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**A LONG WAY DOWN TO REDEMPTION: NICK HORNBY'S FOUR
SIDES TO THE SAME STORY**

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**A LONG WAY DOWN TO REDEMPTION: NICK HORNBY'S FOUR
SIDES TO THE SAME STORY**

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“We don’t see things as they are, we see them as we are”
Anais Nin

RESUMO

Este trabalho apresenta uma análise dos narradores homodiegéticos e de suas respectivas focalizações na obra *A Long Way Down*, de Nick Hornby, publicada em 2005, com o intuito de estimular os estudos sobre este autor no Brasil e de elucidar discussões aprofundadas sobre a narrativa deste escritor. Primeiro, apresentamos brevemente sua biografia e informações relevantes sobre a obra em análise. Em seguida, apresentamos os conceitos de narrador, bem como discutimos a ideia de sujeito de focalização e de objeto de focalização, valendo-nos de autores como Gerard Genette, Mieke Bal e Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, para embasar a análise deste estudo. A terceira parte deste estudo consiste na análise dos quatro narradores homodiegéticos de *A Long Way Down*. Esta análise consiste principalmente em explorar os discursos narrativos desses quatro narradores – respectivamente Martin, Maureen, Jess e JJ – e explorar como cada um articula-se como focalizador ou objeto de focalização dentro da narrativa. Através das palavras desses múltiplos narradores a história se desenrola, bem como todo humor e dramaticidade é criado a partir de tal mecanismo. As quatro personagens, que se conhecem em uma tentativa frustrada de suicídio, compartilham ao longo da narrativa diversas experiências e criam um vínculo afetivo que lhes possibilita sobreviver e, conseqüentemente, contar essa história retrospectivamente. No final, refletimos acerca das últimas considerações apresentadas pelos narradores, discutindo de que forma cada um deles encontrou sua própria redenção e resolveu seus problemas com a vida, ainda que temporariamente. Este estudo destaca a importância de explorar a narrativa de Nick Hornby em termos acadêmicos, bem como salienta a relevância de *A Long Way Down* em sua obra.

Palavras-Chave: Nick Hornby – *A Long Way Down* – Narradores Homodiegéticos – Focalização - Narratologia

ABSTRACT

This work presents an analysis of the homodiegetic narrators and their respective focalizations in Nick Hornby's *A Long Way Down*, published in 2005, aiming at stimulating further investigation on this author in Brazil and at elucidating deeper discussions regarding this writer's narrative. First, we briefly present his biography and relevant information about the book under analysis. Then, we present the concepts of narrator, and we discuss the idea of subject of focalization and object of focalization, based on the studies of scholars such as Gerard Genette, Mieke Bal and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan. The third part of this study is the analysis of the four homodiegetic narrators in *A Long Way Down*. This analysis mainly consists in exploring the speech patterns of these four narrators - respectively Martin, Maureen, Jess and JJ - and investigating how each one of them works as both the focalizer and object of focalization. Through the words of these multiple narrators the story unfolds, as well as all humor and drama is created from such a mechanism. The four characters, who meet in an unsuccessful suicide attempt, share along the narrative different experiences and end up creating an emotional bond that allows them to survive and, hence, tell this story retrospectively. Finally, we reflect on the latest considerations presented by these narrators, discussing how they find their own way to redemption and solve their problems with life, even if temporarily. This study highlights the importance of exploring the narrative of Nick Hornby in academic terms, and emphasizes the relevance of *A Long Way Down* in his oeuvre.

Keywords: Nick Hornby – A Long Way Down – Homodiegetic Narrators – Focalization - Narratology

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INTRODUCTION

Nick Hornby is an internationally acclaimed British novelist, essayist, lyricist and screenwriter constantly linked to pop culture, music and football. Best known for the novels *High Fidelity* (1995) and *About a boy* (1998), as well as for his football memoir *Fever Pitch* (1992), Hornby's work customarily touches upon music, sport, and the aimless and obsessive natures of his protagonists. Considered to be the father of a literary genre known as *lad-lit*¹, a title which he has openly stated not to agree with, Hornby's books have sold more than five million copies worldwide. Besides his literary work and the many awards received in this field so far, Hornby has been nominated for an Oscar for his adapted screenplay for the movie *An Education*, directed by Lone Scherfig, in 2010. He has also been writing reviews and essays for respected magazines such as *The Believer* and newspapers such as *The Independent* and *The Sunday Times*. Hornby's involvement with music is another important feature of his oeuvre, mostly renowned for writing lyrics for American singer and pianist Ben Folds and for the American country-rock band Marah. Three of his literary works, namely *Fever Pitch*, *High Fidelity* and *About a Boy* have been successfully adapted to the cinema screen. A cinematographic version of *A long way down* is eagerly awaited by Hornby's fans throughout the world and to be released by the beginning of 2014. The writer's name was once again in the spotlight in 2012 when *Fever Pitch*'s eventual publisher, Penguin, decided to reissue the book in its prestigious *Modern Classics* series. Hornby's novels have also gradually started being a part of the reading syllabus of schools and universities around the world, which shows his (at last) deserved acceptance among Literature scholars.

Behind an apparent unpretentious writing style, Nick Hornby is an author who seems to portray, in a very subtle and ironic way, what has been going on with the ordinary man's mind in these awkward times we live in. Hornby wonderfully portrays the current times we go through, by showing how humankind, in a confusing and troubled way, has been struggling to make ends meet in a world which demands a lot, time runs faster and people, deep inside, do not seem to know exactly where to go. It is a shame, though, that his novels have not been widely brought into academic discussion for their deeper aspects yet. Considering the relevance and the quality of his writings in this contemporary British literature scenario, it is essential that closer attention be paid to his work. Even though the writer himself has stated that "I do not wish to produce prose that draws attention to itself" (HORNBY, 2004, p.15) –

¹ Lad-lit is a term which refers to literature produced for the male public with male thematic and approaches.

probably reassuring what most of the critics claim to be his simplistic and also accessible writing style – there is plenty to be considered and analyzed in Hornby’s writing. It is time Hornby’s literary work came under scrutiny in academic circles around the world, a most justified attention that, first of all, can be based on the premises that his writings have been progressively becoming part of schools’ and universities’ reading syllabus around the globe. Another crucial factor for bringing his work into academic discussion is Hornby’s peculiar, ironic and apparently uncomplicated style which majestically fosters his readers to delve into subjects which touch human life’s inner aspects: obsession, desperation, depression, immaturity, to name some but a few.

A long way down, Hornby’s fourth novel, released in 2005 by *Penguin publisher*, is the work taken into consideration in this thesis. This book was chosen for three main reasons. To begin with, it was Hornby’s first novel to depict multiple narrators and, hence, to display a different building-up of the story: its predecessors presented first person homodiegetic narrators, who told the story from their own (somehow biased) perspective. Such a choice also directly affects the way focalization² works throughout the text: there will be different perspectives of each of the distinct narrators in their own attitudes and/or towards the others’. This is what actually helps build up the humor and the misadventures in this particular story, once each character picks up after the other and there might be misunderstandings, divergences of views and a number of ironic remarks. The second reason for choosing this very novel is its incredibly human and timeless thematic – suicide – and its correlated topics: despair, depression, loss, fate, relationships and – why not – hope. The last reason concerns aesthetics and appreciation: *A long way down* is probably one of Hornby’s finest and richest novels, regarding the construction of its narrative, characters complexity and the usage of irony, all gathered with a tragic-comic approach. Thus, it clearly portrays the maturation of his writing and the culmination of his wittiness.

A Long Way Down is a novel about four almost-suicides who end up bonding after meeting in the most awkward and inappropriate moment of their lives: they are all about to kill themselves by jumping off the top of London’s highest building. The story begins on a given New Year’s Eve, as these four individuals - Martin, Maureen, Jess and J.J - with diverse backgrounds form the unusual group that is responsible for retelling their story retrospectively from the present and, along with the emphasis on conflict and character development, creates an amusing and interesting narrative. Hornby structures his novel with first person narrators,

² The term will be discussed later on Chapter 2.

who sometimes address the reader directly, using each of the four protagonists as participant-observers, with multiple alternating sections from the perspective of each main character. The descriptions of the characters, given by themselves or by other group members, often reveal the needs of the individuals, especially as related to their specific reasons for wanting to commit suicide, while further actions relate more directly to the exchange among them. Therefore, considering each character as a separate piece of the whole allows us to see how they fit as a group sharing the same one thought: committing (or not) suicide. Every single one of the characters in this book is troubled in the way ordinary people usually are, which makes them even more believable. The brevity of their exchanges says a great deal about humans, their fears, frustrations and, hence, how some individuals choose to cope – or not – with them.

Having briefly presented some considerations on the aforementioned novel, this thesis focuses on Hornby's *A long way down* building of the narrative with its multiple narrators. Thus, its implications and consequences for the development of the story itself and the construction of the characters' profiles through their own perspectives of the same story are to be considered. Building up narratives using multiple narrators has been long used by innumerable renowned writers. The most respectable and influential ones are, to mention only a few, James Joyce, William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf. Unlikely as it might seem to some conservative literary critics, the sometimes underestimated writer Nick Hornby has inherited the possibilities opened up by such a remarkable group of fellow writers in one of his most interesting novels. Hornby depicts four narrators who are also the main characters and come together to tell a single story, picking one after the other while retelling the reader the facts that brought them together.

The aim of this analysis is to point out some relevant aspects on Hornby's *A long way down* usage of multiple narrators and its possible effects on the development of the story and on the building of the narrative itself. Such considerations will be supported by narratology studies in the works of authors such as Gerard Genette, Mieke Bal, Shlomith Romman-Kenan, among others, in relation to the narrator's role in a narrative, taking into account relevant aspects related to it, such as focalization, reliability and the usage of multiple narrators, namely. After that, it is crucial to present some concise insights on Hornby's multiple narrators and their respective focalizations as well as its visible effects on the construction of this particular narrative.

In *A Long Way Down*, it is visible that the multiple narratives serve the purpose of giving space to different voices and doing justice to their different interests. Hornby's

characters belong uncomfortably together, and frequently reflect on this, throughout the narrative. Narratively speaking, there is incredible cooperation, whereas their attitudes towards the group they form do not always conform or are in complete harmony. Often they tell their side of the story as if acknowledging what another narrator has just said, one character picking up the story a moment after the last has left it. Hornby's narrators speak explicitly to the reader, and even seem to know that they are there. This seems to be a tradition in the writer's work. By reading Hornby's novel we are under the impression the narrators are constantly talking to us, and their colloquial tone often reminds us that thinking can be like speaking, as long as there is another person there.

It is also important to highlight the three main questions which have motivated this analysis: 1) How does the use of multiple narrators affect the telling and building of the story, since it is through each of the narrator's focalization on the happenings that the reader gets to know the motivation for their decisions to commit suicide? 2) How do the narrators depict themselves and the others and how much of their feelings do they expose to the others, that is, how much do they hide from each other, how close or distant is their relationship towards each other? 3) Taking into account its serious and deep thematic, suicide and depression, how do the narrators deal with their own issues and do they find redemption in the end, or is it too late to find salvation for their souls in this tragic-comic world they live in? Throughout this thesis we tend to develop these subjects in order to propose answers to those questions, by means of a deeper analysis of *A long way down*'s narrative.

Regarding the structure of this thesis, the first chapter, entitled "Nick Hornby and his suicidal tale", introduces the reader to Nick Hornby's oeuvre and some relevant aspects of his life, as well as some prominent aspects of *A long way down*. As a subchapter, named "About the "boy" – Nick Hornby and his writings", we present pertinent information on the writer's life and on his main works. The second subchapter, "Meet the four suicidal – *A Long Way Down* to doom", focuses on the novel's story and on its four main homodiegetic narrators' general profile.

In the second chapter, "What they sense is what we get: some conceptualization on narrators, focalization, and narrator's reliability", we present the main theoretical background in which this work is solely based on. We introduce the reader to the ideas of some of the most respected Narratology theoreticians such as Genette, Bal and Rimmon-Kenan regarding multiple narrators, focalization and reliability. Such conceptualizations are brought out in order to enrich and solidify the further analysis of Hornby's narrative.

In the third chapter, “The four sides of *A long way down*: co-constructing a failed attempt of suicide”, we focus on Hornby’s building of the narrative by using multiple narrators who tell the story picking one after the other. The main goal is to unveil how the writer constructs the narrative by giving voice to four completely different homodiegetic narrators who tell the story through their own perspectives and bias. Closer attention is given to each of the narrators, mainly in regards to their speech patterns, such as punctuation, use of expressions and adjectives and emphasis. Regarding the content of their narrative, it is important to pay attention to each narrator’s focalization on some of the main events that form the narrative, as well as their perspective on their peers and on the group itself. Our main argument here is that the four narrators cooperate narratively speaking throughout this shared rebuilding of the facts, even though they might not appear to do so in real life events. Furthermore, they all seem to grow with the experience and end up changing their (bad) attitude towards life, themselves and the others, by eventually achieving redemption.

In the last chapter, “Four sides and one story: a long way down to redemption”, we turn our attention to the narrative itself as a whole and some possible conclusions we can come to by analyzing the narrative-characters’ behavior and perspectives towards the end of the narrative. We combine form and theme, trying to point out some aspects which make *A long way down* a novel worth being read and Nick Hornby a writer worthy of his popularity and academic value.

As no significant literary work has been found about the author in Brazil, we sincerely hope this never-ending analysis can inspire other literature students to delve into Nick Hornby’s novels and develop different approaches and investigations on the many different aspects his narratives can certainly bring up.

1 NICK HORNBY AND HIS SUICIDAL TALE

When we think of Nick Hornby today it is impossible not to recall highly-acclaimed novels such as *High Fidelity*, *About a Boy* and his classic football memoir, *Fever Pitch*. Known as the father of a genre called *lad lit*, Hornby's obsessive male characters have been eternalized for their typical childish behavior added to their tragic-comic inaptitude to face problems, filled with witty remarks in the voice of homodiegetic narrators throughout their narrative. Rob Flemming, *High Fidelity*'s protagonist, a neurotic record collector who makes top five lists to try to come to terms with his own failure, has become an iconic symbol of his generation through Hornby's words and was later immortalized by John Cusack's performance on the screen, in the Hollywoodian version of the novel, released in 2000³.

Hornby's name has been prominently associated with many different art forms. His essays and critic reviews on pop music and books have been compiled into books, namely, *31 songs* (2003) and *The Polysyllabic Spree* (2004). His monthly columns for the online magazine *The Believer*, "Stuff I've been reading", have just been turned into a book as well, released in 2012, *More baths, less talk*. His screenwriting for the movie *An adaptation* (2010) has granted him an Oscar nomination as well as his successful musical partnership with American songwriter and pianist Ben Folds has resulted in an album, *Lonely Avenue*, released in 2010.

Even though Hornby's work has been mostly acclaimed by the public and welcomed by most of the critics, there seems not to be much academic research and work done on his novels and writings yet. However cherished and iconic his work might be by his readers, it is noticeable that there is still some resistance towards his writings in the literary academic world. Most of what has already been analyzed and written about Hornby's production consists of critic reviews and articles. In Brazil, for example, Hornby does not seem to have become an area of interest for research in the literary field so far, which makes it harder to find reliable and respectable sources to help develop a study. Only a few master theses involving his name have been found around the world, most of them placed in the US and in Europe. This is one of the main reasons why his work should be brought into discussion in our own country, considering his high acceptance towards our public and also the quality of his writings. His name has been linked to some academic articles in the communication area, though. As his books intertwine topics such as music, pop culture and obsession, issues that

³ *High Fidelity*, directed by Stephan Frears.

concern some aspects of the current times we live in, it is possible to find academic production in this field, especially relating Hornby's male characters' behaviors to the ones we have in our society nowadays. There does not seem to be much research done regarding his narrative, though, which is a shame. Not only does Hornby's popularity account for his amazing way of bringing the reader to his side, it is also due to his unpretentious – and also rather witty – writing style, accessible to different kinds of readers, that Hornby is able to conquer fans around the world. By touching upon some issues of human nature, such as depression, dissatisfaction and defeat, all of this in a tragic-comic tone, readers can certainly relate to such an approach. Therefore, our main aim with this work is to bring Hornby's narrative into discussion and analysis, narratologically speaking.

This first chapter is divided into two parts. In order to familiarize our readers with Hornby's oeuvre, we will bring up some important aspects regarding his personal life, education and career, in a subchapter named *About the "boy" – Nick Hornby and his writings*. Most of this information has been collected from interviews and articles linked to his life. After that, we have another subchapter, named *Meet the four suicidals – A Long Way Down to doom*, in which we present some considerations on *A long way down's* plot and its main characters, so as to highlight some key aspects of this narrative and its main characters, as well as justify the choice of this novel for further analysis.

1.1 ABOUT THE "BOY" – NICK HORNBY AND HIS WRITINGS

Nick Hornby was born on April 17 1957, in Redhill, Surrey, in England. He was brought up in Maidenhead and educated at Maidenhead Grammar School and Jesus College, in Cambridge. His father, Derek Hornby, was a self-made man who ended up as chairman of Rank Xerox. He met Hornby's mother at their first workplace - he was the office boy, she was the secretary. By the time Nick was 11, his parents got divorced. His father, who unbeknown to Nick had begun another family, went to live with them in France and America; Nick remained with his mother, still a secretary in suburban Maidenhead. This made for a disjointed childhood. "Well, home was extremely normal, but my dad's life was quite exotic really. When I went away to stay with him, it was a different world. I never wanted to be in that world. I was much happier with my mates at home", stated Hornby in an interview to Guardian's reporter Simon Hattenstone (2005).

Hornby majored in English Literature at Cambridge University and there he began to compose stage plays, screenplays and radio plays. According to the writer's official website, Hornby started his professional career as an English teacher, mostly by teaching EFL⁴ students. He also worked as a journalist and has been a pop music critic for the *New Yorker* until today. The turning point of his career as a novelist, in his own words, began when he discovered the writings of authors such as Anne Tyler, Raymond Carver, Richard Ford, and Lorrie Moore, declaredly stated as his main influences so far:

I started by writing plays. They were sort of screen-cum-radio-cum-TV plays, and they weren't very good... When I left university and I tried to write, everything came out sounding like bad essays, so I thought I should stick to dialogue. I hadn't done enough reading-not of the things I wanted to emulate-so it took me a while, a long while, to grapple with voice ... everything changed for me when I read Anne Tyler, Raymond Carver, Richard Ford, and Lorrie Moore, all in about '86-'87: voice, tone, simplicity, humour, soul. All of these things seemed to be missing from the contemporary English fiction I'd looked at, and I knew then what I wanted to do. (HORNBY, 2012, electronic information)

On Hornby's official website, the writer once again expresses his admiration for Anne Tyler's and Lorrie Moore's writings as well as acknowledges the great influence their style had on the shaping of his own writing:

At the time that I started writing I had just discovered the books of Anne Tyler and Lorrie Moore. I'd never read a book that more precisely articulated what I wanted to do than Anne Tyler's *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*. There were some depressed and lost characters and a lot of humour, and I just felt this is what I want to be when I grow up. I had read two Lorrie Moore books, *Self Help* and *Like Life*, just before *Fever Pitch* came out. Again they had very sharp humour but were incredibly accessible and I think it was something particularly at the time that had been lost from contemporary British fiction. (HORNBY, 2012, electronic information)

Even though Hornby's first book was a collection of critical essays on American writers, entitled *Contemporary American Fiction* (1992), his biggest come-up took place in the same year, as *Fever Pitch*, an autobiographical story detailing his fanatical support for Arsenal Football Club, was released. Not only has this novel granted him awards but has also brought his name into the spotlight. Furthermore, Hornby started being cherished by football fans all over England and due to the book's success, he began to publish articles in the *Sunday Times* and in the *Times Literary Supplement*. Besides that, he started contributing with music reviews for the *New Yorker*. Hornby himself states

⁴ EFL – English as a Foreign Language

that he owes football a lot, mainly in what concerns his education, as we can see in the following excerpt, retrieved from his official website:

I have learned things from the game. Much of my knowledge of locations in Britain and Europe comes not from school, but from away games or the sports pages, and hooliganism has given me both a taste for sociology and a degree of fieldwork experience. I have learned the value of investing time and emotion in things I cannot control, and of belonging to a community whose aspirations I share completely and uncritically” (HORNBY, 2012, electronic information)

His second published book and also his first novel was the international phenomenon *High Fidelity*, published in 1995, followed by the equally successful novel *About a boy*, in 1998. Both novels have been transported to the cinema screen and released as very faithful and successful movie adaptations⁵. Hornby has also written other four novels, namely *How to be good* (2001), *A long way down* (2005), *Slam* (2007) and *Juliet, naked* (2009).

Hornby’s fiction is better known for its exploration of male obsessions, crises and weaknesses. His first novel, *High Fidelity* (1995), is the story of an obsessive record collector and list-maker; *About a Boy* (1998), the second one, focuses on the growing relationship between 30-something Will Freeman and Marcus, a 12-year-old boy. *How to Be Good* (2001), on a very similar tone, explores contemporary morals, marriage and parenthood. *Fever Pitch* (1992) has introduced the themes that would later be seen in his fiction: the nature of obsession and the search for emotional maturity and a sense of identity, with a particular emphasis on exploring male identity in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

A literary genre commonly known as *Lad Lit* sprang up after Hornby’s first novels were released, awarding him the not-so beloved title of father of this new literary approach. Hornby does not seem to agree with such a title at all. Hornby’s first few novels were often derisively referred in this way due to their focus on what *Guardian* reviewer Simon Hattenstone describes as “men who can’t, or who refuse, to grow up. (HORNBY, 2005b, electronic information).” Hornby’s male protagonists frequently express themselves through the lens of the obsessions that define their lives: Hornby’s own love for the football club Arsenal provides the narrative framework for the autobiographical *Fever Pitch*, while *High Fidelity*’s Rob uses pop music as a toolkit for analyzing romantic relationships past and present. What these critiques fail to realize, however, is that Hornby’s protagonists themselves recognize the problems inherent in viewing life through the framework of “laddish,”

⁵ *High Fidelity*, directed by Stephan Fears, released in 2001; *About a boy*, directed by Chris & Paul Weitz, released in 2002.

obsessions. Hornby himself seems to be against such labelling of his writings, as it is, according to his own words, not his main focus anymore:

When people refer to something being 'Hornby-esque', there's a couple of versions: there's the obsessive relationship with something; and then there's the feckless male who's lost a sense of direction and is struggling to achieve emotional maturity. I don't think I've written about either of those areas for 10 years (HORNBY, 2008, electronic information).

Whether his novels have been unfairly tagged or not, his first novels have indeed followed this formula. *High Fidelity*, Hornby's first novel and still most acclaimed one, introduces the readers to Rob Fleming, a 35-year-old man whose inaptitude to commit to his relationships and with adult life itself is pictured by means of a childish and sometimes arrogant behavior. Rob's only true passion and devotion is to music: as the owner of a semi-failed record store, Fleming's last attempt to come to terms with his own misfortunes is by making top 5 lists of best and worst moments of his life, most of them involving music and a heavy dose of self-commiseration. Fleming has become an icon of his generation, mostly due to his genuine, melancholic, pathetic yet truly heartfelt narrative of his own (mis)deeds.

About a Boy (1998), Hornby's second novel, is a hilarious yet extremely touching story of the relationship between Will, a 30-something male who has difficulty with relationships, and Marcus, the 12-year-old son of a depressed and suicidal single mother. Unlike *High Fidelity*'s protagonist Rob, who is crazy about music, Will, who lives off the royalties of a song written by his father, has no driving passion and no particular drive for anything. His adolescent immaturity is in direct contrast to the adult-like maturity of Marcus, a complex and captivating character who carries too many worries over his young shoulders. The comedy and the tenderness of the story come from the unlikely friendship that forms between these two characters, and the way in which Will helps Marcus to enjoy life and allow himself to be a child, while Marcus in turn helps Will with his belated growing-up.

Hornby's third novel, *How to be Good* (2001) features Hornby's first female protagonist, doctor Katie Carr. The novel, while still as funny as its predecessors, is morally and philosophically more complex, exploring not only modern marriage and parenthood, but also concepts of goodness: Katie prides herself on being a good person, so when she finds herself having an affair she is forced to do some serious soul-searching about the nature of responsibility to oneself, one's family and society. This novel also represents a rupture from Hornby's typical usage of homodiegetic male narrators giving voice to a woman and showing his readers the other side of the story.

A Long Way Down (2005), the novel taken into consideration in this thesis, also demonstrates Hornby's remarkable ability to address the most serious of issues while still creating a humorous and entertaining read. In this case, the serious matter is suicide: four people (two male, two female) encounter each other on New Year's Eve at a well-known suicide spot. After sharing a pizza and a long talk, each makes the decision not to end with their lives, and the novel is therefore less about suicide and more about the determination to go on with life. This time, Hornby builds the narrative by using four multiple homodiegetic narrators, possibly a way of trying to innovate in his writings and distancing himself from the so-called lad lit genre he himself does not seem to approve of.

Slam (2007), his fifth novel, features Hornby's youngest male protagonist: 16-year-old Sam, who is facing unplanned parenthood, displays both the inadequacies and the endearing qualities that are typical of Hornby's older male characters. *Juliet, Naked* (2009), Hornby's latest novel, is the story of a 30-something couple, Annie and Duncan, whose relationship is ending. Duncan is obsessed with an ageing rock star, Tucker Crowe, an obsession that takes up most of his time and causes him to neglect Annie. The novel therefore addresses similar issues to *High Fidelity* (1995): an obsessive passion for music and a male character's emotional smallness and inability to connect with his girlfriend. However, *Juliet, Naked* has a different tone, for this time it is Annie who is the focal point and the more sympathetic character. *Juliet, Naked* (2009) therefore demonstrates both the continuities and the developments in Hornby's fiction. His recurrent theme of unfit men consumed by obsessive passions is ever-present, yet he never bores his readers with repetitiveness, for each novel has its own freshness and originality, and his later work as a whole displays an increasing emotional depth and a willingness to address issues that are more serious.

Concerning his personal life, Nick Hornby has been married twice: he and his first wife have one son, Daniel, born in 1992, who has autism. Hornby's second wife is a producer, Amanda Posey. They have two sons, born in 2003 and 2005, respectively. His oldest son, Danny, has motivated the building of *The Tree House Trust*, a London-based charity, established in 1997 to provide an educational Centre of Excellence for children with autism. It was set up by a group of parents, led by Hornby, whose children had recently been diagnosed with autism. The book, *Speaking with the angel*, is a collection of short stories written by authors such as Irvine Welsh, Zaddie Smith and Hornby himself, released in 2001, aiming at fundraising for *The Tree House Trust*. *Nipple Jesus* is Hornby's contribution to the book. Regarding Hornby's personal life, two points might be relevant to getting to understand his

writing thematic and characters: his fight against depression and his struggle to give his autistic son a better life.

For a supposedly cheerful author, Nick Hornby's books usually present the readers with miserable characters and there is a lot of melancholy behind their actions and thoughts. *Fever Pitch*, for example, even though it is a *memoir* and mostly autobiographic, as much as it is about football, it is about a man coping with depression, underachieving and not belonging. *High Fidelity*, his first novel is the story of a music-obsessed geek, but it is also the story of an emotional illiterate who cannot make plans or face life adversities. *About A Boy*, on the same hand, features a subplot about a mother trying not to commit suicide, and *How To Be Good*, portrays a middle-aged couple striving unsuccessfully to find hope in their relationship. Hornby's melancholic and depressive tone can be explained by his own issues with depression, as he himself stated on an interview to Hattenstone:

The weird thing was that *Fever Pitch* came almost straight out of therapy. I used to go in on Monday afternoon and there was always this awkward thing at the beginning. Before you start getting into things, you sit there, and there's a long pause and she'd say, 'How was your weekend?' and I never knew what to say, so I'd say the same thing every week, which was, 'Rubbish - got beat two-nil,' and 'All right, beat Tottenham.' After about six months, she said, 'Why d'you make the same stupid joke every Monday?' I'd never thought seriously what it was all about. (HORNBY, 2005b, electronic information)

Hornby realized his life was extremely attached to football. As a child, he had resented his father not being around, but they eventually forged a new relationship through football, as his father took him to Highbury. As an adult, football still shaped his week, his hopes and moods. He began to think of Arsenal as a metaphor for his own life: sometimes boring, underachieving and unattractive. *Fever Pitch* was a way of coping with his own depression, a way of exorcizing his own demons:

I was never suicidal or completely black. I've always been able to enjoy aspects of my life. It was more an utter conviction of failure – therefore, what's the point. I assumed that people who were successful were on a completely parallel track, and my track just led to doom and disaster. I thought I was going back to teaching and being extremely unhappy about it for the rest of my life. (HORNBY, 2005b, electronic information)

However miserable and dissatisfied his characters tend to be, most of his stories end on an encouraging tone. Hornby has stated that this preference is not related to possible market pressures and publishing issues, which would force him to give the readers a happy-ending tone. As a matter of fact, Hornby has declared he does that in order to comfort himself:

I think one of the reasons the books work is because people identify with that sort of depression, and they also want to be told that there might be some kind of reason to keep going. They end in an optimistic way because it's about what I want to believe. It's to offer myself consolation. (HORNBY, 2005b, electronic information)

Hornby's relationship with his son, Danny, has also been a source of inspiration to one of his *A long way down*'s character, Matty. As Maureen, Matty's mom and one of the main characters, does in his plot, Hornby has tried to create a life for Danny, by giving him Arsenal jerseys, putting up posters on his walls, in the same way Maureen tries to give Matty what she considers to be the life of a teenager. However, despite some obvious subtleties, Nick Hornby alerts the untrained eye that there is very little of the autobiographical in his writings.

Fever Pitch was obviously and entirely autobiographical. As for the rest - well, it depends on what you mean by autobiographical. Some people ask me which record shop I worked in, or which shop *High Fidelity* was based on, and I have never worked in a record shop, and I made Championship Vinyl up. (...) I think with many of the books, I've ended up dramatizing a mood or state of mind I've experienced, so they're not straightforwardly, literally autobiographical (HORNBY, 2005b, electronic information)

Hornby's second passion is music, which forms the basis of his first novel, *High Fidelity* and also his latest one, *Juliet, naked*. Just as *Fever Pitch* is not really a book about football, *High Fidelity* uses the protagonist's obsession with music as a pretext to delve into the issues it explores. Rob, a pop addict who runs a London record shop, is forced to re-think his approach to life when another relationship comes to an end. *High Fidelity*, like some of the novels that follow, not only explores the contemporary male psyche and its tendency to develop obsessions, but it also examines the nebulous boundaries between fantasy and reality. Just as Hornby's own life, recounted in *Fever Pitch*, is entangled with football worship, Rob sees everything through the lens of his favorite music and endless "Top 5 Lists". In order to function more effectively in the real world and experience a healthier emotional life, he must learn to reduce his obsessions, for they endanger his ability to form meaningful relationships.

Fever Pitch translates life into a football universe. The narrator of *High Fidelity* interprets his own life with the help of rock music and records. *About a boy* is a story about growing up. However, there is hope for men thus infected: all major male characters in Hornby's books show signs of gradual improvement. At least, they realize they have problems. There is no final solution or settlement or healing in the therapeutic sense of these words, but there is development and gradual change.

Due to his somewhat pop-cultural approach, Hornby occupies a peculiar position in the English letters and critical reception. Despite *Fever Pitch*'s popular subject matter, it was celebrated by reviewers in the leading newspapers and was short-listed for the Whitbread Prize. *High Fidelity*, as well as *A long way down*, has been highly acclaimed by reviewers all around the world. According to Cristopher Watson's view (2006), a lot of controversy surrounds Hornby's writings, since they range over the popular-literary divide. Watson believes the distinction between serious and popular writing is a condition of canonicity, that is, it belongs to the history of literacy, of the systematic regulation of reading and writing, as the adaptation of that system's regulatory procedures to social conditions in which the practice of writing is no longer confined to a scribal class. Watson (2006) adds that the explosion of popular writing in the eighteenth century was an effect of the fact that writing itself was becoming popular. Hornby, who is often seen as straddling the popular/literary divide, not only acknowledges but also welcomes the transitory view of textual consumption, being opposed to the view that the only writings considered to be canonic are worth reading. Hornby's reviews for *The Believer* magazine, entitled "Stuff I've been reading" usually bring up his own motto that people should read whatever they want to, not what they think they are supposed to.

In his article, Watson (2006) points out the important fact that, in recent years, both Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus* and Hornby's novel *How to Be Good* have appeared on literature syllabi at the University of North Carolina at Asheville, developments which should be encouraging even to those who do not agree that they qualify as sufficiently "literary" to warrant academic study. When asked recently what the difference between "popular" and "literary" fiction was, Nick Hornby responded as follows:

I'm not sure that I do distinguish between "popular" and "literary" [fiction]. I think that increasingly books are packaged that way, publishers will spell it out to you, when a book is a popular book or a literary book, and I think that reviewers respond in kind. But to me there are still only good books and not-so-good books (WATSON, 2006, p.155)

The question of what makes a book "good," or "not-so-good" presents a seemingly innumerable set of problems for whoever would seek to answer that most subjective question, and whosoever should respond to them would face those same problems in kind. Moreover, to help heat up this discussion of where Hornby's writing stands, *Fever Pitch* was released in the Penguin Modern Classics series at the end of 2012, since it was the book's 20th anniversary. Penguin Modern Classics, launched 51 years ago, has always been a collection

unafraid to mix elitism with populism. It has sought to publish not just the greatest literary works of the 20th century, but also the ones that had the biggest impact. Along with Kafka, F. Scott Fitzgerald and George Orwell, its authors have included Andy Warhol, Malcolm X and Ian Fleming. The decision to republish Nick Hornby's *Fever Pitch* as a Modern Classic – which drew criticism – seems a natural one. Hornby's memoir appeared a respectable 20 years ago and its influence had been impressive. It has generated a new literary genre – the fan's memoir – and helped establish football as a fitting subject for so-called serious writing.

The main controversy in this case probably comes from the fact that ours is a society attached to the present, or at least to the very recent past, as it was stated in *The Guardian's* editorial, “Well done, Nick Hornby, but joining the canon takes time”:

A genuine classic is a work whose brilliance helps it overcome the routine oblivion that consigns the vast majority of books to the literary scrapheap. Many works now considered classics were ignored in their own day, helping to remind us that instant judgments are not always the correct ones” (EDITORIAL, 2012, p.1).

In *What is a classic?*(1944), a presidential address to the Virgil Society, TS Eliot suggests that Classical literature has certain qualities, but that does not mean that all great literature, or great authors should have all those qualities. The outstanding quality of a classic, however, is maturity. The maturity of literature is the reflection of the society in which it is produced: an individual author — notably Shakespeare and Virgil — can do much to develop his language: but he cannot bring that language to maturity unless the work of his predecessors has prepared it for his final touch. A mature literature, therefore, has a history behind it; a history, that is not merely a chronicle, an accumulation of manuscripts and writings of this kind and that, but an ordered, though unconscious, progress of a language to realize its own potentialities within its own limitations. Maturity of language, which distinguishes classic prose, accompanies maturity of mind and manners. When a classic, in addition to the comprehensiveness in relation to its own language, also has value and significance in relation to a number of foreign languages, it may be said to have universality. It is then a universal classic. This is the distinction between a relative classic—classic in relation to its own language— an absolute classic —classic in relation to a number of foreign languages and literatures. If being a classic is directly related to its ability of surviving the effects of time, it may be too soon to make any kind of predictions towards Hornby's oeuvre. However never-ending the debate about the republishing of *Fever Pitch* in a classical series

might be, it is certainly a considerable achievement to Hornby's career as a writer, whether the critics approve it or not.

According to Abrams and Harpham (2011, p.41), in recent decades the phrase "literary canon" has come to designate those authors who, "by a cumulative consensus of critics, scholars, and teachers have come to be widely recognized as "major", and to have written works often hailed as literary classics." It is the product of "a wavering and unofficial consensus; it is tacit rather than explicit, loose in its boundaries and always subject to changes in the works that it includes" (2011, p.41). However, as the scholars state, since the 1970's the nature of canon formation and oppositions to established literary canon has become a leading concern among critics of diverse theoretical viewpoints, whether deconstructive, feminist, Marxist, post-colonial or new historicist. The demand is "to open the canon" so as to make it multicultural instead of "Eurocentric". There are the defenders of the standard canon, and their view, as of its opponents, range from moderate to extreme. The moderate defenders believe that it is important to take into consideration what has been previously included in such an honorable list. The value of the literary work of writers such as Shakespeare, Dickens, Eliot, Beckett and all the other names which figure in Harold Bloom's list on what he considers to be the western canon of literature is undeniable.

However, according to Abrams and Harpham (2011), we have to consider that there has been a great deal of fine literature being produced in the last decades, in both Western and Eastern worlds, and they cannot be taken for granted or reduced because they have not achieved the canonic or classic standards. Furthermore, it is not only time that will dictate which writings will be read as classics – here meaning timeless - but also the readers, with their power of selection and appreciation. We cannot disregard the reader's role in this discussion, no matter what critics might say, without readers there is definitely no accomplishment.

Charlie Cooper, in his editorial for *The Independent*, has gathered different experts' opinions on the publishing of Hornby's football memoir as a "classic". Mostly divided, writers and critics have declared either in favor or against the inclusion. John Sutherland, professor of English Literature at University College London, said that "classics don't just cross time, they cross frontiers. *Fever Pitch* is a very good novel, but are they reading it in Paris, Berlin, Moscow? (COOPER, 2012, p.1)". Tim Lott, whose *The Scent of Dried Roses* is also on the Penguin Modern Classic list, said *Fever Pitch's* classic status was "well deserved":

It is one of the earliest examples of a memoir written novelistically and it took ideas of masculinity in a very new direction. I don't think anyone had really tried to analyse why men were so obsessed with football before. It tied together the sensitivity of men with the rough and tumble of the game (COOPER, 2012, p.1)

Dr Patrick Hayes, fellow and tutor at St John's College, Oxford, stated that by giving Hornby's "middle-brow" brand of fiction classic status, Penguin had provoked a fresh debate about what the word "classic" means: "Whether something is a classic gets judged over an awfully long time, by readers who return to the work again and again and repeatedly discover in that work something compelling or powerful." (COOPER, 2012, p.1) No matter how divided opinions are, nothing will diminish the importance Hornby's memoir has had for opening a new literary genre – the fan memoir - and by heating up this never ending debate over what should or should not be considered good or bad literature – as if such a thing really existed.

Nick Hornby himself has always presented very polemic views on this issue. In his column for *The Believer* magazine, he has always supported the idea that, as a former English teacher and as a writer, people should have the free will to read whatever literature they felt more comfortable with, instead of not reading anything at all, for the sake of not being in conformity with the canonic standards:

In Britain, more than 12 million adults have a reading age of 13 or less, and yet some clever-dick journalist still insists on telling us that unless we're reading something proper, we might as well not bother at all. But what's proper? Whose books will make us more intelligent? Not mine, that's for sure. But has Ian McEwan got the right stuff? Julian Barnes? Jane Austen, Zadie Smith, E.M. Forster? Hardy or Dickens? Those Dickens-readers who famously waited on the dockside in New York for news of Little Nell - were they hoping to be educated? Dickens is literary now, of course, because the books are old. But his work has survived not because he makes you think, but because he makes you feel, and he makes you laugh, and you need to know what is going to happen to his characters (HORNBY, 2006, p.1)

Hornby has also been a defender of writings accessible to all, idea which started being developed throughout his teaching years:

When I was teaching another teacher told me to teach Macbeth by getting the children to draw pictures of witches. I couldn't understand how that was teaching Shakespeare; that was allowing them to draw pictures of witches. I think part of the reason I became the writer I became is because of teaching in a school, and you're always looking for this stuff that is really intelligent but really simple and everyone can understand it. I always thought *Of Mice And Men* was such a perfect book because there's nothing not to understand, but it's still really clever and moving and complicated, but everybody understands the complication. It doesn't leave anybody out. I think that's what books should be like (HORNBY, 2004, p.10)

Hornby has also stated that he is not worried about using sophisticated language while writing his novels. In his own view, the readers should focus on the fictional world and characters he builds up, which means the difficulty in language could, per se, jeopardize this understanding and the flow of the reading:

I am not particularly interested in language. Or rather, I am interested in what language can do for me, and I spend many hours each day trying to ensure that my prose is as simple as it can possibly be. But I do not wish to produce prose that draws attention to itself, rather than the world it describes, and I certainly don't have the patience to read it. (I suspect that I'm not alone here. That kind of writing tends to be admired more by critics than by book-buyers, if the best-seller lists can be admitted as evidence: the literary novels that have reached a mass audience over the past decade or so usually ask readers to look through a relatively clear pane of glass at their characters.) I am not attempting to argue that the books I like are 'better' than more opaquely written novels; I am simply pointing out my own tastes and limitations as a reader (HORNBY, 2004, p. 12)

Nick Hornby has currently been writing a monthly book-review column for *The Believer*, a magazine associated with Dave Eggers. In his column he lists, with commentaries, the books he buys each month and the books he reads, though, in accordance with the magazine's principles, any negative reactions are suppressed or implied by silence. On the other hand, academically speaking, most of what has been said about Hornby's writings consists of critiques and reviews, written by either fellow journalists or literary critics. There is not much academic work done – barely none – published or available on libraries databases worldwide. Very few papers and articles mention aspects of his narratives, most of them focusing on his thematic, stylistic or aesthetics.

After having presented some relevant facts on Hornby's life and on his oeuvre, in the next subchapter we will bring up some considerations on *A Long Way Down's* story and on its four homodiegetic narrators, in order to familiarize the readers of this thesis with general aspects of the novel.

1.2 A LONG WAY DOWN TO DOOM

A long way down, Hornby's fourth novel, was published in 2005 by Penguin Readers. This is the writer's first novel to depict four different narrators and, hence, a story which shows the same story with recurrent different subjects and objects of focalization.

Considered by most of the critics as one of Hornby's best writings so far, ALWD⁶ has also been a success among the public and the critics. Furthermore, a movie based on Hornby's writing will be released by March, 2014, directed by French director Pascal Chaumeil, starring Pierce Brosnan, Rosamund Pike, Aaron Paul and Toni Collette as the four main characters.

ALWD's main theme is considered to be suicide – how four people who give up killing themselves learn (together) how to cope with their own uneasiness and pain. However, the book is more about empathy and learning to go through painful moments than suicide itself. When asked about the idea for such an unusual grouping of characters and, at the same time, heavy thematic, Hornby stated the following:

I wanted to write a book that rocked, which was about something extremely downbeat, and I wanted to see if I could take these characters from the dark and to the light without being sentimental or unrealistic. If I wrote a book about depression that was incredibly depressing, why would anybody want to read it? (HORNBY, 2005b, electronic information)

Jung (2008) argues that ALWD's topic has little to do with suicide and criticizes Hornby's intention of trying to write a witty book on such a serious topic. Suicide here is only "a construed topic to serve an extraordinary and nonexistent plot" (2013, p.8). Heath (2005) claims that, at its heart, this novel isn't really about suicide itself anyway. It's more about what happens when you don't kill yourself, and the tale Hornby subsequently tells is an unusual and unpredictable one. Mccalf (2005) argues that the sentimental aspect of the book has put off some critics and the "foursome never sounds quite like a true foursome, with its members' habitual recourse to pop music as a way of ordering their respective universes" (2005, p.1).

Dederer (2005) points out that voice is the point of the book, point with which we completely agree. Dederer (2005) believes Hornby has set himself the task of making a disparate, unappealing set of depressives as sympathetic and entertaining as possible. This profligate dispersal of his winning voice can be seen as a mark of a new respect for his characters and, consequently, of his growth as a novelist. He could simply keep writing versions of himself, imbuing only members of his own club with his wit. Instead, he chooses to animate this odd grab-bag of souls.

Thier (2005) states that Nick Hornby produces a novel whose central thesis seems to be that the world is grossly, almost intolerably imperfect about the story of what happens next, and of what doesn't. Following that, the book begins with an epigraph from the novelist

⁶ From now on, the novel *A long way down* will be referred to as ALWD so as to avoid repetition

Elizabeth McCracken, "The cure for unhappiness is happiness, I don't care what anyone says". However, Hornby doesn't confuse the simplicity of this thought with the impossibility of sometimes living it. For all his light touches, he is never superficial enough to suggest that these lives that have fallen apart, in four of the millions of ways lives may do so, can easily be patched up and renewed. Whatever limited consolations the characters find in each other, Hornby resists melodramatic resolutions or glorious moments of redemption, and he doesn't smuggle away or refute all the reasons his characters took with them to the rooftop where they met, the ones that urged them toward the edge rather than down to the ground the slow way, back into the world. If, as a result, there's a sort of aimlessness as the book tapers toward its end, maybe it is the price of Hornby's refusal to offer either cheap, grand, sentimental reasons to choose life or a retreat into a lazy bleakness, a wallowing in the pointlessness of it all. It's as though he is fairly certain that life is worth living but can't quite find the ways to show it, or to prove it.

1.2.1 *A long way down's complications and (re)solutions*

ALWD works fine as a dark comedy, dealing with the theme of suicide attempt and, oddly enough, touches the veiled loyalty built up among a bunch of completely different strangers. The story is written in the first-person narrative from the points of view of the four main characters, namely, Martin, Maureen, Jess and JJ. These four strangers happen to meet on the roof of a high building called Topper's House in London on New Year's Eve, each with the intent of committing suicide. Their plans for death in solitude are ruined when they happen to meet, on the verge of ending with their own lives. Hindered by the council's safety measures, they find themselves talking instead of jumping, and a peculiar group identity is formed. They go on meeting up, even though the idea of suicide is always there, bonding them together. The whole narrative is constructed around their misadventures as they decide to come down from the roof alive - however temporarily that may be.

The narrative is divided into three nameless chapters. In the first one, we are introduced to the four main characters and the conditions that made them come that far: disgraced TV presenter Martin Sharp, the lonely housewife Maureen, the unsuccessful musician JJ and the rude teenager Jess meet by chance at Topper's House in London on New Year's Eve. After telling their individual stories to the others, they decide to postpone the

jumping and protect themselves. Accordingly, a group of four unfortunate and very individual people forms. Jess's condition not to jump is that they help her to find her ex-boyfriend Chas. The newly formed group decides to take a taxi and drive to the party they suppose Chas to be at. After finding and talking to Chas, they decide to go to Martin's place where they find Penny, Martin's girlfriend, who has obviously been crying and worried. She accuses Martin of being unfaithful to her because he had left the party they had both attended that evening without any explanation. In this first chapter, the reader acknowledges the first nuances of what the four characters are like. Martin's inclination to leadership is unveiled as well as his constant arguing with Jess, the reckless teenager who seems to put everybody in cumbersome situations. Jess, oddly enough, is the one who first perceives them as a group, comparing them to The Beatles. Along with this, Maureen shows her resignation to life and J.J.'s affiliation to literature becomes visible to the reader.

The second part of the narrative transports the reader to the four characters' daily lives and out of the roof, that is, we are introduced to each character's reality and routine. The next morning the newspapers claim that Martin has slept with Jess, after Chas, in a clever attempt to take advantage of the situation, gives the media false information. Jess' father confronts her because the scandal is likely to be very inconvenient for his current responsibilities: he is the Junior Secretary of Education and has a reputation to lose. Out of fear that her father learns she wants to kill herself, she does not deny it. To make matters worse, the following newspaper edition is about a suicidal-pact between Martin and Jess. Jess' father asks Martin to clear up the accusations and he denies having slept with Jess. After an awkward conversation, her father asks Martin to protect his daughter by giving him money. Martin sees such a burden as an opportune way to wiggle out of his precarious financial situation. Afterwards, a reporter calls JJ wanting to know why they decided not to jump, but JJ refuses to discuss it. Having caused most of the trouble, Jess decides to organize a meeting at Maureen's place to calm all the nerves down. At the meeting, Jess suggests that they try to profit from the suicidal-report in the newspaper. Her idea is to confess to the press that they saw an angel who saved them from jumping. Martin, Maureen and JJ are not comfortable with the idea and try to convince Jess out of talking to the press. The next morning they find out that Jess had already told a reporter, Linda, that they had seen an angel that looked like Matt Damon. Jess also promised Linda an interview with Martin, Maureen and JJ. Although they are disappointed with Jess' behavior, they decide to do the interview. Linda uses the interview to attack Martin in the press, which costs him his job on the cable TV he works for. The

moneymaking scheme works for a while, up to the point in which Jess ends up admitting that the angel-story was not true on live TV.

In the second chapter, the readers are also presented with one of the most unsettling, yet funny, moments of the narrative. JJ decides that the four of them have to go on vacation in order to forget the suicidal event and all the disconcerting events which have unfolded since then. Martin, Jess and JJ help Maureen to find a place for Matty to stay - Matty is Maureen's disabled son and her main reason for feeling miserable and guilty. One week later they sit in a plane to Tenerife. On the second day, Jess sees a girl who looks very similar to her lost sister Jen. Jess bothers the girl and they have a fight. Out of frustration, Jess gets drunk and the police have to take her back to the hotel. JJ meets a girl that knows his old band and they spend the night together. Martin decides to leave the hotel after a fight with Jess. During his absence, he thinks about his life, deciding he has made no mistakes, and feels comfortable in blaming other people for how his life has turned out. In the taxi to the airport, they talk about their vacation and plan another meeting for Saint Valentine's Day. Back to the roof of Topper's House on Saint Valentine's Day, they detect a young man who is planning to jump from the roof. However, they unsuccessfully try to stop him from committing suicide. They decide to go home and to meet the following afternoon at Starbucks.

In the third and last part, we are face-to-face with the characters' attempts to redeem and try to find a plausible (even if temporary) solution to their suicidal dilemmas. Martin tells them about a newspaper article he read according to which people who want to commit suicide need ninety days to overcome their ambition. Based on that, the group decides to wait with their decision until the 31st of March. In the meantime, Maureen and Jess decide to visit Martin's ex-wife, Cindy, to convince her to give him a second chance. Cindy Sharp lives with her kids in Torley Heath and has a new partner, Paul, who is blind. Cindy explains to them that Martin made many mistakes and that he does not seem to care for his children. Following that, Jess organizes a meeting in the basement of Starbucks, inviting all relatives of the four. Seventeen people appear for the "intervention", as Jess prefers to name it, even though the meeting is a disaster. Jess and her parents scream at each other because her mother claims that she had stolen a pair of earrings belonging to Jen out of Jen's untouched room. While they are fighting, Jess runs out of the Starbucks. JJ and a former member of his band are leaving the basement to have a fight and Martin has an argument with one of Maureen's nurses because he claims he has flirted with Penny, the girlfriend he does not even like anymore. Maureen is the only one of the four who is still present. She talks to Jess' parents and utters the speculation that Jen maybe had come back and taken the earrings. The nurses Sean and

Stephen help Maureen bring Matty home and on the way they ask her if she is interested in joining a quiz-team. At the quiz, an old man from the team offers Maureen a job at a newspaper-store. When Jess comes back from her trip around London Bridge, her mother apologizes for her behavior. Jess accepts the apology and they make a pact of trying to be a family again. Maureen, JJ and Martin have new jobs now: Martin teaches pupils and wants to start a new life; JJ is a busker and is happy to make music again while Maureen works in a newspaper-store. The ninety days have passed and they meet in front of Topper's House. They decide to go on the roof again to see what it could feel like. On top, while watching the London Eye, they realize that their lives are not so bad. They decide to put off killing themselves for another six months. Even though the story ends in an uplifting tone, Hornby makes sure to show his readers life is far from being perfect for these characters – and they are all aware of that. However, they all seemed to have learned the most important lesson of all: life, no matter how painful can be, always surpasses death.

Having presented the most relevant actions which shape the ALWD diegesis, it is time to provide an overview of each of the four main characters' profiles, in order to familiarize the readers of this thesis with their main features and peculiarities.

1.2.2 Meet the four suicidals

ALWD is told from the perspective of four homodiegetic narrators: Martin, Maureen, Jess and J.J. Even though these characters may not seem to cooperate in real life situations throughout the narrative, it is by their collaborative storytelling that they tend to work out solutions for their attitudinal problems in facing daily life events or those among themselves.

The first character the readers are introduced to is Martin Sharp. He is a celebrity whose age isn't revealed to the reader – neither by him nor by the others - , being depicted as a “middle-aged man” by the other narrators. This might be a relevant fact, since, from the beginning of the narrative, once Martin himself, when taking the narrator's position, does not want to reveal how old he is – he himself states that he is “old enough to know” he has “screwed up his life” (HORNBY, 2005a, p. 5), without giving further details. As his own narrative depicts Martin as a vain and slightly arrogant character – and this is confirmed by the others' focalizations as well –, the age issue would certainly affect our interpretation of some mishaps regarding this character's path throughout the narrative.

Martin pictures his former life as a perfect one: he had a wife and two little daughters, a well-paid job and was successful. He used to be the host of a famous TV show but he, from what is told, made the mistake of sleeping with a minor. This is one of the reasons why, perhaps, Martin chooses not to tell the reader his actual age, in order to preserve some of his integrity, so to speak. This scandal, however, made him even more popular as his case was stripped in the yellow press. When he is released from prison, he discovers that his marriage is ruined. From that point on, Martin starts telling us his story: he now works for a cable TV channel with low popularity and has an affair with Penny, his former colleague. He does not make an effort to see his daughters or to clarify the tense situation with his wife. However, he seems to be very unhappy about this situation and feels that he has "pissed his life away" (HORNBY, 2005a, p. 15) and that's why he wants to end his life.

Martin made lots of bad mistakes in his life and is able to lucidly acknowledge it, thus showing to be the cleverest in the group. Martin also shows his empathetic feature towards the other characters and certainly knows how to modalize his speech according to his audience. It is visible throughout his turns to tell the story that to some people he talks very informally, whereas with others he talks in a very exalted way. This is very visible while talking to Jess and Maureen. Sometimes he interacts a bit rudely with Jess, clearly his antagonist in this group, while he also adopts some kind of father's role towards her. With Maureen he has a special relation, because of her gentle character. She is nice and sensitive and he misses this in his own life, but for him, she is too old to start an affair with— Martin is vain and used to dating beautiful girls, which would not be Maureen's case, according to his own view. Martin and JJ aren't best friends, but they accept each other in this "special gang".

Maureen is a 51-year-old single mother of a disabled son named Matty. Her whole life revolves around him, having had to leave her job in order to look after him. She has no freedom and free time except the services at the church she attends every Sunday. Maureen's narrative tone clearly opposes Martin's, as she is always very tactful with the words she uses and lives under the Catholic Church's principles. Her reason to commit suicide is to get rid of her problems, mostly related to her son's condition. She is probably the most different character in comparison to the others. She is a middle-aged and very quiet woman who has to bear a heavy burden. Actually, she has practically given her life away to take care of her disabled son, who can neither walk, talk nor recognize anything that is going on in the world around him. It seems as if Maureen hasn't been in contact with many people since Matty's birth. When she says Matty "ruined her life", you can feel her desperation and guilt. Although her most longing desire and the only reason for her to go on any further - that Matty would

die - sounds really cruel, it makes you understand how this person is suffering inwardly. Furthermore, Maureen has a problem with not being able to express her feelings, which makes things even worse. On the one hand, this probably happens because those long years of loneliness and isolation have made her very reserved. On the other hand, she does not even want to feel this hate and aggressiveness in her. Deep inside, Maureen believes she feels even more responsible and has a certain sense of duty, due to her rigid Catholic principles. When she meets Martin, Jess and JJ, you can see one more time that these years of pain and despair have made her even older. It sounds very old-fashioned, for example, that she thinks that JJ was gay because he has long hair and is American. Moreover, she does not know so much about Martin as everyone else seems to do and she cannot understand the typical teenage behavior, the slangy language and Jess' "modern" way of life. Maureen ends up building a good relationship with JJ. Jess, who is actually the complete opposite of Maureen, is the one person who seems to understand Maureen the most and she notices this. Maureen also recognizes that she actually wants to have a life to live, and this is the reason why she decides to follow the group. In addition, she recognizes that she feels good in some way just by being with the others since now she has the chance to do something very different and to break out of her old life – at least for a little while.

Jess Crichton is an 18-year old brat, ill tempered, self-confident and really annoying. Her elder sister, Jen, disappeared a few years ago: her car was found near a famous suicide spot. Jess blames herself for Jen's disappearance, which is why her life is so confusing and chaotic. She is a troubled girl with family problems who does not seem to have any real friends. Jess tends to easily irritate the others as she literally says everything that comes to her mind, not even respecting the readers by constantly addressing and offending them. Jess' narrative's turn is full of slang terms and swear words, which is feasible enough as she is portrayed by the others as the "spoiled brat" type. She doesn't respect the feelings of the other characters, and as such, does not want to be close to any of them. She often argues with Martin because it bothers her that he is everything she dislikes: educated and rather arrogant, features that fit her father, a minister in the government, as well. Surprisingly enough, she is the one who convinces the group not to jump immediately when they first meet on the rooftop on that very New Year's Eve. Instead, she persuades them to find her ex-boyfriend, one of her main reasons for wanting to kill herself, though it's also slightly impulsive – as most of her acts and statements throughout the narrative.

While Martin and Maureen are perfectly willing to help one another over the building's rooftop barrier in order to commit suicide, they are not so willing to assist Jess,

who is seemingly interested in annoying anyone with whom she has contact. The other characters seem to dislike Jess, as she always says what comes to her mind. Jess knows herself, she is aware of the fact that she hurts other people with her speech, with her diction: Jess is the most unlikeable and in that way most complicated character in this novel. She prefers the easy and straightforward mode – a mode that the other characters of the book have to learn to cope with. That is why – especially at the beginning – many conflicts break out. In general, arguments are what Jess is used to: “People do get sick of me, I’ve noticed. (HORNBY, 2005, p. 25)” Throughout the novel she consults her relationships to others again and again, tries to find out why most of them ended up being a total disaster and finally states that probably she herself is the reason. She lost many friends before (“I make friends easily enough, but then I piss them off” (HORNBY, 2005, p. 25), her sister Jen, who obviously means very much to her, and eventually Chas. Her parents and also others do not understand the way she is and feels and are not capable of respecting her foibles. In the end, you see that the actual reason for Jess’ intent to jump off a tower block is not really Chas but her loneliness and innermost conflict with herself.

Unexpectedly, Jess finds somebody she can identify with, people as desperate as she is, although the differences between them are tremendous. Clearly, the group is one of the reasons for her to change her mind on suicide. Martin, JJ and Maureen are the first people in her life who wouldn’t let her down or leave alone although they got to know her. They find a way to handle her, to “stop” her – once she is angry, for example – because, in her words: “I need stopping a lot”. (HORNBY, 2005, p. 133) Therefore, it is not surprising that the four of them – the way she sees it – form a gang. Not only has she felt extremely connected with the others, she also believes in improvement – even though her present situation is quite solemn. The initial antipathy towards her in terms of egotism contradicts the hidden sympathy, which is easily misunderstood because of her way of expressing herself, as already mentioned.

JJ, which stands for John Julius, is a North-American musician who left his American dream in order to follow his girlfriend who moved to London. His big dreams did not sustain for too long, unfortunately: Lizzy left him, as his band, Big Yellow, split up, because she wanted him to be a member of a band – or at least that was what he thought. For Lizzy, he gave up his dream of becoming a rock star, but the band breaks up and she dumps him. Even though the dream of becoming successful still exists in his heart, much to his disappointment, he now earns money by delivering pizza. He compares his own ambition for suicide with the ambitions of well-known musicians and compares the four people on the roof with a band he calls “Topper's House Four”. JJ initially states that a terminal disease is his

reason for committing suicide, and gives the truth to the group late in the narrative, after realizing that he would be in an ongoing relationship with them. JJ's failures personally and professionally lead him to wish for death. He has an idealized version of suicide, thinking that it is reserved for suffering artists, — people who are too sensitive to live, and considers himself, "a failed rock and roll musician, to be among that elite group" (HORNBY, 2005a, p.31).

JJ is probably the most scholarly person in the group, even though he has not had any kind of higher education: he is self-taught and literature enthusiast. Most of his quotes and insights on life come from renowned writers and famous musicians. JJ's role in the group is to give them hope, by showing them, with his tender and supportive words they might be able to endure these hard times they have all been going through. JJ is somehow naive, but rather kind. A partnership between him and Maureen is formed – mostly out of his pity for her – which shows his concern for the older lady and her depressing condition. Martin and Jess, the other partnership which is formed – even if in a very antagonistic way – form the other unusual pairing up of the story. Such groupings will be later discussed, when each narrator is analysed thoroughly.

Having presented relevant information on both Nick Hornby's work and on ALWD's plot and characters, in the next chapter we will introduce the theoretical background on which this dissertation is based. Concepts such as narrator, focalization and narrator's reliability will be discussed, by using the words of renowned theorists to ground this reflection.

2 WHAT THEY SENSE IS WHAT WE GET: SOME CONCEPTUALIZATION ON NARRATORS, FOCALIZATION AND NARRATOR'S RELIABILITY

The theoretical background of this dissertation consists on the reflection on some of the main ideas of a few of the most substantial authors who work with Narratology theories, such as Gerard Genette, Mieke Bal, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, among other respectful scholars. Firstly, we deal with some of the fundamental concepts concerning the role of the narrator in a narrative. The distinct narrative situations prototypes proposed by Genette (1983) and Stanzel (1984) are also presented. Secondly, we bring into discussion the words of famous narratologists concerning the topic of focalization in a narrative. Some concepts such as type, location and cognitive aspects of focalization will be brought up. Finally, we problematize the issue regarding the reliability of a narrator, an important concern directly related to the issue of focalization in a novel. Such theories will help us delve deeper into Hornby's narrative of ALWD and will considerably enrich our analysis presented along the next chapter. Even though most of which concerns literature and its many interpretations tends to be very subjective and personal, there is no solid academic work without a reliable theory to be grounded on. Narratology itself is probably one of the best ways to structure and systematize the studies of a novel, reason why such theory has been chosen. However, not only will the further analysis be based on evidence the text itself shows, but also, inevitably, on some personal views and interpretations of the researcher as a reader and literature devotee.

2.1 NARRATORS: ONE, TWO OR MULTIPLE?

The narrator is, regardless of its classification or its number, definitely, the filter by which the stories are presented in a narrative. It is through their perspectives of the events that the readers are often exposed to the happenings in a narrative. This is the reason why it is very important to consider, when reading and also analyzing a novel, narratively speaking, who is telling the story, what their focalization on the subjects or objects might be and, last but not least, how reliable – and also biased – they tend to be. These three main points have guided our further analysis of Hornby's narrative.

According to Genette (1983, p.186), the narrator is the speaker or voice of the narrative discourse, the agent who establishes communicative contact with an addressee (the narratee), who manages the exposition, who decides what is to be told, how it is to be told (especially, from what point of view, and in what sequence), and what is to be left out. Regarding the different types of narrators, Genette points out that an authorial narrator, who is not a character at the same time and remains outside the story, is called heterodiegetic, while a narrator who has the status of a character in the story is a homodiegetic one. The latter can also be classified as an internal narrator as well, the one who is a character in the story and is aware that he or she is telling a story, being told from an internal point of view. This internal narrator may be a protagonist, one of the main characters or a less central character, a mere observer of the protagonists. There may well be more than one internal narrator. In this case, we get the story from more than one perspective, and often such a method emphasizes the subjectivity of experience and the fact that the same event can have different meanings for different people, which is the case of Hornby's *ALWD*.

An internal narrator may tell the story retrospectively, after he or she has lived through it, or as it is happening. Such approach does make a difference in the development of the narrative, because the retrospective story is told by a person who has lived through the experience and usually has been changed by it. This retrospective narrator knows more than the reader, and can be in a position of, most of the times, irony in relation to the events of the story. Alternatively, the internal narrator or narrators may tell the story as it is happening. In this case, the narrator knows no more than the reader, does not know the outcome, he/she is in a position of suspense in regard to the story. Hornby's narrators are retrospective ones, since from the beginning of the story we are told they tell the story after the events have unfolded. It leaves the reader in a position of relief – as they already know all the characters have not committed suicide – but also of disbelief, since the story is told through four people's eyes and they will offer the version they like best. Also, they have had the time to reflect on the happenings of their story, and by telling it retrospectively there is a lot of room for insight and refinement.

Furthermore, there may be more than one narrator telling the story, usually known as the "multiple narrators", which may take more than one form. There may be more than one internal narrator, that is, a narrator who is aware that it is he/she who is telling the story. Therefore, a narrative might have one section narrated by different narrators (hetero or homodiegetic ones, as previously stated) and we would get, hence, varied perspectives. It is likely in this case that they would have perspectives of the same events, so the facts may be

reconfigured more than once through different eyes. What's more, the same story can be told chronologically speaking, when the narrators tell the events after the other, as they happened, co-constructing the narrative cooperatively – or the very opposite. ALWD's four homodiegetic narrators tell their story in a chronological way and are very aware of it. The happenings unfold as each narrator picks up after the other in order to rebuild the events which have brought them to this particular stage in their lives.

Having briefly presented some concepts regarding the “narrator”, using Genette's (1983) terminology, it is time we present the ideas which form two different narrative situation prototypes. These ideas will help us understand the concepts of focalization which will be later discussed, through different theorists' perspectives. The two different models have been proposed by Genette and Stanzel, respectively, and both present features which support the different aspects focalization can cover, varying from scholar to scholar.

2.1.1 Genette's and Stanzel's narrative situations prototypes

Both Genette (1983) and Stanzel (1984) use the term “narrative situation” to refer to more complex arrangements or patterns of narrative features. Genette's system uses the subtypes of voice (narration) and mood (focalization) in order to explore a range of possible combinations concerning the narrator and the characters, whereas Stanzel is more interested in describing ideal-typical or prototypical configurations and arranging them on a “typological circle” (1984). Stanzel's typical narrative situations are complex frameworks aiming at capturing typical patterns of narrative features, including features of relationship (involvement), distance, pragmatics, knowledge, reliability, voice, and focalization.

Genette comes up with the different terms “voice” and “mood” concerning the telling of the story. Voice is concerned with who narrates, and from where, that is, it is related to the narrator of the story. This narration can be from inside the text, an intradiegetic one, or from outside the text, an extradiegetic one. If this narrator is a character in the story it can be divided into two categories, previously mentioned here: a heterodiegetic narrator, who is not a character in the story and a homodiegetic one, who is a character in the story. Genette says narrative mood is dependent on the 'distance' and 'perspective' of the narrator, and like music, narrative mood has predominant patterns. It is related to voice. The distance of the narrator changes with narrated speech, transposed speech and reported speech. This perspective of the

narrator is what is called focalization. Narratives can be non-focalized, internally focalized or externally focalized, ideas which will be later developed.

Stanzel's typological circle featuring "three typical narrative situations", which describes various possibilities of structuring the mediacy of narrative, is based on three elements. These are mode, person and perspective, which can be divided further into the oppositions "narrator/reflector", "first person/third person" and "internal perspective/external perspective". Thus, Stanzel distinguishes three narrative situations: The "authorial narrative situation" is characterised by the dominance of the external perspective. In the "First-person narrative situation", the events are related by a "narrating I" who takes part in the action in the fictional world as a character or as the "experiencing I". "The figural narrative situation" is marked by the dominance of the reflector mode, restricting to a factual representation or using internal focalisation to create the impression of immediacy.

Stanzel (1984) divides the narrative itself into three different types, which implies three different types of narrators as well. An authorial narrative is told by a narrator who is absent from the story, that is, who does not appear as a character in the story. The authorial narrator tells a story involving other people. An authorial narrator sees the story from an outsider's position, often a position of absolute authority that allows her/him to know everything about the story's world and its characters, including their conscious thoughts and unconscious motives. A figural narrative presents a story as if seeing it through the eyes of a character. In first-person narration, the first-person pronoun refers both to the narrator (narrating I or narrating self) and to a character in the story (experiencing I). If the narrator is the main character of the story s/he is an I-as-protagonist; if s/he is one of the minor characters s/he is an I-as-witness. With respect to focalization, a first-person narrative can either be told from the hindsight awareness of the narrating I or from the more limited and naive level of insight of the experiencing I (functioning as an internal focalizer).

Genette's and Stanzel's both prototypes of narrative present the concept of focalization, which will be thoroughly discussed in the next subitem of this chapter.

2.2 NARRATION X FOCALIZATION: TELLING IS DIFFERENT FROM SENSING

Genette claims that one of the main points when it comes to focalization is the "regulation of narrative information" (1983, p.162). Many questions may arise from this idea.

For example, is narrative information filtered through a single character? Is the reader susceptible to what the character is thinking or only to their external actions? Does the reader see through a character's eyes? Or does the reader watch their actions from an external place? Over the course of the story, does the narrative seem to be unfiltered: the reader is privy to the internal thoughts of many characters, actions are shown from many characters, actions are shown that no character would have seen? These are only some of the narrative questions to be considered in any analysis.

Genette (1983), as previously mentioned, posited the concept of focalization, originally describing it in such ways as “the question who sees?” (1983, p.186), “who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective,” (1983, p.186) and the “regulation of narrative information” (1983, p.162). The concept has been debated by narratologists ever since, with numerous refinements, expansions, and criticisms. It is not possible to address even a majority of the debate, though two of the most cited authors are Bal (2009) and Rimmon-Kenan (2002). Bal in particular takes Genette's work and adds layers of complication and terminology, creating a system that becomes less descriptively useful the larger it grows and the more it focuses on micro-level changes of focalization. Rimmon-Kenan, on the other hand, offers the useful addition of considering focalization through multiple facets – perceptive, cognitive, and ideological ones.

Genette's original purpose for the concept of focalization was to take the idea of “point of view” or “perspective” in its conventionally considered literary sense and separate out the issue of the narrator from the issue of the “restriction of narrative information” (1983, p. 162). Genette's differentiation of narration and focalization springs from the evident shortcoming of the older *point of view* terminology. The latter tends to blur the issue in combining questions about the source of narration at the level of discourse with those about the center of perception/orientation that determines the perspective from which the narrated events are presented. Genette quite rightly criticizes the traditional system for its regrettable confusion between the question *who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective?* and the very different question *who is the narrator?*— or, more simply, the question *who sees?* and the question *who speaks?* Of course, a character's perspective is never really autonomous. The “What?” and the “How?” of a character's perception of the objects (situations, actions, persons) of his or her (fictive) world always form part of the narrative act and, hence, are directly dependent on the narrator's criteria of inclusion and selection.

Bal's influential revision of Genette's theory is another example of the reinterpretation of focalization in terms of point of view. She admits that perspective "reflects precisely" what she means by focalization (2009, p.143). According to Bal (2009, p.100), whenever events are presented to the reader, they are always presented from within a certain vision that is not necessarily that of the narrating voice; whether "real" historical facts or fictitious events are concerned, they are always seen from a certain angle. While it is possible to try to give an "objective" picture of the facts, often that only involves trying to present what is seen or perceived in some other way. It is essential that when we read, we attempt to see "from where" we are "viewing" the text or, in narratological terms, that we be able to determine the focalization as well as the narration of the text, to make an explicit distinction between the vision through which the elements of the story are presented and the identity of the voice that is verbalizing the vision. On the same hand, Rimmon-Kenan (2002) reinforces that focalization and narration are distinct activities, "a theoretical necessity, and only on its basis can the interrelations between them be studied with precision." (2002, p.73)

Herman and Vervaeck (2005), very much based on Genette's and Bal's ideas, state that focalization is the term which is used to refer to the relation between "that which is focalized and the focalizer" (2005, p.70). According to them, such terminology relates to "the characters, the actions and objects offered to the reader" by the "agent who perceives and therefore determines what is presented" to them (2005, p.70). It is recommendable to avoid the verb "to see" when referring to the focalization aspect in a narrative, as, to Herman and Vervaeck, "all senses are involved" (2005, p.70) in this technique, preferably being changed by the verb "to perceive".

Regarding the focalization issue, we can also say that a character's perspective is never autonomous. The character's perception of the objects (situations, actions, persons) of his or her world always form part of the narrative act and, hence, are directly dependent on the narrator's criteria of inclusion and selection. However, the choice of center of perception orientation within any given narrative has great significance for matters such as characterization, completeness, and reliability, regardless of the narrative situation. The subject of focalization, the "focalizer", is the point from which the elements are viewed. That point can lie with a character or outside it. If the "focalizer" coincides with the character, that character will have a technical advantage over the other characters. The reader watches with the character's eyes and will, in principle, be inclined to accept the vision presented by that character. Bal (2009) aptly describes the specific position that the focalizing character occupies within the character constellation of a narrative text. This choice not only bears on

the text's reception; it also is a chief means of characterization, which is why, for Bal, it is important to distinguish between the perceiving agent and the perceiving object, as Herman and Varvaeck have stated (2009, p. 71).

Other theorists accept the idea of narrators as focalizers, but regard Bal's emphasis on focalization as primarily visual, as too narrow. Rimmon-Kenan (2002) includes psychological and ideological forms of focalization. Jahn (2005) adds to this approach suggesting that the determination of focalization revolves around whose affect (feelings), perception (sensual or imaginary) and/or conceptualization 'orients the narrative'. Jahn (1999, p.94) states that "focalization is a matter of providing and managing windows into the narrative world, and of regulating, readerly imaginary perception". Within his model, readers metaphorically puts themselves in the 'focalizer's' position which the text has constructed and when sufficient change has occurred in the determiners of that position, the 'window of focalization' will change.

O'Neill (1996) and Bortolussi & Dixon (2003) claim that the role of the reader is of a grand importance to the aspect of focalization. According to O'Neill, "the focalizer is neither a person nor an agent, but 'a chosen *point*, the point from which the narrative is perceived as being presented at any given moment" (1996, p.174). This point of focalisation may shift around throughout the narrative. Bortolussi and Dixon (2003) propose a theory of focalisation that takes the reader, rather than the text, as a starting point. They argue that readers attach little or no importance to subtle shifts in focalisation and that it is readers themselves who create an idea of the focaliser of a text. O'Neill (1996), on the same hand, suggested that readers have to decide which of multiple focalisations is the most important, but have a slightly different opinion themselves: "From our perspective, what matters is likely to be the global impression readers construct regarding the position of the perceptual agents." (1996, p.175) In addition to this, Bortolussi and Dixon argue that "the agent of focalization should properly be understood as being a construction in the mind of the reader (2003, p.176)".

The concept of focalization seems to be one of a controversial nature, as many theorists add their own layers to the concept. However tricky the differences and similarities may be, most of the aforementioned scholars seem to agree with the fact that focalization is strictly related to the senses. It is not only about "seeing", as all senses are involved in this process of focalization in a narrative. As Herman & Vervaeck claim, "perception" would be a good synonym for "focalization", as cognitive functions, such as thought and judgment, would be included in the narrators/characters words. This is a definition we believe to be the

most comprehensive one, that is, focalizing is both perceiving and sensing, even though there still may be some misunderstanding among scholars and theorists on its concept.

2.2.1. Focalization: some terminology

Having presented some definitions for the term “focalization”, it is important to discuss other relevant terminology directly related to it. The concepts of focalizer and focalized object, as well as the types and stability of the focalization are presented here. In addition, we bring up some different properties focalization may have, such as spatial-temporal and psychological ones.

Genette asserts that focalization is certainly “a restriction of field” - actually, that is, “a selection of narrative information with respect to what was traditionally called omniscience” (1983, p.74). As the reference to omniscience indicates, Genette’s primary concern is not with the focalizing but with the narrating agent; indeed, he explains that “if focalizer applied to anyone, it could only be the person who focalizes the narrative, that is, the narrator” (1983, p.73). Bal, who has reworked Genette’s conceptualizations, has based her concept of focalization in the distinction between three narrative layers, namely story, fabula, and text, each associated with or, indeed, generated by a distinct narrative agent (2009, p. 18). Situated at the fabula level, where the story’s raw events are processed before being mediated by a narrator, Bal’s “focalizer” is responsible for the “represented ‘colouring’” of a narrative (2009, p.18). This coloring is both active and relational as it involves the connection between a subject, the “focalizer,” and a “focalized object.” As she conceives it, “focalization is, then, the relation between the vision and that which is ‘seen,’ perceived” (2009, p.145–46), by making this clear distinction of a focalizer (subject) and a focalized object (object of focalization). The terms of “focalizer” and “focalized object”, as Herman & Vervack (2005, p. 71) state is problematic. The scholars claim that the terms “suggest there are centers of perception in a narrative text that approximate human beings and that apparently think and feel as we all do (2005, p.71)” Genette has openly talked about focalization without making a distinction between subject or object of focalization.

According to Bal (2009), the distinction between Genette’s zero focalization and his internal focalization lies in the agent or subject that “sees” the story (the narrator in the first case, a character in the second); the difference between Genette’s internal and external

focalization, however, has nothing to do with the subject that “sees” but with the object that is “seen” (thoughts and feelings in the first case, actions and appearances in the second). Thus she ends up with a system of two binary distinctions that replace Genette’s triple typology. There are two types of focalization: character-bound or internal (Genette’s internal focalization) and external (Genette’s zero and external focalization combined into one). Furthermore, there are two types of focalized objects: imperceptible (thoughts, feelings, etc.) and perceptible (actions, appearances, etc.).

Bal and many others assume that both characters and narrators can be focalizers; Chatman (1990) argues that characters can focalize while narrators cannot. Genette, on the other hand, rejects character focalizers but concedes, with some reluctance, the possibility of regarding the narrator as a focalizer (1983, p. 72–3). To some scholars, to talk about characters as focalizers is to confuse focalization and perception. Characters can see and hear, but they can hardly focalize a narrative of whose existence they are not aware. This leaves us with the narrator as the only focalizer, an inference whose interest is primarily scholastic. If all the different focalization options can be attributed to one agent, this attribution does not provide us with any conceptual tools that we can use in distinguishing and analyzing texts. Furthermore, the concept of focalizer is misleading because it suggests that a given text or segment of text is always focalized by one person, either the narrator or a character.

Chatman (1986) replaces “focalizer” with the term “filter”: a construct or function through which the narrator may or may not choose to present aspects of the story. He regards the narrator as fundamentally outside the story events. He judges everything in the story to emanate from a narrator utilizing a variety of narratological devices, focalization through characters (filter) being one, and therefore by definition the narrator position as unable to assume that role. To regard it so, would, he claims, be to confuse the ‘who sees?’ and ‘who speaks?’ He states (1986, p. 195) that a story cannot be told “through” the narrator’s perception since he/she is precisely narrating, which is not an act of perception but of “encoding”. He does acknowledge however (1986, p.197) that narrators may demonstrate ‘attitude’, or ‘slant’ as he terms it.

Narratives are focalized not only by someone (the focalizer, the vehicle of focalization) but also on someone or something. Focalization has thus both subject and object. The subject (the focalizer) is the agent whose perception orients the presentation; the object (the focalized) is what the focalizer perceives. The subject of focalization, the focalizer, is the point from which the elements are viewed. That point can lie with a character or outside it. If the focalizer coincides with the character, that character will have a technical advantage over

the other characters. The reader watches with the character's eyes and will, in principle, be inclined to accept the vision presented by that character. Bal (2009) aptly describes the specific position that the focalizing character occupies within the character constellation of a narrative text. This choice not only bears on the text's reception; it also is a chief means of characterization: "the way in which a subject is presented gives information about the object itself and about the focalizer" Convincingly arguing that "the narrator speaks the text whose content is the narrative; the focalizer presents the narrative, whose content is the history; the history is acted out by the actors", she conceived of the relationship among narrator (N), focalizer (F), and agent (A) in a by now famous system of equations.

Functionally, focalization is a means of selecting and restricting narrative information, of seeing events and states of affairs from somebody's point of view, of foregrounding the focalizing agent, and of creating an empathetical or ironical view on the focalizer. A focalizer is the agent whose point of view orients the narrative text. A text is anchored on a focalizer's point of view when it presents (and does not transcend) the focalizer's thoughts, reflections and knowledge, his/her actual and imaginary perceptions, as well as his/her cultural and ideological orientation. While Genette and Chatman prefer to restrict focalization to 'focal characters' only, most narratologists today follow Bal's and Rimmon-Kenan's proposal that a focalizer can be either 'external' (a narrator) or 'internal' (a character). External focalizers are also called 'narrator-focalizers'; internal focalizers are variously termed 'focal characters', 'character-focalizers', 'reflectors', or 'filter characters'.

Focalization should not only be related to a subject and an object of focalization. It can also come in different types, with slight variations in typologies according to the particular critic. In general, types of focalization are related to two criteria — position relative to the story and degree of persistence, following Bal's (reworking Genette) and Rimmon-Kenan's (reworking Uspensky) ideas. Herman & Vervaeck (2005) make this distinction as well, regarding their position within the narrative (internal and external) and their stability (fixed, variable, multiple).

If we consider the position relative to the story, focalization may be either external or internal. This type of focalization concerns the narrative's access to the focalizer's inner thoughts, feelings, memories, and other intellectual processes. Since the vantage point of external focalization brings itself close to the narrating agent, its vehicle is often called the narrator-focalizer. External focalization is most commonly found in third-person narratives, but it can also occur in first-person narratives "either when the temporal and psychological distance between narrator and character is minimal or when the perception through which the

story is rendered is that of the narrating self rather than that of the experiencing self" (p. 74). Internal focalization, by contrast, is located inside the represented events, and its vehicle generally takes the form of a character-focalizer.

Rimmon-Kenan reminds us that just as the focalizer can be external or internal to the represented events, so the focalized can be seen either from without or within. But the two parallel classifications do not necessarily coincide (hence Rimmon-Kenan's division of focalizers into "external" or "internal" and the focalized into "without" or "within" (2002, p. 75). In external focalization, the external focalizer may perceive an object either from without or from within. If that perception comes from without, the reader is presented with nothing but the outward manifestations of the focalized person or thing. Herman & Vervaeck call attention to the fact that if a character is constantly seen through the eyes of a single focalizer, one may wonder whether this view is reliable (2005, p.71). Conversely, one character might be perceived by so many focalizers that the reader has too much information to be able to arrive at a coherent and reliable image (2005, p. 71)

Genette distinguishes between three types of restriction. A nonfocalized text, or zero focalization, means that the narrator is unlimited spatially and unrestricted in psychological access to the characters. In internal focalization, the narrator is limited spatially but has access to the mind of the focal character. External focalization also involves a spatial limitation, but this time the narrator has no psychological privilege and is limited to the role of witness. In Genette's typology of homodiegetic narratives, the progression from types 1 to 3 involves a regression, not in the knowledge of the narrator but in the psychological access allowed the reader. If it appears surprising that Genette does not explicitly take this fact into account, it is even more surprising that Mieke Bal does not, since her external-internal dichotomy depends solely on the diegetic locus of the focalizer, or subject of perception. Instead, Bal (1981, p. 47) links personal narration to internal focalization, and in doing so she changes her definitions.

Rimmon-Kenan presents a synthesis of the theories of Bal. Like Bal, she identifies external focalization with the "narrating agent," while the locus of internal focalization is inside the represented events. Rimmon-Kenan (2002, p. 74) states that external focalization occurs in first-person narratives when the perspective is that of the narrating self rather than that of the experiencing self. She divides the perceptual facet into the components of time and space. Concerning time, "external focalization is panchronic in the case of an unpersonified focalizer, and retrospective in the case of a character focalizing his own past. On the other hand, internal focalization is synchronous with the information regulated by the focalizer"

(RIMMON-KENAN, 2002, p. 78). This definition is consistent with the alternation found in a first-person narrative. In spatial terms, she says, the opposition takes the form of a bird's-eye view or panoramic view versus that of a limited observer. She divides the psychological facet into a cognitive and an emotive component. In cognitive terms, the external-internal opposition becomes one between unrestricted and restricted knowledge. In emotive terms, it distinguishes between attitudes that are objective, neutral, or uninvolved, on the one hand, and attitudes that are subjective or involved, on the other (RIMMON-KENAN, 2002, p. 78-81). All these facets pertain only to the focalizer. Rimmon-Kenan agrees with Bal that focalized human objects can be seen from within or without, and she makes no correspondence between subject and object. The other components require an intermediate category for the narrating self. Spatially, he is external to his story, located somewhere between the position of a limited observer and that of a bird's-eye view. Cognitively, he knows more than he did at the time of experience, but his knowledge is not unrestricted. Emotively, he may be less involved than he was at the time of experience, but he cannot be totally objective and neutral about the story of his own life. In short, to return to Genette's terminology, he does not have the same perceptual powers as the narrator of a nonfocalized text (perhaps we should add) at least theoretically.

The alteration between internal and external focalization is always present in narrative texts, as Herman & Vervacek state. It is also ideally suited to manipulate the reader, who often does not see that information has been filtered through the perception of a character or narrator. As a result, the reader might treat subjective information provided by a character as objective information coming from a detached narrator. (2005, p.73) Even if character and narrator coincide in a first-person text, which is the case of *ALWD*, there is still a difference between internal and external focalization. In Herman & Vervaeck's words, "If the narrating I considers something the experiencing I did, then there is external focalization, if the scene is perceived by the narrating I, and internal focalization if it is perceived by the experiencing I" (p.73). In *ALWD*, most of the times the homodiegetic narrators switch from external to internal focalization, as they are all retelling what happened to them, and by retelling their experiences, the narrating I can both consider and perceive the very same action.

Regarding the focalization stability, it can be variable. Either form (heterodiegetic or homodiegetic) of figural focalization can be subdivided further by means of Genette's categories of frequency. Monofocalization ("fixed focalization" in Genette) sticks to one character as focalizer, whose perceptions determine the highly individualized orientation of the complete story. Multifocalization ("variable focalization" in Genette), on the other hand, offers an alternation between several focalizers. This type displays a number of realizations.

In the category of singulative multifocalization, each focalizer perceives different objects. Repetitive multifocalization (“multiple focalization” in Genette, finally, appears when identical objects are focalized by different focalizers. The last type, repetitive multifocalization, when different focalizers represent identical objects, they can concentrate on the same aspects/features of it or on different ones. It is especially this distinction that helps to establish the degree of a text’s perspectival consistency/integrity. In Hornby’s *ALWD*, focalization alternates between the four homodiegetic narrators, performing as internal character-focalizers and on their own past life experiences as the focalized object.

Herman & Vervaeck point out different properties focalization may have, namely spatial-time and psychological ones, which embrace the cognitive properties, emotional and ideological ones. Perception of the focalizer is determined by both space and time. Spatially, the external focalizer has a bird's-eye view, allowing either a panoramic view of the story's events or a simultaneous focalization of things happening in different places. This kind of perception is obviously denied to the internal character-focalizer (or indeed to an unpersonified position internal to the story). The perceptual facet of focalization is that of time. If we are dealing with external focalization, it is panchronic for an unpersonified focalizer but retrospective for a character focalizing his or her own past. Internal focalization, however, is logically synchronous with the information regulated by the focalizer. Thus an internal focalizer is limited to the “present” of the characters while the external focalizer has access to all the temporal dimensions of the story (past, present, and future).

Within the psychological facet of focalization, it is the focalizer's mind and emotions that take on importance. The external or narrator-focalizer, within the cognitive component, has of necessity unrestricted knowledge about the represented world—and if this focalizer does not pass on total knowledge to the reader it is simply for rhetorical effect. The knowledge of the internal focalizer, however, is necessarily restricted; as part of the represented world, an internal focalizer cannot know everything about it. In its emotive aspect, the difference between external and internal focalization gives us the difference between “objective” (or neutral or uninvolved) focalization and “subjective” (or colored or involved) focalization.

Of course, perception of the focalized from without also restricts observation to external manifestations, leaving the emotions to be inferred from them. In contrast, perception of the focalized from within allows the reader to share the inner life of the focalized, either by making the focalizer and focalized identical or by granting to the external narrator-focalizer the total knowledge to penetrate into the inner life of the focalized.

The third facet of focalization is that of ideology. According to Uspensky, this facet (sometimes simply referred to as the “norms of the text”) consists of “a general system of viewing the world conceptually,” in accordance with which the events and characters of the story are evaluated. These norms, ordinarily presented through a single dominant perspective (often a narrator-focalizer), are usually taken as authoritative, and all other ideologies in the text are evaluated from this “higher” position.

We believe the psychological aspects of focalization must be considered, specially in what regards the analysis of Hornby’s *ALWD*. Jahn’s ideas for the cognitive and perceptual aspects of focalization, by introducing the model of “windows of focalization” is another important proposal to be considered. Emphasizing that narrative texts contain cues that enable readers to imaginatively transfer into the storyworld, Jahn theorizes focalization as a “window” through which objects and events are presented as seen, perceived, or conceptualized from a specific deictic center or focal character. This inclusive conception of focalization, where both the perceptual as well as cognitive processing of focalizers are considered, is very valid. Two distinct kinds of vantage points can be embedded in narrative: a personal one associated with a character and an impersonal one associated with the narrator. That is, even though it is premised on the subjective filtering of characters’ or narrators’ minds, focalization operates at the discourse level, since it is here that textual signals cue the reader to reconstruct the storyworld under the aspectuality of a specific fictional mind. Indeed, for signals of focalization to be registered by readers, there has to exist an aspectuality-neutral background against which the subjective inflection is introduced. As Jahn’s model indicates, focalization, while predominantly associated with the presentation of consciousness, does not have to be so. Narratorial focalization in particular is neither necessarily nor exclusively concerned with consciousness presentation, but with the filtering of all events and existents in the storyworld. Conversely, consciousness presentation does not necessarily presuppose character focalization: The ideological and moral evaluation associated with focalization proceeds from the narrator and not from the character whose consciousness we are seeing. Even if focalization is primarily associated with consciousness presentation, the focalizer does not have to coincide with the consciousness being presented.

Considering the homodiegetic narrator’s involvement in the unfolding and telling of the events, there is another important issue to be taken into consideration: how (un)reliable their voice is. This issue will be dealt in the next subchapter.

2.3 RELIABILITY: CAN WE TRUST YOU?

An unreliable narrator is a narrator, whether in literature, film, or theatre, whose credibility has been seriously compromised. The term was coined by Wayne C. Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* in 1961. The narrative mode can be developed for several reasons, sometimes to deceive the reader or audience. Most often unreliable narrators are first-person narrators, but sometimes third-person narrators can also be unreliable.

The nature of the narrator is sometimes immediately clear. For instance, a story may open with the narrator making a plainly false or delusional claim or admitting to being severely mentally ill, or the story itself may have a frame in which the narrator appears as a character, with clues to the character's unreliability. A more dramatic use of the device delays the revelation until near the story's end. This twist ending forces readers to reconsider their point of view and experience of the story. In some cases the narrator's unreliability is never fully revealed but only hinted at, leaving readers to wonder how much the narrator should be trusted and how the story should be interpreted. An exception is an event that did not or could not happen, told within the fictionalized historical novels, speculative fiction, or clearly delineated dream sequences. Narrators describing them are not considered unreliable.

According to Rimmon-Kenan, a reliable narrator is the one "whose rendering of the story and commentary on it the reader is supposed to take as an authoritative account of the fictional truth" (2002, p. 100). An unreliable one, on the other hand, is the one "whose rendering of the story and/or commentary on it the reader has reasons to suspect. [...] The main sources of unreliability are the narrator's limited knowledge, his personal involvement, and his problematic value-scheme" (RIMMON-KENAN, 2002, p.100). That is, many first-person narrators are unreliable.

An important element in the telling of the story is how much the narrator knows. If we are assured the narrator "knows everything", then we read the story with trust: what is presented to us is what really happened. If we are not so assured, we read the story with suspicion, noting the things that the narrator does not know, or does not understand, and struggling to make sense of the information of the story ourselves and to decipher the narrator as well as the story. This question may arise both with external and internal narrators. We see limited knowledge in internal narrators as normally expected. Any narrator can be more or less reliable. This is a matter of what they know, but also of what their intentions in telling are, of what their biases are, of what their own particular blindnesses are. This category

covers a number of ways in which the narrator may relate to the story and to the listener, divided in different categories, namely: distance, interest, sympathy, voice, orientation and sense of audience.

Regarding the distance, the narrator can be emotionally or in other ways distant from the story she is narrating, or very close, very involved. This can take a number of forms, including, for instance, the coincidence or non-coincidence of dialect, vocabulary or style, distance in time, distance in culture. Hornby's homodiegetic narrators seem to be emotionally involved in the story they tell, once they all take part of the events which form the diegesis.

The second issue, interest regards the narrator sharing the interest of the story with the characters or not: they can show a great interest in the outcome of the story and the choices the characters make or may be clinical, reserved, apparently uninterested, or disinterested (that word means 'impartial', not 'uninterested').

The third aspect, sympathy, refers to how much the narrator empathizes with the characters, or judges them, or approaches them as a clinical observer. It differs from emotional distance in that the narrator may be emotionally close, but judgmental or antipathetic.

Voice, one of the most important factors to be exploited later on, refers to what the narrator is like, as it is conveyed by the language of the narration, the tone, the choice of comments and descriptions, and so forth: These may indicate what her personality is, what her attitude is to the characters, to the subject of the story, to the readers are and what her ideological position, faith commitment, intellectual and emotional positions are.

Orientation, thus, is a category which is useful, but may repeat aspects of the categories above: is the narrator approaching the story from a certain position of commitment and concern, for instance of ideological or sexual or theological or social or political commitment or concern. The term "orientation" can at times be replaced by the term "standpoint."

Finally, there is the sense of audience aspect, in which narrators may differ in their sense of who they are narrating to, and why. In this case the narrator of an embedded narrative (an account, a diary, a letter, etc) will likely have a very different audience than the primary internal narrator.

If we are assured that the narrator "knows everything", then we read the story with trust, without the questioning of the facts. If we are not so assured, we read the story with suspicion, noting the things that the narrator does not know, or does not understand, and struggling to make sense of the information of the story ourselves and to decipher the narrator

as well as the story. This question may arise both with *extradiegetic* – the one who does not take part in the story - and *intradiegetic* narrators – the ones who are always characters in the story. We see limited knowledge in intradiegetic narrators, which would be more than expected, as they are clearly involved with the facts they are narrating. On the other hand, it is also possible to find a story in which it becomes clear that the extradiegetic narrator does not understand the implications of what he or she is narrating, by misrepresenting what is happening. This question of “what” or “how much” the narrator knows is a separate matter from what the narrator chooses to tell us, which leads us to come to the conclusion that any narrator can be more or less reliable. This is a matter of what they know, but also of what their intentions in telling.

Having briefly pointed out some considerations on different narrator’s classifications, on focalization aspects and on the narrator’s reliability, based on the readings of Genette’s, Bal’s and Herman and Vervaeck’s ideas, it is time we presented how some of these aspects work on Nick Hornby’s *A long way down* construction of the narrative.

3 THE FOUR SIDES OF A LONG WAY DOWN: CO-CONSTRUCTING A FAILED ATTEMPT OF SUICIDE

“It’s not my intention to make my characters different from actual people. They’re real to me.”

(Nick Hornby)

Nick Hornby’s *ALWD* begins on a given New Year’s Eve, as four individuals with diverse backgrounds and circumstances form the unusual group that is responsible for retelling the story and, along with the emphasis on conflict and character development, creates an amusing and interesting narrative. Hornby structures his novel with homodiegetic narrators, who sometimes address the reader directly, using each of the four protagonists as participant-observers, with multiple alternating sections from the perspective of each main character. The descriptions of the characters, given by themselves or by other group members, often reveal the needs of the individuals, especially as related to their specific reasons for wanting to commit suicide, while further actions relate more directly to the exchange among them. Therefore, considering each character as a separate piece of the whole allows us to see how they fit as a group sharing the same one thought: committing suicide.

In *ALWD*, the multiple narratives serve the purpose to give space to different voices, doing justice to their own different interests. Hornby’s characters belong uncomfortably together, and frequently reflect on this throughout the narrative. They do cooperate, narratively speaking. Often do they tell their side of the story as if acknowledging what another narrator has just said, one character picking up the story a moment after the last has left it. Hornby’s narrators talk to the reader, and even seem to know that they are there. This seems to be a tradition in the writer’s work. Sometimes the characters address them directly: Jess, seemingly fearless about saying what she feels, brings up the thought of an actual reader: “I don’t know you. The only thing I know about you is you’re reading this (HORNBY, 2005a, p.20)”. By reading Hornby’s novel we are under the impression the narrators are constantly talking to us, and their colloquial tone often reminds us that thinking can be like speaking, under the condition there is another person there. Representing thought means imagining that someone can hear it, at least this is the impression Hornby might want to give his reading audience.

ALWD is told simultaneously by all four characters - in their own voice - which means that Hornby has to jump from the psyche of a middle-aged woman to an American rock n' roll person to a punked-out British daughter to an arrogant, ruined celebrity while still moving the story along. It is an interesting resource and, with the addition of Hornby's usual true-to-life dialogue, it makes the story more compelling than it otherwise might have been. It is dangerously inventive with the very real risk of either setting up characters to fail in the end or leaving the reader with an unsatisfying ending, but it turns out that Hornby knows where to lead us.

Even if we don't like the characters all of the time – which is probably the case here – there's something sweetly human and familiar in all of them. Their reliance on each other is very well drawn and Hornby handles the harsh subject of suicide with grace. Undoubtedly, Hornby's ALWD is mainly more about empathy and mutual understanding than suicide itself. This is the feeling that brings these four people closer and allows them to grow throughout the narrative, touching the reader in a somehow comforting way.

This chapterless three-act novel depicts four homodiegetic narrators telling their tales in their own distinctive styles. Having briefly exposed some of the main points of ALWD's narrators as a whole, it is time we presented some insight into each of the narrator-character which builds this story. As the narrative is shared by the four protagonists, one picking right after the other in the telling of the events, some further considerations will be made now regarding each narrator's main features. We will consider their own particular style for sharing their perspective, as well as their views as subjects of focalization in some particular happenings that build up the narrative of ALWD. We will focus on three main aspects, previously mentioned: 1) How each narrator presents him/herself by also showing his/her focalization on some of the main events that help build up the story 2) How the other narrators see and portray their fellow companions 3) Each narrator's focalization on the group itself as well as their feelings towards them. By analyzing such issues, it will be easier to distinguish each of the narrators' tone and understand the relationship which is formed by living and reliving the experience after retelling it to the reader. Moreover, we have to keep in mind we are left with what and how these narrators choose to present themselves and their fellow companions to the reader, which could leave us in a state of suspension of disbelief, as we shouldn't take for granted these homodiegetic narrators are actually telling us the (whole) truth.

3.1 MARTIN: THE ARROGANT LEADER

Martin Sharp is a former celebrity whose own choices have led him to reach rock bottom. He is the first character-narrator to introduce himself to the reader and it is through his perspective that the story starts being unveiled. Right from the beginning, we can see his humoristic tone, a predominant feature on his speech pattern, by listing his reasons for wanting to kill himself in a clever and practical way. As we can also notice, he directly addresses the reader, a feature which will be repeated throughout all the narrators' turns of narrative:

Can I explain why I wanted to jump off the top of a tower-block? Of course I can explain why I wanted to jump off the top of a tower-block. I'm not a bloody idiot... I can explain it because it wasn't inexplicable: it was a logical decision, the product of proper thought. It wasn't even a serious thought, either. I don't mean it was whimsical – I just meant it wasn't terribly complicated, or agonized. (...) Well, that was me. There simply weren't enough regrets, and lots and lots of reasons to jump. The only thing in my "cons" list were the kids, but I couldn't imagine Cindy letting me see them again anyway". (HORNBY, 2005a, p.3-4)

Martin pictures his life before the suicidal attempt as a perfect one: he had a wife and two little daughters, a well-paid job and was apparently successful. He used to be the host of a famous TV show but from what is told, he made the mistake of sleeping with a girl aged 15 years and 250 days old (a 115 day gap to legality, an information which he himself considers to be very important to be shared with his audience). Because of the incident, he had to spend three months in prison. This scandal, however, made him even more popular as his case was stripped in the yellow press. When released from prison, he discovers that his marriage is ruined. From that point on, Martin starts telling his story: he now works for a cable TV channel with low popularity and has an affair with Penny, his former colleague. He does not make an effort to see his daughters or to clarify the tense situation with his wife. However, he seems to be very unhappy about this situation and feels that he has, in his own words, "pissed his life away" (HORNBY, 2005a, p. 15) and that is why he wants to end it. When describing the loss of his former "ideal" life, and fully aware of the situation he is going through, Martin states:

I'd had a life full of kids and wives and jobs and all the usual stuff, and I'd somehow mislaid it. No, you see, that's not right. I knew where my life was, just as you know where money goes when you piss it away. I hadn't mislaid it at all. I'd spent it. I'd spent my kids and my job and my wife on teenaged girls and nightclubs: These things all come at a price, and I'd happily paid it, and suddenly my life wasn't there anymore. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.11)

Martin's narrative is mostly given in an acid, sarcastic tone, which is in keeping with the events that have occurred, but more than that, express his attitude towards them. Sarcasm is definitely an expression of this character, as he portrays himself, his own past experiences and also his fellow companions by using this artifact. It is clear he carries the highest popularity status in this odd group and is also able to influence all of them, mostly by his wittiness and candidness. However, his own narrative - confirmed by the others' focalizations as well - sometimes presents Martin as a vain, and a bit of an arrogant character.

When presenting his case to the reader, it is possible to perceive Martin's regretful words on the mishaps he put himself through, by making equivocated choices and then having to face suicide as the only way out to his misery. Talking about himself in the third person is another sarcastic tool the character possibly uses to inform the reader that that Martin of the past doesn't exist anymore:

Two years ago, Martin Sharp would not have found himself sitting on a tiny concrete ledge in the middle of the night, looking a hundred feet down at a concrete walkaway and wondering whether he'd hear the noise that his bones made when they shattered into tiny pieces. But two years ago Martin Sharp was a different person. I still had my job. I still had a wife. I hadn't slept with a fifteen-year-old. I hadn't been to prison. I hadn't had to talk to my young daughters about a front-page tabloid newspaper article, an article headlined with the word 'SLEAZEBAG' and illustrated with a picture of me lying on the pavement outside a well-known London nightspot. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.8)

Even though we can feel this remorseful tone regarding his misdeeds in his turntaking, Martin makes sure the reader knows, since the very beginning, that he is fully aware of his acts and of their inevitable consequences. He has a firm posture towards his own acts and does not accept self-pity or loose morals towards his behavior. By somehow mocking Freudian ideas⁷ as in the excerpt below, Sharp takes full responsibility for his acts and knows there's no cure for what he has done to himself and to the ones directly affected by his false moves:

⁷ According to Freud, most of what happens to us could be explained by one's relationship with one's parents

Oh, yes, I know the shrinks would say that they could have helped, but that's half the trouble with this bloody country isn't it? No one's willing to face their responsibilities. It's always someone else's fault. Boo-hoo-hoo. Well, I happen to be one of those rare individuals who believe that what went on with Mummy and Daddy had nothing to do with me screwing a fifteen-year-old. I happen to believe that I would have slept with her regardless of whether I'd been breast-fed or not, and it was time to face up to what I'd done (HORNBY, 2005a, p.8)

Another peculiarity of his speech, which will also be shared by the other narrators (specially Maureen), is the usage of parenthesis as a way of marking where the narration of the facts starts and their thoughts about them start:

So don't tell me that the balance of my mind was disturbed, because it really didn't feel that way. (What does it mean, anyway, that stuff about 'the balance of the mind'? Is it strictly scientific? Does the mind really wobble up and down in the head like some sort of fish-scale, according to how loopy you are?) (HORNBY, 2005a, p.8)

Following the same track of being responsible for your own acts – which seems to be Martin's main point from the beginning to the end of the (or even "his") story – he doesn't accept pretense or loose morals. Even though what he has done may seem to be regarded as immoral by most people, there is a very strong sense of morality in his own immorality. This is probably one of the main reasons why he cannot put up with his life anymore and, oddly enough, ends up becoming the group's guide:

But the point is that I was practicing what I preached. I hadn't been able to keep my thing in my trousers, so now I had to jump. I was a slave to my own logic. That was the price you had to pay if you were a tabloid columnist who crossed the line you'd drawn. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.32)

The four homodiegetic narrators in *ALWD* constantly address the reader. Martin, as well as Jess, challenges and confronts this reader. He doesn't seem to be worried about giving a good impression or portraying himself in a likeable way. His straightforwardness in both his narration and in his attitude in life turn him into a believable character, even if not very beloved.

I know what you're thinking, all you clever-clever people who read the Guardian and shop in Waterstone's and would no more think of watching breakfast television than you would of buying your children cigarettes. You're thinking, Oh, this guy wasn't serious (HORNBY, 2005a, p.43)

After the meeting on the top of the building, Jess ends up convincing the group to go downstairs to look for Chas, the fellow who broke her heart. From Martin's perspective, Chas had a particular role in the evening: to bring the group together and farther from the suicidal ideas.

Well, that was Chas's function that night: he was a bit of sponge that plugged a gap. The whole Jess and Chas thing was ludicrous, of course, a waste of time and energy, a banal little sideshow; but it absorbed us, got us down off the roof and even I was listening to his preposterous speech I could see its value. I could also see that we were going to need a lot more bits of sponge over the coming weeks and months. Maybe that's what we all need, whether we're suicidal or not. Maybe life is just too a big gap to be plugged by filler, so we need anything we can get our hands on – sanders and planers, fifteen-year-olds, whatever – to fill it up. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.62)

Martin's speech is also full of "polysyllabic words", as he himself states. As well as that, he seems to have the tendency to mix refined words to a lot of cursing on his speech. In the previous excerpt, Martin used the words "ludicrous" and "preposterous". This preference for more elaborate words somehow shows Martin's erudition. Both his intelligence and practicality will help him become the group's leader and the most experienced voice to be heard. Martin's speech is also filled with a lot of "profanity", as Maureen would say. Words like "bloody", "bastards", "fucking" are some of the most recurrent ones.

A bit further in the story, while the group is vacationing together, there is a significant diversion in the way the group feels about the experience itself. Martin, as a sophisticated and demanding man, finds everything utterly dull and meaningless. Out of respect for Maureen, though, he decides to keep his feelings towards the trip to himself.

The first evening wasn't too bad, I suppose. I was recognized once or twice, and ended up wearing JJ's baseball cap pulled down over my eyes, which depressed me. I am not a baseball-cap sort of a chap, and I abhor people who wear any sort of headgear during dinner. We ate so-so seafood in a tourist trap on the seafront, and the only reason I didn't complain about just about everything was because of the look on Maureen's face: she was transported by her microwaved plaice and her warm White wine, and it seemed churlish to spoil it. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.156)

All of the narrators keep some insights and situations only to themselves. Martin, for instance, reflects on a "90-day crisis article" he had read about people who were on the verge of committing suicide and, for varied reasons, it didn't work out or they changed their minds in the very last minute. In this article, it was suggested that people under this condition needed at least 90 days to try to sort things out. Such a period would work like a thermometer for the

things they had to try to solve internally and externally. Martin, deep inside, knows suicide is definitely not the way out to their problems. Possibly, the easiest way out, but, as he repeats many times to the reader, he knows that none of them would really go on with the suicide idea, since, no matter how desperate they were, there was nothing they couldn't really deal with:

There was something else in the article I read: an interview with a man who'd survived after jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. He said that two seconds after jumping, he realized there was nothing in his life he couldn't deal with, no problem he couldn't solve – apart from the problem he'd just given himself up by jumping off the bridge. I don't know why I didn't tell the others about that; you'd think it might be relevant information. I wanted to keep it to myself for the time being, though. It seemed like something that might be more appropriate later, when the story was over. If it ever was. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.186)

Martin, probably the most skeptical in the group, differs a great deal from Maureen, Jess and JJ because the latter three seem to be more hopeful towards life. Also, they seem to work harder to try to solve each other's issues. Martin, on the other hand, prefers to keep a distance from his own and from the others' problems. His perspective on real life is, truth be told, that it isn't a fairy tale at all. He clearly goes against any attempt of trying to make things better because he knows they can't get any better. His realistic view is contraposed somehow to Jess's naivety, who attempts to try to sort all of their problems out by setting the intervention. In Martin's ending there is no "happy": life is "hollow, dismal, brutish and short":

It was intended to be this enormous gesture, I think, a way of wrapping the whole thing, as if the whole thing could or would ever be wrapped up. That's the thing with the young these days, isn't it? They watch too many happy endings. Everything has to be wrapped up, with a smile and a tear and a wave. Everyone has learned, found love, seen the error of their ways, discovered the joys of monogamy, or fatherhood, or filial duty, or life itself. In my day, people got shot at the end of films, after learning only that life is hollow, dismal, brutish and short. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.201)

On intervention day, Martin perceives Jess's extraordinary call was probably a kind of a trap, another of her silly little tricks to try to take advantage of the others and the situation itself. Martin can feel in his stomach the sensation that something big is about to start, and they should be prepared for the worst:

As I approached Starbucks, a youngish couple walked in just ahead of me, and immediately went downstairs. Initially, I was pleased, or course, because it meant that Jess's sexual revelations would have to be conducted *sotto voce*, if it all; but then I was queuing for my chai tea latte, I realized that this meant no such thing, given Jess's immunity to embarrassment; and my stomach started to do what it has done ever since I turned forty. It doesn't churn, that's for sure. Old stomachs don't churn. It's more as if one side of the stomach wall is a tongue, and the other side is a battery. And at moments of tension the two sides touch, with disastrous consequences. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.205)

As time goes by, Matty's presence, Maureen's disabled son, at Starbucks puzzles Martin. All of a sudden, he is surprised by the appearance of two little girls calling him "daddy". He fails to realize, though, that they are indeed his two little daughters and, after that, he is able to realize the room is full of people connected to the group. He sees his ex-wife Cindy, his girlfriend Penny, Jess's family, JJ's friends and Maureen's son.

And as I was trying to work out what had brought Matty to Starbucks, two small blonde girls came belting towards me shouting 'Daddy! Daddy!', and even then I did not instantaneously realize that they were my daughters. I picked them up, held them, tried not to weep and looked around the room. Penny was there, smiling at me, and Cindy was at a table in the far corner, not smiling at me. JJ had his arms around the couple who'd walked in ahead of me, and Jess was standing with her father and a woman whom I presumed to be her mother – she was unmistakably the wife of a Labour junior minister. (...) Given Jess's flair for the melodramatic, I wouldn't have been altogether surprised to see her sister, but I checked carefully, and she wasn't there. Jess was wearing a skirt and a jacket, and for once you had to get up quite close to become scared by her eye make-up (HORNBY, 2005a, p.206)

What happens from this point on is a big sequence of mishaps. Each narrator retells the intervention meeting through his or her own perspective and position. Martin's view of his meeting with his friends and family is that he had, once again, the opportunity to ruin things with his beloved ones. His own mess started when he sees Penny, his supposed ex-girlfriend, flirting with one of Matty's nurses. At this moment, Martin loses control of himself and starts making a scene in front of all the people out of jealousy and, consequently, a big fool of himself. Not able to keep his anger to himself, Martin starts shouting abuses at the nurse, who is clearly a kinder, nicer company than he currently is:

My libido was on leave of absence (and one had to be prepared for the possibility that it might opt for early retirement and never return to its place of work): my social life consisted of JJ, Maureen and Jess, which might suggest that it was as sickly as my sex drive, not least because they seemed to suffice for the time being. And yet when I saw Penny flirt with one of Matty's nurses, I felt uncontrollably angry. (...) Jealousy is likely to seize a man at any time, and in any case the blond nurse was tall, and young, and tanned, and blond. There is every chance that he would have made me uncontrollably angry if he had been standing on his own in the basement of Starbucks, or indeed anywhere in London. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.218)

While the scene takes place, Martin, from a more distant perspective now, is able to see this jealous event as childish behavior, an immature act on the part of a fragilized man who has lost it all and had an outburst of cholera. Martin allows himself to be extremely introspective and analytical towards his own behavior when telling his own version of the facts (the nurse fight fiasco, for instance), although he might hide this from the other members of the group or the people who surround him.

I had a feeling that over in the corner, where the girls were colouring their picture, there was another Martin – a kinder, gentles Martin – watching in appalled fascination, and I wondered briefly whether it was possible to rejoin him. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.219)

After the incident on intervention day, Martin decides to confine himself. In fact, the intervention has worked as an enlightening moment to help him finally face his issues. Martin comes to the conclusion that his problems lie in his head: as the person mainly responsible for his decision-making, he has no other option but to accept that he has to either try to change his behavior or it might be too late for him to redeem himself.

Here is the thing. The cause of my problems is located in my head, if my head is where my personality is located. (Cindy and others would argue that both my personality and the source of my troubles were located below rather than above my waist, but hear me out.) I had been given many opportunities in life, and I had thrown each of them away, one by one, through a series of catastrophically bad decisions, each one of which seemed like a good idea to me – to me and my head – at the time. And yet the only tool I had at my disposal to correct the disastrous course my life seemed to be taking was the very same head that had caused me to fuck up in the first place. What chance did I have? (HORNBY, 2005a, p.233)

As he spends some days locked up in his apartment, Martin comes up with a list of actions he regrets and another list of people to whom he must apologize and ask for help. After this grand moment of acknowledgement, Martin starts his own process of acceptance and redemption, a situation which will be dealt with in the next chapter of this dissertation.

Quite clearly I needed two heads, two heads being better than one and all that. One would have to be the old one, just because the old one knows people's names and phone numbers, and which breakfast cereal I prefer, and so on; the second one would be able to observe and interpret the behaviour of the first, in the manner of a television wildlife expert. Asking the head I have now to explain its own thinking is as pointless as dialling your own telephone number on your own telephone: either way, you get an engaged signal. Or your own message, if you have that kind of phone system. (...) I seemed to have lost mine all around the time I went to prison, but I knew plenty of people who'd be prepared to tell me what they thought of me. (HORNBY, 2005a, p. 234-235)

Overall, Martin's focalization on his own deeds and their consequences is shown by his own words. However, it is also possible to conform or confront those views according to the focalization of the other narrators on Martin's attitudes throughout the unveiling of the events that form the narrative. From Maureen's perspective, for instance, he is portrayed as an assertive and practical man, which goes according to how Martin depicts himself. Such features in Martin, as Maureen points out, are clearly opposed to the way she sees herself, a weak and fragile woman. One example in the narrative we can point out is when Maureen narrates the event in which she has to call the clinic which takes care of her disabled son, Matty, and tell them he would have to stay there for a few more days. She tells the reader how different from her Martin is, a man who is capable of easily confronting the situation and simply doing something she wouldn't have been able to:

The way he said it, it was like he knew they weren't going to be asking any more questions. If I'd phoned I would have come up with this great long explanation for why I was phoning at four in the morning, something I'd have had to have thought up months ago, and then they would have seen through me and I'd have confessed and ended up going to get Matty out a few hours earlier rather than a day later. (HORNBY, 2005a, p. 42)

In addition, through Jess's focalization, Martin is again depicted as the leader of the group, defending the others and taking on a somewhat paternal figure for the whole group. Maureen realizes she is not an easy person to deal with and Martin presents himself as some kind of nemesis for her, the one who would force her to confront her worst features and try to change them:

I'm glad Martin pulled me outside. I needed stopping. I need stopping a lot. So I told myself that from that point on I was going to be more a person out of the olden days kind of thing. I swore not to swear, ha ha, or to spit; I swore not to ask harmless old ladies who are clearly more or less virgins whether they shagged doggy style. Martin went spare at me, told me I was a bitch, and an idiot, and asked me what Maureen had ever done to me. And I just said, Yes, sir, and, No, sir, and, Very sorry, sir, and I looked at the pavement, not at him, just to show him I really was sorry. And then I curtsied, which I thought was a nice touch. And he said, What the fuck's this, now? What's the yes sir no sir business? So I told him that I was going to stop being me, and that no one would ever see the old me again, and he didn't know what to say to that. I didn't want them to get sick of me. People do get sick of me, I've noticed. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.52)

Martin and Jess are clearly opposites that end up attracting each other. Both characters spend most of the narrative confronting each other and, surprisingly enough, one of

the main alliances in this group is formed. Even though Jess's main source of fun seems to be to provoke Martin and attack him whenever the opportunity comes, there is a point in which it becomes clear that their bonding grows solid and stronger, mainly because of these confrontations. There is a very clear moment when, from Jess's perspective at the party where they have been looking for Chas, we see this relationship grow fonder in its own awkward way. Martin, until this point in the novel, resists close connections of any sort, but the physical contact fulfills a need for "Shared Understanding" and the sympathy he receives from Jess has not been experienced since his incarceration:

So anyway. Martin went mental at me for a while, and then he just seemed to shrink, as if he was a balloon and he'd been punctured. 'What's wrong, kind sir?' I said, but he just shook his head, and I could understand enough from that. What I understood was that it was the middle of the night and he was standing outside a party full of people he didn't know, shouting at someone else he didn't know, a couple of hours after sitting on a roof thinking about killing himself. Oh yeah, and his wife and children hated him. In any other situation I would have said that he'd suddenly lost the will to live. I went over and put my hand on his shoulder, and he looked at me as if I were a person rather than an irritation and we almost had a Moment of some description - not a romantic Ross-and-Rachel-type moment (as if), but a Moment of Shared Understanding. But then we were interrupted, and the Moment passed. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.53)

Little by little, Jess reveals her affection for Martin to the reader. This first "moment" they have, as she herself names it, will not be repeated exhaustively throughout the narrative, though. As the narrative unfolds, it is noticeable they care for each other and end up getting used to the way they deal with their stormy relationship. In some narrative events, Jess and Martin give away they do care about each other, even though from the outside it might seem they hate each other. It is important to reinforce that this partnership probably works because the two characters have a lot to learn from each other and, since they are all in a fragile moment of their lives, exposing themselves to the others might be dangerous, yet inevitable in the same way. Jess loves Martin in spite of who he is and what he has done, which ends up becoming the whole logic of this illogical group being formed: having reached rock bottom and knowing there are others who are in the same position as you are:

I knew all the things that Martin had done, but when Chas had gone I still wanted him to hug me, I wouldn't even have cared if he'd tried anything on, but he didn't. He sort of did the opposite: he held me all funny, as if I was covered in barbed wire. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.65)

It is Jess's idea to meet regularly, which would require a great deal of effort and patience from all members of the group. Martin is clearly opposed to this, mainly because he does not want to commit himself, especially to the group:

Martin didn't like my idea, of course. First he wanted to know what "regularly" meant because he didn't want to commit himself. And I was like, yeah, well, with no kids and no wife and no girlfriend and no job, it must be hard to find the time, and he said it wasn't a question of time actually, it was a question of choice, so I had to remind him that he had agreed to be part of a gang. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.144)

Jess develops a strong admiration for Martin, most of it because he is the one who is able to make her "stop". However, she is very aware of his many flaws and constantly criticizes him. After going to see Martin's ex-wife Cindy, in a ridiculous attempt to try to make them get back together, Jess realizes Martin is a "tosser". Such a derogatory term is used to demonstrate Jess's annoyance towards Martin's sexual behavior, a man who has left his gentle wife for much younger women:

They're tossers, aren't they, men like Martin? They think women are fucking laptops or whatever, like, My old one's knackered and anyway, you can get ones that are slimmer and do more stuff now (HORNBY, 2005a, p.189)

JJ seems to be the person with whom Martin least interacts, narratively speaking and regarding the events that compose the narrative. However distant they may appear to be, they both cooperate in order to bring the group closer and also throughout their narrative. At one point, JJ compares Martin's choice to go along with the group to Carton⁸, the character who takes his friend's place at the guillotine in *A Tale of Two Cities*, saying that he wore the expression of a man about to have his head sliced off for the greater good (p.167). JJ appreciates his loyalty and devotion to the group. Martin is well aware of the cost he pays as a member of the group, but he is also aware of the rewards he receives through this involvement. Maureen, Jess and JJ acknowledge Martin's importance to the group and attribute to him this role of defender, leader and front man.

The last part of this reflection on Martin's figure as a narrator and character is his view on the group as a whole. Even though Martin is their unelected leader and often acts as a defender and a protector (for Jess and Maureen) and corrector-advisor for Jess, he remains with the group because nowhere else is he able to fulfill his need for companionship, to have that place in him occupied by others. No matter how harsh his life might have been, by

⁸ Sidney Carton is one of the main characters of Charles Dickens' *A tale of two cities* (1859)

pairing up with this unusual group, Martin ends up losing a bit of his bitterness and arrogance towards life and takes the leading role in the group, trying, then, to fulfill the expectations he wasn't able to in his own personal and professional life.

Although Martin knows they have nothing in common, he accepts and embraces his affection and concern towards the "gang". No one else in the world would be able to understand what bonds them:

Even though we had nothing in common beyond that one thing, that one thing was enough to make us feel that there wasn't anything else - not money, or class, or education, or age, or cultural interests - that was worth a damn; we'd formed a nation, suddenly, in those few hours, and for the time being we wanted only to be with our new compatriots. (HORNBY, 2005a, p. 58)

It is understandably clear, though, that Martin is not fully comfortable with explaining his relationship with his new "friends" to Penny, his so-called girlfriend, who has been eagerly waiting for him at his place after his disappearance on New Year's Eve. What she didn't know was that he had decided to commit suicide and those people were the reason why he was still alive:

My immediate problem was how to explain my connection with Maureen, JJ and Jess. She would find the truth hurtful and upsetting, and it was hard to think of a lie that would even get off the ground. What could we possibly be to one another? We didn't look like colleagues, or poetry enthusiasts, or clubbers, or substance abusers; the problem, it has to be said, was Maureen, on more or less every count, if failing to look like a substance abuser could ever be described as a problem. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.72)

Martin's best description of the group's appearance, "A middle-aged woman, a teenaged punk and an American with a leather jacket and a Rod Stewart haircut?" (p.73), comes also in an ironic tone. This very same group he despises in the beginning, ends up making him feel a mixed sensation of sadness and invincibility:

So in some ways it was a mistake, checking out of the hotel and going off on my own, because even though Jess irritated the hell out of me, and Maureen depressed me, they occupied a part of me that should never be left untenanted and unfurnished. It wasn't just that either: they also made me feel relatively accomplished. I'd done things and because I'd done things, there was a possibility I might do other things. They'd done nothing at all, and it was not difficult to imagine that they would continue to do nothing at all, and they made me look and feel like a world leader who runs a multinational company in the evenings and a scout troop at weekends. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.169)

Martin, presumably because of his previous status as a television personality, tends to be the leader of the group. He receives respect and esteem, even from Jess who tries to make everyone uncomfortable or self-conscious by making fun of them or by merely pointing out their flaws. Various group members make suggestions, but those suggestions are seldom acted on without Martin's agreement, showing that he holds authority, the ability to exert influence over multiple group members. Martin, because of the higher status he carries in the group, is able to influence its behavior. Despite his assertion that the relationships with the other group members is unfulfilling, Martin agrees to be part of the gang. By his words, it is possible to see he accepts his role in this narrative and commits to the group as a leader whose sarcasm and criticism end up being his most prominent features.

3.2 MAUREEN: THE ATTENTIVE CATHOLIC MOTHER

Maureen is a 51-year-old single mother of a disabled son named Matty. Maureen's narrative tone is clearly opposite to Martin's, as she is always very tactful with the words she uses and lives under Catholic principles. Her reason to commit suicide is that by doing so she will get rid of her problems, mostly related to her son's condition. Maureen is the second narrator to take turns in the retelling of the story.

Maureen introduces herself to the reader by confessing she is a sinner to have lied, both to her disabled son (who is not even able to understand a word she says) and to her own Catholic principles. From this point on, even though we still do not have much information on her, we can picture someone who lives under those religious principles. Maureen's narration, as Martin's, is sometimes marked by the use of brackets to denote her thoughts. Right from the beginning, Maureen uses words like "ashamed", "pathetic" or "blushed", which denote her fear of living a sinful life and of being misjudged:

I'm ashamed, thinking back. Not about the lies – I'm used to lying now. No, I'm ashamed of how pathetic it all was. One Sunday I found myself telling Matty about where Bridgid was going to buy the ham for the sandwiches. But it was on my mind, New Year's Eve, of course it was, and it was a way of talking about it, without actually saying anything. And I suppose I came to believe in the party a little bit myself, in the way that you come to believe a story in a book. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.5)

Most of her inner suffering and attachment to Catholic principles can be explained by the miserable life she leads. Her life is on hold with the responsibilities of raising Matty, and the only option she can generate to remove her from the situation is suicide. Maureen explains her situation in this way: “But when I had Matty everything stopped and nothing ever moved on. It’s the one single thing that makes you die inside, and eventually wants to make you die on the outside too” (HORNBY, 2005a, p.100).

The excessively burdensome responsibility of taking care of Matty drives Maureen to the precipice of suicide. It is not difficult for the reader to be sympathetic towards her situation, as her life story and the way she – and also the other narrators - depicts herself is in a very self-pitying, sad way. Maureen likes to think of herself as a good person – and to constantly repeat this in her narration – and this attitude comes as a prize to her. She considers herself someone who would not “look at that sort of newspaper that would talk about Martin’s dalliance”, but the realization that the death of her son would bring her happiness is a shock (HORNBY, 2005a, p.27). Although she gives the reader the impression of being a very good and dedicated mother - as unreliable as her own telling of the facts might be - her good behavior is confirmed by the other narrators’ words and descriptions. When Jess suggests that the group could kill Matty for her, she begins to cry, but Maureen disputes, internally, the interpretation of her tears by the group as her being appalled at the suggestion:

But that wasn’t why I was crying. I was crying because all I wanted in the world, the only thing that would make me want to live, was for Matty to die. And knowing why I was crying just made me cry more. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.39).

In the same way Martin provides an informal leadership for the group, Maureen acts as a moral compass or conscience for the group. The most repeated phrase in *ALWD* is “Sorry, Maureen”, after various profanities. Maureen’s sentence repeated over and over again, however, is “Would you watch your language, please?” Maureen is the first to suggest that this is her role in the group through her observations of the others:

“I’m not saying they’re bad. I’m saying they’re different ... They don’t have the church. They’d just say - What’s the difference? and leave it at that, and maybe they’re right, but they’re not me, and I didn’t know how to tell them that” (HORNBY, 2005a, p.52-53).

The constant guilt about abandoning her son by committing suicide weighs on her conscience throughout her own speech. According to the Catholic principles, this act would

be considered as a major sin, for instance. However, Maureen seems to feel so desperate that she herself has to face the consequences of breaking the rules she lives by. On the other hand, the group, despite their sometimes critical comments, respects Maureen for desperately trying to hold to her values, which is a reward for her role. Even though none of them “have the church” as she does, or perhaps because none of them have it, her contributions are highly valued by each of the others. Whenever she is focalizing on the other character-narrators’ attitudes, it is clear to see there is some judgmental tone, which can be explained by her own guilty feelings towards her principles and decisions. Her narrative may give the reader a sensation of a “heavy burden”, which is partly due to Hornby’s majestic work in making his characters believable and reliable.

Maureen is the second person to arrive at the top of Topper’s House. Martin, who was there already, had all the required equipment to cut the wires and to facilitate the suicide. Maureen accidentally pushes Martin, who becomes terrified thinking that someone might be trying to kill him. This is how the whole situation starts:

And then I saw Martin right over there the other side of the roof. I hid in the shadows and watched him. I could see he’d done things properly: he’d brought a little stepladder, and some wire-cutters, and he’d managed to climb over the top like that. And he was just sitting on the ledge, dangling his feet, looking down, taking nips out of a little hip flask, smoking, thinking, while I waited and waited until in the end I couldn’t wait anymore. It wasn’t going to be much use to him. I never tried to push him. I’m not beefy enough to push a grown man off a ledge. And I wouldn’t have tried anyway. It wouldn’t have been right; it was up to him whether he jumped or not. I just went up to him and put my hand through the wire and tapped him in the shoulder. I only wanted to ask him if he was going to be long. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.11)

After they all meet and share their own heartaches with each other, it is time they move on with their lives and try to help Jess find Chas and, still, keep their minds away from the idea of suicide. When Maureen reveals she has to pay for one extra night at the clinic Matty has been staying at, the others end up inferring she doesn’t have the money. Bothered by the fact that they have implied she’s poor, Maureen directs her complaints to the reader:

I didn’t like it that they were making me sound tight. It wasn’t anything to do with money. I needed one night so I paid for one night. And then someone else would have to pay, but I wouldn’t be around to know. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.40)

At the party, while the group is looking for Chas, Maureen decides to use the toilet. The scene in which she sees people doing cocaine right in front of her denotes all her naivety. Though the description is a bit farfetched, since it is difficult to believe there are people in the

world as naive as Maureen, it is an episode that highlights Maureen's innocence and, once again, her own thoughts between parenthesis:

Not that anyone could use the toilet anyway. When I went to find it, someone was kneeling on the floor and sniffing the lid. I have no idea why anyone would want to smell the lid of a toilet (while someone watched! Can you imagine!). But I suppose people are perverted in all sorts of ways. It was sort of what I expected when I walked into that party and heard the noise and saw what kind of people they were; if someone had asked me what I thought people like that would do in a toilet, I might have said they'd sniff the lid. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.50)

Maureen has had a tough life and she herself is able to acknowledge it. However, in her insights on her own life and misfortunes, one can see she believes there is fairness in all these unhappy moments. As an ardent practicing Catholic, Maureen relies her life on God. If life has unveiled in a tragic way, it is because it was supposed to be like that. This also shows Maureen doesn't reflect on her religiousness and seems to be blinded by her faith, a stereotype of an ardent Catholic who accepts everything as God's will. She doesn't believe in luck and is aware that the reason why she has ended up with a disabled child is due to her sins of having slept with a man – only once – without being married:

And, anyway, I'm Catholic, so I don't believe in luck as much as I believe in punishment. We're good at believing in punishment; we're the best in the world. I sinned against the Church, and the price you pay for that is Matty. It might seem like a high price to pay, but then, these sins are supposed to mean something, aren't they? So in one way it's hardly surprising that this is what I got. For a long time I was even grateful, because it felt to me as though I were going to be able to redeem myself here on Earth, and there'd be no reckoning to be made afterwards. But now I'm not so sure. If the price you have to pay for a sin is so high that you end up wanting to kill yourself and committing an even worse sin, then Someone's done his sums wrong. Someone's overcharging. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.59)

Maureen is clearly the character that changes the most throughout the narrative. As she had spent most of her life in a repressed way, being part of the group is somehow liberating to her. One of the first moments we can notice this slight change is when she slaps Chas, Jess's affection. Maureen doesn't seem to regret it, as she knows she is going to die soon anyway. Maybe now is the right time for doing things she has always been afraid of. Also, she has always used her own religiousness as a crutch, which reinforces the fact she doesn't seem to reflect much on the principles her life is guided by:

I had never hit anyone before, not in the whole of my life, although I'd often wanted to. But that night was different. I was in limbo, somewhere between living and dying, and it felt as if it didn't matter what I did until I went back to the top of Topper's House Holiday from myself. It made me want to slap him again, just –

more from the shock, I think, than from the force, because I'm not so Strong – and then knelt on all fours covering his head with his hands. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.59)

Once this brand new world unveils to Maureen, full of swear words and profane behavior, she realizes she herself has been doing things she would never have imagined being capable of. First, she starts getting used to the group's bad temper and vocabulary; Second, she finds herself drinking whisky and Coke, and throwing up on Martin's carpet after that. It all seems like a big adventure to someone whose life was solely based on taking care of her disabled son and going to the church. By the way Maureen focalizes the group itself, she gives away she has always lived a very lonely and empty life. The other three, however different from her as they may be, work as a relief valve which enable her to experience life through a divergent angle:

I know it's not much, but hearing the word 'f-' hundreds of times in an evening, well, even that was something different for me, something new. When I first met Martin on the roof, I physically flinched from the words he used, and now they just bounced off me, as if I had a helmet on. It made me wonder what else would change if I lived like this for just a few more days. Already I'd slapped someone, and now there I was drinking whisky and Coca-Cola. You know when people on the TV say 'You should go out more?' Now I saw what they meant. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.77)

After the first evening together ends, Maureen thinks she will be left out of the group. She then confides her anger to the reader, supposing he/she might have already wondered how she could put up with a life of devotion and resignation. Maureen proves to be as human as Martin, Jess and JJ: with flaws, desires, fears and evil deep inside. It is impossible, though, for both the group and the reader, not to be sympathetic to Maureen's condition, as her life is portrayed:

I thought they might see each other, but they'd keep me out of it. I was too old for them, and too old-fashioned, with my shoes and all. I'd had an interesting time going to parties and seeing all the strange people there, but it hadn't changed anything. I was still going back to pick Matty up, and I still had no life to live beyond the life I was already sick and tired of. You might be thinking, well, why isn't she angry? But of course I am angry. I don't know why I ever pretend I'm not. The church had something to do with it, I suppose. And maybe my age, because we were taught not to grumble, weren't we? But some days – most days – I want to scream and shout and break things and kill people. Oh, there's anger, right enough. You can't be stuck with a life like this and not get angry. Anyway. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.93)

Her relationship with her son Matty is one of the most moving in the whole narrative. After feeling terrified by the fact one of the group's reunion would be at her place, Maureen divulges to the reader her sense of pretending. She is fully aware her son is a "vegetable",

which, however, doesn't stop her from trying to create a different reality to them, an airbrushed one, indeed. Her way of softening his conditions is by giving him a made-up life, one in which he doesn't necessarily have to be treated like a "cabbage" but one in which she is able to interact with him, as crazy as it might sound:

Everything was pretending, wasn't it? The only thing I could do that wasn't make-believe was paint the walls White, get a plain pair of curtains. That would be a way of telling him and me and anyone else who came in that I knew he was a vegetable, a cabbage, and I wasn't trying to hide it. But then, where does it stop? Does that mean you can never buy him a T-shirt with a word on it, or a picture, because he'll never read, and he can't make sense of pictures? And who knows whether he even gets anything out of colours, or patterns? And it goes without saying that talking to him is ridiculous, and smiling at him, and kissing him on the head. Everything I do is pretending, so why not pretend properly? (HORNBY, 2005a, p.118)

On the holiday event, Maureen's perspective highlights this very moment in which the whole group first did something genuinely good for each other. She reiterates this isn't a story of unhappy people who met and were genuinely willing to help each other. On the contrary, all they had done up to that point was to "swear at each other", but Maureen, as she would never use this kind of vocabulary:

It was funny, but up to that point, we hadn't really ever been nice to each other. You'd think that would have been part of the story, considering how we'd met. You'd think this would be the story of four people who met because they were unhappy, and wanted to help each other. But it hadn't been up until then, not at all, nothing like, unless you count me and Martin sitting on Jess's head. And even that was being cruel to be kind, rather than kind plain and simple. Up until then it had been the story of four people who met because they were unhappy and then swore at each other. Three of them swore, anyway. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.153-154)

On the same holiday, Maureen has the opportunity to attend a mass in Tenerife. There, she is confronted with the fact that people are the same everywhere in the world and also faces her own "Tenerife version": a woman who seems to live a life very similar to hers. Here Maureen uses the word "rude" to denote what the other woman probably felt when caught her staring at her. This is an adjective which Maureen uses repeatedly throughout the narrative, either to denote her fellow companions' attitudes or her concern for having acted wrongly with someone. Maureen has this sense of not wanting to cause people problems and, throughout the narrative, shows concern towards being a burden in people's lives. Maureen is afraid of being rude or act improperly with people, another important feature of the character. Furthermore, Maureen's insight on the mass abroad highlights the importance of the church in her life and on those many others who have nothing to comfort themselves on but God:

After a little while, I started to be able to see things, and what I could see were people from home. Not the actual people, of course, but the Tenerife versions. (...) And then I saw me: She was my age, on her own, and she had a grown-up son in a wheelchair who didn't know what day it was, and for a little while I stared at them, and the woman caught me staring and she obviously thought I was being rude. But it seemed so strange, such a coincidence, until I thought about it. And what I thought was, you could probably go into any church anywhere in the world, and see a middle-aged woman, no husband in sight, pushing a young lad in a wheelchair. It was one of the reasons churches were invented, probably. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.168-169)

On the intervention day, Maureen's focalization on the event, observing what is going on around her and her friends, reinforces her naivety. Maureen sees everybody walking out of the meeting and doesn't know what to make of it. She once again uses the adjective "rude", two times, to refer to her companions' behavior. Another important feature on Maureen's personality, added to her naivety, is that she doesn't seem to grasp neither irony nor sarcasm. In many events throughout the narrative this feature is clear on her speech and on the way the whole group portrays her. In the intervention, for example, we can see she is confused about Martin's attitude, asking people if he "looked attractive" pulling Matty's wheelchair. He was clearly having a nervous breakdown and being sarcastic, something which Maureen isn't able to perceive, she just reckons he looks "mad":

Jess was always walking out of everywhere, so I didn't mind her going too much. But when JJ walked out, and then Martin... Well, I started to feel a bit annoyed, to tell you the honest truth. It seemed rude, when everyone had gone to all that trouble to turn up. And Martin was so peculiar, pushing Matty up and down and asking everybody if he looked attractive. Why would anyone think he looked attractive? He didn't look attractive at all. He looked mad. To be fair with JJ, he'd taken his guests with him when he went – he hadn't left them behind in the coffee bar, the way Jess and Martin had done. But later on I found out that he'd taken them all outside to have a fight with them, so it was difficult to decide whether he was being rude or not. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.221)

To confirm Maureen's lack of sense of humor, according to Martin's perspective, Maureen wasn't a very funny woman, since she didn't seem to understand his sarcasm, and the awkwardness of their meeting on the rooftop of Topper House while both were trying to kill themselves was the reason that saved both their lives:

I don't think she was trying to be funny, but what she said made me laugh even more. Maureen went to the other side of the roof and sat down with her back against the far wall. I turned around and lowered myself back on to the ledge. But I couldn't concentrate. The moment had gone. You're probably thinking. How much concentration does a man need to throw himself off the top of a high building? (...) But the conversation with her had distracted me, pulled me back out into the world,

into the cold and the Wind and the noise of the thumping bass seven floors below.
(HORNBY, 2005a, p.14-15)

From Martin's perspective, Maureen is clearly the odd one out in the group. This is clear to the reader from the very beginning, both from the way she presents herself and from the other's focalizations on her as well. Maureen is older and lived under the principles of the Catholic church, whereas the others were openly irreligious and had unrighteous behaviors – lying, cheating, deceiving. Hence, it was difficult for Martin to see her as a part of the group, for the aforementioned reasons:

We didn't look like colleagues, or poetry enthusiasts, or clubbers, or substance abusers; the problem, it has to be said, was Maureen, on more or less every count, if failing to look like a substance abuser could ever be described as a problem.
(HORNBY, 2005a, p.72)

However, from Martin's perspective, Maureen and him shared something very important: their unhappiness. Even with their personality differences, this fact was more relevant than any lack of humor or naivety, that is, he felt understood:

I had hardly exchanged a word with Maureen, and I didn't even know her surname; but she understood more about me than my wife had done in the last five years of our marriage. Maureen knew that I was unhappy, because of where she'd met me, and that meant she knew the most important thing about me; Cindy always professed herself baffled by everything I did or said. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.44)

Jess confirms Martin's view that Maureen doesn't have much sense of humor. - "Maureen wasn't a big comedian" (p.64). On the other hand, she is, as Martin, able to recognize Maureen's affiliation to her, since suicide is the strongest bond you could have with anyone, something stronger than Family, on Jess's perspective:

To say that Maureen and I had nothing in common because she wore raincoats and listened to brass bands or whatever was like saying, I don't know, the only thing I've got in common with that girl (Jen) is that we have the same parents.
(HORNBY, 2005a, p.64)

Through JJ's eyes she is first portrayed as "a middle-aged woman who looked like someone's cleaning lady, and she has spent most of her adult life taking care of her invalid son Matty" (p.32). Nevertheless, JJ turns out to be the narrator who shows most concern and

appreciation towards Maureen, developing a closer relationship with her. JJ is able to read her suffering in silence - “Maureen looked at Martin helplessly. Maureen looked at him helplessly again” and also to notice her braveness as a woman, when he states that:

Here’s the thing about Maureen: she had a lot more guts than I had. She’d stuck around to find out what it would feel like, never to live the life she had planned for herself. I didn’t know what those plans were, but she had them, same as everybody, and when Matty came along, she’d waited for twenty years to see what she’d be offered as a replacement, and she was offered nothing at all. There was a lot of feeling into that slap, and I could imagine hitting someone pretty hard when I was her age too. That was one of the reasons I didn’t intend to be her age (HORNBY, 2005a, p.58)

As with Martin and Jess, a partnership is consolidated between JJ and Maureen. JJ constantly repeats throughout his narration that “Maureen was like my girl” (p.). This fondness starts developing in the first opportunity both have to spend some time alone and get to know each other, after leaving the group’s interview on TV to talk about their meeting with an angel at the top of Topper’s House – all made up by Jess, of course:

What happened was that after the interview I found myself talking to JJ. He was going back to his flat and I was heading towards the bus stop, and we ended up walking alone together. I’m not sure he wanted to, really, because we’ve hardly spoken since I slapped that man on New Year’s Eve, but it was one of those awkward situations where I was walking five paces behind him, so he stopped for me.

‘That was kind of hard, wasn’t it?’ he said, and I was surprised, because I thought I was the only one who’d found it difficult.

‘I hate lies,’ I said.

He looked at me and laughed, and then I remembered about his lie.

‘No offence,’ I said. I lied too, I lied about the angel. And I lied to Matty as well. About going to a party on New Year’s Eve. And to the people in the respite home.

‘God’ll forgive you for those, I think,’ We walked along a bit more, and then he said, for no reason that I could tell, ‘What would it take to change your mind?’ (HORNBY, 2005a, p.133-134)

The conversations go on as the four of them decide to open their hearts to each other and start sharing the things that bother them and what would probably make them change their minds about suicide.

Maureen clearly develops a fondness for the group formed, a feeling which is constantly reaffirmed by her thoughts on her peers. She accepts the fact that they are different from her as “they don’t have the church” (HORNBY, 2005a, p.53), but they aren’t bad people

at all. During the group's first impressions, when sharing their experiences on the top of the building, Maureen is able to come up with some rushed conclusions on each of their styles. Martin is the celebrity type, even though she had never heard of him; Jess is the troubled girl and JJ, for having a long hair, was probably gay:

I think they picked me because I hadn't really said anything, and I hadn't rubbed anyone up the wrong way yet. And also, maybe, because I was more mysterious than the others. Martin everyone seemed to know about from the newspapers. And Jess, God love her... We'd only known her for half an hour, but you could tell that this was a girl who had problems. My own feeling about JJ, without knowing anything about him, was that he might have been a gay person, because he had long hair and spoke American. A lot of Americans are gay people, aren't they? (...) But me... You couldn't really tell anything about me from looking at me, so I think they were curious. (HORNBY, 2005a, p. 28-29)

Maureen's esteem for the group grows mostly for what they have to teach her about life. She has spent most of her life without talking to people and living for her son, who couldn't speak back to her. In a way, Martin, Jess and JJ show her what real life is supposed to be. Maureen admires them for their detachment to social conventions and aloofness:

They spoke quickly, Martin and Jess and JJ. Like people in a soap opera, bang bang bang. Like people who know what to say. I could never have spoken that quickly, not then anyway; it made me realize that I'd hardly spoken at all for over twenty-odd years. And the person I spoke to couldn't speak back. (HORNBY, 2005a, p. 200)

It is evident from Maureen's tone, whenever she has some insight about the group, that she worships them. They are the kind of persons she would like to be, she shows strong admiration for their courage, even though she is fully aware they are not happy either, so it would be better to be someone similar to them, not unhappy, perhaps:

These people, though, Martin and JJ and Jess, they're different from anyone I know. (...) They're not me but I wish I was them. Maybe not them, exactly, because they're not so happy either. But I wish I was one of those people, the people who know what to say, the people who can't see the difference. Because it seems to me that you have more chance of being able to live a life you can stand if you're like that. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.40)

Added to this admiration, Maureen also perceives Martin's, Jess's and JJ's fortune. They all have this amazing ability to meet people and lead interesting lives. Maureen concludes that if you don't meet people, nothing happens to you. Life is about sharing, which entitles meeting people, going out, socializing, building relationships: things which Maureen

doesn't seem to have so far. The group, somehow, is an open door to making this new perspective work out.

Now, that's not the most amazing story you've ever heard, is it? I listen to Jess and JJ and Martin, and that sort of thing happens to them all the time. They meet someone in a lift or a bar, and that someone says, 'Would you like a drink?', or even, 'Would you like intercourse?'. And perhaps they'd been thinking that they'd like intercourse, just when they'd been thinking that they'd liked intercourse, just when they'd been thinking they might like it, is the most amazing coincidence. But my impression is that this is not how they think, or how many people think. It's just life. One person bumps into another person, and that person wants something, or knows someone else who wants something, and as a result, things happen. Or, to put it another way, if you don't go out, and never meet anyone, then nothing happens. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.238)

Maureen's guilt on her own behavior is clear on her speech throughout the narrative. By constantly trying to excuse herself to the reader and to the others, she uses many tag questions, as if she were waiting for someone's confirmation of her doubts or forgiveness. The repetition of this feature ends up being her trademark. It might be implicit here she is constantly questioning herself and the others, even though she shows to be very incisive towards her belief in God. Maureen is a woman in constant doubt and her speech clearly shows this.

3.3 JESS: THE SPOILED BRAT

Jess is an eighteen-year-old girl with family problems who does not seem to have any real friends. Jess tends to easily irritate the others as she literally says everything that comes to her mind, not even respecting the readers, by constantly addressing them in an offensive tone. Jess's father is a local politician and her sister Jen, who seems to be very important to her as she herself reinforces it throughout the narrative, left the family a few years ago and is thought to have committed suicide. Jess' narrative turn is full of slang terms and swear words, which is feasible enough as the others portray her as the "spoiled brat" teenage type. She doesn't respect the feelings of the other characters, and as such, is – or at least it is what she wants them to think - not close with any of them. She often argues with Martin because it bothers her that he is everything she dislikes: educated and rather arrogant, features that fit her father, as well. Surprisingly enough, she is the one who convinces the group not to jump immediately when they first meet on the rooftop on that New Year's Eve.

Instead, she persuades them to find her supposed ex-boyfriend, one of her main reasons for wanting to kill herself, though it is also slightly impulsive – as most of her acts and statements throughout the narrative.

While Martin and Maureen are perfectly willing to help one another over the building's rooftop barrier in order to commit suicide, they are not so willing to assist Jess, who is seemingly interested in annoying anyone with whom she has contact. Martin and Maureen stop her from jumping by telling her, "You're too young" (HORNBY, 2005a, p. 22). Jess's stated reason for wanting to commit suicide is because Chas, her ex who has broken up with her, refuses to give her an explanation.

While Martin and Maureen have certain roles they fill that increase their authority and esteem, causing others to desire their company, Jess offends, attacks, or argues with almost everyone with whom she comes into contact. Jess explains what happens in her relationships and her desire to remain with the group this way:

I didn't want them to get sick of me. People do get sick of me, I've noticed. Chas got sick of me, for example. And I really need that not to happen anymore, otherwise I'll be left with nobody... I think Jen got sick of me, too. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.69)

While on vacation, Jess tries to make up to Martin for having been returned to the hotel by the police and claiming that he was her father. Martin, in an argument as he attempts to distance himself from Jess, responds with "I'm sorry to say it, but I think our relationship is over" (2005, p. 223). Similarly, in her relationship with Maureen, Jess's language and actions are a repeated cause for discomfort on Maureen's part, and although JJ tries to mediate between her and the others, Jess belittles him for having failed as a musician and in his love relationship (HORNBY, 2005a, p. 213). Jess also tells a reporter that, while on the roof waiting to jump, they saw an angel who told them not to commit suicide. This is some clear evidence which shows how manipulative and opportunist she can be. Eventually, they give an interview, for which they receive money as a reward (HORNBY, 2005a, p.167). Jess, however, reveals that the angel is a hoax on Martin's television show, causing Martin to be fired from his job.

Aware of her annoyance to others, Jess wishes to remain part of the group and feels she must do something of value. She feels some pressure to contribute because while her rewards as part of the group are great, she gives very little to others. To create a balance, Jess devises a plan to bring all of the people from the group's past relationships together for an

intervention, which ends in disaster. This shows Jess, despite her attitude, cares for the others. Also, she possibly hides behind her misbehavior and uses this as a shield to prevent people from coming closer to her. Unknown to Jess, however, she is valued by the group for the very things that tend to get her in trouble – and this is shown in the other narrators' turn. Maureen wants to talk to Martin's ex-wife, but only after enlisting Jess's help is she able to accomplish the task, and Jess is rewarded for her part in the form of personal growth and the pride she feels in that small accomplishment (HORNBY, 2005a, p.248).

Despite being the constant annoyance of this shared narrative group, her character is built in a very realistic way as well. Her words and her attitudes throughout the narrative, as her focalization on the other characters' acts and beliefs, suit the purpose of her character's profile: the spoiled teenage girl who wants to confront anyone who tries to stop her from getting what she wants – even when it comes to dying.

Though early in their association with one another, the group already finds Jess's tactless personality valuable in that she is the only one who has the nerve to suggest that they might still commit suicide right away. Although Jess is an integral part of the group, the fact that she is aware of the costs others pay to be in her company makes her legitimately concerned that she could be excluded. However, her value to the group is greater than the costs of avoiding interaction on the part of the other members.

Jess is clearly as straightforward as Martin, especially when it comes to saying what comes to her mind, and this is one of the main reasons why they probably spend the whole narrative teasing each other, but also end up developing a stronger bond. Differently from Martin, though, whose own experiences taught him to have a sarcastic rather polite tone, Jess doesn't seem to mind much offending whoever gets in her way by using curse words and abusive behavior. She is very aware of her flaws and tends to use them as a defense, by always attacking her peers and the reader. She also knows that, eventually, people run away from her and she is the main reason for that. When she first introduces herself to the reader, she starts out by warning him/her she is not a nice person, even though, in her words "I make friends easily enough, but then I piss them off. I know that much, even if I'm not sure why or how. And so people and parties disappear. I pissed Jen off, I'm sure of that. She disappeared, like everyone else." (HORNBY, 2005a, p.7) At this point, the reader isn't aware of who Jen is. However, Jess gives them a very strong hint that this person is very special to her, and her disappearance – still unknown to the reader – has been one of the main reasons for her messed up life and behavior.

At first sight, Jess's reasons for ending up on top of Topper's House and wanting to commit suicide seem to be about a boy who dumped her, without any real explanation. Jess shares this thought with the reader, and gives a lot away on her personality and stalking behavior:

I only went because someone at college told me Chas would be there, but he wasn't. I tried his mobile for the one zillionth time, but it wasn't on. When we first split up, he called me a stalker, but that's like an emotive word, 'stalker', isn't it? I don't think you can call it stalking when it's just phone calls and letters and e-mails and knocking on the door. And I only turned up at his work twice. Three times, if you count his Christmas party, which I don't because he said he was going to take me to that anyway. Stalking is when you follow them to the shops and on Holiday and all that, isn't it? Well, I never went anywhere near any shops. And anyway, I didn't think it was stalking when someone owed you an explanation. Being owed an explanation is like being owed money, and not just a fiver, either. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.6)

As Jess goes on sharing her drama with the reader, it is possible to come to the conclusion that her reasons for ending with her life are just teenage drama:

I wanted Chas, and he didn't want me, and I suddenly realized that easily the best thing to do was make my life as short as I possibly could. I almost laughed, it was so neat: I wanted to make my life short and I was at a party in Toppers' House, and the coincidence was too much. It was like a message from God. Ok, it was disappointing that all God had to say to me was, like, Jump off a roof, but I didn't blame him. What else was he supposed to tell me? (HORNBY, 2005a, p.12)

As the story develops, Jess is the third in the group to turn up at Topper's House's rooftop. Martin and Maureen have been there for a while trying to solve the ladder and the wires issue as Jess makes her triumphal appearance, by screaming and scaring both of them. From Martin's perspective, Jess at first appears to be a "lunatic" who shows up by shouting and dispersing them from their real purpose. In an odd way, Jess's rashness ends up saving all their lives, since she was the one who caused all the tension on the rooftop, by both interrupting their intentions and making them "save" her life. This entire awkward episode gives them time to rethink their positions:

I shouldn't have made the noise. That was my mistake. I mean, that was my mistake if the idea was to kill myself. I could just have walked, quickly and quietly and calmly, to the place where Martin had cut through the wire, climbed the ladder and them jumped. But I didn't. I yelled something like, 'Out of the way, losers!', and made this Red Indian war-whoop noise, as if it were all a game – which it was, at that point, to me, anyway – and Martin rugby-tackled me before I got halfway there. And then he sort of kneeled on me and ground my face into that sort of gritty fake-Tarmac stuff they put on top of buildings. Then I really did want to be dead. I didn't

know it was Martin. I never saw anything really, until he was rubbing my nose in the dirt, and then I just saw dirt. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.17)

As a character Jess's way of expressing herself, such as in vocabulary choice, as well as her own prose, is as confusing as she is: there is no division between the narration of the facts and the dialogues that actually happened, most of the times. Her way of rebuilding the narrative is as chaotic as she is as well: full of swear words and slangs, not much punctuation, a very colloquial and direct approach. She uses brief sentences and there is lack or misuse of punctuation. In the excerpt below, there is a very good sample of her way of mixing the dialogues and telling the story as if she were actually talking to a friend or peer: there's no room for formality or good grammar:

So I was like, Maybe we should talk, and Martin goes, What, share our pain? And then he made a face, like I'd said something stupid, so I called him a wanker, and then Maureen tutted and asked me whether I said things like that at home (which I do), so I called her a bag lady, and Martin called me a stupid, mean little girl, so I spat at him, which I shouldn't have done and which also by the way I don't do anywhere near as much nowadays, and so he made out like he was going to throttle me, and so JJ jumped between us, which was just as well for Martin, because I don't think he would have hit me and bitten and scratched him. And after that little fluffle of activity we sat there puffing and blowing and hating each other for a bit. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.27)

When introducing her dilemma to the group, Jess ensures the others that her problems seem to be as serious as theirs are. It is possible to see she tactfully avoids the subject of Jen and her family issues, which are probably the main reasons why she is in this fragile position at this particular moment. Instead, she prefers to focus on the "Chas episode" and, in a funny way, is able to persuade the other three to go downstairs with her and try to find him. In a way, Jess has saved everybody's life with her teenage drama.

I launched in. I just went, my name's Jess and I'm eighteen years old and, see, I'm here because I had some family problems that I don't need to go into. And then I split up with this guy. Chas. And he owes me an explanation. Because he didn't say anything. He just went. But if he gave me an explanation I'd feel better, I think, because he broke my heart. Except I can't find him. I was at the party downstairs looking for him, and he wasn't there. So I came up here. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.33)

Jess acknowledges JJ's helpfulness when he shows interest in her situation with Chas and suggests that she go find him instead of being there among the other suicidals. She is also able to see, as she is retelling the facts, that there was no reason for being somehow disrespectful to him by using the annoying interjection "duh":

JJ was nice. He could see that I wanted to find Chas, so I was like, Duh, yeah, except I wished I hadn't done the Duh bit because he was being sympathetic and Duh is taking the piss, really, isn't it? But he ignored the Duh and asked me where Chas was and I said I didn't know, some party or another, and he said, Well, why don't you go looking for him instead of fucking around up here and I'd said I'd run out of energy and hope and when I said that I knew it was true. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.34)

Even though Jess tries to mislead the group – and the reader – by showing them her main problem is Chas, she starts giving away, little by little, some information on Jen and on the huge effect her disappearance had on her. She also warns the reader this is not the kind of story in which her older sister comes back all of a sudden and rescues her from her troubled life:

Before I go on, I'll answer the questions that everyone always asks, just so's you don't sit there wondering and not concentrating on what I'm saying. No, I don't know where she is. Yes, I think she's alive. Why I think she's alive: because that whole thing with the car in the car park looked phony to me. What does it feel like, having a missing sister? I can tell you. You know how if you lose something valuable, a wallet or a piece of jewellery, you can't concentrate on anything else? Well, it feels like that all the time, every day. There's something else people ask: Where do you think she is? Which is different from: Do I know where she is? At first I didn't understand that the two questions were different. And then when I did understand, I thought that the Where do you think she is? question was stupid. Like, well if I knew that I'd go and look for her. But now I understand it as being a more poetic question. 'Cos, really, it's a way of asking what she was like. Do I think she's in Africa, helping people? Or do I think she's on one long permanent rave, or writing poems on a Scottish island, or travelling through the bush in Australia? So here's what I think. I think she has a baby, maybe in America, and she's in a little town somewhere sunny, Texas, say, or California, and she's living with a man who works hard with his hands and looks after her and loves her. So that's what I tell people, except of course I don't know whether I'm telling them about Jen or about me. Oh, and one more thing - especially if you're reading this in the future, when everyone's forgotten about us and how things turned out for us: don't sit around hoping for her to pop up later on, to rescue me. She doesn't come back, OK? And we don't find out she's dead, either. Nothing happens, so forget about it. Well, don't forget about her, because she's important. But forget about that sort of ending. It's not that sort of story. (HORNBY, 2005a, p. 107-108)

Even though Jess desperately tries to hide her genuine feelings about herself and about her missing sister from the group, she constantly confides her deepest fears and insights to the readers. It is clear there is some love and affection in her heart, no matter how much she tries to mask it. She desperately tries to bring the group together and closer. She also arranges the intervention day as an attempt to make them solve their unresolved problems. Her bad behavior indulgence is the only possible way Jess finds to handle her own issues. Jess is

aware that we are all tied to something, we all have a “rope” that makes us belong somewhere: Maureen’s is Matty; Martin’s is his daughters; JJ’s seems to be Eddie, his musical partner. Jess’s, as predicted, is Jen: even if she’s an inconsistent one, it is her sister who connects her to the world, her strongest and most special bond. Hence, it is once again possible to affirm that Jess is, deep inside, a very lonely person, having to deal with her sister’s absence:

Most people have a rope that ties them to someone, and that rope can be short or it can be long. (Be long. Belong. Get it?) You don’t know how long, though. It’s not your choice. Maureen’s rope ties her to Matty and it’s about six inches long and it’s killing her. Martin’s rope ties him to his daughters, and, like a stupid dog, he thinks it isn’t there. He goes running off somewhere – into a nightclub after a girl, up a building, whatever – and then suddenly it brings him up short and chokes him and he acts surprised, and then he does same thing again the next day. I think JJ is tied to his bloke Eddie he keeps talking about, the one he used to be in a band with. And I’m learning that I’m tied to Jen, and not to my mum and dad – not home which is where the rope should be. (...) But Jen isn’t solid, like a house. She’s floating, blowing around, no one knows where she is; she’s sort of fucking useless, really, isn’t she? (HORNBY, 2005a, p.142)

As expected, while vacationing with the group, Jess gets into trouble and irritates everyone in many possible ways. She goes to parties, gets drunk and takes drugs. Because of that, she ends up going to jail. Martin leaves the hotel and the group due to Jess’s behavior, which saddens her. After this self-indulgent moment, she is able to come up with her most sincere and frank description on herself: you cannot spend your whole life pretending to be someone you’re not, and being stuck with your real you, specially when you don’t like it very much, can be very painful:

I felt terrible the next morning, mostly because I’d gone to bed without anything to eat, although I’m sure the E’s and the Breezers and the blow didn’t help. I felt low, too. I had that terrible feeling you get when you realize that you’re stuck with who you are and there’s nothing you can do about it. I mean, you can make characters up, like I did when I became like a Jane Austeny person on New Year’s Eve, and that gives you some time off. But it’s impossible to keep it going for long, and then you’re back to being sick outside some dodgy club and offering to fight people. My dad wonders why I choose to be like this, but the truth is, you have no choice, and that’s what makes you feel like killing yourself. When I try to think of a life that doesn’t involve being sick outside a dodgy club, I can’t manage it; I picture nothing at all. This is it; this is my voice, this is my body, this is my life. Jess Crichton, this is your life, and here are some people from Nantwich to talk about you. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.162)

Martin and Jess, as previously stated, form one of the most unusual and hilarious pairs in this group. Martin sees and portrays Jess as an annoying spoiled brat. On her first appearance on the top of Topper’s House, Martin states that he “was just about to let Maureen

jump in Peace when this fucking lunatic came roaring at us” (HORNBY, 2005a, p.17). This is Jess’s entrance into the story and their lives, by screaming and bringing chaos.

Martin is able to read and understand Jess’s behavior since the beginning. He, as the others, is somehow afraid of her, never knowing what to expect and what embarrassment she is going to cause the next day:

“It was only when we got back to the flat that I had any recollection of describing Penny as a right bitch who would fuck anybody and snort anything. But when had I said that? I spent the next thirty minutes or so praying that it had been before Jess’s arrival, when Maureen and I were on our own; if Jess had heard, then I had no doubt that my opinion of Penny would be passed on”. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.70)

In Maureen’s apartment, when one of their meetings takes place, Matty’s presence is uncomfortable to both Martin, JJ and Jess. However, as Martin states, Jess has a particular way of ruining things and embarrassing everybody. At that point, they all have learned a little bit about her, which makes both of them try to remain in silence as she starts questioning Maureen about the fake life she has created for her disabled son:

Matty’s posters weren’t mentioned again that day. We were all curious, of course, but Jess had ensured that JJ and I couldn’t express this curiosity: Jess set things up so that you were either for her or against her, and in this matter, as in so many others, we were against her – which meant staying quiet on this issue. But because we resented being made to stay quiet, we became aggressive and noisy on any other issue we could bring to mind. (HORNBY, 2005a, p. 119)

Martin is also able to recognize some changes in Jess’s behavior, as she starts to control herself and think twice before saying whatever comes to her mind and offending the others:

Somehow Jess had managed to keep her trap shut – an impressive achievement for someone whose usual conversation technique is to describe everything as, or even before, it happens, using as many words as possible. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.202)

Maureen has a very judgmental view on Jess, which is perfectly understandable as they have completely opposed lives and share no common values. According to Maureen, Jess has a careless attitude to life and feelings. Even in a serious situation as the one they were all facing, Jess was able to act in a nonchalant way. Her reckless behavior towards everything – as well as dying – makes Maureen believe she would have jumped off the roof if Martin

hadn't stopped her. Jess was the only one who got closer to jumping, which denotes her impulsiveness and wildness:

Sometimes it was hard to remember that Jess was unhappy too. The rest of us, we were still shell-shocked. I didn't know how I'd ended up drinking whisky in the lounge of a well-known Tv personality when I'd actually left the house to kill myself, and you could tell that JJ and Martin were confused about the evening too. But with Jess, it was like the whole how's your father on the roof was like a minor accident, the sort of thing where you rub your head and sit down and have a cup of sweet tea, and then you get on with the rest of your day. We weren't having fun. We weren't killing ourselves, but we weren't having fun either, We'd come too close to jumping. And yet Jess had come the closest of all of us to going over. JJ had only just come out of the stairwell. Martin had sat with his feet dangling over the edge but hadn't actually nerved himself to do it. But if Martin hadn't sat on Jess's head, she'd have done it. I'm sure of that. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.76)

JJ perceives Jess' behavior – towards Chas and life itself – as she presents herself to all of them: like a hurricane, impossible to be stopped; like a lion impossible to be tamed. This is JJ telling what happens to them retrospectively and, when he affirms Chas knew how difficult it was to calm Jess down, it shows JJ has learned a lot about Jess's uncontrollable way so far:

'No. I want you to come and talk to her. She's had, she's had like a rough evening, and maybe a little chat would help calm her down,' Chas laughed. It was the hollow, desperate laugh of a man who knew that, when it came to calming Jess down, several elephant tranquilizers would be much more useful than a little chat. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.56)

Although Jess tries hard to give a bad impression of herself and hide her background, it is through JJ's perspective that we can feel the image she had built in the group's minds. They were all under the impression she had no family or no education at all, which turned out to be the complete opposite. Jess is the daughter of an Education minister and through JJ's words it is clear Jess was good at building up the wrong impression if she wanted to:

That was the first time we knew anything about Jess's background, and I have to say that my first reaction was that it was pretty fucking hilarious. (...) An Education minister! Holy shit! You've got to understand, this girl talked like she'd been brought up by a penniless, junkie welfare mother who was younger than her. And she acted like education was a form of prostitution, something that only the weird or the desperate would resort to. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.90)

Even though Jess may be the most controversial figure inside the group, she is the one who persuades the group to leave the suicidal idea behind and help her look for Chas. In

addition, it is her idea to keep on meeting regularly and she always finds an excuse to set up meetings and appointments with them. Overall, it is possible to infer that Jess never wanted to kill herself – she was just tired of being who she was – and the unusual group formed on New Year’s Eve was everything she needed to move on. Fortunately, she is able to bring all the other three along with her, even if against their will. Jess is very fond of the group, despite her ruthless attitudes towards them. She is the first one who suggests they are a group, though her comparison of them to The Beatles fails, since they actually have nothing in common to the Liverpoolian band, even if they are equal in number:

A long time ago, when I was eight or nine, I saw this programme on telly about the history of the Beatles. Jen liked the Beatles, so she was the one who made me watch it, but I didn’t mind. (I probably told her I did mind, though, I probably made a fuss and pissed her off.) Anyway, when Ringo joined, you sort of felt this little shiver, because that was it, then, that was the four of them, and they were ready to go off and be the most famous group in history. Well, that’s how I felt when JJ turned up on the roof with his pizzas. I know you’ll think, Oh, she’s just saying that because it sounds good, but I’m not. I knew, honestly. It helped that he looked like a rock star, with his hair and his leather jacket and all that, but my feeling wasn’t anything to do with music; I just mean that I could tell we needed JJ, and so when he appeared he felt right. He wasn’t Ringo, though. He was more like Paul. Maureen was Ringo, except she wasn’t very funny. I was George, except I wasn’t shy, or spiritual. Martin was John, except he wasn’t talented or cool. Thinking about it, maybe we were more like another group with four people in it. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.27)

Jess recognizes the group’s main reason for bonding: it is their sadness that has brought them together and what will make them grow closer:

When you're sad - like, really sad, Toppers' House sad - you only want to be with other people who are sad. (...) I'd noticed with the others that when they made jokes, if they did (Maureen wasn't a big comedian), you could still see why they'd been up on the roof even while they were laughing there was something else in there, something that stopped them giving themselves over to the moment. And you can say that we shouldn't have been up there, because wanting to kill yourself is a coward's way out, and you can say that none of us had enough reason to want to do it. But you can't say that we didn't feel it, because we all did, and that was more important than anything. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.63)

She later concludes the only thing Martin, Maureen, Jess and her had in common was their suicidal feelings. Even though they might not have anything but that in common, this feeling was stronger than any other affinity:

We had nothing in common apart from where we'd ended up, on that square of concrete high up in the air, and that was the biggest thing you could possibly have in common with anyone. To say that Maureen and I had nothing in common because

she wore raincoats and listened to brass bands or whatever was like saying, I don't know, the only thing I've got in common with that girl is that we have the same parents. And I didn't know any of that until Chas said that thing about Martin being a cunt. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.63)

Jess is constantly testing the group – mainly emotionally and psychologically speaking. She has this misconceived sense of righteousness in her, which means people should follow her and do everything according to what she has planned or considers being right. When proposing the “angel moneymaking scheme” to the group, Jess imposes her view on the group and finds a way of convincing them to following her decision. If they hadn't, as she stated, she wouldn't have “anything more to do with them”, as they would have proved not to be worthy of her company. This childish behavior, repeated over and over again throughout the narrative, indicates Jess is indeed lost and scared. The grouping, however faulty and chaotic it might have been, is the way they all find to face their flaws and try to beat their own demons:

And for me, it was our first big test as a group. They all had a straightforward choice to make: were they on my side or not? And to be honest, if they'd decided that they weren't, I doubt whether I'd have anything more to do with them. It would have said a lot about them as people, none of it good. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.124)

Jess's colloquial and sometimes abrupt tone indicates some features of her own messy life and troubled behavior. Her way of expressing herself on her narrative – lack of punctuation, repetitive use of swear words and colloquial expressions, for instance – denotes who she really seem to be: a spoiled rebellious teenager who needs a lot of stopping.

3.4 JJ: THE AMERICAN WANNABE ROCK STAR

JJ is an American who has come to London with his girlfriend, Lizzy, in order to try to have a new life. He used to play in a rock band called “Big Yellow” and toured across the country. For Lizzy, he gave up his dream of becoming a rock star, but the band broke up and she dumps him. Even though the dream of becoming successful still exists in his heart, much to his disappointment, he now earns money by delivering pizza. He compares his own ambition for suicide with the ambitions of well-known musicians and compares the four people on the roof with a band he calls “Topper's House Four”. JJ initially states that a terminal disease is his reason for committing suicide, and gives the truth to the group later in the narrative, after realizing that he would be in an ongoing relationship with them. JJ's

failures personally and professionally lead him to wish for death. He has an idealized version of suicide, thinking that it is reserved for suffering artists — people who are too sensitive to live - and considers himself, “a failed rock and roll musician, to be among that elite group” (HORNBY, 2005a, p.31). He is shocked, then, to find on the roof of Toppers’ House three individuals who distinctly do not fit into his preconceived category of suicidal perfection: “A middle-aged woman who looked like someone’s cleaning lady, a shrieking adolescent, and a talk-show host with an orange face... It didn’t add up” (HORNBY, 2005a, p.32).

From JJ’s perspective, we can see how he first sees the others. Because of the unusual circumstance that begins ALWD, JJ suggests that they have, deep inside, an awareness of their unusual gathering. His misconceptions and prejudice towards the others – here we could interpret it as the so-called American versus British stereotypes and rivalry – weaken as the narrative goes by.

When JJ first joins Martin, Maureen, and Jess on the roof of Toppers’ House, he brings only pizza, a lie about having a brain disease, and his desire to end his life. However, he is soon part of the gathering as they pursue Jess’s estranged boyfriend. He needs to belong to something, and as an American stuck in a foreign country, even one in which the language is the same, JJ is alone. When Ed, his friend and former band member, comes from the States to visit at Jess’s request and asks JJ to come back with him and start a new band. JJ declines saying, — “I have one here” in reference to his relationships with Martin, Maureen, and Jess (HORNBY, 2005a, p.322). By saying this, JJ clearly expresses the whole point and tone which is developed by the four distinct narrators: however unlikely and incompatible their lives might be, they end up, by sharing life experiences and the narrative, a solid and “one for all and all for one” group.

JJ usually acts as an intermediary for Jess and as an advisor, at times, for the entire group. Jess indicates this, saying,

JJ probably would have helped smooth the conversation along a bit, I think. I wanted to talk because I was nervous, and that probably made me say stupid things (HORNBY, 2005a, p. 140)

JJ, if present, would have acted as a buffer between the middle-aged television personality and the rebellious teen. For Maureen, JJ suggests that a way to conceptualize what you really want is to imagine a person of power who could change situations. JJ’s contribution to the group, whether to help — smooth out the conversation or suggest a

vacation is being, as Maureen terms it, — “nice”. In the end, this is what JJ is, a nice guy who helps unite their group, although he himself might not be aware of this.

When first introducing himself to the reader, JJ makes sure to clarify that he is very smart and shows this from that moment on with his literature affiliation. He frequently quotes famous writers and musicians and tries to convince the reader that even if he hasn’t studied much in life, everything he knows comes from much reading and his love for literature and music:

Ok, you don’t know me, so you’ll have to take my word for it that I’m not stupid. I read the fuck out of every book I can get my hands on. I like Faulkner and Dickens and Vonnegut and Brendan Behan and Dylan Thomas. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.15)

JJ is part of a generation which, from his perspective, has issues. He himself acknowledges being part of this generation which has the feeling of being superior to the others. Such a feeling imprisons him; he is sick and tired of having to “be something”: to be someone in life, have a career, be successful. JJ just wants to be free to play his own music and life as it dictates itself doesn’t grant him this freedom:

The trouble with my generation is that we all think we’re fucking geniuses. Making something isn’t good enough for us, neither is selling something, or teaching something, or even just doing something; we have to *be* something. It’s our inalienable right, as citizens of the twenty-first century. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.23)

JJ’s speech is full of literary references, and by quoting famous authors, which is a way of trying to show some erudition, despite his unsophisticated language and colloquial tone throughout the narrative:

Oscar Wilde once said that one’s real life is often the life one does not lead. Well, fucking right on, Oscar. My real life was full of headlining shows at Wembley and Madison Square Garden and platinum records, and Grammys, and that wasn’t the life I was leading, which is maybe why I felt like I could throw it away. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.24)

JJ’s loyalty to his principles and, consequently, to the people with whom he relates to is possibly one of his most prominent features. By his own deeds and according to the others’ narrative as well, we can build up the image of a nice, relaxed fellow, who wants people to be happy and live in peace. By quoting famous people and intellectuals – such as Oscar Wilde, and Bob Dylan – JJ tries to impress the reader and the other three members of the group. JJ has issues with his own failure: he knows he is one of the good people and cannot come to terms with his misfortunes. A way of showing superiority, somehow, is by highlighting this

feature in his personality, a way to compensate for his losses in life. Curiously enough, he quotes Bob Dylan, “To live outside the law you must be honest” (p. 26) in an attempt to try to redeem himself from his own mistakes and cowardice. When he first meets the group, he doesn’t see his problems to be as serious as the others’, so he makes up a serious condition (CCR, which actually stands for a rock band Creedence Clearwater Revival) to “impress” them and ends up contradicting himself. He is not being honest, so he doesn’t feel good about himself and makes sure the reader knows it.

JJ’s life hasn’t turned out the way he wanted it to be. This is his main reason for wanting to end with his life. He has lost his band and his girlfriend, his true motivations for keep going with life. A shared feeling among all of the members of the group is the fact that they all felt like dying but not necessarily wanted to die. JJ explains that feeling to the reader:

The truth was that I didn’t feel like a dying man; I felt like a man who every now and again wanted to die, and there’s a difference. A man who wants to die feels angry and full of life and desperate and bored and exhausted, all at the same time. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.78)

JJ’s inclination to always do the right thing clearly opposes to Jess’ attitude. Right in the beginning of the story, Martin, Maureen and JJ know nothing about Jess’s background. They only get to know her real story by reading the news. Seen through JJ’s perspective, we can feel the empathy in his words:

But then when I read the story, it wasn’t quite so funny. I didn’t know anything about Jess’s older sister Jennifer. None of us did. She disappeared a few years ago, when Jess was fifteen and she was eighteen; she’d borrowed her mother’s car and they found it abandoned near a well-known suicide spot down on the coast. They never found a body. I don’t know what that would have done to Jess – nothing good, I guess. And her old man... Jesus. Parents who only beget suicidal daughters are likely to end up feeling pretty dark about the whole child-raising scene. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.90)

JJ tells the truth about making up his disease for a very good reason, though: the group is having a meeting at Maureen’s place and Jess, as usual, is about to make some nasty comment about Maureen’s son and JJ, in order to defend Maureen, shouts out of a sudden: “I haven’t got CCR” (HORNBY, 2005a, p.110), which turns the whole attention to him and the groups’ concern grows towards JJ’s condition. In a way, he knows he is being completely dishonest. On the other hand, he does that, according to his own words, for a higher purpose: to prevent Maureen from being hurt and offended by Jess.

JJ, who doesn't happen to have a very good relationship with Martin, sees his reaction towards the CCR scheme as a kind of personal revenge: JJ has always posed as the good guy in the group and now he has shown himself to be as dirty as the others, or at least as dirty as Martin and Jess, since Maureen is the "saint" in this group:

Martin smiled. Telling you have an incurable disease when you don't is probably right up there with seducing a fifteen-year-old, so he was enjoying my embarrassment. Plus, he was maybe even entitled to a little moral superiority, because he'd done the decent thing when he got humiliated: he'd walked to the top of Topper's House and dangled his feet over the edge. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.112)

After finally revealing his true story - he's actually miserable - JJ opens himself to the group, by acknowledging there is nothing else for him in this life, as in his own words, "I'm qualified for nothing. I didn't graduate from school. I just had the band, and now it's gone, and I didn't make a cent out of it, and I'm looking at a life of flipping burgers" (HORNBY, 2005a, p.122). As an artist, JJ suffers with his real condition, which is that of not being fatally ill, but being completely disgusted with life.

As every flawed human being, JJ shows his weaknesses to the reader. He is aware of the fact they have agreed to do many bad things in order to gain money as a group. Jess has persuaded all of them to lie that they have seen an angel on the top of the building. This so-called angel has stopped them from killing themselves. Jess comes up with a moneymaking scheme, which would involve lying to the press in order to get rich. Despite the group's indecision and doubts in relation to the case, they all accept it and dig into the lie. JJ, though, realizes it is not as simple as he had pictured; lying doesn't seem to be his thing, after all:

It didn't seem like it was going to be too difficult, at first. Ok, none of us was thrilled that Jess had got us into this angel thing, but it didn't seem worth falling out over. We'd grit our teeth, say we'd seen an angel, take the money and try and forget it ever happened. But then the next day you're sitting in front of a journalist, and you're all agreeing with a straight face that this fucking angel looked like Matt Damon, and loyalty seemed like the dumbest of all virtues. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.128)

After the fake-angel event took place on national TV, JJ ends up losing his faith in himself, since they all have sold themselves. There is a strong sense of morality in his speech, as we can see below:

No, we were finished as serious people. We had sold our seriosity for twelve hundred and fifty of your English pounds, and as far as I could tell that money was going to have to last us for the rest of our lives, unless we saw God, or Elvis, or

Princess Di. And next time we'd have to see them for real and take photos. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.131)

JJ's strongest battle seems to be against himself, since he believes in being a good person. However, after the suicide attempt, JJ has gotten himself into some trouble after joining the group. In fact, JJ is not the only one to feel corrupted or bad by lying in order to make money. Maureen shares the same feelings. This is one of the main reasons why JJ and Maureen end up growing closer: they both share the same benevolence and sense of morality.

One of JJ's main desperations is his break-up with Lizzie, who, in his words, has "dumped" him. JJ's indignation comes from the shallow reasons she had to break up their relationship. He narrates, in tone that is a cry for help, "You know why she dumped me? She dumped me because I wasn't going to be a rock'n'roll star after all. Can you fucking believe that? No you can't, because it's beyond belief, and therefore unbelievable". (HORNBY, 2005a, p. 132) According to JJ's perspective, Lizzie probably never deserved him and had dubious reasons to be with him. JJ will later learn he was wrong, but he doesn't anticipate this information in his narration.

After doing some devious things, the group decides to get together and do something useful. Thinking highly of himself, JJ's view on the book club, "Our cultural program was all on my shoulders, because none of the others knew anything about anything". (HORNBY, 2005a, p. 148)

JJ desperately tries to introduce the crew to the cultural world. He brings up the idea of a book club, which becomes unsuccessful due to Jess's annoyance and, later a music meeting. JJ shows the group songs from famous singers, one in particular calls everybody's attention: Nick Drake. JJ reckons his songs are all about topics people avoid touching, subjects such as melancholy, sadness and depression. The singer's songs fit perfectly into their music meetings, as all of them feel lost and sad.

Even though he has been hardened by life, JJ still cultivates optimism in his life. He constantly tries to cheer the others up. He is the one who proposes the "the wishing game", in which they all have to be very open and honest to each other and admit outloud what they really want from life. It ends up becoming a liberating activity, one in which the whole group is able to be straightforward, and a heartfelt moment arises. JJ admits he wants to have his girlfriend back as well as his band: music and love is what move him:

I don't know why but it was kind of liberating, saying what you really wanted, even if you couldn't have it. When I'd invented that Cosmic Tony guy for Maureen, I'd

put limits on his superpowers because I thought we might see what kind of practical assistance Maureen needed. And as it turned out, she needed a vacation and we could help. (...) We all spend so much time not saying what we want, because we know we can't have it. And because it sounds ungracious, or ungrateful, or disloyal, or childish, or banal. Or because we're so desperate to pretend that things are OK, really, that confessing to ourselves they're not looks like a bad move. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.198)

During the intervention organized by Jess, JJ starts narrating the meeting from his perspective. He has some distorted view of the facts, which is proved by his tendency to romanticize everything he sees. When he sees Ed and Lizzie, he immediately imagines they're going to get the band together and his relationship with Lizzie will be magically solved. He finds then that his first impression was misguided and the people there just had a specific purpose to be there: they wanted to make the four of them feel better and help them try to see a purpose in life, after all they had been through:

Who's that old guy talking to Jess? Could he be a record-company executive? Had Ed fixed us up with a new deal? No, he hasn't. The old guy is Jess's dad, and later I found out that Lizzie had a new boyfriend, someone with a house in Hampstead and his own graphic design company. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.215)

JJ's meeting with Lizzie and Ed during the intervention, as bad as it sounds initially, ends up fine. At first, he thought they would have a happy ending. As time goes by, JJ realized his friends were there because they truly cared about him, even though that didn't mean they would all be back together and live happily ever after. As JJ states, "we are what's happened to us" (p.110): Ed and Lizzie are part of whom he has become and the hardest thing for him is to let them go. He keeps his eternal optimistic point of view and after a long talk, JJ has a moment of acknowledgement: life's worth living after all, the good things in life are having real relationships to rely on. Even if they do not work out the way we expected or wanted them to.

JJ is a romantic-compassionate, a feature which is depicted throughout his narrative and best illustrated by his own deeds and constant concern for the well-being of others. From Martin's first impression, though, JJ and the Americans have an irritating way of talking – surprisingly enough, because they do speak the same language. Martin certainly has a very biased perspective, mostly based on the stereotypes Americans hold, possibly by the British perspective:

"Oh, come on, man", said JJ, in his irritating American way. It doesn't take long, I find, to be irritated by Yanks. I know they're our friends and everything, and they

respect success over there, unlike the ungrateful natives of this bloody chippy dump, but all that cool-daddio stuff gets on my wick. I mean, you should have seen him. You'd have thought he was on the roof to promote his latest movie. You certainly wouldn't think he'd been puttering around Archway delivering pizzas. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.30)

As previously mentioned, JJ and Martin never happen to get really close to each other. Most of the exchanges between them are of mere formality and of being part of the same "gang". They never mistreat each other, though. As a matter of fact, they work collaborate but silently, most of the times in order to try to help Maureen become a happier person or to stop Jess from ruining everything and everybody around them.

Maureen, as well as Martin, builds up a first impression based on JJ's nationality. Her own view is biased as well:

I'd never met an American before, I don't think. I wasn't at all sure he was one, either, until the others said something. You don't expect Americans to be delivering pizzas, do you? Well, I don't, but perhaps I'm just out of touch. I don't order pizzas very often, but every time I have, they've been delivered by someone who doesn't speak English. Americans don't deliver things, do they? Or serve you in shops, or take your Money on the bus. I suppose they must do in America, but they don't here. Indians and West Indians, lots of Australians in the hospital where they see Matty, but no Americans. So we probably thought he was a bit mad at first. That was the only explanation for him. He looked a bit mad, with that hair. And he thought that we'd ordered pizzas while we were standing on the roof of Toppers' House (HORNBY, 2005a, p.20)

Maureen and JJ grow closer and from this partnership, we can see they really try helping each other and doing something useful together, despite the mishaps they had gone through when they first met. JJ is able to help Maureen by convincing the group to go on a holiday together. From that point on, they all acknowledge they could actually do things in order to help each other and not only be involved in moneymaking schemes or exchanging offences. JJ brings harmony to the group, with his hopeful approach to life and fearless loyalty to his companions.

Jess, as could have been predicted, portrays JJ as a pseudo intellectual, and always tries to attack him because of his virtues. When JJ proposes the book club, Jess makes sure she criticizes every book they read and all of JJ's favorite authors as well. "JJ was the only one who thought it was brilliant" (HORNBY, 2005a, p. 112), Jess states when they discuss Hemingway's writings.

JJ's first impression on the group is not the very best either: "A middle-aged woman who looked like someone's cleaning lady, a shrieking adolescent, and a talk show host with

an orange face... It didn't add up" (HORNBY, 2005a, p.25). He is actually in a state of shock to be with these people under the same circumstances of wanting to commit suicide. In JJ's mind, suicide is just for the great minds, for the artists, and those people seemed to be anything but that.

As they expose their reasons for ending up on the rooftop of a building on a given New Year's Eve to each other, JJ starts developing a sympathetic view on the group's problems. He is able to recognize Martin, Maureen and Jess had very solid grounds to be in that desperate situation. JJ feels ashamed for his very own feelings, and that's why he makes up a terminal disease that could make him equal to his peers;

I guess I felt a little queasy listening to the other guys, because their reasons for being up there seemed pretty solid. Jesus, everyone understood why Maureen's life wasn't worth living. And, sure, Martin had kind of dug his own grave, but even so, that level of humiliation and shame... If I'd been him, I doubt if I'd have stuck around as long as he had. And Jess was very unhappy and very nuts. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.34)

JJ is a very good observer and, as the story progresses, is able to perceive many features in his peers' relationships. In the beginning, JJ shows a lot of prejudice against the group, as they are not his "kind of people", a feeling shared by Martin, as well, who doesn't seem to find anything in common in the group, except for the suicidal ideas. JJ is actually embarrassed by their presence, as he states in the moment they leave to pursue Jess's Chas:

I know I'd had that bonding moment with Maureen when she'd smacked Chas. (...) And no offense meant, but I really didn't want to be seen in daylight with these people, if you know what I mean – especially with... some of'em. But breakfast and daylight were still a couple of hours away, so it felt to me like I had no real choice but to go back with them to Martin's place. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.67)

JJ, as Martin, takes longer to affiliate with the whole group, to develop the sense of belonging to a gang. This moment happens when they make a pact of postponing the suicidal pact to Valentine's Day. By doing this, they all commit to one another and decide to have sporadic meetings to check on each other's well-being. JJ's real feeling is that he "hadn't felt like I was in this gang either, until that moment. And now I belonged to the gang that Martin didn't like much, and I felt committed to it". (HORNBY, 2005a, p.83)

As the story unfolds, the group experiences many delicate moments together. The holiday in Tenerife is one clear example of that. JJ senses things haven't turned out really well during their trip together and compares the end of his band with the apparent airport group

break-up which is about to come. However concerned JJ might be, he promises not to worry too much about his peers, “So this time around I was determined not to fret about my fellow band members. They’d be OK, I told myself. It didn’t look that way, maybe, but they’d survived so far, just about, and it wasn’t my problem anyway” (HORNBY, 2005a, p.189). JJ seems to have learned a little from his former experiences with his band, in which he was constantly worried about their well-being. Now, with his “new band”, he wants to do things differently: they are all grown-ups and can handle their own issues by themselves.

Nick Hornby’s clever way of building his narrative makes *ALWD* a different book from its predecessors. Hornby usually works with homodiegetic narrators, which is not different from this one. However, the main difference lies in the usage of multiple narrators this time. Such a choice implies also in the focalization made by each distinct narrator on their own attitudes and towards the others’. This is what helps build up the humor and the mishaps in the story, once each character picks up after the other and there might be misunderstandings, divergences of views and lots of irony. Curiously enough, the narrators do not seem to express how they feel about the others among themselves, leaving this heartfelt moment to the readers only. Against all odds, they end up cooperating, both in real life and narratively speaking. Another important point to consider is the fact that the multiple narrators are aware of their own faults as individuals and Hornby builds their speech in a very feasible way. In spite of sharing a common ideal – committing suicide – in the beginning of the narrative, this is shown to the reader as their apparent only mutual feature.

What is built by the multiple narrators, surprisingly enough, is a story in which an unusual group has been formed. The four of them are able to acknowledge this throughout the retelling of the story and clearly state that, even though suicide was apparently the only thing that held them together, by sharing this one thing – a big thing indeed – they end up developing stronger bonds. They stand up for each other many times throughout the story. However misguided most of their attempts to help each might turn out to be, there is a strong sense of belonging and empathy in their frequent meetings and gatherings. Despite all the awkwardness of having four completely different people abruptly brought together, it is probably in their uneasiness that they find their voice inside this new clan.

Each of the protagonists in Hornby’s book carries wonderful material for narrative exploration. Unfortunately, it would be virtually impossible to cover all relevant aspects of these narrators’ features. The intention here, though, was just to start the discussion and analysis of what might develop, in the near future, into a longer and more detailed approach. *A Long way down* is definitely one of Hornby’s finest and most interesting pieces

of writings. Giving an attentive reading to the different narrators' tones and style may turn this ride into a more enjoyable and rewarding one.

Finally, in the next and last chapter, "A long way down to redemption", we will turn our attention to what happens to these characters by the end of their narrations and how much they appear to have changed with their own and shared experiences. The main question which we intend to investigate is, taking into account its serious and deep thematic, suicide and depression, how the narrators deal with their own issues and, if so, if they find redemption in the end, or is too late to find a salvation to their souls in this tragic-comic world they live in? The main point is that they all seem to grow with the experience and end up changing their bad attitude towards life, themselves and the others, by eventually achieving redemption.

4 FOUR SIDES AND ONE STORY? – A *LONG WAY DOWN* TO REDEMPTION

“I think a recurring question in my books is, how much do we owe people we don’t know?”

Nick Hornby

Redemption, according to the Thesaurus Dictionary, can be defined as “the act of redeeming or the condition of having been redeemed”. Another possible definition comes from the Christian terminology, which could be described as the “salvation from sin through Jesus's sacrifice”. After finishing reading *ALWD*, a few important questions may arise: As the characters do not commit suicide and decide to go on with their “supposedly miserable” lives, was redemption what the characters had been looking for, after all? If they were not strong enough to end their lives and decided to give life a second chance, were they seeking salvation, redemption, remission from their own sins, or even from themselves? Is it possible to begin a new life after all the misfortune they had been through? These are all pertinent questions that follow us throughout the reading of the novel and may become more imperative after we are done with it. In this chapter, we intend to verify how the narrators deal with their own issues as the narrative approaches the end. The main question we would like to answer is: do the characters find redemption in the end, or is it too late to find salvation for their souls in this tragic-comic world they live in? We are going to analyze Martin’s, Maureen’s, Jess’s and JJ’s final thoughts on themselves and on the happenings around them and try to reflect on each narrator’s end of journey.

One of the points that strike us the most throughout Hornby’s building of the narrative is the fact that we can progressively see these characters’ growth, especially when it comes to sharing experiences, openness of heart and acceptance. Even though the story is very amusing, it brings up a deep and serious theme and approaches it in a very faithful and verisimilar way. It is rather easy to identify with these characters’ dilemmas, even if you have never been on the verge of committing suicide or the slightest idea has crossed your mind. Martin, Maureen, Jess and JJ are fictional characters, indeed. However, Hornby is able to give each of their odd and particular personalities specific human qualities and, in a way, reminds us that what we humans fear the most is death. Moreover, we have a ludicrous tendency of not enjoying life as it presents itself; always wishing things are, were or could have been different.

In *ALWD*, we are exposed to the lives of four completely different people, who seem to have nothing left, but their despair and remorse. The main point here is that when you come to terms with your own life, having nothing to lose, and decide suicide is the only way out, this must be the hardest – for some the weakest, indeed – conclusions to come up with. Through the characters' perspectives, it is possible to get a feeling of hope, even though there are no ready answers and those characters are far from achieving greatness. Each of them ends up finding their own way, or at least a way out of committing suicide and back into real life again. It is far from being a successful conclusion, but it is, indeed, one of an optimistic and relieving tone. We know since the very beginning these characters are alive, as they all tell us their story retrospectively. However, the characters themselves ensure that the people who are on the other side – the reader – do not get overexcited or create great expectations towards their *grand finale* – the only certainty we are given is that in the process of presenting their progress, these characters lead us to the reality of no happy (nor unhappy) ending. Behind all the humoristic and amusing tone of the narrative and of its story, we are constantly faced with sad stories from the characters' background and end up cheering for them, however spiteful (Jess), arrogant (Martin), uninteresting (Maureen) or gullible (JJ) they might appear to be. We end up facing our own flaws and faults and this is mainly due to Hornby's fine touch. People who are used to Hornby's writings know this is the way the writer finds to unpretentiously move us, deep inside. It is up to us to delve into their dilemmas and suffer as well as support each of them.

It shouldn't come as a surprise, then, that Maureen is the chosen narrator to wrap up the narrative. Even though we cannot take for granted this was on purpose, it makes sense to give the most hopeless character of all, the one who all the others acknowledge to have had the most suffered life, the final touch to end things in a somehow optimistic way. It is through her focalization that we read, relieved, that things will turn out fine.

According to Lindgren (2005), the inevitable theme of *ALWD* is "choose life". Lindgren also compares Hornby's fourth novel to an odyssey that could be seen "as a modern, profane version of *The Wizard of Oz*". It is a valid interpretation, as the characters, according to Lindgren, could perfectly suit the characters of Dorothy – Jess, whose inconsistency drives much of the plot; the Lion - Martin, who must find courage; the Tin Man, JJ, a rejected lover, and, finally, the Scarecrow - Maureen, a fearful single woman whose adult life has been consumed in caring for a son who never learned to walk or talk. Lindgren believes these characters are after something they already possess, as in the original world of *Oz*: they just have to locate it within themselves.

As Lindgren states, it is important to highlight that Hornby's central theme is that through empathy, we can find purpose in life. After hearing their stories, there is a kind of "seems legit" moment. We have four characters to pick from, depending on which battle of life we are on now. There is Jess and the rebellious phase everyone has gone through, hated and was embarrassed by. JJ and his quarter life crisis. Maureen and the woes of being a mother, and Martin and the difficulties of looking helplessly at a life that is cascading before you. It is unsettling but rather pleasing to be in the subconscious of these characters, as we sympathize with most of their misfortune and deeds. Another relevant question rises as well: can we measure suffering? No matter whose battle we decide to fight for, or which character we identify with the most, is it possible to say that, Maureen, for instance, suffers more due to her son's condition than Jess, who apparently only has teenage dramas to confront? Hornby tries to constantly remind us with his characters' journey that, perhaps, it is not up to anyone to judge people's sufferings and pain. Being sad – Topper's House sad, as Jess would say – is an individual and unique experience. Therefore, it cannot be compared, equalized or judged. Martin, Maureen, Jess and JJ might have completely different reasons for being unhappy with their lives. However, should we say that one or the other has the most "righteous" reasons? That's where Hornby shows us that empathy is possibly the main theme of this novel, and judging one another's pain is not up to us at all.

Even with all this hopelessness in their lives, all the grief they narrate to have been through, there is delight. Their sadness is not contagious. But then again, we are talking about suicide, and the beauty of Hornby and his writing is the way he can talk about serious topics such as suicide in a light manner. In the end, ALWD is a book about four almost suicides that probably never really would have been and one definite suicide that we know virtually nothing about. The characters' recurrent message in the book is that people who are sad do not fit in. As a culture, we don't know what to do with these sad individuals, and yet, it demonstrates that we're all sad most of the time — some of us climb to the top of Topper Tower and some of us don't — but these four characters seem to show us that the climbing or not may be the only difference among us.

Following this discussion on ALWD's main themes, we will talk about each of the characters' end of journey. By reflecting on what happens to them towards the end of the narrative and on their own insights on their lives, we will try to answer the last question this thesis had previously asked: what kind of redemption do they find, if any?

4.1 MARTIN - SOME PHONE CALLS AND A BOY NAMED PACINO

Martin has never lied to himself, neither to the group, nor to the reader, about being a contemplative person. In fact, he has always had a sincere and bitter tone regarding introspection. There is no pretending on his thoughts and actions throughout his whole journey as a homodiegetic narrator. His genuine thoughts about his lack of involvement with himself and the ones surrounding him end up making him sound more human and closer to the reader. During their holiday in the Canarian Islands, Martin runs away from the hotel and abandons the group, after becoming enraged with Jess's bad behavior. This is the first moment in which he locks himself in a hotel room and starts thinking about his own deeds. He shares his lack of belief in introspection with the reader. However, as he himself says "stuck with yourself", there might not be a way out of introspection:

I have never been a particularly introspective man, and I say this unapologetically. One could argue that most of the trouble in the world is caused by introspection. I'm not thinking of things like war, famine, disease or violent crime – not that sort of trouble. (...) I can now see, however, that it's hard to prevent introspection when one has nothing to do but sit around and think about oneself. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.169)

The first conclusions Martin could draw from his introspective moment was that he had "made a pig's ear of just about everything" (HORNBY, 2005a, p.169). Consequently, he would be better dead, and if he died, no one would miss him or feel bad about his death. Following that, he decides to get drunk. In conclusion, this first introspective moment results in nothing.

The second opportunity Martin has to rethink his own acts is after the intervention day. After making a big scene out of jealousy for his ex-girlfriend, he decides to lock himself in his apartment and delves into his own thoughts and fears. After all, even though he has never been the introspective kind, he is left with no option but to delve into his own mind and try to find a way to ease his beloved ones' pain. This time, he feels he has really disappointed his family and friends and it might be the right opportunity to take some action.

And anyway, what does or can one ever learn, apart from times tables, and the name of the Spanish prime minister? I hope that I've learned not to sleep with fifteen-year-olds, but I learned that a long time ago – decades before I actually slept with a fifteen-year-old. The problem there was simply that she told me she was sixteen. So,

have I learned not to sleep with sixteen-year-olds, or attractive young women? No. And yet just about everyone I've ever interviewed has told me that by doing something or other – recovering from cancer, climbing a mountain, playing the part of a serial killer in a movie – they have learned something about themselves (HORNBY, 2005a, p.208)

Martin's main concern, though, from what we are told, is that he is not very sure whether he can learn how to change his old patterns in life. He is not sure people ever learn anything at all, apart from facts and logical thinking. Nevertheless, Martin recognizes he has discovered he is extremely attached to his self-esteem when he is in prison. After losing all of his self-respect, money and esteem, life has led him where he stands at that particular moment in which he decides to come to terms with his life:

In the last few months, I have been to prison, lost every last molecule of self-respect, become estranged from my children and thought very seriously about killing myself. I mean, that little lot has got to be the psychological equivalent of cancer, right? So how come I've learned absolutely bugger all? What was I supposed to learn? True. I have discovered that I was quite attached to my self-esteem, and regret its passing. Also, I've found out that prison and poverty aren't really *me*. But, you know, I could have had a wild stab in the dark about both of those things beforehand. Call me literal-minded, but I suspect people might learn more about themselves if they didn't get cancer. They'd have more time, and a lot more energy. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.209)

During his soul-searching moment, Martin finds out that the only possible way out to redemption is to apologize to those he has deeply hurt along the way. In a heartfelt moment, Martin starts calling people to apologize. The first one he talks to is Cyndi, his ex-wife. They haven't gotten along for a while. Nonetheless, Cyndi picks up the phone – this time without hanging up on him, as she used to – and listens to Martin's earnest struggle to make things right. They both have a very straightforward conversation, which leads Martin to start his redeeming process. Martin listens to what Cyndi has to tell him and accepts all of her offenses, curses and advice open-heartedly.

Having collected some insights on what other people expected from him, Martin decides to do something genuinely good and rewarding: helping slow kids with their reading as voluntary work. Pacino, the boy who he was supposed to assist, studied at a comprehensive school in Martin's neighborhood. Motivated by his talk with his ex-wife, Sharp sees this opportunity as a way of slowly regaining his self-respect. In his own metaphorical words, it would be a long way to achieving redemption, and Pacino was only his first stop:

Pacino was my first stop on the road towards self-respect. It's a long road, I accept that, but I had somehow hoped that Pacino might have been positioned a little

further along it. If we agree that self-respect is in, say, Sydney, and I'd begun the journey at Holloway Road tube station, then I'd imagined that Pacino would be my overnight stopover, the place where my plane could refuel. I was realistic enough to see that he wasn't going to get me all the way there, but volunteering to sit down with a stupid and unattractive child for an hour represented several thousand air-miles, surely? During our first session, however, as we stumbled over even the simplest words, I realized that he was more like Caledonian Road than Singapore, and it would be another twenty-odd tube stops before I even got to bloody Heathrow. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.247)

As slow as the process of redemption may be, Martin perceives it won't be an easy task to help Pacino with his reading skills – as difficult as regaining his love for himself and for his own life tend to be. However, he manages to learn that “hard is trying to rebuild yourself, piece by piece, with no instruction book, and no clue as to where all the important bits are supposed to go”:

“So what would you do? How does one begin to like oneself enough to want to live a little longer? And why didn't my hour with Pacino do the trick? I blamed him, partly. He didn't want to learn. And he wasn't the sort of child I'd had in mind, either. I'd hoped for someone who was remarkably intelligent, but disadvantaged by home circumstance, someone who only needed an hour's extra tuition a week to become some kind of working-class prodigy. (...) Perhaps that was the point, the sheer grinding uselessness of it. Perhaps if you knew you were doing something so obviously without value, you liked yourself more than someone who was indisputably helping people. Perhaps I'd end up feeling better than the blond nurse and I could taunt him again, but this time I would have righteousness on my side. (...) There you are. I can finish that sentence now. Hard is teaching Pacino to read. Or even, 'Hard is trying to rebuild yourself, piece by piece, with no instruction book, and no clue as to where all the important bits are supposed to go.'” (HORNBY, 2005a, p. 248)

Martin knows it will be a long way to repair all the harm he has done to himself and to the others. Nevertheless, Sharp seems to have found his own way of dealing with this. No matter how hard it will be, he is on his way. It may not be clear by Martin's words that he is totally convinced of the usefulness of his new task of teaching Pacino. He seems to dread it, though. Furthermore, he has three friends who are in the same position willing to help him find his way up.

4.2 MAUREEN – IT WAS HIM AFTER ALL

Maureen is possibly the character who changes the most throughout the narrative. As she was the most resigned person among the group, we can see she starts slowly to develop a sense of superiority during the trip they all go through together. She learns how to say “no” to Jess – a very difficult task, indeed - and enjoys her time by herself. This is one of the first signs that indicate Maureen’s growth as an individual: her capability of having her own voice heard. This is most visible during the group’s trip together, in which Maureen chooses to “keep out of everybody’s way” and be with herself:

For the rest of the week I tried to keep out of everybody’s way. Martin was gone anyway, and JJ didn’t seem to mind. Jess didn’t like it very much, and once or twice she tried to make me eat with her, or sit on the beach with her. But I just smiled and said, No, thank you. I didn’t say, But you’re always so rude to me! Why do you want to talk to me now? (HORNBY, 2005a, p.168)

On the big intervention day, Maureen becomes friends with the nurses who are there to take care of Matty. Luckily enough, they invite her to join in a quiz team they all take part in. Without hesitating, she accepts. Out of this fortunate happening, she also ends up getting a job at a newsagent’s. When reporting about these grand changes in her life, she also shows some carelessness towards her audience’s opinion. She doesn’t believe in coincidences, as she is a Catholic. Hence, if you don’t believe in her story, she doesn’t mind.

I don’t know which part of the story to tell you about next. There’s another coincidence involved, so I don’t know whether to put it here, in the coincidence section, or later on, after I’ve told you about the quiz. Maybe if I separate the coincidences out, push them further apart, you might believe them more. On the other hand, I don’t care whether you believe them, because they’re true. And in any case, I still can’t decide whether they are coincidences or not, these things: perhaps getting something you want is never a coincidence. (...) These things can only be coincidental if you think you have no power over your life after all. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.238)

Maureen’s new perspectives in life thrill her. Notwithstanding, she is perfectly aware the conditions are not as perfect as they seem. Life isn’t like a fairy tale or love stories: the salary in her new job isn’t really good and the fourth guy on the quiz team will sometimes show up, which means she won’t always be part of the team. Life has given her much more than she could have asked for. As a Catholic, this process is seen as a blessing, as if God were always there, after all.

Maureen decides to go to her local church and go into confession. The priest asks her during her confession, “Can we help you with anything?” (p.240). Maureen, in a very grateful tone, thanks the Father by telling him she has friends who are helping her already. At this point, Maureen remembers *Psalm 50*, which says: “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me”. She sees this Psalm as a sign that God, an important element in her life, helped her get through her rough times. It was He who sent her Martin, Jess and JJ. Thanks to that, she manages to grow as a person and handle her suffering in a lighter way, by sharing her pain. Now she has friends, a job and feels happy: it was God’s touch, so she’d better glorify Him.

I went Toppers’ House because I had called and called and called, and there was no delivery, and my days of trouble seemed to have lasted too long, and showed no signs of ending. But He did hear me, in the end, and He sent me Martin and JJ and Jess, and then He sent me Stephen and Sean and the quiz, and then He sent me Jack and the newsagent’s. In other words, He proved to me that He was listening. How could I have carried on doubting Him, with all that evidence? So I’d better glorify Him, as best I can. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.241)

On March 31st, as the group meets for their last reunion after the 90-day critical period, they all get back to their starting point. At the top of Topper’s House they share their insights on their learnings and conclude that being alive is certainly better than being dead. Maureen is the last narrator and as the group looks at the London Eye, they wonder if the wheel is really moving. Hornby’s narrative ends with this subtle London Eye analogy to the group’s current life, expressed in Maureen words: “it didn’t look as it was moving, but it must have been, I suppose” (p.256). In other words, their impression might be that they hadn’t conquered anything throughout these 90 days. However, they cannot fail to see the many little things that happened and culminated in this grand moment on the top of the building once more. None of them wants to commit suicide anymore. Moreover, as unpredictable and dull as life may be, they all chose life – and to look after each other along the way.

4.3 JESS – LOVE IS ALL WE NEED

Jess’ effort to change, though possibly risible to the reader and to the other members of the group, is quite visible towards the end of the narrative as well. In a way, despite her distasteful behavior, Jess has always made serious attempts of getting the group closer, even if

her reasons couldn't be regarded as the noblest ones by the others' perspectives. One of the first moments in which we can perceive a slight change in her attitude is when she shows genuine concern towards Maureen's life. On the way back from their attempt of convincing Cindy to make up with Martin, the girls have a long trip back to their homes. Jess decides to take the opportunity to talk to Maureen about life and other issues. She makes a definite attempt not to ask nasty questions nor to embarrass Maureen. In her inner thoughts, though, Jess knows she is a long way from actually making concise changes in her life. Not asking Maureen inconvenient questions could certainly be a start, but was that enough? In this very moment, the reader faces Jess struggling with her own chaotic behavior. It takes a great deal of effort before accomplishing the real changes in life and Jess is very much aware of this:

On the way down I'd been thinking about how I'd moved on, but all I'd done was gone one train ride and one bus journey without asking Maureen about sexual positions. After I'd seen Cindy, that didn't seem like such a long journey. Cindy had got rid of Martin, moved on and met someone else. Her past was in the past, but our past, I didn't know. Our past was still all over the place. We could see it every day when we woke up. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.195)

Given this insight, Jess starts realizing how much she has grown as a person since the Topper's House episode. Not only has she grown, but also the group itself has grown closer together. Some of this growth is due to Jess's idea of bringing the group together and trying to help each other with their own limitations and frustrations. Jess believes their story is coming to an end, as there is a sense of change in the air:

And what I realized then was that I'd come a long way since New Year's Eve. I'd grown as a person. And that made me think that our story was sort of coming to an end, and it was going to be a happy ending. Because I'd grown as a person, and also we were in this period where we were sorting out each other's problems. We weren't just sitting around moping. That's when stories end, isn't it? When people show they've learned things, and problems get solved. I've seen load of films like that. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.191)

As most of the ideas to solve the group's issues come from Jess's initiative, her idea for the intervention doesn't come as a surprise. Trying to fix her friends' problems is a closer way to reaching that so-called successful conclusion. Despite her noble intentions, the whole event turns out to be a complete failure. Jess herself runs away from her own event after having an argument with her mom about her sister's missing earrings. What she didn't know by then was that this intervention was what the whole group needed. They all had a chance to be face to face with their beloved ones and to confront their own dark side.

Because of her impetuous decision to leave the intervention, Jess is forced to roam around London with her own apprehensive thoughts. Her redeeming process is triggered by this adventure around the city. When she least expects it, Jess realizes all things must end, even her troubled days. As she decides to stop running away from life, she meets a nice stranger and they end up sleeping together:

What if I had a future on this planet, though? What then? How many people could I piss off, and how many places could I run away from, before I found myself sitting by the river and swearing externally 4 real? Not many more, was the answer. So the thing to do was to go back – to Starbucks, or home, or to somewhere – anywhere that wasn't forward. If you're walking somewhere, and you come up against a brick wall, then you have to retrace your steps. But then I found a way of climbing over the wall. Or I found a little hole in the wall I could crawl through, or whatever. I met this geezer with a really nice dog, and I went and slept with him instead. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.226)

The reader could take Jess's attitude of sleeping with this stranger as another frivolous action. "Nodog", as Jess calls him, happens to be her second sexual partner. We are led to believe throughout the whole narrative that Jess is a very sexual being, full of wild experiences and partners. The truth is, she's not as liberal and promiscuous as she tries to appear to be. She is a teenager who has fallen in love with the wrong guy, Chas, and now has a second chance of getting to know what love is.

As her relationships proved to be the root of her suicidal ideas, Jess realizes when she meets "Nodog" that she will survive if this encounter doesn't turn into anything solid. She is proud of her progress throughout her arduous journey: from being a crazy stalker to becoming a free soul.

Look at what a fool I was the first time, all cut up and sobbing and obsessed. See, if I'd been like that a second time, I'd have known I was going to have problems. But I really didn't care if I saw Nodog again or not, so that's got to be progress, right? That's much more the way things should be, if you're going to get on in life (HORNBY, 2005a, p.243)

"Nodog" turns out to be a spiritualistic man and teaches Jess some dogmas of how to pursue a better life. Jess falls in love with this man and with his ideas, which inspires her to go back home and make things work with her family. Jess has an open conversation with her father and mother, then. They all make a pact of living as a real family again. Jess attributes her metamorphosis to "Nodog"'s ideas. The impending question then is: Has this man taught her how to lead a new life or is it her own maturation as a person? Jess ensures Martin, Jess and JJ that "Nodog" is her life changing prompter. As they know Jess very well, they all

doubt it. This is another possible indication that redemption is not always final. It seems that Jess is just looking for another external “prompter”. Is she really different? The fact is that the personal narratives do not allow us to come to any sure conclusions and this is an important aspect of the story.

4.4 JJ – BUSKING IS BETTER THAN DELIVERING PIZZA

JJ’s main conflict is accepting the truth, the way things are in his life and with his failed relationships. His band is probably never getting back together and Lizzie, his ex-girlfriend, has move on with her life. JJ doesn’t envisage a life flipping burgers or delivering pizzas, even though he cannot come up with another way of making ends meet. The intervention is utterly meaningful to JJ as well, as he is put face to face with his best friend Eddie and his beloved Lizzie. The outcome doesn’t turn out to be as romantic as JJ predicted – getting his girl and his band back. On the contrary, his band and his girl will never be a reality again. However, they talk about the past and are able to move on with their lives.

JJ finds out accepting the truth is not as hurtful as he had pictured. JJ realizes that moaning isn’t a solution and that “telling yourself life is shit is like an anesthetic, and when you stop taking Advil, then you really can tell how much it hurts, and where” (HORNBY, 2005a, p.231). Lizzie convinces him that he was born to be a musician. Under no circumstances should he give up his dream of making a living out of his talent. JJ, on the other hand, was about to admit his own failures and accept his limitations. His friends are successful in opening JJ’s eyes to his reality: his life without music will be practically unbearable. JJ accepts this and bursts into tears. He is now doomed to live a life without any glamour or fame, as he himself would imagine a typical rock star would have. Nevertheless, he would be following his dream:

I thought this whole thing had been about my failure, but that wasn’t it. And at that moment I felt like crying my fucking heart out, really. I felt like crying because I knew that making music was never going to make me successful, so Lizzie had just condemned me to another thirty-five years of poverty, rootlessness, despair, no health plan, cold-water motels and bad hamburgers. It’s just that I’d be eating the burgers, not flipping them. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.232)

Lizzie and Eddie suggest that JJ go back to the States with them. JJ wants to give London another try, though. By staying, JJ officially engages as a member of his “new band”, aka Martin, Maureen and Jess.

JJ’s chooses life, no matter how unpredictable and challenging this decision turns out to be. He acknowledges there has been a few changes in his life, even though they had been slow and not very considerable. There is some disappointment on JJ’s perspective of his new life. However, there is also some consciousness in the fact life is indeed constantly changing, not necessarily for the best:

We were coming up to the end of our ninety days, and I guess Martin’s suicidologist guy knew what he was talking about. Things had changed. They hadn’t changed very quickly, and they hadn’t changed very dramatically, and maybe we hadn’t even done much to make them change. And in my case anyway, they hadn’t even changed for the better. I could honestly say that my circumstances and prospects would be even less enviable on March 31st than they had been on New Year’s Eve. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.250)

JJ decides to quit a life of delivering pizzas and finds his way back to playing music. It is not as glamorous as he had pictured, but it is certainly a beginning. Busking, the act of playing music or performing entertainment in a public place, is the immediate solution he finds to join work and pleasure. He admits it is a bad thing to do – possibly because he has a romantic view of life – and that he is far from being satisfied. However, he has now the chance to hold a guitar again and do what he loves the most: play music. He seems to be doomed to a poor life with no prestige, as he himself states. Fortunately, JJ knows this is much better than doing something he wouldn’t feel comfortable doing, such as flipping burgers or delivering pizzas. JJ has found his way out of sorrow and busking is his new love:

Busking isn’t so bad. OK, it’s bad, but it’s not terrible. Well, OK, it’s terrible, but it’s not... I’ll come back and finish that sentence with something both life-affirming and true another time. First day out it felt fucking great, because I hadn’t held a guitar in so long, and second day out was pretty good too, because the rustiness had gone a little, and I could feel stuff coming back, chords and songs and confidence. After that I guess it felt like busking, and busking felt better than delivering pizzas. (HORNBY, 2005a, p.251)

After reading *ALWD*, it is clear to the reader that Hornby doesn’t provide us with major solutions or a true happily-ever-after ending. The lives of the four characters are far from being extraordinary and their achievements might sound minor to the untrained eye. As a matter of fact, Hornby presents his characters’ outcome as being believable and, on the same hand, moving. Martin, Maureen, Jess and JJ have gone a long way down to doom. As they

have decided not to end up with their lives, they all had the chance of attaining to their own kind of redemption. Have they achieved it, after all? – that was the question we proposed in the beginning of this chapter. The answer to this question will vary depending on each reader's perspective on life and on his or her own views of failure and triumph. Hornby is not trying to teach us a lesson, though. He is using the amazing gift writers have to enliven a discussion on one of people's biggest fears: death. The four characters choose life. This is probably the most optimistic ending Hornby could have given us. Even though their lives might be different from ours, Hornby also shows us that through empathy we can learn a lot about the others and ourselves. Have the characters redeemed themselves? I would dare say they have. However temporary and inconsistent this redemption may be. After all, the only real permanent thing in life is change.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

We began this work highlighting Nick Hornby's importance in worldwide literature, justifying why this author's oeuvre deserves to be analyzed more attentively at the academic level. Hornby's writings have progressively become more present in schools' and universities' syllabus around the world, reason which reinforces the relevance of deeper studies on his novels. In addition, more attention should be given to Hornby's prose and thematic: his ironic and apparently uncomplicated style invites his readers to explore subjects which touch human life's inner aspects: obsession, desperation, depression, immaturity, for instance. Hornby himself has stated he writes this way because he wants his readers to understand his message straightforwardly and pay attention to content rather than the prose itself. Our main intention here was to focus on both Hornby's writing style and on the content of his novel itself. A comprehensive literary analysis wouldn't be complete if we didn't take into consideration both aspects of the book under consideration.

After that, we focused on Hornby's oeuvre and on the reasons for choosing *A long way down* as our object of study. It was Hornby's first novel to depict multiple narrators and, hence, to display a different building-up of the story. The multiple narrators' artifact also directly affects the way focalization works throughout the text: there will be different perspectives of each of the distinct narrators in their own attitudes and/or towards the others'. The second reason for choosing this very novel is its thematic – suicide – and its correlated topics: despair, depression, loss, fate, relationships and mainly empathy. The last reason concerned aesthetics and appreciation: as previously mentioned, *A long way down* is probably one of Hornby's finest and richest novels, when it comes to the construction of its narrative, characters complexity and the usage of irony, all gathered with a tragic-comic approach. Above all, it distinctly represents Hornby's maturation as a writer. A brief description of the characters and of the plot of the novel were presented in order to familiarize the reader of this dissertation with the main events of the story, as well as a profile of the four main homodiegetic narrators, Martin, Maureen, Jess and JJ.

On the second chapter, we presented the theoretical background which has mostly inspired and helped the further analysis of ALWD's narrative. The works of authors such as Gerard Genette, Mieke Bal, Shlomith Romman-Kenan, among others, were considered in relation to the narrator's role in a narrative, taking into account relevant aspects related to it, such as focalization, reliability and the usage of multiple narrators, namely. Those aspects

were brought up in order to guide this analysis of ALWD's multiple narrators and their respective roles as both focalizers and subjects of focalization. The issue of narrator's reliability was also presented as a relevant matter as we are working with a novel which presents four homodiegetic narrators who, most likely, could be either telling the truth or deceiving their audience. As what we have is their own version of the facts, we have no choice but believe them. However, it is important to pay attention to their own words and attitudes to come up with your own conclusions whether we can solely trust them or not.

The aim of this thesis was to point out some relevant aspects on Hornby's *A long way down* usage of multiple narrators and its possible effects on the development of the story and on the building of the narrative itself. Three questions were asked in the beginning of this dissertation and throughout chapters 3 and 4 we tried to answer them by analyzing the homodiegetic narrators speech patterns and focalizations on themselves, on some main event that shape the narrative and on the group itself. The focalization of each narrator was divided into three main topics, which helped unveil the way the story is constructed and how each narrator ends up working as both a focalizer and a subject of focalization. How each narrator presents him/herself by also showing his/her focalization on some of the main events that help build up the story, how the other narrators see and portray their fellow companions and each narrator's focalization on the group itself as well as their feelings towards them. By analyzing such issues, it will be easier to distinguish each of the narrators' tone and understand the relationship which is formed by living and reliving the experience after retelling it to the reader.

The first question we intended to answer was: how does the usage of multiple narrators affect the telling and building of the story, since it is through each of the narrator's focalization on the happenings that the reader gets to know the motivation for their decisions to commit suicide? The second one was: how do the narrators depict themselves and the others and how much of their feelings do they expose to the others, that is, how much do they hide from each other, how close or distant is their relationship towards each other? Both questions were the main guide for the development of the analyses throughout chapter 3. The last question was: taking into account its serious and deep thematic, suicide and depression, how do the narrators deal with their own issues and, if so, do they find redemption in the end, or is it too late to find salvation for their souls in this tragic-comic world they live in? This point was the *fil conducteur* of the discussion proposed in the last chapter of this thesis.

In our third chapter, the one dedicated to the analysis of ALWD's homoediegetic narrators' focalizations, we answered the first two proposed questions of this work. The first

question concerned the usage of multiple narrators and its possible effects on the telling and building of the story, as it is through each of the narrator's focalization that we get to know the motivation for their decisions to commit suicide. By analyzing the voice of these four completely different homodiegetic narrators who tell the story through their own perspectives, we were able to point out that these narrators cooperate narratively speaking, as the whole story is retold retrospectively with each narrator picking up after the other as if they acknowledged what the other has previously said. These four narrators cooperate narratively speaking throughout this retrospective shared narrating of the facts, even though they might not appear to do so in real life events. Both their lives as separate individuals or as a group is shaped by mishaps and misadventures, fact which ends up adding a comic touch to the novel. However, no matter how much they have provoked, bullied or hurt each other, there is a strong sense of cooperation throughout their narrative, as the story is told in an aligned and fluent way. This is what helps build up the humor and the mishaps in the story, once each character picks up after the other and there might be misunderstandings, divergences of views and lots of irony.

The second question that motivated this thesis, and possibly the most significant one, concerned the way the narrators depict themselves and the others, that is, the way focalization worked throughout their own narrative. In addition, it was important to consider how much of their feelings they expose to the others: how much they hide from each other, how close or distant their relationship towards each other is. In order to develop this question, we gave closer attention to each of the narrators' narrative, Martin, Maureen, Jess and JJ, mainly in regards to their speech patterns, such as punctuation, use of expressions and adjectives and emphasis. The content of their narrative was also of precious validity; hence, we turned our attention to each narrator's version of some parts of the narrative as well as their own focalization on the other members of the group and on themselves.

By analyzing their words on themselves, on their fellow peers and on the group itself, we could point out some relevant aspects on each of the narrator's profile and own narrative pattern. The descriptions of the characters, given by themselves or by other group members, often reveal their needs as individuals, especially regarding their specific reasons for wanting to commit suicide. As important as their focalizations on themselves and on their own acts, was to consider how each homodiegetic narrator was portrayed by their fellow companions, working as the subject of focalization. These multiple narratives serve the purpose to give room to different voices, who end up doing justice to their own different interests. Martin, Maureen, Jess and JJ belong uncomfortably together which makes them

reflect on this throughout the narrative. They all seem to tell their side of the story as if they were aware of what another narrator has just said, one character picking up the story a moment after the last has left it. Curiously enough, the narrators do not seem to express how they feel about the others among themselves, leaving this heartfelt moment to their own insights on themselves or on the events that shaped the narrative.

Another important point to consider is the fact that the multiple narrators are aware of their own faults as individuals and Hornby builds their speech in a very feasible way. In spite of sharing a common ideal – committing suicide – in the beginning of the narrative, this is shown to the reader as their apparent only mutual feature. As the story moves on and we are presented with the four characters' version of the facts, we can perceive a group is actually formed. No matter how different their lives and personalities may be, a stronger bond unites them and helps them, somehow, go a long way down to redemption. The four of them are able to acknowledge this throughout the retelling of the story and clearly state that, even though suicide was apparently the only thing that held them together, by sharing this one thing – a big thing indeed – they end up developing stronger bonds. They stand up for each other many times throughout the story. However misguided most of their attempts to help each might turn out to be, there is a strong sense of belonging and empathy in their frequent meetings and gatherings. Despite all the awkwardness of having four completely different people abruptly brought together, it is probably in their uneasiness that they find their voice inside this new clan.

In the last chapter, “A long way down to redemption”, we turned our attention to what happens to Martin, Maureen, Jess and JJ by the end of their narrations and how much they appear to have changed with their own and shared experiences. The main question which we intended to investigate was, taking into account its serious and deep thematic, suicide and depression, how do the narrators deal with their own issues and, if so, do they find redemption in the end, or is too late to find a salvation to their souls in this tragic-comic world they live in? The main point was to highlight the fact that they all seemed to grow with the experience and end up changing their bad attitude towards life, themselves and the others, by eventually achieving some kind of redemption, if any. In this analysis, we turned our attention to the narrative itself as a whole and came to some possible conclusions by analyzing the narrative-characters' behavior and perspectives.

It is clear that each of them ends up finding their own way back to life, or at least a temporary way out of committing suicide. There is no conclusion in the narrative; we are left with a suspension of disbelief. It is, however, an end of an optimistic and relieving tone, as we

see the four characters' commitment to each other's lives and their endurance to improve themselves, however slight their chances of being happy again is. These characters don't seem to be in search of happiness. They are indeed in search of a reason to continue living. Behind all the humoristic tone of the narrative, we are constantly faced with sad stories from the characters' background and end up being supportive to them and their own personal failures.

The recurrent message in *ALWD* is that people who are sad do not seem to fit in and even all complete disillusion with life can be a step towards redemption. The lives of these four characters are far from being extraordinary and their achievements might sound minor to the untrained eye. As a matter of fact, Hornby presents his characters' outcome as being believable and, at the same time, moving. Martin, Maureen, Jess and JJ have gone a long way down to doom. As they have decided not to end up with their lives, they all had the chance of attaining to their own kind of redemption. Have they achieved it, after all? The answer to this question will vary depending on each reader's perspective on life and on his or her own views of failure and triumph. The four characters choose life. Even though their lives might be different from ours, Hornby also shows us that through empathy we can learn a lot about the others and ourselves.

As no significant literary work has been found about the author in Brazil, we sincerely hope this never-ending analysis can inspire other literature students to delve into Nick Hornby's novels and develop different approaches and investigations on the many different aspects his narratives can certainly bring up.

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