

Secrets and ethics in Ali Smith's
novel *The Accidental*

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Tutkielma käsittelee Ali Smithin (s. 1962) romaania <i>The Accidental</i> (2005, suomennettu 2006 nimellä <i>Satunnainen</i>) salaisuuksien ja etiikan näkökulmasta. Luenta kiertyy teoksen viiden päähenkilön ympärille. Erityistä huomiota kohdistetaan Amberiin, salaperäiseen vieraaseen, joka poikkeaa täysin muista teoksen henkilöistä. Luennan lähtökohtana on ajatus salaisuuksien ja etiikan yhteydestä paitsi romaanin päähenkilöiden maailmassa myös laajemmin. Tutkin, mitä romaani paljastaa salaisuuksien ja etiikan olemuksesta sekä niiden välisistä yhteyksistä.</p> <p>Luennan teoreettinen viitekehys jakautuu salaisuuksiin liittyvään teoriaan sekä eettiseen kerronnan teoriaan. Salaisuudet valottuvat paitsi käsitteen tarkan määrittelyn ja avaamisen kautta (Sissela Bok, Matei Calinescu) myös aukon käsitteen avulla (Gérard Genette, Leona Toker). Kerronnan etiikan teoriaa avataan yhtäältä retorisen etiikan näkökulmasta (James Phelan) ja toisaalta toiseuden etiikan kautta (Andrew Gibson, Simon Critchley). Teoreettisen taustan moninaisuus tulee perustelluksi henkilöiden keskinäisten erojen kautta, mikä mahdollistaa sekä salaisuuksien että etiikan monipuolisen käsittelyn.</p> <p>Analyyysi osoittaa, että salaisuudet ja etiikka ovat monimutkaisia ilmiöitä, joita <i>The Accidental</i> käsittelee paitsi kerrotun myös kerronnan piirissä. Henkilöiden tarkka luenta paljastaa muun muassa, että salaisuuksilla on taipumus ketjuuntua, ja että salaisuuden pitämisellä voi olla arvaamattomia seurauksia. Romaanin kerronnan etiikka osoittautuu monitulkintaiseksi, mikä haastaa lukijaa eettiseen pohdintaan. Hypoteesi siitä, että salaisuudet ja etiikka kietoutuvat romaanissa toisiinsa monin tavoin, pitää paikkansa. Salaisuuksien pitäminen näyttää syvästi eettisenä toimintana, ja toisaalta etiikan perusolemus hahmottuu osittain salaiseksi.</p>	
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1. Introduction

1.1 *The Accidental* and Ali Smith

Lives are changed accidentally in Ali Smith's critically acclaimed novel *The Accidental* (2005). It is a novel that tells the classic story of a life-changing visitation of a stranger, but with a 21st century twist. *The Accidental* focuses on a disconnected family, through the depiction of which it deals with the strangeness of life: knowing and not-knowing yourself and the others around you. It is also a novel about how a stranger can make one see one's own life in a new way. Most importantly and intriguingly, however, it is a novel about secrets and ethics and how they intertwine and change our lives. This is why my study of *The Accidental* focuses on secrets and ethics, their effects and connections, in the novel.

The Accidental tells the story of how an uninvited stranger, Amber, transforms the way in which each of the Smart family members tries to deal with their secrets and ethical problems. Astrid, the 12-year-old girl, is being bullied at school, but she has not told her family about it. Instead, she videotapes the sunrises in the countryside, and finds a friend and a confidant in Amber. Astrid's 17-year-old brother Magnus's secret has to do with bullying as well: he has, together with two other boys, photoshopped a girl's picture and emailed it round the school, and now blames himself for the girl's suicide. Amber has an affair with Magnus, and this seems to bring the boy back to life. Their stepfather Michael, literature professor, has a different kind of secret, one of which his wife Eve already knows: he sleeps with his students. Later he falls in love with Amber, one-sidedly. Eve, mother and writer of 'autobiotruefictinterviews', secretly suffers from a writer's block and nurtures serious doubts about the choices she has made in her life. Her and Amber's relationship has the most dissonance: Amber seems to both heal and irritate Eve. Finally Eve forces Amber to leave, and the family returns to their London home, which they discover has been broken into, and completely empty. The novel ends with both children

dealing with their secrets, Michael having to leave the university temporarily and Eve travelling all the way to the United States, where she settles in a house that belongs to people she does not know.

The narrative of *The Accidental* is focalized through the five main characters: Amber, Astrid, Magnus, Michael and Eve. The structure of the novel is interesting, because it presents four different versions of the family's life: each of the family members has their own beginning, middle and end in the three parts of the novel named respectively the beginning, the middle and the end. Focalization brings each individual to the centre of the narrative in turns, which strengthens the image of them as separate persons with their ethical problems and secrets unbeknownst to the others, problematizing the significance of family. Amber's parts are significantly shorter and very different from the other parts of the narrative; she is the only character whose narrative is told by a first person narrator. These sections focus mostly on cinema, and thus convey the idea that Amber is no ordinary woman, but very mysterious, maybe even not real. To make matters more complicated, Amber is repeatedly compared with Alhambra, the ancient Spanish palace. If the Smarts each have their secrets, Amber's secret seems to be who or what she actually is. She seems to know more about the Smarts than she should, and she does not show in Astrid's videos, for instance. In a similar fashion, each of the Smarts has an ethical issue of their own to consider, whereas with Amber, ethics are problematized in general. Through the five focalizations, there are thus also five different perspectives on secrets and ethics.

The Accidental asks important and difficult questions about the role of secrets and ethics in our lives. It can also be read as exploring the dimensions of accidentalism: what role do contingency and chance encounters have in the unfolding of a person's life? The novel refrains from delivering easy answers, just like its intriguing stranger, Amber, and lets the reader find the multiple meanings on her own. The ambiguity begins with the title of the novel: accidental can be an adjective, a noun and an adverb, and it has a variety of different meanings. As an adjective its main meanings are "present but not essential" and "relating to or occurring by chance or occasionally", whereas as a noun it means, for example, "a secondary feature" or, with the, as in the name of the novel, "something which happens by chance" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). The ambiguous title of the novel reflects the variety present in the characters and in their ways of keeping their secrets and

practicing their ethics. The characters' names also reveal something of their complex identities: as Smarts, they are both bright and brainy and, on the other hand, suffer with their painful personal problems. The mythological aspect is present through the first names: Eve, whose first husband was called Adam, started a family - note the biblical allusion -, and gave her children names of northern gods or saints. Amber's name has a multitude of meanings, the importance of which to my reading I shall discuss later on in my analysis.

The Accidental is, in some ways, a perfect example of Ali Smith's writing: it features an atmosphere of imagination, creative use of language and narrative structures and a group of distinct, carefully crafted narrative voices. Ali Smith is a British writer born in 1962 in Inverness, Scotland, and she now lives in Cambridge. She has published five novels, four collections of short stories and three plays and received several notable awards for her work, such as the Whitbread Novel of the Year award for *The Accidental* in 2005. Her latest book *Artful* (2012), a hybrid of fiction and essay, is based on a series of lectures she has given at Oxford University. She has also been a contributor in several collections of short stories, edited and co-edited a few books and written introductions and forwards for English translations of Tove Jansson's work, for instance. ("Chronology of Ali Smith's life" and "References: Works by Ali Smith" in Germanà and Horton, 2013.) It is safe to say that Ali Smith is already part of the contemporary British fiction canon (see Head 2013). The versatile writer has her own, recognizable way with words: everything that I have read by Ali Smith has left me with a strong impression of the ordinary turned into other, often exhilarating and always unexpected.

Ali Smith has been described to possess "the perfect characteristics of the short story writer: rigorous self-discipline in the planning process, an eagle eye for condensing detail, a capacity for using the personal and individual to suggest universal truths and a skill for hinting at a wider world beyond the story" (Thursfield 2003). I would argue that these are also very good characteristics for a novelist, and that they fittingly describe her as a writer. The themes that Smith writes about include, according to Thursfield (2003), "love, particularly that between women, death, loss, guilt, grief, illness, time and the chasms of misunderstanding". Sexual ambiguity is also present in many of her stories (ibid.) - in *The Accidental* especially so in the character of Amber. Another feature of Smith's writing becomes the centre of attention in *The Accidental*, though: mysteries. Thursfield

(2003) argues that “Smith’s work abounds with mysteries, with unresolved puzzles”. She also states that mysteries “make the stories more real, because this is what life is - a continuous series of strange coincidences and unresolved endings”. Strange coincidences are indeed one of the things of which Ali Smith’s fiction is best known - I would argue, in fact, that strangeness and coincidence are at the very heart of her best work.

Ten years on from Thursfield’s analysis, Ali Smith has both written some of her best loved and most highly appreciated work, including *The Accidental*, and been read by a growing number of book lovers and professional readers. Much of the research done on her work is brand new: the first critical collection of articles about Ali Smith’s works, *Ali Smith: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (Germanà and Horton, eds.), only came out in 2013. In September 2012, when I began working on this thesis, the only available sources on Ali Smith’s work were reviews, a few interviews and a handful of articles, the topics of which did not come very close to my research project. However, it has to be noted that even though Smith is a contemporary writer, who has been active a little less than twenty years, her works have already inspired some literary research in the 1990s and in the 2000s. The earliest mentions of her work are from Scottish sources from the 1990s, but research has become more widespread and active in recent years: more than half of the journal articles and book chapters that discuss her work are from the 2010s, even if Germanà and Horton’s new book is written off. The angles from which Ali Smith texts have been read are manifold: they include intertextuality and creativity (*Girl Meets Boy*), homosexual adolescents, and Scottish culture and hybridity (*Like*). Some of the latest publications that discuss Ali Smith’s texts, outside of Germanà and Horton (2013), include McNally’s (2010) article on the treatment of homosexual adolescents in *Like* and *Hotel World*, Germanà’s (2012) discussion of identity formation in *Like* and Horton’s (2013a) reading of homelessness in *Hotel World*.

Ali Smith’s writing can be placed in at least two significant traditions. As a Scottish-born author whose texts repeatedly involve various kinds of alterity, her writing has been read as belonging to the Scottish tradition. Ali Smith also places herself in that tradition, arguing that “Scotland being on the edge of something larger is always about being from a different perspective, you’re an insider but you’re an outsider all the time” (Gapper 2003). She also brings up the concept of the Caledonian antiszygy: “that peculiar split in Scottish writing - like *Jekyll and Hyde*, or *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, where you’ve

got the angel and the devil” (ibid.). In addition to belonging to “a tradition Scottish (Gothic) writing”, which “manipulates aspects of the uncanny, supernatural, and the spectral in order to disrupt, dismantle and overturn established approaches to the real”, Smith’s texts can also be read as a part of a tradition of woman writers, which can be seen in the ways her work “reflects Smith’s wider preoccupations with desire, love, and commitment as functioning outside accepted heteronormative structures of contemporary society” (Germanà and Horton 2013, 3). Smith herself, even when she identifies to it, sees the tradition of women writers rather grimly: she talks about female authors “who publish and then are lost” (Gapper 2003). Ali Smith’s first novel, *Like* (1997), implicitly discusses two kinds of differences at the same time: the relations of England and Scotland, and love between women. Thus it shows well how Smith’s work can be read as belonging to both a Scottish tradition and a tradition of women’s writing.

If it is rather clear for the majority of readers that Smith’s work can be seen as belonging to a Scottish tradition and a tradition of female writers, it is less decided whether her writing should be categorized as postmodern or modern. Smith herself thinks that she comes from a Modernist tradition, “which ‘broke everything up and everything could start all over again. So you could understand both reality and books from a new angle, a renewed angle’” (Gapper 2003). The Modernist influence in her work is recognized by Germanà and Horton (2013, 5) “in its concern for formal consciousness and experiment”. However, Smith’s writing is very much contemporary: it discusses the world we are living in this very moment. Because it does so by including multiple voices, open endings, self-awareness and language play, her work can also be seen as postmodern. As Germanà and Horton (2013, 5) note, “Smith’s political and ethical engagement displays ambivalence towards the simulacral order of postmodern culture”.

The tension “between Modernist and postmodernist influences and identifications throughout Smith’s work” (Germana and Horton 2013, 6) is one of the recurring topics in *Ali Smith: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*. Germanà and Horton (ibid.) summarize the views of the most recent scholars on Smith’s work:

Repeatedly, contributors call attention to postmodern motifs, structures and influences in Smith’s work, in particular in relation to linguistic self-consciousness, generic experiment, representations of time and subjectivity and narrative construction. Nevertheless, on the whole, these collected essays tend to challenge

Smith's postmodern designation, highlighting her concern with ethics and notions of authenticity and materiality as extending her work beyond the dominant scepticism in the postmodern era, and positioning it in some ways as an extension of Modernism.

What matters most in these definitions, for this study, is that there are, characteristically for Smith, at least two ways of reading the story: the Modernist and the postmodernist. I do not wish to commit myself to either one in my reading of *The Accidental*. Rather, I see the coexistence of the two kinds of influences as enriching for my study. It also reflects the differences between the characters: the Smarts on the one hand and Amber on the other.

It emerges, then, that the two most obvious frameworks for reading Ali Smith's works would be either reading it as joining the Scottish tradition or from a gender studies perspective - or, as in one of the very first sources that discuss her work (Gonda 1995), combining the two. My theoretical framework, secrets and ethics, strives to be more expansive and yet such that it responds to and reflects what is central in Ali Smith's writing in *The Accidental*. The novel discusses neither Scottishness nor love between women on its lines exactly, at least not as much as some of Smith's other work, such as *Like* or the rewritten myth of Iphis, *Girl meets boy* (2007). Instead, *The Accidental* is a novel about strangers and coincidences and how they set secrets and ethics in motion. There is something in the novel that escapes easy definitions - in which it resembles its author.

There are interesting thematical threads that run through Smith's oeuvre. *Hotel World*, Smith's 2001 novel about how an accident in a hotel brings five different women together, along with her latest novel, *There but for the* (2011), can be read as discussing partially overlapping themes with *The Accidental*. All of the three novels convey the idea that the smallest things can cause the most significant changes and become the turning points in our lives. Contingency is at the heart of these narratives: be it the accidental death of a young chambermaid at the Global Hotel, the sudden and life-changing arrival of an enigmatic and charming stranger or, as in *There but for the*, a dinner guest who overstays his welcome by locking himself in a spare room, leaving everyone to wonder about his identity and endeavours. The three novels also share the idea of the importance of encountering others, and this may be considered a central value of the narratives. Also,

all three narratives revolve around characters who are notably detached from the other protagonists: dead, as Sara is in *Hotel World*, locked away, almost unknown and totally silent, á la Miles in *There but for the*, or, like Amber, only flickering presences.

In addition to the similarities on the thematic level, there are important structural convergences between the three novels, too. All of them feature a very controlled structure: the narratives are divided according to different tenses (*Hotel World*), parts of a story (*The Accidental*) or the words of the novel's title (*There but for the*), the meaning of which becomes notably ambiguous in the process. This narrative technique is also used in the three novels in order to achieve similar results: the multiplicity of narrative voices. All three novels are focalized through multiple characters, and in a way that keeps the different voices totally separate, which creates an effect of distance between the characters - even when they are, in fact, voices of family members as in *The Accidental*. In sum, all three novels can be read as making their readers understand secrets and ethics in new ways. The merging of secrets and ethics is thus not unique for *The Accidental* in Ali Smith's oeuvre, but it is the extent and depth of the treatment of the two topics that makes the novel stand out from the others.

The secret that I am interested in finding out more about lies in how *The Accidental* brings secrets and ethics together. This, even though it is such a central concern in Ali Smith's fiction, has not been previously studied. The earlier research of *The Accidental* has discussed the novel from varied perspectives, such as eco-criticism (Ryle 2009), trauma theory (Horton 2012) and domestic realism (Breitbach 2012). Ethical perspectives have been present in some studies about Smith's fictions, however: in Williams (2006) and in Horton (2013b), for instance. In *Ali Smith: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (2013) there are two articles that focus on *The Accidental*. Ulrike Tancke (2013) reads the novel from the point of view of deceptive storytelling and frustrated desires, discussing *There but for the* alongside *The Accidental*. Patrick O'Donnell (2013) focuses on the stranger characters in *Hotel World* and *The Accidental* - that is, he discusses Amber by using Kristeva's notion of stranger as a starting point. Most important articles for my study that are not included in Germanà and Horton's collection are the already mentioned Horton's (2012) reading of *The Accidental* in terms of trauma theory and Smith's (2010) paper on communal narration in *Hotel World* (2010). In addition, I will refer to

Germanà's (2010) book *Scottish Women's Gothic and Fantastic Writing*, where the character of Amber is discussed.

Analysing secrets and ethics is not the only gap that remains in the research of *The Accidental*, however. Surprisingly, there have not been any intertextual readings of the novel even though it floods with allusions to films and other narratives. The single point of reference that is most often picked out in the reviews of the novel is Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Teorema*, a 1968 film that he later turned into a novel. Steven Poole (2005) argues that *The Accidental* is merely "a modern-day reworking" of *Teorema*, whereas Michiko Kakutani (2006) looks for the narrative's roots in "one of those old folktales", in which the stranger's arrival "is a test of generosity or gullibility or gumption, and it will forever change the lives of the occupants of the house". Kakutani claims that Amber is "the Terence Stamp character" of *The Accidental*. However, reading the novel simply as a rewrite of *Teorema* misses most of what is so special in the novel: its unique way of bringing secrets and ethics together and problematizing their relations.

On the other hand, considering *The Accidental* as a 21st century version of the tale of the stranger comes close to what the author seems to be thinking about the novel. Ali Smith says in an interview with Gillian Beer (2013, 142), when asked about the recurring use of stranger characters in her texts, that we have to be aware of what the story of the stranger means, and not just in the negative way. This shows in *The Accidental*: it is about the power of encounters, and the effects that they can have on our secrets and ethics. So, even if research on the intertextuality in *The Accidental* - and, for that matter, Ali Smith's other work - is needed, secrets and ethics form an even more urgent theme for research.

Ali Smith's writing can be characterized as having the capacity to change its readers: "reading Smith's work is an experience that will not leave the reader unchanged" (Germanà and Horton 2013, 1). This is exactly what Smith herself believes literature can do: change our lives for the better. As Ali Smith argues in an interview (France 2005): "Stories can change lives if we're not careful. They will come in and take the shirts off our backs. Tell the right stories and we live better lives." Thus ethics is very much in Ali Smith's agenda: she believes that stories can make us live better, that is, they have the capacity to change our ethics. The way that this happens, however, can never be fully understood and explained: how stories change lives remains a secret.

The way in which Ali Smith herself understands fiction cements my reading of *The Accidental*. She sees novels as “huge structures”, but notes that “underneath that structure, anything and everything can happen” (Higginbotham 2012). I think that this sums up her style of writing beautifully and accurately: in *The Accidental*, there is indeed a solid structure, the beginning, the middle and the end, underneath of which anything can and does happen. The idea that anything can happen comes up in *The Accidental* especially because of Amber. Amber is also the character who shows that secrets and ethics can be so much more than one would first think. Another key feature in *The Accidental*, and in other texts by Ali Smith, is voice. As Smith sees it, voice is narrative: “Yes, that [voice] is the whole point of fiction for me, and I don’t know that you can have a story that doesn’t have a voice. Once you have found the voice you have the story to a large extent, and for me it is usually more than one voice” (Mathieson 2006). Multiple voices, in the case of *The Accidental*, mean multiple secrets and multiple ethics.

The description of Ali Smith’s writing that resonates most with this thesis is delivered by Emma E. Smith (2010, 81): she argues that it is characterized by “a careful attention to the other sides of the story, to how stories are told and the responsibility carried by their writers and readers”. This description manages not only to capture the literariness of Smith’s fiction, but also the idea of listening carefully to other voices - and the idea of ethics. As Frances Gapper (2003) observes, one of Smith’s themes is that “Books are far more than possessions or objects”. Smith comments on this in the same interview: “Books mean all possibilities. They mean moving out of yourself, losing yourself, dying of thirst and living to your full. They mean everything”. This is also related to Smith’s view on writing stories: she thinks that writing is having a dialogue with the story, and for this reason most stories can be thought of as at least two stories. (Ibid..) As *The Accidental* is multiple stories, this thesis will also be more than two stories: the story of secrets, the story of ethics, and the story of how they come together.

1.2 Research questions and hypotheses

Ambiguous duality is a defining trait in *The Accidental*. It can be argued that the novel is both modernist and postmodern. Elements of modernism present in *The Accidental* include “emphasis on subjectivity, inner states of consciousness, and fragmentary and discontinuous character constructions” (Palmer 2011, 275). In addition, the novel displays characteristics of postmodern narrative, such as “a delight in disorder, discontinuity, and ambiguity and a correspondingly cavalier attitude to the conventions of coherent plot, realistic characterization, and clearly identifiable settings” (ibid.). The duality of *The Accidental* exists simultaneously on multiple levels: on those of characters, narration and thematics. The characters can be divided into two, according to their degree of mimesis, which is high for the Smarts and low for Amber. Related to the essential qualities of modernism and postmodernism, the novel portrays interest in the typical questions of both: “*How can we know reality?*” and “*What is reality?*” (McHale 1992 and 2005 cited in Palmer 2011, 276). The first kind of question, “How can we know secrets and ethics?”, as will become clear through the analysis of the Smarts’ secrets and ethics, concerns the family, whereas the second kind of question, “What is secrecy and ethics?”, is brought forward by Amber.

Thus there are two narratives unfolding simultaneously in *The Accidental*: that of Amber and that of the Smarts. Even more importantly, however, these two narratives come together. As is shown in the title of another novel by Ali Smith, *Girl meets boy* (2007), her narratives are essentially about encounters; the meeting of minds, and more. This is something that the author continues to take interest in: her upcoming novel, to be published in August 2014, is titled *How to be both* (“2014 in books: turn over a new leaf”, 2014). An important part of my reading will therefore be the analysis of the encounters of Smarts and Amber, who represent different ways of thinking and being. Further, the novel presents encounters both as secret and from an ethical perspective. For these reasons, it is apposite that my reading is also “both”: I will combine theoretical tools from two areas of research, and also by theorists who strongly oppose each other’s work.

My analysis of *The Accidental* will have two starting points, which are connected by the notion of encounter, a key issue in the novel. I will analyse the text from the point of view of secrets and from the perspective of ethics. These fields of literary research offer valuable insights into the text I have chosen, which, in turn, provides new ways of applying some of the concepts of the theories. Because secrets and ethics are, to my

knowledge, rarely combined in literary research, I also hope to show that they have more in common than one would first realise. Bringing secrets and ethics together in my analysis, as they are, in my opinion, brought together in the novel, is thus the third perspective from which I will read the novel.

So far, *The Accidental* has not been studied from the perspective of secrets and narrative ethics. However, these theories are very well suited for the research of the novel. The rich, complex narration and ambiguous handling of the themes of the story offer a great deal of material for my analysis, and support a reading focusing on secrets and ethics. I believe that my study can add some new ideas to the previous research done on *The Accidental* as it has not paid sufficient attention to neither secrets nor ethics. Analysing the textual and narrative secrets that are present everywhere in the novel offers a broader perspective on the themes of the narrative than the previous research. In addition, *The Accidental* abounds with ethical issues, which need a wider, more careful reading that does not limit itself to a single ethical theory. I am primarily interested in the stranger of the novel and the effects that she causes: the uninvited Amber, who changes the lives of the Smart family or rather, helps them to change their own lives. In my reading, Amber acts as a catalyst: she is the one that makes things happen in the novel. The way the characters evolve in the narrative because they encounter secrets and ethics is central to my study.

My overarching goal in this study is to find out in what ways secrets and ethics are intertwined in *The Accidental* and what kind of meanings are created in the process. The focus will be on the characters and the narration. Thus, the research problem at hand is to discover connections between secrets and ethics. This means that I will look for confluences: what do secrets and ethics have in common and how do they relate to each other. I do not aim at thorough theoretical definition of secrets and ethics - instead, I hope to explore both ideas as variedly as they are present in my target text. Listening to the multiple voices present both in the narrative and in the theoretical sources that I will use is one of the goals in this study.

I will split my research questions into two categories: the first is about the secrets and the second about the ethics of *The Accidental*. I am also interested in who the stranger is and what kinds of effects the stranger causes in the novel. The essence of the stranger is

analysed as a secret, and her actions and the things that she makes happen in the novel are analysed from the ethical point of view. My analysis is not limited to Amber only, however. Much of the analysis will focus on the members of the Smart family, because much of the narrative is focalized through them, and also because the analysis of the four characters reveals excitingly varied experiences of secrets and ethics. The analysis of the Smarts also shows the different meanings that are attached to Amber's ways of being secret and practicing her ethics.

The first set of research questions focuses on secrets. I aim at looking at different ways of keeping and sharing secrets and both the reasons for secrecy and the effects of it. The first questions about secrets are answered in chapter 3.1, The secrets of the Smarts: What kinds of secrets do the main characters of *The Accidental* have and what effects does their secret-keeping or sharing have? The following question is dealt with in chapter 3.2, The secret of Amber, and it helps me to find out about who Amber is: How is Amber secret? In chapter 3.3, Secrets revealed?, I will answer the question: What does *The Accidental*, as a whole, reveal about secrets? In my analysis, I bind together the reading of the narrating and the narrated: I will not only look at the secrets of the characters but also at the way in which they are revealed and hidden in the process of narration, although the focus is on the narrated. I will also briefly touch upon the issue of narratives as secrets, and the role of the reader in chapter 3.3, but regrettably this is too wide an area for me to cover in very much detail in this study.

The second set of questions is about ethics. With the help of the following questions, I aim at discussing the concept of ethics and the different realizations that it has in *The Accidental*. In chapter 4.1, The ethics of the Smarts, I will answer the following questions: What kinds of ethics do the Smarts have and what effects does their ethical behaviour cause? In chapter 4.2, The ethics of Amber, I will discuss the ethics of the stranger and the consequences of her actions with the help of this question: What kind of ethics does Amber have? Finally, in chapter 4.3, Ethics revealed?, I analyse the narrative ethics of the novel as a whole by answering the question of what *The Accidental* reveals about ethics. This entails discussion on the relationship between ethics and fiction. Again, the reader and the act of reading will only receive a limited amount of attention.

My main hypothesis in this thesis is that secrets and ethics are deeply intertwined in *The Accidental*. I will look at the two issues separately, though, because both of them are complex even on their own. Both secrets and ethics are concepts that are easy to understand on a basic level, but very hard to define thoroughly. However, it is assumed that reading *The Accidental* will shed new light on both topics, and reveal some of their complexity and variance. My main hypothesis about secrets is that the Smarts learn a lot about secrecy from Amber, which makes them rethink the reasons for keeping their own secrets. My main hypothesis concerning ethics is that by the end of the narrative, not a single member of the Smart family has quite the same ideas about ethics and dealing with difficult ethical issues as they had at the beginning, which again is at least partially caused by Amber.

The complexity of the novel is also reflected in the variety of theoretical orientation that I have: my main sources for the theory on secrets are Matei Calinescu's theory on rereading, especially rereading for the secret, and Sissela Bok's definitions of secrecy. I will supplement their ideas with other readings. These will include Gérard Genette's narrative theory, especially on gaps, such as paralipsis, and Leona Toker's ideas on withholding information. Secrets have to do with silences, which is another point of view present in this study. Ethics is also an issue that branches in many directions. I will look into the problems of defining ethics as they have been encountered by both philosophers and narratologists. My main sources on narrative ethics are bipartite: I will read both rhetorical ethicists and theorists of ethics of alterity. James Phelan, whose theories establish connections between ethics, characters and structures of the novel, is one of my key sources. However, in order to appreciate the multiplicity present in *The Accidental*, I will also apply some ideas presented by Simon Critchley and Andrew Gibson, who both have their roots in Levinasian ethics.

The main limitation of the study is its restricted discussion of reading. Reading is, as already mentioned before, not at the centre of interest in this study, as intriguing a phenomenon as it is. It has to be noted, however, that my choice of theoretical framework, secrets and ethics, would also permit a study focused on reading. Because of the prominent role reading plays in the theories, it is not to be left totally out of the discussion. I believe that analysing how the characters read each other's secrets and ethics can provide some insights into the novel, which is one of the reasons why I will use some

sources that discuss issues relating to reading. Also, when analysing what the novel as a whole reveals about secrets and ethics, discussing reading becomes inevitable. Reading and the role of the reader offers a way of understanding the difference between the Smarts and Amber. Amber seems to exist somehow on a different level from the rest of the characters, and could be compared to the reader of the novel - or perhaps also to the narrator. Further limitations include the omission of theoretical framework on the study of themes and characters, the definitions of which are discussed, for instance, in Suomela (2001) and Käkälä-Puumala (2001). Even though I consider both topics very interesting and somewhat undertheorized (see also Varis 2013 on the issue of defining characters), there is unfortunately no room in this thesis for a deeper analysis of the concepts.

Through my analysis of *The Accidental*, I aim at gaining a new understanding of both secrets and ethics. For this reason, I will read closely all the five main characters, Astrid, Magnus, Michael, Eve and Amber, paying attention to why and how they change during the course of the narrative. The focus will be first, in the second chapter, on presenting and discussing the theoretical framework of the study briefly described above. The analysis will commence in the third chapter, wherein the secrets of the characters and the novel are covered. In the fourth chapter, the focus will shift on ethics as understood and practiced by both the Smarts and Amber. Ethics of the novel is also discussed. Finally, in chapter 5, Secrets + ethics = ?, the concepts ethics of secrecy and secrecy of ethics are introduced, in order to show how closely related secrets and ethics actually are.

2. Theoretical framework

In this chapter I will map the theoretical background for my study. I will introduce my most important sources and central concepts needed in the analysis of *The Accidental*. First, I will focus on the theories that discuss secrets in narratives, and other ideas related to keeping something hidden, such as gaps and paralipsis. Defining the concept of secret from various angles is one of the main purposes of chapter 2.1, Secrets in narratives. Second, I will briefly introduce the ethical turn in narrative theory and the different strands of research that consider the connections between ethics and narratives. I will then discuss the theories of narrative ethics most suitable for the purposes of this study: rhetorical ethics and ethics of alterity. Again, I will pay attention to the problems of defining ethics. The tools for analysing ethics in *The Accidental* are introduced in chapter 2.2, Ethics in narratives.

2.1 Secrets in narratives

Narratives as such can be thought of as secrets but they are not always about secrets. The fact that almost no narrative can be entirely known before we read it is one of the main reasons why narratives allure us - although there is obviously a different kind of allure, that of the familiar and the predictable, in some kinds of narratives, too. Reading a story, at least when it is not previously known to us, resembles the experience of becoming acquainted with secrets. On a yet another level, secrets are present in narratives also in their details. Sometimes they are left unnoticed, sometimes discovered by the careful reader. But if any narrative could be thought of as a secret until it is read, not every narrative thematizes secrecy in the way *The Accidental* does. This is why multiple theoretical perspectives on secrets are needed for the analysis of the novel. So, how can

secrets be defined and analysed? In this chapter my goal is to map how secrecy and related phenomena have been discussed and defined in literary research and fields of study close to that.

Secrets excite us because they are not known by everyone but usually only a chosen few. Even though secrecy is a phenomenon that we are all familiar with, it is surprisingly difficult to define. *The Oxford English Dictionary* has four entries about secrecy:

1) “The quality of being secret or of not revealing secrets; the action, practice, or habit of keeping things secret” 2) a. “The condition or fact of being secret or concealed” b. “Retirement, seclusion” 3) a. “Something which is or has been kept secret; a secret; the secret nature or condition of something” b. “The secret parts (of a person)” 4) “The condition of being entrusted with a person's secrets; intimate acquaintance, confidence”.

The definitions reveal some important aspects of secrecy to be considered: the juxtaposition between keeping and revealing secrets, intimacy and confidence. It is also interesting to read the very last definition as a description of secrecy in narratives: reading a narrative that has many secrets can indeed be compared to being trusted with somebody's secrets.

Even though everybody knows what secrecy means from an early age, yet it makes us wonder; and not everybody is familiar with the complexity of defining secrecy. Defining secrecy, therefore, is not as easy a task as one might first think. Sissela Bok (1984) discusses the difficulties of defining secrecy at length in her book *Secrets: On the Ethics of Concealment and Revelation*. This is how Bok (1984, 5-6) initially defines secrecy:

To keep a secret from someone, then, is to block information about it or evidence of it from reaching that person, and to do so intentionally: to prevent him from learning it, and thus from possessing it, making use of it, or revealing it. The word “secrecy” refers to the resulting concealment.

In other words, concealment is the defining trait of secrecy: “It presupposes separation, a setting apart of the secret from the non-secret, and of keepers of a secret from those excluded.” This argument is validated from an etymological point of view: the original Latin verb ‘secernere’ carries the meaning of sifting apart. Some concepts that often play a role in our understanding of secrecy include “the concepts of sacredness, intimacy, privacy, silence, prohibition, furtiveness, and deception”. (Bok 1984, 6.) Bok manages to show how complicated it is to arrive to a neutral definition of secrecy and argues, rightly

so, that secrets cannot be thought as being dangerous or bad by nature. The unknown and the private are also in danger of mingling in the definition of secrecy. (Bok 1984, 7-11.) Finally, she notes that defining secrecy could be seen as reflecting “the conflicting desires that approaching many an actual secret arouses: the cautious concern to leave it carefully sealed, or on the contrary, the determination to open it up, cut it down to size, see only one of its aspects, hasten to solve its riddle” (ibid., 14).

Secrets and secrecy have been present in literary research for decades. It could even be argued that they are central to the very beginnings of literary research - not as we now know it, but as it first began centuries ago when sacred texts were read allegorically (Korhonen 2001, 11-12). One of the most important figures in the modern literary analysis of secrets was Frank Kermode, who, according to Hart (2004), “writing in the 1970s, laid the foundation of how to think about how secrets operate within narrative structures”. Kermode’s main argument is that all narratives involve secrets, which are “at odds with sequence” (1981, 83). His idea is that narrative consists of “two intertwined processes, the presentation of the fable and its progressive interpretation”, and that the first process “tends towards clarity and propriety” whereas the second one moves “toward secrecy, toward distortions which cover secrets” (Kermode 1981, 82). According to Kermode (*Art of Telling*, 138, cited in Abbott 2008, 79), “[I]t is not uncommon for large parts of a novel to go virtually unread; the less manifest portions of its text (its secrets) tend to remain secret, tend to resist all but abnormally attentive scrutiny”. This notion of secrets that resist reading is shared by Hart (2004): “Almost always, the titles of novels are both readable and are resistant to being read”. Kermode (1981, 84) gives searching for evidence of suppression as an example of a way of finding secrets of the narrative. This is, in a way, what many literary researchers and critics set out to do when writing about narratives. Research is still active in the analysis of narrative secrecy today (see for example François 2008), although - or perhaps just because - the term secrecy has such a wide coverage.

Another interesting definition of secrecy is given by Matei Calinescu in his book *Rereading* (1993). Calinescu (1993, 227) defines secrecy as “the calculated and selective concealment of information”. He then claims that his definition covers five important aspects of secrecy. The first aspect of secrecy is the deliberateness of it: secrecy cannot be accidental, but it has to be based on a decision. Secondly, secrecy is selective, which

means that what is hidden is only hidden from some people. The third feature of secrecy is double coding: the secret message may appear to convey some information to everyone, but at the same time there is a secret message only for the people who know what the secret is. Fourthly, even though the secret information should not be known by outsiders, they may be able to get hold of the information by guessing, for example. Finally, a secret message always carries with it the responsibility to treat it as secret. (Calinescu 1993, 227-228.) Analysing secrecy in *The Accidental* will challenge this definition, however: not all of these aspects are necessarily present in all of the secrets of the novel.

The difference between secrecy and privacy is not always clear-cut, which shows in *The Accidental*, too. Both Calinescu and Bok struggle to keep the two concepts apart. Bok's (1984, 10-11) definition of privacy is "the condition of being protected from unwanted access by others - either physical access, personal information, or attention". Calinescu aims at definitional clarity in a footnote (1993, 298) by citing Kim Lane Scheppele's definitions in *Legal Secrets*:

Privacy, on the other hand, is "a condition in which individuals can, temporarily, free themselves from the demands and expectations of others. Secrecy is one of the methods that an individual may use to attain this condition. But privacy and secrecy describe different entities. Secrecy describes information, and privacy describes individuals" (p. 13).

Calinescu (1993, 230) then returns to the two definitions when discussing Henry James's novella "The Private Life", saying that whereas secrecy can easily exist without privacy, as is the case in secret societies, privacy cannot exist without the ability to have personal secrets. This is all very well, but I still doubt that the difference between secrecy and privacy is as straightforward as implied in these definitions. If secrecy is one possible way of achieving privacy, why could privacy not be a means to secrecy? At least in the world of *The Accidental*, secrecy and privacy are closely related: it seems that where there is a lot of privacy, there is also plenty of room for secrecy. Bok (1984, 11) offers one possible explanation for this by claiming that privacy and secrecy are "so often equated" because "privacy is such a central part of what secrecy protects", and the purpose in seeking both privacy and secrecy is "to become less vulnerable, more in control".

There is something profoundly conflicting in the essence of secrecy. Bok (1984, xvi) summarizes the contradictory desires we face when dealing with secrecy: “between keeping secrets and revealing them; between wanting to penetrate the secrets of others and to leave them undisturbed; and between responding to what they reveal to us and ignoring or even denying it”. Calinescu also reflects on the human need for both keeping information to themselves to protect their privacy and, on the other hand, the curiosity and the need to find out about the secrets of the people around us. He talks about “the entangled social and psychological consequences of secrecy” (1993, 233). He argues that when one identifies somebody else’s secret, it is almost automatically that one has two intentions; both to keep the secret and to trick one’s way into the full knowledge of it (1993, 233). We have to decide again and again whether the urge to keep a secret or somehow bring it to someone’s attention is stronger. Another aspect of secrecy is “secrecy as a form of social reticence or discretion” (1993, 237). Secrecy is thus also related to gossip: “gossip as a blamable activity, but also gossip seen anthropologically as a kind of informal epistemological sharing of private information about others” (1993, 237). The need to be silent and the need to talk, both about one’s own secrets and the secrets of others, make secrecy an exciting phenomenon.

It is important to notice that secrecy does not just refer to silence, but also communication - which is why secrecy comes close to narrative as it is understood in classical narratology, for instance by Gérard Genette. Further elaborating on the definition of secrecy, Calinescu (1993, 245) discusses how secrecy “is indeed a form of communication - deliberately selective, exclusive, often elliptical, oblique or indirect”. This communication does not have to involve talking about one’s secret to someone else: it can also be communication in a diary, for example. Calinescu (1993, 244) returns to the intentionality of secrecy: “one’s innermost secrets contain within themselves the temptation to disclose, whatever the consequences; one somehow perceives one’s secrets as a burden of which one would wish to relieve one’s conscience of mind.” (Calinescu 1993, 244-245.) In this study, communicating about a secret is seen as a continuum. At one end, there is the choice not to communicate anything to anyone - as the absent protagonist does in another novel by Ali Smith, *There But For The* -, and at the other end, the willingness to share everything with anyone, the complete obliteration of secrecy. So, just like there are different narrative techniques - as Genette (1983/1980, 161-162) characterizes narrative moods: “one can tell *more* or tell *less* what one tells and can tell it

according to one point of view or another” - one can have different strategies for dealing with secret-keeping and sharing.

In principle, anything and everything could become a secret: it may even be something others would not consider important at all as long as it is something that someone wants to hide from someone else. Moreover, just as there are many kinds of secrets, there are multiple reasons why a person should like to keep a secret - both in the real world and in a storyworld of a narrative. Calinescu (1993, 246-247) has compiled a rather thorough list of the possible reasons for secrecy:

one may conceal information to be kind or to protect, when disclosure would be painful or harmful; one may remain silent, or speak misleadingly or deceptively in the face of an intrusive or oppressive authority to avoid persecution; one may withhold information to avoid misunderstanding; in fiction (and in good storytelling generally) information is concealed or disclosed at strategic points of the narrative to maintain the interest of the listener/reader [--]; and one may pretend to conceal important information for the prestige the possession of secret knowledge seems to confer.

Protecting oneself or others is an especially interesting reason for keeping a secret, because it relates to so many issues in *The Accidental*. Also, secrets are not only protective but also protected, “because they hide areas of vulnerability” (Calinescu 1993, 245).

An important point to consider when analysing narrative secrets is that concealing information promotes greater audience interest. Although Calinescu (1993, 247) argues that “this kind of manipulation should be studied under the heading of enigma rather than secrecy”, in this thesis concealing information in a narrative is analysed as secrecy. However, the purpose of the thesis is not to examine ways of maintaining narrative interest, as this has been done by Meir Sternberg, for instance. Narrative fascinates us, according to Sternberg, because of the “interplay among these three kinds of interests”: “suspense, which involves the reader’s interest in what will be told; curiosity, which involves the reader’s interest in gaps in what has been told; and surprise, which involves the reader’s activity of recognition when gaps are filled in unexpected ways” (Phelan 2006, 297).

Defining secrecy and enigma as altogether different issues does not make sense when reading *The Accidental* for reasons that will become clearer in chapter 3. Enigma must be, according to Calinescu (1993, 240), distinguished from secrecy: “an enigma is a riddle, a puzzle, at the limit a purely mathematical puzzle, whereas secrets always involve human agency and people intentionally and selectively concealing information from other people”. Thus the secrets of the Smart family members in *The Accidental* can be analysed from the point of view of why they decide to keep certain secrets. Amber’s identity, however, does not fall as smoothly in the category of secrets. One of my tentative hypotheses is thus that Amber could be read as an enigmatic secret, partly because nobody knows what her true identity is. However, arguing that Amber is *merely* an enigma would miss what is most interesting in the character: the kind of associative interpretation that exactly her nature as secret makes possible. Also, even if Amber comes to represent an enigma for some of the readers of the novel, she can be seen, from the point of the reader, as an enigmatic secret, because the author of the novel has decided to conceal Amber’s true identity and aims.

Narratives contain multiple kinds of secrecy, of which enigma is just one example. There are three different kinds of narrative secrets for Calinescu (1993, 240-241). The first category includes “secrets embedded in texts that are no more than mere signs of recognition” (ibid., 240). These secrets are author’s rewards for faithful readers. Secondly, there are “textual secrets that are addressed, as signs of recognition and invitations to communion to special groups of initiates”, such as members of a secret society (ibid., 241). The third category is labelled “personal authorial secrets” (ibid., 241). None of these definitions cover the kind of secrets I will look into in this study: the secrets of the characters in a narrative. However, Calinescu does offer a valid perspective for studying *The Accidental* when he argues that “a text may be perceived as containing secrets, as withholding or concealing important information under the guise of offering innocuous, unproblematic, smooth literary entertainment” (240) - not that I would necessarily call *The Accidental* unproblematic entertainment.

Rereading, Calinescu’s approach to reading, is by definition connected with secrets: “a good rereader will always also reread for the secret, that is, will always try to discover what a read text may hold away, conceal, or veil, and for what reasons” (1993, 242-243). In a sense, rereading means reading for the meaning:

The question of concealed meaning – of both the why and the how of concealment – haunts the act of rereading, particularly as it comes to focus on tiny textual details, idiosyncratic formulations, letter combinations, patterns of occurrence of names and dates, and other such manners (Calinescu 1993, 14).

This description definitely suits the purposes of my study: the why and how of the concealment (of Amber's identity, of the personal secrets of the other characters) play a significant role in my analysis.

Examining narrative secrets requires rereading, because the narrative may not reveal its secrets before its end. A good example of this is Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001), where it is only revealed at the very last chapter of the novel that the text is not just McEwan's but also the protagonist's novel. In *The Accidental* some secrets remain even when the narrative ends: both secrets between the characters and secrets of the novel as a whole. Nevertheless, rereading helps in understanding the ways secrecy is used in the narrative. Rereading does not merely refer to the act of reading a previously read text again: instead, it is "a process of continuous hypothesis building and revising" (Calinescu 1993, xiv). Although the process of reading will not be a major focus in this thesis, my reading strives to be a rereading of *The Accidental* in the sense of paying attention to the way the novel deals with secrecy on multiple levels.

Having a secret means being silent about something. Thus, I examine the silences in *The Accidental*. *Semantics of Silences in Linguistics and Literature* (1996), a collection of papers that deal with the different meanings of silence, offers a couple of perspectives for this purpose. Silence relates closely to gaps in narratives: "Secrecy as a narrative technique is expressed in a text by intentional omissions, interruptions and incoherence, gaps ("Leerstellen") in the sense of Iser" (Meise 1996, 57). Also, silence can be "deliberately employed as a space for joint imagination" (Meise 1996, 60). Imagining is very important in *The Accidental* because the characters repeatedly engage in imagining different scenarios, even alternative selves. Grabher (1996) discusses ethical implications of concealment in Eugene O'Neill's *Strange Interlude* and thus offers one angle from which I can analyse secrecy and its consequences in *The Accidental*. Especially interesting in this respect is her notion that "In O'Neill's play, silence [--] creates a void that is vicious in that it deprives the characters of the possibility to attribute meaning to their being" (Grabher 1996, 361). This might mean, in the context of *The Accidental*, that

the way the family members keep silent about certain issues deprives them of the possibility to understand each other. Again, Amber's role is more complex: it could for instance be that by being silent about who she really is, she forces the Smarts to reflect on who they are.

Being silent is in some cases similar to withholding information. This is something that all the main characters of *The Accidental* do. Leona Toker (1993, 1) analyses the withholding of information in seven canonical novels in *Eloquent Reticence. Withholding information in fictional narrative*, arguing that silence speaks in novels "through manipulative informational gaps". She argues that form can have ethical meanings, combining rhetorical analysis of the novels to reader response, or, as she prefers to call it, audience response. Toker seems to think that "disinterested aesthetic contemplation" is something opposite to "the wish to pursue the mysteries of the plot" (1993, 3), but I argue in this thesis that mystery or secrets raise the need for contemplation. Toker's (1993, 8) starting points for her analysis are " (a) the value of multiple readings, (b) the ideal of careful reading, and (c) the selectiveness of the reader's attention." These assumptions are not only shared in this thesis, but I believe that Calinescu could also agree on them.

Just as there are secrets in all narratives even though not every narrative thematizes secrecy the way *The Accidental* does, there are gaps in all narratives, but not all texts are equally gappy. The assumption that readers usually have is that gaps communicate something, and the phenomenon is called by different names by different researchers. For the literary theorist Jonathan Culler, it is the rule of signification, for the philosopher of language Paul Grice, the cooperative principle, and for Simon Baron-Cohen, best known for his autism research, the Theory of Mind. What all theorists agree on is that "a satisfying interpretation of a narrative sequence emerges from the interactions or joint work of a text and an audience". (Spolsky 2005, 193.) So, the power of notably gappy texts, such as *The Accidental*, lies in the fact that they offer multiple intriguing possibilities for filling in the gaps. In that way, they call for rereading.

A good example of the way gaps in narratives, or structural secrets, as they are thought of in this thesis, can be categorised is provided by Toker. Toker (1993, 6) distinguishes between "blanks, or spots of indeterminacy, practically infinite in any text" and "relatively infrequent informational gaps". The difference between the two is not clear-

cut, however, because “a blank turns into an informational gap if we are not sure that our way of filling it in is correct and if the correctness of our surmise seems to be of issue” (Toker 1993, 7). Some categorization is possible, though. Toker (1993, 15) classifies the different ways of withholding information “according to the structure of the suspended material” in four categories. The first category is chronological displacement, where “a considerable portion of the fabula is first suppressed and then revealed in long narrative blocks”. This type of withholding information is not analysed by Toker because Meir Sternberg has already written about it in his *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction*. The second category, diffusion of information, happens when “a great number of separate pieces of information are suppressed, thus creating numerous small gaps”. Temporary suspension of information, the third type of withholding information, is at stake when “a crucially important separate piece of information is first suppressed and later analeptically revealed”. Finally, there are gaps that can be classified as permanent suspension of information. This is the case when “what seems to be a crucially important separate piece of information is suppressed and never revealed”. (Toker 1993, 15-16.) In my analysis, I will focus especially on the fourth type of informational gap, because they are important with regard to Amber.

From a more structural perspective, secrets can thus be seen as gaps. Gaps in narratives can be divided also into temporary and permanent gaps. Temporary gaps, or “retarding structures” as Calinescu (1993, 240) calls them, are used to create suspense, whereas permanent gaps “shape the plot and determine strategic ambiguities”. I am especially interested in the permanent gaps in *The Accidental*, most of which have something to do with Amber, the strange, flat, yet extremely interesting character among the family that could live next door to anyone. Yet another interesting way of thinking about gaps in narratives is offered by Genette. Changes in focalizations, “when the coherence of the whole still remains strong enough for the notion of dominant mode/mood to continue relevant” (Genette 1983, 195), are classified as either *paralepsis* or *paralipsis*. In *The Accidental*, it is mainly *paralipsis* that is important. *Paralipsis* refers to parts of narrative where less information than is necessary is given; a classical example is when, in internal focalization, an important action or thought of the focalizer is missing (ibid., 195). Applying the concept of *paralipsis* helps me to understand what makes it so difficult to understand Amber’s secret. On the other hand, *paralepsis*, defined as “taking up [--] and

giving information that should be left aside” (ibid., 195), can also be seen in the novel, for instance in Amber’s own chapters that overflow with references to films.

Gapping is also related to indeterminacy in narratives, which helps explain part of the secrecy and mystery present in *The Accidental*. According to Emma Kalefanos (2005, 241), “Indeterminacies specific to narrative pertain to who does what, when, how often, at what ontological level or modality, and to what effect, in the narrative world that perceivers/readers (re)construct”. A good example of a significant source of indeterminacy in *The Accidental* is its narrative technique: according to Kalefanos (2005, 241), “free indirect discourse can blur information about whose vocabulary the reported words reflect”. Gerald Prince, as Kalefanos (2005, 241) summarizes, draws a distinction

between gaps in information to which narrators call attention in the discourse (the ‘unnarrated’ - a practice that ensures readers’ awareness of an indeterminate element in the narrative world), and, in contrast, events that the narrators include in the discourse but describe as not having occurred in the narrative world (the ‘disnarrated’).

The disnarrated, according to Prince (2005, 118) “comprises those elements in a narrative which explicitly consider and refer to what does not take place (but could have)”. Characters’ “unrealised imaginings (incorrect beliefs, crushed hopes, false calculations, erroneous suppositions)” (ibid.) abound in *The Accidental*.

The novel also portrays some examples of a related phenomenon called denarration. Brian Richardson (2006, 87) defines it as “a kind of narrative negation in which a narrator denies significant aspects of his or her narrative that had earlier been presented as given”. Richardson (2005, 100) also draws a distinction between ontological and existential denarration, ontological denarration being defined as above, and existential denarration as something that “denotes the loss of identity in postmodern culture and society”. Existential denarration thus comes close to what Eve and, curiously, some of the relatives of her “characters” experience in *The Accidental*.

Analysing secrets in novels is highly intriguing because one can do it on so many different levels and from a variety of perspectives. For the purposes of my analysis, I will apply some of the theories introduced above; those that are best suited for the analysis of *The Accidental*. The focus will be on the novel, though, and how to better interpret and

understand it with the help of narrative theory, not vice versa. As I hope to have shown above, secret is a concept that is far from unambiguous, and also something that relates closely to many important issues in narrative theory and analysis. One of the significant connections that the study of secrets in narratives has is the study of ethics in narratives. The connection is made explicit in different ways by different scholars, such as Toker and Phelan. In my study, I will show the connection step by step, both in theory and in the analysis.

2.2 Ethics in narratives

Ethics and fiction may not seem, at a first glance, to be very closely tied together. However, when one thinks about the two domains, one can quickly begin to understand their many intersections. Even when it is accepted that ethics and narratives, fictional or otherwise, actually do have a great deal in common, it is not easy to determine exactly what or how. The researchers are very much on different pages about the issue, which is understandable, considering how complex the convergence of the two major fields is. In this chapter, I will map the vast and sometimes confusing area of narrative ethics. The preliminary synthesis of the field is necessary, because it then enables me to focus on the specific narrative, *The Accidental*.

There are countless ways of defining ethics, although it is a truth universally acknowledged, I believe, that the concept is used when discussing good and bad. The common understanding is that ethics relates to the wrong and right, to moral decisions and judgments. Ethics is considered when we talk about what really matters in life: how we should live and treat each other in different situations. In a more academic manner, ethics is customarily defined as a branch of philosophy. The difference between the concepts ethics and morality is not always clear in everyday speech, although in philosophy ethics is defined as theory and moral as actions. In this study, I will take advantage of the two meanings that the word ethics has: both ethics as a concept and as a plural form, indicating that there are different kinds of ethics. The close and yet uneasily defined, even controversial relationship between ethics and narrative is also seen as

positive; the plurality of the discussion makes it possible to approach ethics in my reading of *The Accidental* in several ways.

In philosophy, ethics is usually understood as the branch of philosophy that deals with morality. Drawing lines between strands of ethics is not easy in the opinion of McGinn (1999, 5): “In moral philosophy, the theoretical and the applied are not really separable”. However, some basic categorizations can be made. Moral philosophy has three main research areas: normative ethics, meta-ethics and descriptive ethics. A concise definition of ethics is that “[T]he field of ethics (or moral philosophy) involves systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong behavior.” (Fieser 2009/2003.) Normative ethics and meta-ethics resemble one another because they are both philosophical and theoretical research on morals, whereas descriptive ethics focuses on describing, explaining and understanding ethics in reality. Normative ethics asks questions such as ‘What is right or wrong?’, ‘What is good or bad?’ and ‘What kind of person should I be?’. Thus normative ethics is based on a set of ‘do’s and don’ts’, which should be well argued and systematically presented in order to be taken seriously in the philosophical study of ethics. Meta-ethics is less well known for the general public, but it played an important role in the moral philosophy of the 20th century. Its research subjects are concepts that are used in the regulation of behaviour, and their meanings and relations, the methods of acquiring moral knowledge and the other, non-ethical beliefs that lurk behind the regulation of behaviour, for example the supposition that moral values exist independently. Descriptive ethics has traditionally asked what kind of a social phenomenon morality is and whether it can be separated from other mechanisms that control behaviour. Fundamentally, descriptive ethics is empirical, which has an influence on the on-going debate on the relation between descriptive and normative ethics. There are also other ways of categorizing philosophy, such as the analytical versus continental division that is used of the philosophy of the 20th century. However, the differences between the two are far from clear. (Oksanen, Launis & Sajama 2010, 7-12.)

In the end, it is characteristic of moral philosophy to avoid concise and closed definitions. Using the idea of moral goodness as an example, McGinn (1999, 7-34) discusses the problems of defining and analysing ethical values. The non-cognitivist tradition “holds that moral utterances are not fact-stating, do not admit of truth and falsity, denote no genuine moral properties that things can have or fail to have”, whereas McGinn,

representative of the objectivist position, thinks that “[T]he property of moral goodness [-] is an objective property in the sense that it is constituted independently of any mental fact” (McGinn 1999, 8, 7). Looking at the complexity of the issues debated in the study of ethics, it becomes clear that the relationship between ethics and literature, and their research, is not simple. On the other hand, there seems to be something in common for the study of the two fields: the endeavour of deep understanding, perhaps sometimes at the expense of clarity.

What makes the combined ethical and literary analysis intriguing, but also very complex, is the dividedness of both fields. There is disagreement on the definitions and sphere of study of both literature and ethics. Thus it comes as no surprise that the ways of putting ethics and literature together are varied and even contradictory. There is some tension between the two fields. As Eldridge (2009, 1) analyses, “[B]oth literature (both its production and the critical study of it) and philosophy as disciplines have often been seen (sometimes by each other) as embodying either strange fruitlessness or compelling necessity—sometimes both.” However, there is something that literature and philosophy have in common: both “imaginative disciplines are forms of attention both to the generalities and to the difficult particulars of human life” (ibid., 14). So, it can be asked, like O’Leary (2009, 138) does: “Can literature make a contribution to ethics? Could a particular ethics make a contribution to our reception, or understanding, of fiction?”

There are indeed many different ways of bringing ethics and literature together. Some philosophers, like Colin McGinn (1999, 2-3) argue that literature, especially the analysis of characters, can be very important to ethics. The exact argument varies, but it is usually something like this: because reading fiction, especially novels, makes it possible for us to encounter other ways of being and thinking, it can make us reflect on ethics in a new way and thus contribute to our ethical growth. McGinn (1999, 2), for example, argues that the purpose of fiction, from the ethical point of view, is “to present and reveal character in such a way as to invite moral appraisal”. The value of fiction is thus its ability to combine the general and the specific, because “the human ethical sensibility works best when dealing with particular persons in specific contexts; abstract generalities are not the natural *modus operandi* of the moral sense” (ibid., 3). This idea is tied to another argument of McGinn’s. He claims that there are “two traditional paradigms of what a moral text should look like” and that the focus of moral philosophy has been too heavily

on the first type, “a list of moral directives”, instead of the second type, the parable, in which “a narrative is constructed in which concrete characters take part, equipped with intelligible motivations and personalities, confronted by situations of choice” (McGinn 1999, 171-172).

From the point of view of literary research, Phelan’s (2014) definition of literary and narrative ethics is worth quoting at length:

Where literary ethics is broadly concerned with the relation between literature and moral values, narrative ethics is specifically concerned with the intersection between various formal aspects of narrative and moral values. Thus, narrative ethics is both broader (including in its domain nonliterary narrative) and narrower (excluding from its domain nonnarrative texts) than literary ethics. At the same time, narrative ethics can be usefully seen as a recent development in the larger trajectory of literary ethics, one beginning in the late 1980s.

In this study, it is narrative ethics that is of interest. Nevertheless, it is important to note that, unlike some of the most eager commentators of the so-called ethical turn have claimed, the interest in analysing ethics in narratives never was completely gone. Quite on the contrary, ethics and literature have a long-standing history (Phelan 2014). For instance, Plato argued that literature must be subjected to a strict regime because of its power and frivolousness, whereas Aristotle saw ethical significance in tragic drama because it offered catharsis (O’Leary 2009, 138). As Davis and Womack (2001, x) point out, “[W]hat *has* changed over the course of the twentieth century in our discussion of ethics and literature is the simplistic, uncomplicated prescription of external ethical forces regarding so many different literatures and cultures”.

It can be roughly defined that the contemporary Western philosophy has two main ways of thinking about the relationship between ethics and literature: on the one hand “literature (especially the modern novel) helps us to clarify our emotions and our moral concepts”; on the other hand “the value of literature is, in a sense, the opposite: it complicates, it confuses, it splinters; it confronts us with the alien and the unknown, and tends to undermine rather than refine our perception of the world”. The first perspective, represented by Nussbaum, among others, sees literature as something that “provides emotional training and allows a certain clarification of concepts through the complex fictional scenarios it presents to the reader”. (O’Leary 2009, 138-139.) The second approach sees “the ethical significance of fiction” in “its capacity to pierce the veil of our

ordinary experience of the world and of ourselves; to undermine our commonsense grasp of language and its relation to the world; and to convey an experience that in some sense takes both the writer and reader to a disturbing limit” (ibid., 139). The basic supposition is, according to O’Leary (2009, 141) that “works of fiction can play an important role in the ongoing task of working out answers to the central question of ethics, ‘how is one to live?’”. O’Leary (2009, 142) argues that one should “approach a work of fiction with care and attention”, which means that one is “open to the complexities of its relations with the non-fictional world”. This is what I hope to achieve in my analysis of *The Accidental*.

The ethical turn of narrative theory is a term used since the 1980s to refer to several developments: “a pointed interest in narrativity and narrative literature from the side of moral philosophy; an increased reflection, from within narratology itself, on the relation between ethics and the novel; and the corresponding growth of criticism focusing on ethical issues in narrative fiction” (Korthals Altes 2005, 142). Not everyone, however, agrees that the term ethical turn should be used. Eaglestone (2004, 562), for example, strongly criticizes the discourse of ethics returning to literary studies, arguing that “we must abstain from romanticizing and sensationalizing the developments mentioned—even at the risk of winding up with the fairly boring, provisional insight that we are dealing here, as I mentioned earlier, with a *revival* and a *resurgence*”. Even so, the recent developments in the study of narrative ethics are worthy of a more detailed analysis.

Ethical criticism typically concentrates on the novel, and it is most popular in Britain and the United States. There are three main tendencies in the growing field of ethical criticisms. The first tendency is pragmatist and rhetorical ethics. It is linked to the tradition of reading for wisdom, and theorists have argued that reading narratives can be a valuable part of moral philosophy. This strand of research also includes rhetorical narratology, to which I shall return. The second significant tendency, ethics of alterity, can be seen as a critique of the first one. The general idea is that literature can offer ethical insights because it can make us experience radical strangeness and ultimate undecidability. The third tendency can be labelled political approaches to ethics and it covers a wide array of criticism concerning the representation of race, class, gender and multiculturalism. (Korthals Altes 2005, 142-143.) The first two tendencies are the areas into which I will look in this thesis, because they can shed the most light on the essential ethical questions that reading *The Accidental* raises.

In the tradition of pragmatist and rhetorical ethics, researchers such as Nussbaum, Booth, Parker and Phelan “argue that narrative fiction can play an important role in the moral development of readers by modelling their emotions, self-conception, and view of life”. Nussbaum and Parker’s research focuses on “the development of moral awareness in characters”. Phelan’s research interests lie in the “analysis of the rhetorical devices responsible for the contradictory pattern of desires which narratives impose upon their readers - devices such as point of view, distance, reliability of the teller, voice, or tense”. At its best, this approach can lead to a productive analysis of the ethical dimension of aesthetic form, but the danger is that literature is only valued for its potential to build the reader’s morals. (Korthals Altes 2005, 143.) More faults can be found from this “neo-Aristotelean” approach, as Eaglestone (2004) calls it, though. Eaglestone (2004, 602) considers it problematic that the approach “takes up a strong mimetic position, suggesting that “we” and art are, in deep ways, the same”, because it necessarily limits the understanding of literature. Secondly, he criticizes the reducing effect that the neo-Aristotelian reading can cause, when “works become sources for the exploration of ethical issues rather than autonomous artworks” (Eaglestone 2004, 603). Finally, Eaglestone (2004, 603) thinks that “narrative itself seems often to miss precisely what it is trying to seize in relation to ethics”. For these reasons, then, one has to be wary of pragmatist and rhetorical ethics.

James Phelan has considerably advanced ethical and rhetorical theory of narrative, as is shown in a recent study of his theory (Shang 2011). Character analysis is one of the areas in which narrative ethics can be considered. Phelan provides a useful way of analysing characters of *The Accidental* in his essay “Narrative Discourse, Literary Character, and Ideology” (1989). The first principle in his analysis is that characters consist of three subelements: “the mimetic (character is like a possible person), the thematic (character is transindividual and ideational, sometimes representing a group, sometimes an idea), and the synthetic (character is an artificial construct)”. Secondly, it depends on the progression of the narrative how the three elements vary in a character. The third principle is that there are both dimensions and functions in each character, “where “dimensions” signifies the potentiality of character to be meaningful in each sphere, and “functions” signifies the realizations of that potentiality.” (Phelan 1989, 134.) An important point is also that there is no simple, straightforward relation between

characterization, or any other element of narrative technique, and ideology. Phelan argues for the dissection of narrative elements “in order for us to understand their complex potential for participating in the rhetorical transaction of narrative, including the inculcation of ideology.” (Phelan 1989, 145.)

Phelan (2007, 6) argues that narrative judgments are “crucial to the activation of our multileveled responses and to our understanding of the interrelations among form, ethics and aesthetics”. He has as many as seven theses about the judgments. His first thesis is that narrative judgments are “the point of intersection for narrative form, narrative ethics, and narrative aesthetics” (2007, 7). According to the second thesis, readers make interpretative judgments, ethical judgments, which are of special interest for the present thesis, defined as being about “moral value of characters and actions”, and aesthetic judgments (2007, 9). The third thesis claims that narratives “establish their own ethical standards in order to guide their audiences to particular ethical judgments” (2007, 10). This thesis reflects on the more general idea behind rhetorical ethical criticism: the aim is not to apply an ethical system to the narrative, but seeking “to reconstruct the ethical principles upon which the narrative is built” (2007, 10). Thesis four is that readers do not only make ethical judgments about the characters and their actions but also about the ethics of storytelling (2007, 12). According to the fifth thesis, rhetorical ethics “involves a two-step process: reconstruction and evaluation” (2007, 13). Thesis six highlights the relation between ethics and aesthetics: both proceed from the inside out and both involve the process of reconstruction and evaluation (2007, 13). Phelan’s (2007, 14) final thesis is that “individual readers’ ethical and aesthetic judgments significantly influence each other, even as the two kinds of judgments remain distinct and not fully dependant on each other”. The seven theses play a role in the unfolding of the analysis of the Smarts especially.

Narrative ethics can also be analysed with the help of Phelan’s (2005, 23) concept of ethical position, “a concept that combines being placed in and acting from an ethical location”. Ethical positions involve “the ethics of the told (the character-character relations)”; “the ethics of the telling (the narrator’s relation to the characters, the task of narrating, and to the audience)”; “the implied author’s relation to these things”; and “one involving the flesh-and-blood audience’s responses to the first three positions” (Phelan 2007, 11). He adds to this list the ethics of rhetorical purpose, “ethical dimension of the

overall narrative act” (2007, 11). The ethics of the told are most important for my study because I am interested in analysing the ethics in the story-world. Phelan (2005, ix) also asks about the ethical dimension of stories: “what are we asked to value in these stories, how do these judgments come about, and how do we respond to being invited to take on these values and make these judgments?”. Even though his study is much more focused on reading than mine, his “theorypractice” and analytical tools for “exploring a range of effects that follow from narration by a character” (Phelan 2005, x) are highly usable in my study as starting points and instruments for thinking.

Ethics of alterity, the second major strand of research in narrative ethics, is a fascinating field of analysis, because it celebrates the complexity and ambivalence that are present in my target text. This tradition builds on the views of Emmanuel Levinas and deconstructive philosophers such as Jacques Derrida and Jean-Francois Lyotard, all of whom emphasize the respect for otherness. Levinas thinks that ethics is about placing oneself under the command of the Other, and this ethical relation always occurs in face-to-face relation. He values the act of Saying (a specific moment involving You and I) over the Said, which is why his opinion of literature is for the most part none too high. Regardless, Gibson, Newton and other critics have shown that Levinas’ ethics can be used in the analysis of narratives. They argue that modern fiction “can be shown to stage the act of Saying and to problematize the Said” because it “invites the reader to join in the event of the utterance (or the act of writing), which can thus become an ethical experience”. Deconstructive narrative ethics may sound like a paradox, but, as argued by J. Hillis Miller, ethics can be understood as reflection on and respect for alterity, which is at the heart of deconstruction. What can be achieved with this kind of reading is the showing of “how texts undermine the reader’s expectations and his or her desire for totality and closure”. (Korthals Altes 2005, 144.)

Of course this approach is not without its problems either: “criticism inspired by an ethics of literature as radical undecidability, linked to the textual mechanism of *différance*, also runs the risk of discovering the same in all texts” (Korthals Altes 2005, 145). Further, as Eaglestone (2004, 605) criticizes, the “claims for the ethical significance of “undecidability” and interruption and the responsibility for reading” pigeonhole “much work in the “deconstructive” approach to the issue of ethics and literature”. Nevertheless, ethics of alterity, when combined to rhetorical ethics, offers a balancing,

even if partly conflicting, view of *The Accidental*. Using applications of Levinas's philosophy as my main sources for the theory on ethics of alterity is justifiable because his ethics have been applied to literary research before, and they shed light on encountering alterity, which is one of the key topics in *The Accidental*. Reading Levinas's original texts would not offer much support for the analysis of the novel, but I am interested in finding out how the applications work with a novel which thematizes the power of encounter by showing how it affects secrets and ethics.

Alterity is an important notion in *The Accidental*, because of the way encountering Amber, the stranger or other, changes the other protagonists. Alterity is, according to *Oxford English Dictionary*, "the fact or state of being other or different; diversity, difference, otherness; an instance of this". Alterity, which is frequently also called otherness, was already established by Hegel "as a condition of identity" in his master-slave allegory, but has later become "a central focus in philosophy and literary theory as a counterterm for identity and subjectivity". In narrative theory especially, ethics is recently often considered "as the genuine locus for the discussion of alterity". Levinas, a Jewish phenomenologist, is seen as the founder of a philosophy of alterity. His ethics focus on the difference between Other and other:

For him the ultimate Other (Autrui, with a capital A) is the sheer phenomenological fact of being, the terrifying 'there is' which defies the ego and all personal forms of the symbolic and thus undermines any closure. In his ethics irreducible alterity is met in the face of the other person (autrui, with a lower-case 'a') (Horatschek 2005, 13).

One narrative theorist who has made use of the Levinasian paradigm is Adam Zachary Newton, who argues that if narrative is seen as an intersubjective act or performance, ethics is automatically implied. His point of view is that novels have an ability to "make 'the invisible visible' as a gap or rupture in their depiction of selves and communicative intersubjectivity". (Horatschek 2005, 12-14).

Andrew Gibson (1999) searches for a postmodern way of analysing both literature and ethics. His work discusses the ethics of Levinas and strongly criticises the new positivism and the 'politics of English'. He moves away from F.R. Leavis's view of ethics and literature: "Leavis thought that novels had effects on those who read them - that, ethically, it mattered which novels you valued and how you valued them; how you read them, too,

the kind of commentary you produced about them, because commentary itself was a mode of valuation” (Gibson 1999, 1). Instead, Gibson is interested in ethics and ethical temporality that are postmodern or post-theoretical. He criticizes the earlier narrative ethicists, especially Rorty, Nussbaum, Booth and Parker, who all “slip into difficult or paradoxical positions” and believe that “ethics is a totality or involves totalities, whether of value or perception” (Gibson 1999, 10). Gibson (1999, 11) criticises especially “the extent to which it ignored all the various problematizations of narrative and narrative ‘form’ - problematizations that have been very precisely postmodernist, that could not have emerged without the modern novel - in novel theory from the 1960s onwards”. In his opinion, the pragmatist and rhetoric research had neglected the issues of narration, representation and the unity of the work. (Ibid., 1-12.)

Gibson finds his allegiances in researchers who he thinks have “argued for a close relationship between theory and an ethical criticism”, or “have been promoting the cause of a deconstructive ethics”, such as Simon Critchley, or those who have been “exploring the possibilities - and sometimes the problems - of a post-theoretical, ethical criticism” (Gibson 1999, 12). His conception of postmodernity is an interesting one: he thinks that it is “the (not necessarily contemporary) condition in which we arrive at - and must work with and through - a more and more developed awareness of moralities as myriad, groundless, incommensurable and interminable” (Gibson 1999, 14). Levinas’s philosophy fits into this kind of literary research because his ethics “does not proceed on the basis of or in the hope of establishing a secular, objective, universal morality on securely rational foundations” (Gibson 1999, 16). Levinas does have some blind spots though: women, Eurocentrism and ‘the ethics of marginality’. Thus his thinking is challenged with other views while Gibson goes on with his project of developing modes of ethical reading and discussing “how far a non-cognitive, Levinasian ethics of fiction might also be an ethics of affect”. (Gibson 1999, 17.)

Gibson has narrating subject and narrated object as the starting point of his argument. He argues that narration does not need to be seen to be “a mode of activity in which a subject takes another, other, the world as the object or objects of knowledge and claims possession of them” (Gibson 1999, 26). Instead, narration can be seen through Levinasian eyes, the focus then being on the encounter with alterity. He argues that ethics plays a role in representation, analysis and judgment in different ways, but that “the narration of a

story appears as a particular kind of ethical concern” (Gibson 1999, 26). The concept of excendance is introduced: “*Excendance* is the spontaneous and *immediate* desire to escape the limits of the self, a desire generated as those limits are experienced in their narrowness, even their sheer absurdity” (Gibson 1999, 37). In other words, excendance means reaching out - and this is precisely what makes it ethical. The concept can be used in analysing especially postmodern fiction, because “narratorial relations in certain kinds of fiction are characterized by excendance and its temporality” (Gibson 1999, 42). In this thesis, excendance is used in the analysis of the character of Amber, because it allows seeing Amber ethically: Amber can be read as escaping the limits of self, and urging others to do that, too.

Gibson (1999, 54) criticises modern literary theory and criticism for taking for granted “the meaning and point of terms like ‘omniscience’, ‘focalization’, ‘reliability’ or ‘unreliability’ in narration”. He points out that Levinas is against rhetoric, “which refuses to listen, refuses exchange, assimilation, hybridization, self-reflexivity”, things that he highly values. Rhetoric is seen as the opposite of conversation, which “maintains the ethical relation with the other and the possibility of unsaying what is said, and philosophical discourse seeks to avoid violence in turning away from rhetoric”. (Gibson 1999, 59.) Because Levinas values the face-to-face encounter and not representation and cognition, Gibson has to use other sources in further constructing his argument about narrative ethics. Lyotard, who builds on Levinas’s work, sees ethics as “resistance to tantalization and closure”. However, Lyotard thinks that ethics also has a political dimension, which effects on his views of anti-representationalism. Whereas Levinas is against representationalism because he values the encounter between two people, Lyotard’s reasons have to do with aesthetics: he is committed to the aesthetics of the avant-garde and the sublime. Lyotard sees the ethical dimension in the sublime: “He argues, for example, that ‘there is no sublime’ without ‘the development of the speculative and ethical capacities of the mind’”. Even though the ethics of sublime is linked to the idea of progress, narrative ethics can also be understood through negativity and melancholia. (Gibson 1999, 63-77.)

Postmodern ethics, as defined by Gibson (1999, 85), “will insist on producing or discovering rifts, gaps, distances, differences, not in order to break up all sense of community but - unendingly - in the interests of a community to come whose values are

still to be formulated, a solidarity that has yet to be created”. This insistence on gaps and differences is precisely what connects postmodern ethics to the postmodern novel that is analysed in this study, *The Accidental*. Gibson raises the question of unity of the novel as an ethical question, arguing for the dissolution of the novel as “an active principle and a form of intellectual work” (Gibson 1999, 86-88). His ethical model for the text is “not one in which particularities are embodiments or illustrations of a stable, pre-existing ground or system, of prior values or principles, but one in which the movement onwards of the text, what Bakhtin calls its ‘eternal unfinishedness’, the unlimited multiplicity at work within it, is of cardinal importance” (Gibson 1999, 91). Alterity is discussed as “the future and the multiplicity of becoming”, that “does not emerge as or in radical discontinuity”. Instead, the idea is that alterity happens when something is reworked and thus repeated so that one can think of it as a plural thing. (Gibson 1999, 99-100.) The sphere of common, the assumed common ground that we share with others, is dissolved in post-humanist ethics, because it “denies what Levinas calls the radical anarchy of the diverse” (Gibson 1999, 103).

Critchley (1992) argues for the ethical dimension in Derridean deconstruction in *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*. Derrida’s work can be read “as an ethical demand” (Critchley 1992, 2) when ethics is understood not as a branch of philosophy but in the way it emerges from Levinas’s work. Critchley (1992, 5, 8) sums up Levinas’s ethics: “it is the critical *mise en question* of the liberty, spontaneity, and cognitive emprise of the ego that seeks to reduce all otherness to itself”; “Ethics is not the simple overcoming or adornment of ontology, but rather the deconstruction of the latter’s limits and its comprehensive claims to mastery”. Ambiguity between “what is said in a text” and “the very ethical Saying of that text” (Critchley 1992, 19) is central in Levinasian ethics. Deconstruction, on the other hand, is defined as something that takes place “wherever there ‘is’ something”: as a textual practice it is double reading, “a reading that interlaces at least two motifs or layers of reading” (Critchley 1992, 22, 23). In this sense, deconstruction as a textual practice bears a resemblance to the idea of rereading - which is something that texts like *The Accidental* seem to invite.

Critchley (1992, 30) introduces the concept clôtural reading, which he defines in the following ways: “Clôtural reading is double reading extended to include the analysis of closure and the question of ethics.” It is exactly clôtural reading that “allows the question

of ethics to be raised within deconstruction” (Crichtley 1992, 30). But how does one do a clôtural reading, then? According to Crichtley (1992, 30), a clôtural reading consists “first, of a patient and scholarly commentary following the main lines of the text’s dominant interpretation, and second, in locating an interruption or alterity within that dominant interpretation where reading discovers insights within a text to which that text is blind”. Crichtley (1992, 30) then claims these interruptions or alterities are “moments of *ethical transcendence*”, “an event in which the ethical Saying of a text overrides its ontological Said”.

As different as rhetorical ethics and ethics of alterity may sound, the two approaches do have something in common. Both approaches, even when they are being very critical or incredulous about the place of ethics in the theory and analysis of literature, do simultaneously point to the importance of the one to the other. Eskin (2004b, 585) sums up what he considers to be the central arguments in this discussion: both literature and ethics, or moral philosophy, are primarily concerned with what being human means and that both are “secondary speech genres”, “utterances “about” utterances”. As Eaglestone (2004, 605) notes,

both “wings” of the debate assume certain ideas about the sort of truth and thus the sort of knowledge that the work of art can create. More than this, they also rely on the idea that ethics and literature represent two different fields that need to be joined rather than, following Heidegger’s account of *ēthos* and *aletheia*, versions of the same uncovering.

Moreover, as Hale (2007, 189) has pointed out, “discussion about the ethical value of “literature”” is very often discussion about novels only - although Phelan’s work with lyrical narratives, for instance, may be mentioned as an aberration. Hale’s (2007, 189) argument then becomes that the “new ethical theorists, when taken together, propose a common theory of literary value [--] which is based in an agreement about the novel’s function as an agent of the reader’s ethical education”. What Hale (2007, 190) sees as distinctively new in the work of the ethical theorists is that they see “the reading subject as engaging in self-restriction as an act of free will”, through which the reading is able to “produce the Other”. Some of these ideas will without a doubt emerge in the analysis of *The Accidental*, too.

In the 2000s, the study of narrative ethics is a varied field: some studies, like the present thesis, do a close reading of a narrative, “particularly in terms of the dilemmas and the conundrums presented in the lives of the characters that we encounter there”, whereas others focus on the ethics of authors or readers - or, perhaps surprisingly, to the value of ethical criticism of narratives (Davis & Womack 2001, x). The energy of the research on narrative ethics shows in the amount and variety of publications. *Poetics today*, for instance, has published a special issue in winter 2004 focusing on ethics. A recent collection of articles to illustrate the breadth and depth of the study of narrative ethics is *On the Turn: The Ethics of Fiction in Contemporary Narrative in English* (Arizti & Martínez-Falquina, eds., 2007). It seems safe to argue, then, as Phelan (2014) does, that

[M]ore generally, as the recent collection *Narrative Ethics* (Lothe & Hawthorn 2013) indicates, because the domains of narrative and ethics are themselves so vast and their interactions so varied, we can expect that exploration of their intersections will continue to excite much debate and to yield rich results.

In fact, it is even possible to hear a “symphony of contemporary buzzwords and topoi [--] such as *alterity, interpellation, call of the other, answerability, ethical responsibility, openness, obligation, event, doing justice, witnessing, hospitality, singularity, particularity, or the gift*” (Eskin 2004a, 561). It has to be remembered, though, that underneath the new words there are some old, and yet fascinating ideas about ethics and narratives.

In Finland, narrative ethics research has not been as active as it is in the United States and in Britain. Nevertheless, there have been some studies that discuss ethics in narratives from varied perspectives. Two recent dissertations can be mentioned: *The Ethics of Representation in the Fiction of Amitav Ghosh* (Huttunen 2011), and *Rewriting Loss: Melancholia, Ethics, and Aesthetics in Selected Works by Chuang Hua, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Fae Myenne Ng* (Pehkoranta 2013, unpublished). Huttunen’s (2011, 207–208) standpoint of ethics is similar to the present study in its choice not to adopt complete theoretical frameworks but certain threads of them. Encounters have been one of the themes of research in the past few years, especially in the more philosophically oriented studies; see, for instance, Korhonen and Räsänen (2010) and Korhonen (2012). Lehtimäki (2009, 2010) critically applies James Phelan’s theory in his works. In the more recent article, Lehtimäki (2010), in order to read “a sophisticated narrative”, compares the way

of reading based on rhetorical theory to encountering the text as if it was the face of other. This, as will be shown in the analysis, is highly interesting for the purposes of this thesis.

In the end, it seems impossible to content oneself with just one definition of ethics, which is why I have chosen to construct my understanding of the issue by closely reading the target text of this thesis. To have (at least) two so clearly different understandings of the concept and its research in fiction as starting points for my study might not be absolutely necessary, but it will certainly help me to gain more interesting insights of *The Accidental*. The mixing of different theoretical perspectives resembles the way in which secrets and ethics merge in the novel. Also, when reading a narrative that has as different kind of characters as *The Accidental* has, mainly Amber compared to the Smarts, reading for ethics with just one conception of it would seem unfitting and unfair. To be able to appreciate the differences in the ethics of each of the protagonists, the understandings of both rhetorical ethics and ethics of alterity are needed.

3. Secrets in *The Accidental*

In this chapter the focus will be on revealing the most important and intriguing secrets in *The Accidental*, mainly on the level of the narrated. First, I will read the most significant secrets that each member of the Smart family keeps, and track the changes that they experience in the course of the narrative as related to secrecy. Second, I will read the secret of Amber: not just who she is and what she does, but also what is her role in regard to the secrets of the Smarts. I aim at including all the different versions of Amber that are present in the novel. Finally, I discuss secrets on the level of the whole novel and the narration, focusing on what the narrative ultimately communicates about the meaning of secrets.

3.1 The secrets of the Smarts

Although the Smart family appears to be disconnected and dysfunctional, there is one thing that they all have in common: secrets. This connection, however, remains a secret for the characters themselves. In order to bring their secrets to light, I will need the help of various theoretical tools: definitions of secrecy, ways of reading silences and different kinds of gaps in the narrative. What the analysis will reveal, I hope, is the diversity and complexity of the secrets of the characters. Even though narrative technique is not a main focus in this chapter, it is interesting to note how, in the words of the Ali Smith, “All those characters in *The Accidental* are written in stream of consciousness, in that they are sorting out their unconsciousness with an enhanced consciousness” (in Smith, Caroline 2007).

The Accidental has internal focalization, which means that the narrator narrates not only the observable side of the characters, but also some of their thoughts. To be more precise, the focalization could be labelled, in Genette's terms (1980, 189-190) variable and multiple; the narration is focalized through each of the family members in turns, but the narrative also occasionally displays multiple tellings of a single action. For instance, the dinner on which it is revealed that Astrid no longer has her video camera is focalized through both Astrid and Magnus. Smith's use of focalization and other narrative techniques plays a role in the overall development of secrecy in the novel.

3.1.1 Astrid: secrets of a victim

Astrid, although she is the youngest in her family, manages to keep two major secrets. Her secrets relate to the construction of identity and to the searching of her own place in the immediate community. What troubles her is loneliness: she both suffers from school bullying and misses her absent father. Both secrets are also, essentially, someone else's doing: Astrid's former friends or her father. Thus Astrid is put in the role of a rather helpless victim. It is telling of Astrid's situation that although she has planned to tell someone about her worries, she has not managed to do it. The secrets show in Astrid's chapters as if accidentally; even though both of them pose a serious threat to the integrity of her self-image, she by no means thinks about them constantly.

Astrid is in a difficult situation at school, but although she fears that the rejection might get worse because of the early start to her summer holiday, she is not at all hopeless: "with any luck by the time school starts again in September Lorna Rose and Zelda Howe and Rebecca Callow will have forgotten about her being taken out of school early" (A, 12). Thus Astrid can be read as hoping for an easy solution to her secret: perhaps the bullies will simply forget. Even though Astrid first "concentrates them out of her head" (A, 12), thus demonstrating willpower, her thoughts soon return to the bullies. One of the incidents is possibly revealed in a vision that Astrid has before waking up again; the narrator does not make it clear whether she is completely asleep or somewhere in the fuzzy state between dreaming and being awake. Lorna and Zelda ask Astrid and Rebecca,

still Astrid's friend at this point in the past, to come and play tennis with them. Astrid says no, because the surface of the tennis court "is all pieces of broken glass" (A, 14). Rebecca goes on the court nonetheless, and gets a piece of chocolate from a man who has joined the girls. Astrid notices that she has her camera in her hand: "If she can get this on film she will be able to show someone everything that's happening" (A, 14). This is Astrid's plan of revealing her secret: not telling about it, but showing someone what happens. It is an uncanny plan: would it not be far simpler just to tell someone? Perhaps Astrid's obsession with showing and filming stems from a serious mistrust in words, be it promises or confessions.

The bullying messages, as if proof of Astrid's secret, jump up from the narration, mimicking the way text messages used to contain capital letters only: "THINK UR SMART ASTRID SMART. U R A LOSER. UR NEW NAME = ARS-TIT. FACE LIKE COWS ARS 3 HA HA U R A LEBSIAN U R WEIRDO" (A, 24). Immediately after this, Astrid moves on to think about bullying on a general level, as if it was not to do with her: "It is dangerous, to bully. [--] At some point soon Astrid will tell her mother that her mobile phone has been stolen" (A, 24). However, Astrid does not lie to Eve about the phone or tell her about the bullying. It seems that Astrid has not made a firm decision to share her secret, like one would expect based on the definition of secrecy as deliberate (Calinescu 1993, 227), but instead drifts into not telling it. Thus Astrid's narrative challenges the idea of secrecy as something that we can always control; perhaps it actually is often the case that people head for secrecy out of inability to confess. Secrecy could thus also be characterized as accidental, at least to an extent. Astrid's silence on the bullying betrays her uneasiness with trusting her family and confessing to being bullied.

The consequences of Astrid's secret-keeping begin to show when her mother reminds her to keep her mobile phone with her: "Her mobile, switched off, is in the bottom of one of the litter bins at school, at least that's where she left it three weeks ago" (A, 24). Apparently the dumping of the phone has been Astrid's own choice after she had received bullying messages to it. Thus the hurtful words urge Astrid to protect herself by cutting off all possibilities of connection via her mobile phone. This has, however, not only relieved her from reading further malicious text messages but also given her a freedom from her parents being able to reach her at any time. On the other hand, Astrid's choice has also led her into keeping a further secret: that she no longer has a mobile phone. This

is one of the main effects of secrecy that can be seen in the novel: secrecy often generates further secrets. When protecting one's secret one typically has to conceal other things, too, so that the secret cannot be guessed.

School bullying is not the only thing that Astrid chooses to keep to herself. Astrid also thinks about her father a lot: she keeps the love letters that he and Eve had written, and reads them again and again. In other words, Astrid tries, secretly, to keep her family united by cherishing the love that her parents once had for each other. The reason why she gets up to film the sunrises also relates to something she read in those letters: "*If I had a film camera behind my eyes what I would do is film all the dawns of all the mornings of my life then give the finished film to you all spliced together*" (A, 124). Thus Astrid's secret longing for her father manifests itself in her secret project of concretizing her father's promise to her mother. Astrid's parents are no longer married, and Astrid feels that her identity is cut into two: she is both Astrid Berenski and Astrid Smart. Both men who gave her the last name are remote to her: the first physically and the second emotionally. Astrid is alone with her secret longing: "Magnus Smart. Magnus Berenski. Magnus is not even bothered. Why should I care about him when he clearly doesn't give a fuck about me, he said once. But Magnus can remember him" (A, 26). Astrid's loneliness both in her family and at school shows in the way she tries to figure out who she is: although constructing one's identity can always be considered a somewhat secret or hidden process, for Astrid it is lonely, too.

Astrid's secret, her double loneliness, is one of the reasons why she is so much drawn to Amber. Finally she chooses to tell her secret to Amber: "Astrid tells Amber about the mobile phone in the school litter bin with its rental still being paid and nobody knowing. She tells her about Lorna Rose and Zelda Howe and Rebecca Callow. She tells her about how she and Rebecca Callow used to be friends" (A, 124). She also tells her about her father and how important he still is for her:

She tells her about her father Adam Berenski's letters to her mother and how she found them under the birth certificates, car insurance, papers about who owns the house etc., in the bureau in her mother's study and how she took them and how nobody has even noticed she's taken them and how she keeps them now inside a sock inside another sock inside the zip-up pocket inside the holdall under her bed at home. (A, 124)

Amber's reaction is bland: "Amber breaks a tall stem of grass from the edge, puts the stem in her mouth and lies back on the lawn. She looks up at Astrid for a long time through eyes half-closed against the sun. She doesn't say anything" (A, 125). Astrid, who has long kept her thoughts on her former friends and her father silently to herself, faces silence as a reaction to her revelation.

Silence, however, does not mean that nothing happens. Astrid finds herself able to let go of her father, step by step: first by discontinuing the filming of dawns because she no longer has the camera, and later on by realising that she does not need her father's letters. Astrid is freed from the secret longing that she had for her missing father:

Also, the astonishing thing is, she doesn't need her father's letters any more. They weren't proof of anything really. It doesn't matter that they're gone. In fact it is a relief not to always have to be thinking about them or wondering what the story is or was. Her father could be anything, and anywhere, is what Amber said. (A, 232)

Thus Astrid has been able to work on her secret with Amber's help so that she feels relieved not having to try to keep her parents' love story alive. This kind of process of letting go of something that used to be an important secret is discussed theoretically neither by Calinescu nor Bok, but it is easy enough to see that the development of Astrid's secret captures something essential about secrecy. Secrets change, just like their keepers, and sometimes this happens without overt pressure from outside.

When Astrid returns to school after the summer and faces her bullies, she is able to play with the partially overlapping concepts of secrecy and privacy (see Bok 1984, 11-14). She confronts Lorna, one of her bullies who had just given her "the you're a weirdo look" (A, 231), publicly in the middle of an English lesson, and lets her decide whether the bullying is their private business. This seems to give the power to the bully, but actually Astrid knows that Lorna has no choice: if she said that it was not their private business, she would give Astrid her permission to tell everyone about the bullying. The threat of that alone might be what changes it for good: "since then they haven't done anything to her, in fact Lorna Rose and Zelda and Rebecca have all made a kind of almost embarrassing effort at being friendly" (A, 231). By making it their shared secret rather than only hers, she is able to settle the matter. Astrid has learned the power of secrecy: some secrets hurt less when they are shared together with one's enemies.

3.1.2 Magnus: secrets of a wrongdoer

Magnus's secret is different from his sister's: it relates to a single incident that irrevocably changes his life. Moreover, Magnus is not a victim like Astrid, but a bully, albeit in a more or less accidental way. He shows two other boys how to use Photoshop in order to alter a photograph of a girl, on whom one of the boys has a crush. They put the girl's face from her school portrait together with a picture of a naked woman taken from a porn site, and email it to everyone at their school. Shortly after they send the email the girl commits suicide. Magnus is paralyzed by guilt, which is made worse by his agreement with the other boys to keep quiet about what they have done. Thus Magnus's secret is the incident that changes his life forever. Because Magnus cannot live with his secret, the focus of his narrative is on the possibility to confess.

Magnus's secret keeps coming up in the character's thoughts. The first remembering of the incident is at the very beginning of Magnus's chapter in the beginning: "the beginning of this = the end of everything. He was part of the equation. They took her head. They fixed it on the other body. Then they sent it round everybody's email. Then she killed herself" (A, 36). The unfortunate events are then retold as they return to Magnus's thoughts obsessively altogether eleven times in the 20-page passage. The remembering discontinues the progression of the narration, sometimes quite visibly:

But Magnus knows. He is all swollen up with knowing.
He did it.
They did it.
Then she did it.
She killed herself
Magnus shakes his head hard inside the duvet. He says the words to himself again.
She. Killed. Herself. (A, 43)

The way that the narrative breaks into pieces strengthens the image of Magnus as a broken character, traumatized by his secret. As argued by Horton (2012, 642) in her article about trauma in *The Accidental*, Magnus is "in a state of traumatic numbness and repetition that directly parallels trauma's 1990s theoretic diagnoses", and that "these experiences signal Magnus's extreme estrangement from regular psycho-symbolic

experience, pushing him in the direction of suicide”. What is more important than the symptoms of trauma, however, is the way Magnus deals with his traumatic secret.

One of Magnus’s strategies of dealing with his guilt is to view his identity as broken into two: the old him, the one before the secret thing, whom he now calls the Hologram boy, and the new him, all desperate and hopeless. The Hologram boy, his old self, is described like this:

Far far away, as if he is looking down the wrong end of a telescope, he can see a boy. The boy is the size of a small stone. He is shining, as if polished. He is wearing his school clothes. He waves his arms the size of spiders’ legs. He speaks in a squeaking voice. He says things like *well cool, quality, quite dodgy really*. He talks all about things. He talks as if they matter. [--] He talks about how holograms are produced. He himself is a hologram. (A, 37)

Magnus used to be an eager schoolboy, who is interested in learning about different phenomena. The fact that Magnus calls his old self a hologram is both very telling of Magnus’s interests and of his scornful view of the way he used to be: totally innocent. The notion of hologram also captures the idea that the same thing may look very different from different perspectives, which is exactly what Magnus has to struggle to accept. In contrast, the new Magnus is “this, now, massive, unavoidable” (A, 38). He is “all bulk, big as a beached whale, big as a floundering clumsy giant” (A, 38). What Magnus does not say, probably because he simply cannot, is that it is actually the dark secret and the accompanying guilt and regret that are massive and unavoidable. He imagines himself as different animals, hopes to be “a fish, any kind of fish, in or out of water” (A, 38), or “a dog with a dog-brain”, or a badger, because “Even the word is lucky. It is only half bad” (A, 39). In other words, his secret generates both jealousy and longing masked as hatred for his former self and the wish of regression.

Another effect of Magnus’s secret-keeping is that he has become totally distanced from his family:

There’s his mother. She doesn’t know anything. She is saying something. Magnus nods. He picks up the plate from a place at the table with no one sitting at it. His sister takes the plate from him. She doesn’t know either. [--] Magnus nods. He hopes that this nodding is what they need. He nods several times, as if he is very sure of what he is nodding about. Yes. Yes, definitely. No worries. (A, 47)

With his secret-keeping, he has built a wall between himself and his family; having to keep up appearances is the result of his promise of not to tell. Magnus's enormous guilt makes him unable to see himself as anything else than a despicable wrongdoer and unable to communicate with his family members in a meaningful way. This raises questions about the protectiveness of secrecy (Calinescu 1993, 245): what if by protecting a secret one is actually harming oneself? Magnus certainly is a case in point. Even though Magnus shares the terrible secret with the two boys, he has nobody with whom he could talk about it: the boys have sworn a pact of silence in order not to get caught. Magnus's distress proves that confessing the practical joke gone wrong could have been a better option for him: suffering from the enormous guilt in secrecy may be even harder for him than facing the consequences of his actions.

As Magnus's secret-keeping clearly cannot go on forever - as Horton (2012, 642) notes, unlike other Smarts, Magnus clearly suffers from "genuine clinical trauma" - he eventually confides in Amber, though not in as many words as his sister. Once he notices that Amber has "an astonishing way of looking differently at things", he tells her what troubles him: "It keeps getting dark when it's light, he says. I mean, when it's not meant to be dark" (A, 144). Later on, in the evening, Magnus expresses his secret in a more direct manner: "I broke somebody" (A, 149). Again, Amber's reaction is mild: "So? she says. And?" (A, 149). Magnus's secret, kept to protect both himself and the unfortunate girl, does not seem to be so grave any longer. Amber's reaction leaves unanswered questions, though: is she saying that little because she does not care or because she wants to protect Magnus from explaining it all to her and so becoming even closer to her?

Even more importantly, Magnus decides to trust his secret to Astrid, too. This happens after he has been found guilty for the Photoshop incident - Jake, one of the two boys that were with him, had told the headmaster about it, having been in love with the girl. Magnus is not supposed to talk about it with anyone: "Astrid is not to be told anything about the school etc. Nobody is. As part of the non-expulsion agreement Magnus has agreed not to mention the name or case in public, and has been warned against mentioning it in private" (A, 242). But he tells her:

Catherine Masson, he says.
What? Astrid says.
It's her name, Magnus says.

Whose name? Astrid says.

Magnus says it again.

Catherine Masson.

Then he tells it to Astrid through the opened door, or as much of it as he knows and as much of it as he can, beginning at the beginning (A, 257-258)

Astrid's reaction to Magnus's secret is left unknown, which strengthens the impression that what really matters in the narrative is Magnus trusting his sister. Telling Astrid may also be Magnus's way of provoking some of the blame and hate he has been craving for ever since his secret became known by the school staff. Also, because Magnus did not confess his wrongdoing to the authorities, telling Astrid gives him the opportunity to make a confession. And then again, Astrid has already told him that "There's nothing you could tell me that would make me hate you more than I already do" (A, 243). In other words, it is safe to tell the secret to Astrid - it will not change anything.

Magnus's secret is especially interesting because it can be read as problematizing the question who owns a secret. Bok (1984, 24) asks a good question about the ownership of a secret: "Should one include only those "about whom" it is a secret, those who claim a right to decide whether or not to disclose it, or all who know it?" A complex secret like Magnus's has several different phases. The first phase is when it was still an innocent joke shared with the other boys: at this point there probably had not been that much pressure to keep it a secret. Catherine's suicide brings the boys' secret to its second phase and changes its nature from a joke to a horrid act of cruelty: it becomes vital not to let anybody know about it. This is the phase Magnus is struggling to live with at the beginning of *The Accidental*. Jake's confession starts the third phase: the authorities now demand that the boys keep quiet about the matter. Thus the control over the secret is claimed by the authorities: Magnus had to buy his right, as it were, to stay at the school with his promise that he will not reveal the secret. The further lifespan of the secret - whether Astrid keeps it to herself or not - remains unknown. This is also one key feature of secrecy: the more keepers a secret has, the more unpredictable it becomes whether it remains a secret or not.

3.1.3 Michael: secrets of an adulterer

Michael's secret is infidelity: he keeps having affairs with his university students. Michael's secret could be characterized as an open secret, or secret of Polichinelle: "something which is ostensibly a secret, but which requires little effort or penetration to discover" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). However, Michael does not seem to be aware that quite so many people know his secret, at least not that his wife has known for years, too. When Michael's secret is finally brought into light, it is actually Michael who is the most surprised and shocked. Michael's narrative thus interestingly discusses the limits of secrecy.

Michael's secret, an open one although believed to be a genuine secret by him, is that he keeps cheating on his wife Eve. He, "Dr Michael Smart, official campus cliché" (A, 260), as the narrator notes, has had sex with numerous of his students over the years. He does not even enjoy the cheating any longer:

Ten years ago it had been romantic, inspiring, energizing (Harriet, Ilanna, that sweet page-boyed one whose name escaped him now but who still sent a card at Christmas). Five years ago it had still been good (for instance, Kirsty Anderson). Now Michael Smart, with twenty-year-old Philippa Knott jerking about, eyes open, on top of him on his office floor, was worried about his spine. (A, 70)

The secret-keeping has become habitual to Michael. The fourth aspect of secrecy as defined by Calinescu (1993, 227-228) becomes an important issue with Michael's secret: as much as one may try to keep one's secret, someone may get hold of it. However, it seems that Michael is not exactly keen or clever to hide his secret: Eve has become accustomed to finding "the usual condoms" (A, 181) in his pockets, and he has been warned several times by the faculty to stop sleeping with students. The only precaution that Michael takes is blocking his number when he calls his students: "never ever give out the mobile number" (A, 68). This carelessness with a delicate, potentially life-changing secret with severe consequences is confusing. Is Michael simply a bad liar, or does his carelessness have another explanation? It could be read as sign of wanting to be caught, but there are no other such indications in Michael's narrative.

The effects of Michael's secret being an open one are interesting. They reflect the nature of Michael's secret: the string of affairs should be kept secret because it is forbidden - and dangerous, if the word comes out. Protecting the forbidden or dangerous are just some of the motives for secrecy; we may also want to protect something that we see as sacred,

intimate, or fragile (Bok 1984, 281). Michael's secret is definitely intimate as well, although perhaps more so for the girls, for whom it may be a one-time thing. Still, its dangerousness is what makes Michael's poor secrecy skills surprising: it seems as if he did not realize that his secret jeopardizes both his marriage and his career. An open secret like Michael's shows interestingly how complex it is to be an insider or outsider to a secret, an issue that Bok (1984) discusses in a fascinating way. The separation between insider and outsider can be seen as a defining trait of secrecy: "to think something secret is already to envisage potential conflict between what insiders conceal and outsiders want to inspect or lay bare" (ibid., 6). An open secret blurs these boundaries: outsiders may easily become insiders to secret, which pushes the original insiders to the secret towards outsiders if they still believe to be the only insiders. Thus an open secret puts the person who supposedly 'owns' the secret into a position in which he is the outsider to his secret not being secret. Again, secrecy generates further secrecy.

The cheating is connected to yet another secret: the unhappiness of their marriage. Living in an unhappy marriage is typically described as living a lie, although it resembles more, to my mind, keeping a secret. When Michael's narrative has become poetry, in his section of the middle, this is how he sees his relationship:

It was New Labour love, then, him and Eve,
a dinner-party designer suit-and-tie,
a rhetoric that was its own motif,
they believed in each other, and a lie
was at the very centre of belief.
The waste it was made Michael want to cry.
He was a ruined nation, and obscene,
and nothing meant what it was meant to mean. (A, 174-175)

The lie "at the very centre of belief", Michael's infidelity, reveals another aspect of secrecy. Some secrets can be kept rather easily by not telling anyone about them, but other secrets need constant lies in order to remain secrets. Otherwise, as is the case with Michael's secret, they may become open secrets. The element of self-betrayal is also present in Michael's secret; perhaps his serial adultery is, among other things, his way of faking a fulfilled life and forgetting his marital troubles.

In a way, Michael's most profound secret is that he is a person who is always looking for something new, a fresh experience. Michael loves beginnings:

the beginning again!

Extraordinary. Life never stopped being glorious, a glorious surprise, a glorious renewal all over again. Like new. No, not just like new but really new, actually new. Metaphor not simile. No *like* between him and the word new. Who'd have believed it? (A, 57)

Michael's love for beginnings is interestingly paired with his fascination with cliché: "Cliché was earth-moving, when you understood it, when you felt it, for the first time." (A, 60). Beginnings and clichés are combined in Michael's infidelity: he tries to experience new beginnings in the most clichéd way possible. The character of Michael also reveals how secrecy is related to play "as an extension and re-elaboration of daydreams, for instance" (Calinescu 1993, 245). His constant daydreams of new girls have turned into reality and messy secrets that threaten both his marriage and his position at the university. However, he seems to be both blind to this threat and immune to guilt. The character does not portray a need for confession. Michael lives in the present, oblivious to the fact that his actions cannot remain secret forever.

Thus, the turning point for Michael's secret is when it becomes known to him that his secret was an open one. Michael's colleague talks about the topic as if it was old news: "And don't say that you weren't warned, I told you five years ago, four years ago, two years ago and last year" (A, 265). When she leaves him the revealing message, she does not even mention what she means by "the game": "*The game's up, Michael. It's Marjory. Phone me. Careful who you talk to. The legal department's involved*" (A, 269). To Michael's endless surprise, it is not only the university staff who is aware of his philandering - Michael's secret turns out to be already known by Eve:

Whatever this is, I swear, I don't know anything about it, Michael said.
It's all right, Eve said. I know.
She nodded. She took his hand.
Michael, looking at Eve's photograph in the bookshop, understood again, like he'd understood now every day since, and every day the understanding came to him as incomprehensibly newly as it would if he suffered from a brain disease that meant he couldn't remember anything for longer than twenty-four hours.
Astonishing.
He realized Eve knew. He realized she had always known, known all along, and it had made no difference to her. He realized, too, that they had both been waiting for exactly this message. (A, 269)

The fact that Eve had known about his adultery and had not cared enough to let him know that she knew is almost incomprehensible to Michael. It seems like the greatest deceiver,

after all, is Eve: not reacting to one's spouse's infidelity must be rather rare. Their roles are reverse to how Michael imagined: Eve is not shocked, but he is, and she has a good reason for leaving him, whereas he has to play the role of the regretful husband. If there was a game, then, it was between the husband and wife, and it is safe to say that Eve should be crowned as the queen of secrecy. The revealing of Eve's secret, then, becomes much more significant a turning point for Michael than his own secret.

3.1.4 Eve: secrets of a fake

The character of Eve is different from the rest of the Smarts in that her secrets are harder to determine. It seems that there are plenty of things she would want to be or thinks she should be but is not: a productive writer, a loving mother and a happy wife. She has devoted her hours to imagining lives that long dead people never had the chance to live, but now she finds herself incapable of continuing with the writing. Eve hides her crisis from her family like a true Smart, but, unlike her children, never makes a full confession of her secrets to Amber or to anyone else.

Eve is supposed to be writing her new book, an 'autobiotruefictinterview', in the shed in the garden of their rented holiday home, but she does not write a word. She does not even want to think about writing, as is revealed in her narrative in the beginning:

How and where was the book? Please don't ask this.

Wasn't she working on it? Every night at six she came out of the shed, went back into the main house and changed, and ate as if a day's work had been done and everybody's summer wasn't being wasted in a Norfolk hell-hole. Today Astrid had come over the grass rather than up the gravel so Eve hadn't heard her, had only just seen the shadow cross the window and only just managed to get up off the floor and on to the old chair at the desk to make a noise at the keyboards of the off laptop.

After Astrid had gone Eve had stared at the blank screen. Calm. Measured. (A, 84)

Eve pretends to her family that she is working, and she also lies to the publisher when meeting with her later on in the summer that her new book is "well under way" (A, 199). After having said this, she even tells herself that when she gets home, she will be working the new Genuine, and that she will be "halfway through it" (A, 200). Such is the power of her delusion and self-betrayal.

In truth, Eve suffers from a serious writer's block:

Did Eve have a subject for her new unbegun book yet? No. Why was the very thought of starting a new book, which would bring in relative money and fame, enough to make her spend all day lying on her back on the floor of the mock summerhouse unable to do anything? Good question. See if you can answer it from the answers already given. (A, 85)

The question and answer format in which she has written her "Genuine articles", the six books about different persons who, in reality, had died in the second world war, creeps into Eve's mind and the narration of her first chapter. Eve is constantly interviewing herself. Asking herself questions and then answering them creates an image of a person who wants to control everything and who believes in answers; as Eve answers her own question "Why the Q & A gimmick?": "It's not a gimmick. Every question has an answer" (A, 82). However, the continuous questioning also creates an effect of a character who is lost and confused, such as in the passage quoted above where Eve refuses to answer her own question, and refers to an ambiguous "you" who should be able to infer what she really thinks.

Eve's internal dialogue shows that secrecy is indeed a form of communication, as argued by Calinescu (1993, 245). As Eve cannot trust anyone with her secret, she has to communicate about it with herself, albeit in an evasive manner. Eve's distress shows in the way her questions grow bigger and bigger and her answers become shorter and panicky:

Was Eve, for instance, tired of making afterlives for people who were in reality dead and gone? Eve chose not to answer this question. [--] Did Eve really remember the whole of that review off by heart, verbatim? Eve chose not was it anything to do with the fact that thirty-eight thousand wasn't actually that many after all, not in bestselling terms, and now that the big time had arrived, it was disappointingly not that big a time? No! of course not! Absolutely not. (A, 84-85)

Eve is thus in denial, trying to keep her uneasiness with her work and her life in general as a secret even from herself. Self-betrayal can also be seen as a kind of secrecy (Bok 1984, 60). This is highly problematic, though: "How can one simultaneously know and ignore the same thing, hide it and remain in the dark about it?" (ibid., 61). Self-betrayal can be thought of as a proof of the complexity of the human mind - and of the difficulty many of us feel when we need to be thoroughly honest to ourselves.

Eve is not happy with her work, but she also keeps her husband's unfaithfulness and their somewhat unhappy marriage a secret. Eve could be compared to a character in Henry James's "The Private Life", as analysed by Calinescu (1993, 232): "He is so used to pretending that rather than paint he pretends to be painting." It seems that Eve has become so used to pretending to love Michael that she cannot stop, and actually starts to pretend and lie about her writing as well. The problems in her relationship have an impact on how she sees her children, too. Eve imagines how she would like to feel towards her family:

Next to her was an Eve just like Eve was now, in reality, but one who buttoned the top button on the coat her daughter Astrid was wearing before she went out in the cold and rain, and felt real, good love as she did, not the kind of love that made you panic but the kind that made you happy. (A, 294)

Pretending that everything is all right makes Eve unhappy, and keeping all this to herself does not help. Thus the character of Eve, along with the other Smarts, indicates that secret-keeping may be psychologically very demanding.

Eve is the only character whose secret, at least if it is understood mainly as her writer's block instead of a fully-fledged unhappiness with her life, remains a secret even after Amber's visitation. There are hints that the others are aware of Eve's dissatisfaction with her life, though. Astrid recognizes the threatening tone in Eve's voice when she orders Amber to go, and later on warns Astrid not to talk about her. This is how Astrid sees it:

But it's not Amber that's over, Astrid thinks, looking at the photograph of Michael with his hand on Magnus's shoulder and both of them laughing, her mother smiling like that with her arm round Astrid, Astrid with her arm round her mother.
It's finished now. That time's over. I'm warning you. (A, 232)

Is it their family that is over, then? It certainly seems like it as Eve leaves the others to the robbed house to go to a solitary journey round the world. She clearly does not love Michael any longer:

Michael: [--] You think about me too, don't you?
Eve: Oh, I suppose so. I suppose I think of you occasionally. (A, 291)

Not telling her family what her journey is all about means that Eve continues to keep her secrets to herself - and the distance between herself and her family is not just

geographical. Very tellingly she throws her mobile phone into the Grand Canyon, making it impossible for her family to reach her.

3.2 The secret of Amber

In this chapter the focus will be on the mystery of who Amber is and what she does in *The Accidental*. Thus, the secret of Amber consists of both her secret identity and the secret reasons for her actions. I will read Amber as an enigmatic secret; a character that resists final readings but offers a multitude of possibilities for interpretation, as the Smarts' different conceptions of Ambers show. An important part of the secret of Amber is that she can be read as having multiple personalities - or even as two different characters, Amber and Alhambra. Moreover, the effects of Amber's secrecy are profound and complex, as I shall shortly show. In what follows, I will first analyse the different ways of interpreting the secret of Amber, and then move on to discuss the effects that her secrecy has in the novel, especially for the Smarts.

3.2.1 Reading Amber's secret

Amber is a character that demands a different kind of reading from the Smarts. Phelan's (1989) model helps to reveal and understand the differences between the kinds of characters that the Smarts and Amber are. The basic idea of the model is that characters consist of three elements: "the mimetic (character is like a possible person), the thematic (character is transindividual and ideational, sometimes representing a group, sometimes an idea), and the synthetic (character is an artificial construct)" (Phelan 1989, 134). Whereas the Smarts are highly mimetic characters, very much like possible persons, Amber is mostly thematic and synthetic. The thematic element of Amber is particularly strong with relation to secrets because Amber represents the idea of secrecy. The vast amount of references to films in the parts of the novel when Amber is the narrator underline that Amber as a character is an artificial construct much in the same way as the protagonists of films are. Amber's functions as a character, the ways in which she is

meaningful in the three domains, as defined by Phelan (1989, 134), probably vary from reader to reader as Amber can be interpreted arguably in at least two different ways. There are some elements that would support the reading of the character as a vicious crook who not only manipulates the poor family but also robs them blind. On the other hand, one could also read Amber as the saviour of the family, giving each of the family members ways to deal with their secrets, thus helping them to become better.

The complexity in the way Amber is secret begins with the character's name, which has multiple meanings. The main usage of the word nowadays is amber as resin: "A yellowish translucent fossil resin, found chiefly along the southern shores of the Baltic. It is used for ornaments; burns with an agreeable odour; often entombs the bodies of insects, etc.; and when rubbed becomes notably electric" (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2013). So Amber is something that preserves things - such as the history of cinema or the almost-collapsing Smart family. Becoming electric also fits Amber's image and her role in the novel. Another meaning that the word amber has, as an adjective, is "Designating the intermediate cautionary light in road traffic signals, between red (= stop) and green (= go). Also, as n., the amber-coloured light itself; hence fig., an indication of approaching change or danger" (*ibid.*). Amber definitely brings about change, perhaps also danger. Being in the middle of going and stopping also aptly describes the atmosphere of the novel and the lives of its main characters.

The now deceased northern dialect version of the word amber, lamber, which refers to yellow amber (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2013), brings to mind a connection to the word lamb. Lambs are important in *The Accidental* because one of the paratexts of the novel is a photograph of a lamb in a fold (taken from Fay Godwin's *Our Forbidden Land*). Another meaning of lamber is "One who tends ewes when lambing", and ewe, an obvious allusion to Eve, is a female lamb (*ibid.*). Amber thus gets the role of a shepherd, guiding the lambs, the Smarts, where she wants to take them. The figurative meanings of the word lamb include being "as meek, gentle, innocent, or weak as a lamb" and "A simpleton; one who is cheated" (*ibid.*), further strengthening the reading of Amber as using her power over the Smarts. The religious reading of Amber as a shepherd and the Smarts as her lambs should not be neglected either, especially because there are many other instances in the narration that refer to Amber's possible supernatural qualities. These will be analysed later on in this chapter.

Amber's alleged last name, MacDonald, is not quite as rich in meaning and allusion as her first name, but nevertheless adds to the interpretation of the character. The surname originates in a Gaelic name, Mac Dhomhnuill, "which is composed of the ancient Celtic elements domno- 'world' + val- 'might', 'rule'" (*Dictionary of American Family Names* (2013) cited in "McDonald family history"). Thus Amber's last name could be translated as the ruler of the world, which is indeed not that far from what Amber comes to represent to the Smarts. Amber says that she is "directly descended from the MacDonalds of Glencoe" (A, 92). This opens up further possibilities for reading the character, because the history of the MacDonalds of Glencoe (also known as MacIains of Glencoe), a branch of clan Donald, is interesting. For instance, the motto of the clan is "Cuimhnich", 'Remember', which refers to the massacre the MacDonalds of Glencoe faced in the late 17th century ("The MacIains of Glencoe" 2013). Remembering has a link to the meaning of Amber's first name: amber is a substance that 'remembers' or preserves. The motto of the MacDonalds of Glencoe had been, before the massacre, "Nec tempore Nec fato", 'Neither time nor fate' (ibid.) - again something that evokes similar kinds of ideas to Amber. Time and fate are both concepts that Amber makes the Smarts understand anew, although it seems that time and fate do not affect her life quite in the same way than the others' - Amber's watch has stopped at the magical number seven, because she needs to "keep an eye on the time" (A, 144) and she thinks that "for all we know I'm going to live forever" (A, 105).

The knowledge that the reader gets about the secret of Amber comes from two different sources: from the Smarts' chapters that reveal how Amber is seen by each of them, and from the four passages in the novel narrated by a first person narrator. These brief chapters tell the story of Alhambra, and can be read as a framing device to the overall narrative. It is one of the major gaps that relate to Amber whether she is actually Alhambra or whether they are two different characters. Reviewers of *The Accidental* have not been in agreement about Alhambra's meaning: the majority thinks she is Amber, but opinions are divided on the significance of the Alhambra chapters in the novel as a whole (see Turrentine 2006 for a positive review of Alhambra/Amber and Kakutani 2006 for a negative one). In an interview by Caroline Smith (2007, 78), Ali Smith gives a revealing description of the enigmatic character:

[--] she is complete artifice! She has no self at all. As well as being the most earth-stampingly bodily character, she is also in dreams and cinemas. She is a trick of light. Each one of her sections is first person and sets up an immediate distrust and immediate self entry. You can place anything or read anything onto this character: she might punch you for it, you know, but you can still carry on doing the reading.

If the author of the novel is to be believed, then, Amber and Alhambra are the same person, a character with no self. This is the reading that makes the most sense, because it allows the reader to get to know the character better (who would Alhambra be, if not Amber?) - but also, importantly, lets the reader experience the character's all-encompassing essence and offers a partial explanation for her strangeness as experienced by the Smarts.

The main problem in reading Amber is that she is a very gappy character - all of the novel's most important gaps have something to do with her. What kind of gaps are there in *The Accidental*, then, that have an effect on ways of reading Amber? Calinescu (1993, 29) problematizes Roman Ingarden's phenomenology of reading and theory of schematic structure: "Is the schematic structure - the apprehended structure of "gaps" to be "filled-in" by the reader - something that can be ascertained with complete and incontrovertible objectivity?". I think it obvious that it is not: with texts as complex as *The Accidental*, there is always room for several equally plausible interpretations. Of course, there are different degrees to this complexity: Amber as a character is much more complex and open to multiple interpretations than the Smarts. Amber's true identity, for example, is a significant gap that goes into Toker's (1993) fourth category, permanent suspension of information. The narrative never reveals whether Amber is, in fact, a Scottish woman who drove over a girl and changed her life, or Alhambra, multiple fictional characters blended into one.

Another term that can be used when talking about gaps in narratives is alteration, which refers "to a momentary infraction of the code which governs that context without thereby calling into question the existence of the code" a narrative discourse (Genette 1983, 195). The two types of alteration are named *paralepsis*, "the excess information" (ibid., 197), and *paralipsis*, "giving less information than is necessary in principle" (ibid., 195). In the internal variable and multiple focalization of *The Accidental* there are various infractions. Especially Amber's chapters abound in both *paralepsis* and *paralipsis*: she gives too much information about films and cinemas, and too little information about who she is and what

she does with the Smarts. None of the family members are mentioned even once in any of Amber's chapters, which makes possible the reading that the Amber who spends time with the Smarts and the Amber who tells her cinematic story in between could actually be two different characters. Nevertheless, reading them as one character, as paradoxical as that may sound, allows the secret of Amber to be read as fully meaningful as possible.

At the very beginning of the novel, before the part named the beginning, the story of Alhambra/Amber begins. "My mother began me one evening in 1968 on a table in the café of the town's only cinema" (A, 1) are the first words of the novel, excluding the paratexts. Not very much is given away about Amber in this first short chapter; only that her name is actually Alhambra, after "the place of my conception" (A, 3). There are multiple meanings to the word conception: idea, understanding, impregnation and origin (*Oxford English Dictionary*). This ambiguity highlights Amber's strangeness and the mysterious essence of her character. The fact that Amber "began" at a cinema is key to the interpretation of the character: she can be compared to cinematic narratives, illusion and dream. The chapter closes with enigmatic words from the first person narrator: "From my mother: grace under pressure; the uses of mystery; how to get what I want. From my father: how to disappear, how to not exist" (A, 3). It seems already at the beginning of the narrative that Amber has some rather unusual characteristics, unless one wants to read her words as merely metaphorical.

After all of the Smarts have had their beginnings, Amber's story is told again, in a new way. This time her mother is not a film-goer and her father a boy working in the café, but the main characters from *The Sound of Music*: "My mother was a nun who could no longer stand the convent. She married my father, the captain; he was very strict" (A, 103). Various other film references are given, such as *My Fair Lady*: "I sold flowers in Covent Garden. A posh geezer taught me how to speak proper and took me to the races, designed by Cecil Beaton, though they dubbed my voice in the end because the singing wasn't good enough" (A, 104). The most important mother and father might in the end be Terence and Julie, "Stamp. Christie" (A, 105) - at least Terence Stamp is mentioned elsewhere in the narrative. Terence Stamp also links *The Accidental* to Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Teorema* (1968), which has a similar story with a very special stranger joining a family and changing their lives.

In the end of the part of the novel called the middle, Amber's voice is heard again. This time she describes the history of cinema, starting from when films were first invented: "I am born just short of a century after the birth of the Frenchman whose name translates as Mr Light, who, in his thirties, late in the year 1894, has a bad night, can't sleep, feels unwell, sits up in his bed, gets up, wanders about the house and - eureka!" (A, 205). Amber's secret is thus again linked to the magic of the motion picture. The rest of the chapter briefly maps the rise and fall of cinemas, with the names of films, actors and cinema houses scattered throughout the text. Amber becomes as artificial as the film industry, and yet miraculously alive with the various allusions to memorable characters in different films. It is as if Amber is an enigma with far too many clues: by being everything, the character comes close to being nothing. There are only a few possible clues as to what her true identity could be, such as the following: "Red means passion, or something on fire. Green means idyllic. Blue means night and dark. Amber means lamps lit in the dark" (A, 206). Again Amber is seen as a symbol of light, which activates the various metaphorical senses: light is linked to both God and Lucifer (as the morning star and as the Devil, *Oxford English Dictionary*), knowledge, seeing or understanding. Light is a recurrent metaphor for Amber in various contexts, such as in traffic lights, where she represents the warning sign. Moreover, Amber makes the Smarts feel like they understand life and themselves anew: she brings them enlightenment. Magnus even thinks about Plato's allegory of the cave (A, 249) because of Amber and the change that she brought. On the other hand, illusion, which is in the heart of cinema, is also what Amber is about. Other things Amber and films have in common include the allure that they have for many people, the powerful influence they may have on those who encounter them, and the possibility for endless interpretation that some films and the multifaceted character of Amber offer.

The final, unnamed section of the novel is again narrated by Amber. This time the passage is not about the history of cinema, but about Alhambra:

I was born. And all that. My mother and father. And so on.
Never mind that. Imagine the most beautiful palace. It's the most beautiful palace in the world. Now imagine it multiplied. It's a palace made of palaces. (A, 305)

Amber then recites the brief history of Alhambra, before ending up where her story began:

The people who built cinemas gave some cinemas its name. Like the one I was conceived in. Now we're back at the beginning.
Heaven on earth. Alhambra. (A, 306)

Even the very last words of the novel leave Amber's identity and purposes open for different interpretations:

It's a palace in the sun.
It's a derelict old cinema packed with inflammable filmstock. Got a light? See?
Careful. I'm everything you ever dreamed. (A, 306)

One has to be careful with Amber: she may bring chaos and destruction with her. Another possible reading, focusing on the last sentence, is that Amber is a film character that has come to live, a living motion picture, reflection of how the Smarts would like to live. The context of dreams is also important, although it is not altogether clear whether Amber is a nightmare or a blissful dream.

What further complicates reading the secret of Amber, in addition to her own chapters and the multitude of meanings and possible interpretations that they create, is that all the other protagonists see her differently. It can be argued that there are multiple Ambers in *The Accidental*, as she appears focalized through each of the other protagonists: Astrid's Amber, an exciting friend who teaches her to be fearless; Magnus's Amber, the teenage boy's dream come true; Michael's Amber, painfully fascinating yet indifferent; and Eve's Amber, full of charisma and ambiguity. Even these Ambers do not stay the same because the Smarts' ways of reading Amber change during the narrative as their relationships progress. Thus each of the Smarts can only understand Amber's secret in part, and form a limited idea of Amber's identity. In other words, the reader knows more about Amber than the characters; not just because of the possibility to see how Amber develops relationships with each of the Smarts but also, crucially, because of Amber's own chapters. The ambiguity makes Amber a fascinating character, who not just has secrets but actually is one - or, to put it differently, whose essence and purposes are the most important gap that there is in *The Accidental*.

The Smarts struggle to read Amber's secret; that is, understand who she is and what she wants. Amber comes across as an enigmatic character from first to last, though. The story that Amber tells of herself to Eve, when asked, speaks of a Scottish heritage - and it is a completely different story from what can be read from the Alhambra chapters. Amber's

Scottishness is not immediately obvious, though: Astrid thinks that Amber “has a way of talking i.e. Irish-sounding, or maybe a kind of American” (A, 31), whereas Michael observes that she “had an accent that sounded foreign. Scandinavian” (A, 65). For the English family, the fact that Amber is from Scotland quite likely adds a little bit of exoticism to her. On the other hand, it also strengthens the connection between Amber and Eve: Eve’s mother comes from Scotland. Amber does not give her surname before Eve asks Amber to tell her something about herself, though; being a MacDonald seems, then, to be less important in reading Amber than her first name. It is noteworthy what Amber chooses to share with Eve: not her reasons for visiting the family, but a few Gaelic proverbs “that everybody knows off heart” where Amber comes from (A, 92). She tells them in Gaelic, first, which Eve thinks “sounded like gibberish” (A, 92). Amber’s proverbs are telling: “One: there’s many a hen that lays an egg. Two: the yellow will always return to the broom. Three: be careful not to let folk over your threshold till you’re absolutely sure who they are” (A, 92).

Eve does not ask Amber to explain her proverbs, which may be Amber’s secret message or even a warning to the gullible family. The proverbs certainly are double-coded from the point of view of the reader, who already knows that Amber is not who the Smarts think she is, such as one of Michael’s students. Double-coding is a part of Calinescu’s (1993, 228) definition of secrecy: the secret message “may be publicly coded so as to convey spurious or deceptive or merely neutral information to the layman and at the same time secretly coded so as to convey the privileged information for the initiate only”. In this case, the initiate seems to be the reader instead of one of the characters. Especially the third proverb can be read as Amber warning Eve about not trusting her, although it has deeper echoes as well: how can Eve, or anyone else, ever be absolutely sure who other people, even close ones, are? The secret of Amber is reinforced, then, both by her knowledge of a rare language, unknown to the other protagonists, and her use of proverbs that remain without further explanations. It depends from the reader whether Amber’s answer is read as a case of paralipsis: does she tell too little, or even fend off Eve’s question, or does she really reveal something important about herself through the proverbs? The reader’s opinion may very well change from reading to rereading the narrative: Amber’s proverbs are likely to raise more interest on a second reading, when the reader is fully aware of the complexity of the character and the open ending that the novel has.

A fuller version of Amber's story is narrated through Eve's focalization at the end of her part of the beginning. Amber had had a terrible accident that had changed her life completely:

When she was in her twenties Amber MacDonald worked in the city in a high-flying position in investment assurance and insurance interests. She had a Porsche. It was the 1980s. One sleeting winter night, the week before Christmas, she was driving along a narrow car-lined street in a small town with the radio playing a song called Smooth Operator and the windscreen wipers doing their rubbery swipe over the windscreen, and a child, a girl of seven wearing a little winter coat, its hood edged in fur, stepped between two cars on to the road in front of her and Amber MacDonald's car hit the child and the child died. (A, 100-101)

Death of a child is an intriguing reason for Amber to have changed her life. The accident may be read as an allusion to *An Accidental Man*, a novel by Iris Murdoch (see Sophie Ratcliffe, 'Life in Sonnet Form', *Times Literary Supplement*, 20 May 2005, 19, cited in Germanà 2010, 96). Although *An Accidental Man* is a different kind of novel from *The Accidental*, it features a similar kind of car accident, and, I think, a covert theme of secrets and ethics, too. The story of the turning point in Amber's life, however, should be read with caution because it is filtered through Eve's consciousness. This may have severe consequences to the reliability of the story for various reasons. First, oral stories typically change a little when retold. Second, creating alternative life stories is what Eve does for a living, which, theoretically, makes her extremely capable of altering Amber's original narrative. Third, it seems as if Amber does not remember the story at all later on, when Eve wants to talk about it: "What child? Amber said. What accident?" (A, 201). It is possible that Amber tells each of the Smarts - that is, apart from Michael - things that they want to or need to hear, instead of actually revealing her personal experiences, as the listeners may believe.

Part of the mystery of Amber is the uncertainty as to why she is there with the Smarts. This question is never directly answered to in the narrative, but the explanation for Amber's lifestyle, living in her car, is given in the narration through Amber's voice:

Since then, Amber MacDonald said, I gave up my job, my salary. I sold the car and I left most of the money I got for it, thousands, in a big pile of cash, like a hillside cairn, by the side of that road where it happened. I bought a second-hand Citroën Estate. And I decided that from then on I would never live in a place that could be called home again. How could I? How could I live the same way after? (A, 101)

Her story is credible because it would conveniently explain why Amber appears to be a “gypsy kind of a person” (A, 98). This reading also helps to explain Amber’s close connection to Magnus, a boy who feels that he is responsible for the death of an innocent person. Furthermore, it is interesting to view this as Amber’s secret motivation for joining the Smarts: a disconnected family in a disappointing holiday rental hardly is at home, but nevertheless may be better off than they realise. Amber’s ambiguity shows in her choice of vehicle: she switches from an expensive to a second hand car, but nevertheless keeps driving, possibly more than before - even when it is exactly her driving that ended the child’s life. Despite telling Astrid that “Cars are a very bad idea in such a polluted world” (A 32), Amber goes on a drive one night with Eve just to kill some time. Moreover, Amber’s story of the way she changed her life, as believable as it otherwise might be, is however questioned only after a few lines - and by Amber herself. She asks Eve: “*Well?* she said. *Do you believe me?*” (A, 101).

Amber, even though she can be read as ‘the accidental’, does not arrive on the doorstep of the Smarts accidentally. “Everything is meant” (A, 3) are one of the very first words of Alhambra. Significantly, these words are not addressed to any of the Smarts, but to the reader, who has not yet read anything about the family. As “Everything is meant” are among the closing words of Amber’s first chapter, they can very well be read as a nod towards a reading strategy in which Amber’s arrival to the Smarts is planned, as well as her ways of interacting with the family. This shows in how Amber’s arrival is narrated: “She had rung the doorbell this morning. He had opened the door and she’d walked in. Sorry I’m late, she’d said. I’m Amber. Car broke down” (A, 61). Nobody is expecting Amber, so how is it possible that she is late? The apology is all the more meaningful on a second reading of the novel: it is Amber’s only one, although repeated once in Michael’s narration. Why was Amber driving all night to get there - or is it a lie just like that she would have left the car in the middle of the road? These uncertainties of the narration enable different kinds of readings of the character, such as that Amber has a secret responsibility for the family, one of which the Smarts are unaware.

The reading that Amber’s arrival to the Smarts is “meant” gains support from the fact that Astrid has seen Amber once before. Astrid suddenly realises that she has seen Amber before only after they have already spent some time together: “But on one of the

mornings Astrid, through her camera lens, which has a very good range, has seen her” (A, 34). It is possible that Amber may have been searching for the Smarts from afar:

It was definitely her.

It was far away, there was someone sitting on the roof of a car, a white car, Astrid is sure it was a white car, parked at the very far edge of the woods. She seemed to have binoculars or maybe some sort of camera, like a birdwatcher or an expert in some kind of nature. (A, 34-35)

What is more, Amber “almost seemed, typical and ironic, to be watching her back” (A, 35). What can this watching mean? It scarcely is totally accidental that Amber happens to be awake early in the morning, watching at Astrid from the distance, and then arrives at her house later on. The only instance that could be read as a sign that Amber recognizes their earlier encounter, as brief and faraway as it was, is that Amber “talks as if they’re midway through a conversation and as if she takes it for granted that Astrid understands exactly what she’s talking about” (A, 35).

The Smarts initially focus on the exterior signs of Amber’s otherness, such as her looks. To Astrid, Amber comes across as “kind of a woman but more like a girl” (A, 21). Astrid finds Amber’s appearance “weird” and “unbelievable”, because she has no make-up on and has not shaved her underarms or legs (A, 21). Michael, who immediately notices that Amber is not there for him, also has trouble determining Amber: “A bit raddled, maybe thirty, maybe older, tanned like a hitchhiker, dressed like a road protester, one of those older women still determinedly being a girl” (A, 64). For Magnus, Amber is “very beautiful, a little rough-looking, like a beautiful used girl off an internet site” (A, 55), whereas Eve thinks that Amber looks “vaguely familiar, like someone you recognize but can’t remember where from” (A, 89). In sum, none of the characters see Amber as an ordinary-looking woman, but have trouble placing her, even recognizing her femininity. This is a sign of Amber’s ontological otherness.

Another important aspect of Amber’s secret that the Smarts strive to understand is her secret knowledge and abilities. Amber seems to be exceptionally talented and knowledgeable - although sometimes the Smarts’ admiration of her goes to comical proportions, such as when Eve is convinced that Amber has the hands of a good piano player even though she has never heard her play. Amber charms the Smarts with her wide general knowledge:

Amber knows about Egyptian, Minoan, Etruscan, Aztec everything. She knows about car electronics, solar radiation, the carbon dioxide cycle, things in philosophy. She is an expert on those wasps which inject other insects with paralysis so that their own grubs can feed off something still alive. She knows about art, books, foreign films. (A, 150)

Amber's wide, but rather random knowledge in different areas might be a sign that she has devoted her life since the car accident, if that has really happened, to studying this and that. On the other hand, there might also be a hidden purpose, a secret aim behind her choice to talk to Magnus and other Smarts about the things she knows. An interesting part of Amber's etymological otherness is her partial ability of reading others' minds, or guessing some of their thoughts, at the very least. There is evidence in the narration that Amber may be capable of mind-reading. This happens mostly with Astrid, but Amber does know things about Magnus and Eve that they have not told her: about Magnus's complicated birth and about Eve's injured knee.

From the Smarts' varied efforts at trying to understand her secret two main metaphors emerge. The first one is the reading of Amber as light, already briefly touched upon in the analysis of the Alhambra chapters. Amber is systematically linked with light by the Smarts, beginning from when Astrid first meets her: she is looking through the camera viewer, which "floods with light so bright that she can't see" (A, 18). From this very first description on, there is something ambiguous about Amber: "It was so bright it was almost sore"; "the face is a blur of light and dark" (A, 18). These contrasts already predict Amber's essence as an angel-demon character. To Magnus, Amber appears to be "all lit up against the wipe-clean wallpaper" (A, 55). For Michael, another man to fall in love with Amber, the experience is life-changing: "(--) what mattered more than anything was that he knew, from nowhere, as if he had been struck by, well, yes, lightning, that he wanted that woman Amber" (A, 74). Michael thinks that he "had opened his eyes into what he knew was light, like a coma patient after years of senseless dark" (A, 77). Michael's sonnet shows that Amber's light can be seen as destructive, too:

so bright herself she eclipsed everything
that shone back to her with a lesser light-
Because she was light itself. Amber, walking
through the world, lit the world, took the world, made it,
and after her everything in it faded. (A, 165)

Amber is light that both ends the darkness, helping others to see, and then causes everything to fade, making it somehow less than it was before. Again her two sides, the renewing and the destructive, can be seen. What is more, Amber is not just the light, but she knows how light works, too, and explains it to Magnus: “Persistence of vision, she says. You must have seen something so dark that it’s carried on affecting your vision even though you’re not looking directly at it any more” (A, 144); and also: “He and Amber have discussed how light is part particle, part wave-structure” (A, 150).

Another very frequently occurring understanding of Amber’s secret is linked to the supernatural. Amber’s secrecy comes across as alluring, but, on the other hand, also as somehow threatening. Amber can be read as an angel/demon character (Horton 2012, 641); this also links her to Scottish literature, which “abounds in references to witches and unsettling femmes fatales” (Germanà 2010, 61). Astrid notices how there is something very alluring and at the same time forbidding in Amber: “Amber is blessed with a magnetic forcefield from outer space or another galaxy. If she were a cartoon character she would be the kind of superheroine that can draw things to her and repel them away from her at the same time” (A, 109). The element of supernatural is also present as Astrid compares Amber’s walking on the motorway, stopping the cars by raising her hand, to “the story from the bible when the sea parts in two” (A, 109). Amber becomes Astrid’s heroine, but the girl’s admiration is not entirely without hesitation: “Personally Astrid thinks Amber should stop when she gets to the edge of a pavement (--). It is insane just to walk out” (A, 109). To Magnus, “Amber = angel” (A, 142), from their very first encounter on. Eve, on the other hand, connects Amber to the supernatural only later on, when she experiences the power of her kiss:

Eve was moved beyond belief by the kiss. The place beyond belief was terrifying. There, everything was different, as if she had been gifted with a new kind of vision, as if disembodied hands had strapped some kind of headset on to her that revealed all the unnamed, invisible colours beyond the basic human spectrum, and as if the world beyond her eyes had slowed its pace especially to reveal the spaces between what she usually saw and the way that things were tacked temporarily together with thin thread across the spaces. (A, 202)

The kiss may be read as Amber’s initiation for Eve; based on the novel’s ending, Eve’s “new kind of vision” is something truly life-changing.

The various minor characters of *The Accidental* also find Amber special, even if they cannot figure out her secret either. She manages to charm the villagers, as Magnus notices when he meets the owner of the local curry place after Amber has gone: “Amber had clearly befriended the man, like she had befriended most of the Village People” (A, 255). The man thinks that it is a pity that Amber has gone: “She’s a fine one, that one, he said. A real lady. The real thing” (A, 256). Amber, quite opposite “the real thing” as a character, charms an old lady, by going to church with Magnus: “You’re a good girl, aren’t you, always at the church, day after day, him too, always there with you. It’s grand to see” (A, 145). At least in the case of this lady, Amber’s good reputation is built on the wrong grounds - after all, she is going to the church to have sex with an underage boy. Katrina, the cleaner who comes with the Smarts’ holiday home, might be the only character in the novel who knows Amber as Alhambra. This reading can be based on what Katrina once says to Eve: “What she’d said had sounded like: *her name’s a hammer*” (A, 185). It is unclear whether Katrina and Amber really know each other, even though Michael thinks they might even be working together. Not everyone finds Amber alluring though: people working in the supermarket where she causes confusion by moving things around and not buying them, or the person who tries to stop Astrid filming the CCTV cameras in the train station and gets questioned by Amber, for instance. Still, Amber seems to make everyone who she meets react to her in one way or another, even when everybody may not notice how different the character actually is. The most important thing about the minor characters’ views of Amber is, however, that they prove that Amber is not just the Smarts’ collective hallucination.

As I have shown, Amber’s chapters abound with *paralepsis* and *paralipsis*: telling too much and telling too little. Possible ways of handling alterations like this include, according to Manfred Jahn (2006, 12), naturalisation, “explaining it as a motivated exception”, defamiliarisation and unintentional error. The fact that Amber’s true identity stays ambiguous thanks to the various gaps in the carefully crafted narrative is clearly not an unintentional error. What would then be the best possible explanation for her? Naturalisation is a reading strategy that Michael seems to employ: he explains Amber as a trickster who took advantage of their generosity and robbed them blind, so that there is nothing that special about Amber left. She is, to him, just a charming, creative criminal. However, I think that this reading ignores some of the most interesting sides of the character, such as why she is loved by everyone even when she does somewhat hateful

things, and why she, when talking about herself, does not really talk about herself but films. Defamiliarization would seem like a more fruitful reading strategy: Amber, as a literary character, is made in such a different way from the other characters, that she certainly creates defamiliarizing effects. It could even be argued that this is what Amber ultimately strives for: she wants to wake the sleepwalking family up to really understand what is going on in their lives, and her best way to do so is to be so different from them and behave in such an unexpected way that they are bound to look at the familiar and see it anew.

Although Amber's secret, as in her secret identity and aims, can fairly be read in at least two different ways, the character nevertheless remains enigmatic. This is because there is, ultimately, no single reading that would explain away all of the mystery of Amber. As Tancke (2013, 96) summarizes it:

Amber can be viewed as the uncanny other who each family member either desires or abjects, but the question of her agency in the novel is an open one: the dysfunctional Smart family is already on the road to ruin before the events of the novel begin, and Amber may be either the active instrument of wreckage or a neutral catalyst whose mere presence magnetizes inherent destructive forces.

Amber is, as a character, so multifaceted and ambiguous that drawing some kind of final conclusions from her would be impossible. Amber is thus the one character who does not let go of her secret on any level - even Eve's secret becomes known for the reader of *The Accidental*. Amber's secret is never revealed. The complexity of Amber and the ways in which she is a secret or an enigma raise the need for further analysis of the effects of her secrecy.

3.2.2 Effects of Amber's secret

Amber's secret and the fact that it remains unresolved at the end of the novel have significant bearings on the Smarts and on the overall narrative of *The Accidental*. One of the most notable effects of Amber's secrecy on the Smarts is that each of them has to struggle in order to understand her. As I have already discussed the Smarts' efforts at reading the enigmatic character in 3.2.1, the focus will now be on the effects of Amber's

secret on the secrets and secret-keeping of the Smarts. In addition, Amber's secrecy affects the overall idea of secrecy that the novel imparts.

In a nutshell, Amber's secret both decreases and increases the number of secrets that the Smarts harbour. Thus her effect on the secrecy of the Smarts is contradictory, as is typical for the character. Amber's power to both generate new secrets and to induce the Smarts to share the old ones can be compared to her simultaneous allure and revulsion. What is more, Amber also changes the quality of the secrets of the Smarts. The new secrets, such as Magnus's relationship with her, are secrets that need more careful protection from the other family members. This is because they are, in essence, secrets that have originated in the close proximity of the rest of the family and that involve Amber, someone who all of them know. This would show even more clearly in the novel if Amber did not appear to be so different a person from each of the Smarts' point of view. Therefore it is their own secretive or non-communicative ways that make it possible for these new secrets to thrive.

Amber's accumulative effect on the secrecy of the Smarts can be seen in each of their narratives. One interesting example of this is when Amber breaks Astrid's camera. Astrid keeps the incidence a secret as long as she can by being silent, but has to come up with an explanation of the loss of the camera when she is asked to film their dinner one evening. Astrid has to say that she cannot get the camera, and explains that she has lost it. Amber, after laughing at Astrid's witty answer, reveals the secret by telling Eve and Michael that she dropped Astrid's camera. This confession is followed by "a silence that goes on and on, keeps going on" (A, 123) until Astrid tells another lie. The fact that Magnus, as it is revealed in his narrative, thinks that "Amber covered for her" (A, 136), shows just how complex a mesh Amber's effect causes on the secrecy of the Smarts. Amber's misunderstood confessions can be linked to the language of secrecy which Calinescu (1993, 259-260) describes as "selectively revealing concealed information to certain people under certain circumstances", and "a mode of social interaction". Amber tells the secrets for everyone, but there is only one person in the family at a time who actually knows that what Amber says is true and hence a secret. Even a confession, a sharing of secret, is no guarantee that the secret would then dissolve. Misreadings and misinterpretations may turn into new secrets. Thus it can be argued that Amber's secrecy blurs the lines between truths and lies.

On the other hand, Amber's secrecy also makes the Smarts able to let go of some of their secrets. This can even be read as a healing process, especially for Astrid and Magnus, who, as analysed in chapter 3.1, are able to let go of their secret worries. The secret of who Amber is seems to draw the siblings to confide in her. This shows, for instance, in the narration of Magnus's very first meeting with Amber:

Meanwhile someone has come into the bathroom. It is his own fault. He should have locked the door. He didn't remember to lock it. He is such a failure. He can't even do this properly.
It is an angel. She stares up at him.
It was just a joke, he says.
I see, she says. Is this a joke too? (A, 55)

Magnus's first words to Amber are like a confession: because he thinks she is an angel, he does not even have to clarify what he means with his utterance. Revealing one's biggest secret to an absolute stranger is a powerful example of Amber's allure - even if, although Magnus probably does not realise this, the stranger is not likely to understand the full meaning of such a brief revelation. Astrid is also tempted, by Amber's fascinating secrecy, to share her secrets with her, as discussed in chapter 3.1.1. It is striking that Amber never asks to hear the siblings' secrets. Thus it must be something in Amber's enigmatic mien that makes them to reveal their innermost secrets to her.

Amber's effect on the secret-sharing of the Smarts can however be read otherwise, too. Michael has a different idea of Amber's effects on secrecy:

Months later he remembered that she knew where the house keys were kept, after this game - in the bedside cabinet. Months later, too, he thought about the wanting her with shame and not a little wryness, like a clue right under his own nose, a clue that came and went and told him exactly what he needed, plain as abc, and he'd refused to read it (A, 177)

Michael is thus of the opinion that Amber has tricked them into revealing their secrets in order to harm them. Interestingly, the game involves not only the possibility for Amber to learn some of the secrets of the Smarts - not the major ones, but less significant pieces of information kept from her - but also the possibility for her to openly state that she knows more of the Smarts than they themselves do. Thus, in exchange of a negligible piece of

information revealed by each Smart's choice of "something you do quite a lot with in an everyday way", Amber gets the permission to tell the each Smart "all sorts about yourself" (A, 176). Astrid refuses to give Amber anything, though, perhaps because Amber has already taken her camera, and Eve, cunningly, picks up a random stone from the garden and gives that to Amber. Eve's action could be read as resistance to Amber's power of reading others' secrets.

Again, one has to remain aware of the possibilities of reading Amber: is she merely a catalyst, or a more active presence when it comes to the Smarts' secrecy? There are, to my mind, two possible readings. The first way of reading Amber is that she is the accidental of the novel's title, a catalyst character. Personifying coincidence and chance, Amber proceeds to change the Smarts' lives - or help them to see that they are in need of changing. O'Donnell (2013, 97-98), for instance, reads Amber like this: "As 'the accidental', she is the embodiment of contingency - the untimely and unforeseen, the small event that has fatal consequences, the sudden arrival of the catastrophic." Calling Amber the catastrophic, however, is too straightforward a view; as O'Donnell (2013, 96) admits, "Amber may be either the active instrument of wreckage or a neutral catalyst whose mere presence magnetizes inherent destructive forces". Moreover, it is not just destruction that Amber brings, but also new understandings and new beginnings. Thus it is more in line with the character's ambiguity to view her as 'the accidental'. This reading includes both sides of Amber and recognizes that she is, in the words of Horton (2012, 641) "a fantastic, angel-demon presence". A key word to reading Amber is unpredictability - the ability to surprise and astonish the other characters is part and parcel of Amber's secrecy. The second way of reading the effects of Amber's secrecy on the Smarts is to read her as actively destructing the Smarts and their secrets. Although an element of this kind of behaviour can be seen in the character, reading Amber as merely a destroyer - or merely a catalyst with no actual own agenda or power - is not enough. The character's effects on the other protagonists are most fully understood when she is viewed as both catalyst and an active player.

One of the most important effects of Amber's secrecy to the progression of the narrative is the way Amber is thrown out of the house by Eve. The fact that the Smarts are never able to reveal Amber's secret may be the reason why she is thrown out. One of the paradoxes of Amber is how the character is simultaneously packed with meaning and yet

devoid of it - in which she resembles a gap. In another context, Michael explains it quite well: “It had meaning because she said it. Even though you don’t know what she said, it had meaning because it went between you [--]. It was just that the literal meaning itself wasn’t immediately comprehensible [--]. That doesn’t mean it didn’t mean” (A, 290). On the other hand, Amber is evicted by Eve, who has been kissed by Amber and received “a new kind of vision” (A, 202), which may be a sign that Eve knows more about Amber than the others. This reading is persuasive also because Eve then begins to behave in a manner that bears a remarkable resemblance to Amber’s.

Amber’s secrecy also contributes to the overall picture of secrecy that the narrative draws. Without Amber, there would be nothing out of the ordinary in the progression or the characters of the novel. Eve’s description of Amber is apt in this regard as well: “But it was like trying to imagine that there was no such thing as a question mark, or trying to forget a tune once you knew it off by heart” (A, 200). *The Accidental* without Amber would be a novel without its most significant question mark, or biggest gap - or greatest secret. Amber is, essentially, a secret stranger: her true identity is never revealed, and the Smarts can only guess why she joined their family in the first place. Amber shows what it is to be an outsider to a secret, whereas reading the Smarts offers a glimpse of being insider to a secret. It is as if Amber’s secrecy, the overall gappiness or mysteriousness of the character, brought altogether another level to the novel, contrasting the mimetic Smarts and their familiar-feeling world. This is one of the ways in which Ali Smith definitely is both a modern and a postmodern writer. Amber is a character without closure. Her secrecy continues and even strengthens at the very end of the novel, when the Smarts are, months after last meeting her, still wondering who she was, and when Amber gets the final word: “I’m everything you ever dreamed” (A, 306). The power of secrecy lies, perhaps, in that secrets can be anything.

Another example of the effect of Amber’s secret can be seen in how the enigmatic character affects the role of the reader. Reading the Smarts is a rather straightforward activity: the characters are mostly written so that there is no significant mystery. Although the Smarts do have secrets, as I have shown, their secrets are never secrets from the reader or the narrator. This is the crucial difference to Amber: her secrets are always secrets from both Smarts and the reader. As her own chapters are narrated by a first person narrator, or, in Phelan’s (2005, xi) term, they fall into the category of “character

narration”, it is Amber herself that controls the flow of information to the reader. The different narrating technique also works as one further way of setting Amber apart from the other characters: there is, as it were, nothing between the character and the reader, no separate narrator who could narrate Amber’s story from the perspective of ironic distance. Amber’s use of paralipsis, or underreporting, to borrow the term from Phelan (2005, 52), in her narration is one of the major ways in which her secrecy is constructed. Reading Amber is problematic because it is hard to draw the line between underreporting and “reliable elliptical narration, that is, telling that leaves a gap that the narrator and the implied author expect their respective audiences to be able to fill” (Phelan 2005, 52). Filling the gap of the secret of Amber is possible to do in at least two ways, as I have argued, but is two ways one too many? In the storyworld of *The Accidental* Amber may look like “the real thing” (A, 256), but the character’s reliability is frequently questioned.

Amber’s foregrounded synthetic and thematic elements make it possible to read the character as moving in a partially different space from the other characters of the storyworld. Because Amber is not just a character but also a narrator of her own story, she has significantly more control to the narrative than the Smarts - although they are brought closer to the reader. The distance between the reader and Amber is greater than that between the Smarts and the reader. It could even be argued that Amber is on a higher level of knowledge than the reader. The character’s god-like qualities such as her mind-reading ability testify to this reading. On the other hand, if Amber is, like her creator Ali Smith says her to be, “complete artifice” with “no self at all” (in Smith, Caroline 2007, 78), then the reader gets full freedom to imagine Amber in any way she likes. It would not be possible, or at least easy, to imagine any of the Smarts as, say, a fictional character inside the novel’s storyworld. For Amber, however, it is not just a doable but even plausible reading.

Reading the character of Amber is, however, not the only way of analysing the overall stand on secrecy that the novel takes. Although she is a major factor in the construction of the novel’s ideas of secrecy, its reasons and effects, there is more to the reading of secrets in *The Accidental* than reading Amber. Therefore, a final analysis of the overall message about secrecy in the novel is needed.

3.3 Secrets revealed?

Secrets are not just present in the storyworld of *The Accidental*. The novel is about secrecy in other ways, too: it leaves a great deal of freedom to the reader to decide how to analyse its secrets, and it seems to say that all stories may be thought of as secrets. Therefore, in this chapter I will read secrets and secrecy as they emerge from *The Accidental*. The question to which I am searching answers is “What does *The Accidental*, as a whole, reveal about secrets?” The purpose of my analysis is not to do an exhaustive reading of all the ways secrets relate to the novel, which would be an unattainable goal in any case. Instead, I would like to briefly explore the scope of the discussion on secrets as it is related to *The Accidental*.

Secrecy is one of the most central themes of the novel. It is discussed through all the main characters, as I have shown earlier in this chapter. By discussing secret-keeping and sharing the novel also discusses what it is to be human: to want to keep some things private and yet to feel curiosity toward the unknown. In *The Accidental*, secrecy is seen from both sides: secrecy “may accompany the most innocent as well as the most lethal acts”, and keeping secrets is likewise “needed for human survival, yet it enhances every form of abuse” (Bok 1984, xv). In the Smarts’ narratives this duality is beautifully shown, although it arguably culminates in the character of Amber who can be read as embodying the best and worst of secrecy.

Secrecy is shown to be far from simple in *The Accidental*. The novel problematizes especially the idea of secret-keeping as something controllable. All the Smarts fall into sharing their secrets, although Eve’s confession is by no means complete. The fact that Amber is able to find out about or even guess the Smarts’ secrets shows how vulnerable secrets are, and testifies to the power of the need to disclose one’s secrets. Furthermore, even the enigmatic Amber is not able to stay as a complete mystery to the reader of the novel - although there is no closure for the character, it is entirely possible for the reader to decide who the character is and what is her meaning in the whole of the novel. In addition, it is interesting to note what the novel seems to be saying about the effects of secret-keeping. They can be quite opposite to what one would think. For these reasons, I

cannot accept Calinescu's (1993, 256) view of the importance of secrecy in "a first involved reading of a work of fiction - a reading that takes the form of a game of make-believe" as "relevant insofar as the text makes the reader a participant in a situation of imaginary gossip, in which he or she becomes privy to the characters' "secrets"".

Although it is true that a rereading typically reveals more of the secrets of a narrative, it is too condescending to claim that reading characters' secrets is a form of gossip. At the very least in the case of *The Accidental*, even the first reading of the narrative shows how much more secrets are about than gossip.

Secrets in narratives may be understood to mean various phenomena. For instance, when the narrator keeps too many secrets, we may label her an unreliable narrator. Phelan (2006, 322-323) structures unreliable narration more elaborately by arguing that narrators can be unreliable in three ways: as reporters, as interpreters and as evaluators. Further, he claims, "they can be unreliable either by offering distorted reports, interpretations, and evaluations or by underperforming their functions" (ibid., 322). Secrecy is related to the second type of unreliability, as underperforming means that narrators are "reporting less than they observe; offering only partially correct interpretations of what they report; stopping too soon in their evaluations" (ibid., 322-323). Another example of secrecy in narratives is gappiness, as I have discussed: if there are too many gaps in the narrative, readers may find the text too incoherent and unable to catch their interest. On the other hand, if there are too few secrets in the narrative, the story is highly likely to be seen as foreseeable and thus not worth reading, barring genre fiction, for instance. Thus the extent to which readers expect narratives to be secret varies. Also the kinds of secrets readers are looking for differ: the readers of murder mysteries are keen on guessing the motives and identity of the criminal, whereas readers of experimental literature expect to encounter a different kind of unknown. Therefore it can be argued that the concept of secrecy can also be fruitfully used in mapping reading and reader response.

Earlier definitions of secrets in narratives have been offered by Calinescu (1993) and Kermode (1981). Calinescu's view of secrets in narratives underlines the role of the author: he sees the "deeper" secrets of the narrative (those that we cannot find on a first reading) as the author's intentional messages to the readers. Kermode, on the other hand, understands secrets as being "at odds with sequence" (1981, 83). My understanding of secrets in narratives is wider than the two definitions, partly due to reading *The*

Accidental so closely. Secrets exist, I believe, on multiple levels, not all of them controlled by the author. When a novel or another kind of narrative thematizes secrecy in the way *The Accidental* does, secrets can be understood as characters' secrets, narrator's secrets, author's secrets, structural secrets and secrets as experienced by the reader of the narrative. As Phelan (1996, 120) indisputably puts it: "To narrate is to tell secrets; to read narrative is to share in them."

There is also something at least close to secrecy in the way narratives begin and end. It could be compared to switching light on at the beginning of the narrative, and then switching it off again on the last page. Both before and after a narrative there is something unknown. Of course, beginnings and endings are very different, and sometimes they are written in such a way as to say that the narrative is all there is, and the reader should not waste time thinking about the secrecy of it all. However, this is certainly not the case in *The Accidental*, as it is not the case in so many postmodern novels. The structure of the novel seems to highlight the arbitrariness of beginnings and endings, and thus also conveys the idea that how something begins or ends is actually a secret, something quite unreachable. I would thus agree with the narrative theorists of beginning claiming that "all beginnings are somehow arbitrary, fabricated or illusory" (Richardson 2008, 79). Moreover, I think that all beginnings are, to an extent, secrets.

The Accidental also discusses secrets as related to the power of stories. Reading fiction, or analysing novels, can be thought of as a process of trying to reveal the secrets of the narrative. Unless the reader is willing and able to devote time and attention to the story it may not reveal its secrets. This resembles Calinescu's (1993) argument on rereading; the difference is that whereas Calinescu believes that reading for the secret happens on the second reading, I think that already the first reading may involve reading for the secret. Of course, readings and readers differ in the kind of secrets they focus on. In any case, reading is typically considered as a necessary act in order to become one of those who know the secrets of a particular narrative. "The logic of a novel is in a way analogous to the logic of disclosing secrets", Calinescu (1993, 239) agrees.

If complexity and ambiguity of secrecy is what *The Accidental* reveals, there are many things the novel hides from its readers, too. Toker (1993, 5) provides an interesting way

of thinking about this issue: she argues that it can be thought of as “not in the presumed inadequacy of the mimetic model provided by the text but in the suppression of information concerning the model itself, the fictional world whose spatial and causal-temporal relationships constitute the so-called *fabula* of a novel”. Furthermore, she argues that “gaps in the *fabula* information open upon mirrors that the novels hold up to the audience” (ibid.). These gaps in the *fabula* information, or the story of *The Accidental*, include the mystery robbery of the Smarts’ London home. It is interesting, however, how burglars are thought of by various characters already at the beginning of the narrative; by Astrid: “It is the moment before burglars walk in through the garden and just help themselves” (A, 29), by Michael: “Nowhere’s safe these days. Not even out here in the middle of nowhere. Thieves everywhere.” (A, 67), and by Eve: “That happy child version of Magnus had been stolen, by thieves maybe” (A, 90). These occasions are too many to be completely accidental: it seems plausible that the idea of robbery is put to the narrative so that it germinates in the reader’s mind.

Secrets are central to Ali Smith’s writing, as can be seen not only in *The Accidental*, but also *There but for the*. Both novels feature an enigmatic stranger at the centre of the narrative, the identity of whom remains a secret for the other characters and readers alike. Thus the secret stranger seems to be, for Smith, also a way of bringing readers and protagonists closer together. Another strong tendency in her work is that not everything is explained. This shows, in addition to the secret of Amber, in her latest work, *Artful* (2013), in which a dead lover comes, inexplicably, back to where she used to live. Secrecy is something that the author values: she finds that the author’s personality may come in the way of reading, even as it is “the least interesting thing about what we’re doing if we’re writing” (Higginbotham 2012). Author’s privacy and the resulting mystery are thus seen by Smith as freeing the reader from possible prejudice towards the story - to be able to remain open to the story.

Secrecy cannot be fully understood without ethics. As Phelan (1996, 120) summarizes it:

Secrets may be about matters honourable, shameful, or indifferent, may be revelations of virtue, vice, or mediocrity, but, regardless of their content, secrets always have some ethical valence. Furthermore, the keeping or telling of secrets also always has an ethical dimension. We keep or tell secrets to inform or mislead, to titillate or ingratiate, to submit or dominate, repel or seduce, protect or hurt.

Reading the secrets of *The Accidental* cannot be properly done, then, without reading the narrative's ethics, too. Therefore, in the following chapter, the focus will shift to analysing the ethical issues and questions related to the secrets discussed in this chapter, along with the ethical stances that the different characters take.

4. Ethics in *The Accidental*

The secrets and secrecy analysed in the previous chapter are deeply intertwined with ethics. Therefore, in this chapter the analysis will focus on the ethics that both the characters and the novel can be read as practising. I will first read the ethics of the members of the Smart family, discussing the ethical problems present in each of their lives. I will then move on to discuss the ethics of Amber, the multifaceted catalyst character. The essential differences between Amber and other characters are taken into account by applying different theoretical ideas for the analysis of Amber and the Smarts: rhetorical ethics for analysing the Smarts' ethics, and ethics of alterity for Amber. Finally, I will focus on revealing the ethics of *The Accidental*, discussing the narrative ethics of the novel as a whole.

4.1 The ethics of the Smarts

The study of rhetorical ethics in narratives, as developed by James Phelan, provides some useful tools for analysing the ethics of the Smarts in *The Accidental*. This is because his approach to narrative analysis is rather adaptable: he argues that “The individual elements of narrative need to be considered in themselves in order for us to understand their complex potential for participating in the rhetorical transaction of narrative, including the inculcation of ideology” (Phelan 1989, 145). Applying ready-made ethical categories to Ali Smith's work would seem to miss what is unique in it, which is why Phelan's approach of careful examination of different aspects of the narrative is well-suited for analysing it.

Two of Phelan's (2007) key concepts are judgements and progressions. Judgements refer to readers' judgements about characters, narrators and authors that "are crucial to our experience - and understanding - of narrative form" (2007, 3). As for progression, the term is used to refer to plot. Even though plot can be argued to be problematized in *The Accidental*, by highlighting the artificiality of narratives as simply beginnings, middles and endings, for the purposes of my analysis I mainly refer to judgments. In this chapter, I will focus on analysing the ethics of told, as Phelan defines it: ethics of character-character relations (2007, 11). Limiting my analysis inside the storyworld in this chapter also means that I will be mainly attending to the mimetic component of the Smarts; that is, reading them as if they were real people. I will focus on the progression of events in the narratives of each of the Smarts, but also unavoidably refer to the progression of audience responses to those events, as I have a double role as a reader: both observing and judging the characters' actions and judgments in order to map who they are, ethically speaking.

4.1.1 Astrid: ethics of responsibility

The most pressing ethical issue in Astrid's narrative is bullying, but Astrid's silence on a variety of issues that are important in her life also leads to problematic ethical situations. As discussed in the third chapter, Astrid does not share her thoughts on her missing father or on being bullied with anyone else except Amber, who does not seem to respond to her confessions. The consequences of Astrid's silences include imagined violence and an alliance with her bullies. Thus keeping silent about a secret is in no way simple: it can have multiple, unpredicted consequences. This is one of the ways in which Ali Smith's writing in *The Accidental* works along Phelan's model (2007, 52): guiding the audience towards making ethical judgments about the characters' actions and realising the complexity of that process.

Astrid's helplessness in front of her bullies, and perhaps also the distress of having to keep it a secret shows in the beginning of her narrative. She fantasizes about being inside a hazelnut: "It is completely safe. Nobody else can get inside it" (A, 13). Total isolation from others is seen by Astrid as safe. However, the fantasy crumbles when she "begins to

worry that Lorna Rose and Zelda Howe and Rebecca [--] would think she was even more laughable and a mental case” (A, 13). At this point in her narrative, Astrid is not yet ready to tell: she believes that the only way to make someone understand is showing. The pain of being bullied thus becomes worse because of Astrid’s inability to tell anyone about it. At this point, Astrid is simply afraid.

The agony of being all alone shows in the dream that follows immediately from the memory. As if a dark mirror image of herself, Astrid encounters a terrifying man at the door of their home: “He has no face. He has no nose, no eyes, nothing, just blank skin. Astrid is terrified. Her mother will be furious with her. It is her fault that he is here. You can’t come in, she tries to tell him, but she has no breath. We’re not here, she breathes. We’re on holiday” (A, 14). Astrid does not have a voice and she can only barely breathe: she is at the mercy of the monstrous man. His voice drowns everything else out: “A mouth appears in the skin and a great noise roars out of it like she is standing too close to an aeroplane. It forces the door back” (A, 14-15). The faceless man represents Astrid’s fears that she cannot control: the fears force themselves into the house.

As Astrid gradually gains more self-confidence with the help of Amber, her fantasies become more assertive, too. Telling Amber about the bullying and about her father has made it possible for her to shift the responsibility of dealing with the sore issues in her life to Amber. Thus when Amber announces that she has “sorted something out” for Astrid (A, 132), Astrid imagines that Amber has resolved her bullying problem by revenging the girls for her. The imagined Amber “goes to Zelda Howe’s house and rings the bell and someone comes to the door and it is actually Zelda Howe and Amber slaps her hard across the face” (A, 133). Astrid’s violent fantasy continues with Amber attacking the other girl: “Then she goes to Rebecca, who is watching with her mouth open, and she gets hold of either side of the swing chair and pushes it hard backwards so that Rebecca falls out of it on the lawn” (A, 133). As Ulrike Tancke (2013, 83) notes, all signs of the narrated being Astrid’s fantasy are dropped by the end of the scene. This makes it possible to read Amber as actually performing the revenge in the storyworld. If one reads Amber as attacking the girls, the character’s sinister, morally dubious element becomes even more apparent. Of course, this affects the reading of Astrid, too: is wishing bad things to happen for others just as bad as doing them?

The revenge situation ends with Amber leaving the house in order to make another of Astrid's unspoken wishes true: to find her father. It is easy for Amber to find out who Astrid's father is: "Then Amber goes to the research place where you can find out where people are for other people who need to know. She says to the lady behind the counter, I need to trace the whereabouts of, and then she writes down his name on the form" (A, 134). Astrid's naivety shows in her confidence in the smoothness of the operation: "She disappears through the back where the computers are which have all the details on them of everybody, like where they are in the world and what is it they're doing there" (A, 134). However, she cannot imagine this encounter until the end: in her mind, the lady working at the "research place" never comes back with the news of her father's identity. Astrid thus recognizes the fact that her two ethical issues are different in nature: the bullying problem is something that can be solved, whereas her missing father may remain forever missing. Along the same lines, Astrid's narrative suggests to the audience that some deeds that can be considered unethical may never be resolved. Sometimes one simply has to learn to live with someone having done wrong to one.

The fact that Astrid imagines Amber to solve her two issues shows that she believes that Amber has special power and capabilities. However, the Amber fantasies can also be read as a sign of Astrid's insecurity: she is not ready to face the consequences of trying to solve her ethical problems. Astrid's concern for the presumably dead animal she has poked with a stick and filmed (A, 17) shows that she is not violent by nature. Nevertheless, she does imagine Amber using both physical and psychical violence against her bullies. The consequences of this, ethical or other, are left unnarrated, which further complicates the understanding of the scene as either something that happened or something that did not happen at all. Another ethically significant issue left unnarrated is the consequences of Astrid's silence for the other possible targets of bullying. Because Astrid does not expose the bullies to anyone at school, nobody stops them from bullying someone else when she is gone. Perhaps this is not seen as Astrid's responsibility. Another way of reading this is to label it as unnarratable, something that is not interesting enough to be told, as Gerald Prince defines the term according to Marttinen (2012, 45).

In the final part of the novel, Astrid has grown to understand the power that she can have. She no longer imagines someone else to revenge her wrongdoers. Instead, she imagines an asteroid destroying the Earth, and somehow the asteroid is connected to her: "Astrid is

two vowels short of an asteroid” (A, 215). She “is not afraid to imagine the end” (A, 216); perhaps she could now imagine the ends of her earlier imagined stories? Astrid is beginning to see possibilities: “There are more than 1,000,000 asteroids, and those are only the ones that scientists and astronomers actually know about. There could easily be loads more. Id est.” (A, 220) There could easily be “loads more” to who Astrid is, too. Ethically reading, this may refer to the possibility to do both good and bad. The reader may judge Astrid’s imaginations as either something menacing or her personal empowerment.

One way in which Astrid has changed because of what she experienced with Amber is that she has learnt to accept that her father is gone:

Also, the astonishing thing is, she doesn’t need her father’s letters any more. They weren’t proof of anything really. It doesn’t matter that they’re gone. In fact it is a relief not to always have to be thinking about them or wondering what the story is or was. Her father could be anything, and anywhere, is what Amber said. Afraid or imagine. (A, 232)

Instead of being afraid of having lost her father and never getting to know the real reason why, or what kind of a person he was, Astrid now feels free to imagine the story of her father herself. What Astrid has realised is that she had no power over her father leaving his family. Thus recognizing one’s powerlessness can also be a liberating experience. When someone does you wrong, it may be better not to fight against the inevitable - especially afterwards, when it cannot be changed anyway. Astrid finds her consolation in imagination, which testifies to the power of imagination and storytelling.

One of Amber’s lessons that Astrid really seems to have internalized is that seeing is more important than proving:

She can remember exactly what it felt like to stand in front of, for example, the local high spirits, making them feel bad because someone had their eye on them, and this is the thing to remember, not what their faces or their clothes were like or where they were standing or how many of them there were. Nobody is ever going to ask her to prove which people in the village they were; that’s someone else’s responsibility, that’s for someone else to do. Her responsibility is different. It is about actually seeing, being there. (A, 226-227)

Astrid has thus found her ethical responsibility: it is not giving a testimony or proof, but simply seeing, keeping her eyes open to unethical behaviour. It is brave, for Astrid, to just

look instead of trying to prove. On the other hand, this development in the character may be seen as ethical regression: now Astrid not only stays silent about being a victim but also about other ethical issues. It is revealed in Eve's ending, however, that Astrid is working on "an alternative school newspaper or something. She's writing a manifesto for it" (A, 290-291). This may be a sign of Astrid taking action to be responsible by writing about the problems that she can see.

The fact that Astrid, in her narrative at the end, not only imagines that her bullies are hurt by Amber, but conjures the whole world on fire shows that her anger has changed. Now Astrid is clearly more infuriated at her mother: "Her mother has been gone now for three weeks and three days. It is not fixed, the date of her coming back. It is a round the world kind of thing. It is apparently very necessary. Astrid thinks it is deeply irresponsible" (A, 218). The irresponsibility is made worse, of course, by the fact that Astrid's mother is the second of her biological parents to have left for an unknown period of time. Astrid's new-found idea of responsibility thus contradicts her mother's new-found independence: "It is like the opposite of actually being there. It is substandard parenting. It will have consequences. It is substandard responsibility" (A, 227). Astrid, adolescently, already has a plan to annoy her mother when she comes back: she will go out with the boy who works in Dixons. Astrid knows that it "will really annoy her mother, who has a weird thing about Astrid never growing up to marry a shop assistant" (A, 229). In other words, Astrid will try to annoy her mother by making her afraid of Astrid marrying someone like Adam. She recognizes that her mother is not at peace with who Adam was and what he did, and rather pitilessly plans to use it against her. Thus Astrid is ready for revenge, at least in her mind, when the object of revenge is actually on the other side of the world.

It is interesting to note, however, that Astrid's responsibility is actually a variation of what her mother always taught her. When Astrid is trying to convince herself of the necessity of poking and filming a dead animal, she thinks back to Eve's words: "it is important to look closely at things, especially difficult things" (A, 18). Looking, to Astrid, first meant filming. After encountering Amber, though, the meaning of looking changed into seeing and being there. Looking is how Astrid manages to solve her bullying problem, though: when "Lorna Rose dared to give her the you're a weirdo look", Astrid walks to Lorna's desk in the middle of the class and "stood in front of her desk looking at her" (A, 231). Her only words to Lorna are "I'm watching you" (A, 231). Astrid cleverly

shifts the responsibility of the situation to Lorna by telling the teacher “I don’t mind telling everybody right now, Miss, unless Lorna would rather we kept it private” (A, 231). Lorna cannot but keep the bullying private, and thus Astrid forces Lorna to seal the bullying as being a secret, their shared, private issue. By making her bully vulnerable in front of the rest of the class, Astrid manages to become as powerful as she is. They are now allied: it is not just Astrid who has to keep the secret, but her bullies too.

Astrid’s philosophy, afraid or imagine, shows her new understanding of things as potentially both good and bad. She chooses red colour to symbolize Amber: “She changed the word amber in her head to the word red” (A, 223). Red becomes a part of her, first by being the new dominant colour of her belongings, then by being included in her name as she sees it: “Astred” (A, 223). For the first time, Astrid’s name is not a compromise between her two fathers, the missing biological father or the stepfather, but her own. At the end of her narrative, Astrid can understand that there are two meanings to red, too: “Red sky at night, shepherd’s delight. Red sky in the morning, shepherd’s warning” (A, 233). Astrid is a counterpart for Eve: daughter is the red dawn predicting storms, mother is the evening. Red sky, however, does not just relate to Astrid: red is Amber’s colour, too. Astrid’s thoughts about shepherds and lambs thus refer to Amber as a shepherd for the Smart flock. Amber’s role is to “look after the sheep, lying under trees playing their pan pipes in the summer with the sheep all grazing round them and choosing which of their flock get butchered and which don’t” (A, 233). Amber can also be read as a shepherd in the religious way because the element of belief is really important with her.

Astrid’s ethics thus remain ambiguous. A good example of this is in the last pages focalized through Astrid when she sees the end as the “beginning of everything, the beginning of the century and it is definitely Astrid’s century” (A, 234). The element of imagination is strongly present as Astrid’s story as an asteroid is narrated: “wherever her mother is in the world, she could wake up and look out of her hotel room window like Astrid is looking out of her window right now” (A, 234). It is an example of disnarrated, similar to parts of narrative that Marttinen (2012) analyses with the help of Prince’s (1992) definition of the disnarrated as the narration of something that does not actually happen in the storyworld and does not have to be narrated. Astrid’s disnarrated has a certain vindictiveness in it:

She will look out of her window and she will maybe see the moment before it smashes a great big hole 10 km wide in front of her and blows all the doorknobs off the doors [--] and in that moment her mother will think to herself that what she's doing is stupid, that all along she should have been watching out, and all along she should have been somewhere else, not there. (A, 234)

The vindictive fantasy in which Astrid personifies herself as a deadly asteroid gains further power by the fact that the sky is not warningly red only in the disnarrated but also in the narrated: “the river is just the same old grey water with the sky dawning red above it, red all over the city of London, red through the window of Astrid's room” (A, 235).

4.1.2 Magnus: ethics of relation

The most important ethical problematic of Magnus's narrative relates to the disastrous Photoshop incident discussed in more detail in the third chapter. In Magnus's mind, the suicide of the attractive schoolgirl leads to issues of death and sexuality becoming intertwined. Magnus's strategy of dealing with his most pressing ethical issue, his perceived guilt of Catherine's suicide, resembles his sister's: he keeps the secret to himself. The relationship with Amber further complicates the connections between violence and sexuality. Magnus's narrative discusses the loss of innocence and the struggle to regain a sense of self, along with questions of responsibility and regret.

Even though Magnus cannot possibly know what made Catherine kill herself, he is convinced that he was “part of the equation” (A, 36). His guilt originates in Magnus seeing himself as the person who made it all possible: “He was the one who pushed the door open. (--) It was a pretty easy procedure. But they were both computer-stupid. They couldn't have done it if he hadn't shown them” (A, 36-37). Magnus lives in the scientific world of explainable causes and effects, and applies this pattern to the tragedy as well: “It is caused by causal effects. He has caused it. He has changed the way the world is” (A, 41). This makes Magnus responsible for Catherine's death. What makes his conscience even worse is the fact that he has not been caught.

First Magnus tries to push the pain caused by guilt outside his body by splitting his identity into two: the unreal Hologram Boy before what happened to Catherine and the

bad Magnus after. His self-image is changed: “He was bad all along though he didn’t know it” (A, 39). Magnus begins to believe that “Maybe everything there is is a kind of pretending” (A, 46). Later on, he begins to talk about it as seeing darkness: “It keeps getting dark when it’s light, he says. I mean, when it’s not meant to be dark” (A, 144). Thus Magnus already sees the problem outside himself, not as his personal wickedness but as something bad that has happened.

Magnus is convinced that by doing wrong, he not only caused suffering but also changed himself. The change is not merely psychological, but even physical: “He is foul. He changed himself when he changed her. He snapped his own head off without even knowing” (A, 40). The convergence of the bodies of Magnus and Catherine can also be seen elsewhere in the narrative. It is related to Magnus’s death wish, too: “She is lucky. She is dead. She can’t feel anything. He can’t feel anything either. But he isn’t dead” (A, 44). It reaches its extreme in Magnus’s suicide attempt in the bathroom of the holiday home, mimicking Catherine’s actual suicide. In other words, Magnus tries to comply with the eye for eye mentality, punishing himself because he has not received a punishment from elsewhere.

The core of the ethical issue, for Magnus, is that he played a role in Catherine’s death. Exactly how important a role is difficult to say, but Magnus, nevertheless, feels that he caused it. The pain of feeling guilty makes him try to isolate from others. The biggest ethical insight that Magnus gains in his narrative brings him back in touch with his family. Magnus realises that not just he, but everyone is broken:

His mother, broken. Michael, broken. Magnus’s father, his real father, so broken a piece of the shape of things that, say he were walking past Magnus, his son, sitting in the corroded bus shelter of this village right now, Magnus wouldn’t recognize him. He wouldn’t recognize Magnus. Everyone is broken. (A, 148)

The inability to recognize loved ones is thus a part of being broken. Magnus thinks of people as pieces of a puzzle, thus recognising the need for people to stay together in order for the picture to make sense. Being broken can be read to refer to being separate from others, being alone. Magnus recognizes this, too: “Everybody at this table is in broken pieces which won’t go together, pieces which are nothing to do with each other, like they all come from different jigsaws, all muddled together into the one box by some assistant who couldn’t care less in a charity shop” (A, 138). In charity shops, the items may look

good but they are typically used and abandoned by somebody. Thus Magnus's view of his family is rather grim.

The agony of knowing something terrible is also a part of being broken. What broke Magnus is, in effect, the knowledge that his actions contributed to the death of Catherine. Knowing is thus a source of acute pain, not of joy as it used to be for Magnus:

There are things that can't be said because it is hard to have to know them. There are things you can't get away from after you know them. It is very complicated to know anything. It is like his mother obsessed by the foul things that have happened to people; all those books about the Holocaust she's got piled up in her study at home. Because can you ever be all right again? Can you ever not know again? (A, 151)

Because of his mother's work, Magnus is aware that knowing terrible things can become an obsession. However, not knowing something can also be a way of being broken: "All the people who know in the world, all the people who don't know in the world. It's all a kind of broken, the knowing, the not-knowing" (A, 149). Thus brokenness seems to be an inescapable part of being human.

Not knowing things one knows appears to be very difficult, if not impossible. Amber becomes Magnus's answer to this problem. He tries to regain his innocence by doing something opposite to innocent with her:

Can you ever be made innocent again? Because up in the attic with Amber, or under the old wooden roof of the church, fast-breathing the dusty air - held, made, straightened out then curved by her - Magnus cannot believe how all right, how clean again it is possible to feel even after everything awful he knows about himself, even though supposedly nothing about what Amber is doing or he is doing, or they are doing together, is innocent in any way. In fact, the opposite is true. (A, 152)

As Tancke (2013, 81) argues, Amber can be read to rescue Magnus from the brink of suicide and introduce meaningful sexuality to him, thus breaking the vicious connection between death and sexuality that Magnus has made. However, Tancke (2013, 82) also notes that Amber and Magnus's relationship "hints at the violent potential inherent in sexuality and desire". The regaining of innocence is thus only partial, or maybe even just an illusion.

Once Magnus is over being totally numb, he becomes extremely aware of the potential danger in letting his feelings be known:

From nowhere Magnus is overcome with love for his mother, for his sister watching sleepily from the sofa, for Michael at the table rustling the paper. He even loves Michael. Michael's all right. At the very same moment Magnus understands that if he ever let it be known that he feels anything at all, things will fly apart, the whole room will disintegrate, as if detonated. (A, 151)

Magnus is not just scared about what how his feelings might affect his family, but also about feeling something. Being scared of letting others know anything about him, even the positive things, reveals that Magnus is deeply concerned about the consequences of his feelings. This can be read as an exaggeration of responsibility.

Magnus's heavy self-judgment puts the reader into an interesting position. Should one join Magnus in hating him for what he has stupidly done, or should one read with more empathy, thinking that the consequences of the ill-judged practical joke were not to be anticipated? Phelan (2005, 23) argues that when we think about characters in the storyworld, we are not just judging their actions but also their judgements. What should one then think about the fact that Magnus does not seem to blame the other two boys who took part in the prank? The problem is that "Nobody will know Magnus is anything to do with them. They are known as bad. He is known as good" (A, 43). When Anton, one of the other two boys who participated in the photoshopping, says to Magnus that all girls at school look the same, "like they're off porn sites" (A, 51), Magnus is not angry but "pleased someone like Anton had singled him out to tell him something like that in his ear" (A, 50). Even when Anton is not mentioned in the end, when he is "completely getting away with it" (A, 244), Magnus is not judgemental.

Only blaming oneself can be thought very noble, but not recognizing the role of the others to blame seems unwise. However, with Jake, the third boy responsible for the prank, Magnus's lack of blame is understandable. This is because Jake is the boy who finally told about it to Catherine's mother, because he had had a crush on Catherine. Magnus thus draws the conclusion that it "was Jake Strothers that did it. It was love" (A, 244). He empathetically imagines Jake "crying so much that his tears would fall" (A, 247) while the kind mother comforts him, or, in an alternative disnarrated scenario, how Catherine's

mother “was crazy and hurt and angry” and “threw everything within reach at him” (A, 247).

Magnus is not happy with how “the matter” (A, 236), as the school calls it, ends:

The end result = they’ve got away with it.
The end result = nobody really wants to know. (A, 236)

When Michael advises Magnus to forget the matter and let it go, Magnus does not seem to be convinced:

He can let it go, as if it is a toy balloon filled with helium and he has been holding on to it by a piece of string, with the kind of stubbornness a small child has, and now he can open his hand and it’ll float off upwards [--] until he can hardly make it out any more. He can forget it. A simple act of subtraction. Him minus it. (A, 238-239)

Magnus’s guilt is definitely not a toy balloon, but this extract shows how laughable he thinks of the adults’ attitude of forgetting the matter without really listening to what happened. The narrator thus judges Magnus as ethically more mature and responsible than the adults. What Magnus is missing is punishment: when Astrid calls him “a killer hornet from hell”, he thinks that it is good because it “implied that for doing the wrong thing he could be heated to death by the righteous exact calculation of innocent bees” (A, 242). In other words, Magnus would like his guilt to be dealt with mathematically, so that someone would calculate exactly what kind of a punishment he deserves.

Patrick O’Donnell (2013, 99) suggests that Amber helps Magnus to get over his anxiety caused by the unresolved ethical dilemma by bringing “a recognition of the element and paradoxes of time and space that both acculturates and particularizes his sense of reality, enabling a movement beyond the bondage to guilt toward a sense of connection and worldly futurity”. I join O’Donnell in arguing that Magnus moves towards a new sense of connection in his ending, but I see the sense of connection also as the source of his pain: being connected to Catherine’s suicide is what makes Magnus miserable in the first place. I thus frame Magnus’s narrative as a narrative of the ethics of relation from beginning to end.

The change in Magnus’s worldview can be seen in the way he looks at trees, the symbol of life, and for Smith, books (see *Artful*), in the beginning and towards the end. Just

before he goes to the bathroom in order to hang himself he walks outside thinking that “Leaves are pointless. Trees are pointless. They sustain the lives of insects which die almost as soon as they’re born” (A, 48). On his trip to the special library, on the other hand, Magnus looks at another tree:

Its leaves, Magnus can note to himself now, are connected to its twigs are connected to its branches are connected to its bigger branches are connected to its trunk and its trunk to its roots and its roots to the ground. [--] and if there’s a past and a present then there’s probably (and definitely possibly) a future, and the notion of a future and Magnus and all. (A, 156-157)

These two extracts show how Magnus starts to see connections as positive, life-affirming instead of threatening and meaningless.

Amber plays a role in the development of Magnus’s ethics, too. By not asking him questions or judging him she gives him space to recover. Also, Amber keeps talking about Magnus as someone who is good. She repeatedly calls him St Magnus. This may be a reference to Saint Magnus, a legend that is known in Scotland. St Magnus of the legend is known by “his meekness and pacifism” which “leads to chaos in a culture that demands firm, unified government by the most powerful” (Elphinstone 2006, 112). Again, for those who know the legend, Amber’s nickname for Magnus can be read in two ways: as an encouraging comment on the potential to be good that Magnus has or as secret mocking of his personality and the kind of troubles it may lead him to.

‘And’ becomes Magnus’s philosophy as he reads about his saint namesake: “he is totally fascinated by a single word. The word is: and. (-- It is so simple, so crucial a word” (A, 154-155). He sees and as “a little bullet of oxygen” (A, 155); it is also the noise he and Amber make when they make love:

the noise that he hadn’t realized was even a word, the same word breathed out and in, over and over:
and
and
and (A, 158)

At the library, Magnus who understands the word and as if for the first time “is suddenly high as a kite, breathing again with the whole of his lungs as if he’s been for a long time cramped in a small and dark and suffocating space not big enough for the proper recognition of a small word” (A, 155-156). Thus letting go is not what finally frees him, it

is acknowledging that everything is connected, and that even after being bad, he can be good.

4.1.3 Michael: ethics of passion

Michael's ethical issue is that he keeps on being unfaithful to his wife with his university students. What makes this ethically even more problematic is that the unfairness of the cheating does not bother him: Michael does not reflect on the righteousness of his actions. Michael is a character who seems incapable of judging his own actions. In this respect Michael is the exact opposite of the guilt-ridden Magnus. Michael becomes aware of the ethically problematic nature of love and desire only when he has a one-sided infatuation for Amber and has to disappoint bitterly as she completely neglects him.

Michael can be read as a hedonist, someone who thinks that life is all about enjoyment and fulfilling one's desires no matter what. The way he thinks about a moth reveals a great deal about his character and his ethical position: "Moths couldn't help it, *like a moth to a*, they were genetically programmed to be attracted by light, of course they saw all light as love-light" (A, 59). Parallels can be drawn between the moth and Michael. Hedonism entails very little consideration of responsibilities, which is an apt description for Michael. Another comparison that he draws of himself already on the first pages of his narrative is a wine glass, a suitable symbol for a hedonist: "If he were this wine glass there would be hairline cracks holding him together, running their live little electrical connections all over him. Oh. To be filled with goodness then shattered by goodness, so beautifully mosaically fragmented by such shocking goodness" (A, 58). Again Michael can be read as the opposite for Magnus; broken by goodness instead of badness.

What is interesting about Michael's character, ethically speaking, is his indifference to the suffering he must cause to his wife. Michael is uncomfortable when cheating on Eve with Philippa, but not because of the idea of cheating her would make him feel bad after all those other times and girls. Instead, Michael egocentrically feels bad because he cannot get the same satisfaction from the sexual act than before. Cheating on Eve, he thinks that it is the girl who cheats him, by not being the way he would have wanted her to be: "It

was a little depressing; he couldn't help but feeling misunderstood, cheated even, as he went in under her dress. He liked to give the little speech about Agape and Eros. He liked to tell the story, how he had admired her in class when she'd said ' "' (A, 69). The fact that Philippa takes care of bringing her own condoms and putting one on Michael makes him feel "weak, as if hospitalized" (A, 70). Michael has a certain ritual that he wants to go through every time he commits adultery, and not being able to follow it means that he loses the sense of control and some of the pleasure.

Even when Michael falls in love, the experience is self-centred: "He had seen the light. He was the light. He had been lit, struck, like a match. He had been enlightened. He was photosynthetic; he had grown green. He was leafy and new. He looked around him and everything he saw shone with light" (A, 77). The almost obsessive use of the pronoun referring to Michael makes the narrator sound ironic. The woman Michael has fallen in love with is not mentioned once in this ecstatic description, not before the end: "She had ignored him the whole time" (A, 77). Instead of there being a sexual encounter similar to the ones Michael has with his students, there is no encounter. Not finding a real connection with anyone, even when he keeps 'beginning' new affairs and 'entering' new women, might be Michael's underlying problem. At least this seems to be what Amber thinks: "You've still got to work it out, what you want and what it is, the real meaning of want" (A, 177).

Thus Michael's view of desire is problematized in the narrative. Continuously finding new objects of desire causes unhappiness for others around him and brings only short-lived pleasure to him, too. An interesting way of reading Michael is to think about desire as either authentic or simulated. This theoretical division is made by Monica Germanà, who, in her article on a play by Ali Smith, tries to "unveil the complex ways in which *The Seer* articulates the conflict between authentic and simulated desire" (2013, 117). Simulated desire refers, in Germanà's article, to consumerism, which is subtly criticized also in *The Accidental*. For Michael, however, it may mean his way of using women like items. This is evident when Michael goes to a supermarket and "did what he always did when he felt down" (A, 175):

checked along the line of working girls
judging them for the likeliest recruit (A, 175).

It is indicative of Michael's philandering as simulated desire that even though the girl "was very sweet", "he felt nothing at all", and even "bad, utterly small" (A, 175). The "utterly small" feeling is one of the very first signs in the narrative that Michael may be regretting what he keeps doing.

Effusive desire seems to be what makes Michael behave in an ethically substandard way. Germanà (2013, 127) makes an interesting analysis of desire:

Though desire may derive from a lack within us, it is through the encounter with the other, the stranger, that we become aware of our longing for the object of our love. Troubling the inside/outside, self/other categorical oppositions, then, the discourse of desire shares the ambiguities of the Freudian uncanny.

For Michael, this seems to be the case: he becomes aware of his constant longing because of Amber, who means a great deal to him even though they never develop a reciprocal relationship. It is interesting, too, that discourse of desire is seen as troubling the inside/outside and self/other oppositions, because these oppositions are also discussed in Michael's narrative. For him, the key is entry: "Entry! It was a wonderful word. The fly in the fly. The boy in the grass. The grass in the boy. The boy deep in the day and the day deep in the boy" (A, 61). Inside and outside, self and other blend together. The experience of falling in love with Amber is described as a kind of entering too: "She had entered him like he was water. Like he was a dictionary and she was a word he hadn't known was in him" (A, 61).

Entering his life without giving him anything and without letting him enter her, Amber is very problematic to Michael. In Michael's words:

But sonnets shouldn't be so damned one-sided.
They implied, at least, dialogue. He found that
no one spoke back [--]
He realized he would never have her. [--]
He turned from sand to glass and then he broke. (A, 167)

The breaking of Michael, who is a man of language, is visualized in the narrative as the breaking of words and form:

eh ? what ? a pieces in man,in a meant
fragments,heart,rags skin instead of a . (A, 169)

This new brokenness develops further already on the following page:

SO BRIGHT the heart opening

with a slam.
A new self b r o k e n took the world -
n o o n e . (A, 171)

Having to deal with unrequited love and simultaneously understanding that the family that he lives in is not really his leaves Michael feeling alone. The loneliness is highlighted by typographical means: the blankness of every second page in Michael's sonnet narrative.

Reading a character like Michael who keeps committing morally base deeds can be an unsettling experience. As Phelan (1989, 137) asks: "If we are made in part by the discourses we experience, what does experiencing this discourse do to us?" This question is especially important when the discourse focuses on repetitive wrongdoings. However, it would be too straightforward and simplistic to assume that reading a narrative like Michael's would make the reader concerned about moral issues related to the ethics of love and desire in any specific way. As Phelan (2007, 13) argues in his fifth thesis on narrative judgments, "*individual readers need to evaluate the ethical standards and purposes of individual narratives, and they are likely to do so in different ways*". Thus reading Michael's narrative is likely to be a different experience for different readers depending on a variety of personal factors. Moreover, Michael does not stay wholly oblivious to his moral misconduct throughout the narrative: the revelation of his secret forces him to undergo some change. Therefore progression also plays a role in ethical judgment (Phelan 2007).

The only sign that Michael recognizes his ethical wrongdoing to his wife before he is caught is given after he has met Amber. Michael is clearly disappointed in his marriage, but it remains unclear whether he sees this disappointment as something that Eve caused or perhaps he himself. However, Michael does have a life-changing ethical insight when he learns that Eve has known about his unfaithfulness for years. When Michael lies to Eve that he knows nothing about Marjory's message about the legal department, Eve simply says "It's all right [--]. I know" (A, 269). Michael is overwhelmed to realize that Eve has known: at a bookshop, months later, he "understands again, like he'd understood now every day since, and every day the understanding came to him as incomprehensibly newly" (A, 269). Eve's kindness is compared to the sky: it "opened above him as big as

the sky” (A, 269). Thus Michael sees Eve’s behaviour as something natural, yet wonderful, but also as something which is unreachable for him, and far too massive to comprehend.

Michael has been scolded about his irresponsible behaviour before, which has not changed him. Marjory from the university tells him: “One girl, we could have written off. One, we could have done something about. Don’t think we didn’t try. And don’t say you weren’t warned, I told you five years ago, four years ago, three years ago, two years ago and last year” (A, 265). The way that Michael sees Marjory’s sermon reveals that he is not likely to change his behaviour because of an angry judgment: “So Michael liked sleeping with girls. Was it a crime? They liked him back. Was it a crime? They were all consenting adults. He was good-looking. They were good-looking, most of them. Was it a crime?” (A, 265). The way Michael keeps asking whether it is a crime shows how little he understands the actual “crime”: the inappropriate relationship between teacher and student, and the way he hurts his wife. The comment that Michael’s former psychiatrist makes may be revealing: she thinks that Michael has a “near-psychotic need, when it comes to self-belief, to refute all guilt”, and reminds him of an Oscar Wilde quote “We are all innocent until we are found out” (A, 268). The fact that the psychiatrist’s comment is put in parenthesis further strengthens the image that Michael keeps his guilt a secret from himself. In any case, it is neither analysis nor lecturing that has an impact on Michael, but surprising kindness.

Even though the revelation of Michael’s secret - and, significantly, the fact that it was not nearly as secret as he thought - does not instantly put him into a state of ethical self-analysis, there are some significant changes in the character. Michael’s progression highlights these changes in his ending: he has not visited bookshops or the faculty, he has not “found a girl attractive for months” (A, 263), and even when he tries to develop a new identity, focusing on “nothing but the definitive, the concrete” (A, 262), he finds that all words are loaded, they “turn into words which could be used against him, even by himself” (A, 262). It remains unclear to what extent Michael’s difficulties actually reflect what has happened between him and Eve, and what happened with Amber. It is evident, though, that Amber’s indifference to him has scarred him considerably: Michael now sees her as someone who has not just stolen all their belongings but also taken his actual heart. He even imagines going to a doctor and that the doctor can find “no heartbeat there at all”

(A, 272). Thus it is also possible to read Michael as deeply regretting what he has done; perceiving himself as heartless. Typically for Michael, someone else is to blame, however: “The pretty young woman has broken him open while he slept, put her hand in and thieved the heart out of him” (A, 270).

Michael’s family seems to be what makes him reconsider his ethics, after all. The fact that Eve has gone to her round-the-world trip forces Michael to try and take care of the children. Both Magnus and Astrid seem to get along with him better than before. In Magnus’s narrative it is told that they even “sat in the kitchen together for a while round the table and had coffee, something they’d never done before” (A, 240). As it turns out, the children take care of Michael. When he comes home after having read about hypothermia, scared that he has it, Magnus and his friend Jake, who spend time together ignoring the command of the school, manage to calm him down. The boys tell him how hypothermia should be treated and give him something to eat. They then enjoy a film together, called “The Lady Vanishes”, which inspires Michael to write a poem sequence of the same name, as Eve finds out when talking with him on the phone. Again, it is kindness, this time “the boys’ instinctual kindness” (A, 280), that moves Michael. Therefore, the best way to make him think ethically is to treat him ethically.

4.1.4 Eve: ethics of authenticity

Eve’s ethical issues relate to authenticity in many ways. She questions her life choices and is questioned by Amber. Her family neglects her, and she is not happy with them. She writes a book series called “Genuine articles”, which are, in fact, far from genuine life stories. The ethics of authenticity is thus the area in which the character of Eve most focuses on. Authenticity and betrayal both relate to the character in many ways: she has been betrayed by both of her husbands and her father, and has led her life partly in self-betrayal. What Eve longs for is authenticity, and her narrative tells the story of how she changes her life in search of it by continuing the period of not writing and leaving her family behind in order to do a solitary journey round the world.

In the beginning of her narrative, Eve thinks over the betrayals she has had to suffer during her life. The first important betrayal is done by her father, who has “his ‘other’ family” in the United States (A, 94). Eve’s mother dies when she is 15, and her father flies in to attend the funeral, disappointing Eve by taking her “for an upmarket dinner in a London restaurant, as if a treat, before he flew back to New York State” (A, 95), and by suggesting that “she might like to spend summers there with the ‘other’ family” (A, 95). Eve’s first husband Adam likewise lets her down when “he announced that he was going to divorce her and marry ‘Sonja’ from ‘Personnel’ at the ‘Alliance’, whom he’d met when he went to set up a ‘joint interest paying current account’ for him and Eve” (A, 95). Eve’s role in the divorce is not discussed, so it could also be argued that Eve blames her ex-husband for something which they were both responsible for; perhaps the relationship was not going to last in any case.

The role of someone who is betrayed is also taken by Eve in her current family of four. She thinks back to

the first time she understood [--] that the wallspace of the office and even the spaces between the bookshelves on the walls were covered with a mosaic of postcards, literally hundreds of them [--] and that probably every one of these postcards was from some girl he’d been fucking (A, 95-96).

Even though the experience is clearly shocking to Eve, she has not told Michael that she knows, as is discussed in the third chapter. By keeping quiet about what she knows she manages to retain a fake status quo. This must be what Eve refers to when she, near to the end of her narrative, realises: “What was happy? What was an ending? She had been refusing real happiness for years and she had been avoiding real endings for just as long, right up to the moment she had opened the front door of her own emptied house” (A, 295). The betrayed Eve has become so much accustomed to her role that she cannot but imagine future betrayals:

Eve had known as she watched, she had known in the photoflash of the moment in which she stood watching and unperceived, that one day Astrid would betray her. She had known in the flash of the moment that Astrid doing the natural thing, simply growing older, was a helpless betrayal in itself. (A, 97-98)

What is significant in Eve’s visualization of the betrayal is that she sees the unavoidable growing up of her child as a betrayal. It seems as if her concept of betrayal has been distorted.

The most recent of the actual betrayals is Michael's continuing adultery, which shows surprisingly little in Eve's narrative. There is plenty of textual evidence of Eve being very much used to being cheated on. She is not surprised to find condoms in his trouser pockets (A, 181), and she knows Michael's type: "*Wasn't she a lot older-looking than his usual?* Curiously, yes, and more salacious-looking, rougher-looking, with her high-cut shorts and her low-cut shabby shirt, certainly more shabby than Michael usually liked" (A, 89). When Eve has just met Amber, and still believes that she is one of Michael's girls, she is ready to let her stay in the house for the night: "She would go in herself after the tenth minute and courteously offer the girl the spare room for the night, to show there was no ill feeling, because there wasn't, was there? and in the morning, with no ill will, the girl would leave" (A, 93). Not having ill will is strangely important to Eve; perhaps it is her strategy of tolerating Michael's behaviour. On the other hand, the question "was there?" discloses the self-betrayal, that there might indeed be some ill will. Eve is, notwithstanding her seemingly nonchalant behaviour, understandably upset with the situation.

One possible way of reading Eve is that she is so much hurt by all the betrayals that she joins in by betraying herself. Thus Eve is read as a helpless victim, someone who is not wholly responsible of her own actions. This reading, however, lacks credibility because of Eve's own attitude: "Her fifteen-year-old self [--] stared back at Eve, steely, disdainful, not-crying. Feeble, she was saying. As if anyone's childhood was an excuse for anything" (A, 95). Eve's mental encounters with her younger self, and the life-like meeting with her dead mother that Eve cannot see as mere dream, are unusual in the otherwise rather realistic storyworld. As Stephen M. Levin analyses (2013, 40), "the encounter with these spectral traces may cause a profound breakdown in one's present reality". Encounters with her former selves and her dead mother demonstrate Eve's unstableness: her self-betrayal causes her to look for answers from spectral presences, persons who are not actually there but exist in her memory.

Especially in Eve's narrative, Ali Smith's writing can be understood to discuss the problematic nature of clearly-defined ethical judgments. The situation resembles the way in which Phelan (2007, 53) analyses Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: "an author might want to move to a kind of meta-ethical position and guide us to the conclusion that no clear and

fixed ethical judgment of a central action is possible". However, the situation of Eve in *The Accidental* is crucially different from Sethe's in Morrison's novel: Eve is, for quite some time, an observer and an object of morally suspect deeds. Eve's process of trying to ignore the wrongdoings that affect her is shown to cause her unhappiness. Not judging is thus seen as unethical in the sense that it seriously damages an individual's sense of what is right - and this is not just the case with Michael, who hurts Eve the most in the present of the narrative, but also with Eve, who does not stand up for her rights. Eve's incapability of judging actions that are admittedly unethical leads her to live a life she is not happy with.

This unhappiness is only slowly realised by Eve. An important moment of insight occurs when she looks carefully at a family photograph taken at the holiday home and realises what it does not show:

Did it show that Michael had come home smelling, yet again, of someone else? Did it show that Magnus was a boy so like his father that Eve almost couldn't bear to sit in the same room with him? Did it show that Astrid was infuriating to Eve, that she deserved to have no father, just as Eve had done most of her life, and was lucky to still have a mother at all? (A, 183-184)

The distance between things as they should be, or how they look like, and things as they are, is a recurrent theme in Eve's life. Even the holiday home is not as idyllic as advertised. Eve's sore knee, the soreness of which Michael has never noticed and Eve herself has forgotten, becomes a symbol of Eve's hidden sorrow and anger, and the poor state of her marriage. It takes a complete stranger, Amber, to take note of it and heal it. It is very telling of Eve as a character that she first insists to Amber that the knee is fine - only to discover that it is not.

Another important area of ethics discussed in Eve's narrative is the ethics of writing. For Eve, who has a career as a writer of "autobiotruefictinterviews" (A, 81), ethics of writing are related to work ethics. This is also an area in which she has to work with questions of authenticity and betrayal. In the early stages of the novel, Eve still believes in her personal philosophy that every question has an answer. Writing about personal histories (partly real, partly imagined) in the format of questions and answers reveals Eve's belief in the rationality of life stories: her characters can explain what and why something happened to them, even if Eve, their creator, cannot do the same. Eve's reactions to the

more personal questions that are actually posed by herself in her head are telling: she clearly has some unanswered questions in her life. As the narrative progresses, Eve begins to question not just some of her life choices but also her writing, which shows in her writer's block.

From the point of view of ethics of writing, the most important ethical question discussed in Eve's narrative in *The Accidental* is the right that one has to tell stories about real people. According to Dominic Head (2013, 107), Eve's writing career is "quintessentially unethical". He argues that

[H]er series of popular fictionalized biographies based on the premise of imagining the afterlives of victims of World War II as if they had not died, has produced inevitable tensions with, and distress for, the families of her subjects. That she is suffering from writer's block at the outset of Smith's novel implies a subconscious guilt that parallels that of her son and her husband. (Head 2013, 107)

Head thus suggests that Eve's writing is unethical because she uses real people as starting points or frames in her fiction, and perhaps also because she does not clearly label her writing as fiction. However, I do not think that this is the main reason for Eve to suffer from writer's block and to have doubts about her writing. It seems to me that Eve is more troubled with the fact that she is not writing about something more urgent: that she is romanticizing the past instead of criticizing what happens now in Iraq and other places where war is fought.

In Eve's self-interview in her beginning, the issue of the unethicalness of her writing is not fully problematized yet:

Don't living relatives have something to say about Smart digging up their dead?
'Usually relatives are delighted. They feel it is very positive attention,' says Smart.
'I always make it clear that Genuine Articles are first and foremost fictionalization. But fiction has the unique power of revealing something true.' (A, 82)

Eve thus believes that she has good motives: she aims at revealing truths. Ethically speaking, however, Eve's writings cause controversy because the general public might not be able to figure out where the real person ends and the fictional one begins. As the novel progresses, the negative reactions of the relatives of Eve's characters become stronger. Near the end of the novel, Eve is preparing herself to attend a press conference "about the Families Against the Thievery of Relatives' Authenticity group", thinking that

her strategy is to ask questions such as “*Who is to say what authenticity is? [--] Who is to say that my versions, my stories of these individuals’ afterlives, are less true than anyone else’s?*” (A, 286). What Eve does not talk about is that her stories have publicity and thus power.

Eve is not completely unaware of another problem in the ethics of her writing, as can be seen in her direct citation of a bad review of the latest *Genuine*: “Smart’s *Genuine* Articles are a prime example of our shameful attraction to anything that lets us feel both fake-guilty and morally justified. No more of this murky self-indulgence. We need stories about now, not more peddled old nonsense about then’ (*Independent*)” (A, 82). This is, I feel, the criticism that Eve begins to see as more and more apt. Feeling guilty over something one has not played a role in, such as the Second World War, is less meaningful than feeling guilty because of something one could potentially change, such as the war in Iraq. Eve tries to change her writing strategy, as can be seen in her meeting with the publisher. However, when Eve announces that “I might write about a person who dies” (A, 198), “Or what about if I wrote about someone who’s alive right now, but will be dead tomorrow morning, say? In Iraq?” (A, 198), she notices how this makes Amanda, the publisher, feel: “Amanda had the look of a person who has been told she’ll be shot at dawn” (A, 199). So Eve withdraws and tells Amanda that her new book about a Scottish land girl is “well under way” (A, 199). So, ironically, prioritizing the feelings of others leads to Eve neglecting her own wishes and her search for writing stories that are ethically more valuable.

Eve’s progression of slowly understanding the ethical difficulties in her writing creates “a progression of possibilities for ethical judgment”, to use Phelan’s (2007, 70) phrase from his analysis of *Beloved*. Thus Eve and the reader can engage in parallel processes of realising the ethical complexity of storytelling. Eve’s *Genuine* articles can be first seen as harmless stories, then perhaps ethically suspect because of the resentment caused to the relatives of the partly real characters, and then finally understood as unethical because of the responses they cause and the deliberately historical focus which enables them and the readers not to voice their opinions on the ethical catastrophes present at the very moment of reading.

Eve's lack of authenticity is deeply ironical, given that she has created a book series called *Genuine Articles* (a genuine article refers to "a person or thing held to be an authentic or excellent example of a particular type", according to *Oxford English Dictionary*). Eve's own genuineness is even questioned when she wants to visit the local church:

No, what I mean is are you a genuine tourist? Do you have permanent accommodation elsewhere? the woman said.
Of course, Eve said.
Have you got an electricity bill? the woman said. Or a gas bill or something with your name and address on it? (A, 188)

The woman is not suspicious towards every visitor, because Amber has managed to get the key to the church quite easily. There must thus be something in Eve herself that provokes this reservation. The inauthenticity of the stories that Eve writes can be read as leaking to Eve herself.

The character who most significantly suspects Eve's authenticity is Amber. Amber openly confronts Eve's beliefs, especially the idea that every question has an answer.

But you can't go without telling me the answers, Eve said to Amber, low, catching her by the wrist.
To what? Amber frowned.
To those questions, Eve said.
I don't know the answers, Amber said.
All the same, Eve said not letting go. (A, 181)

What Amber then does shows Eve that inventing answers when there are none leads to being fake:

Amber took Eve's hand and opened it. She dropped the little white stone, warm from her own hand, back on to Eve's palm and closed Eve's fingers over it. As she did she caught Eve's hand in both of hers and shook it as if heartily congratulating Eve.
You're an excellent fake, Amber said. Very well done. Top of the class. A-plus. (A, 181-182)

Amber, again working as a catalyst, thus provokes Eve to face her own inauthenticity and self-betrayal.

The very ending of Eve's narrative resembles the way Amber first met the Smarts: she wanders into a house, knowing that it is not her father's house that she is searching. When

Eve is taken for the domestic help, her first reaction is to tell the truth: “Several sentences began in Eve’s head. *Who exactly is it that you, and I’m not the*, were the gist of all of them. But out of nowhere, instead of any of these things, she said: What if I told you my car broke down?” (A, 297). She then begins to behave as if she was the domestic help, and does not even correct the lady when she calls her Steve. Furthermore, she adopts Amber’s outspokenness, and tells the girl living in the house that her mother is “an absolute nightmare bitch from hell” (A, 300). When the lady finally realises her mistake and apologizes, Eve stays firm: she tells the woman that “It’s unforgivable, the way you behaved. And not just to me” (A, 302). These words must have been in the making a very long time: it is as if Eve finally says them for the unknown lady because she never managed to say them to Michael or others who have hurt her. At the same time, she adopts into her second imagined role as a guest of a family celebration. Thus Eve’s ethics of authenticity gain a final, unexpected turn that further complicates the picture of ethics that can be drawn from her narrative. Encountering Amber has made Eve realise that she has been living the life of a fake - so Eve changes her life, and possibly ends up becoming as ambiguously “the real thing” as Amber is.

4.2 The ethics of Amber

In this chapter I will read the ethics of Amber/Alhambra. Because Amber as a character is so different from the Smarts, a different set of theoretical tools are needed in order to analyse her. Instead of rhetorical ethics I will make use of ethics of alterity, especially as it has been developed by Andrew Gibson and Simon Critchley. Ethics of alterity is a suitable theoretical perspective for reading Amber, because it focuses on others and otherness - in other words, what Amber represents in *The Accidental*. Amber is the rupture, the surprise that there is in the novel.

The key concepts of the two theorists are somewhat different, and using these concepts to shape my analysis helps me to respect the multiplicity that there is in the character of Amber. Gibson (1999) focuses on the ethics of Levinas and underlines the importance of them as non-foundational. In other words, by using Levinas’s ethics in the analysis of

novels we can ensure that there is room for multiple kinds of ethical encounters as we are not tied down to a simple definition of ethics. Gibson's concepts, especially excedance and ethical saying, are important in my analysis of Amber. Critchley (1992) sees Levinas's ethics as closely connected with the philosophy of Jacques Derrida, and argues that deconstruction should be understood ethically. His central concepts include closure and clôtural reading, which I will use in analysing Amber's ethics. My somewhat Levinasian reading of Amber's ethics in *The Accidental* is based on the reading of the novel as focusing on encounters: facing the other.

But how could one trace Amber's own ethics? What does she value or find worthless? Or, if Amber is read more as an idea than as a possible person, what kind of ethical ideas does the fictional character represent? There are no easy, straightforward answers to these questions. Instead of trying to find a ready-made ethical model that would aptly describe the ethics of Amber, I will explore the ethical multiplicity and ambiguity present in the character. Also, I will be reading for the ethical effects that she has on the other characters of the novel.

4.2.1 Reading Amber's ethics

Instead of a single main reading, there are at least two important possibilities for analysing the ethics of Amber. The first possibility utilizes the method I used in order to analyse the ethics of the Smarts: relying on commonly shared values and ideas of ethical behaviour and reading Amber as if she was a real person living in the real world. In this strategy, Amber's behaviour is likely to be seen as ethically problematic: she tricks her hosts into offering her food and a place to stay, she destroys their belongings and crosses other boundaries. For example, Michiko Kakutani, the reviewer of *The Accidental* for *The New York Times* (2006), is not convinced of Amber's charisma, but stresses that "she seems like a foul-mouthed, insolent con woman - someone who lies and manipulates to get her way, someone who may very well be mad". The negative review summarizes the ethical problems in Amber's character, although the question of her possible madness rather complicates the matter.

However, it has to be recognized that even Amber's ethically suspect acts often have at least some ethically positive consequences for the Smarts. By shocking them with her behaviour she manages to make them more conscious of the problems in their own lives. Moreover, she does do some deeds that can be considered ethical without any problems: she devotes time to both of the lonely younger Smarts, and heals Eve's sore knee, for instance. Some critics of *The Accidental*, including Eleanor Birne, see Amber's role in a more positive way. Birne (2005) makes an interesting observation: Astrid is at first angry to Amber for wrecking her camera, but relents when she realizes she is only being angry because she thinks she should be. Amber seems to be able to evoke rather positive reactions even when her ways of acting are ethically dubious.

There is thus an element of ethical undecidedness in Amber's character and the effects she causes - and much more so than in the other characters of *The Accidental*. As Gail Caldwell (2006) notes in her review of the novel, the point "with all these acrobatics is one about illusion about the truths and lies and special effects that shape us". She also argues that "Amber is all things to all her Smarts", which I take to refer to Amber's special capacity to both good and bad - a capacity that all human beings share, but one that Amber's character highlights and problematizes. This is the second possible way of reading Amber, and the way that reveals a wider spectrum of ethical questions. Therefore my reading of Amber in this chapter will be based on this view of Amber: that she is simultaneously similar to the Smarts and wholly other, both ontologically and ethically.

Reading Amber's ethics is different from reading the ethics of the Smarts. Even if the major differences between the types of characters, namely the Smart's heavy mimetic component compared to Amber's foregrounded thematic and synthetic components (Phelan's terms, 1989), are brushed aside, one important difference remains. Amber does not have an ethical dilemma of her own like the Smarts, unless one wishes to read her tale of the car accident as such. This is highly problematic because the accident might not even have happened; when Eve later asks her about it, Amber acts like she had never told her about the death of the girl: "What child? Amber said. What accident?" (A, 201). Thus Amber does not have to focus on her own ethical troubles in the present of the narrative. Even though she is the only character that could benefit from the intimacy of narration in the first person, the reader never really gains direct access to her thoughts. Moreover, when she is faced with the ethical problems of the Smarts, she keeps her distance. And

yet Amber's role in the unfolding of the ethical events of the Smarts' lives is significant because of her otherness and her charisma: she influences all of the Smarts' ethical thinking.

Amber is the character who embodies alterity in *The Accidental*. Very importantly, Amber is an other whose otherness, or alterity cannot be reduced. She remains other throughout the novel. I have already argued in my analysis of the Smarts that Amber seems to test their respect for otherness. According to Korthals Altes (2005, 144), Levinas stresses the respect for otherness: for him, ethics means to surrender voluntarily to the command of the Other. Amber's respect for otherness remains partly unclear, but it is evident that her otherness does teach something to the Smarts. The openness with which the family receives Amber as their guest shows that they are open to otherness - at least when it is as charming as Amber is. None of them fully recognizes how different, how other Amber actually is, although they do immediately notice something foreign in her. Even though the Smarts may not voluntarily or totally conspicuously place themselves under the command of Amber, i.e. other, they still do it. Likewise, although Amber's alterity is questioned by some of the characters, it ultimately cannot be reduced: her mystery is not solved.

Amber's alterity consists of both who she is and what she does, as I have already shown in the third chapter. When analysing her ethics, it is important to look at both what she does and what she does not do, because both of these aspects contribute to her ethics. Amber's ways of acting could be labelled as doing otherwise: instead of going shopping with Astrid, she takes her to a trip to a supermarket in order to show her how distorted it is that they film everything. She does even ordinary things differently: eats like she is really hungry, spends her nights in the car and crosses the motorway wherever she likes. Amber has her own way of looking at things, which the Smarts notice with delight and surprise. Her stories and jokes carry a wealth of information and they always have multiple meanings. It seems that if Amber tries to do something to the Smarts, it is to surprise or even confuse them. Ethics of surprise could thus be one way of labelling Amber's morals. *Arrivant*, the one who arrives, is an apt description for Amber because she arrives to the middle of the Smarts' secrets and ethics as someone completely other. Amber is a good example of the *arrivant*: part of the difficulty of postmodern ethics, as argued by Gibson (1999, 106), is living with the surprise of the *arrivant*, the Other. This

is exactly what *The Accidental* manages to show: the difficulty - but also joy - of living with Amber, a surprise.

Identifying Amber's ethical values is not easy, because the narration does not provide the reader with a direct access to her thoughts. From what she says to the other characters it becomes clear, however, that she values questions more than answers. Amber's ethics, just like the character in general, are postmodern. Here, I am thinking about Gibson's (1999, 86) definition of postmodern ethics: he sees them as procedures that "aspire to reticence, dubiety, critical modesty" and that question "the availability of knowledge of the whole". Amber refuses to answer the Smarts' questions, thus making it clear that everything cannot be known. This is all the more important because Amber comes across to the other characters as a person with a wide knowledge of many different topics.

One of the features that contribute to Amber's ethics as 'doing otherwise' is the way she is honest about things others would lie about. When Amber brings Magnus downstairs to have dinner with his family, first time in a long time, she says "I found him in the bathroom trying to hang himself" (A, 89). The family laughs at this, missing the chance to find out what the matter with Magnus is. Another unexpected telling of the truth happens also at the dinner table. Astrid is asked to film the dinner, and she has to confess having lost the expensive video camera. Her parents begin to get very angry, even though "they are trying hard to be perfect in front of her" (Amber) (A, 123). It is only when Michael brings up the reporting of the lost camera to the police that Amber, who dropped the camera on purpose, speaks up: "Actually, Amber says as she helps herself to another slice of bread, it's my fault. I didn't like her carrying it around all the time. So I threw it off a motorway pedestrian bridge" (A, 123). The silence that follows forces Astrid to lie on behalf of Amber. Amber's honesty thus gets an unpleasant tinge: if she is only honest when she knows her words will not be believed anyhow, can it still be considered honesty? Does Amber actually ever tell the truth when she knows that she will be believed? Amber seems to leave the responsibility entirely to the listener.

Despite her honesty, Amber also lies, at least to Michael:

Your car? he said again, louder. Broken? he said. Won't start, or?
She shrugged.
The battery? he said. He said it too loud into a pause in the vacuum noise.

She looked blank. Maybe she didn't know the word battery.
I put the key in, turn it, nothing, she said, looking away from him. (A, 66)

Lying can hardly be considered ethical, but is lying to a liar at least partly understandable? Amber does not tell similar lies to the other Smarts, which makes me think that she is giving Michael a dose of his own medicine. Thus Amber may be read as taking revenge to Michael on behalf of all those he has lied to. This reading, however, presumes two rather extreme ideas about Amber: first, that she would know all about Michael's dishonesty, and second, that she would be, for whatever reason, willing to avenge Michael on behalf of other people that she does not know. Again, the reader faces the question of Amber's capabilities: can she read others' minds? Is she perhaps an omniscient character? Amber's mindreading abilities, if one wants to believe in them, raise doubts about her existence. She is clearly no ordinary person, not even an ordinary fictional character in the way the Smarts are. What if Amber actually only exists in the minds of the other characters? This reading comes close to the reading of Amber as God or god-like, wholly other.

In addition to what Amber does it is interesting to consider what she does not do. Simply put, Amber does not act according to the wishes of the Smarts or tell them what they would hope to hear. This behaviour includes many different elements, such as silence, outspokenness and lack of verbal consolation. Amber does not engage in comforting talk when the Smarts pour out their hearts for her; she seems to be carefully avoiding any counselling, especially with Astrid and Magnus. Sometimes her only response is silence. These two strategies, bad as their use may feel for the Smarts, can be more easily considered ethically acceptable. When one has a strong influence on people, especially children, one has to be very careful not to make their decisions for them. Therefore, even possibly upsetting silence may be a better option than voicing one's personal opinion in a situation in which it is likely to be understood almost like a command. However, Amber's persistent ignorance of Michael, which stretches to more than silence, is, according to conventional standards of politeness, shockingly rude. Rules of politeness and ethics are, of course, two different things, but both generally consider complete ignorance of another person problematic.

Amber's third strategy, outspokenness, is ethically more difficult to defend. Her outburst when Eve tells her how she first met Adam, for instance, is ethically ambiguous. At a first

look, one could unequivocally condemn Amber's behaviour as deeply unethical: she willingly insults Eve when she has made herself vulnerable by being friendly and sharing a personal experience of importance. This may well be true; however, ethical analysis should not stop here. Instead, we should consider in what ways Amber's behaviour could be of benefit. For instance, Eve seems to be delighted in Amber's surprising response. If Eve is happy with Amber's response, does it not mean that it is ethically acceptable, if not preferable? This reading is naturally only possible when one recognizes that ethics are situational: there cannot be one set of general rules that could be applied to all ethical encounters. This particular reaction is also interesting from the religious point of view: there are some religious undercurrents in the character of Amber and in the ways the other characters relate to her. Why, then, does Amber react so strongly when she learns how Eve and Adam first met? Perhaps she thinks herself God and is for that reason so bored with the story - she must have known it, after all. Amber's words, "Jesus fucking wept, all these endless endless fucking endless selfish fucking histories" (A, 196), can be read as a comment not only to Eve's personal revelation but also to her writing.

Another way of reading Amber ethically is to think of her as a question. This is a valid reading for many reasons. First, she confuses the other characters in many ways: both her thinking and behaviour are unexpected in their eyes. Second, she questions the usual ways of thinking and doing. Being critical seems to be a part of her philosophy. Third, Amber tempts not only the Smarts but also the reader to think otherwise and ask questions. Amber can be seen as a personified *mise en question*. This term relates to Critchley's (1992, 5) understanding of Levinasian ethics: ethics is the critical questioning of "the liberty, spontaneity, and cognitive emprise of the ego that seeks to reduce all otherness to itself". If questioning is thus seen as the central process in ethics, Amber is acting in a highly ethical way. On the other hand, does she ever question the ego exactly? Is she perhaps limited to questioning the egos of others, or the general process of reducing otherness into sameness? If Amber is understood first and foremost as a catalyst character, these questions are easier to answer: a catalyst does not necessarily have to develop herself - the main thing is that she affects the development of others.

I have earlier on in this thesis stated that the concept of excendance allows me to read Amber ethically. Excendance means, very simply said, moving towards the other (Gibson 1999, 38). Excendance happens spontaneously when we want to escape our own limits

and turn towards the other (ibid., 37-38). By arguing that excendance allows the ethical reading of Amber I do not mean that Amber would necessarily embody excendance as a character. More importantly, she contributes to the excendance of others, tempting them to turn towards her and away from their own secrets and problems. This is exactly how Amber's impact on the Smarts is positive regardless of her sometimes dubious ways of acting: she manages to make them turn towards the other. This does not just include Amber herself, although all of them become very interested in her. Excendance crucially makes the Smarts a bit more open and interested in the world around them - and in each other.

Escaping the limits of the self is what the cinematic Amber, or Alhambra, could be read as doing in her own chapters before, after and between the three main parts of *The Accidental*. It becomes increasingly clear in her chapters that she does not have just one self. Amber even has multiple cinematic parents, as analysed in the third chapter. However, it is questionable whether Amber's escape of the limits of the self is, in addition to moving away from (one) self, also a movement *towards* the other. The focus of the narration in the Alhambra sections is more on connections between the past and future, and the blending together of the real and imagined (cinematic) history and identity. It could also be asked whether any art, be it cinema or literature, can be described as movement towards the other. A Levinasian answer would be no: facing the Other is not possible when watching a film or reading a novel. My answer, however, is yes - narratives that thematize encounters, such as *The Accidental*, can be compared with an actual encounter. I would argue that the Levinasian idea of *le tiers*, "the third party who ensures that the ethical relation always takes place within a political context, within the public realm" (Critchley 1992, 225), is especially important in this respect. Narrative encounters, by which I mean encounters experienced by reading literature, make it clear that encounters are multiple - it is not just me and another person; it is me and a multitude of others. This is what Amber embodies: because she is many persons in one body, by encountering her the Smarts actually encounter more than one person. They encounter multitude.

4.2.2 Effects of Amber's ethics

Amber could be read as escaping the limits of her self even more literally. When she tells Eve how the car accident changed her life, she is essentially narrating the story of her self-escape. As O'Donnell (2013, 98) summarizes it: "Amber implies that she has been escaping this event and the 'self' associated with it ever since, as she roams without direction from place to place, a nomadic entity born out of accident, her life a skein of contingent relations with strangers." But how is this escape ethical? Perhaps it is enough that it has ethically valuable consequences: Amber, according to O'Donnell (2013, 97-98), embodies contingency by being "the accidental", "the untimely and unforeseen, the small event that has fatal consequences". What Amber brings to the Smarts, as O'Donnell (2013, 99) crystallizes it, is "both knowledge of self and a knowledge of alterity", which "leads to the spontaneous creation of a community of strangers both gathered around and scattered by the person or event that has generated a confrontation with the alterity within and without". This is exactly what Amber does to the Smarts: reveals the alterity within and outside the family, and both brings them together and tears them apart. These ambiguous effects help explain why Amber's ethics is so difficult to capture: if one values the unity of the family, one respects Amber more for having strengthened that for the Smarts, but at the same time one has to react to Amber's contrary effect on the same family. To use Phelan's terminology, the readers are faced with a real challenge when trying to make their ethical judgments of the progression of the characters.

Another twist into the ethical reading of Amber is provided by her very own sections in the narrative, where the first person narrator calls herself Alhambra. Although it could be argued that Alhambra and Amber are two different persons, reading them as one person or different versions of one character leads to more interesting interpretative possibilities. O'Donnell (2013, 99) is uncertain about who Amber/Alhambra is, too: he thinks Alhambra "may be Amber's off-double", because "one name nearly, but not quite, phonically and anagrammatically incorporates the other". I think that the cleaner's words, which Eve hears as "*her name's a hammer*" (A, 185), insinuate that Amber is actually Alhambra. The mystery of Amber's/Alhambra's true identity makes it harder to present strict arguments about her ethics. If Amber/Alhambra is read as a fictional person inside a novel, it has severe consequences for the ethical analysis.

I have earlier labelled the version of Amber present in those short chapters with the first person narrator the cinematic Amber, and will use the same definition here. If the secret of Amber is read so that she represents films, imagined persons on a blank canvas, the key to her ethics is then the concept of illusion; she seems real but is not real, her story is not true but it could be, she does not have just one life story but a whole bunch of them. The whole point of her existence is imagination: we act like she is real in order to gain new ideas and experiences. Smarts perhaps act like she is real because they are in a desperate need of new perspectives. Her unrealness, however, leaks through: they recognize her as something different, even alien. Magnus sees her as an angel, and the others cannot fully fathom who she is, either. Perhaps it is best to say that Amber is not fully any one thing: maybe she is partly human, part god-like, or even part machine.

The illusionary Amber cannot be easily analysed ethically. A reading that in some ways comes close to this, however, has been done by Levin in his 2013 article “Narrating Reminders: Spectral Presences in Ali Smith’s Fictions”. He argues that Amber represents “the intrusion of the spectre” (Levin 2013, 38). He constructs his spectral reading of the novel on Jacques Derrida’s *Specters of Marx* (1994), where spectre is, according to Levin (2013, 36), seen as “a figure that calls into question the boundaries of form itself, and that compels us to conclude that the perceptible reality of any object owes its materiality to unseen, and often suppressed, historical agencies”. This is highly relevant for my reading, too, because at this point of his writing, Derrida was already turning towards Levinas, reformulating some of his important ideas (Lawlor 2002). Levin reads what I call the cinematic Amber as “an ‘avatar’ of spectral time” (2013, 42). To summarize, he argues that Amber’s presence not only affects the form of the narrative but also opens up new temporalities and ethical perspectives (Levin 2013, 35-42).

Levin (2013, 155) presents his most fascinating idea in a footnote to his article: he argues that spectral intrusion, arrival of the other, is a recurring theme in Ali Smith’s writing, and that it is related to her “interest in love as a response to the arrival of something ‘wholly’ other”. What Amber makes visible in *The Accidental*, then, is the hospitality of the Smarts. Hospitality is an interesting ethical concept because it deals with our ways of encountering both strangers and loved ones. It is a concept that is, I feel, hidden between the lines in Levinas’s thinking about face. Moreover, Derrida has written about hospitality at some length. According to Michael Naas (2008, 22), Derrida thinks that “the concept

of hospitality must be rigorously distinguished from any relation of reciprocity or exchange between two parties”. The idea is that the Other, *arrivant*, is welcomed without knowing what will happen: unconditional hospitality means that we are ready to welcome an absolute stranger, a wholly other, who is not even a guest. Naas even goes as far as arguing that deconstruction can be defined as hospitality. This is because deconstruction consists of first learning the tradition and then looking at what has not previously been looked at in that tradition, thinking otherwise. Derrida is aware of the risks of unconditional hospitality: the *arrivant* may cause us harm and suffering. (Naas 2008, 22-33.) The ambiguous effects that Amber’s visitation has on the Smarts show beautifully the uncertainty that is a part of unconditional hospitality.

What kind of an ethics could there be behind Amber’s actions? One possibility is suggested by Caputo (2000, 113):

On the view that I am defending here everything turns on a certain affirmation, beyond any positivity or positionality, of the “other”, the affirmation of - to borrow the language of Kierkegaard and Levinas, which was later on taken up by Derrida - “the wholly other,” tout autre. As an affirmation of the wholly other, this view originates not in a no but a yes, not in a refusal but a welcome to the wholly other, opening our home to the stranger who knocks at our door.

What is Amber, if not this wholly other, a stranger knocking at the door? Caputo is writing about the end of ethics, which can be categorised in meta-ethics. Amber does not seem to follow any conventional line of ethical thinking, and the effect of her actions can be argued to make the Smarts and the reader to wonder about ethics. The idea of accidentalism seems also fitting: “An accident is something that happens to us beyond our control and outside the horizon of foreseeability. [--] Ethical life is a series of such accidents and casualties, against which ethical theory can provide little insurance” (Caputo 2000, 112). The way the Smarts react to Amber resembles what Caputo (2000, 114) writes about facing the wholly other, dealing with something radically new: “Then we are sent back to the drawing boards, forced to re-examine basic assumptions, a little bit stunned, shocked, amazed, and confused.”

Why is Amber’s ethics so different, then? It can be argued that Amber embodies an ethics of Saying. This means that the character shows how ethics is not a product but a process that begins from encountering a singular Other person. Saying is

the performative stating, proposing, or expressive position of myself facing the Other. It is a verbal or non-verbal ethical performance, whose essence cannot be caught in constative propositions. It is a performative doing that cannot be reduced to a constative description. [--] The Saying is the sheer radicality of human speaking, of the event of being in relation with an Other (Critchley 1992, 7).

This is a very demanding description to work with because it states that the essence of Saying cannot be caught - which is one of the reasons why it comes very close to what Amber represents. Amber both is and causes the movement from the Same to the Other in the novel. The way the Smarts first try to explain her as someone familiar, somebody who is similar to them, but then have to re-evaluate Amber, shows their ethical growth. Amber, by being both similar and different, and by demanding the family to accept her difference, plays a major role in opening the Smarts' eyes to alterity.

To conclude my reading of Amber's ethics, I would like to return to the concept of clôtural reading as developed by Critchley (1992). Simply defined, clôtural reading refers to "the production of a dislocation within a text" (Critchley 1992, 88); looking for the alterity in the narrative. In my analysis, I have tried to show that there are multiple ways of reading Amber's ethics and that the first dominant reading, Amber as a malevolent person invading the Smarts' lives, is not enough on its own. This reading has to be done, though: one cannot jump directly to the second phase of reading. The idea of a clôtural reading is to that it does not "choose between the ethical opening and the logocentric totality; it must be undecided; it must be hesitant" (Critchley 1992, 95). Therefore I will not argue for a final, unambiguous reading of Amber's ethics. Instead, I would like to argue that the undecidedness is what Amber's ethics are about: there is both egoism and altruism in the character, and it would be unwise to argue that the effects of Amber could be read simply as positive or negative. Amber is a truly diverse character with intriguing, ambiguous ethics.

4.3 Ethics revealed?

In this chapter I will read ethics as it emerges from *The Accidental*. In other words, I move from analysing the ethics of the characters to examining the ethics of narration and

ethics of the novel as a whole. In the terms of Gibson (1999, 54-55), my focus has so far been mostly on “the plane of the represented”, but it will now shift to “the plane on which representation takes place”, which can be understood “as the author’s, narrator’s, reader’s or culture’s, or a mixture of them”. The question to which I am searching answers is “What kind of ethics can be constructed based on (reading) *The Accidental*?”. Again, my goal is less to make a definitive, final reading than to highlight the multiplicity present in the novel. I am acutely aware that to make a thorough ethical analysis of a novel as complex as *The Accidental* would require considerably more space than what I have available in my thesis. Nevertheless, I am convinced that even a brief look into this matter will greatly widen the scope of my ethical analysis. I will begin with a short overview into the discussion of the relationship between form and ethics and then focus on the narrative ethics of *The Accidental* and its author.

Ethics is not only related to characters in the storyworld but to the structures of the storyworld, too: narrative form. The relationship is not straightforward, though; I doubt that few literary theorists would argue in the 21st century that certain narrative form automatically leads to certain kind of narrative ethics. Some researchers had to make this argument, however, before the theory could be further developed. The famous case, or, in Phelan’s (1989a, xi) words, “the *locus classicus* for discussions of ethics or morality in narrative theory”, is Booth’s text from 1961 in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* where he “worries, much to the consternation of many other critics, about the morality of impersonal narration”. Later on, Booth (1989, 75) has become suspicious of “systematic correlations between a given technique, open or closed, and a given ethical (or for that matter aesthetic) effect”. He strongly criticizes what he calls “fashionable generalizations about ethical effect”, especially

the claim that what distinguishes good literature from bad is its power to shock the reader, to undermine conventions, to shatter illusions, to wake up the sleepy and complacent, to lead us to questions rather than answers, to introduce the reader to something radically “other” (Booth 1989, 63).

As a reader who values *The Accidental*, both aesthetically and ethically, for some of the reasons Booth mentions in his critical comment, I cannot join his view entirely. Instead, I think that all intriguing, thought-provoking novels may merit a careful reading and analysis regardless of the specific techniques or style used. If novels that discuss otherness are fashionable at the moment, it does not have to mean that they would be the

only kind worthy of analysis. One of the more recent developers of narrative ethics, Gibson (1999, 11) has criticized the earlier study on narrative ethics arguing that it has not paid sufficient attention to narrative form, especially to postmodern or experimental forms. He considers the problematizations of form ethical indeed, and I agree, at least in the case of *The Accidental*. Moreover, as I shall show shortly, *The Accidental* can be read as taking part in the discussion of the ethical value of literature.

The Accidental's narration is a powerful example of free indirect narration. Ali Smith is known as a writer whose language is highly creative and imaginative. She has developed a distinct, personal voice for each of her characters, even though only Amber/Alhambra enjoys the privilege of narration in the first person. Each of the Smarts has their own voice that the narrator brings to life when any one of them acts as the focalizer. This narrative choice already reveals something about the conception of ethics behind the narrative: different voices and experiences exist even within the same micro community, family. Brian Richardson (2006) has pointed out that contemporary narrative theory lacks "sustained accounts of multiple modes of narration". Emma E. Smith (2010) has shown how "multiperson narration" can produce a kind of communal dynamic, perhaps even a "democracy of voice", in the fictions of Ali Smith. Ethics is thus seen as multiple, myriad and changing - the kind of postmodern ethics that Gibson (1999) writes about.

The novel has a very solid structure with three parts: beginning, middle and end. The use of these three parts, however, is done so that it makes the reader ask whether the beginning is actually the ending and vice versa. As Tancke (2013, 77) notes:

In addition to this tripartite structure, however, the narrative also boasts experimental elements which disrupt the seemingly straightforward plot line. For instance, Amber's profound impact on each of the characters and the degree to which she unsettles their existing beliefs and senses of self is also communicated by the fragmentary nature of much of the novel's language, which boasts chapters beginning in mid-sentence [--], passages written in verse [--] and stream-of-consciousness.

Amber thus brings the element of surprise in the novel, the structure of which would otherwise seem very traditional indeed. The narrative manages to create an impression of unfinishedness, not in the sense that the text would be somehow unfinished or rough, quite on the contrary, but in the sense of "what Bakhtin calls its 'eternal unfinishedness', the unlimited multiplicity at work within it" (Gibson 1999, 91). In this way, *The*

Accidental can be argued to contain a residue of Saying within its Said: to include something of the untamed unpredictability of life.

In my analysis, *The Accidental* is seen first and foremost as a novel about the way encounters shape secrets and ethics. It is, as a narrative, clearly interested in ethical issues, especially those related to encountering the other. The stranger who joins the family unexpectedly tests the limits of hospitality and the understanding and acceptance of alterity - both in themselves and in others. Moreover, the novel provides ethical encounters for its reader. The reader gets the possibility to see how the four family members think and feel, and even reconsider their ethics. For these reasons, it can be argued that *The Accidental* discusses ethics as they are understood in the applications of Levinasian philosophy done by Gibson and Critchley.

Narration may be often seen as “a mode of activity in which a subject takes another, other, the world as the object or objects of knowledge and claims possession of them”. However, narration can be rethought “as an arrangement or play of different language games [--] or genres of discourse or phrase regimens”. In any case, from the Levinasian perspective, narration has to be thought ethically. (Gibson 1999, 26.) Ali Smith’s novel underlines this ethical concern on two levels: the plane of the represented and the plane on which representation takes place. If narrating is understood in the Levinasian way, as surrendering to the other (ibid., 45), it is already in itself an extremely ethical process. This view of narration is related to a postmodern understanding of narrative: narrative is thought of “in the mode of *excedance* as a movement outwards, a relation, an engagement or composition with an exteriority in which interior, exterior and the boundary between them do not ‘stay the same’, but are ceaselessly renegotiated” (ibid., 49). *The Accidental* can be fruitfully analysed with the help of the concept of *excedance*, as I have shown with my reading of Amber. Understanding the narrative of the novel as a kind of *excedance*, too, works well because it strengthens the connection that there is between Amber and narration.

The connection between Amber and narration has also been noted by other readers of *The Accidental*. Amber can also be read as a “figure for narration”, as Levin (2013, 41) argues: “Amber’s homelessness and disruptive force suggest that she herself embodies a principle of narration - specifically, the capacity of narrative simultaneously to orient and

disorient the emplotment of the self within a particular subject position". The quintessential essence of narrative thus seems to be freedom: the capacity to do anything, to move freely and cause ambiguous effects. He also states that

[T]he startling conclusion of the novel, in which Eve appears to take on Amber's role of saboteur by entering a random house during her travels in the United States, suggests that Smith regards this function of narration as an ethical imperative. To be a writer, and not a purveyor of formulaic biographies, Eve must become a dangerous infiltrator in the reassuring domestic narrative of an 'other' (Levin 2013, 42).

However, I consider this reading of the ending of the novel as problematic because there are no textual clues as to whether Eve still tries to write or not. Moreover, even though there is criticism against her writings in the novel, her work is not simply seen as formulaic and indifferent. Nevertheless, the reading that Ali Smith understands narratives as communicating ethical imperatives is, I believe, accurate.

It is important not to confuse ethics of narration with ethics of the author, although the author's ethical inclinations may naturally effect on how ethical ideas are discussed in the novel. What is known about Ali Smith's ethical thinking happens to be very interesting with regard to my reading of *The Accidental*. In an interview by Gillian Beer in 2012, published in its entirety in *Ali Smith: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (2013), Smith makes an intriguing comment on strangers:

As our countries and our world becomes smaller, and yet we're bordered, everything is about the stranger. So if we don't pay attention to what the story of the stranger means, and if we forget the goodness of the stranger, the way in which inordinate hospitality was signalled as crucial to survival, never mind to immortality, and also simply to obvious benign-ness. If we don't pay attention to the things that happen when something enters our world from outside, and if every dominant narrative tells us to dislike it, then I don't know how we'll manage to stay human. (Beer 2013, 142)

Thus the author's aim seems to have been to create a narrative about the unpredictable stranger, and about the possible consequences of hospitality. Smith's attitude does remind me of Levinasian hospitality: even when we do not know who we are welcoming to our lives, we should do it. Amber is not an easy, polite guest but resembles an intruder whose presence creates difficult situations.

Amber's personality and effects in the novel are so varied that it almost seems as if the Smarts were housing two visitors at once. There is the charming Amber whose company is highly sought after, but also the Amber who baffles and upsets her hosts. It seems as if Ali Smith would have purposefully wanted to include both the good and the bad of the stranger in the very same character. Reading Amber can therefore act as a test of the reader's beliefs about strangers: is her difference read positively (as refreshing and interesting) or negatively (as dominating and dangerous). The stranger may make us start anew, either feeling like having lost everything or like having gained a valuable experience of being otherwise.

There is more to the ethics of *The Accidental* than facing the other, though. In addition to the specific ethical dilemmas that I have analysed in chapter 4.1, the overarching ethical attitude of the novel may be looked into as well. Tancke (2013, 79-80), for instance, reads the novel as suggesting "that individuals' implication in violence and cruelty starts much closer to home and that professed moral outrage at things far beyond our personal sphere of influence may all too easily make us overlook our own capacity for inflicting violence and suffering". However, Tancke does not see *The Accidental* as defeatist in its ethical position. Instead, she argues that it demands the reader's ethical response to the violence and destructive desires that the novel shows to be inherent in us (Tancke 2013, 87-88). This is one of the main points I would like to make about the ethics of *The Accidental* as well: by showing deeply human imperfections, it nevertheless asks us to try to become better. Of course, the complexity of the novel's ethics makes it possible that other readers may come to different conclusions. However, when reading the narrative from the point of view of secrets and ethics, the possibility of ethical growth certainly is one of the key themes of the novel.

One important facet of *The Accidental* that requires ethical analysis is its discussion of accidents: things that happen without planning. As the word accidental means both something that was not supposed to happen and something that is non-essential, the title of the novel stays faithful to the novel's ambiguity about ethical issues. One very interesting reading of the role of accidents in Ali Smith's work has been done by O'Donnell (2013, 99): he suggests that there is a development, from *Hotel World* to *The Accidental*, "in Smith's discourse of contingency that manifests itself an increasing dependency on 'the accidental' to rupture the homogenous narratives of self, family,

nation and world such that a future beyond these, different from these, might come to pass". He links Amber to an alternative version of history, which is an apt reading because it manages to make sense of the Alhambra chapters. O'Donnell (2013, 100) believes that the stranger is for Smith "the allegorical embodiment of cultural and historical contingency" and "the visible reminder that 'we', in time, are always composed otherwise". This reading connects Amber with the rupture that there is in the homogenous narrative, which is what this thesis has tried to do, too. Also, O'Donnell's reading includes the idea that Amber acts as a reminder of the alterity both within and exterior to us. The other meaning of the word accidental, that it is something non-essential, is intriguing, too. It subtly hints that the accidental, Amber, may not be what matters most: she is, after all, a reminder, a less important character whose role is to make herself unnecessary. The ideal ethical outcome would thus be that the Smarts would be able to do without her, not forgetting the other ways of seeing that she has opened their eyes to.

The Accidental, like many other texts by Ali Smith, also discusses literature. What does the novel say about the ethical value of literature, then? In short, the message is that literature matters - that stories and storytelling in general matter. *The Accidental* is not one of those novels in which literature is portrayed as the answer to personal problems. On the contrary, writing and analysing literature is what creates or reawakens ethical problems. By portraying Eve the writer as working between genres, having created her very own concept 'autobiotruefictinterview', Ali Smith shows how complex the relation between reality and fiction is. Eve's narratives are received with both praise and criticism. By including some mentions of the angry relatives of Eve's subjects, who have even founded an organisation ironically called Families Against the Thievery of Relatives' Authenticity, the narrative once again leaves the ethical question to be answered by the reader. Likewise, by showing Michael, the professional reader, losing all his interest in books and even his faith in language, Smith addresses the issue of the power of narratives. Writing, reading and analysing narratives are all ethical activities.

5. Secrets + ethics = ?

In this chapter I tie the two main threads of my thesis together by arguing that ethics and secrets go hand in hand not only in *The Accidental* but in other contexts, too. I develop two concepts, ethics of secrecy and secrecy of ethics, in order to illustrate the connections between the two phenomena. I will begin with an analysis of secrecy as seen from the ethical perspective: what kinds of ethical questions have to be confronted when dealing with secrecy, be it secret-keeping or secret-sharing? Then, I will move on to examine how secrecy influences ethics: what kind of a role does secrecy play in ethics in general? *The Accidental* as it has been analysed in the previous chapters acts as a starting point for the present discussion, because it asks important and challenging questions about the role of ethics in secrecy and secrecy in ethics. By looking at the two concepts together from two different perspectives I aim at revealing their complex connections in more detail than I have been able to show in the previous chapters.

5.1 Ethics of secrecy

Ethics of secrecy entails ethical analysis of secret-keeping and secret-sharing. Ethics of secrecy is a concept used by both researchers in different disciplines and the general public. It can be alleged that the interest and importance in ethics of secrecy has grown considerably in the 2000s. Bok (1984, xvii) writing in the early 1980s, already saw this development: “Powerful new techniques of storing and probing secrets increase the need for careful debate”. In literature, it is less well-known if and how secrecy has changed in general. It could be suggested, for instance, that readers are, more than ever, interested in the secrets of the writers. In the present study, ethics of secrecy has come up in the analysis repeatedly, especially in connection to the secret-keeping and secret-sharing of the protagonists.

Secret-keeping and secret-sharing are thoroughly ethical processes, even if this does not always show immediately. However, even when ethics of secrecy, as argued by Bok (1984, 28) “mirror and shed light on aspects of ethics more generally”, they also prove to be problematic to analyse. According to Bok (1984, 28):

Thus secrecy both promotes and endangers what we think beneficial, even necessary for survival. It may prevent harm, but it follows maleficence like a shadow. Every misdeed cloaks itself in secrecy unless accompanied by such power that it can be performed openly. And while secrecy may heighten a sense of equality and brotherhood among persons sharing the secret, it can fuel gross intolerance and hatred toward outsiders. At the heart of secrecy lies discrimination of some form, since its essence is sifting, setting apart, drawing lines. Secrecy, moreover, preserves liberty, yet this very liberty allows the invasion of that of others.

This ambiguous description strengthens my reading of Amber as the manifestation of secrecy: her behaviour, too, can be seen to have those two sides to it. The difficulty of reaching any firm conclusions in the analysis of the character testifies to the connection she has to secrecy.

In *The Accidental*, keeping silent about a secret is ethically problematic, as I have shown in my analysis, because it may be done for a variety of reasons and lead to multiple, even unpredicted consequences. It has to be noted, however, that the ethics of secret-keeping cannot be judged without an awareness of the kind of secret that is kept. Ethics of secrecy are simpler to analyse when the secret relates only or mostly to the secret-keeper. When others are involved, as is the case with Magnus’s secret about Catherine, the keeping and revealing of the secret has to be considered from the others’ point of view as well. Of course, Magnus’s situation is also changed by the fact that he is, at the end of the novel, asked to keep quiet about what he knows. He knowingly violates this promise by sharing the dark secret with his sister, as if begging for both understanding and a proper punishment.

Ethics of secret-keeping are also discussed in the novel through the character of Amber. Ethics of Amber’s secrecy are not easily defined because Amber’s secret remains secret from the reader of the novel, too. What can be analysed, though, is whether Amber’s secret-keeping oversteps the line, ethically speaking. It can be asked, for instance, whether the Smarts have the right to know who Amber is. The principle of reciprocity

suggests that because the Smarts reveal so much of themselves to Amber she ought to do the same, and tell them at least something about herself. Amber clearly does not respect this principle, however, and the character's constant violations of it and a number of other rules that the Smarts follow reveal that her ethics is altogether different. Another important question that reading Amber evokes is whether the secret-keeper is responsible for any of the ambiguity created by the secret-keeping. Where does secret-keeping end and misleading begin? It should be clear for readers of *The Accidental* that these are very complex questions.

Amber's secret-keeping brings us to the ethics of secret-sharing. Thus, it could be asked whether there are any situations in which one has a duty to share certain secrets with certain people. Amber's silence on her reasons for being with the Smarts raises doubts about her ethics. Further, her knowing about some of the ethical issues of the Smarts and keeping quiet about those, too, is also problematic. Should she not repeat what she tells the family about Magnus's attempt at suicide when they mistake her telling as a joke? On the other hand, Amber does not seem to be guilty of being "sensitive only to the needs [of secrecy] of some -adults, perhaps" (Bok 1984, 43). In this way, keeping the secrets of everyone seems an ethically sound choice.

Another very important consideration related to ethics of secrecy is the person with whom one shares one's secret. Astrid and Magnus both opt for telling their secret to Amber instead of their parents. Amber is not necessarily a safe choice; she gathers information about the family but never gives any promises to keep it to herself. Amber's silence on her own secrets may be read as a considerate choice: if the Smarts were unable to deal with her true identity and aims, for instance, it may be better for them never learn about them at all. Revealing one's secret to a person who is unable to handle it, for one reason or another, does not reflect high moral standards. It is the classic question of the (one-time) adulterer: should I tell in order to be honest or keep the secret so that I would not burden and hurt my partner? It is symptomatic of Michael's ethics that there are no signs in the narrative of him asking himself this question.

It could be argued that most people consider sharing someone else's secret ethically wrong, whereas one can share one's own secret with as many people as one likes. The limit is reached when there is no selection process: a secret cannot be considered as secret

when it no longer matters who knows about it and who does not. However, it is not always clear *whose* secret something is. Astrid's narrative especially brings this point up: when she confronts her bullies, they share the secret in a new way. Thus Astrid and her bullies are no longer against each other but on the same side. Another good example is Eve's writing: is she, by writing about real people, albeit dead and partly fictionalized, sharing their secrets without permission?

Ethics of secrecy are typically discussed when something goes wrong. Therefore it is very interesting to read *The Accidental* from this perspective: secrecy is actually a thoroughly ethical phenomenon. There are no easy answers to questions such as who one should trust with one's secret, but it becomes clear that this is an issue we should consider carefully. The novel's ending where Eve hides her true identity in a manner that resembles Amber is another twist in the narrative full of intriguing ideas of secrets and ethics. Thus the final pages of the novel create an atmosphere of ethically questionable secrecy.

Even if many questions remain open, it becomes increasingly clear that secrecy cannot be separated from ethics. As Bok (1984, 44) notes, "[T]he experience of secrecy and the perspectives of insider and outsider to secrets mirror a central aspect of moral relations between self and others more generally". Learning to live with secrecy, as Bok (*ibid.*) argues, "blends with and reflects moral development". This can be seen in the characters of Astrid and Magnus especially. However, one has to be careful to remember that the relationship between secrecy and ethics is "nevertheless not one of parallelism or point-by-point correspondence" (*ibid.*).

5.2 Secrecy of ethics

The second major way in which secrets and ethics are intertwined is secrecy of ethics. Compared to ethics of secrecy, secrecy of ethics appears to be almost an un-theorized topic: a search in Google Scholar, for instance, produces only two results for "secrecy of ethics", and they both refer to John Llewelyn's text "Stay!" (2003). Llewelyn (2003, 103) uses the concept only once, saying that "[T]he distance is that of the secrecy of ethics, the separateness that prevents all fusion". The idea seems to be, in Llewelyn's

phenomenological essay about ethics and religion, that secrecy of ethics presupposes a distance. The idea of distance is important in secrecy of ethics as it implies that the two concepts are separate, despite their connections.

There is considerable friction between secrets and ethics as they are typically thought of: ethics may be seen as something pure and sublime, removed from the everyday choices and situations (we talk about those with the word moral), whereas secrets are often considered as potentially dangerous and ethically suspect. Bringing these two phenomena together by arguing that first, there is something that we could call “secrecy of ethics”, and second, that it is worth analysing when reading *The Accidental*, is not a simple task. As Bok (1984, 44) notes, it is easier to argue for the importance of ethics to secrecy than vice versa. Whereas ethics of secrecy can be conceived of as an established, albeit minor, area of study in many fields, secrecy of ethics is best characterized as a kind of thought experiment, at least for now. Nevertheless, fiction - or, more generally, art - can rightly be thought of as a terrain (and perhaps even as *the* terrain) for the secrecy of ethics. So, what could the paradoxical-sounding concept, secrecy of ethics, mean in *The Accidental* and beyond?

Ethics can be thought of as secret in at least three ways. First, ethics usually exists on the level of secrecy. When secret is understood as “the secret nature or condition of something” (*Oxford English Dictionary*), secrecy of ethics begins to make sense. Based on the lack of a mutually accepted, exhaustive definition of ethics, regardless of our intuitive understanding of the concept and the endless volumes dedicated to the analysis of it, I dare say that ethics is something we may never be able to define thoroughly. In other words, being secret is part of the very essence of ethics. This, of course, also depends on our understanding of ethics as something theoretical or as a way of thinking - that is, as something that cannot be seen or touched. Ethics exists in our thoughts and reasoning behind our actions, and thus it is mostly hidden from others.

We can usually judge each other’s ethics only on the basis of actions, not ethical thinking per se - unless the other person chooses to vocalize her ethical conceptions. This is, I believe, also often the case in analysing literary characters, unless the narration gives us access to their thinking processes, as it does for the Smarts in *The Accidental*. When the ethical reasoning of a character is described, such as Magnus’s train of thought about

Catherine's suicide, it becomes possible for the reader to make ethical judgments that are not only based on the character's actions but also the reasoning behind them. In comparison, reading Amber's ethics appears considerably more difficult a task because the reader is never really given access to her ethical thinking.

Different ethical theories help in further explaining why it is so demanding to do ethical analysis. Because ethics can be understood and practiced from a variety of angles, I believe that it is necessary to voice one's own ethical position whenever possible. For instance, consequentialists are happy to judge one's ethics by looking at the consequences of her actions, but from a deontological perspective this is not correct. Deontologists argue that duties form the basis of ethical behaviour. (Alexander & Moore 2012.) Had I decided to do a reading of narrative ethics in *The Accidental* based solely on consequentialist ethics, reading Amber's ethics especially would have been even more difficult. This is because I would have then had to decide whether the consequences of her actions were ethically valuable or not. By not following strictly any one ethical theory I have achieved, if not lucid readings of the ethics of the characters, at least readings that do not judge the characters' ethics in an oversimplified way.

The second sense in which ethics can be secret is that it is secret, or hidden, from ourselves. This can be either because a child has not yet fully grasped the concept of ethics or because an adult has not encountered a certain kind of a difficult moral dilemma before. What I mean by this is that ethics may be partly subconscious: we may act according to a rule we have never really thought about, and, on the other hand, have ethical ideas that we are not capable of voicing. This issue also relates to the idea of accidentalism. The argument would then run that ethics may be constructed partly accidentally, and thus be somewhat secret. It has to be conceded, though, that it is easier to argue for accidentalism of secrecy than that of ethics.

Playing with the idea of secret ethics, this is what *The Accidental* shows: young people who are still learning their own ethics, and adults who have to face new kinds of ethical dilemmas. Ethics is not something stable, but changes and evolves with age and experience. For this reason, we expect higher ethical standards from Michael and Eve than from Magnus and Astrid. Yet the youngest in the family seem to be most painfully aware of ethical problems: Magnus has to fight his guilty conscience on a daily basis,

whereas Michael, who has been behaving in an ethically substandard way for years, seems to have no regrets. Admittedly this is a view that resembles the arguments of virtue theory. In virtue theory, moral education is seen as important because “virtuous character traits are developed in one’s youth” (Fieser 2009). Moreover, adults are seen as responsible for the moral education of the young (ibid.). For these reasons, at least from the point of view of virtue theory, the fact that the older Smarts seem to be more in the dark about ethics is alarming.

The third possible way of defining secrecy of ethics is as the deliberate secret-keeping of ethics. Bok (1984, xvii), when studying ethics of concealment and revelation of secrets, notes that the process required her also to “trace the paths of secrecy in ethics - the uses of moral reflection to ward off, dismiss, obscure, and conceal”. Sometimes, especially when making decisions that concern others as well, keeping one’s ethical ideas and justifications a secret can be reprehensible. Bok (1984, 112) describes the problematics of this kind of secrecy of ethics:

Because I take moral arguments to require such publicity and open discussion, I find that the oddest and perhaps most corrupting exercise of secrecy is secrecy about one’s moral position: esoteric ethics. It is practiced by all groups that have one set of moral principles for public consumption and another for themselves. Esoteric ethics allows groups to follow strictly self-serving and subjective calculations.

So, yet another way of looking at Amber’s ethics would be to label it as esoteric. This would be the reading of Amber as the deceiver, the demon. Considering the character’s multifaceted qualities, it would provide too simple an explanation for the mystery of Amber. This, of course, depends on the reader, but personally I am more interested in the good than the bad.

This definition of secrecy of ethics overlaps with the discussion of Amber’s secrecy in chapter 5.1. Amber is the character who embodies secret ethics in *The Accidental*. Her ethical opinions and beliefs remain a kind of mystery even after multiple careful readings of the novel. Amber’s character shows that the fact that ethics are secret can be read in different ways, both positively and negatively. Some people may find it unbearable that they do not know the reasons behind another person’s choices, whereas some could not care less. With Amber, everybody certainly cares, but her enigmatic ethics are still

reviewed ambiguously by the Smart family members. Moreover, the same applies for the novel as well: ethics is enigmatic.

As we have seen, secret-keeping is ethical behaviour. Keeping silent, for instance, is something that all Smarts do in the novel, but for a variety of different reasons. Astrid and Magnus both keep quiet about school bullying. As it is usually believed that children and young people should rely on adults to solve their bullying issues, some readers might regard Astrid and Magnus's behaviour ethically equally problematic. However, if and when their secret ethics become known, quite of a few of us are likely to judge the siblings' silences in a different way. In other words, the same kind of behaviour may conceal different kinds of ethical reasoning and values. On the other hand, similar kinds of ethics may show in different kinds of behaviour.

What *The Accidental* shows is how significant encounters may reveal the secret nature of ethics for a brief moment. When something surprising happens and we are caught off guard, we may become momentarily better aware of the ethical beliefs and commitments of our own and of those of others. Thus an encounter with a special other may make us encounter ethics as well, in the shock of the dramatic event. In *The Accidental*, it is encountering Amber that puts all of the Smarts' ethics in motion: they have to reconsider their own ethics and to form an opinion of the ethics of the mysterious stranger. This is how the novel captures its readers, too: one has the unique chance to both make judgments of the ethics and ethical judgments of four different characters and to imagine the secret ethics of the fifth, very enigmatic character.

6. Conclusion

In this thesis, I have looked into secrets and ethics in Ali Smith's novel *The Accidental*. I have focused on the analysis of the characters in the storyworld and paid special attention to Amber, the stranger in the novel. The various ways in which secrets and ethics intertwine in *The Accidental* have been shown by doing close reading of the major characters' secrets and ethics. In addition, I have discussed narrative secrets and ethics from a more general perspective, on the level of the whole novel.

I originally became interested in *The Accidental* as a research subject because of Amber's character: I wanted to find out how the stranger works in the novel. This was especially interesting because I had noticed, having read other texts by Ali Smith as well, that the stranger is a recurring topic for the author. I wanted to do a thematic reading that would combine the two major themes of the novel, secrets and ethics, with the idea of the stranger. Thus, my research problem became to find the connections between secrets and ethics in the novel. I developed two sets of research questions, one focusing on secrets and the other on ethics. The main question that I wanted to ask was "How are secrets and ethics portrayed in the novel, and how do they intertwine?". My main hypothesis was that secrets and ethics are intertwined in various ways, and that the novel would present both themes in a varied, perhaps even ambiguous way. I also believed that Amber would have a significant role in the changes that the other main characters go through during the course of the narrative.

The two themes dictated the overall theoretical background for the thesis. For the sake of variety and in order to gain a wider selection of theoretical tools for my analysis I chose different, even contradictory sources. Another reason for this is the multiplicity and ambiguity present in the target text. As for secrets, the theory I used discussed it both as a general phenomenon (Sissela Bok), as a feature connected with reading (Matei Calinescu) and as an issue of form (Gérard Genette). The theoretical background shaped the analysis so that it eventually included the reading of multiple kinds of secrets on various levels of

The Accidental. The background reading of the earlier literary research on narrative ethics presented in the second chapter of this study can be divided into two distinct orientations: rhetorical ethics and ethics of alterity. It was hypothesised that by using sources from two so different strands of research it would ultimately be possible to honour the complexity of ethics present in the novel. During the course of my research project I experienced both frustration at the complexity of the theory and, more often, joy of new discoveries when trying to balance the reading of the different theoretical perspectives and *The Accidental*. Because my project is not theory-driven but ultimately relies on the narrative that I read, I tried to refrain from allowing the earlier theory dictate my reading. Instead, the goal was to examine what the novel reveals of the possibilities of secrets and ethics.

The analysis proved that *The Accidental* is a novel full of secrets that it reveals for the careful reader. Some of the secrets can be seen on the first reading, such as the Smarts' personal secrets and that Amber's identity remains a secret. However, the novel can be characterized as, unfathomably, revealing more and more secrets in the process of analysis. By showing the reader more it shows the reader more ambiguity. Of course this is not merely a characteristic of *The Accidental*: phenomena such as analepsis are typical features of many novels. My focus has therefore been mostly on what is unique to *The Accidental*: a rich and complex treatment of secrets and secrecy both as they occur in our everyday lives and in literature. Close reading of the secrets of the main characters revealed that the major secrets were often connected to minor or deeper secrets and insecurities. As one of the most memorable secretive families of the 21st century British literature, the Smarts truly are as good as their name. The careful secret-keeping both shows the intelligence of the Smarts and the pain that they feel because of not being close and honest to each other. My reading of the novel's overall message on secrets is that secret-keeping and sharing is no simple business, and that finding the answers to the questions what to tell and for which reasons is may be a process that one cannot do alone.

Ethics seems to be almost an impossible concept to define, and its intricacy shows very well in *The Accidental*, too. My reading focused on the ethical dilemmas encountered by the Smarts and the examining of Amber's ethics. The hypothesis that Amber's ethics appear as highly ambiguous held true. On the other hand, I remain uncertain whether all of the Smarts went through notable changes in their ethical thinking or behaviour, even if this was one of my original interpretations. Using concepts originated both in the use of

rhetorical ethics in analysing narratives, as theorized by James Phelan, and ethics of alterity, as theorized by Andrew Gibson and Simon Critchley, proved demanding, but was of substantial help when illustrating the differences between Amber and the other characters. Reading Amber as other, both ontologically and epistemologically, became one of my key strategies. As the study progressed, I became more and more interested in ethics as it emerges from reading the novel as a whole, not just focusing on the main characters. For this reason, and in order to be able to include at least a brief discussion on reading the novel as a whole, I revised my original plans and wrote a short chapter in which I analysed the kind of ethics that could be behind the novel: ethics of narration. Narrative ethics of *The Accidental* were thus revealed to be such that they demand a certain responsibility from the reader.

In order to make the connections between secrets and ethics even clearer I finally examined them together, focusing less on a minute reading of the novel than on further developing the interpretations that I had already made. Creating the concepts secrecy of ethics and ethics of secrecy worked as my final attempt to blend the two issues into each other as much as I understand them to be blended. The point of this was not to dispel the two issues: they can, of course, be understood separately too. However, for the purposes of this study, it is necessary to consider secrets and ethics as partly overlapping phenomena. This is based on the analysis of *The Accidental* as portraying the two themes closely together.

The Accidental has been read, in addition to this thesis, by other, more experienced readers - most recently in the collection of critical work published about Ali Smith's writing in 2013. The fact that the novel still generates interest testifies to the lasting impression it has made on many readers, and the allure of its ambiguity. My study has not been able to make an exhaustive reading of the novel either: there is still a great deal of room for further study. Some of the possible future research topics would include the role of stranger in Ali Smith's other works; a suitable pair to *The Accidental* would be *There But For The*, which I originally planned to analyse alongside *The Accidental*. The relationship between secrets and ethics in other texts by Smith would also merit more careful reading - the results would certainly be very interesting.

How, then, would one answer to the question posed by *The Accidental*: “Afraid or imagine?” (A, 131). First posed by Amber to a baffled employee who tried to stop Astrid filming a CCTV camera, and later on adopted by Astrid as a catchphrase for her new philosophy, the question is more profound than it first seems. The novel can not only be read as a charmingly complex answer to the question “Afraid or imagine?” but also as deep reflection on how we could approach secrets and ethics. With secrets, it is possible to concentrate on the negative, the dangerous and the scary: to choose afraid instead of imagine. As the novel shows through the character of Amber, focusing on imagining is a much more satisfying option. Similarly, with ethics, there are two choices: to be afraid of all the horrible things human beings are capable of doing to each other and to themselves, or to start imagining how things could be otherwise.

Although it has been insisted throughout this study that *The Accidental* is a novel that has its roots in ambiguity, one thing becomes clear. If one chooses to imagine instead of being afraid, wonderful things can happen. *The Accidental*, which, accidentally, has changed my life, too, has “imagine” written all over it.

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