



Losing the Plot: Tragedy in the 20th Century

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Tragedy in the 20th Century

- Shift in focus from tragic *events* to tragic *condition*
- Decline of the supernatural
 - From the Gods to impersonal nature
- The process of decline is less interesting
- Tragedy becomes democratised
 - Tragedy becomes *personal*
 - Effects become localised
- The end of the grand narrative
- Potential for electronic forms of art/communication
 - Characters explore a space
 - Discover failures





Non-Linearity in Tragedy: Some

- Joseph Conrad, 'Heart of Darkness' (1899)
 - Film version: Coppola, *Apocalypse Now* (1979)
 - The tragedy (of the ivory trader Kurtz) takes place offstage
 - The narrative concerns Marlow, travelling up-river to find Kurtz
 - Our engagement with the tragedy is the contrast between Kurtz' ambition and the reality of his creation





Examples

- John Cheever, 'The Swimmer' (1964)
 - Film version: Perry, *The Swimmer* (1968)
 - The tragedy of Neddy Merrill is only inferred from his alienation and isolation. He has no memory of his fall from grace.
 - All we see is Neddy's attempt to 'swim' home
 - He fails in his attempt to create a symbol of his own success





Examples

- Malcolm Lowry, *Under the Volcano* (1947)
 - Film: Huston, *Under the Volcano* (1984)
 - (In)significance of the artist – Lowry wrote a novel about writing *Under the Volcano*
 - Interplay of texts and poems and Lowry's biography
 - *The Voyage That Never Ends*





Examples

- B.S. Johnson, *The Unfortunates* (1969)
 - A set of random reflections upon a friend's death, interrupted by events from the outside
 - Johnson wanted to capture fundamentally non-linear mental states
 - Chapters unbound, to be read in any order
 - The resonances of the different events and situations vary from reading to reading

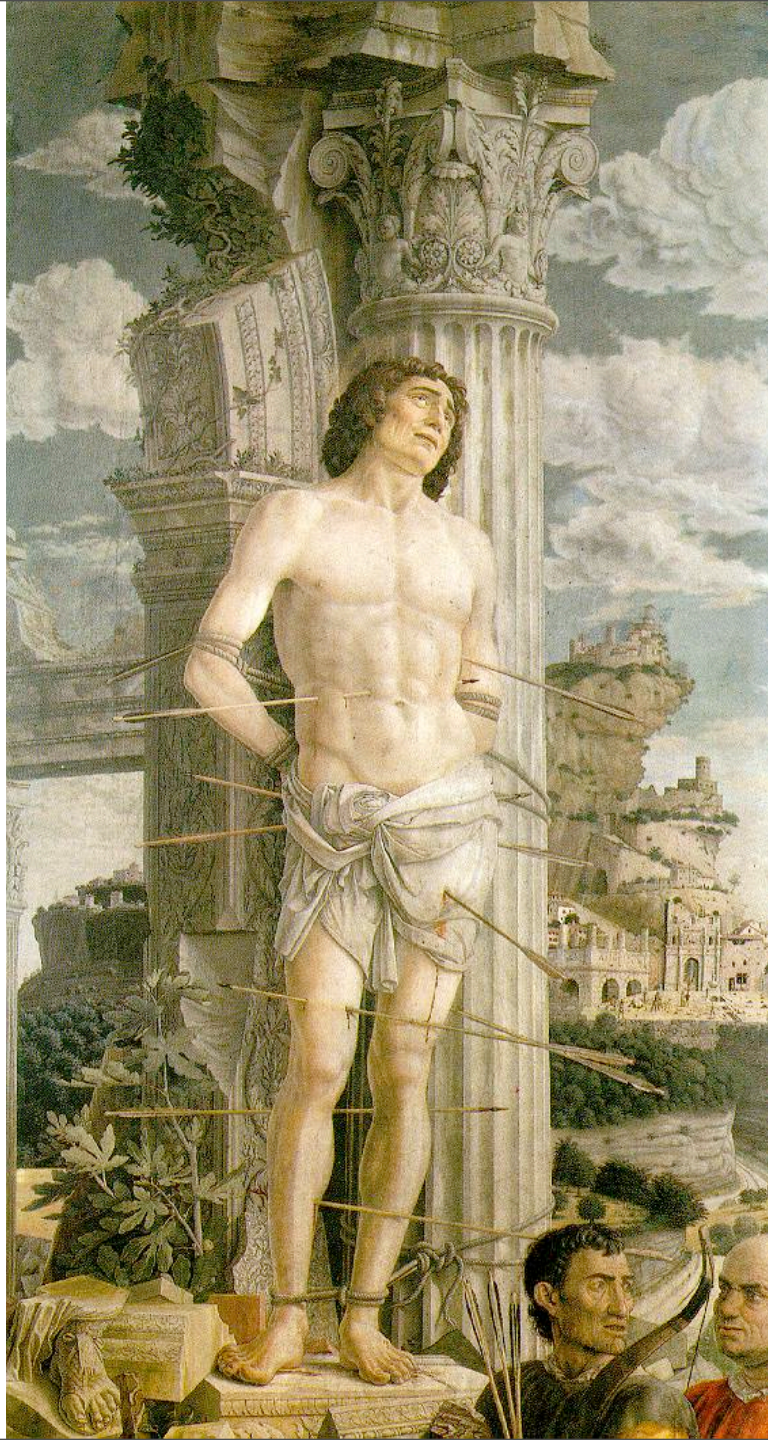




Examples

- Samuel Beckett, *passim*
- Characters try to make sense of their meaninglessness and impotence
- *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958)
 - Krapp reacts to his own audio diary





The Visual Arts



