participation in constructing an imaginative context that necessitates a new approach to reading, one that extends beyond the text itself to perceive and interpret the world at large. Thus, "the text presents itself as something not closed in on the author's meaning, but waiting for the moment of reading to be performed actively" (Pfahl 403).

The structure of *Vanishing Point* lacks a clear sequence or cause-and-effect relationship. The question is: How does Markson interweave disparate elements (thoughts, quotes, anecdotes, and historical references) to provide coherence to this seemingly loosely

organized novel? A reader approaching Markson's technique of bricolage needs to carefully collect the scattered fragments and piece them together, much like a mosaic, to form a comprehensive understanding of the novel. As one immerses himself in Markson's narrative world, one gradually explores a deep sense of coherence and organic unity throughout the novel. The fragments are woven together by constructing narrative patterns through the repetition of a wide range of themes and motifs where the craft of art, the passage of time, the concept of aging and mortality, and the human condition are at the center. These recurring themes act as a unifying thread, helping to counterbalance the narrative fragmentation, provide a framework that connects different parts of the story, and enhance the overall reading experience. Apparently, it is left to readers to piece together the disparate elements of the novel into a meaningful pattern. Thus, the text's meaning is not fixed by the author's intentions but is created in the act of writing itself; it "is born simultaneously with the text" (Barthes, *Image* 145).

The Craft of Art

1.1 The artistic process and the role of the artist

Markson's *Vanishing Point* serves as a manifesto that explores his ideas about the nature of postmodern art which is characterized by skepticism toward grand narratives or ideologies that aim to offer absolute truths. Markson's novel accordingly reflects the postmodern perspective that reality is not an objective entity, but is socially constructed and subjective, and that truth is not absolute but contingent on various factors such as culture, language, and individual perception. The opening fragment of the novel guides

readers toward an innovative or creative reading of art. It reads "A seascape by Henri Matisse was once hung upside down in the Museum of Modern Art in New York—and left that way for a month and a half" (153). This note refers to an embarrassing incident where a painting by Henri Matisse, entitled "Le Bateau," was mistakenly hung upside down at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and remained undetected for over a month. Strangely enough, the upside-down hanging of Henri Matisse's "Le Bateau" due to human error challenged visitors to engage with the painting more actively and imaginatively, inspiring them to read the painting in innovative ways.

Moreover, a fragment about the renowned Italian conductor Arturo Toscanini emphasizes the artist's unwavering dedication to his craft, whether it be writing, painting, sculpture, or music. It reads: "Orchestra play like pig. Being an Arturo Toscanini explanation of why he would not apologize to his Metropolitan Opera musicians after cursing at them in Italian" (153). Dissatisfied with the performance of the Metropolitan Opera musicians, Toscanini refused to apologize to the musicians after likening their performance to that of a pig. This incident highlights Toscanini's high standards and his uncompromising approach to musical excellence. Moreover, it emphasizes the importance of perseverance, reminding artists that success is often the result of hard work and resilience.

The artist's responsibility toward himself and others is metaphorically explored in the following fragment: "The speedometer needle after the crash that killed Albert Camus was frozen at 145, in kilometers—meaning roughly ninety miles per hour" (153). This note reminds readers of the car crash that resulted

in the death of Albert Camus, the renowned French author due to high speed. Apparently, Markson's note serves as a reminder that while it is important to take obvious risks, it is also important to do so with diligent attention to the possible challenges. Hence, the fragment is a clarion call to approach experimental techniques in art with a sense of duty and responsibility.

In the following fragment, Markson urges the artist to overcome the obstacles that often hold him back:

From the earliest biographical note on Rembrandt: He could read only the simplest Dutch. And that haltingly. Rembrandt. (153)

This note is a reminder that Rembrandt, the Dutch painter, had limited reading abilities in his native language. Despite this obstacle, Rembrandt became one of the most celebrated artists of his time, influencing the development of Western art by presenting innovative techniques and a profound understanding of human nature. This fragment affirms Rembrandt's innate talent and his determination to transcend the limitations of language and literacy.

Like the previous snippet, the following fragment explains and affirms the value and importance of perseverance and hard work in the pursuit of one's goals.

Werner Heisenberg was thirty-one when he won the Nobel Prize. And nine years earlier had been given a grade of C on his doctoral examinations. (153)

Aspiring writers are advised that academic success and recognition may take time and that setbacks are common to the writing practice. This is particularly true in the academic world, where early setbacks can be discouraging but should not be taken as a sign of permanent failure. Werner Heisenberg, a famous physicist,

was awarded the Nobel Prize at the age of thirty-one. Interestingly, nine years before this achievement, he received a poor grade on his doctoral examination. This fragment suggests powerfully that success and recognition can come late in one's career. The fragment about Charles Ives who received the Pulitzer Prize for his Third Symphony at the age of seventy-three is another commentary on how society often fails to recognize innovative art until much later.

At seventy-three, Charles Ives won a Pulitzer Prize for his Third Symphony. Which he had written when he was thirty. (155)

It is noteworthy that Ives had actually composed this symphony when he was just thirty years old. This late recognition highlights the enduring impact of Ives' work and the recognition of his talent even after several decades.

In a series of disparate fragments, Markson examines the experience of the writing process where Author, the protagonist, uses index cards to organize his thoughts before translating them into written form, and then rearranges them to create the desired flow of thought.

Then again, Author doesn't feel he's lost much time by not typing, since he's done a good deal of shuffling and re-arranging of the index cards. Author is pretty sure that most of them are basically in the sequence he wants. (158)

Unlike the practitioners of collage or cut-up techniques who utilize "modern word processing and other digital technologies to facilitate the production of carefully crafted cut-and-paste modes of writing" (Robinson 2), Markson's protagonist uses the traditional method of organizing and structuring his thoughts because it allows

for flexibility and a visual conception of the narrative structure, facilitating the process of editing and reorganizing.

In addition, Markson incorporates two brief quotations from Quintilian, a rhetorician from ancient Rome, to emphasize that quantity would never lead to quality. The act of erasing (removing unnecessary or ineffective elements) or revising what has been written is as crucial as the initial act of writing in creating a compelling, clear, and concise piece of work.

Erasure is as important as writing.

Said Quintilian

Who also said, Write quickly and you will never write well. (224)

The quote underscores the importance of meticulousness and care in the writing process, implying that haste can compromise the quality of the work.

1.2 Productivity can often be delayed

In a mosaic of fragments, Markson examines the creative process, where Author's productivity was very slow. This slow writing is most probably due to various reasons such as writer's block, lack of inspiration, or even personal circumstances.

Actually, Author could have begun to type some weeks ago. For whatever reason, he's been procrastinating. (154)

The text implies that Author had the opportunity to start writing weeks ago, but has been procrastinating for some unknown reasons. Whatever the reasons, the delay indicates that the protagonist is not making as much progress as he could be, and may need to take decisive steps to overcome his procrastination and get

back on track. This is a self-referential remark, where Markson steps in and comments on the challenges facing writers and the need for hard work and perseverance.

Moreover, Markson shows that Author struggles with procrastination, which is attributed to a lack of energy or motivation:

One reason for Author's procrastination is that he seems not to have had much energy lately, to tell the truth. For work, or for much of anything else. (155)

It has become increasingly difficult for Author to stop procrastinating and be productive. This lack of energy affects not only his writing but also other aspects of his life. This could imply a deeper issue such as mental health concerns, or aging, which are common challenges that face many authors and can significantly impact their productivity and creativity. The narrator recommends that writers should actively seek to overcome this obstacle and regain their energy and productivity. In other words, a writer needs to work diligently and effectively by staying committed to his craft, even when success and recognition seem elusive.

1.3 The unpredictable nature of the writing process

Markson reflects on the sophisticated and unpredictable nature of the writing process, a central motif that is emphasized throughout the novel.

Not that rearranging his notes means that Author has any real idea where the book is headed, on the other hand. Ideally, in fact, it will wind up someplace that will surprise even Author himself. (161)

Despite his efforts to organize and rearrange his notes, Author has no idea or a clear roadmap for the book's final direction.

However, Author expresses the hope that the book will ultimately reach a new level of creative maturity that goes contrary to expectations. This sheds light on the dynamic interplay between the writer's intent and the creative process where the result can often diverge from initial expectations, leading to unexpected revelations for the author himself.

Experimental fiction, like basic research, often involves venturing into the unknown, pushing the boundaries of one's understanding, and embracing uncertainty as a necessary part of the process of scientific discovery. A quote attributed to Wernher von Braun, a prominent German-American aerospace engineer, refers to the exploratory nature of basic research, which is driven by intellectual curiosity and the pursuit of knowledge.

Basic research is what I am doing when I don't know what I am doing. Determined Wernher von Braun. (156)

In such research, the path to discovery is often clouded with uncertainty, and the outcomes are not predefined or predetermined. Von Braun's determination implies that despite the lack of direction or clear objectives, he remains committed to the process of discovery and the potential for scientific progress. Like scientific exploration, experimental fiction can venture into uncharted territories where the writer may not have a clear direction or specific goals. The quote crystallizes the dilemma of Author, the protagonist whose delay in completing his work implies a level of uncertainty about having a clear direction or specific plan for his novel.

1.4 Experimentation

The narrator quotes Charles Darwin, alluding to Darwin's willingness to engage in exploratory research and experimentation, even when the outcomes are uncertain or the hypotheses seem unconventional.

I love fools' experiments. I am always making them. Said Darwin. (222)

By referring to these experiments as "fools' experiments," Darwin acknowledges the risk of failure or ridicule associated with such endeavors. This statement suggests Darwin's appreciation for unconventional or risky scientific inquiries which he often undertook. It also reflects his adventurous and open-minded approach to scientific exploration, emphasizing the importance of experimentation, where progress often depends on challenging traditional boundaries.

Another quote attributed to Oliver Wendell Holmes, a renowned American jurist and philosopher, "All life is an experiment," encapsulates a philosophical perspective on life as a process of trial and error. This viewpoint suggests that life is not a predetermined path but a series of trials, errors, and adjustments, akin to the scientific method of experimentation. This quote serves to underscore the experimental and unpredictable nature of life, art, and human endeavor. In addition, the quote, "We owe the invention of the arts to deranged imaginations" by Saint-Évremond, a French critic and poet, suggests that the genesis of artistic creation often stems from unconventional, non-conformist, or 'deranged' thought processes that deviate from the norm. This perspective aligns with the notion that artists often break from societal norms and traditional thinking patterns to explore unique, innovative, and sometimes

radical ideas. In the broader context of Markson's novel, both quotes emphasize the importance of unconventional and non-conformist thinking and the willingness to challenge established paradigms in the pursuit of novel artistic expression.

Indeed, Markson was known for his experimental narrative style that challenged mainstream fiction. He explores a literary experimental technique, known as "authorial absence," where he aims to minimize his authorial presence, allowing the story to unfold gradually.

Author is experimenting with keeping himself out of here as much as possible because?

Can he really say? Why does he still have no idea whatever where things are headed either?

Where can the book possibly wind up without him? (222)

This approach creates a sense of uncertainty about the narrative's direction, reflecting the author's own uncertainty. The question "Where can the book possibly wind up without him" underscores the experiment's inherent risk and the potential for the narrative to evolve in unexpected ways without the author's guiding hand. The author's uncertainty about the direction of the narrative reflects a defining characteristic of postmodern fiction, where the author's role is often decentered, and the text itself becomes a self-referential entity.

Thus, Markson's protagonist experiments with writing techniques by reducing his authorial guidance, thereby inviting readers to actively engage with the text and construct their interpretations.

Probably by this point more than apparent—or surely for the attentive reader. As should be Author's experiment to see how little of his own presence he can get away with throughout. (220)

The "attentive reader" is thus a crucial participant in this literary experiment, as the reduced authorial presence demands a higher level of reader involvement to discern connections and meanings.

Author's experiment could be seen as an exploration of the boundaries between the author, the text, and the reader, and how these boundaries can be blurred or even dismantled.

As should be Author's experiment to see how little of his own presence he can get away with throughout. (220)

This fragment refers to a metafictional technique where the artist intentionally recedes into the background to let the text speak for itself. This technique challenges traditional narrative structures and explores the boundaries of authorship, questioning the necessity of a dominant authorial voice in the construction of the narrative. According to Robinson, "the traditional roles of author and reader are subverted in the most absolute sense, forging not only 'the birth of the reader,' but a new level of engagement, in which the distinctions are dissolved and the reader becomes the author, and vice versa. Thus, a new mode of writing emerges" (247).

1.5. Defying tradition and offering new perspectives

For Markson, innovative and experimental artists and scientists share a common stance against obsolete traditions. Their shared resistance to "worn-out" traditions indicates a mutual desire to break from the past and possibly reshape the literary, cultural, or social landscape. This opposition is reflected in their works, where they challenge, critique, or subvert these traditions, thereby advocating

for change, progress, or modernity. The following fragment describes how, as a child, Sigmund Freud challenged social conventions by intentionally urinating on the floor of his parent's bedroom.

At the age of seven or eight, Sigmund Freud once deliberately urinated on the floor of his parents' bedroom. (154)

This act of rebellion or non-compliance with societal and institutional constraints is presented as a symbol of Freud's rejection of tradition and his willingness to assert himself and offer his insights. Indeed, Freud's later work as a psychoanalyst was characterized by a similar spirit of defiance.

The narrator of Markson's novel urges young writers to defy tradition and offer new perspectives that can be a powerful force for progress and innovation.

A novel of intellectual reference and allusion, so to speak minus much of the novel.

This presumably by now self-evident also. (162)

This fragment refers to a novel that is rich in intellectual references and allusions but perhaps lacks the narrative structure or elements typically associated with traditional novels. It could be a postmodern or experimental work that challenges conventional storytelling by focusing more on ideas, themes, or intertextual references rather than plot or character development. The statement "this presumably by now self-evident also" implies that the reader, having engaged with the work thus far, would have recognized this unconventional approach to the novel form. Noticeably, Markson's work deviates from the conventional novel format, focusing more on a bricolage of ideas and references.

1.6. The fight with the old writers

It can be daunting for a young writer to defy the old and established cultural norms. However, young writers must be willing to challenge the status quo and speak the truth, even if it goes against what has been accepted for years. Hence comes the significance of the following fragment in which Ernest Hemingway at the age of thirty-seven engages in a physical altercation with Wallace Stevens, resulting in significant injuries to Stevens' face.

At thirty-seven, in Key West, Ernest Hemingway badly marked up Wallace Stevens' face in a never-fully explained fistfight. Stevens was fifty-seven when it happened. (154)

It is worth noting that Stevens was fifty-seven years old at the time of the incident. This fragment makes it clear that while the fight with old writers may not always be easy, the victory will undoubtedly belong to the young who are more interested in moving beyond the traditional literary norms by engaging with diverse cultural spaces and introducing innovative literary techniques that reflect the complexities of the contemporary world.

1.7. Competition among writers: Historical instances of rivalry among literary figures

Competition between writers has been a common occurrence throughout literary history, and sometimes this rivalry can evolve into profound animosity or deep-seated hostility. One well-known example is the rivalry between the poets Corinna and Pindar.

Corinna once defeated Pindar five times in a sequence of poetry contests at Thebes. Pindar called her a sow. (155)

Corinna, a Theban poetess, was one of the few recognized female poets of her generation who competed against Pindar on several occasions. To the surprise of many, Corinna emerged victorious over Pindar on five separate occasions. In response to his losses, Pindar insultingly referred to Corinna as "a sow," implying that her poetry was unworthy of respect. Despite Pindar's abuse of Corinna, her victories over him established her as a talented and respected poet in her own right, and her poetry continued to be admired long after her death.

A second famous example of intense competition between writers is the rivalry between Ralph Waldo Emerson and Algernon Charles Swinburne: "Emerson was once quoted as having criticized Swinburne. Swinburne called him a toothless baboon" (155). In response to Emerson's criticism, Swinburne referred to him as a "toothless baboon." This incident shows how intense and even vicious the competition among writers can be. One further instance of this rivalry between writers occurs between Herman Melville and Ralph Waldo Emerson: "*Stuff* Melville dismissed Emerson as. i.e., as in *stuff* and *nonsense"* (155). Though Emerson was a leading figure in the literary world, Melville regarded his philosophical ideas as insignificant or nonsensical. This attitude may have been fueled by Melville's struggles for recognition as a writer, as he did not achieve the same level of success as Emerson during his lifetime.

1.8. The insecure nature of the artistic profession

In a collection of fragments, Markson emphasizes the unpredictable and insecure nature of the artistic and writing profession. On the one hand, Nikolay Gogol, the Russian dramatist,

faced precarious financial conditions struggling to make ends meet. At the time of his death, Gogol's possessions "were little better than those of a pauper" (156). On the other hand, Thomas Chatterton, a significant figure in English literature, lived in poverty and deprivation: "In the week before his suicide at seventeen, Thomas Chatterton is known to have lived on a single loaf of stale bread" (156). Chatterton's precarious financial circumstances made his life-long dream of becoming a writer impossible. Similarly, Amedeo Modigliani, a modern Italian painter and sculptor, struggled with financial hardships and lack of academic recognition during his early years in Paris; this sheds light on the plight of many avant-garde artists of the time.

I do at least three paintings a day in my head. What's the use of spoiling canvas when nobody will buy anything? Said Modigliani, penniless in Paris in his mid-twenties. (157)

In this fragment, Modigliani expresses his frustration with the lack of buyers for his paintings. He mentions that he creates at least three paintings in his mind every day, questioning the purpose of physically painting on canvas when there is no demand for his artwork. Although poverty "may wound or destroy the imagination…imagination can provide moments of connection and communication that help compensate for material deprivation" (Marrs 18-19). Therefore, despite their poverty, many writers, driven by their love and passion for art, continue to pursue their craft despite the challenges of life.

1.9. The subjective nature of literary criticism

Markson critically examines the role of literary criticism within the artistic landscape, highlighting its inherent subjectivity. He explains that literary criticism is not an objective exercise, but rather a deeply personal process, shaped by the critic's individual biases, preferences, and experiences. This exploration underscores the intricate dynamics between personal subjectivity and critical analysis, illuminating the complexities of how writers' individual biases influence their assessment of their fellow authors' works, thereby challenging traditional notions of literary criticism as a detached, objective endeavor. The following fragment underscores the subjective nature of literary criticism, even among acclaimed authors.

Tolstoy, to Chekhov: You know I can't stand Shakespeare's plays, but yours are worse. (292)

This fragment refers to Leo Tolstoy's 1906 essay "Shakespeare and the Drama" in which he argued that Shakespeare was "one of the worst and most contemptible writers the world has ever seen," accusing him "of patching his plays together without caring twopence for credibility" (Orwell 86). In addition, Tolstoy extends his disdain to Chekhov's plays, suggesting that they are worse than Shakespeare's. For many who consider both Shakespeare and Chekhov to be literary giants, Tolstoy's harsh criticism, possibly fueled by personal animosity or jealousy, is largely subjective, reflecting "too much a matter of personal opinion" (Orwell 86).

Moreover, Cormac McCarthy, a postmodern American novelist, expresses his inability to comprehend or appreciate the works of Henry James and Marcel Proust, two highly esteemed authors in the literary canon.

I don't understand them. To me that's not literature. Said Cormac McCarthy of Henry James and Marcel Proust. (215)

Both Henry James and Marcel Proust represent a style that McCarthy does not consider as 'literature'. Likewise, Tolstoy found George Bernard Shaw's work to be lacking in depth or significance. The fragment "Tolstoy, in his diary, on George Bernard Shaw: His triviality is astounding" refers to a critical observation made by Leo Tolstoy about Shaw. This reflects the subjective nature of literary criticism, where even widely acclaimed authors like Shaw can be viewed differently through the lens of their contemporaries.

Finally, Walter Savage Landor, a 19th-century English poet, is known for his critical and often controversial views on other writers and their works. Landor's statement that "most of Homer is trash" reflects his critical stance toward the works of Homer, the author of the Iliad and the Odyssey.

Most of Homer is trash, determined Walter Savage Landor. Who felt the same way about Dante. (196)

Similarly, Dante Alighieri's writing lacked value or quality. This highlights Landor's discerning and potentially iconoclastic literary criticism, challenging the widely accepted greatness of these well-known figures in Western literature.

2. The effects of time

2.1. The progression of life toward mortality

Markson's novel is a profound reflection on the human condition, acknowledging the unalterable progression of life toward mortality. The novel encapsulates the existential understanding that

the flow of time, the process of aging, and the eventuality of death are inherent aspects of human existence that cannot be avoided. The following fragment focuses on how time can alter perceptions and feelings, and how the past can never truly be recaptured.

Twenty-five years after she broke off their relationship, Charles Dickens had a tryst with Maria Beadnell, his still-remembered first love. And found her fat and foolishly affected and wholly witless. (153)

The fragment refers to the secret rendezvous between Charles Dickens and his first love, Maria Beadnell twenty-five years after their relationship ended. Upon their reunion, Dickens can see the effects of the passage of time upon her, describing her as overweight ("fat"), pretentious ("foolishly affected"), and lacking intelligence ("wholly witless"). The text contrasts idyllic, nostalgic recollections of the past, symbolizing innocence and joy, with the stark, harsh realities of the present, thereby creating a poignant commentary on the inevitable progression of time and its transformative impact. Writers are encouraged to approach art with an eclectic and open-minded perspective, recognizing that the world is constantly changing and that their beliefs and practices must change with it.

2.2. the inevitability of aging

In a notable fragment, Markson explores the concept of aging and its impact on his energy and lifestyle.

In fact why has Author now and again even caught himself taking a nap, which he cannot recall having ever done before in his entire adult life? Like his younger grandchildren, for heaven's sake. (208)

Author notes a change in his behavior; he cannot remember ever taking a nap in his entire adult life prior to this. He compares this experience of taking naps to the behavior of his younger grandchildren. This comparison serves to highlight the contrast between his current state and his past, suggesting a contemplation of the life cycle, the passage of time, and the inevitability of aging.

The following fragment shows how Author got tired of living; it is a reflection on the recurring fatigue he experienced, possibly due to the mental and emotional exertion of the creative process.

But having nothing to do with the question of why, again, still, is Author so often so damnably tired?

La chair est triste, hélas! et fai lu tous les livres. (209)

The repetition of the words "again" and "still" emphasizes that Author has been overcome by tiredness. The use of the word "damnably" adds a sense of frustration or annoyance to the statement. The subsequent French phrase, "La chair est triste, hélas! et j'ai lu tous les livres" translates to "The flesh is sad, alas! and I have read all the books," is a quote from the French poet Charles Baudelaire. This quote expresses a sense of melancholy or sadness and suggests that Author's exhaustion is not easily explained and that even intellectual pursuits such as reading may not alleviate his sense of sadness or fatigue.

Author's lack of energy could be due to various reasons such as physical exertion, lack of sleep, or an underlying health condition.

Actually, more than his persistent tiredness, what has started to distress Author lately is the way he has found himself scuffing his feet when he walks.

But also the singular small missteps he sometimes unexpectedly takes. As if his Adidas have whims of their own. (260)

This fragment depicts Author's awareness of his physical decline, symbolized by his scuffing feet. The word "scuffing" refers to dragging the feet along the ground while walking instead of lifting them properly. Author's concern about "scuffing his feet" while walking suggests that he has noticed a change in the way he walks. The scuffing of feet is a metaphorical representation of Author's struggle with aging that will ultimately lead to death.

Author shares a subjective perspective regarding the effects of aging, associating a recent episode of lightheadedness with the natural progression of time and the process of getting older.

Age .

Dammit .

Also being the cause of this new recent lightheadedness, Author is certain. (283)

The use of the term "Dammit" effectively demonstrates Author's frustration or discontentment with the inescapable physical and cognitive changes that come with aging. This statement exemplifies a common human experience characterized by physical transformations and health obstacles that often accompany the passage of time.

Indeed, Author is keenly aware of mortality, realizing that the fear of death is what lies behind the fear of aging.

Timor mortis conturbat me.

Says William Dunbar's Lament for the Makers: The fear of death distresses me. Which Author suspects he has quoted before in his life. (287)

"Timor mortis conturbat me" is a Latin phrase that translates to "The fear of death disturbs me." This is a line from William Dunbar's poem "Lament for the Makers," a work that mourns the death of fellow poets and contemplates the inevitability of death. Author reflects on this quote and its thematic resonance, suggesting a personal connection and repeated use of this quote in his own life, possibly as a contemplation of mortality and the transient nature of life.

Apparently, *Vanishing Point* offers a poignant and rich meditation on the nature of aging and death.

Age. Age.

Every man is worth just so much as the things he busies himself about. Said Marcus Aurelius. (288)

This brief quotation is attributed to Marcus Aurelius, a Roman emperor and philosopher. The repetition of the word "Age" could be interpreted as a contemplation on the passage of time and the impending death of the protagonist who eventually perceives the presence of arterial blood as a sign of imminent danger.

I know the color of that blood. It is arterial blood—I cannot be deceived in that color. That drop of blood is my death warrant. (289)

By referring to the blood as his "death warrant," Author suggests that its presence is symbolic of a fatal injury or a life-threatening illness.

In conclusion, David Markson's *Vanishing Point* is a novel that intentionally lacks a clear sequence or cause-and-effect relationship; rather, it utilizes the bricolage technique, a postmodern literary practice that disrupts traditional narrative structures and challenges literary conventions. This technique promotes a form of writing

where the language itself takes precedence over the author, creating a multi-dimensional narrative space where various writings from different cultural sources are juxtaposed in new and unexpected ways. The result is a dynamic narrative where the meaning of the text is not fixed or author-determined. Instead, the text evolves through the skillful arrangement and reinterpretation of disparate ideas or fragments. Thus, the bricolage technique, which involves the juxtaposition and rearrangement of disparate ideas, invites the attentive reader to actively engage in piecing together the disparate fragments into a meaningful pattern, thereby transforming the reading experience into a dynamic interplay between the text and the reader. The narrative coherence and unity are achieved through the repetition of themes and motifs, such as the craft of art, the passage of time, aging, mortality, and the human condition, which serve as a unifying thread that counterbalances the narrative fragmentation and enhances the overall reading experience.

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