

## DOCTORAL THESIS

### **The vicissitudes of the authentic self: a literary mapping of the authentic self from John Milton's Paradise lost to Bret Easton Ellis' Glamorama**

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**The Vicissitudes of the Authentic Self: A Literary  
Mapping of the Authentic Self from John Milton's  
*Paradise Lost* to Bret Easton Ellis' *Glamorama***

**WALLBANKS, Mark**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**Principal Supervisor:  
Dr. Jessica Yeung (Hong Kong Baptist University)**

**February 2017**

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis represents my own work which has been done after registration for the degree of PhD at Hong Kong Baptist University, and has not been previously included in a thesis or dissertation submitted to this or any other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualifications.

I have read the University's current research ethics guidelines, and accept responsibility for the conduct of the procedures in accordance with the University's Committee on the Use of Human & Animal Subjects in Teaching and Research (HASC). I have attempted to identify all the risks related to this research that may arise in conducting this research, obtained the relevant ethical and/or safety approval (where applicable), and acknowledged my obligations and the rights of the participants.

Signature: 

Date: February 2017

Abstract of thesis entitled

**The Vicissitudes of the Authentic Self: A Literary Mapping of the Authentic Self from John Milton's *Paradise Lost* to Bret Easton Ellis' *Glamorama***

Submitted by

**Mark Wallbanks**

Since the rise of individualism in the seventeenth century there has been increasing pressure on individuals to define themselves in the public eye. This has led to the recent phenomena of identity politics and self-branding. Yet how is one's true identity – if such a thing exists – ever expressed externally? How do individuals deal with the inner and outer aspects of identity? These are some of the issues which impinge upon the ethics of authenticity. This thesis investigates the development of the concept of the authentic self from its inception in the modern period to the postmodern. Through an analysis of the various tropes of literary texts, I shall illustrate how the concept of authenticity has travelled and transformed between cultural and temporal contexts.

The body of the thesis contains five central chapters. Chapter 1 represents *Paradise Lost* (1667) as the end of one world and the beginning of another. The “Satanic” trope introduces the contingency of transgression and displacement in regard to authentic self-definition. With the birth of the modern epoch, I argue that the collapse of the epic totality instigated the liberation of self through the process of individuation, yet the corresponding loss of “place” in the social order evoked existential angst. In the second chapter I argue that Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*

(1719) is an apposite inclusion in the tradition of St. Augustine's and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions*. Through analysis of the "island" trope I assert that, even given the most perfect conditions of solipsism, the individual remains an inherently social being that retains a primordial compulsion for dialogical inscription of the self. In chapter 3, an analysis of the trope of "voice" as a metonym for ideology in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) portrays Kurtz and Marlow as opposing sides of the authenticity struggle against the ideological allure of collective and absolute power. Chapter 4 associates Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* (1934) with the anarchic egocentrism and intense individualism of Max Stirner's philosophy as a means of rebelling against the demands of social collectivism. In this chapter I analyse the "dream" trope in terms of Miller's trademark use of surreal metaphor which, I argue, provides a means of escape from the influence of collective identities. Finally, the fifth chapter will discuss the trope of "image terrorism" in reference to *Glamorama* (1998). This trope addresses the problemata of the globally destabilising influences of celebrity and terrorism, the tyranny of consumerism, and the Debordian *Society of the Spectacle*. The chapter raises the question of how, indeed if, in a globalized postmodern world with ever reducing horizons of differentiation, travel remains the last viable option in the pursuit of the authentic self.

## **Acknowledgements**

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# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

*J'ai dit souvent que tout le malheur des hommes vient d'une seule chose, qui est de ne savoir pas demeurer en repos dans une chambre.*

*Blaise Pascal, Pensées*

### **Background of Research**

Blaise Pascal famously quipped, “I have often said that all men’s misfortunes stem from one source; that they do not know how to remain quietly in their own bedchamber” (*Pensées* 136; my translation). Interpreted literally, Pascal’s solution to worldly misfortune is to retreat into the idealised seclusion of the hermit. Interpreted figuratively, we have the metaphor of a return to the sanctuary of the mother’s womb. Yet, if one does not depart the womb, the journey of life never begins. What is peculiar about Pascal’s comment, then, is that it repudiates the most central trope in Western literature: the trope of travel. Whether it be Odysseus’s return to Ithaca, or Oedipus’s encounter with his fate at the crossroads, or Dante’s descent into Hell at the mid-way of his life, or Christian’s progress towards Puritan salvation, or Ahab’s monomaniacal pursuit of the White Whale, or Bardamu’s nihilistic journey to the end of the modern condition, the trope of travel imposes itself with magisterial authority.

Indeed, the trope of travel as journey or voyage is so ubiquitous in both Western literature and culture that its employment seems almost instinctive. Whether we encounter them textually or in common parlance, tropes of travel,

journey or voyage abound as exile, fugue, freedom, conquest, the founding of an origin myth, or the pursuit of knowledge, to name but a few. That such usage is instinctive is supported by Bishop C. Hunt, Jr.'s observation that "Since the earliest times, the act of *travelling*, of proceeding from one place to another, has been seen as the natural metaphor for *learning*, for the acquisition of experience and knowledge" (44; original emphasis). Furthermore, although the metaphor of travel as a kind of meta-trope has its origin in Antiquity, as Michel de Certeau has also illuminated, "In modern Athens, the vehicles of mass transportation are called *metaphorai*. To go to work or come home, one takes a 'metaphor'—a bus or train. Stories could also take this noble name; every day, they traverse and organise spaces; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them" (115; original emphasis).

Georges Van Den Abbeele further remarks, "Travel then becomes the metaphor of metaphor while the structure of the metaphor becomes the metaphor for the travel of meaning" (xxiii). In light of such perspectives it could equally be inferred that to travel is to read, and to read is to travel. Hence, considering the three preceding author's views together as both literal and figurative readings of metaphor, I believe it could be said that, if the transfer, the *metaphorá*, constitutes a to-ing and fro-ing of meaning between a departure and a destination of knowledge, then the interstice between these two points, the journey, constitutes an interpretation of meaning. And as an interpretation involves a form of decoding, the literal form of travel requires the traveller interpret the world around her and could therefore be viewed as a semiotic interpretation of the images or objects of that world; and, as far as reading is concerned, the act of reading requires the reader discern between literal and figurative meanings and then interpret the significance

of the images evoked by tropes. Thus, semiotics would be to travel what tropology is to reading.

Furthermore, reference to the etymology of the word *interpretation* as per the *OED*'s definition reveals a compound of *inter*, "between" and the root of the Sanskrit *prath-*, "to spread abroad." Hence, interpretation, whether it be of the world as world, or the world as text, simultaneously establishes an interrelation. Unsurprisingly, then, of all the tropes of travel, the metaphor of the journey as *self*-discovery is arguably the most prominent. For if the self is travelling it is not only accruing knowledge of the world in which it travels but, at a more intimate level, also learning about itself in the process. Significantly, Hunt distinguishes between two epistemological journeys. There is the "circular journey, a *round*-trip, in which you set out, as it were, from Ithaca and later, usually a lot later, return to where you started" that implies the world is *knowable* and waits to be *discovered*; or there is the "linear journey [that] suggests a different concept of knowledge: namely, that *new truth* exists 'out there' for the traveller to discover: an exploration rather than an excursion" (45; original emphasis). The former, circular journey belongs to the premodern world whereas the latter, linear journey belongs to the modern (and in particular to the genre of the novel). Hence, *pace* Pascal, we can see that if one does not leave, if one does not embark on either or any journey, not only does one negate misfortune, but one also negates narrative *in toto*. Ultimately, this means the negation of one's personal narrative, or *life story*.

Yet, there is another manner by which to interpret Pascal's quip and that is as a prelude to what Charles Taylor has described as "the massive subjective turn of modern culture, a new form of inwardness, in which we come to think of ourselves as beings with inner depths" (26). It is almost as if Pascal is suggesting

that a sense of contented well-being may be achieved by the individual quietly engaged in *dialogue* with one's own inner thoughts but that any externalisation of these thoughts is doomed to incite conflict from the resistance of others. It therefore alludes to the inner and outer division of private and public selves engendered by social mobility. This notion of a private and public self was a relatively new phenomenon when Pascal penned his words; indeed, the idea of an inner and outer self that enables us to think of the real self as being something that resides inside was not formulated in Western culture till a little over three centuries ago. In other words, it is a particularly modern thought.

It is at this juncture in history, signifying the change from the premodern to the modern world, that my thesis begins. I argue that this sudden birth of individualism soon required an ethics of authenticity as a direct consequence of social displacement and social mobility. I shall map out the development of the concept of authenticity with reference to literary texts primarily from the Western canon that explicitly or implicitly conjoin travel with the authenticity struggle. My approach is therefore historical but each chapter also couples the literary text(s) with what I consider to be a particularly apposite philosophical idea that functions as a complimentary enframing or contextualising device. The philosophical background of each chapter will illustrate the fluidity of authenticity as it is reinterpreted and redefined within different historical and cultural contexts. In the course of this thesis I shall demonstrate the manner in which the concept of authenticity has travelled and transformed from its inception over two centuries ago to the turn of the twenty-first century.

## Research Questions

1. How does the metaphor for the loss of self require the location of the self as displaced *oikos*?
2. To what degree is authenticity re-attained—during travel—through its resistance to trope and writing as the decentring of embodied experience without abolishing the writing of “self”?
3. If, according to Erich Fromm, “fear of freedom” implies a human proclivity for the collective identity, in what regard can travel succeed in counteracting the conformist drive?
4. To what extent can the textualization of the self, dating from the birth of the early-modern novel, be responsible for the “fragmented” metaphor of the postmodern self?

## Methodology

This thesis seeks to merge an analysis of the historical development of the authentic self with the close reading of literary texts by examining how the pursuit of authenticity is carried through the texts by literary tropes. Hayden White reminds us that *tropic* derives from the Greek words *tropikos*, *tropos*, which meant “turn” and in *Koiné*, which meant “way” or “manner” (2). The etymology of the word *trope* therefore suggests a *deviance* from normal expectations and as such “is always not only a deviation *from* one possible, proper meaning, but also a deviation *towards* another meaning, conception, or ideal of what is right and proper *and true* “in reality” (White 2; original emphasis). Following the “turns” and “deviations” of tropes therefore mirrors the “turns” and “deviations” an authentic worldview necessarily takes from the norm as it strives to better understand the world.

Complimenting this approach, I shall also be using Kenneth Burke’s “Dramatistic Pentad” of Act, Scene, Agent, Agency and Purpose from *A Grammar of Motives* (1945) as both an enframing device, as each chapter corresponds to a particular element, and philosophically as an orientation technique insofar as I think the Pentad can be employed to question the authenticity of the characters’ motives. Like Burke, I consider the Dramatistic Pentad as a “generating principle” in investigating motives, all of which require “some word that names the *act* (what took place, in thought or deed), and another that names the *scene* (the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred); also, you must indicate what person or kind of person (*agent*) performed the act, what means or instruments he used (*agency*), and the *purpose*” (xv). I consider such a rudimentary method of

investigation the most straightforward means of assessing authenticity in my textual analysis.

Furthermore, as I also use and interrogate tropes through this thesis to clarify or illustrate my arguments, the Pentad corresponds perfectly to the central tropes of each chapter. Hence, chapter 1 on *Paradise Lost* concerns the original *act* of creation in recounting the genesis myth; chapter 2 on *Robinson Crusoe* relies on the *scene* of the island trope as a metaphor of the solitary confessor; chapter 3 on *Heart of Darkness* uses the trope of voice to discuss the extent of the individual's *agency* when interpellated by the ideology of imperialism; chapter 4 on *Tropic of Cancer* investigates the dream trope in regard to the degree to which the imagination can liberate the individual from a herd mentality and facilitate a self-serving *agent*; and finally, chapter 5 on *Glamorama* raises the issue of authenticity in relation to the trope of image terrorism which annihilates critical perspective and, ultimately, *purpose*. Hence, Burke's Dramatic Pentad lends my thesis a holistic form whilst serving as a self-reflexive model of interrogation to be employed in the pursuit of authenticity.

## **Literature Review**

The following conceptual aspects shall be investigated during the course of this thesis: displacement, travel, and the ethics of authenticity.

### **1. (Dis)placement**

In *On Being Authentic* (2004), Charles Guignon ponders over the maxim above the gates at Delphi by posing the rhetorical question, “What exactly did Socrates mean when he said ‘Know thyself?’” (7). He concludes that it meant something very different for Socrates and the Greeks than it would mean for us. We are surely inclined to look inwards in the assumption that to know oneself means to understand one’s feelings, preferences and conflicts because we consider ourselves self-encapsulated individuals. Yet, this idea was completely foreign to the Greeks as their society, unlike our own, was strictly cosmocentric. There was for them a divine order whereby everything was part of a grander cosmos. Within this cosmos humans were born into prescribed social roles, “But note that here personal desires and feelings, far from constituting your true being as a person, are regarded as negative traits—personal liabilities keeping you from measuring up to the ideal type that defines your function as an instance of humankind” (Guignon 8).

In antiquity people had no reason to think of themselves in terms of *individuals* because they were expected to conduct their lives in accordance with generic types. Obviously, that is not to say that they did not have identities, only that their sense of self had very little need, if any, for the degree of self-scrutiny we subject ourselves to today. For the Greeks, it was a duty to the larger social body that one discover one’s natural ability and nurture one’s potential. We are reminded that in Plato’s *Republic* the concept of justice is contingent on a person assuming

their most natural function in society and therefore contributing to the public good to the degree that it established “the principle that it is right for someone who is by nature a shoemaker to make shoes and nothing else, for the carpenter to practice carpentry, and the same for the others...” (qtd. in Guignon 8). Hence, in the premodern world there was a palpable sense of interconnectedness which meant that to know oneself was to know and accept one’s *place* in the cosmic order of things. So much so that, according to Guignon, “belonging to a household (*oikos*), even in the lowest position, was considered to be so important that a slave in a household was seen as better off than a “free man” (*thēs*), that is, a person who sold his labor on the market and did not belong to any household” (10).

The dawn of the Judaeo-Christian world continued in a similar vein, the only difference being that the cosmic order was now replaced by a divine order. The institution of a divine creator and corresponding soteriological narrative meant that the cyclic time frame of antiquity was replaced with a linear structure; there was now an *archē* and a *telos*, a beginning and an end, to existence. Yet, as Lewis Mumford argues, the prominent sense of one’s place and social connection that held such sway in antiquity continued unabated as “The unattached individual during the Middle Ages was one condemned either to excommunication or to exile: close to death. To exist one had to belong to an association—a household, manor, monastery or guild” (qtd. in Cresswell 11). In *The Culture of Cities* (1938) Mumford elucidates further the source of social cohesion as arising from the dominance of the Church: “Membership in that association was a constant source of life and well-being; and to be cut off from its communion was so great a punishment that, until the sixteenth century, even kings trembled before it” (27). Hence, the ideological force of an abstract excommunication equated to the very concrete exclusion of terrestrial exile.

Similarly, the historian Christopher Hill informs us that until the sixteenth century there existed a “relatively static agricultural society, with local loyalties and local control: no man and no land without a lord” (39). The feudal system therefore preserved a bond of loyalty and dependence between lord and man. Order was maintained by the notion of a Great Chain of Being that designated the king as godhead on earth. However, as title of Hill’s book suggests, after the English civil war and the regicide of Charles I, by the late seventeenth century England and the rest of Europe resembled *The World Turned Upside Down* (1972). What the regicide in England and other forms of European revolution (both social and technological) effectuated was a destabilised world which furthered the expansion of cities and increased social mobility.

As a result of increasingly loosened ties to God, the loss of the Great Chain of Being and, due to the advancement of technological development and correlative increased sense of mastery over nature, the late sixteenth century saw the rise of “masterless men” – servants to nobody and as such anomalies and “potential dissolvents of society” (Hill 40). It should be emphasised though that the new social mobility and freedom it induced, as the appellation *masterless men* suggests, was gendered. As Nyland has contended, it would not be until the late seventeenth century that John Locke would propound a form of argument in his *Two Treatises of Government* (1690) that would advocate the right of analogous freedoms to women restrained within the domestic environment. Individualism, then, came into being as the greatest achievement of the modern epoch, however, as we have seen, the nascence of individualism was indubitably contingent on the insecurities of mobility and a fragmented social structure. Such a development could therefore be interpreted as Janus-faced.

In *The Ethics of Authenticity* (1991) Charles Taylor highlights the consequences mobility bore on the modern period with what he terms the “Three Malaises.” The first malaise would be a “disenchantment of the world” (3) that led to a loss of the heroic dimension and a “centring on the self, which both flattens and narrows our lives, makes them poorer in meaning, and less concerned with others or society” (4). This in turn gradually led to “the primacy of instrumental reason” (5) which focuses on rationalised modes of thought and production and creates a dependence on technology. Human value henceforth becomes measured merely by its productivity and efficiency. Finally, instrumental reason would have increasingly significant consequences at the political level of the species as a whole insofar as

the institutions and structures of industrial-technological society severely restrict our choices, that they force societies as well as individuals to give a weight to instrumental reason that in serious moral deliberation we would never do, and which may even be highly destructive. A case in point is our great difficulties in tackling even vital threats to our lives from environmental disasters, like the thinning ozone layer. (8-9)

Paradoxically, then, the rise of individualism in the modern period has fomented both a pronounced sense of autonomy in a private sense, and a distinct lack of agency in the public. It has also been noted elsewhere that the changes arising throughout modernity have likewise engendered an entrenched background of *differentiation* best described as “the origin of alternatives and the feeling of freedom in modern society [yet] also the primary ground of the contradiction, conflict, violence, fragmentation, discontinuity and alienation that are such evident features of modern life” (MacCannell 11).

## 2. Travel

As our world has become increasingly globalised, it is unsurprising that travel theory has gained considerable interest as a subject of academic research. Indeed, so much so that it can be said that travel theory itself has travelled beyond the fields of geography to anthropology, sociology, literature and beyond. Hence, Jonathan Culler has even gone so far as to describe the practice of tourism as a topic of “considerable cultural and economic importance ... well known in some guise to every literary or cultural critic” yet neglected by students of culture despite its centrality to our contemporary world (153).

No doubt Culler’s concern about the lack of interest in a subject so fundamental to our contemporary world is a critical response to the early research in a field which focused on an all-too-simple dichotomy between authentic travellers and inauthentic tourists. Fussell, for example, denotes the central difference between travellers and tourists as *motives*. Candidly defining a tourist as a “fantasist equipped temporarily with unaccustomed power,” Fussell cheekily suggests that as the “resemblance between the tourist and the client of a massage parlour is closer than it would be polite to emphasize” it also raises the question as to whether this is even a worthy topic of investigation for the discipline of anthropology (qtd. in Culler 156). Daniel D. Boorstin, considering the subject more seriously in *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (1962), takes the traveller/tourist distinction beyond motives to modes of conduct by viewing the traveller as someone who works at something as opposed to the tourist who merely seeks pleasure. Thus, “The traveller was active; he went strenuously in search of

people, of adventure, of experience. The tourist is passive; he expects interesting things to happen to him” (85). Boorstin is keen to alert his reader that the etymological root of the noun “travel” lies in “travail,” meaning “trouble,” “work,” or “torment” (85). He argues that from the mid-nineteenth century travel was rapidly replaced by tourism in the form of the “package tour” pioneered by Thomas Cook for whom “Adventure would be sold in packages and guaranteed to be consumed without risk” (86). Consequently, in Boorstin’s eyes “foreign travel ceased to be an activity—an experience, an undertaking—and became instead a commodity” (85). The perceived inauthenticity of the tourist experience therefore relegated it to a field of pseudo-intellectual pursuit until the publication of the structural anthropologist Dean MacCannell’s influential 1976 study *The Tourist*.

In this seminal study MacCannell employs the noun *tourist* in two ways. Tourists are first and foremost quite literally people: “sightseers, mainly middle-class, who are at this moment deployed throughout the entire world in search of experience” (1). However, in the word “tourist” MacCannell also claims to have discovered a perfect metonym for “modern-man-in-general” (1). MacCannell explains that the further he took his research, the more he began to view tourists as his “colleagues” as he began to understand that tourist attractions are “an unplanned typology of structure that provides direct access to the modern consciousness [and is] precisely analogous to the religious symbolism of primitive peoples” (2). He interprets the progress of modernity as having fostered the notion that “reality and authenticity are thought to be elsewhere: in other historical periods and other cultures, in purer, simpler lifestyles” (MacCannell 3). Hence, the modern nostalgia for “naturalness” and the search for authenticity are “not merely casual and somewhat decadent, though harmless, attachments to the souvenirs of destroyed

cultures and dead epochs. They are also components of the conquering spirit of modernity – the grounds of its unifying consciousness” (MacCannell 3). However, it could be said that such a mode of inquiry itself endorses a somewhat *inauthentic* study of culture—one that propagates a “conquering spirit”—given that both the subjects of and “colleagues” in MacCannell’s research are privileged citizens of the so-called First World. There is no mention at all of the more serious issues of diaspora and forced refugee migration of Third World citizens. This is a point MacCannell somewhat guiltily broaches in the Introduction to the 1989 edition of *The Tourist* where he remarks that “The rapid implosion of the ‘Third World’ into the First constitutes a reversal and transformation of the structure of tourism, and in many ways it is more interesting than the first phase of the globalisation of culture” (xxii-xxiii).

Merging poststructuralist and feminist theories, Caren Kaplan is, unsurprisingly, unimpressed with MacCannell’s belated concession. Kaplan agrees that, as is suggested by the cultural prevalence of metaphors of travel and displacement, the “modern era is fascinated by the experience of distance and estrangement” (1). Yet, she takes to task MacCannell’s “effort to pose the tourist as ‘universal experience’” by stressing that, although tourism is the world’s largest growth industry, “the numerical majority of people who move in this world do so to work or survive life-threatening events” (Kaplan 5). Juxtaposing exile with tourism, the former implying coercion and the latter choice, she perceives tourism as heralding postmodernism insofar as it is “a product of consumer culture, leisure and technological innovation” (Kaplan 27). This suggests that rather than signifying a separation between modernity and postmodernity, the one would in fact segue into the other as a continuation of global Euro-American hegemony. Kaplan

therefore conceives of tourists as those who “want confirmation of reality without acknowledging their role as agents in the construction of reality effects” (61). As such the touristic “quest for authenticity” can only be engaged in by a “group that has the privilege to ignore alternative points of view [and] can entertain the cultural myopia demonstrated in the cultural production of this kind of travel discourse” (Kaplan 62).

However, in a response which would appear to counter Kaplan, MacCannell later engages in an ethical turn in his 2011 publication *The Ethics of Sightseeing* by arguing that the “ultimate ethical test” for tourists lies in either their active realisation of the productive potential of their journey or passive reduction to the status of a cipher through surrender to the arrangements devised for them (6). In this text, MacCannell makes the link between ethics and epistemology with the contention that “Tourists of any age, ethnicity, class, or category discover something about themselves and the world by acknowledging the *gap* that separates them from the *other-as-attraction*. There is nothing in this gap but the entire field of ethics” (7; original emphasis). It seems that here MacCannell optimistically suggests that the ethical responsibility of recognising this gap could potentially bridge the divide.

Continuing in the vein of a more consciously inclusive exploration of the globalised world is human geographer Tim Cresswell’s *On the Move* (2006). Cresswell makes the prodigious claim that “mobility is central to what it is to be human” (1). Interestingly, he also identifies the significance tropes of mobility bear in the modern Western world. Accordingly, he argues that motifs of mobility recurrently manifesting in Western consciousness “as progress, as freedom, as opportunity, and as modernity, sit side by side with mobility as shiftlessness, as

deviance, and as resistance” (Cresswell 1-2). Such a pronounced juxtaposition, he feels, implies that mobility is more central to both the world and our understanding of it than ever before (2). Travel therefore takes both concrete and abstract forms and David Delaney has observed that “human mobility implicates *both* physical bodies moving through material landscapes *and* categorical figures moving through representational spaces” (qtd. in Cresswell 4; original emphasis).

This notion of the literal and figurative implications of travel lead Cresswell to stress an analytic distinction between *movement* and *mobility*. Cresswell defines *displacement* as “the act of moving between locations” (2), however, he complains that in classic migration theory the content between the two locations remained largely unexplored. In order to properly “unpack” this interstitial space and “make sure it is not taken for granted” he emphasises that all moving people (and things) are imbued with meaning and are therefore both products and producers of power (2). Hence, *movement* should be considered a form of abstract mobility, a simple act of displacement that permits people to move between locations without being anchored in any context of power, the “dynamic equivalent of location in abstract space—contentless, apparently natural, and devoid of meaning, history, and ideology” (3). Conversely, *mobility* “is the dynamic equivalent of *place*” if place is understood as a word that signifies “meaningful segments of space” or “locations imbued with meaning and power” (3; original emphasis). A place is therefore “a centre of meaning—we become attached to it, we fight over it and exclude people from it—we experience it” (Cresswell 3). Thus the simple act of getting from A to B is never quite so simple as it “becomes synonymous with freedom, with transgression, with creativity, with life itself” (Cresswell 3). Mobility is therefore both figuratively represented in discourse and cartology and literally a practiced,

experienced, and embodied way of being in the world (Cresswell 3). Interpreted thus, we can see that in Cresswell's terms physical human mobility becomes a form of praxis insofar as it is empiric and "irreducibly embodied" (4).

The irreducible embodiment of the travelling subject is further developed by the Foucaultian approach theorised in Urry and Larsen's *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (2011). Inspired by Michel Foucault's *Birth of the Clinic* (1976), Urry and Larsen argue that it is not only the gaze of the medic that is "socially organised and systematised" (1). They aver that the human gaze *tout court* is a product of the social milieu of the gazer and is therefore a "learned ability" that dismisses the notion of "the innocent eye [a]s a myth" (1). According to Urry and Larsen, the world we perceive is not simply an extant world "out there" to be discovered but "an epistemic field, constructed linguistically as much as visually" (1). Their argument therefore buttresses that of Jenks' belief that "Vision is skilled cultural practice" (qtd. in Urry and Larsen 2). The traveller gazes upon foreign locations through the socially constructed filter of a lens "framed by social class, gender, nationality, age and education" (Urry and Larsen 2). In other words, traversing and perceiving another culture, they argue, entails a filtering of vision through the lens acquired in one's quotidian habitat – in this regard it could be said that the traveller transports her culture with her throughout the journey.

However, "there is no single tourist gaze as such. It varies by society, by social group and by historical period. Such gazes are constructed through difference" (Urry and Larsen 2). If such gazes are constructed through difference, then the variety of social gazes must be more variegated than can be simply defined by social group or age or gender or ethnicity, but rather by individual as the individual is always an aggregate of the aforementioned elements. Indeed, by stressing the

contingency of a particular tourist gaze to whatever it is contrasted with, thereby insinuating that tourists look at “‘difference’ differently” (3), Urry and Larsen also seem to imply that each gaze is *de facto* unique. Furthermore, counterbalancing the admission that tourism is a “banal subject of study” they draw attention to “interesting parallels with the study of *deviance*” (Urry and Larsen 3; emphasis added). The study of deviance of course infers a plurality of alternative interpretations to what is habitually designated as the *norm*. As such, the gaze “presupposes a system of social activities and *signs*” which require interpreting or decoding (Urry and Larsen 2-3; emphasis added).

Urry, in “*The Tourist Gaze ‘Revisited’*” (1992), draws attention to two kinds of sign: metaphor and metonym. Metaphor involves tourist images or places as representative of something else “such as the use of the term ‘fun’ as a metaphor for sex or the sunset for romance”; metonym involves the “substitution of some feature or effect or cause of the phenomenon for the phenomenon itself” (173). This idea harks back to Cresswell’s description of place as “a centre of meaning” (3) and also reflects what Jonathan Culler, following Dean MacCannell’s lead, terms the “semiotics of tourism” (Culler 153). Culler claims that the “distinction between the authentic and the inauthentic, the natural and the touristy, is a powerful semiotic operator within tourism (159). Such a claim echoes MacCannell’s belief that “*sightseeing is a ritual performed to the differentiations of society*” (13; original emphasis). In this regard sightseeing becomes a “kind of collective striving ... to overcome the discontinuity of modernity, of incorporating its fragments into unified experience ... [however] it is doomed to eventual failure: even as it tries to construct totalities, it celebrates differentiation” (MacCannell 13).

According to MacCannell, the paradox of unintentionally celebrating differentiation whilst attempting to construct totalities resides in the fact that the “organization of behaviour and objects in public places is functionally equivalent to the sacred text that still serves as the moral base of traditional society” (39-40). In our contemporary, globalised world the simplistic binary distinctions of the traditional world such as “Us” and “Them” or “we are good” and “they are bad,” will not hold. Hence, “Modern man has been condemned to look elsewhere, everywhere, for his authenticity, to see if he can catch a glimpse of it reflected in the simplicity, poverty, chastity or purity of others” (41).

### **3. Authenticity as an Ethical Ideal**

When applied to the genuineness or provenance of works of art, manuscripts or signatures, the concept of authenticity is fairly straightforward to grasp; something is defined as either real or fake. However, when employed in a philosophical sense the concept of authenticity becomes a rather slippery one. In his 1995 investigation *In Search of Authenticity* Jacob Golomb claims that “The term ‘authenticity’ is used in so many different contexts that it may very well resist definition.... Even to speak of ‘the nature of its meaning’ is misleading, since it implies a kind of essentialism, a perspective of objectivity that is foreign to authenticity” (7). When the term *authentic* is applied to an individual we naturally encounter the problem of definition as individuality, *by definition*, negates generic characterisation. With this in view, I submit that the religious individual, for example, in her interpretation of authentic existence most probably focuses on self-abnegation and fulfilment from a source which transcends the self. This, however, is a very different interpretation

of authenticity from the atheist whose focus on self-possession strives for a self-centredness free from external interference. Golomb even goes so far as to suggest that, without at all warranting any spiritual preference, the concept of authenticity might be best approached from the theological trajectory of the *via negativa* insofar as the clearest definition may be attained quite specifically by describing it in terms of what it is not (8).

Indeed, Lionel Trilling, whose 1972 publication *Sincerity and Authenticity* instigated the field of research on this topic, explicitly defines authenticity in contradistinction to the older concept of sincerity. Trilling baldly states that “Now and then it is possible to observe the moral life in process of revising itself” (1). And it is in the late sixteenth century, he claims, that “the moral life of Europe added to itself a new element, the state or quality of the self which we call sincerity” (2). Sincerity, described as “a congruence between avowal and actual feeling” (2), therefore served the social function of establishing truth and honesty in human relations, possibly in an attempt to maintain order in the face of increased social mobility and urban growth. Trilling’s methodological approach traces the evolution of sincerity to its divergence with authenticity by referencing sources throughout the modern period of Western literature and thought. It should be no surprise, then, that he resorts to one of that epoch’s most important works of literature to illustrate sincerity: Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (ca. 1602). It is interesting that Trilling, as I shall also later do with my own choice of texts, draws our attention to the importance of genre. He states that “It is surely no accident that the idea of sincerity, of the own self and the difficulty of knowing and showing it, should have arisen to vex men’s minds in the epoch that saw the sudden efflorescence of the theatre” (10). The implication is that the genre of drama had a social influence upon those who began

to think of themselves as inhabiting a social stage. (I will later argue that, concerning the texts I study in this thesis, the genres of epic and novel were specifically chosen by their authors for certain ideological ends.)

Trilling argues that in *Hamlet* there is a defining example of sincerity in Polonius' speech to his son, Laertes. During his otherwise platitudinous speech Polonius suddenly says the following lines: "This above all: to thine own self be true / And it doth follow, as the night the day, / Thou canst not then be false to any man" (qtd. in Trilling 3). "To thine own self be true" heard on its own sounds very much like a possible definition of authenticity, however, Trilling emphasises the importance of not dismissing the third line, "Thou canst not then be false to any man." In other words, Polonius is saying that you should be true to yourself *in order not* to be false to anyone else. If you mean what you say, and say what you mean, then you can avoid being false to others. Yet, such honesty may not be appreciated by someone of whom we have a low opinion or are critical. And this can be somewhat of a hindrance in many of our social interactions; being critical of an employer, for example, is not always the wisest choice. Hence, "Society requires of us that we present ourselves as being sincere, and the most efficacious way of satisfying this demand is to see to it that we really are sincere, that we actually are what we want our community to know we are" (Trilling 11). But in this case, are you not just playing a role? The role of playing yourself? And if you are being true to yourself to avoid being false to others, are you actually being true to yourself?

In his 1759 *Conjectures on Original Composition* Edward Young mused, "Born originals, how comes it to pass that we die copies?" This idea is central to the concept of authenticity and the need for the individual to resist the influence of others in forging her own identity. It is at this point that I can now introduce

authenticity in opposition to sincerity as authenticity supposes a transgression of social norms. I argue that authenticity is aligned with a sense of autonomy and individual identity that balks at the thought of performing prescribed roles. Charles Taylor agrees claiming, “Authenticity involves originality, it demands a revolt against convention” (65). In fact, Taylor, *pace* Golomb, believes that authenticity can be defined in terms that

(A) involves (i) creation and construction as well as discovery, (ii) originality, and frequently (iii) opposition to the rules of society and even potentially to what we recognize as morality. But it is also true, as we saw, that it (B) requires (i) openness to horizons of significance (for otherwise the creation loses the background that can save it from insignificance) and (ii) a self-definition in dialogue. That these demands may be in tension has to be allowed. But what must be wrong is a simple privileging of one over the other, of (A), say, at the expense of (B), or vice versa. (66)

Taylor speaks of “horizons of significance” which ground the individual in the world. What he means by this term is that, although authenticity is quite obviously self-referential, authenticity also supposes values that transcend the self. In other words, Taylor warns against a shallow emotivism whereby the individual attributes value to something purely because they like it and feel the object warrants special attention. Life is not simply about individual preferences; certain values exist independent of individual taste. As he explicates, it would be absurd to claim to be a “self-chooser and deploy a whole Nietzschean vocabulary of self-making, just because I choose steak and fries over poutine for lunch. Which issues are significant, *I* do not determine. If I did, no issue would be significant. But then the very ideal of self-choosing *as a moral ideal* would be impossible” (39; original

emphasis). This is precisely the kind of faux-authenticity I shall address in my final chapter as it seems to me to be a particularly contemporary phenomenon.

Following Taylor's definition, then, throughout this thesis I shall be assessing authenticity in terms that demand a self-reflexivity by the characters in question and an interrogation as to how they position their own inscriptive narrative in relation to those of others. I will be analysing the struggle for authenticity with regard to the manner in which the characters conduct and define themselves (and others) as their appreciation of the extant "horizons of significance" are drawn into question during the vicissitudinous (re)contextualisation effectuated throughout their travels. In the course of this thesis we shall observe how context affects the possibility of authentic behaviour which, concurring with Golomb, I believe will be most striking in what Karl Jaspers called *Grenzsituationen*, limit or boundary—in the sense of *extreme*—situations.

### **Chapter by Chapter Summary**

I have specifically chosen canonical texts by male authors as traditionally the authenticity struggle has been a particularly male dominated struggle. However, by analysing the writing of male authors with predominantly male characters, I attempt to attack this gendered struggle from the interior and suggest avenues of ingress for others.

The selection of my first text, *Paradise Lost* (1667), is necessarily an epic as, by its very form and subject matter of the Fall, it represents the end of one world and the beginning of another. Hence, the last great epic of the English language symbolises the transition from a structured premodern to a chaotic modern world. I

therefore commence with Western culture's original symbiosis of transgression and travel through Milton's interpretation of the Fall(s). Not only does Milton's account of Genesis highlight the dawn of individual subjectivity through what I shall term the "Satanic" trope, but also indicates the contingency of transgression and displacement in regard to authentic self-definition. With the birth of the modern epoch, I argue that the collapse of the epic totality instigated the liberation of self through the process of individuation, yet the corresponding loss of "place" in the social order evoked existential angst.

Departing from *Paradise Lost* and the collapse of the epic world, I draw attention to the novel as *the* modern genre. In *The Origins of the English Novel 1600 – 1740* (1987) Michael McKeown describes the genre of the novel as "resistance to the authority of traditional convention, its self-creation through the negation of other forms" (11); a description which could almost equally be applied to the contemporaneous notion of individual self-fashioning. In fact, I would argue that the birth of the novel reflects both the loss of the rigid structure inherent in the epic, and the subsequent liberation of self-expression established in the technological and cultural evolutions of the modern period. Therefore, following Georg Lukács' claim in his highly influential *Theory of the Novel* that "The novel is the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God" (88), it seemed a logical transition for me to begin my analysis of novels with one that recounts an abandoned individual who discovers God in solitude.

In the second chapter I therefore argue that Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) is an apposite inclusion in the tradition of St. Augustine's and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions*. Through analysis of the "island" trope I assert that, even given the most perfect conditions of solipsism, the individual remains an inherently

social being that retains a primordial compulsion for dialogical inscription of the self. However, I also suggest that dialogue can all too easily become a struggle for domination when one encounters the exotic other. Ultimately, this may lead to the exclusion of the other and pave the way towards the imperial colonialism and proto-fascism that serve as the subject matter of the following chapter's novel, *Heart of Darkness*. Indeed, in *Defoe and the Idea of Fiction* (1983), Geoffrey M. Sill even implies that the novel itself may be employed as an ideological tool with the observation that, "Though neither ideology nor fiction is usually thought of as 'knowledge,' they were for Defoe a way of knowing and, finally, of *changing* the world" (25; emphasis added).

Thus, in chapter 3, an analysis of the trope of "voice" as a metonym for ideology in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) will reveal the irony of *fin-de-siecle* imperial rhetoric through the character of Kurtz, a figure Cedric Watts quite rightly identifies as "a literary descendent of Milton's Satan" (47). Kurtz and Marlow portray the two sides of the authenticity struggle against the ideological allure of collective and absolute power. Erich Fromm describes the dangerous predicament a slide from authenticity engenders when, "in our effort to escape from aloneness and powerlessness, we are ready to get rid of our individual self either by submission to new forms of authority or by a compulsive conforming to accepted patterns" (116). Such a slide from authenticity, I claim, may lead to the individual's adoption of extremist ideologies.

As a counter-balance, chapter 4 associates Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* (1934) with the anarchic egocentrism and intense individualism of Max Stirner's philosophy as a means of rebelling against the demands of social collectivism. In this chapter I analyse the "dream" trope in terms of Miller's trademark use of surreal

metaphor which, I argue, provides a means of escape from the influence of collective identities. Counteracting the individual's absorption in the collective mind-set between the horror of two World Wars, I suggest a paradigm shift towards Stirnerian egoism was effectuated by the likes of Henry Miller. With the realisation that the individual had literally become sacrificed by the state to what Stirner had termed the "dunghill of history," the corporeal self inscribes its narrative in *Tropic of Cancer* as erotically charged, hedonistic consumption of the world. The anonymity and exoticism afforded by displacement and relocation in a foreign land here acts to liberate the self's search for authenticity.

Finally, the fifth chapter will discuss the trope of "image terrorism" in reference to *Glamorama* (1998). This trope addresses the problemata of the globally destabilising influences of celebrity and terrorism, the tyranny of consumerism, and the Debordian *Society of the Spectacle*. The chapter raises the question of how, indeed if, in a globalized postmodern world with ever reducing horizons of differentiation, travel remains the last viable option in the pursuit of the authentic self. I will argue that the term "authenticity" has been expropriated and travestied in a consumer society whereby the "authentic self" now becomes the self which is projected and observed by the gaze of the other. Authenticity is now defined in the superficial terms of how one is perceived, rather than how one actually is. The consequence is a society of debased, alienated subjects that permanently crave puerile recognition. Bret Easton Ellis' *Glamorama* illustrates this conundrum in his portrayal of the vacuous lifestyle of fashion model and "It boy of the moment" Victor Ward's dissolution of self through an overwhelming reliance on external confirmation in a world which merely mirrors itself wherever it is.

To conclude this introduction, I feel it is necessary to briefly explain the absence of certain texts. Given Michel de Certeau's claim that "Every story is a travel story—a spatial practice" (115), to truly do justice to my subject matter lies beyond the scope of this thesis. Hence, I have selected texts I felt apposite for study and reserve the project's expansion for future endeavour. I surmise that certain readers may ask themselves why such or such a text has been excluded. Why, one may inquire, in a study of authenticity and travel is Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* absent? Or, similarly, why hasn't a single nineteenth century Realist novel been included? To these charges I shall seek to buttress my responses with observations made by authorities in the field.

Hence, regarding the exclusion of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, I argue that the puritan strain of analysis on free will and determinism is covered by my line of argumentation in the chapters on *Paradise Lost* and *Robinson Crusoe*. Furthermore, the topical similarities between *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *Robinson Crusoe* have already been thoroughly scrutinised by a number of academics, not least Stuart Sim who, in *Negotiations with Paradox: Narrative Practise and Narrative Form in Bunyan and Defoe*, claims that both authors "are critical of the value-system of their times; they both construct fictions to present a counter-cultural case to that value-system;... they must engage in negotiation with their belief systems; and, lastly, that such negotiations plunge them into the heart of the free will/determinism debate" (6).

And as far as the omission of the Realist novel is concerned, not only has Edward Said referred to *Robinson Crusoe* as the "prototypical modern realistic novel" in *Culture and Imperialism* (xii), but in *The Rise of the Novel* Ian Watt reminds us that "Modern realism, of course, begins from the position that truth can

be discovered by the individual through his senses” (12), a definition which almost perfectly synopsis the quest of Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*. A novel which, although published in 1902, was serialised just before the turn of the century.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *PARADISE LOST (1667): THE FORCE OF NEGATION*

*Uncreated till the crime*

*Of thy rebellion!*

*John Milton, Paradise Lost*

#### Act

“*Mythos*,” Kenneth Burke reminds us in *Language as Symbolic Action*, “originally meant but ‘word’ (being the Homeric equivalent of *logos*)” (380; original emphasis). Hence, myth is also synonymous with such terms as story, fable or narrative. In as much as myth is a narrative, it stands as the narrative *of* a people, tradition or culture; and as a narrative of a people, tradition, or culture, it stands as *the* narrative binding a social group throughout history and can therefore be considered in terms of establishing *order*. And any narrative, in order to function as narrative (from *narrare*, to relate, to tell), requires an essential act which instigates the subsequent concatenation of *related* events. Hence, the essential *qua* constitutive act would be the original act of creation related by the origin myth. In the Gospel according to St. John we are told that “[i]n the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (*King James Bible*, John 1:1). In which case, myth essentially relates the story of the origins upon which that story is constructed. Each subsequent act would therefore involve conflict as it would be both *destructive* in so far as it derives (from *derivare*, to lead off) from the original act, and *constructive* in so far as it creates alternatives to the original act. As each alternative presents a challenge to the extant status quo, a supporting myth

involving conflict, the combat myth, is then required to ground the validity of the origin myth. In other words, whenever there is change a new order contests an old order, hence the purpose of the combat myth is to protect the stability of the established, original order. Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) is caught in the confluence of two historic periods: the premodern and the modern. *Paradise Lost*, I argue, ratifies the rational, self-authenticating responsibility of the individual espoused by the project of modernity whilst paradoxically clinging to the enchanted, hierarchic order central to the cosmogony of the premodern epic. Such a reading of *Paradise Lost* therefore interprets the falls recounted in the text as representative of the radical historical break between the premodern and modern worlds which, in turn, incurred an equally radical reconceptualisation of selfhood.

### **Introduction**

*Paradise Lost* commences with a clear declaration of its subject matter: "Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit / Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste / Brought death into the world, and all our woe, / With loss of Eden" (*PL* 1.1-4). The epic therefore opens with a lament: the lament for an irrecoverable loss. Milton proceeds by asking his Heavenly Muse:

Say first, for heaven hides nothing from thy view

Nor the deep tract of hell, say what first cause

Moved our grand parents in that happy state,

Favoured of heaven so highly, to fall off

From their creator, and transgress his will

For one restraint, lords of the world besides?

Who first seduced them to that foul revolt? (*PL* 1.27-33)

It should come as no great surprise for the reader to discover that the next line clarifies the great seducer whose “guile stirred up with envy and revenge, deceived the mother of mankind” as the “infernal serpent” Satan (*PL* 1.34-36). Milton’s interrogation as to why “our grand parents in that happy state” partook of the forbidden fruit, hence confounding their progeny to hereditary sin, requires a rather complicated explication. In order to do so Milton presents the reader of *Paradise Lost* with three major transgressions culminating in the Original Sin of Adam. Yet, to arrive at any comprehension of Original Sin we must first extrapolate from the original transgression of Satan as, logically speaking, had Satan not transgressed, neither would Eve nor, subsequently, Adam. In other words, had Satan not fallen there would be no story. Milton’s epic therefore strives to explain what the biblical account of Genesis so conspicuously omits: how evil came to exist in a perfect universe and why Eve and Adam, despite forewarning, transgressed the prohibition that condemned them to exiled mortality.

In relation to this fall, it is the aim of this chapter to argue that Milton posits the inception of the authentic self as contingent on travel. Travel, however, of a particular form: Transgression, from *transgressio*, a “stepping across.” I shall argue that authentic self-creation in *Paradise Lost* is contingent on transgression due to Milton’s insistence that the potential for Adam and Eve’s Fall lay within themselves as “they themselves decreed / Their own revolt” (*PL* 3.116-17). In other words, authenticity, I submit, only ever becomes important at the moment it is put in question. Therefore Satan, or *Adversary* as the translation from Hebrew suggests, was the *required* catalyst for their eventual, *necessary* transgression towards attaining a notion of authentic selfhood dependent on subscription to a certain moral

code. Hence, the transgression which “brought death into the world, and all our woe” (*PL* 1.3), while ostensibly a curse, can paradoxically be interpreted as an endowment which liberated humanity from a life of sybaritic conformity and engendered authentic individuality based on free moral choice. Thus, the introduction of moral responsibility to human existence transforms a woeful Fall into the *felix culpa*, or Fortunate Fall, I maintain Milton’s epic endorses.

As transgression serves as the nexus of *Paradise Lost*, antinomies permeate the text: good versus evil, reason versus passion, free will versus predestination, knowledge versus ignorance, to mention but a few. Indeed, it could be said the entire epic revolves around a construction of order from chaos that comes across not only as the agonistic split between rebel and authoritarian - or Satanic and Messianic poles - within the author himself, but as the very trope of the human condition. Hence Milton’s version of Genesis is essentially the origin myth amalgamated with a variant of the “combat myth” Laurence Coupe describes as “a recurrent pattern in various cultures, recounting the creation of the universe from a primal struggle between equally divine forces, one representing light and the other darkness” (32). Such conflict is illustrated in Milton’s epic by the precarious balancing of order over the gulf “where eldest Night / And Chaos, ancestors of Nature, hold / Eternal anarchy” (*PL* 2.894-96).

If we now move proleptically, as Milton continually does, this conflict is further demonstrated by Milton’s denial of creation *ex nihilo*. In Book 7 the negation of nothingness is introduced by God actually forming the world from chaos:

Silence, ye troubled waves, and thou deep, peace,

Said the omnific Word, your discord end:

.....

For chaos heard his voice: him all his train

Followed in bright procession to behold

Creation, and the wonders of his might.

Then stayed the fervid wheels, and in his hand

He took the golden compasses, *prepared*

*In God's eternal store*, to circumscribe

This universe, and all created things

(*PL* 7.216-17, 7.221-27; emphasis added)

Denial of creation *ex nihilo* therefore precludes the possibility of something being created from nothing – there is always already something upon which to construct, always an hypostasis. The above quotation therefore illustrates Milton's monistic belief that all is of one substance – both corporeal and ethereal – as all is “prepared in God's eternal store.” Such a notion of animism dictates that God be the provenance of all created being and that all created being be part of that same God. Raphael, the sociable spirit, explains as much: “O Adam, one Almighty is, from whom / All things proceed, and up to him return / If not depraved from good...” (*PL* 5.469-71). Hence Raphael may even dine with Adam and Eve “with keen despatch / Of real hunger, and concoctive heat / To transubstantiate” (*PL* 5.436-38). Transubstantiation, normally the transformation of one substance to another, in this case implies a transformation of form rather than substance which suggests the difference between corporeal beings such as Adam and Eve and ethereal beings

such as Raphael is one of degree rather than kind. The conviction of Milton's monistic belief in creation *ex deo* is stressed by the "omnific Word," which implies an existence scripted in strict accordance to the Almighty's narrative design. However, Milton was equally firm in stressing the importance of human moral responsibility and free will within that narrative.

Free will, the epic suggests, is what distinguishes *action* from *motion*. Choice drives the self into a state of flux which can only be resolved through exertion of agency. It could be said that decision making throws the present, deciding self into future exile as decision implies consequence. And the conditions for this existential exile are only ever instigated within the text due to Satan's iterative negation of God's authority. In other words, the paradox here is that negation always brings *more* into existence rather than *less*, in effect leading to an *Aufhebung* resulting from and in the Fall(s): evil negates good only for that good to return in a refined form. Milton offers this argument in support of the theodicy which claims God's

wisdom had ordained

Good out of evil to create, instead

Of spirits malign a better race to bring

Into their vacant room, and thence diffuse

His good to worlds and ages infinite. (*PL* 7.186-191)

However, this passage raises a crucial paradox regarding precedence. If God's plan is "good out of evil to create" surely evil must exist prior to the *subsequent* creation of good. Such a position is supported by Mikics who addresses the underlying

paradox of creation stemming from “an originary instance of lack” in the poem by arguing that Milton

indicates that the source of creation lies in a limited, specific motive: compensation for the angels’ fall. God supplants fallen angels with human beings in order “good out of evil to create” (7.190) [Sic]. The official argument of *Paradise Lost* asserts the exact reverse: that evil is parasitic on goodness, because God’s creative must be prior to Satan’s destructive power. (135)

Hence, in order to avoid a *reductio ad absurdum* the figure of Lucifer/Satan becomes the essential fulcrum on which a logical argument swings as Lucifer, created good, transgresses as Satan, “Self-tempted, self-depraved” (*PL* 3.130). Such circularity draws a direct parallel between Satan and the mythical Ouroboros, the serpent which consumes its own tail, and thereby lends itself to notions of eternal return and self-generation which, as we shall shortly see, is an argument Satan himself raises. Lucifer/Satan, I shall argue, becomes not only the force behind Adam and Eve’s Fall, but also the requisite scapegoat figure whose function serves to provide their conditions of redemption and the *sine qua non* of Christ’s Atonement.

As a result of Satan’s guile “man falls deceived / By the other first: man therefore shall find grace / The other none” (*PL* 3.130-32). Therefore, with their Fall Adam and Eve acquire centres of self-reference from which to strive towards enlightenment and grace. Satan, on the other hand, implodes in aetiological self-doubt and is forced to wander aimlessly in orbicular obscurity until his perverted *raison d’être* becomes repetitive *motion* rather than action: “If then his Providence

/ Out of our evil seek to bring forth good, / Our labour must be to pervert that end /  
And out of good still to find means of evil” (*PL* 1.163-65). Consequently, I shall have recourse to two tropes of the self in this chapter. First, the Satanic trope of the solipsistic self, “A mind not to be changed by place or time” (*PL* 1.252-53), that essentially revolves on its own axis, rendering itself immobile yet *generating* change as (re)action. A mind so resistant to temporal and local change suggests a critique of Cartesian subjectivity if we recall that in part four of the *Discours de la methode* Descartes argues that although he can pretend not to have a body, he cannot pretend not to exist and therefore concludes that “from this I knew that I was a substance whose entire essence or nature was to think, and for whom to exist required no place nor depended on any material thing” (34; my translation)<sup>1</sup>. Hence, the Cartesian separation of *res cogitans* (thinking thing) and *res extensa* (extended thing) was incompatible with Milton’s monism which considered the individual as an embodied self. Second, the trope of self-authorship Milton raises throughout the epic which always presupposes mobility or displacement. The second trope is dependent upon the first so I shall trace the second trope with particular attention to Adam and Eve who, upon banishment, assume the moral responsibility of inscribing their individual historical narratives in a world tainted by Sin and Death as, “authors to themselves in all / Both what they judge and what they *choose*” (*PL* 3.122-23; emphasis added). I argue that it is only at the moment of their fall that Adam and Eve become authentic selves with a true conception of free moral choice.

### **Free Will & Memory**

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<sup>1</sup> “je connus de là que j’étais une substance dont toute l’essence ou la nature n’est que de penser, et qui, pour être, n’a besoin d’aucun lieu, ni ne dépend d’aucune chose matérielle”

John Milton is primarily associated not only with the last great epic of the English language, but also with the poem's blind bard who sought to "assert the eternal providence, / And justify the ways of God to men" (*PL* 1. 25-26). The poet revolutionary who supported regicide in the interests of individual freedom and proclaimed to achieve, "Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme" (*PL* 1.16); the literary rebel who sought to surpass Homer, Virgil, Dante, Tasso et alia by breaking tradition and creating not only the greatest but also most original work of literature, while simultaneously imposing the most self-possessed authoritative voice to explicate the Word of God. Such a literary project would, in itself, be an epic feat, yet the epic form was not Milton's initial design. According to Alastair Fowler, inchoate drafts suggest that Milton's original intention was to unfold a narrative entitled *Adam Unparadized* within a far more restrictive format corresponding to the classical Unity of Time frame "not exceeding the twenty-four hours of 'correct' tragedy" (*PL* 3). The tragedy would focus on Adam's transgression and exile from Eden, however, gradually the project expanded to require the epic structure. This change of course necessitated an encyclopaedic scope which would not only suit Milton's desire to tell the story of all things through embellishment of the first three books of Genesis, but also quite literally limn the history of mankind from its origins to the genesis of *Paradise Lost* in the 1660's. Furthermore, we should not ignore the fact that the composition of an epic was considered a patriotic task. As Northrop Frye states:

The epic, as Renaissance critics understood it, is a narrative poem of heroic action, but a special kind of narrative. It also has an encyclopaedic quality in it, distilling the essence of all the religious, philosophical, political, even scientific learning of its time, and, if completely successful, the definitive

poem for its age. The epic in this sense is not a poem by a poet, but the poet's poem... (5)

Frye's comment thus underscores Milton's self-assured task of asserting himself as *the* poet to leave an indelible mark on history; a stressing of his own individual identity and historic worth. This assertion, however, is not achieved purely by contradistinction, but, as "unattempted yet in prose or rhyme" suggests, through negation of all previous literature. Indeed, Harold Bloom maintains that Milton's design was "wholly definite" and had as objective the reversal of literary tradition insofar as "precursors return in Milton, but only at his will, and they return to be corrected" (xxviii). As such, Milton's reticence to directly acknowledge his influences has been noted by numerous critics as testament to his egotism, yet for Stephen M. Fallon this should be taken as further as evidence of his striving for novelty as his behaviour "reflects the rhetorical practice of philosophers in the mid-seventeenth century, a practice traceable in part to the new philosophies' pretensions to originality" (8).

Selecting the epic form in which to couch such literary content obliged Milton to employ a distinctly imaginative, tropological style which would enable his fallen readership, by means of the imagery evoked by epic simile, metaphor, and allegory, to approximate comprehension of the divinely incomprehensible. In other words, to intellectually move *towards* reasoned understanding. As fallen readers we are denied access to the prelapsarian Adamic language that named the things as they actually were. Tropes therefore permit visualisation of abstract concepts such as hell, "A dungeon horrible, on all sides round / As one great furnace flamed, yet from these flames / No light, but rather darkness visible" (*PL* 1.61-63), or Death, that "execrable shape ... If shape it might be called that shape had none

... Or substance might be called that shadow seemed” (*PL* 2.681, 667, 669). Hence it can be claimed that tropes are the essence of fallen language as their very nature highlights the disjunction between sign and referent, or word and the Word. Moreover, the epic form enabled him to retain the teleological *qua* soteriological structure of the Bible whilst delineating the developments of a world which was increasingly losing belief in religious veracity.

Milton’s overwhelming belief in free will and its necessary inclusion in his Christian doctrine meant he adopted an Arminian perspective that dismissed Trinitarianism as incredibly fantastic, and Calvinist predestination as morally reprehensible. This detraction from Calvinist belief in a predestined elect, and by extension a correspondingly predestined damned—presupposing, in Milton’s mind, an unjust God—headed instead towards the Arminian notion of potential universal Atonement. Contrary to the Calvinist belief in unconditional election, which claims that God has already selected a number of souls for salvation regardless of their merit or faith but simply in accordance with his grand design and therefore implying predestination, Arminian doctrine held the view of conditional election, meaning that God chose those to be saved by *foreseeing* that they would be meritorious, thus preserving the individual’s free will in relation to their salvation. This doctrine is first illustrated in book 3 when Milton’s God explains to his Son:

they themselves decreed

Their own revolt, not I: if I foreknew,

Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault,

Which had no less proved certain unforeknown. (*PL* 3.116-19)

Thus, as stated in *Areopagitica*, the individual, for Milton, is always at the core of a narrative in which true freedom is only attainable upon following one's personal route towards reason for "when God gave him [Adam] reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing" (23). This pursuit of freedom allied to reason implies a personal struggle against the inner voice of passion which need not be entirely negated, but rather controlled: "Wherefore did he create passions within us, pleasures round about us, but that these rightly temper'd are the very ingredients of virtue?" (A 23-24). Life's journey is therefore perpetual toil as "That which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary" (A 17). Here we cannot avoid the dialectic reminding us that as fallen readers our lives exist in conflict and that identity is always acquired through contradistinction. As fallen creatures we can now know good only by evil. Hence, for Milton the authentic path is that taken by the wayfaring Christian who "can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better" (A 17).

Milton's theodicy, to "justify the ways of God to men" (*PL* 1.26), is therefore also an attempt to reconstruct social order in the wake of the English revolution through myth. His unwavering belief in reason and free will would mean interpreting and expanding the biblical myth in a rational, comprehensible manner precisely as a justification for the existential hardship such free will incurs and as justification for social hierarchy. The aim of the project, I maintain, was to render explicable the ostensibly incomprehensible, to rationally explain the ambiguity of the Genesis myth through a psychological tracing of the Fall(s); a rhetoric of "that warning voice" ignored by Eve and Adam (*PL* 4.1).

*Paradise Lost* is, therefore, intrinsically a moral pedagogy on the loss of ontological orientation. This is reflected in the deeply psychological structure of an epic which forces the reader to constantly identify with and question the characters' dilemmas. Indeed, so much so that Stanley Fish was to open his 1967 study *Surprised by Sin* with the claims that:

(1) The poem's *centre of reference is its reader who is also its subject*; (2) Milton's purpose is to educate the reader to an awareness of his position and responsibilities as a fallen man, and to a sense of the distance which separates him from the innocence once his; (3) Milton's method is to re-create in the mind of the reader (which is, finally, the poem's scene) the drama of the Fall, to make him fall again exactly as Adam did with Adam's troubled clarity, that is to say, 'not deceived'. (1; emphasis added)

Fish's thesis asserts that Milton sought to so envelope the reader in the text through forced identification with the characters' predicaments that any borders between the fictional and real worlds be obliterated. To achieve such requires not only incredible artistry on behalf of the author, but also great imagination on the part of the reader and goes a long way to explaining why readers generally identify with the character who paradoxically portrays the most human foibles: Satan. Moreover, as John Carey has accurately noted, "If we wish to find a single term for the character attribute which Satan's ambivalent presentation, taken as a whole, *generates*, then the most suitable term seems to be 'depth'" (162; emphasis added). Hence, Carey also identifies the generative force of Satan within the text with respect to the depth the character's dissimulation creates. Such depth and negative generation, I submit, is a constant source of interrogation for both the character and

the reader. The character of Satan therefore mirrors the natural inclination of the reader towards self-reflexivity:

Oh had his powerful destiny ordained

Me some inferior angel, I had stood

Then happy; no unbounded hope had raised

Ambition. Yet why not? (*PL* 4.58- 61)

Thus Satan, as the above quote testifies, is constantly questioning the motives behind his own acts which accordingly propounds an investigation into how actuality may have been otherwise.

Milton's skill in luring us into identification, possibly even sympathy, with Satan is intended to weaken our defences in preparation for our fall(s) with Eve and Adam in Book 9. Hence, the *transgressio*, the *step across* the border from "real" to "imaginary" strongly suggests that the act of imagination is itself the primordial form of transgression, yet simultaneously also the rudimentary form of creation. It is for this reason that when Satan imagines the act of celestial insurrection *before* the actual act it becomes not only a moral transgression, a sin—the first sin—, but actually engenders the allegorical birth of Sin from Satan's mind:

All on a sudden miserable pain

Surprised thee, dim thine eyes, and dizzy swum

In darkness, while thy head flames thick and fast

Threw forth, till on the left side opening wide,

Likest to thee in shape and countenance bright,

Then shining heavenly fair, a goddess armed

Out of thy head I sprung: amazement seized

All the host of heaven; back they recoiled afraid

At first, and called me Sin, and for a sign

Portentous held me... (*PL* 2.752-61)

Here, indeed, is a “sign portentous” that Milton implies to be the dangerous undercurrent of creative design which, by extension, requires restraint lest the reader’s own creative imagination emulate that of Satan. Hence, it could be said the last great epic of the English language is possibly also the last epic effort at retaining social integrity in an increasingly disoriented world. As Christopher Hill has noted in his influential study *Milton and the English Revolution*:

The goodness of matter and the freedom of man’s will are linked concepts for Milton. A return to chaos occurs when God’s goodness is withdrawn, or not put forward: it means an end to human freedom. Adam and Eve are ‘in a troubled sea of passion tossed’ (*P.L.* X. 718) after the Fall as Chaos appears to invade Eden, just as the people of England lost their freedom when understanding ceased to rule them in the late fifties... (326-27)

It would appear that Milton believed reattainment of English freedom and understanding could only be achieved by a return to origins.

The return to literary origins explains Milton’s choice of the epic as his preferred rhetorical device due to its close relation to myth. Order, or hierarchy, to properly function requires an authentic source: an essence. Tradition and folklore are forms of myth that cannot work unless they are supported by a return to

believable origins as essences and are also the basis for the construction of collective identities. Myths can be interpreted as offering frameworks to understand reality, or as frameworks which construct reality. Thus, *Paradise Lost* offers both an explicit justification and an implicit aetiology.

As epic formula dictates, *Paradise Lost* opens *in medias res* with a brief synopsis of the whole argument before swiftly drawing the reader into the midst of things. However, the midst of things is a vast terrain, so why does Milton choose to open his poem in a place of absolute negation: hell? We are immediately greeted by scenes of that “dungeon horrible” where Satan and “his horrid crew / Lay vanquished, rolling in the fiery gulf / Confounded though immortal” (*PL* 1.61, 1.51-53). It is also striking that the first four Books of a poem which has stated its intention to delineate creation and “justify the ways of God to men” focuses predominantly on Satan and his destructive followers. Placing such initial emphasis on the satanic impasse supports my theory that it is only through textual analysis of Satan’s narrative that we can arrive at any understanding of God’s. Milton’s technique, I believe, intends to lead the reader along that treacherous trajectory described by Satan as “long is the way / And hard, that out of hell leads up to light” (*PL* 2.432-33). It is therefore by means of negative instruction that the reader is to orientate herself towards empathising with the predicament of the Fall in Book 9. Milton seems to imply that the reader necessarily travel the long and hard way through eight full books of the epic before confrontation with *the* definitive choice alongside Eve. A literary journey of such measured distance is clearly not for cheap dramatic effect, but because the only way to comprehend Eve’s decision is not by epiphany, but by lengthy illumination.

The poem therefore commences after the malevolent insurgents have been expelled from heaven, “Nine times the space that measures day and night / *To mortal men*” with the victorious loyal angels hot on their talons (*PL* 1.50-51; emphasis added). Pertinently, time is here measured by *space* from the perspective of the falling rebels, and from a temporal perspective by the reader. For the fallen angels existing in eternity, of course, Time as we postlapsarians know it does not strictly exist. However, I believe that if we take the basic definition of time as quoted from the *Oxford English Dictionary* to be “A finite extent or stretch of continued existence, as the interval separating two successive events or actions, or the period during which an action, condition, or state continues,” and the definition of event as “The (actual or contemplated) fact of anything happening” then Satan’s incipient insurrection must be termed an “event” which marks a temporal break in heaven. In fact, the first significant “event” would be signified by the unprecedented break in celestial order stemming from the “moment” of his original sin: the *conception* of his planned insurrection which results in the birth of Sin springing as “a goddess armed / Out of [his] head” (*PL* 2.757-58). With this unintentional act of malefic creation and subsequent act of insurrection in heaven Lucifer is “Unnamed in heaven” (*PL* 6.263). Un-named he is stripped of the moniker Lucifer, bearer of light, becoming the “Author of evil” hereafter known as Satan (*PL* 6.262). This transformative event, I argue, must surely constitute the commencement of some form of pseudo-time within eternity from which a true sense of *memory* begins.

Satan and his co-insurrectionists are altered by their downward voyage not merely psychologically, but also physically as the shock of Satan’s first address to his cohort Beelzebub illustrates:

If thou beest he; but oh how fallen! how changed

From him, who in the happy realms of light

Clothed with transcendent brightness didst outshine

Myriads though bright.... (*PL* 1.84-88)

“If thou beest he” clearly demonstrates that, although the angels have been physically transformed, the ability to still recognise Beelzebub despite the visual change implies Satan remembers Beelzebub from his former state.

Thus, it is purely due to memory, the bard’s narration informs us, that pain and persecution can be inflicted, “for now the thought / Both of lost happiness and lasting pain / Torments [Satan]” (*PL* 1.54-56). It is precisely the memory of “lost happiness” and projection of “lasting pain” that inflicts torment as now, for the first time, Satan and his infernal crew truly have apprehension of there being an alternative to their actual conditions of existence. Before their insurrection they could have known no state other than that which they incessantly experienced. Yet, unfortunately for them, they have been brought to a painful understanding of the inaccuracy contained in the adage that contends the grass is always greener on the other side. Consequently, their overriding concern is now to repress the knowledge that such an event even occurred which is why they seek

Lethë the river of oblivion rolls

Her watery labyrinth, whereof who drinks

Forthwith his former state and being forgets,

Forgets both joy and grief, pleasure and pain. (*PL* 2.583-86)

The fallen angels discover, “The tempting stream, with one small drop to lose / In sweet forgetfulness all pain and woe” (*PL* 2.607-8), yet they are suddenly denied in

the same manner as another mythical transgressor as, “of itself the water flies / All taste of living wight, as once it fled / The lip of Tantalus” (*PL* 2.612-14). Tantalus, we should remember, in Pindar “is accused of stealing ambrosia and nectar of the gods after having dined with them and of having revealed secrets of the gods to mortals” (Roman and Roman 458). Tantalus as both martyr and criminal was tortured by insatiable hunger and thirst. In *Paradise Lost*, the devils are tortured by an insatiable desire to forget their crime, in effect historically erasing it. The reason memory plays such a prominent role is, other than the purpose of punishment, due to its close relation prohibition.

Prohibition, I maintain, is contingent on memory for if prohibition cannot be remembered there can be no logical means of avoiding committing the prohibited act. Furthermore, the direct derivative of prohibition is guilt which is also contingent on memory as should the crime be forgotten so too is guilt consigned to oblivion. Yet, as at this point in “time” nothing has ever been prohibited we are faced with the glaring enigma of how Satan, or rather Lucifer, could possibly transgress. Ostensibly, in Heaven there is no correlate to the Tree of Knowledge of which Adam and Eve are forbidden to taste which implies the birth of Sin is an *unconscious* act and explains why “All on a sudden miserable pain / *Surprised*” Lucifer, leaving him “dizzy spun / In darkness” (*PL* 2.752-24; emphasis added). To compound the confusion, it also begs the question of how, being born good in a perfect universe, Lucifer could even entertain the tainted thought of revolt. This problem takes a profoundly darker twist in Book 5 when, after Eve *dreams* of transgressing, Adam pacifies her by claiming, “Evil into the mind of God or Man / May come and go, so unapprov’d, and leave / No spot or blame behind (*PL* 5.117.19). If God and humans can entertain evil thoughts which not being acted

upon exculpates them of any sin it may seem curious the same courtesy wasn't extended to Lucifer and his fellow angels. Unless, that is, Adam simply hasn't felt it necessary to include the fact that the angels *were* extended that courtesy and, therefore, God's "Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault, / Which had no less proved certain unforeknown" (*PL* 3.118-19). Such a premise I offer to suggest that Lucifer had always been Satan if only latently and by transgressing, indeed only thinking of transgressing, his authentic personality was revealed. Hence, by transgressing a non-existent prohibition, Lucifer discovers his real identity as Satan which generates the very concept of prohibition that shall affect all those that follow: i.e. Adam, Eve and their eventual progeny. The inception of Satan thus permits the establishment of the very first *Thou shalt not!* To fully explicate this position we must now address the central issue of what motivated Lucifer's insurgent cerebration.

### **Self-generation**

Satan challenges Abdiel in Book 5:

Rememberest thou

Thy making, while the maker gave thee being?

We know none before us, self-begot, self-raised

By our own quickening power.... (*PL* 5.857-61)

Satan's argument presents self-creation as the angels' right to rebel against their putative creator, God. His thesis is based on the perception that heaven apparently functions hierarchically: "Thrones, principdoms, powers, dominions" (*PL* 3.320).

Yet, in the poem it would appear that the hierarchy is a cast system which prevents any ascension which features Lucifer as, “If not the first archangel, great in power, / In favour and pre-eminence” (*PL* 5.660-61). It is therefore with great chagrin that Lucifer discovers he has lost favour when, upon God’s whim, he is superseded by the creation of the Son, Messiah. Although the angels don’t actually witness the Son’s creation, God relates the event to them when they are introduced for the first time:

Hear all ye angels, progeny of light,

Thrones, dominations, principdoms, virtues, powers,

Hear my decree, which unrevoked shall stand.

This day I have begot whom I declare

My only Son, and on this holy hill

Him, have anointed, whom ye now behold.... (*PL* 5.600-5)

The argument would then follow that the angels have existed in their present state for as long as their memories extend, hence leaving open the ontological door to Satan’s claim they be “self-begot, self-raised” (*PL* 5.860). Indeed, the Son would seem to be the only being they understand as actually having been born as God has already described him in Book 3 as his “Only begotten Son” (*PL* 3.80). However, this would presuppose the angels consider themselves mere *things* which equate to the other things they have observed God create. Yet Lucifer, as I have previously argued, by his very thought of insurrection, expresses a sense of latent selfhood which manifests itself as Satan. Furthermore, as Satan “Drew after him a third part of heaven’s host” (*PL* 5.710), is it not conceivable that they too possess latent

authentic selves? Indeed, as Satan will later admit, it is from a “sense of injured merit” that he revolts (*PL* 1.98). And a sense of injured merit, I submit, corresponds with a sense of injured self-esteem, which naturally presupposes a sense of self. As the angels must surely feel a sense of kinship with God it is quite possible that for them the emphasis in “Only begotten Son” be placed on *begotten* rather than *Son*. Such an inflection would then offer reasonably sound ground for Satan’s rebuke to Abdiel: “Rememberest thou / Thy making, while the maker gave thee being?” (*PL* 5.857-56).

C.S. Lewis ridicules Satan’s claim of self-generation on the basis that such auto-formation would retain the memory of its own creation and would be able to understand its existence as *causa sui*. A created being, he insists, would simply find itself existing and wondering from whence it came. “Yet at the same time, if a creature is silly enough to try to prove that it was not created, what is more natural than for it to say, ‘Well, I wasn’t there to see it being done’” (Lewis 97-98). This is a fair enough claim, however, Milton makes the remarkable assertion that angels enjoy the pleasures of coitus, and to far greater degree than us:

spirits when they please

Can *either* sex assume, or *both*; so soft

And uncompounded is their essence pure,

Not tied or manacled with joint or limb,

Nor founded on the brittle strength of bones,

Like cumbrous flesh; but in what shape they choose

Dilated or condensed, bright or obscure,

Can execute their airy puposes,

And works of love or enmity fulfil. (*PL* 1.423-31; emphasis added)

Yet there is never any mention of them procreating, and the claim that angels can “either” or “both” sexes assume would imply that they are essentially genderless or hermaphroditic, hence, either unable to have offspring or somehow capable of reproducing in their *own image*. And God, the official narrative argues, is the only being capable of creating in His own image. This would explain why “amazement seized / All the host of heaven” when Satan engendered Sin (*PL* 2.758-59). Furthermore, even though a third of heaven’s angels fell with Satan God tells his Son “heaven yet populous retains / Number sufficient to possess her realms” (*PL* 7.146-47), which implies a finite number of angels. As God has created everything thus far, it seems logical to assume he also populates heaven with angels and it is with our species—as compensation for the angelic loss—that procreation begins, “out of one man a race / Of men innumerable” (*PL* 7.155-56). Hence, the only angel who *has* actually given birth is Satan whose offspring, Sin, springs forth from his head, “Likest to thee [Satan] in shape and countenance bright” (*PL* 2.756). Satan has therefore achieved the perverse impossible and, godlike, created Sin in his own image. Sin, of course, is *not* an angel, however, she is distinctly female and possesses a womb—possibly the only womb—as she explains:

Familiar grown,

I pleased, and with attractive graces won

The most averse, thee chiefly, who full oft

Thyself in me thy perfect image viewing

Becam'st enamoured, and such joy thou tookst

With me in secret, that my womb conceived

A growing burden. (*PL* 2.761-67)

Satan then goes one step further and, unintentionally and unbeknownst to him, procreates as a result of incestuous coupling with his daughter and is only later to discover that her growing burden be Death. The birth of Death, however, is an issue I shall return to in the penultimate section concerning Satan's quest. For the present, it is important to remain focused on how the rebellion occurred and it should therefore be noted that Satan was "chiefly" the "most averse" to Sin's "attractive graces." Satan's reticence to submit to her attractive graces therefore suggests a certain compulsion *qua* a lack of voluntarism towards the act of copulation, which is the allegorised form of sinning. Sin winning over the most averse, Satan *chiefly*, implies that there must have been many others she won over too. Taking joy in Sin is simply the allegory of the act of sinning. Hence, we can presume that as a third of the angels fell with Satan they also indulged in Sin/sin, and, as the only sin at this point was conspiracy to rebel, conspiracy fomented at the rate Sin was indulged in. This returns us to the problem of how such a large percentage of the angels could become discontent in heaven and can only be answered with the assumption that something was gravely rotten in that idyllic state.

### **Insurrection**

To continue with C.S. Lewis' reflections, he makes two interesting points in relation to the insurrection which I would now like to consider individually. The first point concerns what he terms the "satanic predicament" and is explained as follows:

On his [Satan's] own showing he is suffering from "a sense of injured merit" (I, 98). This is a well known state of mind which we can all study in domestic children, film stars, politicians, or minor poets; and perhaps nearer home. (95-6)

In essence what Lewis is illustrating is that Satan's character encapsulates qualities which *we* share, highlighting the human aspect of his being. Of course, they are particularly trite qualities, but their very triteness stands to mark them as particularly *fallen* characteristics. Lewis' second point expands upon this "sense of injured merit" thus:

No one had done anything to Satan; he was not hungry, nor over-tasked, nor removed from his place, nor hated – he only thought himself impaired. In the midst of light and love, song and feast and dance, *he could find nothing to think of more interesting than his own prestige.* (96; emphasis added)

Hence, "in the midst of light and love, song and feast and dance, *he could find nothing to think of more interesting than his own prestige.*" For *prestige* I would suggest reading *subjectivity*, i.e. in the midst of all the Epicureanism and vacuous amusement it is not that "he could think of nothing more interesting than himself" but that he could actually find *something* interesting at all. The *ease* of life is a recurrent theme in *Paradise Lost*, yet, it is a theme fraught with negative connotations. Belial is criticized, the narrator's tone suggests, as he who "with words clothed in reason's garb / Counsell'd ignoble ease, and peaceful sloth / Not peace" (*PL* 2.226-28). When Satan succeeds in corrupting Eden it will become a "place where Thou [Sin] and Death / Shall dwell at ease" (*PL* 2.840-41). Indeed,

Satan's journey to Eden, which shall be detailed in the next section, is absurdly easy.

It is interesting that when Satan first encounters Abdiel on the battlefield he reproaches him precisely in terms of supinity:

At first I thought that liberty and heaven  
To heavenly souls had been all one; but now  
I see that most through *sloth* had rather serve,  
Ministering spirits, *trained up in feast and song*.

(*PL* 6.164-67; emphasis added)

I suggest that the sin of rebellion which bred throughout the angels was born of boredom. Angels and humans are described as being of similar types in the poem and Lewis' "Satanic predicament" further buttresses the claim. Therefore, it seems to me that, just like humans, after an extended period of luxury life becomes tedious and the mind starts to *wander*. And to wander in *Paradise Lost* is never good; to wander is to *err*; to wander is to head towards chaos. However, their wandering minds, I submit, didn't wander far. In fact, they wandered closer to home inasmuch as, like Satan, they began questioning their subjectivity. Consequentially, they discover their sole *raison d'être* is to be subject to God and now also the Son, to whom "shall bow / All knees in heaven, and shall confess him Lord" (*PL* 5.607-8). From this moment it becomes simple for Satan to employ his guile and stir up discontent to the point where a third of heaven is prepared to rebel with him.

Yet, all the while, God has been observing the insurrection take seed and flourish while "smiling" (*PL* 5.718). He then confides in his Son the following:

In full resplendence, heir of my might,  
Nearly it now concerns us to be sure  
Of our omnipotence, and with what arms  
We mean to hold what anciently we claim  
Of deity or empire.... (*PL* 5.720-24).

Alas, God's plot now begins to unravel. God has begotten his only Son fully knowing that act would bring Lucifer's latent satanic identity to the fore and inspire a third of heaven to rebel alongside him. This argument returns us the explanation offered in Book 1 that:

the will

And high permission of all-ruling heaven  
Left him [Satan] at large to his own dark designs,  
That with reiterated crimes he might,  
Heap on himself damnation, while he sought  
Evil to others, and enraged might see  
How all his malice served but to bring forth  
Infinite goodness, grace, and mercy shown  
On man by him seduced, but on himself  
Treble confusion, wrath and vengeance poured. (*PL* 1.211-20)

This line of argument is supported by William Empson who, in one of his typically provocative interpretations, claims "[h]ere we are specifically told that God's

actions towards Satan were intended to lead him into greater evil” (42). Satan also comes to the same conclusion after defeat believing that God “his strength concealed, / Which tempted our attempt, and wrought our fall” (*PL* 1.641-42). Of course, on the face of it this is a very lame excuse. To claim that by disguising his strength God tempted Satan to rebel is like a car thief blaming the victim for leaving her car keys in the ignition. The thief still knows that theft is morally wrong. However, unlike the thief, Satan does not have the benefit of daily newspaper reports or having witnessed one of his colleagues being arrested by a police officer. In other words, as far as Satan’s crime is concerned there is no precedence and therefore he cannot be absolutely certain that his act is morally reprehensible. Furthermore, Satan does rightly state that God “Sat on his Throne, upheld by old repute, / Consent or custom” (*PL* 1.639-40), hence, as God has never had his authority tested Satan is quite reasonably questioning the veracity of God’s regal title. And, as has already been argued in relation to the Arminian concept of conditional election, if God is an omniscient being with *foreknowledge* of what his creatures will do in a postlapsarian world, surely he would also have foreknowledge of what his celestial creatures would do *ergo* he would know exactly how Satan would react to a feigned weakness. In this case, Satan would be correct in his claim that God “tempted our attempt.” To compound the matter, knowledge of Satan’s “fixed mind” would mean that coercing him would be as easy as moving a chess piece on a board. Again, Satan appears to glean some *post hoc* comprehension of this fact with his proclamation that:

Nor what the potent victor in his rage

Can else inflict, do I repent or change,

Though changed in outward lustre, that fixed mind

And high disdain, from sense of injured merit,

That with the mightiest raised me to contend.... (PL 1.95-99)

Satan understands too late that his sense of injured merit raised him to contend with the mightiest which causes him to lament “Oh had his powerful destiny ordained / Me some inferior angel, I had stood / Then happy” because “no unbounded hope had raised / Ambition” (PL 4.58-61). The question as to why God would formulate such a devious plan is answered by the notion of hierarchy. It becomes clear that the motivation behind God’s plan is not to prove his own omnipotence, which is ultimately absurd, but for the Son to prove his worth. For the Son to deserve his honorific he must prove, “By Merit more then Birthright Son of God” (PL 3.309). As attainment of such merit can only be achieved by some incredible act it therefore becomes necessary that the Son have a foe to defeat. Enter Satan and the war in heaven.

In Book 6 we are recounted the war in heaven by Raphael. God sends Michael forth with his troops “*Equal* in number to that godless crew / *Rebellious*” (PL 6.49-50; emphasis added) and allows the battle to rage for three days casually observing the events that transpire. Why God decides to send his army forth in equal number instead of sending His remaining two-thirds of angels to ensure victory is peculiar to say the least. To compound the confusion Abdiel even gibes Satan for attacking God by claiming that God could create a force infinite in number to destroy the rebels in a second:

fool, not to think how vain

Against the omnipotent to rise in arms;

Who out of smallest things could without end

Have raised incessant armies to defeat

Thy folly; or with solitary hand

Reaching beyond all limit, at one blow

Unaided could have finished thee.... (PL 6.135-41)

The obvious question which Satan must be asking himself is: so why doesn't he? Confusion is compounded when we are informed that by the second day of war the rebels are in a dominant position as, "horrid confusion heaped / Upon horrid confusion rose: and *now all heav'n / Had gone to wreck*" (PL 6.668-70; emphasis added). But it is on the third day that God reveals his trump card and we are described a literal *deus ex machina*:

*Had not* the almighty Father where he sits

Shrined in his sanctuary of heav'n secure,

Consulting on the sum of things, foreseen

This tumult, and permitted all, advised:

That this great purpose he might so fulfil,

To honour his anointed Son avenged

Upon his enemies, and to declare

All power on him transferred.... (PL 6.671-78)

Satan and his motley crew succumb to the superior force of Messiah as God has decreed, "For thee I have ordained it, and thus far / Have suffered, that the glory

may be thine / Of ending this great war, since none but thou / Can end it” (PL 6.700-3). And why can only the Son end the war? “To manifest thee worthiest to be heir / Of all things” (PL 6.707-8). In other words, this is first proof we have that Satan has been manipulated to serve as a cosmic plot device. Satan has become the first scapegoat, the function of which is to ensure hierarchic order. As Kenneth Burke succinctly explains in *The Rhetoric of Religion*:

Order leads to Guilt

(for who can keep commandments!)

Guilt needs Redemption

(for who would not be cleansed!)

Redemption needs Redeemer

(which is to say, a Victim!). (4-5)

We now understand how and why the infernal crew fell from heaven and again encounter the relevance of travel with regards identity. The Son descends to the lower regions of heaven to conquer the rebellious Lucifer, who falls as Satan, and in victory the Son becomes Messiah. The next step for Messiah requires an even greater feat which is occasioned him by atoning for human sin on earth as Christ. For this to happen, of course, humanity must fall with Satan as the *sine qua non* of that fall. Again, due to the hierarchic structure, if Messiah is to be hero his adversary must be a worthy opponent. Next, I shall illustrate how the heroic, worthy aspect required of Satan as foe is contingent on travel as his journey towards Eden and “all our woe” becomes a heroic quest (PL 1.3).

## Satan's Quest

Taking Stephen Merchant's description of the epic hero we can see how Satan represents a somewhat inverted form: "The hero is engaged in a struggle with the powers of darkness, a struggle which must end in defeat and decay, but his heroism and later reputation depend upon this conduct of struggle" (20). Satan's voyage parodies that of Odysseus as he, too, must similarly employ guile, don disguises (or, more accurately, change corporeal form) and, in the shapes of Sin and Death, confront the treacherous pass between Scylla and Charybdis. However, Satan's journey, of course, differs from Odysseus' voyage as his destination is not the *oikos*, the home of return, but the colonisation of a foreign locus. Satan falls (and continues to fall) through hubris, the classic flaw of the epic hero. Yet, as it is also a typically human flaw, is precisely the flaw which endears him to the reader; an irony certainly not overlooked by Milton. We cannot help but identify with Satan's defiant metaphor that "The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven" (*PL* 1. 254-55), nor with his great soliloquies of despair. Milton must begin by raising Satan to a position of grandeur for two reasons. First, in order that the reader identify with him and therefore experience the depth of his fall, hence, fearing to fall him/herself. Neil Forsythe argues along similar lines saying, "the redemptive structure of the poem is repeated in the reader, constantly, with each satanic occasion, but Satan himself is excluded (he excludes himself) from this redemptive possibility." The reason being that Satan's "exclusion is a measure, finally, of the reader's salvation" (152). Second, to illustrate how unworthy of praise he actually is once Christ's sacrifice for mankind is related in the second part of the story. Hence Milton must construct heroic images of Satan which, in accordance with his hubristic personality, Satan unabashedly purports to incarnate.

Here we see a typical example of his self-aggrandizing when he describes the dangers facing the brave volunteer who shall venture to Eden “to learn / What creatures there inhabit, of what mould, / Or substance, how endued, and what their power” (*PL* 2.354-56), before assuming the mantle himself.

Book 2 in its entirety and books 3 and 4 predominantly are devoted to Satan’s quest therefore I believe the following rather lengthy quote shall be justified as a synopsis of the journey he expects to embark upon:

But first whom shall we send  
In search of this new world, whom shall we find  
Sufficient? Who shall tempt with wandering feet  
The dark unbottomed infinite abyss  
And through the palpable obscure find out  
His uncouth way, or spread his airy flight  
Upborne with indefatigable wings  
Over the vast abrupt, ere he arrive  
The happy isle; what strength, what art can then  
Suffice, or what evasion bear him safe  
Through the strict sentries and stations thick  
Of angels watching round? Here he had need  
All circumspection, and we now no less  
Choice in our suffrage; for on whom we send,

The weight of all and our last hope relies. (*PL* 2.402-16)

“The weight of all and our last hope relies” is obviously a self-gratifying depiction of Satan as a perverted Messiah, yet there is actually considerable truth to his statement for if their plan to corrupt Paradise’s inhabitants does fail, they shall indeed be faced with eternity in hell. Satan has cunningly opened such a grand speech with a double challenge to the mettle of all his followers: “Whom shall we find sufficient?” and “Who shall tempt with wandering feet?” These challenges naturally accentuate the bravery of whomever accepts. Satan being Satan, of course, is prudent not to wait too long for a reply in case anyone else accepts, “And so refused might in opinion stand / His rivals, winning cheap the high repute / Which he through hazard huge must earn” (*PL* 2.472-73). Milton is careful here to impart Satan with a sense of faux-heroism. Yet Satan’s voyage to Eden should be fraught with peril and adversity if Adam and Eve are to be given any kind of protection. *Should*, but as we shall see, his journey progresses with considerable ease.

Satan departs with his infernal crew then, “Explores his solitary flight; sometimes / He scours to the right hand coast, sometimes to the left” (*PL* 2.632-33), hence weaving his way towards the gates of hell. He ascends until finally reaching the roof where he discovers the gates: “three folds were brass, / Three iron, three of adamant rock, / Impenetrable” (*PL* 2.645-46). On either side sits a formidable shape. The first shape to block his egress he addresses thus:

Whence and what art thou, execrable shape,

That darest, though grim and terrible, advance

Thy miscreated front athwart my way

To yonder gates? (*PL* 2.681-84)

They parley and the execrable shape commands Satan turn on his heels, “Lest with a whip of scorpions I pursue / Thy lingering, or with one strike of this dart / Strange horror seize thee, and pangs unfelt before” (*PL* 2.701-3). Satan stands unterrified and would have engaged in battle, “Had not the snaky sorceress that sat / Fast by hell gate, and kept the fatal key, / Risen, and with hideous outcry rushed between them” (*PL* 2.724-26). The “snaky sorceress” we, and Satan, learn is Sin, and his challenger Death. When Sin first addresses Satan he replies, “I know thee not, nor ever saw till now / Sight more detestable than him and thee” (*PL* 2.744-45). It is completely understandable that Sin, having lost the attractive graces she possessed in heaven, is totally unrecognisable to Satan. Of course, in heaven Sin was Satan’s mirror image, hence her physical transformation further confuses him. Yet this is only because he has not yet realised how grotesque he has also become, how *degraded*. What he discovers next though, is that the execrable shape of Death is his son who as soon as he was born raped his mother causing her to give birth to more sin, “hourly conceived / And hourly born” (*PL* 2.796-97). Therefore, Sin breeds sin in perpetual rhythm. Yet the most bizarre revelation is that when she fell with the defeated insurrectionists:

at which time this powerful key

Into my hand was given, with charge to keep

These gates for ever shut, which none can pass

Without my opening. (*PL* 2.774-77)

God’s choice of guardian is therefore all too convenient, and in a parody of Satan’s defiance of his unacknowledged father Sin is all too obedient when he requests she open the gates: “Thou art my father, thou my author, thou / My being

gav'st me; whom should I obey / But thee, whom follow? (*PL* 2.864-66). She proceeds to open the gate which, "with *ease* / Unfastens" (*PL* 2.878-79; emphasis added). The gate, however, will not close which leaves the way open for all the legions of hell to break loose at a later time: "Sin and Death amain / Following his track, such was the will of heaven" (*PL* 2.1024-25). Indeed, to facilitate access to the new world Sin and Death are permitted to construct "a bridge of wondrous length" by which "the spirits perverse / *With easy intercourse* pass to and fro / To tempt or punish mortals" (*PL* 2.1028, 2.1030-1032; emphasis added). For the time being, Satan continues on his way into the realm where "Chaos umpire sits" and "Chance governs all" (*PL* 2.907, 2.910). Here, again, for an omnipotent and omnipresent being, God is conspicuously absent. His absence is particularly convenient when Satan suddenly loses the power of flight and:

Fluttering his pennons vain plumb down he drops

Ten thousand fathom deep, and to this hour

Down had been falling, had not by ill chance

The strong rebuff of some tumultuous cloud

Instinct with fire and nitre hurried him

As many miles aloft.... (*PL* 2.933-38)

"Ill chance," indeed, but, once again, not with regards Satan's purpose. No doubt such a fall rattled his resolve somewhat as he continues his journey feeling, "Alone, and without guide, half lost" (*PL* 2.975). Half lost, Satan need not wander long as his the fortunate hand of fate intervenes for this supposedly cursed creature when by chance he encounters Chaos and Night. Chaos swiftly acquiesces to Satan's

request for guidance and directs him towards Eden with the encouraging claim, “Havoc and spoil and ruin are my gain” (*PL* 2.1009).

Book 3 begins with God and his Son observing Satan’s progress while God exculpates himself of any responsibility of future events. We then follow Satan’s progress as he nears his destination until he encounters the archangel Uriel who sits guard in expectation of Satan’s appearance. Satan, however, guileful cad that he is, transforms himself and “now a stripling cherub appears” (*PL* 3.636). Uriel, not recognising his adversary, is charmed by Satan’s obsequious demand to catch a glimpse of God’s creative crowning glory and lets him pass. But as we enter Book 4 and Satan alights on Mt Niphates he begins to fall into self-doubt. As he approaches his first view of Eden, he also approaches full comprehension of his dire situation. Now, he truly is “alone and without guide” as, even were he surrounded by his infernal crew, he would be no less alone in existential turmoil:

Upon himself; horror and doubt distract

His troubled thoughts, and from the bottom stir

The hell within him, for within him hell

He brings, and round about him, nor from hell

One step no more than from himself can fly

By change of place.... (*PL* 4.18-23)

No change of place can ameliorate his condition; he has become static. Whichever movement he makes only returns him to his damned point of departure. He must now exist in perpetual frustration in what James P. Driscoll has termed an “uroboric cycle” of evil: “The self-fed, self-enclosed nature of its malice and envy precludes

repentance and so renders it a changeless absolute” which portrays Satan “as more like a black hole than like a vacuum” (61). Hence, Satan has, before the deed, already devolved to the form in which he will successfully tempt Eve in Eden: the serpent that feeds on its own tail. “Now conscience wakes despair / That slumbered,” we are told and “wakes the bitter memory / Of what he was, what is, and what must be / Worse” (*PL* 4.23-26). Here we have proof of the role memory plays in his torture as lamenting the past only confounds his present misery which, in turn, condemns him to a worse future. His recollection of a brighter past therefore shatters his delusion of self-creation and kindles his hellish guilt complex: “He deserved no such return / From me, whom he created what I was / In that bright eminence” (*PL* 4.42-44). The moment of reckoning has arrived for Satan when he becomes the very metaphor of hell itself:

Which way I fly is hell; myself am hell;

And in the lowest deep a lower deep

Still threatning to devour me opens wide,

To which the hell I suffer seems a heaven. (*PL* 4.75-78)

There is a slide to bathos on Mt Niphates when Satan finally realises that he is actually the catalytic condition of the very telos he strives to obliterate. It is at this moment that he gives his infamous soliloquy of self-realisation and defeat:

So farewell hope, and with hope farewell fear,

Farewell remorse: all good to me is lost;

Evil be thou my good.... (*PL* 4.108-10)

Lewis famously translates this last line as “[n]onsense be thou my sense” (99), however, a more sympathetic reader may well be inclined to comprehend the predicament in which Satan is placed. In order to retain some degree of sanity, Satan can only reverse the logic of his previous role from which now he is eternally exiled. Here, he can but accept the absurdity of his condition. It is almost an epiphany whereby he recognises himself as a mere plot device in God’s grand scheme which, in order to necessitate a redeemer, must first institute a scapegoat. With appreciation of his predicament, he now regains his resolve and emboldened proceeds to effectuate his own devious scheme in Eden.

### **The Fall**

To return now to the beginning, as is only fitting, I claimed that for Milton the notion of chaos is always literally or figuratively the sub-structure upon which post- and prelapsarian beings exist(ed) and is expressed by a dialectic struggle between reason and passion. As with Adam and Eve, momentary loss of reason can instantaneously signify one’s fall from grace when, “inordinate desires / And upstart passions catch the government” (*PL* 12.87-88). This dialectic, I argue, is ultimately expressed by the very personalities of Adam and Eve whereby Milton’s Adam is imbued with rational, extroverted tendencies in contrast to Eve’s passionate introspection.

When Adam relates his birth in Book 8 it is upon an outward looking that his sense of self hinges, if, strictly speaking, he can even be considered as having a sense of self at this point. His immediate instinct is to demand of the fair creatures inhabiting his world “Tell, if ye saw, how I came thus, how here? / Not of myself;

by some great maker then” (*PL* 8.277-78). Adam’s initial instinct is to search for existential answers from beyond himself. Who created me? How did I come to be here? What external authority can instruct me as to who and why I am? Adam next asks, “Tell me, how may I know him, how adore, / From whom I have that thus I move and live, / And feel that I am happier than I know” (*PL* 8.280-82). Adam’s initial instinct, in complete contradistinction to Satan, is to “know” and “adore” his maker. His first thought is “from whence did I come?” rather than “who or what am I?” Hence, betraying a desire to understand the origins of his being rather than his developing being. Adam becomes rapidly obsessed with expanding his mind and generating a greater understanding of phenomena which far “transcend[s] his own” which is to the grave detriment of his gaining any knowledge of *himself*. When he recalls the moment of first awakening his instinct is to reach out for external guidance, “While thus I called, and strayed I knew not whither” (*PL* 8.283). Adam has manifested virtually no self-awareness at all, and in this regard, when he says he “strayed I knew not whither” I believe this can be interpreted not only in the physical sense of which he speaks but, on a deeper level, in an existential sense. Hence, he is both literally and figuratively lost and, as we shall see, it is Eve who provides him with a sense of direction. Adam and Eve constitute two *opposites* within a conjugal *whole*: Adam representing the extroverted faculty and Eve the introverted. Hence, God tells Adam in his birth dream: “What next I bring shall please thee, be assured, / Thy likeness, thy fit help, *thy other self*” (*PL* 8.449-50; emphasis added).

From the moment Adam enters existence he has an insatiable thirst for knowledge, in fact, he is, “as one whose drouth / Yet scarce allayed still eyes the current stream / Whose liquid murmur heard new thirst excites” (*PL* 7.66-68). Yet

the knowledge he seeks is always of external entities whether they be worldly or divine. In Book 5, when the sociable angel Raphael descends to dine and converse with Adam he is driven:

not to let the occasion pass

Given him by this great conference to know

Of things above this world, and of their being

Who dwell in heaven, whose excellence he saw

*Transcend his own* so far. (PL 5.452-57; emphasis added)

Raphael is none too pleased with Adam's jejune awe of what transcends himself and attempts to coax him towards a more self-reflexive line of inquiry by describing God's master-work which, unlike the prone animals, "With sanctity of reason, might erect / His stature, and upright with front serene / Govern the rest, *self-knowing*" (PL 7.505-10; emphasis added). Adam, however, still isn't taking the bait and Raphael must repeat his message in less subtle terms by instructing him to "be lowly wise: / Think only what concerns thee and *thy being*" (PL 8.173-74; emphasis added). Raphael is so insistent that Adam be "lowly wise," i.e. recognise his corporeality, as it is only by comprehending his existence as both mind and matter that he will become "self-knowing." Not self-knowing, not able to choose rationally, and when matters concern Eve, Adam is far from rational. He is besotted by his co-partner to the extent that his uxoriousness will be the cause of his fall. Raphael makes one last vain attempt to quell Adam's fixation with Eve:

For what admir'st thou, what transports thee so,

*An outside?* Fair no doubt and worth well

Thy cherishing, thy honouring, and thy love,

Not thy subjection: weigh with her thyself;

Then value: *oft-times nothing profits more*

*Than self-esteem.... (PL 8.567-72; emphasis added)*

Eve, on the other hand, has no problem with her self-esteem. Upon gaining consciousness for the first time she displays far more introversion, “wondering where / And *what I was*, whence hither brought, and how” (*PL 4.451-52; emphasis added*). There is instant self-reflection on the part of Eve, she poses the existential question “who am I?” with specific reference to her present locus. She displays an inward focalisation, a certain, albeit nascent, sense of self. In fact, she begins to manifest the first of many traits she is to share with Satan: a pronounced narcissistic tendency.

As I bent down to look, just opposite,

A shape within the watery gleam appeared

Bending to look on me, I started back,

It started back, but pleased I soon returned,

Pleased it returned as soon with answering looks

Of sympathy and love; there I had fixed

Mine eyes till now, and pined with vain desire,

Had not a voice thus warned me, What thou seest,

What there thou seest fair creature is thyself.... (*PL 4.460-69*)

Eve is so enamoured with herself that for the first time a hortatory “voice” is required to warn her who the visage “with answering looks / Of sympathy and love” belongs to. This voice prevents her from plunging into the static self-absorption attributed to Satan which would have resulted in her fixed gaze petrifying herself: “there I had fixed / Mine eyes till now.” Yet when Eve does encounter Satan in the guise of the serpent there is no warning voice to help her.

After entering Eden, Satan disguises himself in the form of a cormorant and sits atop the Tree of knowledge when by chance Adam and Eve sit under a bower nearby. Adam explains to Eve the interdiction God has imposed on them to taste of the tree and Satan overhears. Now he formulates his plan and awaits the opportunity to effectuate it. He need not wait long till working in their garden Eve complains, “what we by day / Lop overgrown, or prune, or prop, or bind, / One night or two with wanton growth derides” (*PL* 9.209-11). She suggests they divide their labour and work separately because being so near each other:

Looks intervene and smiles, or object new

Casual discourse draw on, which intermits

Our day’s work brought to little, though begun

Early, and the hour of supper comes unearned. (*PL* 9.222-25)

In an echoing of the discontent in heaven Eve’s complaint that “the hour of supper comes unearned” suggests that she too needs more than a life of simple ease. Adam is initially against the idea cautioning, “Not diffident of thee do I dissuade / Thy absence from my sight, but to avoid / The attempt itself, intended by our foe” (*PL* 293-95). Yet, Eve’s self-esteem as pronounced as it is interprets this as a challenge, “And what is faith, love, virtue unassayed / Alone, without exterior help sustained?”

(PL 9. 335-36). Adam, unable to convince her otherwise finally succumbs, “Go; for thy stay, not free, absents thee more; / Go in thy native innocence, rely / on what thou hast of virtue” (PL 9.372-73). Now Eve is free to wander.

Eve’s wandering, of course, leads her to the Tree of Knowledge where she fatally errs. Satan’s first attempt at beguilement panders to her narcissistic proclivity. He claims that upon eating the fruit himself he has become endowed with remarkable perspicacity then resorts to flattery in a bid to coerce her:

I turned my thoughts, and with capacious mind

Considered all things visible in heaven,

Or earth, or middle, all things fair and good;

But all that fair and good in thy divine

Semblance, and in thy beauty’s heavenly ray

United I beheld; no fair to thine

Equivalent or second, which compelled

Me thus, though importune perhaps, to come

And gaze, and worship thee of right declared

Sovereign of creatures, universal dame. (PL 9.603-12)

Eve is well aware that she is being flattered as her response “Serpent, thy overpraising leaves in doubt / The virtue of that fruit” (PL 9.615-16), yet her self-absorption and piques her curiosity. She inquires further and this time Satan tempts her with the attainment of godlike status:

Ye eat thereof, your eyes that seem so clear,

Yet are but dim, shall perfectly be then

Opened and cleared, and ye shall be as gods,

Knowing both good and evil as they do. (*PL* 9.706-9).

This seals her fate. Having tasted the fruit and realised the gravity of her act she immediately reflects upon the fact that now the balance of power within the relationship has incontrovertibly shifted and for the first time she is in a position of dominance. She then deliberates upon whether to relinquish that power by offering the fruit to Adam:

Shall I to him make known

As yet my change, and give him to partake

Full happiness with me, or rather not,

But keep the odds of knowledge in my power

Without copartner? So to add what wants

In female sex, the more to draw his love,

And render me more equal, and perhaps,

A thing not undesirable, sometime

Superior; for inferior who is free? (*PL* 9.817-25)

The instant Eve transgresses she instinctively relates to a hierarchic structure: “Superior; for inferior who is free?” In mimicry of Satan she is now possessed by a lust for power. However, upon further reflection she panics when she realises that God must have witnessed the event and could be planning to punish her with death—although she still has no real conception of what that word signifies

yet—at any moment. Suddenly, the desire for superiority is superseded by the fear of solitude. Tainted as she has become, she flies into a fit of jealousy when she realises the probable consequences of the affair: that only she may suffer, “And Adam wedded to another Eve, / Shall live with her enjoying, I extinct; / A death to think” (*PL* 9.827-29). A prisoner of her jealous passion she resolves that, “Adam shall share with me bliss or woe: / So dear I love him, that with him all deaths / I could endure, without him live no life” (*PL* 9.831-33). Eve has effectively just decided to murder Adam by coaxing him to also taste the fruit. However, when she confronts Adam with the news of her transgression she is saved from effecting her malevolent design as Adam, due to his uxoriousness, decides for her:

So forcible within my heart I feel  
The bond of nature draw me to my own,  
My own in thee, for what thou art are mine;  
Our state cannot be severed, we are one,  
One flesh; to lose thee were to lose myself. (*PL* 9.955-99)

With the thought that to lose Eve would be to lose himself he performs the sacrificial act of joining her in condemnation. Hence, as with Eve, by transgressing he does lose himself; he loses his innocent self but gains that passionate faculty his extroverted former self lacked. And Adam’s act of self-sacrifice draws Eve out of her self-absorption to attain a new rational perspective.

Oh glorious trial of exceeding love,  
Illustrious evidence, example high!  
Engaging me to emulate, but

Short of thy perfection, how shall I attain,

Adam, from whose dear side I boast me sprung,

And gladly of our union hear thee speak,

One heart, one soul in both. (*PL* 9.961-67)

Therefore, we see that through negation of their former selves they are essentially elevated and reconstituted as two balanced individuals forming separate integers. Paradoxically, in “gaining” mortality they discovered their authentic selves as truly morally responsible beings. Hence Milton ends his epic: “They *hand in hand* with wandering steps and slow, / Through Eden took their *solitary* way” (*PL* 12.648-49; emphasis added). Adam and Eve’s solitary yet conjoined journey into authentic being therefore also marks the beginning of our own. And it is on this solitary trajectory that we shall embark in our next chapter with the concept of “authors to themselves” (*PL* 3.122).

## **CHAPTER THREE**

***ROBINSON CRUSOE (1719):***

### **MAN IS AN ISLAND IN THE ARCHIPELAGO OF MODERNITY**

*The mind is its own place, and in itself  
Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven*

*John Milton, Paradise Lost*

#### **Scene**

In 1624, the metaphysical poet John Donne famously wrote, “No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main” (87). The poem suggests that, regardless of how abandoned and solitary we may at times feel, as a species we are all fundamentally united. However, almost a century later Daniel Defoe would change the course of literary history by reworking the island metaphor to illustrate the contrary in a story detailing the minutiae of an individual completely and forlornly isolated. And *isolated*, we should remember, stems from the Latin *insulates*, “made into an island.”

Why this volte-face? I suggest that the turn of the eighteenth century marked the beginning of the collapse of feudal society and a significant waning of the Church’s authority. The most significant consequence of this seismic social change would be the inception of what Jürgen Habermas called the “Public Sphere”:

In German the noun *Öffentlichkeit* was formed from the older adjective *öffentlich* during the eighteenth century, in analogy to ‘*publicité*’ and ‘publicity’ ... It was specifically a part of ‘civil society,’ which at the same time established itself as the realm of commodity exchange and social labor governed by its own laws” (3).

This new Public Sphere provided a discursive space wherein the individual was now at liberty to voice private thoughts and criticism publicly, even with the aim of influencing the political climate. Yet, as Defoe reminds us in *The Serious Reflections of Robinson Crusoe* (1720), “All that we communicate of those things to any other is but for their assistance in the pursuit of our desires; the end is at home; the enjoyment, the contemplation, is all solitude and retirement; it is for ourselves we enjoy, and for ourselves we suffer” (3). Leo Braudy has also argued of the many “great literary changes of the eighteenth century—the new importance of the novel, the disappearance of satire, the fascination with sentiment and sensibility, the exploration of extreme states of feeling” and how they are symptoms of an existential anxiety stemming from the uncertainty of human character (76). For Braudy, the central questions at this point in history become “not ‘what is human nature?’ (too broad and timeless), but ‘what separates one individual from another?’ and ‘what is personal identity?’” (76).

Hence, it would appear that this new development is Janus-faced. On one side, the newfound liberty of self-expression forged a pronounced sense of individual autonomy yet, on the other, rather than simply promoting an enhanced sense of social bonding in the Habermasian view, this autonomy, as Defoe and Braudy suggest, also established a sense of atomised fragmentation. Ironically, then, it would appear that at this particular historical moment the individual abruptly

attained more involvement in the public sphere whilst being simultaneously reminded of his/her solitary stance within that very sphere. Consequently, what emerges is the distinct dichotomy of public and private selves.

Given this cultural focus on the self and the distinction between private and public life it should come as no surprise that the literary form of autobiography was particularly popular at that time. Autobiography, of course, is essentially the public rendering of private sentiment and is therefore based on sincere and authentic disclosure. And it is at this time, in 1719, that Daniel Defoe published what is widely considered the first novel in the English language commonly known as *Robinson Crusoe*. However, the full title as it appeared in the first edition of 1719 was slightly lengthier: *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York. Mariner: Who lived Eight and Twenty Years, all alone in an uninhabited Island on the Coast of Africa, near the Mouth of the Great River of Oroonoque; Having been cast on Shore by Shipwreck, wherein all the Men perished but himself, WITH An Account how he was at last as strangely deliver'd by PYRATES. Written by Himself.* Most interestingly, for my purposes, is the final short sentence: “Written by Himself.” This narrative style of faux-autobiography would be replicated in all Defoe’s major works of fiction and indeed could even be taken as his trademark. Indeed, in *The English Novel: An Introduction*, Terry Eagleton reminds us that “It is what [Defoe] himself described as a ‘mean style,’ one which seems to lack all consciousness of its artifice” (22). I shall return to the discussion of this faux-autobiographical style presently.

First, however, in order to conclude these prefatory remarks on scene it is important to highlight the emphasis placed on loci in this long title. We have the temporal locus of “Eight and Twenty Years” and the physical locus “all alone in an

un-inhabited Island on the Coast of Africa ... near the Mouth of the Great River of Oroonoke.” Hence, what is stressed here is the lengthy duration, the solitude, and the morbid yet fascinating threat of being swallowed “near the Mouth” of the exotic Great River of Oroonoke. The remarkably long time frame of twenty eight years of solitude lends the novel an epic quality, while the exotic setting of the Orinoco river serves to further distance the character from his reader. These two factors, I maintain, are responsible for the novel’s swift attainment of cultural credence as a myth of human individualism and self-reliance. That the “autobiographical” style of the novel should be introduced as the fulcrum of such a myth, I argue, is apposite in its representation of the social insularity nascent in the early Modern period.

Hence, this chapter shall address the notion that within the scope of autobiographical *Confessions* by St. Augustine (397) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1782) can be incorporated the “confessions” of Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, thereby denoting a shift from the religious to the secular. Augustine’s *Confessions* are specifically didactic in that they present a character model to be emulated as the individual journeys towards re-integration with the fold. Rousseau, by contrast, in the iterative stressing of his uniqueness thereby proclaims the impossibility of such a model. The novels of Daniel Defoe therefore straddle the interstice between these two *Confessions* insofar as *Robinson Crusoe*, as the prototypical novel, *formally* supports Augustine’s didactic model of a life which can be generically structured in accordance to God’s Word as the good Christian, while *substantially* reflecting a Rousseauian denial of that very model. Robinson Crusoe’s authenticity, I argue, is attained through a conflation of these antithetical models as he struggles to impose a personal structuring upon a world which is fundamentally beyond individual control. In the *Crusoe* novels, the authentic self is defined by self-

discovery arising from the acceptance of the worldly limitations that force the individual to adapt and recalibrate his/her relation to the world they inhabit. All texts deal with the rhetoric of conversion and requisite isolation reflected in Crusoe's belief that "Our meditations are all solitude in perfection; our passions are all exercised in retirement; we love, we hate, we covet, we enjoy, all in privacy and solitude" (SR 3).

### **Introduction**

John D. Barbour, in his 2004 publication *The Value of Solitude: The Ethics and Spirituality of Aloneness in Autobiography*, quotes Philip Koch's claim that "Solitude is, most ultimately, simply an experiential world in which other people are absent: that is enough for solitude, that is constant through all solitudes. Other people may be physically present, provided that our minds are disengaged from them" (1). Barbour further explicates in his own words:

Solitude is easily confused with related concepts such as loneliness, isolation, alienation, and privacy, and these ideas are often blurred in autobiographical accounts....Solitude is not the same as loneliness, which is a painful emotion of longing for other persons. Although the positive qualities of solitude are often contrasted with loneliness, solitude itself is not an emotion but a *condition*. The state of being disengaged from other people may be accompanied by various emotions or by none at all. (3; emphasis added)

Patrick Riley's *Character and Conversion in Autobiography*, also published in 2004, traces the conditional nature of conversion in autobiography from Augustine

to Sartre. He postulates that “conversion reveals itself as a structure lending coherence and continuity to the autobiographical enterprise” if conversion is considered “both historically as the Western theistic experience of change through which one embraces a new religion” and tropologically “as a transformation of character sharing the language and subjective paradoxes of religious vocation” (1).

Although *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719) is one of the best known novels of the English language, less known is that it became part of a trilogy. The subsequent volumes being *The Further Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Serious Reflections during the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* published the following year. *Serious Reflections* is a theological and philosophical companion to its antecedents to which I shall have recourse at various points throughout this chapter. It opens with “The Publisher’s Introduction” addressing the content of the first instalment of *Robinson Crusoe* and its public reception: “The moral of the fable, as the author calls it, is most instructing; and those who challenged him most maliciously, with not making his pen useful, will have leisure to reflect, that they passed their censure too soon, and, like Solomon’s fool, judged of the matter before they heard it” (SR 1). The “Publisher’s Introduction” and subsequent “Preface” by Crusoe replicate the original “Editor’s Preface” of *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* which to the contemporary reader can be perceived as transparently false, yet for Defoe’s readership may quite reasonably have been interpreted as bona fide. Indeed, the preface to *Robinson Crusoe* claims “The editor believes the thing [narrative] to be a just history of fact; neither is there any appearance of fiction in it” (RC 25). Consider next “Crusoe’s Preface” in which he claims:

As the design of everything is said to be first in the intention, and last in the execution, so I come now to acknowledge to my reader that the present work is not merely the product of the two first volumes, but the two first volumes may rather be called the product of this. The fable is always made for the moral, not the moral for the fable. (SR 1)

The natural question may be, why does Defoe include these appurtenances? I believe that in each case the construct of fictitious authenticity has a twofold function. First, it establishes an authoritative textual voice. It creates a form of logocentric realism and a rhetoric aimed at persuading the reader of the “veracity” of Crusoe’s account that strengthens the moral instruction of the tale. If there is already an editor who vouches for the reliability of the text it creates the impression of authoritative substance. Second, in doing so it establishes the notion of recognition and its contingency upon what can be considered a “reliable” history; one’s opinions (and, arguably, very existence) can only be confirmed by an external other. It is this second point, this cognizance of interdependence which shall serve as the port of departure for what I shall be later dealing with as the island trope. However, first it is important to limn the crucial role of the authoritative voice and the function of the faux-autobiographical style in establishing a narrative centre.

The inclusion of the “Editor” and “Publisher” creates a *higher* authority, a central reference point of “authentication.” This authoritative voice is, however, always bifurcated: on the one hand serving as an identifying support whilst, on the other, acting as an overbearing oppressive influence offering only one perspective. Indeed, it is, as I shall soon illustrate, the higher voice of authority (Crusoe’s father/the Father) that Crusoe will be forced to flee in order to “find himself.” Another point of interest concerning the claim that “The fable is always made for

the moral, not the moral for the fable” is that it appears both a logical yet peculiar sentence for Crusoe to emphasise. Logical, as it clearly intends to reinforce the moral pedagogy of the first novel. Peculiar, as the very moral of the novel is thrust into question by its contradictory denouement. As I shall soon argue, authorial voice and self-authorship are therefore already stretched to extremities in a novel which strives to establish a centre of self-identification.

If we now move from the “Publisher’s Introduction” of *Serious Reflections* to the origins of the “Editor’s Preface” in *Robinson Crusoe* we are informed that:

The story is told with modesty, with seriousness, and with a religious application of events to the uses to which wise men always apply them, viz. to the instruction of others by this example, and to justify and honour the wisdom of Providence in all the variety of our circumstances, let them happen how they will. (RC 25)

With the expression “justify and honour the wisdom of Providence” we have a near-echoing of “assert the eternal providence, / And justify the ways of God” proclaimed by Milton’s epic voice in *Paradise Lost* ergo we also have the first intimation that we are about to encounter a narrative centred, however obliquely, on a secularised Fall. Hence, although the narrative is expressed in the form of a novel, it also retains the universality of a mythical structure. This mythical structure can in turn be viewed as the point of departure from which *Robinson Crusoe*’s trajectory shall later be incorporated into the philosophy of Rousseau. Rousseau is concerned with society rather than God and will later be examined with regard to the island trope of both the original novel and the first chapter of *Serious Reflections* entitled “On Solitude.” As argued in the above passage, the novel, in a similar vein to *Paradise Lost*, is to be a didactic tool, an “instruction.” However, as shall become

clear, it is a strange pedagogy that is ultimately undermined by its own internal logic whereby the edict of civic and filial duty is contradicted by the trope of transgressive mobility. And transgressive mobility is the essential component in the novel as regards Crusoe's establishing a sense of integrated self-identity.

The first chapter of *Serious Reflections*, entitled "On Solitude," is, as far as this thesis is concerned, the most interesting as it expands greatly on not only the island trope of the original, but also provides "answers" to the extremely egoistic character of Crusoe and, from this narrator's perspective, man in general. *Serious Reflections* also reiterates the synecdochic character of Crusoe evoked in the original novel which offers the dual interpretations of the character as individual and/or everyman. Moreover, in these novels the notion of "authenticity" is raised by Crusoe himself:

I have heard that the envious and ill-disposed part of the world have raised some objections against the two first volumes, on pretence, for want of a better reason, that (as they say) the story is feigned, that the names are borrowed, and that it is all a romance; that there never were any such man or place, or circumstances in any man's life; that it is all formed and embellished by invention to impose upon the world ... all those parts of the story are real facts in my history, *whatever borrowed lights they may be represented by.* (SR 1; emphasis added)

Here we already have the oxymoron of "factual fiction" which throws into flux the notion of identity and the reliability of language in providing truthful revelation.

### Departures

Crusoe explains early on that he is the third son of the family and not bred to any trade and therefore his “head began to be filled very early with rambling thoughts” (RC 27). These “rambling thoughts” lead to an obsession with rambling itself, culminating in the disclosure that he “would be satisfied by nothing but going to sea, and my inclination to this led me so strongly against the will, nay, the commands of my father ... that there seemed to be something fatal in that propension of nature tending directly to the life of misery which was to befall [*sic*] me” (RC 27). We are here drawn to the fact that social position hinging on occupation or, given the Puritan strain of the novel *vocation* may be a more fitting terminology, implies a binding of the citizen to the social fabric. Devoid of this vocational bond one is ostensibly socially supererogatory. The individual is therefore obliged to search further afield for her orientation, for her calling. At this point it is pertinent to note Pat Rogers’ claim that “Many critics want to define Crusoe as the representative bourgeois, whilst his story is clearly that of an adventurer *rejecting* the bourgeois comforts held out to him by his father” (76; original emphasis).

Crusoe’s father, described as “a wise and grave man” by Crusoe, harangues him on the duty of accepting his position in the “middle station” of life:

He called me one morning into his chamber, where he was confined by the gout, and expostulated very warmly with me upon this subject. He asked me what reasons more than a mere wandering inclination I had for leaving my father’s house and my native country, where I might be well introduced, and had a prospect of raising my fortune by application and industry, *with a life of ease and pleasure.* (RC 27-28; emphasis added)

I have italicised the final sentence of fatherly counsel concerning Crusoe's Wanderlust as I find it serves as a rather interesting comparison to the infernal council in Book II of *Paradise Lost* where "Belial with words clothed in reason's garb / Counsell'd ignoble ease and peaceful sloth" (2.226-27). The reason being that it is precisely the objective of a life of ease and pleasure Belial suggests that Milton denigrates, one can imagine, as it clashes dramatically with the Puritan mode of life. The comparison is also pertinent as the infernal council terminates with Satan embarking on his quest "abroad / Through all the coasts of dark destruction seek / Deliverance for us all: this enterprise / None shall partake with me" (*PL* 2.463-66). Hence, journey and deliverance appear to converge in harmonious refutation of a life of ease and pleasure.

Another detail of particular significance is the unnecessary (as far as plot is concerned) mention of his father's gout which is of course historically considered an illness of over indulgence in, amongst other things, rich foods, alcohol and venery; hence its epithet "rich man's disease." Again, the subtle allusion to the perils of a life of "ease and peaceful sloth" clearly belies the reliability of his father's further advice:

That the middle station had the fewest disasters, and was not exposed to so many vicissitudes as the higher or lower part of mankind; nay, they were not subjected to so many distempers and uneasiness, either of body or mind, as those were who, by vicious living, luxury, and extravagancies ... bring distempers upon themselves by the natural consequences of their way of living. (*RC* 28)

Although there is no *explicit* evidence to doubt the benevolence of Crusoe senior's advice, the following quote does indicate the oppressive nature of father

figures in general and their (sub)conscious resistance to the son's liberation: "After this, he pressed me earnestly, and in the most affectionate manner, not to play the young man, not to precipitate my self into miseries which nature and the station of life I was born in seemed to have provided against" (RC 29). The point being that he *is* a young man which draws into question the relationship of "nature and the station of life" not as according, but actually as conflicting. In other words, whenever station of life and nature are juxtaposed we are really entering the classic Rousseauian critique of society versus individuality whereby society corrupts the individual by imposing inauthentic structures. A yet more apposite reading could be to say that the son always pays for the sins of the father. That can either be interpreted as inheriting the sin of Adam or, taking a secular interpretation, the father's moulding the son in his image. Furthermore, by attempting to "protect" the son from what the father calls life's "vicissitudes," could the father not be subreptitiously retarding the son's natural inclination towards empiric self-development?

The idea that the home can only be occupied and, indeed, *possessed* by the father or son is also strongly implied by the fact that Crusoe's two elder brothers are also conspicuously absent. We learn that one "was lieutenant collonel [*sic*] to an English regiment of foot in Flanders ... and was killed at the battle near Dunkirk against the Spaniards. What became of my second brother I never knew any more than my father or mother did know what was become of me (RC 27). I suggest that, given the prevalence of the trope of anthropophagy throughout the novel, we here have a subtle symbolic reference to the myth of Cronus. The mysterious absence of one of Crusoe's brothers and the other's death as "lieutenant colonel"—a military position of *middle* rank—therefore suggests that Crusoe Senior has symbolically,

in Cronus-like fashion, devoured his sons in order to retain his hegemony. John J. Richetti endorses my suggestion of a father/son conflict from an economic perspective by arguing that Crusoe's desire to depart is "to become rich above his father's station" (26), thereby essentially slaying his father in economic terms. He further elaborates thus, "The official and sanitised version of capitalist ideology represented by Crusoe *père* formally disapproves of a radical separation of son from father and of the consequent destruction of father by son in surpassing him" (27). Although I agree with Richetti's economic evaluation vis-à-vis the father's position, I disagree that pecuniary gain is to any degree an underlying *motive* for Crusoe's decampment. I maintain that in this novel authority equals freedom. Hence, if we consider Crusoe's departure from an authentic angle, by succumbing to his "wondering inclination" he is actually following an innate drive that spurs him towards the pursuit of autonomous self-definition far from the oppressive influence of the father.

The paternal influence would also explain Rousseau's main motive for educating his *Émile* in figurative solitude with mere gentle guidance by his educator. It also goes a long way to explaining why he insisted the only work of fiction *Émile* should read is *Robinson Crusoe* who, if I may borrow a Sartrean expression, was condemned to be free on his island:

Robinson Crusoe, alone on his island and deprived of the assistance of his fellow man and the implements of survival, nevertheless provides for his subsistence and conservation and even procures a kind of well-being. Here is an object of interest to people of all ages, and one which can be made attractive to children in a thousand ways. Thus shall we make a reality of the desert island which originally served as an illustration. This condition is

not, I admit, that of a social being, nor is it ever likely to be *Émile's* own condition, but it is the condition from which he should judge all others. The surest way to raise him above prejudice and to direct his judgments as to the true relations of things, is to put him in the place of a solitary man, and to judge all things as they would be judged by that man with regard to their actual utility. (*Émile* 217; my translation)<sup>2</sup>

As can be concluded from the above citation, Rousseau appreciates the trope of the self as island because such self-imposed isolation liberates the individual from the influence of others. If we now transpose this trope to Crusoe's scenario, I believe the island trope can be interpreted on one level as a caveat which addresses the impracticability of the father and son occupying the same place as there can be only one governor, only ever one alpha male in Crusoe's Hobbesian world. (And make no mistake, Crusoe's world is unquestionably both Hobbesian and masculine.) Crusoe himself later illustrates this on his island by affecting the role of "governor" the moment he encounters new arrivals impinging upon his sovereignty. Hence, even with this welcome intrusion—Crusoe has repeatedly pined for human society—he is compelled to define the parameters of (his) social etiquette.

A more cynical interpretation of the father's desire for Crusoe to remain also implies the need for domination. From the son's perspective, to remain would either

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<sup>2</sup> "Robinson Crusoe dans son île, seul, dépourvu de l'assistance de ses semblables et des instruments de tous les arts, pourvoyant cependant à sa subsistance, à sa conservation, et se procurant même une sorte de bien-être, voilà un objet intéressant pour tout âge, et qu'on a mille moyens de rendre agréable aux enfants. Voilà comment nous réalisons l'île déserte qui me servait d'abord de comparaison. Cet état n'est pas, j'en conviens, celui de l'homme social ; vraisemblablement il ne doit pas être celui d'*Émile* : mais c'est sur ce même état qu'il doit apprécier tous les autres. Le plus sûr moyen de s'élever au-dessus des préjugés et d'ordonner ses jugements sur les vrais rapports des choses, est de se mettre à la place d'un homme isolé, et de juger de tout comme cet homme en doit juger lui-même, eu égard à sa propre utilité."

mean his usurping the father's dominion or, by further assuming his own subservient status, ascribing his father yet greater authorship in prescribing his future narrative. Either way, as Richetti has also observed, a conflict of interest arises: "In *Robinson Crusoe*, a position is always relative; the freedom and defining autonomy of the narrative self is in the consciousness (or, better, the enactment) of this dynamic relativity" (24). Crusoe's "dynamic relativity" would require a conversion brought about through an insincere religious experience and the dynamism of travel. It is therefore appropriate at this point to introduce the original model upon which this faux-autobiographical novel is based: the spiritual autobiography of St. Augustine's *Confessions*.

### **Augustine**

Augustine's *Confessions* consists of 13 books; the first eight of which relate his sinful past up to his conversion. The text begins with the following eulogy: "Great are Thou, O Lord, and greatly to be praised; great is Thy power, and Thy wisdom infinite" (C 1). As he proceeds with his prayer Man's relative insignificance to God is established thus, "And Thee would man praise; man, but a particle of Thy creation; man, that bears about him his mortality, the witness of his sin, the witness that Thou resitest the proud: yet would man praise Thee; he, but a particle of Thy creation" (C 1). Hence, Man is but "a particle" of God's creation whose journey is towards God as aggregate: "Thou awakest us to delight in Thy praise; for Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless, until it repose in Thee" (C 1). What we are immediately aware of is that Augustine is addressing himself *directly* to God, hence we, the reader, are essentially witnesses to his confessions. We are witness to a redemptive soul confessing his sins with the hope of absolution and an

understanding of himself through that confession to God. Augustine, as a particle of God's creation, can only attain union with the rest of creation through God.

However, being a particle alongside fellow man can be misleading; other than God who can we unite with, who can we trust? Authenticating oneself in society always posits the subject as victim to the influence of others. Thus Augustine pays special attention in Book II to his sin of theft. Recalling his pilferage of pears as a child he assures God, "Yet alone I had not done it: such was I then, I remember, alone I had never done it ... But since my pleasure was not in those pears, it was in the offence itself, which the company of fellow sinners occasioned" (C 16). As Augustine's petty larceny illustrates, one's authenticity is constantly on trial in society. In other words, it was the influence of others that led him astray, "Yet alone I had not done it." It is clear that Augustine transgresses purely to curry favour with his peers, purely as an attempt to enhance his public standing. Confession is therefore necessarily a sincere manifestation of one's authentic remorse.

However, it will eventually be the influence of previous converted sinners that will sway Augustine to likewise convert. In book VIII Augustine recounts the conversions of Victorinus, Anthony and Ponticianus before his conversion. In a situation which echoes Barbour's claim that "solitude itself is not an emotion but a condition," Augustine's "Moment" arrives under a fig tree in Milan alongside his friend Alypius. However, he continues, "I rose from Alypius: solitude was suggested to me as fitter for the business of weeping; so I retired so far that even his presence could not be a burden to me" (75). I feel the image here is that although self-disclosure presupposes an other, some things are best disclosed only to oneself and to God. "This controversy in my heart was self against self only," he continues

(75). Straight after his conversion he asks in Book IX “Who am I, and what am I?”

(76). Hence, only God can provide him with the existential answer and only through knowing God is he to know himself. This is reiterated somewhat in Book X, “Let me know Thee, O Lord, who knowest me: let me know Thee, as I am known. Power of my soul, enter into it, and fit it for Thee, that Thou mayest have it and hold it without spot or wrinkle” (89). Therefore only upon conversion from the secular to the religious and the confession of his sins can he gain insight into a heretofore obfuscated yet hypostasized “authentic” self which is to be rendered less opaque through God. Transparency of self, however, is an impossibility Augustine is entirely aware of as only God has the perspicacity to perceive the depths of the human soul, “There is something of Man that the Spirit of Man that is in him does not know” (180). Union with God is therefore the pursuit of perfection. Yet, what this pursuit of perfection entails is an emptying of self as, born an inherent sinner, Augustine’s objective is to *purge* himself of his imperfections. Augustine’s route to authenticity therefore requires the process of *kénōsis*, or emptying of self, whereby the closer one gets to God the less one retains of self and volition. As the reader is witness to his written confessions of a sinful life, it would then appear that Augustine’s rhetoric of conversion is aimed at proselytizing the reader indirectly to follow a similar route towards authenticity. So, even though his confession is directed at God, the very fact he has written these confessions suggests Augustine is positing himself as an exemplar for his reader.

### **Rousseau**

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in his *Confessions*, also sets himself up as exemplary. In the Preface he actually removes God from the scene with a plea to his reader “in

the name of the human race not to destroy a unique and useful work which serves as the first piece of comparison in the study of man” (C 3). However, arguably no modern author (with the possible exception of Kafka) reflects the paranoid condition of modernity more than Rousseau whose *Confessions* relate the history of a man converted from social to solitary existence, wracked by the paranoia that his contemporaries were out to persecute him. He was, paradoxically, an author terrified by the prospect of his contemporaries publishing inauthentic versions of his texts after his death—and hence corrupting his self-image—yet who traced the misfortunes that led to his persecution and retreat to solitude precisely on the moment which transformed him into an author.

Rousseau’s *Confessions* contain twelve books with his conversion also occurring in Book VIII. However, note the stark contrast in opening whereby he addresses the reader directly. Immediately we are presented with a work that claims to be the only true portrait of man which exists, or is likely to exist: “I am commencing an undertaking, hitherto without precedent, and which will never find an imitator. I desire to set before my fellows the likeness of a man in all the truth of nature, and that man myself” (C 3). Evidently what Rousseau is stressing in writing a work without imitator is that, as the work in question is an autobiography, neither is Rousseau’s life, nor by extension Rousseau the man. He continues:

Myself alone! I know the feelings of my heart and I know men. I am not made like any of those I have seen; I venture to believe that I am not made like any of those who are in existence. If I am not better, at least I am different. Whether Nature has acted rightly or wrongly in destroying the mould in which she cast me, can only be decided after I have been read. (C 3)

It is interesting that, although claiming to be unique Rousseau's *Confessions* are clearly both a mirroring and an inversion of Augustine's. Where Augustine strives to empty himself of imperfection on his pilgrimage to God, Rousseau reiterates his indifference to perfection in lieu of terrestrial transparency of an authentic soul: "I have only one thing to fear in this undertaking; not that I may say too much or what is not true, but that I may not say all, and may conceal the truth" (C 169). Rousseau's truth cannot be found in any previously written book and therefore signifies a shift from the Book of God to the book of the world. Such a shift ultimately replaces God with Nature. And by replacing God with Nature he is also refuting Augustine's claim, "Thee, O Lord, who knowest me." Hence, in converting from the religious to the secular Rousseau is ultimately saying, "No one knows Rousseau like Rousseau."

Rousseau's conversion, contrary to Augustine's, does happen in complete isolation. Strolling along the road to Vincennes he happens to stop and read the question in the *Mercure de France* whether the progress of the sciences and arts have led to the amelioration or deterioration of social mores. This would instil such inspiration in him that, after discussing it with Diderot, he would write his *First Discourse* which would go on to win the prix de l'Academie de Dijon and propel him into the limelight with its publication in 1750. He would be transformed from Jean-Jacques the failed musicologist and composer to Jean-Jacques the philosopher and author. The paradox is that having now found his calling it would only serve to gradually ostracise him from society. It is for this reason that he claims to bare all in his *Confessions*, to place himself naked in front of his reader and tell all:

I should like to be able to make my soul to a certain extent transparent to the eyes of the reader; and, with this object, I endeavour to show it to him

from all points of view, to exhibit it to him in every aspect, and to contrive that none of its movements shall escape his notice, so that he may be able by himself to judge of the principles that produce them. (C 169)

Yet, in Book VIII, when he comes to the part of his life where he abandons his five children in an orphanage he abruptly stops with the claim that “I promised my confession, not my justification; therefore I say no more on this point. It is my duty to be true; the reader’s to be just. I shall never ask more from him than that” (C 348). It would appear, then, that autobiography in Rousseau’s terms cannot or should not reveal everything.

It is therefore relevant to briefly clarify the semantic difference between a confession and a justification. A justification implies that what the agent has done was faultless in itself, yet was misconstrued as erroneous and hence requires clarification to the contrary. A confession is an admission that what the agent has committed was indeed erroneous and therefore necessitates an explanation. In other words, a confession has the object of exculpation as it stems from a transgression or sin; a justification is a defence. So, the admittance of guilt, I would argue, presupposes a more sincere narrative. And this is where the two previous texts converge with *Robinson Crusoe*.

### **Crusoe**

At this point I feel it shall be useful to offer a brief account of the essential plot structure of *Robinson Crusoe*: He leaves home against the command of his father due to what he calls his “wandering inclination.” His first voyage, where he has barely left the mainland is fraught by, in his naïve seafaring opinion, a terrible storm which renders him ill and having serious second thoughts about the wisdom of such

an enterprise. Indeed, the storm has but “blown a capful,” according to his seasoned shipmate, and is even advised against embarking on a seafaring “calling” by the captain of the ship. However, with the wisdom of youth he perseveres and takes to sea on another voyage. This time he is captured by Moors and held as a slave for 6 years. Eventually, he contrives a successful escape plan and steals his master’s boat, agreeing to take a fellow slave, Xury, along with him. They are rescued by a Portuguese cargo vessel. Crusoe is so grateful to the captain that, despite having just proclaimed his love of the young slave for offering to sacrifice his life for him, Crusoe agrees to sell Xury—a Muslim—to the ship’s captain yet justifies himself with condition he be released after 10 years if he converts to Christianity. Crusoe makes it to Brazil where he establishes himself as a successful plantation owner, however, once again he succumbs his “wandering inclination” and agrees to take part in a venture with his fellow plantation owners to return illegal slaves to their plantations. This is the fateful voyage that will render him the sole survivor and castaway on a desert island for 28 years until he is rescued and returns to England.

Ian Watt claimed in *The Rise of the Novel and Myths of Modern Individuality* that Crusoe is the prime example of homo economicus. This is a sound argument, and one which I certainly wouldn’t contradict, however, I maintain that it is indeed his conversion that effectuates his eventual status as homo economicus. I prefer to take Crusoe and an example of homo faber for three reasons: first, his “wandering inclination” is in strict conflict with the stable conditions required for economic security and the middle station in life. On his island he must fabricate all he needs with limited tools and begins to comprehend the notion of use-value. When he retrieves money from a scavenging mission to the ship one day, he understands that it is clearly now bereft of any economic value and laughingly

reflects that “Thou art not worth to me, no not the taking off of the ground” (75). Second, because he carries this explicitly over to the notion of objectification and uses others as mere tools, as a means to an end. In fact, no thing or person is of interest to him unless they are expedient to his projects. He has always been an egoist, but it is only on the island that this egocentrism will flourish. As Watt notes in *Myths of Modern Individualism*, “His character certainly illustrates the psychology which Defoe had earlier described in *Jure Divino*: ‘Self-love’s the Ground of all we do’” (156). This is clear at many points of his narrative, not least by the selling of his “dear” Xury whom he promised “if you will be faithful to me, I’ll make you a great man” (RC 14). Third, upon his conversion he actually (re)constructs himself through the redefinition of his identity. His island therefore presents a blank slate on which to reinvent himself. Indeed, his religious conversion, as I shall illustrate, is also only expedient to him as a solitary on his “island of despair” and is abandoned as soon as he reintegrates with society.

In fact, it is upon his return to society that a reverence of capital will replace religion. In the pre-conversion years of his solitude Crusoe leads a forlorn existence cursing his hubris in transgressing the commands of his father. He is in a constant state of fear from the unpredictable threats of nature and the obsession that, upon discovering the opposite side of the island from which he inhabits has been the scene of a cannibal sacrifice, he too shall one day be consumed. In fact, the trope of anthropophagy recurs throughout the novel and I think buttresses his egocentrism by illustrating his fear of losing autonomy, of being incorporated into another. Again, according to Watt,

his egocentricity, one might say, is forced upon him, because he is cast away on an island. But it is also true that his character is throughout courting its

fate and it merely happens that the island offers the fullest opportunity for him to realize three associated tendencies of modern civilization – absolute economic, social and intellectual freedom for the individual. (*RN* 95-6).

Crusoe's irrational fear is instigated by the lack of structure or control he has over his existence. He is purely at the mercy of nature. Rather interestingly, his means of overcoming this is to write his journal as a form of therapy:

I now began to consider seriously my condition, and the circumstances I was reduced to; and I drew up the state of my affairs in writing, not so much to leave them to any that were to come after me—for I was likely to have but few heirs—as to deliver my thoughts from daily poring over them, and afflicting my mind; and as my reason now began to master my despondency, I began to comfort myself as well I could, and to set the good against the evil, that I might have something to distinguish my case from worse" (*RC* 42).

This is also the journal that his narrative proper is based on. So the writing of the self, as with Rousseau, ostensibly acts as a tool for structuring one's situation and identity.

However, this only works to a certain degree; it can't successfully explain the greater existential questions such as why he was the sole survivor, or why he disobeyed his father. It can't explain chance either, and he only has his first inkling of Providence when he is surprised to see stalks of barley growing. Crusoe candidly admits that until this moment he had "acted upon no religious foundation at all" nor had he "entertained any sense of anything that had befallen me or otherwise than chance, or, as we lightly say, what pleases God, without so much as inquiring into the end of Providence in these things, or His order in the governing events for the

world” (*RC 50*). However, when he remembers having previously shaken a bag of chicken feed out in that place, “then the wonder began to cease; and I must confess my religious thankfulness to God’s providence began to abate ... upon the discovering that all this was nothing but what was common” (*RC 50*).

Ultimately, and in keeping with his sense of self-preservation, his conversion only occurs when he is at his lowest ebb and is faced with his own mortality. First he is terrified out of his wits by an earthquake, then he is afflicted with a terrible ague and “frightened almost to death with the apprehensions of my sad condition—to be sick, and no help. Prayed to God, for the first time since the storm off Hull, but scarce knew what I said, or why, my thoughts being all confused” (*RC 55*). It is only days later, and still in a terrible fever, his “conversion” is complete after dreaming he sees a man descend “from a great black cloud, in a bright flame of fire, and light upon the ground he was all over as bright as a flame, so that I could but just bear to look towards him; his countenance was most inexpressibly dreadful, impossible for words to describe (*RC 56*). Surely this should be construed as a vision of Satan or some vengeful angel. At this point he says aloud, “my dear father’s words are come to pass; God’s justice has overtaken me, and I have none to help or hear me. I rejected the voice of Providence, which had mercifully put me in a posture or station of life wherein I might have been happy and easy” (*RC 58*). It is only now that he considers his transgression as his “original sin” and uses religion to assuage his despondency by ordering his world. Providence now invests past events with a significance which he had previously interpreted as misfortune. In a scene which mimics that of Augustine’s “tolle, lege” (pick up and read) while he is ill he takes a Bible and “the first words that occurred to me were these, ‘Call on Me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee, and Thou shalt

glorify me” (C 60). So now religion conveniently offers him the hope of deliverance. He can now look favourably on his solitude, with the following excerpt commencing with a mirroring Augustine’s text yet concluding in a Rousseauian reverie of solipsism:

“I was removed from all the wickedness of the world here; I had neither the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, nor the pride of life. I had nothing to covet, for I had all that I was now capable of enjoying; I was lord of the whole manor; or, if I pleased, I might call myself king or emperor over the whole country which I had possession of: there were no rivals; I had no competitor, none to dispute sovereignty or command with me” (RC 81-82).

He also uses religion to protect his “sovereignty” the moment Friday appears to threaten this total propriety. By converting Friday to Christianity he also empowers himself.

Crusoe has become an example of possessive individualism, however, it is only his upon return to society that any comparison to homo economicus may be drawn. Indeed, upon his reintegration in society homo economicus would seem a rather tame appellation for a character who is now more illustrative as an expression of capitalist drive itself. Back in society he inauthentically assumes the role of the acquisitive merchant. For this reason he can claim that “I might well say now, indeed, that the latter end of Job was better than the beginning. It is impossible to express the flutterings of my very heart when I found all my wealth about me (RC 279-80). Indeed, his infatuation with capital is so strong by the end of the novel that he almost dies when he is surprised to discover the wealth he has accumulated in the Brazils during his absence: “In a word, I turned pale, and grew sick; and, had

not the old man run and fetched me a cordial, I believe the sudden surprise of joy had overset nature, and I had died upon the spot” (RC 280).

However, despite his wealth his next impulse is hardly that of a charitable Christian. He has no qualms about recovering the sum of 5000 pounds sterling that the Prior of St. Augustine’s (no less) and retained with the intention of donating to the poor. Only later, in a contrived show of altruism, does he decide to leave this money to the needy. He also admits to his lack of religious sincerity when debating whether to return to his plantation:

However, it was not religion that kept me from going there for the present; and as I had made no scruple of being openly of the religion of the country all the while I was among them, so neither did I yet; only that, now and then, having of late thought more of it than formerly, when I began to think of living and dying among them, I began to regret having professed myself a Papist, and thought it might not be the best religion to die with. (RC 182-23).

Upon finally returning to England, he gets married—claiming that it was “not either to my disadvantage or dissatisfaction” (RC 298)—has children (all of which he relates in one sentence!) and, once again following his “wandering inclination,” sets off on what will become *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*.

Geoffrey M. Sill offers an interesting analysis of Crusoe’s character I would endorse which claims that “Defoe thus suggests an antithesis in Crusoe’s psychological composition between religious thankfulness, which exerts a conservative influence, and his imagination, which causes such ‘violent eager embracings’ of the imagined object ‘that the absence of it is insupportable’” (163-64). Sill’s description lends itself to the notion that Crusoe is torn between the desire

for self-preservation *qua* financial stability advocated by his father and an imagination which constantly strives for mobility. Ultimately, Crusoe is torn between the classic binarism of reason and passion. It is passion expressed through imagination that compels Crusoe to travel in search of the unknown. Or, again according to Sill, “Crusoe is drawn by his imagination toward objects that have a mental, but not visible reality” (163-64). His imagination, then, serves as a positive force within the figurative confines of an oppressive society as it expresses itself as the inner voice of self-motivation he describes as his “wandering inclination.” Imagination is the force which compels Crusoe to discover himself by embarking on a pilgrimage that has no obvious destination—or visible reality—specifically because the destination lies within.

However, once Crusoe enters a space which is quite literally oppressive, such as the confines of a ship or his fateful island destination, his imagination must be tamed by reason as it abruptly has nowhere left to wander. Hence, on what he initially views as his “Island of Despair” (RC 87), Crusoe’s imagination now becomes an affliction as, being physically incapable of any great wandering, it is now his mind which begins to wander into the unknown. And, as always, it is the unknown that is both sought and feared. Pat Rogers argues that “Crusoe’s fears are not just Hobbesian; they are existential as well as commonsensical. To speak of Crusoe’s *cheerfully* casting off his allotted role in life is to miss an entire thread of guilt, self-examination and recrimination within the book” (75; original emphasis). Physically trapped, either on a ship or on the island, his imagination, spurred by a guilt and excessive self-examination, projects mental objects that begin to manifest visibly as objects of extreme paranoia. In other words, in confinement things become *visible* for Crusoe insofar as his projections lead him to see more than is

there. Discovering the footprint on the beach is a prime example of a mind thrown into flux by self-examination leading to self-doubt. The footprint has an alienating effect as Crusoe's incomprehension forces him to doubt his ipseity: "how it came thither I knew not, nor could I in the least imagine. But after innumerable fluttering thoughts, like a man perfectly confused and *out of my self*, I came home to my fortification ... nor is it possible to describe how many various shapes affrighted imagination represented things to me..." (RC 162; emphasis added). Being "out of himself" forces a retreat to the integrity of his fortification and his journey is fraught with a sense of being pursued by shapes of his imagination. As paranoid delusions, such shapes one can only be interpreted as threatening a further or complete loss of self. It is therefore unsurprising that one of Crusoe's most paranoid fantasies takes the form of being consumed by an exterior force; in other words, being cannibalised.

### **Anthropophagy**

The anthropophagic trope is arguably the most startling and recurrent in *Robinson Crusoe*. Significantly, the trope is generally evoked in the passive form, hence connoting Crusoe's own paranoid obsession of being ingested by an Other. The reader is alerted to this the moment Crusoe leaves the security of home soil with the first metaphors of ingurgitation introduced in relation to the forces of nature. For example, during Crusoe's initial valediction he "expected every wave would have swallowed [him and his crew] up" (RC 31), yet as soon as the bad weather abated so too were his "fears and apprehensions of being swallowed up by the sea ... forgotten" (RC 32-33). The metaphor contains a suggestion of the lost protective sanctuary of the oikos and, by extension, the mother's womb which is replaced by

exposure to consumption by Mother Nature herself. It also reflects the anthropomorphic tendency humans have when discussing external forces and highlights our general inability as a species to decentre ourselves to a non-personal point of reference.

Crusoe's first sea voyage involves the metaphor twice during a storm which he is later informed "blew but a capful of wind" (RC 32). Moreover, the phrasal verb "swallow up" features on four further occasions, and the verb "devour" is employed no less than 37 times throughout the novel. Especial attention, I believe, should be paid to the inclusion of this verb. Use of the verb "devour" provides a most striking metaphor as it elicits considerably more violent connotations than, say, the simple verbs "eat" or "consume." Indeed, I maintain "devour" evokes a loss of control. It provokes images of a particularly aggressive consumption, of a tearing apart and dismembering. When coupled with nature this certainly does imply a most ferocious and unrelenting adversary. Yet, when attributed to a human are we not presented with a famished or gluttonous individual – gluttony, of course, being one of the seven deadly sins – and hence a loss of self-control? Indeed, I claim it insinuates an animalistic or bestial mode of comporting oneself, one which implies degeneration or atavism of the self. This atavistic or animalistic behaviour therefore gravitates towards Plautus' dictum of *Homo homini lupus* portraying humans as wolves and implying a politics of self-interest. Incidentally, it also leads us towards Hobbes' *bellum omnium contra omnes* of which Crusoe appears to be an exponent. For Crusoe, the ego and interests thereof are to be protected and advanced with pragmatic calculus, ostensibly devoid of remorse for anything beyond it. Humans, as we shall see, are important to him purely as regards their use-value.

Whether in relation to nature or man, then, Crusoe is repeatedly perturbed by an apparently primordial, yet virtually always unwarranted terror. The cannibal trope expresses the anxiety of losing the centre, of confusing or subsuming subject with object. The fear of losing the centre is fear of losing the “self,” i.e. the ostensibly integrated notion one has constructed of oneself. Active and passive annul each other – whether one devours or is devoured inevitably results in a symbiosis of one contaminating, or being contaminated by, the other. This returns us to the weight Crusoe attributes to the island trope in *Robinson Crusoe* and, more particularly, in *Serious Reflections* which, I believe, pre-empt the central tenet of Rousseau’s philosophy that society corrupts the individual. With Defoe it is clearly the Puritan notion that one must isolate oneself from the temptation exuding from others and that the only non-perverting relationship one can have is internally with God. However, the cannibal trope accentuates the fact that we are embodied selves that exist dialogically in relation to those that inhabit our peripheries.

Again we are reminded of the importance of recognition. Yet, to what extent can the individual establish a relationship based on recognition without diminishing one’s own sense of autonomy? How can self-control be retained when the very sense of self is dependent on the other? This is explicitly Crusoe’s dilemma and one which is solved with his estrangement on his island. The perfect solution is communion with God. An ever present yet absent other. One whom he can interpret through the ambiguous semiotics of Providence. In the extreme solitude of the island it is imperative that Crusoe anchor himself psychologically or risk sliding precipitously into insanity. Hence, this is a novel where the centre is firmly established and explains why Crusoe must settle on a religious hypostasis while solitary:

I spent the whole day [the anniversary of his arrival] in humble and thankful acknowledgments of the many wonderful mercies which my solitary condition was attended with, and without which it might have been infinitely more miserable. I gave humble and hearty thanks that God had been pleased to discover me, even that it was possible I might be more happy in this solitary condition, than I should have been in a liberty of society, and in all the pleasures of the world; that He could fully make up to me the deficiencies of my solitary state, and the want of humane society, by His presence and the communications of His grace to my soul, supporting, comforting, and encouraging me to depend upon His providence here, and hope for His eternal presence hereafter. (*RC 125*)

Now, by transcending his terrestrial predicament through union with God Crusoe can effectively reverse his situation with the comforting thought that he “might be more happy in this solitary condition” than in the freedom of society. Thus, Providence becomes Crusoe’s saviour as it eliminates the burden an overemphasis on free will imparts; when things happen, they happen for reasons beyond the individual’s ken or control. Providence imposes a heretofore imperceptible structure on existence and the island becomes a surrogate Eden. Hence, it is unsurprising that Crusoe discovers God during his most incoherent period on the island when he succumbs to the pain and loss of lucidity arising from a terrible ague.

However, before he discovers God, he employs another near perfect substitute who recognises him without demanding anything in return: his parrot Poll. By teaching Poll a number of stock questions and phrases he is able to retain a semi-integral notion of self through the delusion that the parrot really is engaging

in conversation with him. This affords Crusoe the delusion that his animal companions can replace human interaction:

Then see how like a king I dined too, all alone, attended by my servants. Poll, as if he had been my favourite, was the only one permitted to talk to me. My dog, who was now grown very old and crazy, and had found no species to multiply his kind upon, sat always at my right hand, and two cats, one on one side the table, and one on the other, expecting now and then a bit from my hand, as a mark of a special favour. (RC 157)

This demonstrates the extent to which a centred sense of self and, indeed, sense of reality, is a construct; yet quite obviously a *necessary* construct. Claiming that Poll was the “only one permitted to talk to” him is, from a certain perspective, the ranting of a lunatic yet, from another, displays sufficient rationality for him to impose a self-controlled structure on his reality. He therefore retains a form of order, with himself naturally at the centre, that would be the contrivance of a schizophrenic in civic society yet which functions perfectly logically on his island of solitude. Note how in his delusion of grandeur he assumes the kingly role while making a linguistic slip which reminds us of the somatic dependence we have on our bodies. By remarking that his dog was “now grown very old and crazy, and had found no species to multiply his kind upon” he is quite clearly projecting a metaphor of his own sexual abstinence. In turn, this metaphor reflects the denigrating effects deprivation of (inter-)corporeal contact inflicts upon the mind, portraying Crusoe almost exactly as Freud describes a paraphrenic:

He seems really to have withdrawn his libido from people and things in the external world, without replacing them by others in his phantasy. When he *does* so replace them, the process seems to be a secondary one and to be part

of an attempt at recovery, designed to lead the libido back to objects. (74; original emphasis)

Hence his need to substitute animals for people in the absence of any real society as an attempt to recover from the paranoia of anthropophagic consumption. This manoeuvre makes him feel less alone by creating the illusion that he is in control of proceedings rather than being at the mercy of nature. It is only when a real human, in the form of Friday, is rescued and becomes the second inhabitant of the island that Crusoe will finally be quelled of his paranoid delusions. The reason being that rather than projecting his paranoid fantasies onto a world of invisible threats, he can now master his fears through mastery of another human being, a visible, corporeal entity.

Of course, paranoia is only to be expected when dealing with a personality whose *cynosure* is self-possession. The insistence on an integral self is destined to encounter problems of self-authorship and self-ownership the moment the merest society is formed. How can the egocentric self co-habit the same territory as another without being inclined towards conflicts of control and autonomy? The novel suggests any utopian solution to be an impossibility as Friday's arrival on the island only assuages Crusoe's paranoia at the expense of establishing a master-slave dialectic. Crusoe's subjugation of Friday by naming him, imposing the English language as their *lingua franca*, and proselytising him religiously liberates only one of the dyad: Crusoe. The narrative suggests that within modern society one cannot do without a notion of selfhood yet, paradoxically, it is precisely this need for pronounced identity that instigates social division and structures of domination. Extending this argument beyond a single culture therefore draws us to the global scene and the conflict between Crusoe and Friday as coloniser and subaltern. From

this analogy we can imagine how selfhood is replaced by nationhood. Neither party *belongs* to the island yet as settlers a hierarchy of precedence is very swiftly established. The acquisition and control of land now becomes central to the construction of identity. Crusoe, the canny coloniser, is conscious that his freedom is dependent on self-possession. However, this freedom is also contingent on what he possesses for subsistence. As the island and all he has done to cultivate it belongs to him, Crusoe instinctively understands his need to continue controlling this terrain if his freedom is to be maintained. Yet, as Rousseau argued:

The first person who, having enclosed a piece of ground and said to himself “This belongs to me,” and having found people gullible enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society. From what crimes, wars, murders, miseries and horrors could the human race have been saved had but one of his fellow men ripped out the stakes or filled in the ditch and cried to the others: “Do not listen to this imposter! Whoever forgets that the fruits of the earth belong to everyone, and the land to no one, is lost!” (*Discours* 107; my translation)<sup>3</sup>

Although Rousseau’s argument, made in 1754, is intended literally, I suggest it can also be taken as a direct reference to sovereignty and the wave of colonial expansion that had been developing since the dawn of the sixteenth century. As Edward Said is keen to stress in *Culture and Imperialism*, “Crusoe is explicitly enabled by an ideology of overseas expansion—directly connected in style and form to the narratives of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century exploration

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<sup>3</sup> “Le premier qui, ayant enclos un terrain, s'avisa de dire : *Ceci est à moi*, et trouva des gens assez simples pour le croire, fut le vrai fondateur de la société civile. Que de crimes, de guerres, de meurtres, que de misères et d'horreurs n'eût point épargnés au genre humain celui qui, arrachant les pieux ou comblant le fossé, eût crié à ses semblables : Gardez-vous d'écouter cet imposteur ; vous êtes perdus, si vous oubliez que les fruits sont à tous, et que la terre n'est à personne.”

voyages that laid the foundations of the great colonial empires...” (70). Crusoe therefore becomes a synecdoche of empire; particularly if we take Said’s definition of imperialism as “the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory” and colonialism, a direct consequence of imperialism, as “the implanting of settlements on distant territory” (9). It therefore seems almost *natural* that Crusoe assumes sovereignty of his island and all who later inhabit it because identity and location meld into one.

If we recall how Crusoe describes himself as “perfectly confused and out of my self” upon discovering a single footprint in the sand, and how his immediate reaction is to return “*home* to my fortification,” we are alerted to his need for a scene, or fixed location upon which to *define* himself (RC 162). “Out of self” becomes analogous with “out of place” meaning he requires his fortification in order to fortify himself against any external threat to his identity. His fortification is also defined as “home” which, by extension, becomes a metaphor of self as both imply a sense of possession and provenance; returning to a location he definitively possesses imbues him with fortified self-possession. Now the link between travel and identity can be made by the oxymoron of *mobile stability* insofar as, regardless of where he travels, he can avoid any sense of alienation by “possessing” that terrain as long as he identifies it to a greater or lesser degree as “home.”

Before his discovery of the footprint Crusoe could claim that “it was possible I might be more happy in this solitary condition, than I should have been in a liberty of society, and in all the pleasures of the world” quite clearly because he had *cultured* the island to his specifications and could comfort himself with the conviction he was communing with God (RC 125). Such isolation presents the perfect conditions for authenticity. Yet, the authentic self experienced by Crusoe at

this point is chimeric as the conditions in which he finds himself are uncontested. The truly authentic, by definition, can only become such in conditions which threaten to undermine it. Hence, the footprint, as a symbol of society, challenges Crusoe's authenticity. This challenge is beneficial insofar as he becomes conscious of the need for his fortification which, ultimately, represents his idealised conditions of authenticity. His fortification therefore becomes the metaphorical point of reference from which to orientate himself within society. Serving as a guiding *ideal*, the transposition of literal isolation to figurative isolation in the social realm imposes a sense of responsibility upon Crusoe as it instigates an awareness that he is the sole agent of his actions. And as far as this ideal serves as a means of orientation it could be deemed a crude form of ideology.

Sill maintains that "to the extent ideologies are historically necessary, they have at least a psychological validity in that they serve as an organising principle around which men may move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc." (22). Hence, as long as Crusoe believes himself to be in control, whether that be of his fortification or his island, he is capable of recognising alterity. For this reason, although Crusoe initially flies into a murderous rage upon first observing the cannibals perform their festive rites on the island, he can later calmly reflect on the difference between both parties' moral and cultural values. Thus he can debate with himself, "how far these people were offenders against me, and what right I had to engage in the quarrel of that blood which they shed promiscuously one upon another" (RC 177). After much deliberation he concludes that by attacking the savages he would be acting in a manner that "justified the conduct of the Spaniards in all their barbarities practised in America" (RC 178). Crusoe's comparison with the Spaniards therefore betrays the fact that, although he has become a self-made man

in isolation, his redefinition has been effectuated in accordance with the culture he has brought with him. Ultimately, he has fashioned himself as the archetypal Englishman, embodying the values that distinguish his cultural roots from those of other nations. Moreover, as he further explains, “Religion joyned [*sic*] in with this prudential ... As to the crimes [the cannibals] were guilty of towards one another, I had nothing to do with them; they were national, and I ought to leave them to the justice of God, who is the governour [*sic*] of nations...” (RC 179).

Yet, Crusoe’s term on his island will conclude with him assuming the similar godlike role of sovereign after rescuing Friday’s father and a Spaniard from one of the cannibal sacrifices. Abruptly, with this increased population Crusoe can muse

My island was now peopled, and I thought my self very rich in *subjects*; and it was a merry reflection which I frequently made, how like a king I looked. First of all, the whole country was my own meer property; so that I had an *undoubted right of dominion*. 2ndly, my people were perfectly subjected: *I was absolute lord and lawgiver*; they all owed their lives to me, and were ready to lay down their lives, if there had been occasion of it, for me. (RC 240-41; emphasis added)

Crusoe may indulge in such reveries as “merry reflection,” however, as a synecdoche of English imperialist expansion we must not forget that such innocence can swiftly give way to the rapacious lust for a real “right of dominion.” As Hardt and Negri allege in *Empire*, “Wherever modern sovereignty took root, it constructed a Leviathan that overarched its social domain and imposed hierarchical territorial boundaries, both to police the purity of its own identity and to exclude all that was other” (xii). We now have the suspicion that, acquired in isolation,

Crusoe's newly discovered authenticity is at risk of being usurped by the imperialist ideology at the heart of his cultural origins. As we shall see in the following chapter, Crusoe's naïve delusions of grandeur had the potential to take a much darker turn towards an imperialist hegemony that was prepared not simply to exclude the Other, but to exterminate it.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### ***HEART OF DARKNESS (1902):***

#### **THE HORRIFIC ALLURE OF THE VOICE**

*So glozed the tempter, and his proem tuned*

*John Milton, Paradise Lost*

#### **Agency**

*Arbeit macht frei*. Translated: “work liberates,” or “work makes you free.” This phrase, inscribed over the gates of the Nazi concentration camps, is indubitably the most horrific example of irony to emerge from the twentieth century. It can be taken as an extreme instance of language, if I may appropriate a line from *Macbeth*, “That palter[s] with us in a double sense” (5.9.20). The situation can be interpreted as ironic following D.C Muecke’s definition of irony as “a double-layered or two-storey phenomenon. At the lower level is the situation either as it appears to the victim of irony (where there is one) or as it is deceptively presented by the ironist (where there is an ironist)” (*A Compass of Irony* 19). The irony of the phrase *Arbeit macht frei*, however, can only be comprehended once an external perspective or, in Kenneth Burke’s terms, “perspective of perspectives” has been assumed (*A Grammar of Motives* 503).

Considered on the most rudimentary, literal level, as far as the scene and agents are concerned, the inscription *Arbeit macht frei* may logically be interpreted from either of two opposing perspectives. First, from the prisoner’s mortified perspective, the phrase signifies escape from immediate execution only through

subjection to the hortatory work command. Second, from the Nazi ideological perspective, the Nazi soldier performing his task may actually believe himself to be “liberating” his nation through his participation in the abhorrent project of actualizing a world “free” of Jewry. Hence, assessed simplistically, both agents react according to the differing – in this case conflicting – motivations which frame their present existence. The situation can therefore be defined as purely relativistic, and as Burke reminds us, “in relativism there is no irony ... for relativism sees things in but one set of terms” (*Grammar* 512).

It is here that brief consideration should be given the concept of agency. Agency can be described as the means or way of doing something. In material terms, the most fitting synonym of agency would be *instrument* in as far as it is what is used to achieve a particular objective. And agency is therefore founded on motive in so far as it serves as stimulus. Hence, taking an example from the arena of politics we could say that a vote is a form of agency with regards the voting public as the vote is an instrument used to nominate a candidate. However, from the politician’s perspective the voter herself is an instrument, in so far as her agency serves the objective of the politician’s hope of nomination. As Burke clarifies, “We may think of voting as an act, and of the voter as an agent; yet votes and voters are both hardly other than a politician’s medium or agency” (*Grammar* xx). We can therefore rather quickly see how irony arises as regards agency. Does the motive belong to the individual, or does the individual belong to the motive?

In order to understand the irony of the concentration camp scenario, a dialectic consideration of all the relative perspectives is necessary for any significant meaning to transpire. To further clarify, I cite Muecke’s claim that “the ironist presents an appearance and pretends to be unaware of a reality while the

victim is deceived by an appearance and is unaware of a reality” (*Irony* 30). Or, indeed, Samuel Hynes’ definition of irony as “a view of life which recognizes that experience is open to multiple interpretations, of which no *one* is simply right, and that the co-existence of incongruities is part of the structure of existence” (qtd. in Muecke, *Irony* 22; original emphasis). In other words, to understand irony an additional, extraneous perspective is necessarily assumed either temporally or spatially. Kenneth Burke elaborates by applying “literal” or “realistic” terms to what he considers the “Four Master Tropes” thus: “For *metaphor* we could substitute *perspective*; For *metonymy* we could substitute *reduction*; For *synecdoche* we could substitute *representation*; For *irony* we could substitute *dialectic*.” However, “give a man but one of them, tell him to exploit its possibilities, and if he is thorough in doing so, he will come upon all three” (*A Grammar of Motives* 503; original emphasis). The ironic perspective, the perspective of perspectives, is a viewpoint attained through a development of all the terms considered as interacting in such a manner that “none of the participating ‘sub-perspectives’ can be treated as precisely right or precisely wrong. They are all voices, or personalities, or positions, integrally affecting one another” (*A Grammar of Motives* 512). In this respect, any trope involves travel, movement from one perspective to another, yet irony becomes the trope of travel *par excellence* as it insists that for interpretation to be successful one must go *beyond* the immediate (given) point(s) of reference.

Furthermore, as irony instigates a process of further development by displacement it is also the trope which presupposes transgression and therefore reflects a phenomenological approach towards authenticity concerning ways of seeing and interpreting by contradistinction. As Jacob Golomb elaborates, “Irony

brings out the self-detachment needed to transcend subjectivity, and enables the individual to refocus, as it were, on the emerging authentic self.” He continues, “The ironic posture, and especially self-oriented irony, enables us to take ourselves lightly, keeping us from regarding ourselves in terms of rigid a priori essences” therefore transporting one from a mode of Being to that of Becoming (29). Golomb’s description therefore reiterates the Sartrean claim that “l’existence précède l’essence” ‘existence precedes essence’ (17; my translation).

### **Introduction**

In this chapter I shall illustrate how authentic agency is achieved by the character of Marlow in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* as he approximates the ironic perspective through resistance to the allure of imperialist ideology. He does so by travelling precariously along the periphery of imperialist culture in contradistinction to Kurtz who, ostensibly embarked on the mission of colonial enlightenment, is eventually consumed by the rapacious clandestine allure at the tenebrous centre of the imperialist venture. Kurtz therefore becomes a victim of irony. Hence, the overriding irony of *Heart of Darkness*, I claim, is that Marlow’s journey enlightens him to the horror at the centre of Enlightenment rhetoric – based on rationalised capitalist efficiency and imperialist exploitation, yet masked as an altruistic project, or “redemptive idea” – which would ultimately pave the way to the abominations of the trenches of World War I and the concentration camps of World War II.

In his struggle for authenticity, Marlow explains “I’ve had to resist and to attack sometimes – that’s only one way of resisting” thereby alluding to the

distinction between physical and psychological defence, the internal and the external (*HD* 43). Of course, the further we progress up river with him, the more evident it becomes that the real danger lies not in the external, but in the internal battlefield of the mind. The further his journey progresses physically, the weaker his psychological resistance to the allure of hegemonic ideology. However, in order to successfully resist something it must be known what one is resisting. What, then, is ideology?

Terry Eagleton has interpreted ideology as “a *text*, woven of a whole tissue of different conceptual strands; it is traced through by divergent histories, and it is probably more important to assess what is valuable or can be discarded in each of these lineages than to merge them forcibly into some Grand Global Theory” (1; original emphasis). In other words, as he states more bluntly: “Nobody has yet come up with a single adequate definition of ideology” (Eagleton 1). Hence, ideology, by its nebulous nature, shares an affinity with the concepts of irony and authenticity, and becomes the final element of the triptych revolving around the distinction between appearance and reality, truth and falsehood to be analysed in my critique of *Heart of Darkness*. This is an apposite triptych of inquiry, I claim, due to the technique Conrad employs in the novella, ironically using language to express the ineffable: “Do you see him? Do you see the story? Do you see anything?” (*HD* 57). Moreover, in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* Slavoj Žižek reminds us that one of the most rudimentary definitions of ideology was given by Marx as “Sie wissen das nicht, aber sie tun es [They don’t know it, but they are doing it]” (28). And Louis Althusser expands upon the Marxist tradition claiming: “L'idéologie représente le rapport imaginaire des individus à leurs conditions réelles d'existence ‘Ideology

represents the imagined relations of individuals to their real conditions of existence' (Althusser 38; my translation).

Both Žižek's and Althusser's definitions of ideology describe the form of dramatic irony which, like the character of Kurtz, concerns an agent who through ignorance acts in a manner which leads him further from his goal rather than closer to it; each ostensibly positive act furthers self-defeat. The quotidian routine of every individual entails her or his participation in the unfolding social drama which contains her/him, however, by this definition of ideology the agent behaves much like Oedipus, unaware that s/he is functioning in a prescribed situation and manner much like "a blindfolded man set to drive a van over a bad road" (*HD* 67). From this vantage point we can understand how Kurtz "will be a somebody in the Administration before long. They, above – the council in Europe, you know – mean him to be" despite his own intentions (*HD* 47). Hence, as Eagleton states, the most difficult form of emancipation is from ideology, ergo "freeing ourselves from ourselves" (xiv); it is precisely such an endeavour Marlow valiantly struggles with on his river journey towards authentic self-detachment in *Heart of Darkness*.

### **Duty and Calling**

Thomas Carlyle draws the strains of work and self-knowledge together in *Sartor Resartus*, preaching the necessity of Work as a requisite for the development of the self:

A certain inarticulate Self-consciousness dwells dimly in us; which only our Works can render articulate and decisively discernible. Our Works are the mirror wherein the spirit first sees its natural lineaments. Hence, too, the

folly of that impossible Precept, *Know Thyself*; till it be translated into this partially possible one, *Know what thou canst work at*. (118; original emphasis)

Carlyle, therefore, presupposes an obscured, inner authentic “Self-consciousness” which can only be realised through self-definition disclosed in the process of work. This mode of thought certainly has its roots in his own cultural background, reflecting a residual strain of the Calvinist belief in the individual’s *calling* to his/her religious duty. Max Weber declared in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* that “it is unmistakeable that even in the German word *Beruf*, and perhaps still more clearly in the English *calling*, a religious conception, that of a task set by God, is at least suggested” (39; original emphasis). This, of course, is a description of the Protestant work ethic which dictates that “The only way of living acceptable to God was not to surpass worldly morality in monastic asceticism, but solely through the fulfilment of the obligations imposed upon the individual by his position in the world. That was his calling” (Weber 40). Yet, when decontextualized from a Providential order and recontextualised within the existential parameters of the secular human condition, I believe the very definition of both the work to be undertaken and the admonishing voice must be rigorously reappraised. These reappraisals, bereft of divine guidance, can only be achieved by the individual alone. However, how does the individual make an authentic appraisal against the influence of social rhetoric? Particularly when the collective voice is a resounding echo of the commands made by a demagogue possessing virtual Messianic status?

*Heart of Darkness* addresses these issues by depicting the character of Kurtz as the synecdochic “voice” of an ideology which empties the individual of *being* through subservience to an excessive collective obedience to *duty*. Such

subservience not only voids the individual of her of selfhood, but ultimately of her “humanity” too. Kurtz, therefore, stands as a trope for the voracious yet insatiable appetite of a nineteenth century possessive individualism which, ironically, only serves to dispossess the individual of autonomy by becoming a tool of production for the state. Hence, it also presages Herbert Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Society*:

Its productivity is destructive of the free development of human needs and faculties, its peace maintained by the constant threat of war, its growth dependent on the repression of the real possibilities for pacifying the struggle for existence - individual, national, and international. This repression, so different from that which characterized the preceding, less developed stages of our society, operates ... not from a position of natural and technical immaturity but rather from a position of strength. (7)

The worst example of such societies witnessed the transformation of the individual to a mere automaton within the mechanical, dehumanising conditions of the twentieth century’s totalitarian regimes. The character of Marlow, depicted as an individual whose whimsical adventure takes on an altogether more instructive aspect, presents an alternative existential trajectory of self-expansion through travel. One could say that Marlow “develops” or “matures” throughout his journey, eventually becoming a more responsible, ethically conscious individual by its dénouement which, as he attests, “was the farthest point of navigation and the culminating point of my experience” (*HD* 32). As Tzvetan Todorov has claimed, “L’aventurier de Conrad – si l’on veut encore l’appeler ainsi – à transformé la direction de sa quête: il ne cherche plus à vaincre mais à comprendre. *Coeur des ténèbres* est un récit de connaissance” “Conrad’s adventurer – if we still wish to call him such – has transformed the direction of his quest: he no longer attempts to

vanquish, but to understand. *Heart of Darkness* is a narrative of knowledge' (146; my translation).

Hence, Marlow's quest differs from that of Kurtz before him as Marlow travels as a passive recipient of knowledge whereas Kurtz travels as the commanding agent. Yet, both retain varying degrees of the heroism associated with quests. Kurtz embarks on an ostensibly Promethean exploit as one of the "knights-errant...bearing the sword" and "a spark from the sacred fire" (*HD* 29), whereas Marlow pursues a juvenile "passion for maps" (*HD* 33), the fate of which thrusts him towards the role of Hermes—stem of the Greek *hermēneutikos* and *hermēneuein* from which our *hermeneutics* is derived—whose journey reveals the dark reality behind the altruistic veneer of imperialist enterprise. Therefore Marlow, in relating his account on the *Nellie*, becomes the divine "messenger of the might within the land" (*HD* 29). Ironically, though, the full disclosure of his message becomes a linguistic impossibility "because no relation of a dream can convey the dream-sensation ... it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence – that which makes its truth, its meaning – its subtle and penetrating essence" (*HD* 57). This establishes a central theme in the novel pertaining to the gulf between phenomena and noumena, or appearances and essences, which language is incapable of bridging. "The yarns of seamen" we are told "have a direct simplicity, the whole meaning of which lies within the shell of a cracked nut," however, Marlow "was not typical (if his propensity to spin yarns be excepted), and to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze" (*HD* 30). It is Marlow's ability to travel on the peripheries of the imperialist narrative which permits him an incongruous insight into the reality of the exploit.

Hence, I maintain, we are dealing as much with a “narrative of orientation” as a “narrative of knowledge.” As a narrative of knowledge it ultimately manifests itself as a quest for truth which only reveals the very circumscription of such a pursuit.

*Heart of Darkness* above all addresses the limitations of hermeneutics by questioning the degree to which we can ever know the “truth” in itself. Indeed, if Marlow is right that “We live as we dream – alone...” the novella raises the existential question of the degree to which any individual can comprehend existence beyond the self (*HD* 57). However, what this ostensibly solipsistic narrative implies is that even though truth may in itself remain beyond the individual’s purview, the essential is to continue both questioning *idées reçues* and disburdening oneself of *idées fixes* as only through such a process can one attain a modicum of self-awareness. As Marlow claims “The most you can hope from [life] is some knowledge of yourself” (*HD* 112).

Ian Watt’s study of *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* also addresses the Carlylean influence in Conrad’s oeuvre. In his critique of *Heart of Darkness* he lends particular significance to *Sartor Resartus*—itself a highly ironic text and often considered a proto-Existentialist novel. There are indeed explicit references throughout the novella which imply that *Sartor Resartus* – which translates to *The Tailor Re-tailored* – influenced the philosophical tone of the text, notably that of the wayfaring central character, Herr Teufelsdröckh, and the focus on work as a requisite for self-definition. Formally, too, I maintain, the tripartite structure of Marlow’s narrative journey mimics the central conversion of *Sartor Resartus* as he traverses Teufelsdröckh’s transition from the “Everlasting No” through the “Centre of Indifference” to the transcendently affirming “Everlasting Yea.” Marlow’s trajectory, however, is an altogether darker inversion with the first section of the

novella recounting his ebullient departure exclaiming “Dash it all! .... I went along Fleet Street, but could not shake off the idea. The snake had charmed me”; the middle section miring him in a slough of lassitude: “before I could come to any conclusion it occurred to me that my speech or silence, indeed any action of mine, would be a mere futility. What did it matter what anyone knew or ignored?”; and culminating in the final section with his return to society as the hardened cynic “resenting the sight of people hurrying through streets to filch a little money from each other, to devour their infamous cooker, to gulp their unwholesome beer, to dream their silly and insignificant dreams” (*HD* 33, 72, 113). By the time Marlow narrates his tale on the *Nellie*, however, he has attained a detached, meditative stance; signifying a middle way of acceptance rather than indifference.

### **The Heroarchy**

Carlyle’s influence does indeed resonate strongly in *Heart of Darkness*. However, with this novel’s theme of idolatry and the danger of succumbing to the diabolic charm of a demagogue such as Kurtz, *On Heroes, Hero Worship, and the Heroic in History* is Carlyle’s work I consider to reverberate with greater force. One of the central ironic motifs in *Heart of Darkness* can be understood via Carlyle’s notion of the Great Man of Destiny. Kurtz, we are led to believe, is a “universal genius” of whom “all Europe contributed to the making of” (*HD* 58, 86). He reflects the character type Carlyle perceives as forging world history:

They were the leaders of men, these great ones; the modellers, patterns, and in a wide sense creators, of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or attain; all things that we see standing accomplished in the world are

properly the outer material result, the practical realization and embodiment, of Thoughts that dwelt in the Great Men sent into the world” (*On Heroes* 5).

According to Marlow, it is these Great Men who furnish human existence with the *Idea* which instils purpose in the social group, “not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea – something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to...” (*HD* 32). The Great Men of history are Men of Destiny, authentic world definers who enlighten the lumpen mass of fellow mortals by carving the divine path set before them. Their great deeds can only be achieved through an uncompromising adherence to the authentic inner voice which guides them.

Indeed, Carlyle claims it is this uncompromising adherence to the voice which is such a major aspect of their greatness. They are the secular institution of a Messianic figure combating a Modern world increasingly dominated by the “quackery” of a mechanized social order which “gives birth to nothing; gives death to all things” (*On Heroes* 7). What this quackery usurps is the concept of faith. The estranged individual of the nineteenth century no longer has any need of faith as a result of the atheism of Comtean positivism Marlow appears to espouse. In this regard, Carlyle’s remark presages the theme of entropy permeating the *fin de siècle* pessimism encountered at the very beginning of the novella when “the sun sank low, and from glowing white changed to a dull red without rays and without heat, as if about to go out suddenly, stricken to death by the touch of that gloom brooding over a crowd of men” (*HD* 28). As a Romantic, Carlyle strives to retain the heat and light of this Sun metaphorically through the spirit of man and the belief in transcendental truths.

Some speculators have a short way of accounting for the Pagan religion: mere quackery, priestcraft, and dupery, say they; no sane man ever did believe it,—merely contrived to persuade other men, not worthy of the name of sane, to believe it! It will be often our duty to protest against this sort of hypothesis about men’s doings and history; and I here, on the very threshold, protest against it in reference to Paganism, and to all other isms by which man has ever for a length of time striven to walk in this world. They have all had a truth in them, or men would not have taken them up.

*(On Heroes 7)*

Of course, the “isms” Carlyle cherishes are belief systems he refuses to acknowledge as the purely human constructs which most twenty-first century readers would be wary of as such. What the history of “isms” has bequeathed humankind, I argue, is a sequence of worldviews offering structure to collective bodies, which certainly does not, as Carlyle naively asserts, confirm that “they have all had truth in them.” Indeed, “isms,” as structuring worldviews, are what in modern parlance we term ideologies, and the “truth” each pronounces is always open to contradiction by the others. Hence, the reverence Kurtz is accorded in his jungle outpost is the very Paganism Carlyle defends but which Conrad attacks in his novel. Furthermore, the very language Carlyle employs in proclaiming that it will be “our *duty* to protest against this sort of hypothesis” discloses the strong influence of Calvinism upon his own thought. Although he claimed to have abandoned his religious beliefs, it is evident that the residue of his Calvinist background entrenched him in his firm belief in absolute truth and glorification in the duty or *calling* to a higher cause. Not being a prophet himself, however, Carlyle could never predict that in the twentieth century blind faith in higher causes would

actually lead to various “isms” that did indeed “give birth to nothing; give death to all things.”

The novel parallels the recurrent theme of the split between reality and semblance in *On Heroes*. “It is the property of every Hero, in every time, in every place and situation, that he come back to reality; that he stand upon things, and not shows of things (105). Carlyle argues that hero-worship is a timeless recurrence, implying that it is an innate psychological trait shared by all: “‘Gold,’ Hero-worship, is nevertheless, as it was always and everywhere, and cannot cease till man himself ceases” (14; original emphasis). The metaphorical equation of “gold” as “Hero-worship” thereby stresses the economic quality of such a relation. In the figurative sense, the mimetic influence of the Hero figure functions within the constructs of self-fashioning by presenting a desirable model towards which one may orient oneself. Literally speaking, the Hero figure of Kurtz in the novel accrues inordinate revenue through his obsessive and occult accumulation of ivory. In economic terms, then, investment in the hero-figure as an ideal is of considerable value in character formation, however, the temptation to over-invest in the influential figure (or thing idealised) logically leads to a peripeteia whereby the individual no longer gains in character formation but is reduced to a shadowy mimesis of that figure. The currency of hero-worship therefore implies not only potential profit, but an equal potential for loss.

Hierarchy, or *Heroarchy* (Carlyle’s neologism), and capitalist enterprise are also melded together within a value system: “They are all as bank-notes, these social dignitaries, all representing gold;—and several of them, alas, always are *forged* notes” (14; original emphasis). The novella is fully conscious of Carlyle’s metaphor of the hero as *currency* yet firmly questions this premise as Kurtz, the worshipped

hero, eventually succumbs to a base fetishism of the worshipped commodity: “The word ‘ivory’ rang in the air, was whispered, was sighed. You would think they were praying to it” (*HD* 52). This obeisance is metaphorically limned by the conflation of Kurtz’s skull into an ivory ball, hence suggesting his unadulterated consumption by the commodity:

The wilderness had patted him on the head, and, behold, it was like a ball – an ivory ball; it had caressed him, and – lo! – he had withered; it had taken him, loved him, embraced him, got into his veins, consumed his flesh, and sealed his soul to its own by the inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish initiation. He was its spoiled and pampered favourite. (*HD* 84)

The “wilderness” here, I argue, can be interpreted as a metaphor for any external influence which denigrates the individual’s autonomy. The imagery of a force which “caressed,” “loved,” and “embraced” him while “[getting] into his veins” and “consuming his flesh” in “some devilish initiation” suggests violation by a succubus, which connects with the novel’s recurrent motif of life as a nightmare: the waking nightmare of ideological false consciousness. Interpreted thus, the influential spirit first permeates the individual’s mind then “seals his soul to its own” in the same supine manner one falls under the influence of fixed ideas; therefore implying the danger of idealism itself.

Hence, *Heart of Darkness* simultaneously reverses Carlyle’s hero principle by demythologising the hero figure represented by Kurtz whilst illustrating the strong allure of that very figure. Kurtz, we are informed, is “a prodigy .... an emissary of pity, and science, and progress” providing “for the guidance of the cause entrusted to us by Europe, so to speak, the higher intelligence, wide

sympathies, a singleness of purpose” and therefore representative of the alleged altruism of colonialist ideology (*HD* 55). Disturbingly, however, this “entrusted cause” and “singleness of purpose” reflects Hitler’s *Weltanschauung* expressed in *Mein Kampf* that Germany’s world domination would achieve “peace, supported not by the palm branches of tearful pacifist professional female mourners, but founded by the victorious sword of a people of overlords which puts the world into the service of a higher culture” (qtd. in Fromm 195). Furthermore, we are reminded that Kurtz was a poet, politician, painter, and journalist, hence, representing the multifaceted character of Carlyle’s Hero: “He is practically the summary for us of *all* the various figures of Heroism” establishing himself as “*Rex*, Regulator, *Roi*: our own name is still better; King, *Konning*, which means *Can*-ning, Able-man” (*On Heroes* 165; original emphasis).

Yet, despite all his “great qualities” Kurtz has been selected to rise to the top of the administration by a higher authority which is not divine, but rather the bureaucratic capitalist machine: “They, above – the Council in Europe, you know – mean him to be” (*HD* 47). The hypostasis of a prescribed role, which supports both the Man of Destiny and the Company idol, therefore throws the very idea of free will into dispute. For this reason, the longer Kurtz remains in isolation at the central station, the more he is affected by a *calling* from the darker side of the human psyche in what could be interpreted as an inversion of Plato’s cave analogy. “You remember that fancy of Plato’s, of a man who had grown to maturity in some dark distance, and was brought on a sudden into the upper air to see the sun rise[?]” (Carlyle, *On Heroes* 10), well, the “original” Kurtz who arrives as the emissary of light and progress eventually regresses into this cave – or natural tomb - of malefic darkness. Despite Carlyle’s veneration of the Hero figure, he is conscious that:

Multitudes of Great Men figure in History as false selfish men; but if we will consider it, they are but *figures* for us, unintelligible shadows; we do not see into them as men who could have existed at all. A superficial, unbelieving generation only, with no eye but for the surfaces and semblances of things, could form such notions of Great Men. Can a great soul be possible without a *conscience* in it, the essence of all *real* souls, great or small? (*On Heroes* 178; original emphasis)

Kurtz is indeed a “figure” in the novella; he is a figure of speech, a synecdoche of imperialist culture who, Marlow specifically informs us, “presented himself as a voice” (*HD* 83). Hence, Kurtz as “A voice! a voice! It rang deep to the very last” becomes the representative part for the whole, thing contained for the container, otherwise stated a synecdoche of capitalist imperialist ideology (*HD* 110). Kurtz is the figurative angel of Enlightenment who departs as Lucifer and falls as Satan. As the Promethean light bearer of European progress he must carry his culture with him. Yet, unfortunately for him he is ignorant that as he transports his culture, his culture also transports him, ultimately imprisoning him within the psychological confines his isolated stasis in the jungle outpost represents metaphorically. The more he succumbs to and *embodies* the sham ideology of imperialist altruism, the further he is *disembodied* of any authentic selfhood. Indeed, his existence ironically culminates in an “authentic” expression of the ideology which has corrupted his intentions and rendered inauthentic his original trajectory, revealing him to be “hollow at the core” (*HD* 97).

Conrad has specifically laid out his characters (Manager, Chief Accountant, etc.) and locations (Sepulchral City, Inner and Outer Station, etc) as “figures” or generic types, dealing with the “outer shells.” (The Congo is often assumed to be

the geographical heart of darkness within the novella however neither Marlow nor the frame narrator ever specifies the steamboat's destination as such.) With the exception of Marlow and Kurtz, who have proper names, all the characters are named generically in accordance to their function within the narrative. When Marlow asks the Brickmaker who Kurtz is the latter retorts that he is the chief of the Inner Station. Marlow scoffs at such an empty description replying, "And you are the brickmaker of the Central Station. Everyone knows that" (*HD* 55). These characters are hollow "papier-mâché Mephistopheles" who are but external appearance; breaching their surface would reveal "nothing inside but a little loose dirt, maybe" (*HD* 56). They have disburdened themselves of any interior turmoil by attaching themselves to external compasses which direct them down prescribed paths. As unique individuals, Marlow and Kurtz are therefore both deviants, yet both come to understand that their so-called "free will" has strict limitations. Yet it is Marlow's restraint which saves him from following Kurtz over that precipice which plunges the self into a hollow abyss.

Marlow, as he progresses up river, is constantly pursued by imperialist ideology and at times betrays his resistance to it through slips of hypocritical observations. His discourse fluctuates between consciously condemning the project of colonialism while subconsciously revealing a hypocritical endorsement of it which, only later, in recounting his story on the *Nellie*, does he become fully conscious of: "I became in an instant as much of a pretence as rest of the bewitched pilgrims. This simply because I had a notion it somehow would be of help to that Kurtz whom at that time I did not see" (*HD* 57). This is a prime example of the insidious influence ideology inflicts upon the individual. However, it is Marlow's particular mode of travel, stemming from an innate empathy and drive to

comprehend the Other, which will eventually draw him beyond the full grasp of ideology and towards an understanding attained by an ironic perspective.

Marlow, we are told, “was a seaman, but he was a *wanderer*, too, while most seamen lead, if one may so express it, a sedentary life. Their minds are of the stay-at-home order, and their home is always with them – the ship; and so is there country – the sea (*HD* 29; emphasis added). Hence, Marlow’s deviancy, his proclivity to wander, is reflected by the very fact that as a seaman he is willing to turn fresh water sailor for his journey towards Kurtz. It is, therefore, precisely his *deviant* nature which permits him to slip the grasp of a hegemonic rhetoric responsible for the parochial mentality of the typical seaman for whom “One ship is very much like another, and the sea is always the same” (*HD* 29). The immutability of the collective mindset and metaphoric negation of mobility means “the foreign shores, the foreign faces, the changing immensity of life, glide past, veiled not by a sense of mystery but by a slightly disdainful ignorance” (*HD* 29-30). Hence, even Kurtz, the prodigy, the longer he remains in the stasis of the inner station, the more he becomes a fanatical tool of the Company, therefore, the less he is himself, and the greater his immurement within capitalist imperialist ideology. His obsessive acquisition of ivory is mirrored by his loss of individuality as he becomes complicit with the rapacious hegemonic project: “Everything belonged to him – but that was a trifle. The thing was to know what he belonged to, how many powers of darkness claimed him for their own” (*HD* 85). Hence, the novel couples “The fascination of the abomination” with the “unselfish belief in the idea you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to...” while highlighting the slim interstice which separates the two (*HD* 31, 32). Indeed, the following passage from *On Heroes* draws distinct parallels between “truth” and the character of Kurtz:

The nakedest, savagest reality, I say, is preferable to any semblance, however dignified. Besides, it will clothe itself with *due* semblance by and by, if it be real. No fear of that; actually no fear at all. Given the living *man*, there will be *clothes* found for him; he will find himself clothes. (174; original emphasis)

Kurtz, as false prophet, gradually loses not only his apparel, but even the very flesh which his diseased body progressively emaciates. As Marlow's first encounter with the great man reminds us, "His covering had fallen off, and his body emerged from it pitiful and appalling as from a winding sheet," yet, despite this, "A deep voice reached me faintly" (*HD* 99).

### **Rhetoric and Ideology**

The preceding oxymoron concerning vocal depth and superficial reception is a succinct definition of the effects of rhetoric. "Speech designed to persuade" (*dicere ad persuadendum accommodare*): this is the basic definition for rhetoric (and its synonym, "eloquence,") given in Cicero's dialogue *De Oratore*," Kenneth Burke informs us (*A Rhetoric of Motives* 49). Hence rhetoric, as its synonym eloquence suggests, addresses the receiver in insidious fashion. Functioning like Kurtz, "A voice! a voice! It was grave, profound vibrating, while the man did not seem capable of a whisper" (*HD* 100), it is the subtlety of the language employed which wields such potency. The obfuscating confluence of voices throughout the novel—illustrated by a narrative structure whereby Marlow's narration often segues imperceptibly into the primary narrator's—not only models the confusion experienced by the characters within the novel but also effectuates this by

subverting the reader's interpretation, too. Marlow's description of Kurtz's report for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs provides a concise definition of how rhetoric, and by extension ideology, function:

The peroration was magnificent, though difficult to remember, you know. It gave me the notion of an exotic Immensity ruled by an august Benevolence. It made me tingle with enthusiasm. This was the *unbounded power of eloquence – of words – of burning noble words*. There were no practical hints to interrupt the *magic* current of phrases ... *It was very simple[.]* (HD 87; emphasis added)

The “eloquence of words” rings particularly true for how the rhetoric of propaganda dupes the receiver. The “magic” of the “simple” expressions employed make it universally accessible yet “difficult to remember” exactly how the effect was created. One could almost say there is a somewhat imperceptible fusion of addresser and addressee. “Longinus refers to that kind of elation wherein the audience feels as though it were not merely receiving, but were itself creatively participating in the poet's or speaker's assertion” Burke apprises us before conjecturing, “Could we not say that, in such cases, the audience is exalted by the assertion because it has the feel of collaborating in the assertion?” (*A Rhetoric of Motives* 58). This, I argue, is ideology's real power; the real message is always disguised or “hidden” from the individual it manipulates yet manifests itself through subconscious complicity. This is revealed ironically by Kurtz's addendum to his report for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs: “Exterminate all the brutes!” (HD 87). Hence, in a report which reflects the desired ideological message that the Europeans “must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings,” able to “exert a power for good practically

unbounded” and *suppress* their savage customs, Kurtz expresses the most savage imperative of the entire novella—Exterminate all the brutes!—thereby unconsciously disclosing what really underscores imperialist ideology (*HD* 86-87). As Marlow attests, “The curious part was that he had apparently forgotten all about that valuable postscriptum, because, later on, *when he in a sense came to himself*, he repeatedly entreated me to take good care of ‘my pamphlet’ (he called it)” (*HD* 87; emphasis added). Kurtz, in following the false (prescribed) ideals which have been instilled in him back in Europe, is gradually corrupted by the virus-like proliferation of that same ideology’s real message. Hence, Kurtz’s valedictory cry “The horror! The horror!” is a decoding *in extremis* of that message which enables him to comprehend that, while pursuing what he thought were his honourable ideals, he has been insidiously duped into acting as a motor of the very project he abhors. As Hitler was all too aware, when humans succumb to the allure of the hegemonic voice, “They neither realise the impudence with which they are spiritually terrorized, nor the outrageous curtailment of their human liberties for in no way does the delusion of this doctrine dawn on them” (qtd. in Fromm 192).

At this point I must stress that I do not claim that rhetoric is synonymous with ideology. However, as persuasion is synonymous with rhetoric, I do believe that the function of ideology is dependent on rhetoric. Burke elaborates: “Insofar as a choice of *action* is restricted, rhetoric seeks rather to have a formative effect upon *attitude* (as a criminal condemned to death might by priestly persuasion be brought to an attitude of repentance and resignation)” (*Rhetoric* 50; original emphasis). Yet, “While the active form of *peitho* means to ‘persuade,’ its middle and passive forms mean to ‘obey’” (*Rhetoric* 52). Rhetoric, I claim, is therefore such an effective form of language due to an already existing subconscious *desire* within the individual to

agree with others. The fear of isolation, of estrangement or ostracism from the collective plays such a strong role in the formation of society that we are virtually preconditioned (by this fear) to connect with others. Hence, it could be said that society itself instigates a subconscious drive towards symbiosis, a striving for a return to that prelapsarian symbiosis enjoyed by Adam and Eve or, indeed, the Platonic *Symposium* (which would also reflect the frame narration of the novel). That this symbiosis is an unattainable utopian dream has no bearing on the logic of the instinctual compulsion.

According to Fromm, “Religion and nationalism, as well as any custom and any belief however absurd and degrading, if it only connects the individual with others, are refuges from what man most dreads: isolation” (15). The asinine camaraderie of the pilgrims and their fellow Europeans bears testament to this claim. Their violent antipathy towards the indigenes serves to establish a bond between them at the expense of the other. In fact, it is the very violence perpetrated which concretises their cultural tie; by projecting their own destructive impulses upon the indigenes they construct the illusion of fraternity required to maintain the imperialist mindscape. A particular example is when the natives fire a warning barrage of arrows at the steamer, vainly attempting to refute their approach, which is immediately - and gleefully - interpreted as an attack by the pilgrims. The irony of this is not lost on the perspicacious Marlow as his critique of one of the pilgrims professes: ““Say! We must have made a glorious slaughter of them in the bush. Eh? What do you think? Say?’ He positively danced, the blood thirsty little gingery beggar. And he had nearly fainted when he saw a wounded man!” (*HD* 89). Having realised that the pilgrims had been shooting inaccurately from the hip, and unable to suppress his sardonic humour, Marlow casually retorts “You made a glorious lot

of smoke, anyhow” (*HD* 89). In other words, the resultant inauthentic camaraderie is actually as obfuscatory and as binding as the “glorious lot of smoke” their violence perpetrates.

The instinctual propensity to gravitate towards one’s ideological confrere therefore also implies a detrimental reaction upon the individual’s very sense of individuality; no matter how stubbornly one clings to the unifying idea, it can only manifest itself as a mere smokescreen of the vacuity it obscures. This becomes an inevitability even Marlow is incapable of entirely eschewing due to the overwhelming allure Kurtz’s discourse holds over him. Furthermore, if we accept that the concept of individual freedom is based on autonomy we immediately slide into paradox. Either we succumb to the demands made by society upon us and relinquish our autonomy; or we assert dominance over others, simultaneously controlling yet distancing them from us emotionally. The strength one gains as part of the collective body ultimately usurps one’s autonomy in the most insidious manner. The deeper the individual is immersed in the cultural mindscape, the more attenuated one’s points of orientation become until they are eventually obliterated by the consolidating rhetoric – one becomes imperceptibly encompassed by hegemonic influence much in the same manner as the steamer is enveloped by the forest:

The reaches opened before us and closed behind, as if the forest had stepped leisurely across the water to bar the way for our return. We penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness ... We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings; we glided past like phantoms, wondering and *secretly appalled*, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse. We could not understand because we

were too far and could not remember, because we were travelling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign – and *no memories*. (68-69; emphasis added)

Metaphorically, then, gravitation towards the collective identity encompasses one like the forest which “step[s] leisurely across the water to bar the way for [the individual’s] return” (*HD* 68). From the above quotation one can also glean the notion of lost memory which implies that, as the individual becomes more complicit in the activities of the collective, the potency of one’s prior voice and agency is expunged through conformity. Consequently, this loss of memory, aligned with a sense of habit or normative behaviour, permits one to rationalize one’s submission to hortatory directives. As Burke reminds us, “You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, *identifying* your ways with his” (*Rhetoric* 55; original emphasis). Here identification is highlighted as a principle factor in persuasion but I argue it also extends naturally to ideology as well. Quoting from *Mein Kampf*, we can see how conscious Hitler was of the force identification wields on the man of the crowd:

If he steps for the first time out of his small workshop or out of the big enterprise, in which he feels very small, into the mass meeting and is now surrounded by thousands and thousands of people with the same conviction...he himself succumbs to the magic influence of what we call mass suggestion. (qtd. in Fromm 193)

I shall return to ideology later, but first I must allude to the fatuous notion of community based on identification which is represented on the very first page of

the novel. The primary (unidentified) narrator begins by describing the crew of the *Nellie* which consists of the Director of Companies, the Lawyer, the Accountant, Marlow - who shall later refer to himself as “one of the Workers with a capital – you know” (*HD* 38) - and himself; essentially defining the primary roles of the capitalist structure. He continues congenially by stating that, “Between us there was, as I have already said, the bond of the sea” (*HD* 27). Now, not only has he done no such thing as having “already” informed the reader of their “bond of the sea,” but that very bond, given their epithets, is blatantly contestable as a logical source of unification. Although the narrator’s occupation is undisclosed, two pages further he reveals that Marlow was “the only man of us who still ‘followed the sea’” (*HD* 29). Whence, then, this maritime “bond”? It is true that Conrad may here be intentionally parodying the epic structure which begins *in medias res*, however, the convoluted nature of this bond has already been cast in doubt by his description of the Director as “captain” and “host” who “resembled a pilot, which to a seaman is *trustworthiness* personified” (*HD* 27; emphasis added). Intrinsicly, what the narrator is claiming here is that social bonds and communal ties are formed solely on identification by social roles. The *Nellie*, therefore, stands (or rather floats) as the metaphor of a society whose very stability is as dependent on imagined relations as she is dependent on the tide. Of course, here we have one of the many underlying Platonic themes within the novella and an auguring of the Noble Lie with which the story will conclude. The inclusion of Marlow’s Noble Lie to Kurtz’s Intended raises the notion of hierarchy and accepting “one’s place” in modern society.

### **A Woman’s Place**

After Kurtz's death Marlow returns to Europe, finding himself in the sepulchral city a changed man resenting the very sight of people who "trespassed upon my thoughts ... were intruders whose knowledge of life was to me an irritating pretence" (*HD* 113). It is clear that his journey on the steamer has radically affected him. In fact, it supports Albert J. Guerard's insistence that Marlow has experienced what anthropologists term the *night journey* which "is the story of an essentially solitary journey involving profound spiritual change in the voyager. In its classical form the journey is a descent into the earth, followed by a return to light" (15). Guerard is equally emphatic that the "personal journey is unmistakably authentic, which means that it explores something truer, more fundamental, and distinctly less material: the night journey into the unconscious and confrontation of an entity within the self" (39). The inference being that Marlow's journey has facilitated his authentic insight not only to the true nature of the imperialist project, but also his complicity in that project. Consequently, the knowledge gleaned from this insight projects a deep disdain upon those who casually go about their daily lives in dull ignorance of their true relation to the grander scheme of things.

Marlow claims to have no "desire to enlighten them, but ... some difficulty restraining myself from laughing in their faces" (*HD* 114). Although conscious his "behaviour was inexcusable" he still proffers the excuse that his "temperature was seldom normal in these days" (*HD* 114). This pyrexia condition, Marlow comes to admit, is quite evidently a symptom of psychological rather than somatic disturbance as when his aunt endeavours to "nurse his strength" he scoffs, "It was not my strength that wanted nursing, it was my imagination that wanted soothing" (*HD* 114). According to Joanna M. Smith, "His helplessness before this contradiction places Marlow in what Melanie Klein calls the feminine predicament,

a situation defined by a sense of physical and/or social helplessness” (188). I must confess that I find Smith’s argument itself somewhat contradictory for if Marlow, a male, is suffering from Klein’s *feminine* predicament, surely the question arises as to why, or how exactly this predicament can be gendered? Are men exempt from any form of pronounced “physical and/or social helplessness?” I surmise not. I do, however, agree with what I believe to be Smith’s implication *viz.* that women were systematically excluded in the patriarchal societies of Marlow’s Europe and that Marlow, having returned to land and therefore estranged from his normal seafaring life is now, like the proverbial fish out of water, experiencing the “normal” estranging conditions of exclusion suffered by his female counterparts. Hence, recalling Todorov’s earlier description of *Heart of Darkness* as a “narrative of knowledge” we now must deal with the social accessibility to knowledge and its synonym “truth” if we are to understand how this politics of exclusion is effectuated.

Ruth Nadelhaft reminds us that in 1973 Carolyn G. Heilbrun claimed Conrad created “artistic worlds in which women have no part, or no continually essential part” then refutes this with her own assertion that Heilbrun was one of a long line of critics who failed to realise, or accept, that “women are, and always were, central to Conrad’s vision as a political and moral novelist” (151). She then continues with the interesting observation that, “In his earliest novels ... women, frequently half-breeds, represent the clearest means of challenging and revealing Western male insularity and domination” (Nadelhaft 151). Indeed, Nadelhaft’s assertion concurs with the more recent trend in Conrad criticism which, like Susan Jones’s 1999 publication *Conrad and Women*, argues that “Above all he increasingly turned to the issue of gender, female identity, and, in relation to

romance, *how women are invited to conform to its conventionalised gestures and plots*” (2; emphasis added). Such averment makes it increasingly clear that Conrad’s so-called *clichéd* female characters are purposeful inclusions intended to depict a *specific* female type: white middle-class European. In other words, Conrad portrays as clichéd precisely the demographic that accepted socially what Jones describes in terms of the romance novel’s invitation to “conform to its conventionalised gestures and plots.” Conrad’s novelistic inclusion is therefore consciously representative of the social exclusion experienced by this marginalised demographic of European females. However, as we shall shortly see, it would appear that in another example of Conradian irony *Heart of Darkness* presents the white middle-class European female as both victim *and* perpetrator of the patriarchal ideology of imperialism that oppresses her.

In a telling comparison, when we first encounter the Intended’s nemesis, Kurtz’s ostensible African concubine, we are confronted by “a wild and gorgeous apparition [who] ... walked with measured steps ... treading the earth proudly” (*HD* 100). No hint of the “feminine predicament” here! We are next informed that “her hair was done in the shape of a helmet” and that she “was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent; there was something ominous and stately in her progress” (*HD* 100-01). Her proud and measured steps are offset by the bellicose imagery of helmet-shaped hair that elicits a portrait of reverential femininity and prowess. Furthermore, as if reflected in the pathetic fallacy of the gaze, “the immense wilderness, the colossal body of the fecund and mysterious life seemed to look at her, pensive, as though it had been looking at the images of its tenebrous and passionate soul” (*HD* 101). This passage strongly suggests that in such a state of nature women fare better than men, indeed, are perfectly at ease in this milieu as

they are at one with it; a suggestion buttressed by the emaciated demise Kurtz suffers as a result of his personal struggle with the wilderness.

Yet the contrary is true of the Intended's civilised habitat. Her society seems to engulf her in its sterility, thereby meriting its epithet of the sepulchral city. Marlow meets her in a drawing-room where, "The tall marble fireplace had a cold and monumental whiteness. A grand piano stood massively in a corner; with dark gleams on the flat surfaces like a sombre and polished sarcophagus" (*HD* 117). Here in the similarly morbid sarcophagus of the drawing-room, rather than any wild and gorgeous apparition, Marlow encounters a deathly apparition that "came forward, all in black, with a pale head, floating towards me in the dusk" (*HD* 117). He informs us that Kurtz had been dead for more than a year now, yet, "she seemed as though she would remember and mourn for ever ... For her he had died only yesterday" (*HD* 117). The inquisitive reader, however, may well question whether she would have mourned a moment longer if only she had learned the truth of what really became of her beloved Kurtz. Thus the imagery of the sarcophagus as an imprisoning tomb blends with the intended's temporal and physical *dislocation* to reinforce her isolation. There is therefore a suggested reversal between the vitality of Kurtz and herself whereby Kurtz lives on beyond the grave while she is passed off as the living-dead. I believe this allusion emphasises the limitations of the Intended's cognizance and, by extension, her agency. Becoming fixed in time and space she appears to be caught in a deathly no-*man's* land that could be referred to as a limbo of knowledge. And in limbo one truly is bereft of power. In fact, this local and temporal stasis can be interpreted as placing her, as a synecdoche of her demographic, outside of history. She, as white middle-class European female is effectively de-historicised. And if one is removed or resituated outside of history,

quite obviously one can have no part to play and therefore no autonomous influence on that historical and social moment. Furthermore, if indeed knowledge is power as Francis Bacon claimed, then her absolute ignorance of what really transpired in the heart of Africa underscores her complete lack of agency. Jeremy Hawthorn therefore interprets her situation synecdochically by claiming that “The Intended’s sterile isolation depicts realistically the separation of those in the domestic culture from full knowledge of what is being done in their name in Africa” (152).

In this respect, the Intended’s situation mirrors that of Marlow’s aunt, who belongs to the same social echelon. Marlow informs us that, when speaking of Africans, “She talked about ‘weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways’” and when describing her nephew, Marlow is portrayed as, “Something like an emissary of light, something like a lower sort of apostle” (*HD* 39). Of course it is this outlandish discrepancy that leads Marlow to opine, “It’s queer how out of touch with truth women are. They live in a world of their own ... It’s too beautiful altogether, and if they were to set it up it would go to pieces before the first sunset” (*HD* 39). Yet Marlow is also conscious that the very reason this beautiful yet fragile female world would go to pieces is because “Some confounded fact we men have been living contentedly with ever since the day of creation would start up and knock the whole thing over” (*HD* 39). What Marlow is actually admitting is that it is men who have always controlled knowledge *ergo* they have also always controlled *reality* as it is ideology that defines reality.

Furthermore, given Marlow’s belief of self-revelation through work it is surely implied that even men can only come to this comprehension by means of a rigorous work ethic. That he feels compelled to relate this modicum of wisdom to his fellow crew members on the *Nellie* further supports this notion. And Ian Watt

reminds us in *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*: “It therefore follows that, merely by allotting women a leisure role, society has in fact excluded them from discovering reality; so it is by no choice or fault of hers that the Intended inhabits an unreal world” (244).

Marlow therefore finds himself in a double bind when he inadvertently reveals that he was with Kurtz to the very the last as the Intended pleads with him to repeat her beloved’s final words. “I want – I want – something – to – to live with” she murmurs in a “heart-broken tone” (*HD* 121). Now Marlow, who “hate[s], detest[s], and can’t bear a lie” because “There is a taint of death, a flavour of mortality in lies,” is compelled to compromise himself, justice and *truth* by concealing Kurtz’s terminal enunciation—“The horror! The horror!”—from the Intended (*HD* 57). He considers such a revelation “would have been too dark – too dark altogether...” and is therefore faced with assuming his socially prescribed role of “protecting” the frailty of femininity with a lie and sacrificing his personal belief system (*HD* 121), or remaining true to his proclamation that when dealing with truth he, “must meet that truth with his own true stuff – with his own inborn strength. Principles won’t do” (*HD* 69). Authentically speaking, then, this is a truly difficult quandary. The Intended insists that she requires, “His last word – to live with ... Don’t you understand I loved him – I loved him – I loved him!” (*HD* 121). Marlow feels he has no authentic choice but to pull himself together and slowly inform her that “The last word he pronounced was – your name” (*HD* 121). “I knew it – I was sure!” she replies (*HD* 121). However, Joanna M. Smith, in my opinion, assumes the untenable position that

the *particular lie he chooses* is meant to punish her, to satisfy his ‘dull anger’ with her naïveté and her insistence that he give her ‘something...to

live with.’ He and his audience (and the reader) know that by substituting the Intended’s name for ‘The horror! The horror!’ he equates the two; keeping her ignorant of this equation is a mode of humiliating her. (193; emphasis added)

I find it a most peculiar charge by Smith that Marlow chose one particular lie over another when, unless one wilfully misinterprets the text, there really is only one lie of consequence in the entire novella: this lie. In my estimation, regardless, or possibly because, of any ideological prescription, I maintain that this is Marlow’s defining act of authenticity as in sacrificing his own strict ideals he has transcended them and has therefore effaced the ideologically imposed boundaries between men and women. In doing so, he simultaneously recognises both genders pure and simply for what they are: human. Hence, his lie, the deception which avoids the unnecessary infliction of pain upon another, serves to bond them in loss. Marlow here exercises the very quality the absence of which signified Kurtz’s inauthentic hollowness: restraint. We must remember that at one point in the narrative Kurtz warns the Harlequin that as far as limitations were concerned, “there was nothing on earth to prevent him from killing whom he jolly well pleased” (*HD* 95). We then learn of the skulls adorning his fence posts attesting to the fact that, in an egregious lack of restraint, he did indeed prosecute that threat. Therefore the symbolism of Marlow’s lie is precisely the contrary. His deception is proof that he has mastered the “restraint” of which Kurtz was incapable and, denying his propensity for truth, saves the Intended’s life even though her life will continue as a living death. Marlow, however, cannot control the machinations of imperialist ideology, he can only deal with the present, individual situation whereby telling the truth would have been an act of murder. His self-betrayal therefore enlightens him

to the fact that constructs of ideology are purely illusory: “It seemed to me that the house would collapse before I could escape, that the heavens would fall upon my head. But nothing happened. The heavens do not fall for such a trifle” (*HD* 121).

However, Marlow is also enlightened to the ominous fact that as social beings no individual is immune to the effects of ideology whilst participating in that society. Again, a valid endorsement of that conjecture is made by Ian Watt in *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* with his observation that “Even if the life of the Intended had given her the basis required to understand reality in the experience of work, Marlow could not have conveyed the truth about Kurtz to her, because she is armoured by the invincible credulity produced by the unreality of the public rhetoric” (245). It is therefore stasis which denies the middle-class European female the chance to attain authentic selfhood by incarcerating her in what Watt terms “the unreality of the public rhetoric.” The only mode of disburdenment would be through travel; by leaving society and appraising it from the exterior as Marlow has done. Ironically, though, as Hawthorn elucidates, “It is European men who are sent to Africa to further the aims of imperialism; but we see European women—ignorant of what their menfolk are really doing for imperialism—offering powerful ideological support to them” (152). The ideology of imperialism therefore underwrites itself by creating an hermetic loop based on a relationship, or in Kenneth Burke’s terms a *courtship*, of hierarchy and cause. As Burke elaborates,

“Hierarchy” is the old eulogistic word for “bureaucracy,” with each stage employing a rhetoric of obeisance to the stage above it, and a rhetoric of charitable condescension to the stage beneath it, in sum, a rhetoric of courtship, while all the stages are infused with the spirit of the Ultimate Stage, which sums up the essence implicit in the hierarchic mode of thought

itself, and can thus be “ideologically” interpreted as its “cause.” (*Rhetoric* 118)

Ironically, then, the better the white middle-class European female performs her role of citizen and wife in support of the imperialist cause, the greater her degree of complicity in its perpetuation of not only her oppression but also that of her counterpart subalterns in the colonies.

### **Cause and Duty**

“Cause” and “duty” straddle both the religious and secular realms due to their reliance on hierarchy. Work and duty can be considered as contiguous; they do converge, however, work may or may not imply an implicit *identification* with others whereas duty, by definition, establishes a bond of responsibility between individual and organisational body. The relationship between an individual’s work and duty is further affected by the dynamics of the system within which one works. An artisan, for example, who if not working for a small company may very often be self-employed, can no doubt conflate work and duty to a personal plane. Obviously, this relationship to one’s work has an affirmative effect as the worker has an intimate connection to the product of his/her endeavour. This strengthens one’s autonomy by defining, and surpassing, individual limits. Marlow endorses this idea claiming:

No, I don’t like work. I had rather laze about and think of all the fine things that can be done. I don’t like work, - no man does – but I like what is in the work, - *the chance to find yourself*. Your own reality – for yourself, not for

others – what no other man can ever know. They can only see the mere show, and never can tell what it really means. (*HD* 59-60; emphasis added)

Here we have the Carlylean sentiment of Work's supreme importance and Marlow's belief in it as a requisite for authentic self-definition. However, the individual cannot possibly find herself in work if she loses herself in that work by renouncing her autonomous self in blind fulfilment of her duty. Yet, neither can work furnish one with any self-knowledge if the individual simply "plays" at performing his/her role. Such inauthentic performativity is illustrated by the Brickmaker who "did not make bricks – why, there was a physical impossibility in the way – as I was well aware; and if he did secretarial work for the manager, it was because 'no sensible man rejects wantonly the confidence of his superiors'" (*HD* 58).

The Brickmaker stands in direct contrast to Marlow's "authentic" work ethic as a paradigm of the inauthentic sycophant who guilefully manipulates the system to achieve his own ends. As Marlow knows full well, there is no "physical impossibility in the way" of the Brickmaker, only the desire to shirk responsibility and curry favour with his superiors. Hence, synecdochically, he imbues the whole colonial project: "[He] was as unreal as everything else—as the philanthropic pretence of the whole concern, as their talk, as their government, as their show of work" (*HD* 54). "The philanthropic pretence" therefore ironizes the official colonial rhetoric which purports to be mutually beneficial to both coloniser and colonised when, in fact, the project is pillage pure and simple. Such duplicity also travesties the alleged work ethic which the Brickmaker so blatantly exploits by his otiosity. The arrival of the Eldorado Exploring Expedition, which Marlow describes as "an

invasion, an infliction, a visitation,” further serves to illustrate the hypocrisy of the colonising work ethic:

Their talk, however, was the talk of sordid buccaneers: it was reckless without hardihood. Greedy without audacity, and cruel without courage; there was not an atom of foresight or of serious intention in the whole batch of them, and they did not seem aware these things are wanted for the work of the land. To tear treasure out of the bowels of the land was their desire, *with no more moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglars breaking into a safe.* (HD 61; emphasis added).

It would appear that the moment we enter a systematised, bureaucratic structure the interstices between individual, work, duty and product increase ineluctably and unjustly. As illustrated by the bureaucratic Brickmaker, working as an automated cog whose service is a mere component of an overall product diminishes one’s identification with their role within the entire system. Lack of identification with the overall system, and the sense of detachment it engenders, also serves to diminish individual moral and ethical responsibility in relation to that system; like the Brickmaker one can inauthentically perform one’s role. However, when this inauthentic sham is exposed it causes embarrassment to the charlatan whose only means of defence is to zealously proclaim their adherence to official rhetoric. “We want,” he [the Brickmaker] began to *declaim* suddenly, “for the guidance of the cause entrusted to us by Europe, so to speak, higher intelligence, wide sympathies, a singleness of purpose” (HD 55; emphasis added). Thus, in order to save face, inauthenticity is further compounded by reinforced subjection to the system.

Within the hierarchy of an ideological cause, as within any hierarchy, the individual's status becomes inextricable from prestige. Status and title are, of course, linguistic constructs however the prestige they bestow on the employee has very concrete effects. It is therefore interesting to cite an observation made by Hannah Arendt in her report on the Nazi war trials in Jerusalem that "the Nazis had changed the military "recipient of orders," the *Befehlsempfänger*, into a "bearer of orders," a *Befehlsträger*, indicating, as in the ancient "bearer of ill tidings," the burden of responsibility and of importance that weighed supposedly upon those who had to execute orders." This was to create a psychological effect within the Nazi apparatus of endowing clerics connected with the Final Solution – such as Adolf Eichmann (to be discussed in greater detail shortly) – with a heightened sense of self-worth in becoming "officially a "bearer of secrets," a "*Geheimnisträger* ..." which as far as self-importance went certainly was nothing to sneeze at" (Arendt 27; original emphasis). Thus there is a distinct parallel between Conrad's portrayal of generic types and the Nazi's refined titular system as both use the tropological inflection of language to reinforce the relation of the individual to the whole as a synecdoche, as *representative* of their function. Hence, the false sense of self-worth constructed in such a "privileged" call of duty establishes the ostensible importance of any inane or morally reprehensible directive, effectively eliminating the guilt any conscientious individual would feel in complying with such a command. Indeed, as Eichmann was to claim, such an individual would actually consider refusal to enforce the directive as a dereliction of duty – an egregious absurdity! "No exceptions—this was the proof that he had always acted against his 'inclinations,' whether they were sentimental or inspired by interest, that he had always done his 'duty'" (Arendt 137).

“Of course you must take care of the motives – right motives – always” Kurtz warns Marlow (*HD* 110). Blind obedience to one’s duty is clearly a shirking of one’s own autonomous objectives and in this respect is a manifestation of negative freedom. It expresses a freedom *from* the torment of orienting oneself in the uncertain direction precipitated by a freedom *to* achieve something of personal significance. Placating oneself with the demands of duty therefore alleviates the guilt complex one suffers in admitting one lacks the volition to act according to one’s own desires. The abdication of one’s own volition can therefore easily ascribe responsibility to the collective body, hence, initiating integration rather than separation. Adherence to a futile task in the name of duty is a recurrent motif of the novella. Marlow repeatedly questions the motives behind the acts of labour and duty he encounters, yet rarely if ever does he fathom what they could possibly be. At one point he observes a man-of-war anchored off the coast which is firing shells into the bush. Marlow, however, is unable to see any possible target yet repeatedly, “a small flame would dart and vanish, a little white smoke would disappear, a tiny projectile would give a feeble screech – and nothing happened” (*HD* 41). The event is imbued with paranoia as, “somebody on board assuring me earnestly there was a camp of natives—he called them enemies!—hidden out of sight somewhere” (*HD* 41).

“There was a touch of insanity in the proceeding, a sense of lugubrious drollery in the sight” sums up the inanity of the proceedings. “Nothing could happen” (*HD* 41). Marlow has enough acuity of vision to interpret the purported explanation—“he called them enemies!”—as the vacuous claim that it is. The French man-of-war is therefore a metonym of the “incomprehensible” European work ethic. Marlow’s ironic stance in respect to this engagement is alluded to in

remarking that “After all, I was also a part of the great cause of these high and just proceedings” (*HD* 43). The explicit sarcasm directed towards the purposelessness of the work ethic is recognition that the ironic perspective liberates one from the self-denying duplicity of the “freedom from” trajectory. The negation of the self in such a senseless call of duty is, furthermore, illustrated as being a definite danger. It implies potentially fatal hazards for the inattentive acolyte as Marlow’s peregrination around the Company’s Outer Station suggests:

I avoided a vast artificial hole somebody had been digging on the slope, the purpose of which I found it impossible to divine. It wasn’t a quarry or a sandpit, anyhow. It was just a hole. It might have been connected with the philanthropic desire of giving the criminals something to do. I don’t know. Then I nearly fell into a very narrow ravine, almost no more than a scar in the hillside. I discovered that a lot of imported drainage-pipes for the settlement had been tumbled in there. There wasn’t one that was not broken. It was a wanton smash-up. (*HD* 44)

Aimless, unquestioning wandering within the machinations of the state apparatus, this passage seems to suggest, can only lead the individual towards the edge of an abysmal loss of self.

Aimless wandering is a strong character trait of the Harlequin who, seemingly compelled to efface or flee his subjectivity, represents Fromm’s masochistic individual. His very name suggests a fragmented identity, a mere collage of self. He is also the devoted follower of Kurtz and, interestingly, the one person with a guidebook of sorts: *An Inquiry into some Points of Seamanship*. Marlow notes that it wasn’t “a very enthralling book; but at the first glance you

could see there was a singleness of intention, an honest concern for the right way of going to work” (*HD* 71). There may well be a “singleness of intention” yet one is confounded how this could benefit the Harlequin who, unlike Marlow, doesn’t “follow the sea” but had merely been “wandering about that river for nearly two years, cut off from everybody and everything” (*HD* 91). This not only renders his treasured text useless, it also explains why he is so susceptible to Kurtz’s rhetoric: he illustrates the danger of misinterpreting his cause; or worse, affiliating oneself with any cause which proffers itself as relief from isolation. Kurtz, too, “as a rule wandered alone” and the Harlequin can therefore be considered the masochistic compliment to Kurtz as sadist (*HD* 94). Hence, the Harlequin, as blindly devoted follower –whose guidebook it is difficult not to interpret symbolically as a Bible of sorts—is also the most *disoriented* character in the novel. In his perpetual search for an external source of enlightenment – Kurtz, his *Inquiry into some Points of Seamanship* – he effectively defers any knowledge of self, meaning he becomes as ethereal, as “hollow,” as his idol, Kurtz. “He shook hands and vanished in the night. Sometimes I ask myself whether I had ever really seen him” Marlow is to muse. Indeed, the be-patched Harlequin can be viewed as a parody of the multifaceted Kurtz: “The original Kurtz had been educated partly in England, and ... his mother was half-English, his father was half-French. All Europe had contributed to the making of Kurtz” (*HD* 86). The relationship between Kurtz and the Harlequin therefore functions as a metaphor of a socialised sadomasochistic partnership.

At first thought, masochism and sadism may appear conceptually divorced. However, according to Fromm they both stem from the same fear of freedom. Fromm attributes the term “symbiosis” to the objective of this condition. “Symbiosis, in this psychological sense, means the union of one individual self with

another self (or any other power outside of the own self) in such a way as to make each lose the integrity of its own self and to make them completely dependent on each other” (Fromm 136; original emphasis). Fromm further elaborates thus:

The sadistic person needs his object just as much as the masochist needs his. Only instead of seeking security by being swallowed, he gains it by swallowing somebody else. In both cases the integrity of the individual self is lost. In one case I dissolve myself in an outside power; I lose myself. In the other case I enlarge myself by making another part of myself and thereby I gain the strength I lack as an independent self. (136)

It should therefore come as no surprise to learn that when Kurtz opened his mouth “it gave him a weirdly voracious aspect, as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him” (*HD* 99). In contrast, the Harlequin represents a masochistic fleeing from self towards the sadist induced by a fear of isolation; the paradox being that suffering or torture brought on by another confirms a human connection which is preferable to the alienation of solitude. In submission one frees oneself from the burden of freedom; one surrenders to a more powerful and controlling force. Notice how the Harlequin continually returns to Kurtz even after his life has been threatened: “I don’t mind telling you, he wanted to shoot me, too, one day ... but I didn’t clear out. No, no. I couldn’t leave him” (*HD* 95). Again, Fromm’s explication is useful in comprehending such behaviour:

In the masochistic feeling of smallness we find a tendency which serves to increase the original feeling of insignificance. How is this to be understood? Can we assume that by making a fear worse one is trying to remedy it? Indeed, this is what the masochistic person does. As long as I struggle

between my desire to be independent and strong and my feeling of insignificance or powerlessness I am caught in a tormenting conflict. If I can succeed in reducing my individual self to nothing, if I can overcome the awareness of my separateness as an individual, I may save myself from this conflict. (131)

By extension, it becomes quite clear how this conflict creates the potential for a fascist or totalitarian political system whereby this type of individual is provided security, unity and strength in a collective body comprising millions of selfless others. The motivation is always to disburden oneself of the responsibility of one's own choice. In choosing not to choose for oneself one is relieved of the insecurity of judgement, risk, conflict and so forth. Immersion in one's *duty* could equally be interpreted similarly – it acts as an anodyne in the same way that a narcotic obliterates one's consciousness of individual reality and isolation. Immersion in one's duty therefore signifies immersion in the river Lethe. The appeal of duty grounds the individual in a structured mode of behaviour which, by negating supplementary choice, orients her: “*Do the Duty which lies nearest thee,*’ which thou knowest to be a Duty! Thy second Duty will already have become clearer” as Carlyle proclaimed in *Sartor Resartus* (139; original emphasis). This is an example of negative freedom, of “freedom from” rather than “freedom to” which requires consciousness of one's agency within the unfolding drama. Of course, no one is entirely sadistic or masochistic – both characteristics co-exist to a greater or lesser extent in all of us. Hence, it is entirely logical to imagine a sadistic individual whose outward comportment may appear gentle and caring, yet which deeper analysis of their phantasies and gestures would betray.

In this regard, commitment to one's duty, particularly if the obligations are somewhat cruel, may successfully mask not only a masochistic tendency in succumbing to the collective demands imposed by that duty, but also personal satisfaction in performing the acts. Commitment to the task, which negates personal choice, can even be used by the individual to delude him/herself as to the pleasure derived therefrom. The Chief Accountant, whose books are in "apple pie order," is a prime example of this veiled sadism. The extreme pedantry of his conduct merges with the ominous revelation that he has "taught" one of the native women to starch and press his apparel which raises the sinister suspicion that the "pedagogy" employed, "It was difficult. She had a distaste for the work," was somewhat heavy handed yet not to his displeasure (*HD* 46). He focuses on his duty to such an extent that any innate stirrings of empathy towards fellow human suffering are obliterated. In fact, his commitment to the task at hand permits him to objectivise the moribund workers as an annoying distraction: "'The groans of this sick person,' he said, 'distract my attention. And without that it is extremely difficult to guard against clerical errors in this climate'" (*HD* 46). That the suffering of a fellow human can be discarded as a mere inconvenience, a distraction to his auditing, illustrates the extent to which the Chief Accountant has become immersed in his functional role as *Accountant*. His lack of empathy is thus a symptom of the self-alienation permitting his categorical role to supersede his own individuality (sense of self). Conrad evokes a wonderful metaphor to illustrate this point illustrating the degree to which the Accountant has become imprisoned by his bureaucratic role. Marlow explains that "to be out of the chaos I would sometimes get into the accountant's office" which "was built of horizontal planks, and so badly put together that, as he bent over his high desk, he was barred from neck to heels with narrow strips of

sunlight” (*HD* 46). This, I believe, is a perfect metaphor for Max Weber’s “Iron Cage” of modernity: “The Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so” (123). The Accountant bears an uncanny resemblance to the figure of “mechanized petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance,” Weber describes (123). In the Chief Accountant Conrad presents us with a generic type devoid of any spontaneous enjoyment of life which can only signal a fundamentally dissatisfied existence which “originate[s] nothing” (*HD* 50). Such individuals are reduced to the deluded status of “Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart [yet] this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved” (Weber 124).

The Chief Accountant reiterates this condescending standpoint shortly after with the offhand remark: “When one has got to make correct entries, one comes to hate those savages – hate them to the death” (*HD* 47). Of course, ironically, in reducing the significance of his fellow human’s existence to less than a “clerical error” he is also denigrating himself to an insignificant myrmidon within the apparatus of the dehumanising system he so fervently serves. He becomes another “papier-mâché Mephistopheles” within the hegemonic apparatus. The Chief Accountant’s behaviour therefore models that of the Nazi cleric previously mentioned: Adolf Eichmann.

Eichmann was the petty bureaucrat whose role within the Nazi apparatus meant he was responsible for sending millions of Jewish children, women and men to the concentration camps. It was his extreme sense of duty and confused deontological comprehension which morbidly fascinated Hannah Arendt to such a degree she would describe the period of Nazi horrors as “the fearsome, word-and-thought defying *banality of evil*” (252; original emphasis). What she found

particularly intriguing was his sincere belief that in fulfilling his duties within the Nazi structure he was acting in strict accordance to Kant's categorical imperative. At his trial for war crimes in Jerusalem in 1961, Eichmann claimed that "I meant by my remark about Kant that the principle of my will must always be such that it can become the principle of general laws" (qtd. in Arendt 136). Arendt criticises the logic of such an interpretation claiming it would be ludicrous for a thief or murderer to abide by such a dictum as they could not possibly wish to exist within a system which would condone the theft of their own possessions and certainly not the right of another to murder them. From Arendt's perspective, deluded idealists express total loss of self in subservience: "The perfect 'idealist,' like everybody else, had of course his personal feelings and emotions, but would never permit them to interfere with his actions if they came into conflict with his 'idea'" (42). The absurd logic of such a position is not lost to Arendt who later grants that "Whatever Kant's role in the formation of "the little man's" mentality in Germany may have been, there is not the slightest doubt that in one respect Eichmann did indeed follow Kant's precepts: a law was a law, there could be no exceptions" (137). In this respect Eichmann was a complete idealist:

An "idealist," according to Eichmann's notions, was not merely a man who believed in an "idea" or someone who did not accept bribes, though these qualifications were indispensable. An "idealist" was a man who *lived* for his idea—hence he could not be a businessman—and who was prepared to sacrifice for his idea everything and, especially, everybody. (Arendt 41-42; original emphasis)

Hence, in his extreme zeal to attain his preconceived ideals, idealism is also the problem which plagues Kurtz. Fatally, though, his ideals suffer a volte-face in

his jungle seclusion where his original altruistic project is subsumed by the voracious desire instilled in him by the Company to accrue the sacred commodity at any expense. The more he succumbs to this desire the greater the sense of power he experiences, realizing what Marlow one day overhears the Manager of the Outer Station enthuse: “Anything – anything can be done in this country” (*HD* 64). Here, of course, is confirmation of Baron John Emerich Acton’s famous claim that power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. We learn that Kurtz spirals ever deeper into depravity through this unleashed drive lacking “restraint in the gratification of his various lusts” because “there was something wanting in him” (*HD* 97). At heart he is a simple conformist whose “proper sphere ought to have been politics ‘on the popular side’” (*HD* 115). The fact that he has gained praise for his multiple “talents” only proves that he has mimicked the attributes that society has deemed praiseworthy. He has simply been a monumental actor, deceiving those gullible enough to fall for the surface reflection of things, who is really “hollow at the core.” Thus, Marlow, upon returning to the Sepulchral City after Kurtz’s death, discovers that “Kurtz really couldn’t write a bit” and leaves him “unable to say what was Kurtz’s profession, whether he ever had any” (*HD* 115).

Kurtz’s apparent inability to identify with any single career option further supports the previously mentioned symbiosis between Kurtz and the Harlequin: both are mere pastiche. The only difference being that the Harlequin sports this on the outside, whereas Kurtz masterfully disguises it inside. At the denouement of the novella it becomes evident that Kurtz is in fact the paradigm of the Emperor in Hans Christian Andersen’s tale *The Emperor’s New Clothes* with the ironic inversion that only he is aware that his garb is false, and this realization only comes to him *in extremis*. Recalling Carlyle’s aforementioned metaphor of the Hero as “*forged*

note,” we are presented with the case of Kurtz as a king of men not because he is a king, but due to the fortuitous sequence of events throughout his life which have led others to misinterpret him as such. As Malvolio says in *Twelfth Night*, “some are born great, some achieve greatness, and others have greatness thrust upon ‘em” (2.5.129-130). Kurtz is indubitably subject to the latter assertion. However, having greatness thrust upon him is what rests at the heart of Kurtz’s inauthenticity, and is quite understandably a terrible predicament to be in. The more accustomed Kurtz becomes to accepting both the false praise and the largess which accompanies it, the more difficult it must be to contradict misperceptions of him and therefore the greater his self-estrangement until he becomes the hollow caricature of his “original” self. Hence, Kurtz may well have embarked upon his enlightened project with the sincere conviction of his altruistic motives, however, very quickly such motives are exposed as self-delusion which explains why “the wilderness had found him out early ... and had whispered to him things about himself he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude” (*HD* 97).

Kurtz is eventually unveiled as both a conformist fool and an opportunist whom Marlow is finally given “reason to infer that it was his impatience of comparative poverty that drove him out there” (*HD* 119). Yet Kurtz repressed admission of such a motive, preferring the self-aggrandizing philanthropic ideal. One of Kurtz’s journalist colleagues explains that ‘He had faith – don’t you see? – he had the faith. He could get himself to believe anything. He would have been a splendid leader of an extreme party.’ ‘What party?’ I asked. ‘Any party,’ answered the other. ‘He was – an – an – extremist.’ Did I not think so? I assented” (*HD* 115). For “faith” I would here substitute “gullibility” as anyone who “could get himself

to believe anything” must surely be an imbecile. Ironically, Kurtz the “universal genius” is really a sot who has been led by the nose through his opportunistic sniffing. This explains why the council in Europe specifically selected him to “be a somebody in the Administration” perceiving that little or no manipulation would be required for him to succumb to greedy temptation and become an expedient of their objective (*HD* 47). As Erich Fromm elucidates: “Nazism never had any genuine political or economic principles. It is essential to understand that the very principle of Nazism is radical opportunism” (190). Yet, despite his shallow nature, Marlow maintains till the end that Kurtz was a remarkable man. This is because his one crowning act is the authentic acceptance that his whole life has been a lie. “He had summed up – he had judged. ‘The horror!’” (*HD* 113). His valedictory cry is therefore an admission of self-deception.

Marlow, by contrast, presents an image of self far removed from that of the insensitive cleric caught in obeisance to duty. His restraint symbolises his self-mastery. The distinction between the two extremes is illustrated by Conrad’s repeated use of chiaroscuro. The change from darkness to light signifies Marlow’s capacity to move beyond hegemonic ideological constraints, however, this is often employed ironically. Just before he meets the Chief Accountant, Marlow has been studying moribund natives suffering silently in the undergrowth. He has empathised with these suffering shadows who “were dying slowly – it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now” and goes so far as to offer one of them “one of my good Swede’s ship’s biscuits” (*HD* 44, 45). Furthermore, he depicts himself as the only character in the narrative to adopt an extraneous perspective by engaging in the logical analysis of why a native has tied a piece of white worsted around his neck: “Why? Where did he get it? Was

it a badge – an ornament – a charm – a propitiatory act? Was there any idea at all connected with it?” (HD 45). Marlow ventures to enter the psychological frame of this unfortunate other. It is true that no insight is gleaned, however, the attempt here is the essential. The will to accept this other as a person with a volition of his own and whose logic, albeit unfathomable to a European, does indeed exist becomes a validation of that other’s very existence. Such appreciation and acceptance of the other is what separates Marlow from his European brethren. Yet, no sooner is this *enlightened* insight achieved than Marlow encounters the accountant and an ironic turn ensues:

I didn’t want any more loitering in the *shade*, and I made haste towards the station. When near the buildings I met a white man, in such an unexpected elegance of get-up that in the first moment I took him for a sort of vision. I saw a high starched collar, white cuffs, a light alpaca jacket, snowy trousers, a clear necktie, and varnished boots. No hat. Hair parted, brushed, oiled, under a green-lined parasol held in a big white hand. He was amazing, and had a penholder behind his ear. I shook hands with this *miracle*[.] (HD 45; my emphasis)

He reflexively recedes back into his culturally conditioned perspective precisely as he leaves the shade of his *enlightened* critique. The moment he steps into the light he is blinded by surface reflection once again and all hermeneutic penetration is rendered impotent. Marlow succumbs to the ostensible importance of superficiality noting that “in the great demoralization of the land he [the Chief Accountant] kept up his appearance” (HD 46). Marlow admits he “respected the fellow,” interpreting “his collars, vast cuffs, his brushed hair” and impeccable demeanour as signifying “backbone” (HD 46).

Therefore, Marlow, too, in letting his guard down, betrays himself by basing his judgement on pure appearance. He is also guilty of oscillating between dark and light, of losing himself temporarily under the influence of ideology. What Marlow demonstrates is the possibility of suspending the influence of ideology, no matter how indefinitely, by two means: restraint and travel. His natural restraint enables him to bolster his identity in a process of becoming towards authenticity. In contradistinction to Kurtz Marlow is able to orient his estranged self by returning to a stable sense of self as he is not hollow at the core. In returning to that notion of self he is capable of avoiding the fatal plunge which consumes Kurtz. This restraint, however, is no “gift of the gods,” it is accessible to all who refuse to adhere to the herd instinct. Marlow suspects as much:

True, he had made that last stride, he had stepped over the edge, while I had been permitted to draw back my hesitating foot. And perhaps in this is the whole difference; perhaps all the wisdom, and all truth, and all sincerity, are just compressed into that inappreciable moment of time in which we step over the threshold of the invisible. Perhaps! (*HD* 113)

By travelling on the peripheries of imperialist expansion, working for yet outside that very ideological structure, Marlow is permitted a perspective by incongruity. Marlow manages to extricate (estrangle) his present self from his historical self through the distance of narration; recounting his story to the Nellie’s crew enables him to approach an authentic interpretation of the events by objectivising his subjectivity from an incongruous (temporal and spatial) perspective. In other words, he attains an ironic perspective by becoming a *dislocated* character in his own narrative; separating his present from his former self. Through travel Marlow is permitted to take the “middle way,” the ironic perspective which leads him from

darkness to light. It is therefore suitable that the novella ends with him “sat apart, indistinct and silent, in the pose of a meditating Buddha” (*HD* 121). Buddha of course means “The Enlightened One” who brings wisdom and signifies the middle way through life with restraint and self-mastery. The main objective is a transformative experience of the individual along a path towards liberation. As Paul Williams states, “it is a transformation from greed, hatred, and delusion, and all their implications and ramifications, to the opposites of these three negative states—non-attachment, loving kindness, and insight or wisdom, and all their implications and ramifications. It is this that liberates” (3). Thus Marlow’s story is an enlightened warning to his listeners—and, naturally, us as readers—who are willing to listen and avoid the same fate as Kurtz.

Hence, in concluding this chapter it is only appropriate that, as in the novel, we return to the point of departure and consider its ominous augur. It is fitting that Marlow’s journey begins at Gravesend. This is possibly the first subtle clue Conrad teases the reader with concerning the cyclic structure of the novel. It begins with the crew of the *Nellie* awaiting the turn of the tide, and ends with them having “*lost the first of the ebb*”; hence implying the delay in departure is no act of volition – no show of restraint – but merely a caesura in the malevolent concatenation of unfolding events (*HD* 121; emphasis added). The ambiguous undertone, I suggest, is that the journey Marlow is about to embark upon may eventually lead to his grave should he fail to remain an individual on an authentic trajectory. Gravesend is effectively both the end of the beginning and the beginning of the end. It marks the end of the beginning insofar as the experience Marlow is about to recount will end with the death of the enigmatic figure of Kurtz. The further Marlow progresses on his *Bildungsreise* the greater affinity he has with the enigmatic Kurtz, yet the

stronger his restraint and self-definition gradually become. The telling of the tale relates the closure of a previous identity for Marlow, a former self. It signifies the beginning of the end as on his first journey Marlow pilots the Company's ship while on his imminent second he is to be piloted by the Director of Companies hence signifying the continued allure of the capitalist imperialist voice which inveigled Kurtz. Kurtz's resonance in Gravesend therefore insinuates his presence did not end in his grave. Thus it is imperative that Marlow maintain his resistance to the snare of destructive collective ideals. In his own words, "He must meet that truth with his own true stuff – with his own inborn strength. Principles won't do" (*HD* 69). In his humility, however, he has indeed made the first step along that path with the recognition that, despite what imperialist rhetoric would claim, those he encountered in the heart of the dark continent were not inhuman but of his own species. He can now make the admission, "you know, that was the worst of it – this suspicion of their not being inhuman ... Ugly. Yes, it was ugly enough; but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise" (*HD* 69). As Hannah Arendt, Erich Fromm and numerous others have documented, this is the ironic perspective which is required if we are to stand any chance of preventing history from repeating itself. It is imperative to remain conscious of the frailty authentic individualism holds in the face of a consuming collective identity. However, as Marlow admonishes us, the individual always has "a choice of one's nightmares" (*HD* 103). It is for this reason that by the end of the twentieth century Ian Watt could claim that "except to those who have had a very blinkered view of the century's battlefields" *Heart of Darkness* was not quite so pessimistic because "neither Conrad nor Marlow stands for the position that darkness is irresistible; their

attitude, rather, is to enjoin us to defend ourselves in full knowledge of the difficulties to which we have been blinded by the illusions of civilisation” (*CN* 253). On that note, it seems appropriate to conclude this chapter optimistically with a short poem by Thom Gunn which recalls a German conscript who, unlike Kurtz, escaped the shackles of ideological imprisonment in risking his life to aid Jews escape the Nazi horror:

I know he had unusual eyes,  
Whose power no orders could determine,  
Not to mistake the men he saw,  
As others did, for gods or vermin. (qtd. in Eagleton xiii)

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

***TROPIC OF CANCER (1934):***

### **THE ONEIRIC CONSUMPTION OF BEING**

*So easily obeyed amid the choice*

*Of all tastes else to please their appetite*

***John Milton, Paradise Lost***

#### **Agent**

In opening his section titled “Agent in General,” Kenneth Burke quotes the Baldwin dictionary definition of idealism thus: “In metaphysics, any theory which maintains the universe to be throughout the work of reason and mind” (*Grammar* 171). He then expands on this definition with the claim that any “unadulteratedly idealistic philosophy starts and ends in the featuring of properties belonging to the term, *agent*” (171). Idealistic philosophies therefore all think in terms of the “ego,” the “self,” the “super-ego,” “consciousness,” the “will,” etc. which, I maintain, also draw allusion to the imagination. In this chapter I shall observe how authenticity can be attained through creative rebellion; through a refusal to accept the constraints society imposes on the individual by means of oneiric egress.

#### **Introduction**

“‘Life,’ said Emerson, ‘consists in what a man is thinking all day.’ If that be so, then my life is nothing but a big intestine. I not only think about food all day, but I dream about it at night” (*Tropic of Cancer* 69). Henry Miller’s surreal metaphor of

life as “nothing but a big intestine” can be interpreted as indicative of his ontological view of the self’s reconstitutive capacity.

In this chapter I present the trope of “the oneiric consumption of being” on three primary levels. First, oneiric consumption implies Miller’s historical self-consumption through creation of his textual self. Second, oneiric consumption attests to how Miller interpreted historical “veracity” i.e. that memory is always a reconstruction of the past hence never “true” or “exact”; as with the digestive process, in relating prior events a transitional addendum or lacuna is unavoidable in the creative act. Indeed, Miller’s oeuvre exults in blurring the distinction between “truth” and “reality,” his style being thoroughly lavished with poetic licence. Third, yet foremost, oneiric consumption refers to the central role the surreal and oneiric play in Miller’s oeuvre due to the intrinsic function imagination holds in liberating the individual from the staid confines of social conformity. In reaction to the catastrophic consequences of the submissive collective destruction caused by the First World War and the one-dimensional “Air-Conditioned Nightmare”<sup>4</sup> of Fordist America, Miller’s overriding tenets are nothing if not the celebration of the creative individual and critique of the dehumanising imperative of twentieth century capitalist states. His concern resides explicitly in the duplicitous model of contemporary American society which he reproached for presenting itself as “pacifistic [yet actually] cannibalistic. Outwardly it seems to be a beautiful honeycomb, with all the drones crawling over each other in a frenzy of work; inwardly it’s a slaughterhouse, each man killing off his neighbour and sucking the juice from his bones” (*Tropic of Capricorn* 42).

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<sup>4</sup> See *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* (1945) is Miller’s scathing travelogue of his native America.

Henry Miller is not only one of the English language's most prolific "autobiographical" or "confessional" writers, but one who has also been the most continually misrepresented, misinterpreted, and misunderstood. At equal turns he has been construed as a rebel, a satyr, a misogynist, an artist, and a pornographer amongst numerous other epithets. Miller, I maintain, is above all an advocate for individual autonomy, and autonomy regardless of gender. Miller is anti-conformist and provocateur *à la fois*, hence his "philosophy" (for want of a more apposite term) may be best summarized by the lines from Blake's epic *Jerusalem*: "I must Create a System or be enslav'd by another Man's. / I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create" (629). As Miller boldly states in "An Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere" (1938):

The highest aim of man, as a thinker, is to achieve a pattern, a synthesis, to grasp life poetically; the chief and highest aim of man as animal is to live out his instincts, take him where they will. So long as he cannot operate as a savage or less than savage, and think as a god, or better than a god, he will suffer, he will propose to himself remedies, governments, religions, therapies. Back of all his behaviour is fear—fear of death. (*The Cosmological Eye* 176)

Miller's solution to this fear of death is to embrace it, counteracting its ostensible negativity by rejoicing in the ineluctable consumption of self. From this perspective, Miller can be ascribed a particularly nineteenth century notion of authenticity based on self-possession and ownership akin to that of Max Stirner. Ownership in this sense, however, must not be construed as property or commodity acquisition; on the contrary, it should be interpreted as owning one's existence by assuming responsibility for one's actions regardless of the comfort that existence

entails. Indeed, as Miller often claimed, it is precisely a paucity of resources, and often conditions of existential strife, that provide the basis for a liberated inscription of the self: “I have no money, no resources, no hopes. I am the happiest man alive. A year ago, six months ago, I thought I was an artist. I no longer think about it, I *am*” (*Cancer* 1; original emphasis). The task of the autonomous individual *chez* Miller is therefore aimed towards becoming the creative artist, the potent author of one’s life writing and writing of life, the self as a progressive work of art. The creative artist thus liberates herself from the peonage of self-definition circumscribed by capital or private property, but as such condemns herself to a life on the periphery of society.

Henry Miller’s *Weltanschauung* has often been aligned with that of Friedrich Nietzsche – indeed, he claimed his very first piece of prose was an essay on Nietzsche’s *The Anti-Christ*<sup>5</sup> – however, I maintain a more anarchic heritage imbues Miller’s writing. Furthermore, numerous critics<sup>6</sup> regard with suspicion the fact that, despite the erudition Nietzsche acquired through a voracious appetite for literature, he never once mentions his predecessor in the myriad references to writers and thinkers throughout his oeuvre. Suspicion is further compounded by the peculiar coincidence that many of Nietzsche’s fundamental tenets bear a remarkable likeness to those expounded in Stirner’s magnum opus, *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* (*The Ego and Its Own*), which, coincidentally, was published the month of Nietzsche’s birth, October 1844. Moreover, in both style and content Miller’s texts exude an anarchic influence in which he revels. Indeed he went so far

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<sup>5</sup> *The Books In My Life* (48)

<sup>6</sup> Huneker, for example, claims: “Though the name of Stirner is not quoted by Nietzsche, he nevertheless recommended Stirner to a favourite pupil of his, Professor Baumgartner at Basel University. This was in 1874.”

as to recount – yet, possibly apocryphally<sup>7</sup> – purchasing Stirner’s anarcho-psychological text along with Nietzsche’s *The Anti-Christ* from none other than “Red Anna” Goldman in San Diego in 1913.

A further association Miller and Stirner both share is that they required self-imposed exile to liberate the creative force in themselves. It was only by leaving his native Bavaria that Stirner would encounter the intellectual stimulus to compose his work. His creativity was piqued by attending the lectures of Hegel at Berlin University, and his involvement with the Young Hegelian philosophical circle, a circle that included, amongst others, Ludwig Feuerbach, Bruno Bauer, and his other soon-to-be philosophical nemeses Marx and Engels. (Marx’s and Engels’ *Die deutsche Ideologie* contains circa 400 pages of critique on Stirner’s thought.) Miller, however, would require more than mere regional displacement to exploit his creative tendencies; to ignite his imaginative/literary/creative petard he would need to encompass a new worldview, and to do so he would literally have to travel between two worlds: from the new to the old and, metaphorically, from the “real” to the “oneiric.” But more of Miller anon, first it should be instructive to map out the basic coordinates of Stirnerian egoism which shall facilitate our navigation towards the notion of authentic self-possession in Miller’s oeuvre.

### **The Ego and Its Own**

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<sup>7</sup> Männiste cites conflicting accounts in the biographers Robert Ferguson’s *Henry Miller: A Life* and Mary Dearborn’s *The Happiest Man Alive*. According to Ferguson, Goldman did not lecture in San Diego in 1913 due to a riot, while Dearborn claims that although Goldman was prevented from actually lecturing, Miller did manage to “buttonhol[e] her on her way out” (Männiste 23).

Max Stirner's magnum opus, *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* (*The Ego and Its Own*), is essentially a *reductio ad absurdum* of Ludwig Feuerbach's *Das Wesen des Christentums* (*The Essence of Christianity*). Feuerbach's thesis addresses the theological impasse between God and man, claiming to have answered the question "What is Man?" with the syllogism: if God is in man, and man is in God, then God is essentially man. Thus Feuerbach formulates his atheistic thesis:

The essence of man is man's supreme being; now by religion, to be sure, the *supreme being* is called *God* and regarded as an objective essence, but in truth it is only man's essence; and therefore the turning point of the world's history is that henceforth no longer *God*, but man, is to appear as God. (qtd in Stirner 34; original emphasis)

Stirner agreed with the Feuerbachian perception of Christianity as the pivotal moment in the cultural progression of Western thought and, like Feuerbach, strove to (re)invest humanity with agency through destruction of idolatry idealism by anthropocentric materialism. However, as a strict anti-essentialist Stirner's main contention is that Feuerbach's argument remains fundamentally contradictory. Simply annulling the notion of God as the transcendental essence of humanity and positing humanity as its own essence is, in Stirner's opinion, merely reverence of a superior essence at one remove. As the individual can at most only constitute a metonym of the species, the individual can never truly be human *per se*, i.e. the concept "human" remains essentially an ideal the assumption of which, in its all-encompassing or purest form, remains an impossibility for the individual. Thus he elaborates:

The supreme being is indeed the essence of man, but, just because it is his *essence* and not he himself, it remains quite immaterial whether we see it

outside him and view it as ‘God,’ or find it in him and call it ‘essence of man’ or ‘man.’ *I* am neither God nor *man*, neither the supreme essence nor my essence, and therefore it is all one in the main whether I think of the essence as in me or outside me. (Stirner 34; original emphasis)

In response to Feuerbach, Stirner therefore modifies the question “What is Man?” to “*Who* is Man?” For Stirner we are always already human therefore the objective of the individual is not to become *more* human, but to become *more than* human by distinguishing oneself from one’s *substance* through possessive self-definition. This view is expressed succinctly in his claim that “[e]very higher essence, such as truth, mankind, and so on, is an essence *over* us” (Stirner 38; original emphasis). Stirner is averse to any essence over the individual because he considers these essences to be false ideals which enslave and consume the individual without profit to the individual. Just as the ideal of an after-life denies the individual enjoyment of worldly pleasures, so too is the Enlightenment ideology of progress nothing but a ruse orchestrated by the privileged few at the enormous expense of the masses fool enough to be beguiled by such proclamations as the cause of the nation, the brotherhood of man, and so forth. For these causes, which are themselves purely egoistic, the individual is simply an expedient facilitator to be consumed in their name then tossed into the anonymity of history:

How is it with mankind, whose cause we are to make our own? Is its cause that of another, and does mankind serve a higher cause? No, mankind looks only at itself, mankind will promote the interests of mankind only, mankind is its own cause. That it may develop, it causes nations and individuals to wear themselves out in its service, and, when they have accomplished what

mankind needs, it throws them on the dung-heap of history in gratitude. Is not mankind's cause – a purely egoistic cause? (Stirner 6)

Stirner believes the individual should have no truck with ideals such as “God” or “man” as they “have concerned themselves for nothing, for nothing but themselves. Let me then likewise concern myself for *myself*, who am equally with God the nothing of all others, who am my all, who am the only one [*der Einzige*]” (Stirner 6-7; original emphasis). This refutation of ideals towards an inward turn brings us to the title of Stirner’s treatise.

*Der Einzige and sein Eigentum* is translated as *The Ego and Its Own* in English, and *L'Unique et sa propriété* in French. I include both language translations here in a bid to elucidate the particularly tricky task of retaining the sense of the original German. This is due to the word play of the German adjectives “*einzig*” meaning “unique,” “sole,” “exclusive,” “single,” “only”; and, “*eigen*” meaning “own,” “proprietary,” “distinct,” “particular,” from which derives the noun “*Eigentum*” meaning “property,” “estate,” “ownership.” Stirner’s *Einzig* is a unique, autonomous individual, however, and this cannot be stressed strongly enough, this does not presuppose the *Einzig*’s superiority over other individuals, purely that “unique” in the Stirnerian sense avers an innate facultative distinction between humans. Furthermore, neither should the “Ego” translation of the *Einzig* be taken strictly as, although it could possibly be interpreted as a precursor to, the Freudian ego. Indeed, in *Break-Out from the Crystal Palace* John Carroll describes Stirner’s writing as anarcho-psychology which he elucidates thus:

One of the main roots of the anarcho-psychological perspective, and its opposition to rationalist-positivist thought and to progress models of society, is its disbelief in the law of non-contradiction. Implicit in the work

of Stirner, Nietzsche, and Dostoevsky is the conviction that knowledge cannot be comprehensive, and consequently that there do not exist hypotheses which are both interesting and tell the whole truth. The reality of the human condition is far too complex to be encompassed by propositions: philosophy can proceed only part-way towards creating propositions, and then for only a few of the many facets of this reality. (41)

Stirner's *Einzig*e is therefore not a purely metaphysical concept but, on the contrary, a thoroughly embodied protean ego or self. The *Einzig*e is a sui generis entity which regenerates its self by means of self-configured worldly inscription.

Hence, although Stirner never explicitly refers to authenticity in *Der Einzige*, I contend the implicit aspect of the authentic self can be traced etymologically in Stirner's philosophy by recourse to the Greek "authentikos, adj of authentēs, one who acts on his own authority, a chief" (Partridge 183). A yet more rigorous etymology can be gleaned from Ernest Klein's definition:

αὐθέρτης, αὐτο-έρτης, 'absolute master, ruler; murderer', lit. 'one who does a thing himself,' compounded of αὐτός, 'self' ('see auto-), and \*έρτης, 'one who does (a thing) himself,' which is rel. to ἀύω, Att. ἀύω, 'I accomplish,' and cogn. With OI. *sanóti*, 'wins, gains,' perhaps also with Hitt. *shanḫ-zi*, 'he seeks, strives' (61; original emphasis)

These definitions, I maintain, correspond significantly to the striving, constructive notions underpinning Stirner's *Einzig*e as the following description of the human condition attests: "From the instant when he catches sight of the light of the world one seeks to find out *himself* and get hold of *himself* out of its confusion, in which

he, with everything else, is tossed about in motley mixture”<sup>8</sup> (Stirner 13; original emphasis). Logically enough, Stirner continues to explain that as one seeks to get hold of oneself in all life’s “motley mixture” one cannot avoid constant contact with others who “assert [their] own persistence.” Consequentially, as each individual has for one’s primary interest the care of oneself “the *combat* of self-assertion is unavoidable” (Stirner 13; original emphasis).

Stirner’s philosophy not only refutes Feuerbach and the Hegelian tradition, but also presents a paradigm shift from the central tenets of the main thinkers we have encountered so far in this thesis. Thus it should not be surprising that *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* has been deemed “the most revolutionary [book] ever written” (Huneker 350). Stirner’s flowing, evolving definition of the *Einzige* necessarily rejects the Kantian categorical imperative as a static framework. Augustine’s concept of the “inward and upward” trajectory of authenticity towards a transcendental self is also clearly repudiated as the *Einzige* respects nothing above himself.

Furthermore, as Stirner’s philosophy is expressivist it would presuppose an “inward and outward” expression of the self which denies any extant moral “truths”:

Your claims of obligation, to your ‘thou shalt,’ to the pronouncements of your categorical verdict, I refute en bloc with the ‘ataraxia’ and serenity of my Ego. It is out of sheer condescension that I make use of language. I am

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<sup>8</sup> Note: In the original German I interpret “ein Mensch” as “a human” rather than the gendered translation: “Von dem Augenblicke an, wo er das Licht der Welt erblickt, sucht ein Mensch aus ihrem Wirrwarr, in welchem auch er mit allem Andern bunt durcheinander herumgewürfelt wird, *sich* herauszufinden und *sich* zu gewinnen...” (Stirner 9; original emphasis)

the “Unspeakable” and it is quite right that I should show myself, that I should appear. (qtd in Guerin 35)

Stirner structures his thesis metaphorically upon the triumvirate historical genealogy of Ancients-Pre-moderns-Moderns which he extends to that of child-youth-man within the social context. The child-youth-man trajectory of self-discovery may at first glimpse mirror that of Rousseau’s *Émile*, however, Stirner negates Rousseau’s secularised version of the Fall myth which conceives of humans as born into the innocent state of nature and subsequently corrupted by society. For Stirner, the human is always already born into the prescriptive fetters of society: for modern humans there is no natural state. The task of the individual therefore becomes one of struggle against the repressive forces of the state and its institutions. Just as the child is born into the family to be nurtured and disciplined by parents before embarking on an autonomous existence, socially speaking the individual’s maturation should follow a similar trajectory which progressively severs the cord of social convention. Hence, for Stirner’s *Einzige*, social and moral insurrection becomes an ineluctable condition. However, according to Stirner, such insurrection does not necessarily imply internecine social slaughter as, continuing with the family metaphor, through mutual recognition of strength and right it is possible that individuals coexist in the manner of the parents and their self-governing adult progeny.

Writing in the third person in an article titled “The Modern Sophists” (1847) Stirner questions the logic of a strictly nihilistic *misinterpretation* of his *Einzige*, “Does that amount to saying that Stirner, with his ‘Egoism,’ is seeking to deny everything that belongs to us all, to declare it non-existent, that, out of negation pure and simple, he wants to make a *tabula rasa* of all private property in our social

organization, which none may escape?" (qtd in Guerin 35). He continues by interrogating the vital or existential value a purely atomised mode of existence would offer any individual: "Does it mean that he wishes to turn his back on all human community, to turn into a chrysalis, which would be tantamount, so to speak, to committing suicide?" That, he rhetorically answers, would be a "rather crass misunderstanding" (qtd in Guerin 35).

A socially atomised structure leading to a *bellum omnium contra omnes* is unthinkable for Stirner as the *Einzig*e requires the other for his own gratification. For Stirner there is no such thing as "altruism" as every individual act is motivated by self-interest. Altruism is an empty ideological construct brought about primarily through religion then adopted by the state which aims at inveigling the individual into guilty submission:

What is not supposed to be my concern! First and foremost, the Good Cause, then God's cause, the cause of mankind, of truth, of freedom, of humanity, of justice; further, the cause of my people, my prince, my fatherland; finally, even the cause of mind, and a thousand other causes. Only *my* cause is never to be my concern. 'Shame on the egoist who thinks only of himself!' (Stirner 5; original emphasis)

Hence, Stirner argues that any concern purely for the self becomes a pseudo-crime with regard to the state's dictates as it necessitates a suspension of obedience to the state. As an act of disobedience it would by extension imply the individual's positing of personal interest before that of duty to the state. Yet as Stirner contends in an 1845 issue of "Wigand's Viertel Jahrschrift": "The 'exclusivism' of the authentic Egoist, which some would represent as 'isolation' or 'detachment' is instead a full participation in whatever arouses interest, to the exclusion of whatever

does not” (qtd in Guerin 33). In this respect, the *Einziges*’s “participation in whatever arouses interest” seems to indicate that self-expression, consumption of the self and ultimately *enjoyment* of the self become the only real conditions of existential value. It is, therefore, from this sybaritic point of departure that we may head towards the ecstatic terminus of Henry Miller.

### **A Human Book**

In his 1940 essay, “Inside the Whale,” George Orwell described *Tropic of Cancer* as “a novel in the first person, or autobiography in the form of a novel, whichever way you like to look at it” (9). However, in his own essay published just two years previously, “An Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere” (1938), Miller had already expressed the perspective from which his work should be interpreted:

The naïve English critics, in their polite, asinine way, talk about the ‘hero’ of my book (*Tropic of Cancer*) as though he were a character I had invented. I made it plain as could be that I was talking in that book about myself. I used my own name throughout. I didn’t write a piece of fiction: I wrote an autobiographical document, a *human* book. I mention this only because the book marks a turning point in my literary career—I should say, *in my life*. At a certain point in my life I decided henceforth I would write about myself, my friends, my experiences, what I knew and what I had seen with my own eyes. Anything else, in my opinion, is literature, and *I am not interested in literature*. (*Cosmo Eye* 161; original emphasis)

In Orwell’s defence, no one, not even Miller himself, would employ the adjective “asinine” when referring to Orwell’s status as literary critic and it should therefore be noted that *Inside the Whale* elucidates a number of valuable observations on

*Tropic of Cancer*. First, Orwell's description of *Tropic of Cancer*'s narrative structure is explained by the fact that "Miller insists that it is straight autobiography, but the tempo and method of telling the story are those of a novel" (Orwell 9). This is a rather obvious yet highly important observation to make as it highlights the ambiguity of the autobiographical form Miller intentionally conveyed, yet one which has been ignored by many critics in their attempt to categorize Miller's oeuvre in two oversimplistic terms: autobiography *or* fiction. I argue that it is actually through a style of "planned incongruity" that Miller's work throws into question the validity of these very distinctions. As with Rousseau, Miller is entirely conscious of autobiography's reliance on the author's memory at the moment of composition. Both authors draw attention to the retrospective, or *distancing* act involved in autobiography which constructs the author's notion of *present* identity by comparison with the past. As James M. Decker states: "Identity functions as a manifestation of memory, and only through a long and painstaking dissection of one's historical traces and their relationship to the present may one attain any substantial degree of self-comprehension" (12). It may be argued, however, that the attainment of self-comprehension based on the unreliability of memory implies the sacrificing of historical accuracy. This may be the case, however, it is not necessarily detrimental to Miller's project which seeks to (re)construct history upon an emotional essence rather than a *de facto* account of history. Miller wrote "to establish a greater REALITY" (*Cosmo Eye* 371; original emphasis). Yet he categorically denied being either a realist or naturalist: "I am for life, which in literature, it seems to me, can only be attained by the use of dream and symbol." His ultimate objective was "[a]bove all, for imagination, fantasy, for a liberty as yet undreamed of" (*Cosmo Eye* 371).

Miller implies that to err is to be human, hence his proclamation: “I wrote an autobiographical document, a *human* book.” To exploit this emotional, or human, essence Miller fashioned a style conflating diachronicity and synchronicity which he referred to as a “circular or spiral form of time development” which he felt “enables me to expand freely in any direction at any given moment.” His reasoning for adopting such a revolutionary structure was because the traditional chronological development seemed “wooden and artificial, a synthetic reconstitution of the facts of life. The facts and events of life are for me only the starting points on the way towards the discovery of truth” (qtd in Jong 237). For Miller, the goal of writing to produce a literary product bears less importance than the existential process of the writing as for him the writer discovers her/himself in writing. By filtering memories, dreams, and fantasies through an anecdotal matrix, Miller allows his narratives to blur categories of past, present, and future, enabling him to depict a persona that stands both in and apart from the historical continuum (Decker 1). In avoiding a linear narrative structure Miller is able to digress from his account of a particular event by meandering through a surreal dream passage, or simply by relating a tangential anecdote, before revisiting the initial event from a different perspective. The more frequently this method is employed, the more the perspectives of the event are multiplied thus delivering a more “truthful” account of the event. Regardless of historical veracity *per se*, in returning and revisiting a *prior* self as he *remembers* it, Miller is effectively reconstituting and supporting his *present* sense of self. In effect, this signifies a “psychological” structuring of time.

Psychological as it is, Miller’s style is by no means “confessional” in the manner of Augustine or Rousseau. Confession, I maintain, implies guilt on the part of the confessor and when reading Miller one cannot but sense that he thrives on

disclosing facts of a disconcerting nature. Neither, I suggest despite Miller's own use of the term, is "autobiography" an apposite description of Miller's writing even though he claimed that to be a successful writer he had to learn "to content myself with what was *within my grasp*, my *scope*, my personal ken" (*Cosmo Eye* 161; emphasis added). The reliance on personal "scope" suggests an individual perspective aimed at encompassing as much of the world as possible beyond, yet limited by, the self. I therefore suggest "periautography," meaning "writing around and about the self," as most applicable to Miller's oeuvre and concur with James Olney that the profitable use of this term "is precisely its *indefinition* and lack of generic rigor, its comfortably loose fit and generous adaptability" (Olney xv; original emphasis).

Furthermore, similar to the egoistic behaviour of Stirner's *Einzig*, Miller's use of periautography in writing about and around the self buttresses his previous explanation for focusing on "myself, my friends, my experiences, what I knew and what I had seen with my own eyes" thus presenting a particularly egocentric style of writing which places the author at the very centre of the narrative. In making the cynosure the personal narrative Miller thereby excludes the allure of "grand" narratives which coerce the individual's liberty. This returns us to the germaneness of Orwell's essay in this chapter as it concerns Miller's content, style and the importance of travel.

Considered within *Tropic of Cancer's* (1934) historical context, while Mussolini's army was "marching into Abyssinia and Hitler's concentration camps were already bulging," Orwell believed that "[o]n the face of it no material could be less promising" (10). At a time when the world's attention was firmly fixed on Rome, Berlin and Moscow it certainly didn't appear to be opportune that "a novel

of outstanding value was likely to be written about American dead-beats cadging drinks in the Latin Quarter” (Orwell 10). And certainly not a novel of such explicit content as Miller’s first publication (which, incidentally, would not be published in English speaking countries until the obscenity laws were revoked in 1961). However, what was initially assumed to be a “bit of naughty-naughty left over from the twenties” turned out to be “nothing of the kind, but a very remarkable book” (Orwell 11). Such a plaudit derives from the escape Miller’s novel provides the reader that only a select few novels are capable of achieving: that of “creat[ing] a world of their own” (Orwell 11).

When reading Miller, Orwell experiences a “peculiar relief” which he describes “as though you could hear a voice speaking to you, a friendly American voice, with no humbug in it, no moral purpose, merely an implicit assumption that we are all alike” (12). Orwell implies an existential disjunction while reading Miller: “For the moment you have got away from all the lies and simplifications, the stylized, marionette-like quality of ordinary fiction, even quite good fiction, and are dealing with the recognizable experiences of human beings” (12; original emphasis). I submit that Orwell is suggesting that in an epoch besieged by propaganda Miller addresses the reader with an authentic voice. What Orwell enthuses about in Miller’s books is not so much that “English is treated as a spoken language, but spoken *without fear*” (14; original emphasis). In other words, it appears Orwell praises Miller for having written a *human* book, for having expressed his opinion freely yet without any intention of proselytizing the reader. I agree with Orwell’s interpretation overall, yet strongly disagree with his belief that Miller intones “an implicit assumption that we are all alike.” I suggest Orwell’s reading is influenced by his Marxist leanings whereas Miller’s anarchic approach

would imply that as humans we are not all alike, but that we share existential similarities only in regard to the social contexts in which we find ourselves. Indeed, in his introduction to *Tropic of Cancer*, Karl Shapiro says that Miller would proffer Krishnamurti's view that "The world problem is an individual problem" (*Cancer* xxiv). However, the true drama arises when individuals project their problems outwards onto the world stage before considering them ontologically on a personal level: "Before you have established peace and understanding in your own minds you desire to establish peace and tranquillity in the minds of others, in your nations and in your states; peace and understanding will only come when there is understanding, certainty and strength in yourselves" (*Cancer* xxiv).

To return to Orwell, he praises the human element in *Tropic of Cancer* yet questions the human content of the novel: "But what kind of experience? What kind of human beings?" (12). He proceeds by betraying his own prejudiced evaluation of an idealized human type by criticizing Miller's characters as "people living the expatriate life, people drinking, talking, meditating, and fornicating, not ... people working, marrying, and bringing up children" which he concludes as "a pity, because he [Miller] would have described the one set of activities as well as the other" (Orwell 12). By Orwell's own admission he had not read *Tropic of Capricorn* (1939) which deals precisely with the latter set of activities, therefore I shall return to the content of this novel in detail later in the chapter.

What I find most problematic here is that Orwell constructs a hierarchy of "worthy" types who work and get married, contrasted with the others whom he perceives as "utter worthlessness as social types" whose textual, and by extension existential, significance is only to be accepted *aesthetically* due to Miller's "mastery of technique" (13). Trapped in his Marxist purview, Orwell prioritises a synecdoche

of the proletarian as the idealised human at the expense of those he considers mere *vauriens*. I submit that were the reader unaware of Orwell's staunch belief in Communism such a description could rather be interpreted as a Fascist social critique and would support Miller's view "that the men who would create a Fascist world are at heart the same as those who would create a Communist world. They are all looking for leaders who will provide them with enough work to give them food and shelter" (*Cosmo Eye* 158).

### **The Impotence of -isms**

Miller loathed the false confidence and moralising of collective identities. He considered the brotherhood of man as "a permanent delusion common to idealists everywhere in all epochs: it is the reduction of the principle of individuation to the least common denominator of intelligibility" which ultimately "leads the masses to identify themselves with movie stars and megalomaniacs like Hitler and Mussolini" (*Cosmo Eye* 152). Miller even went so far as to apply this to art claiming that there was no such thing as Surrealism, only Surrealists; the circle of which he extended to include the likes of Bosch, Grunewald and Giotto. "The desire to posit an ism, to isolate the germ and cultivate it, is a bad sign. It means impotency" (*Cosmo Eye* 181). In fact, Miller claimed to have been "writing Surrealistically in America before I had ever heard the word. Of course I got a good kick in the pants for it. I wrote for ten years in America without once having a manuscript accepted. I had to beg, borrow, and steal to get by" (*Cosmo Eye* 160-61). To be a true revolutionary, Miller seems to suggest, is to stand alone against the state. Indeed, employing language which could almost have been penned by

Stirner himself, Miller claims to believe in a liberty which no leader can offer: “I need no leader and no god. I am my own leader and my own god. I make my own bibles. *I believe in myself*—that is my credo” (*Cosmo Eye* 158; original emphasis). Perhaps it was a result of the high esteem in which Orwell held Miller’s prose which made it difficult for him to accept that Miller’s unbridled self-belief was attained precisely due to his inclusion in the “utter worthlessness [of] social types.” And the inclusion in such a social context was a consequence of his self-imposed exile in France.

“A man can get to love shit if his livelihood depends on it, if his happiness is involved” muses Miller in *Tropic of Cancer* (148). He arrives at such a profound conclusion whilst reflecting on his short-lived job as a proofreader which, if he were “still a man with pride, honour, ambition and so forth, would seem like the bottom rung of degradation.” Yet now he welcomes it “as an invalid welcomes death” because his current existence has become a “negative reality, just like death—a sort of heaven without the pain and terror of dying” (*Cancer* 148). At first glance, Miller’s disavowal of such “qualities” as “pride, honour, ambition and so forth” may suggest a pathetic soul bereft of any kind of personal integrity. However, it is precisely this disavowal which empowers him to construct his own value system. Once again we can draw parallels with Stirner who “does not hanker after the ‘dignity of man’” although he “does place value on ‘ownness’ [*Eigenheit*], a concept of authenticity concretely bound to the individual self and its realization” (Carroll 43).

Miller’s inversion of reality is therefore a refutation of social mores which liberates him from the confines of common responsibility. Such an inversion of reality serves as a release from socially imposed modes of thought and enables him

to pursue his artistic impulses. In a crude epiphany he poses the question: “How could I have foreseen, in America, with all those firecrackers they put up your ass to give you pep and courage, that the ideal position for a man of my temperament was to look for orthographic mistakes?” He finds it incredible in its simplicity to realise that back in his homeland the individual is compelled to “think of nothing but becoming President of the United States some day. Potentially every man is Presidential timber” whereas in France “it’s different. Here every man is potentially a zero. If you become something or somebody it is an accident, a miracle” (*Cancer* 150). The assumption that every individual is a potential cipher releases the pressure valve of expectation and in turn fosters the individual’s unique capacity to pursue their own imaginative exploits. If the attainment of freedom is a personal struggle, one first requires creative space in which to imagine the individual parameters of such freedom otherwise it can never come to fruition.

Miller comprehends that he “had to travel precisely all around the world to find just a comfortable, agreeable niche as this.” There is no irony intended in this comment as, by becoming a non-entity in a foreign land, he has succeeded in disburdening himself of the prescribed dreams of the American way of life – all those firecrackers they put up your ass to give you pep and courage have now been defused. His current cultural context offers him a perfect *tabula rasa* for self-fashioning, “I have no money, no resources, no hopes. I am the happiest man alive. A year ago, six months ago, I thought I was an artist. I no longer think about it, I *am*” (*Cancer* 1; original emphasis). It is uniquely such desperate conditions that offer the framework in which he can finally become the artist he had long felt germinating within.

Cultural displacement therefore liberates Miller to pursue the potentialities of his own self. He admits that he has come to Paris “for a reason I have not yet been able to fathom” but appreciates that there is some sense lurking behind it (*Cancer* 1). That reason could well be the self-preservation instinct we all share: remaining in the metropolis of New York would have been slow suicide for the uninspired pre-artist Miller. Hence, the open, flowing narrative style Miller adopts in Paris with *Tropic of Cancer* is indicative of the self-liberation he engendered through his rebuttal of systems and structures which voluntary exile afforded him. At last Miller feels confident enough to stop emulating the writing styles of his literary heroes and discard the awkward third person narrative he had been attempting in his compositions. In true anarchic style he rebels against all that had heretofore stymied his creative flow: “Everything that was literature has fallen from me. There are no books to be written, thank God” (*Cancer* 1). Reflecting on the very book his reader is reading, he dementedly continues, “This then? This is not a book. This is libel, slander, defamation of character ... a prolonged insult, a gob of spit in the face of Art, a kick in the pants to God, Man, Destiny, Time, Love Beauty” (*Cancer* 2). From this perspective, free from cultural and institutional influences, he can become the “creative nothing” [*das schöpferische Nichts*] of Stirner’s *Einziges*. “I am not nothing in the sense of emptiness, but I am the creative nothing [*schöpferische Nichts*], the nothing out of which I myself as creator create everything” (Stirner 7).

Echoing Krishnamurti, by living in self-imposed exile Miller is free to consider the “individual problem” without dealing with the crushing “world problem.” Abandoning the world problem should therefore not be deemed “irresponsible” as it would be in a conventional social critique. Rather, by focusing

on the individual problem Miller is free to engage in Schiller's notion of "play" in *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen* (*On the Aesthetic Education of Man*). Schiller believed that both humans and animals share a "play impulse." However, in humans this impulse acts as an intermediary between our sensual and rational drives. Hilde Hein elucidates: "As a synthesis of both the sensuous and formal impulses, play cancels the authority of both and liberates man physically and morally. In the play experience man's dual nature is harmonized and humanized" (67). Such a description should put us in mind of the "'ataraxia' and serenity" Stirner's *Einziges* felt in refuting society's "Thou shalt's"; an ataraxia also reflected in Miller's socially superfluous condition. Miller's superfluity within the social context opens avenues to creative agency, emancipating his thought process to enter realms of fantasy. By negating authoritarian influence, as like a child, Miller can embark on free discovery of himself as the object of scrutiny. His supererogatory status as a mere proofreader therefore disburdens him of the duty ordained by a proper career and permits him to indulge in the daydreaming required for his creative writing. Hence he is no longer subject to the system, but subject to himself. As John Carroll claims, "In this view man is human not by virtue of his work and how *useful* he is, but by virtue of his play and how *superfluous* he is" (139). The energy one preserves in refusing to be a worker drone furnishes the individual with the creative surplus which provides her personal fulfilment.

The abundant creative surplus Miller experienced manifests itself in the myriad surreal tropes and imagery which imbue his novels. For instance, he describes the intellectual gestation of *Tropic of Cancer* as an actual pregnancy. His novel has begun to grow inside him and he carries it everywhere. "I walk through the streets big with child and the cops escort me across the street. Women get up to

offer me their seats. Nobody pushes me rudely any more. I am pregnant” (*Cancer* 26). Here we can see the empowering effect of his “negative reality.” The world is turned upside down with gender roles reversed as women “offer [him] their seats,” and even the authoritarian threat of the cops is diminished as they escort him “across the street.” Anything is possible, *c'est le monde à l'envers*. Miller implies that as our human worlds are constructed by language it is through recourse to linguistic tropes that one make the first movement towards breaking the shackles of socially imposed conformity. But this movement itself is dependent on actual bodily displacement to fertile soil, which in Miller’s case is Paris.

It therefore seems strange that Orwell—particularly when considering his own traveling experiences recounted in *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933), *Burmese Days* (1934), *Shooting an Elephant* (1936), and *Homage to Catalonia* (1938)—should claim that “the penalty of leaving your native land ... means transferring your roots into shallower soil” (12). Based on the material he was to garner through his own travelling experiences, and in view of the invigorating effect exile had on Miller, that seems a peculiar remark. What could a writer possibly gain by a narrow rather than a broad world view? His answer returns to the matter of subject choice by claiming that: “Exile is probably more damaging to a novelist than to a painter or even a poet, because its effect is to take him out of contact with working life and narrow down his range to the street, the café, the church, the brothel and the studio” (Orwell 12). Even were Miller not to disprove Orwell’s theory by writing such serious travelogues as *The Colossus of Maroussi* (1941), *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* (1945), and *Remember to Remember* (1947) later in his life, this would still be egregious comment to make it as it is specifically his

superfluous position in Paris which confirmed his credo of believing in himself rather than the destructive influence of collective causes.

Orwell was troubled by the recent trend of English intelligentsia flocking towards Russian Communism when he was all too aware that it was an inauthentic form of Marxism. He knew the “authentic” brand of Communism which had set out to violently overthrow capitalism had run its course after only a few years. It seemed absurd to him that writers and poets should still be desperate enough to continue adhering to its call when it was now completely opposed to individual creativity and expression under the Stalinist model. However, the reason he then provides is startlingly plain: “The debunking of Western civilization had reached its climax and ‘disillusionment’ was immensely widespread” (Orwell 35). Furthermore, with the developing narrative depicting German Fascism as the greatest threat to humanity, Russian Communism was portrayed as the binary opposite so that “God – Stalin. The devil – Hitler. Heaven – Moscow. Hell – Berlin. All the gaps were filled up” (Orwell 35-6). Just as the previous generation had fashionably found solace in Roman Catholicism, the simple explanation for the present generation’s allegiance to Communism “was simply something to *believe in*” (Orwell 35; my emphasis). Hence, these stay-at-home philosophers, rather than question the value system they were endorsing, simply embraced it naively in the blind attempt to structure some kind of logic to their existence. Sides, they believed, had to be chosen. Hence, bereft of any individual vision of their own they simply subscribed to the reductionist narrative presented to them. As Orwell succinctly describes it, “it is the patriotism of the deracinated” (Orwell 36).

Orwell elaborates with an observation which I argue completely contradicts his critique of the traveling or displaced writer:

With all its injustices, England is still the land of habeas corpus, and the overwhelming majority of English people have no experience of violence or illegality. If you grow up in that sort of atmosphere it is not at all easy to imagine what a despotic regime is like ... To people of that kind such things as purges, secret police, summary executions, imprisonment without trial, etc., etc., are *too remote* to be terrifying. They can swallow totalitarianism *because* they have no experience of anything except liberalism. (36; both original emphasis & emphasis added)

Surely by this rationale it would be imperative that people leave their comfort zone and educate themselves to what is actually happening in the world beyond their horizon. In fact, the point is illustrated with reference to the line “The conscious acceptance of guilt in the necessary murder” in W. H. Auden’s poem “Spain.” Orwell is outraged by the phrase “necessary murder” which he maintains could “only be written by a person to whom murder is at most a *word*” (37; original emphasis). This is immediately followed by the acerbic quip “personally I would not speak so lightly of murder” which he feels warranted to express precisely because “I have seen the bodies of numbers of murdered men ... *Therefore* I have some conception of what murder means – the terror, the hatred, the howling relatives, the post-mortems, the blood, the smells” (Orwell 37; emphasis added). Hence, precisely due to empirical knowledge gleaned through travel does Orwell feel justified in criticizing Auden’s moral position! In other words, had Auden actually witnessed the horrific sights he laments in his poetry logic suggests that he too would be justified in evoking them rather than “expressing a brand of amoralism ... only possible if you are the kind of person who is always somewhere else when the trigger is pulled” (Orwell 37). I submit that Orwell is here indirectly endorsing

an authentic world perception which is intrinsically empirical. Much as our generation, having never experienced its horror, cannot *truly* imagine the existential conditions endured by those living in a totalitarian state, it is not enough to merely imagine the suffering of others from a safe vantage point. A certain degree of personal experience of the imagined condition is essential in order to acquire a modicum of actual comprehension. Hence, the prisoner can ephemerally escape her actual conditions of existence through the phantasy of freedom because they have the memory of freedom prior to incarceration. The free, however, can only ever have a vicarious phantasy of imprisonment. How, therefore, can Orwell's criticism of Auden's ignorant comment serve other than to refute his previous opinion that exile be "damaging to a novelist ... a painter or even a poet" or indeed anyone who cares to gain greater insight into the human condition?

From this perspective, Miller's anti-political stance appears justified by Orwell's description of what was meant by "Communism" in the late thirties: "The more vocal kind of Communist is in effect a Russian publicity agent posing as an international socialist" (33). Therefore Miller displays acumen in his claim "I think it is a piece of the most cruel deception to urge men to place their hopes of justice in some external order, some form of government, some social order, some system of ideal rights" because these systems are always in flux and always to the benefit of those in control (*Cosmo Eye* 162). This point is further compounded by Orwell with an auguring of the "virtual reality" he would include in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*:

Every time Stalin swaps partners, 'Marxism' has to be hammered into a new shape. This entails sudden and violent changes of 'line', purges, denunciations, systematic destruction of party literature, etc., etc. Every

Communist is in fact liable at any moment to have to alter his most fundamental convictions, or leave the party. (33)

The reality of such a system is the annihilation of individual thought and without individual thought any system succeeds in regenerating the perfect conditions of its continued existence. This applies as equally to the draconianism of a totalitarian system as to the soft despotism of the capitalist system and therefore brings us back to the importance of individual agency and the need for imaginative space. It also suggests that the refutation of all prescribed political theories is the only real option for individual emancipation and supports Miller's virulent social critique: "Karl Marx, so they say, explains the structure of our capitalistic society. I don't need any explanation of our capitalistic society. Fuck your capitalistic society! Fuck your Communistic society and your Fascist society and all your other societies! Society is made up of individuals. It is the individual who interests me—not the society" (*Cosmo Eye* 162).

Miller's disparagement of society can be traced back to his miserable experiences of subsistence during the Depression which he recounts in *Tropic of Capricorn*. In this, his third novel, he details the dehumanising effects that a capitalist system which perceived individuals only as expedient tools of production had on his existence. He admits to being a natural rebel, however, the conditions he and his brethren were to suffer simply to make ends meet compelled him to transgress the norms at any given occasion. It is in such frustrating conditions that he first came to realise that both the state and corporatism owns and consumes the individual. Hence the only means of pursuing one's authenticity heads ineluctably towards a non-conformism which offers the individual personal gain at the expense of financial hardship. As Miller explains, he had nothing to do "except improve

myself, and I was going crazy with the improvements I made every day. Even if there were a job for me I couldn't accept it, because what I needed was not work but a life more abundant" (*Capricorn* 300). Already in New York we see the essentially superfluous existence which would eventually ignite his creative flare in Parisian exile: "I couldn't waste time being a teacher, a lawyer, a physician, a politician, or anything else that society had to offer. It was easier to accept menial jobs because it left my mind free" (*Capricorn* 300).

Not only were his immediate family and social circle incapable of understanding such an ostensibly indolent mode of existence, but academics too. One of Miller's harshest critics on the matter was the feminist critic Kate Millet. Millet's schadenfreude is almost palpable when she states: "By the ethos of American financial morality, Miller was a downright 'failure' until the age of forty; a writer unable to produce, living a seedy outcast existence, jobless and dependent on handouts" (298). Yet, on the contrary, Miller protests that he was rarely "jobless" in America and claimed to have worked in such diverse fields of employment as:

Dish-washer, bus boy, newsie, messenger boy, grave-digger, bill sticker, book salesman, bell hop, bartender, liquor salesman, typist, adding machine operator, librarian, statistician, charity worker, mechanic, insurance collector, garbage collector, usher, secretary to an evangelist, dock hand, street car conductor, gymnasium instructor, milk driver, ticket chopper, etc." (*Cosmo Eye* 367-68)

Being well aware of such a misperception, he countered it by saying, "People regarded me as lazy and shiftless, but on the contrary I was an exceedingly active individual. Even if it was hunting for a piece of tail, that was something, and well

worth while, especially if compared to other forms of activity—such as making buttons or turning screws, or even removing appendixes” (*Capricorn* 318).

However, it would indeed appear to be true, as Millet contests and he documented himself, that he did often rely on handouts. Yet that stemmed from an altruism borne of frustration at the egregious injustice of the capitalist system. During his employment at what he calls The Cosmodemonic Telegraph Company of North America he found himself responsible for the hiring and firing of deliverymen. Fully conscious that these men had nowhere else to go, and that their families naturally depended on them as the breadwinners, he did his utmost to employ and retain the services of even the most effete candidates despite the indifference of his employers to the grander social problems beyond their own economic gain. Miller’s attitude was to remain faithful to the proprieties of his own moral perspective and nurture the human flame beneath the broken and desperate individual till it “become a conflagration” (*Capricorn* 27). At the risk of losing his own job he behaved recalcitrantly against the directives of his superiors:

Be firm! Be hard! they cautioned me. Fuck that! I said to myself, I’ll be generous, pliant, forgiving, tolerant, tender. In the beginning I heard every man to the end; if I couldn’t give him a job I gave him money, and if I had no money I gave him cigarettes or I gave him courage. But I gave! The effect was dizzying. Nobody can estimate the results of a good deed, of a kind word. (*Capricorn* 27)

Miller laments that there is clearly something rotten in the state of New York and that the only means of retaining sanity is to rebel against the system from the inside, acting as a kind of cancerous tumour within a parasitic system. As he

candidly states in *Tropic of Capricorn*, he felt that the only available escape from within the context of such a dehumanising system was altruistic self-abasement:

I had the secret in my hand: it was to be generous, to be kind, to be patient. I did the work of five men. I hardly slept for three years. I didn't own a whole shirt and was so ashamed of borrowing from my wife, or robbing the kid's piggy bank, that to get the carfare to work in the morning I would swindle the blind newspaperman at the subway station. (*Capricorn* 28)

Miller illustrates the moral dilemma, the incongruous moral position one must assume when functioning within the context of a corrupt system. Here his moral framework is necessarily recalibrated to euphemise the raiding of his child's piggy bank which offsets a yet more morally reprehensible act of swindling the blind newspaper man. The quandary obliges him to conduct himself along a path of damage limitation. A balance must be struck within a staggered hierarchy of damage infliction: by compensating one unhappy soul, unfortunately another must to some degree suffer.

In a bid to dissociate himself from the strictures of his New York existence Miller's first essay of voluntary exile is to follow his forefather's tradition and go West. Yet even in the sunshine of California he becomes painfully aware of the crushing shadow of his culture:

I am alone and I am working like a slave in the orange grove at Chula Vista. Am I coming into my own? I think not. I am a very wretched, forlorn, miserable person. I seem to have lost everything. In fact, I am hardly a person—I am more nearly an animal. All day long I am standing or walking behind the two jackasses which are hitched to my sledge. I have no thoughts,

no dreams, no desires. I am thoroughly healthy and empty. I am a nonentity, I am so thoroughly alive and healthy that I am like the luscious deceptive fruit which hangs on the Californian trees. One more ray of sun and I will be rotten. “*Pourri avant d’être muri*” (*Capricorn* 151; original emphasis)

“Rotten before ripening,” indeed. If Millet has read such passages from *Tropic of Capricorn* she seems unmoved as her criticism changes tact thus: “Of course, Miller is a maverick and a rebel, but much as he hates the money mentality, it is so ingrained in him that he is capable only of replacing it with sex—a transference of acquisitive impulse” (298). Rather than interpret sex as a metaphor of the artist’s creative force, Millet construes sex literally as some kind of psychological surrogate or substitute which compensates Miller for his failure within the capitalist system (this is simply armchair psychoanalysis). The blinkers of her own feminist motive distract her from the contextual argument her perspective shares with Miller: that context and language play a defining role in individual behaviour. Miller is as critical of the dehumanising conditions created by capitalist society as Millet is of the commodification of the female body which a patriarchal system propagates. Miller defies the rationalized modes of production which dictate that an individual must serve as an expedient component of production within a process which negates any inclusion of self interest other than acquiring wages sufficient to subsist. It is for this very reason that Miller expresses respect towards prostitutes. Generally, he is sympathetic when discussing women who perform their roles purely for pecuniary gains, otherwise he wholly praises the prostitute who is a “whore from the cradle” and, in his opinion, actually enjoys plying her trade, thus “enjoying” full possession of her body.

In *Tropic of Cancer*, while discussing one of his innumerable sexual liaisons, Miller describes with apparent admiration a prostitute called Germaine:

There was something about her eloquence at that moment and the way she thrust that rosebush under my nose which remains unforgettable; she spoke of it as if it were some extraneous object which she had acquired at great cost, an object whose value had increased with time and which she now prized above everything in the world. (*Cancer* 43)

Of course, Germaine's use of her "prized object" becomes a *commodified* form of self-possession. However, Miller continues his description of Germaine and her relationship with her body in almost reverential terms, "Her words imbued it with a peculiar fragrance; it was no longer just her private organ, but a treasure, a magic, potent treasure, a God-given thing—and none the less so because she traded it day in and day out for a few pieces of silver" (*Cancer* 43). If we are to take Miller at his word, Germaine's somatic relationship suggests a transgressive empowerment of self within the capitalist structure which Miller himself would only attain upon publishing his novel under the auspices of Jack Kahane whose Obelisk Press was renowned for its pornography and would tar Miller's literary reputation for the remainder of his life. Considered metaphorically, could it not be said that Miller, too, was obliged to prostitute himself in order to reveal his "prized object?" Obviously, Millet holds a most tenable position as regards a strict feminist critique, however, I question how reasonable a stance Millet is taking when considering the social context both parties were entrenched in. Once again, to view the situation through a Stirnerian lens, as Carroll reminds us, "Stirner's concern never deviates from the essential *value* of things, the significance they have for their proprietor; the matter of deeds of ownership is trivial to real possession." As a result,

“Ownership is a function of the satisfaction derived from consumption, in effect, the owner's power over the consumer-good” (Carroll 135; original emphasis). Regarding the bodily transaction involving Miller and Germaine as proprietor and customer, is it therefore not inconceivable that, on the basis of bodily ownership, prostitute and client both possess and *consume* one another?

On this level, it seems rather harsh that Millet asseverate, “What Miller did articulate was the disgust, the contempt, the hostility, the violence, and the sense of filth with which our culture, or more specifically, its masculine sensibility, surrounds sexuality” (295). Millet’s failure to appreciate the tropes of Miller’s text stems from her terministic screen,<sup>9</sup> or pre-established motive, to disparage the novel by interpreting it all too literally. Furthermore, Millet’s motive leads her, whether intentionally or unconsciously, to decontextualize, or indeed entirely dismiss the context of the quotations she selects for analysis. Ignoring, or being ignorant of, Miller’s homage to Germaine, she makes the accusation that, “Miller and his confederates—for Miller is a gang—just ‘fuck’ women and discard them, much as one might avail oneself of sanitary facilities—Kleenex or toilet paper, for example” (Millet 296). Employing such a “disposable” metaphor, Millet is in effect defining the feminine as the paradigm subject of passivity. The noun “subject” I employ here in its etymological sense of “thrown under,” thus the terminology of Millet’s vituperation constructs the feminine as the subaltern participant in an iterative

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<sup>9</sup> Burke claims, “Even if any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent must function also as a *deflection* of reality ... We must use terministic screens, since we can’t say anything without the use of terms; whatever terms we use, they necessarily constitute a corresponding kind of screen; and any such screen necessarily directs the attention to one field rather than another ... All terminologies must implicitly or explicitly embody choices between the principle of continuity and the principle of discontinuity” (*Language as Symbolic Action* 45,50; original emphasis).

drama of passivity. The tragic aspect of Millet's project is, therefore, that in symbolically constructing the feminine identity in such yielding terms, her attempt to empower woman does more damage than Miller's own language. Millet continues her tirade of what she deems Miller's unacceptable behaviour by further denigrating the autonomy of women: "The formula is rather simple: you meet her, cheat her into letting you have 'a piece of ass,' then you take off. Miller's hunt is a primitive find, fuck and forget" (296). Here Millet completely desexualises and disempowers the female with her claim that Miller can "cheat" women into sexual engagement, hence implying that the female has no desire for coitus and is gullible to the point of being "cheated" or tricked into bed. Quite frankly, this sounds to me more like a critique of an eighteenth century picaresque novel such as *Tom Jones* or *Roderick Random*.

However, where Millet's critique does resonate is with Miller's alter-ego in *Tropic of Cancer*: Van Norden. He is a character who, in his all-consuming narcissism, is incapable of achieving Miller's respectful position in his sexual exploits. He is incapable of doing so because he lacks the imagination to render any sexual encounter erotic which, I maintain, requires a certain degree of fantasy. As a result, his extreme virility and insatiable sexual appetite paradoxically lead only to a metaphorical and psychological impotence. Each woman he conquers signifies another personal defeat in the attempt to forget himself for even one moment – the point of climax – which exacerbates his misogynistic treatment of women and his inability to perceive them as anything other than "cunt." In his objectification of women, by reducing them to this bodily synecdoche, he ultimately becomes incarcerated in a linguistic prison of his own devise. Thus his ostensible agency leads to nothing more than a self-deprecating *mise-en-abyme*.

It is Miller's capacity to instantaneously embark upon surreal dreamscapes which suspends the tragic aspect of the moment and transports him to a state of symbolic comprehension denied by the "real time" of language or perception. In the middle of describing one of Van Norden's "desperate scenes" Miller suddenly breaks the narrative to explain the event in oneiric fashion:

'you can kill me afterwards, but let me get it in...I've got to get it in!' And there he is, bent over her, their heads knocking against the wall, he has such a tremendous erection that it's simply impossible to get it in her. Suddenly, with that disgusted air which he knows so well how to summon, he picks himself up and adjusts his clothes. He is about to walk away when suddenly he notices that his penis is lying on the sidewalk. It is about the size of a sawed-off broomstick. He picks it up nonchalantly and sticks it under his arm. As he walks off I notice two huge bulbs, like tulip bulbs, dangling from the end of the broomstick, and I can hear him muttering to himself 'flowerpots...flowerpots.'" (*Cancer* 127)

Hence, it is through an anarchic form of authentic self-possession and refusal to succumb to the dictates of an oppressive society that Miller attains his identity as the writer-self/written-self. It is his credo of self-belief which permits him, both physically and emotionally, to transgress the norm and discover the unknown. For Miller, it was clearly a journey fraught with travail, but one which led him to a comprehension of existence as a creative evolution:

The struggle is to synchronize the potential being with the actual being, to make a fruitful liaison between the man of yesterday and the man of tomorrow. It is the process of growth which is painful, but unavoidable. We

either grow or we die, and to die while alive is a thousand times worse than to 'shuffle off this mortal coil.' In a thousand different languages, in a thousand different ways, men everywhere are trying to express the same idea: that one must fight to stay vitally alive. Fight in order to realize one's potential self. (*Cosmo Eye* 189)

## CHAPTER SIX

### **GLAMORAMA (1998): IMAGE TERRORISM**

*Thyself not free, but to thyself enthralled*

*John Milton, Paradise Lost*

*It's big and it's bland*

*Full of tension and fear*

*David Bowie, "Fashion"*

#### **Purpose**

Historically we have travelled from the modern to what has been termed the postmodern world. In other words, we have moved from an epoch of differentiation to an epoch of de-differentiation. As far as the technologies of the postmodern condition obfuscate delineations and reduce all difference to a shallow relativism, this mode of existence destroys the individual's understanding of the world. Without an appreciation for difference all critical distance is eliminated and therefore so is authenticity. By this, I mean that authenticity must be pursued through the discovery of what we are not because if all we perceive is facsimile, or worse, a mirroring of ourselves, there can be no *true* self-reflection. And without self-reflection we can never question our motives, never ask why we do what we do. Without purpose, then, we risk becoming mere cyphers.

## **Introduction**

In this final chapter our perambulation terminates violently in our contemporary image fixated postmodern world. The postmodern epoch is generally construed as being traumatised by the image. Indeed, Nicholas Mirzoeff goes so far as to claim that “it is the visual crisis of culture that creates postmodernity” (4). Hence, ironically, in an epoch dominated by the airbrushed magazine image and the explosion of “reality” TV the buzzword of the time is *authenticity*. A fascination with the “real” imbues a culture which no longer seems capable of distinguishing essence from appearance, reality from illusion, the original from the ectype. The postmodern has variously been described as a period which “no longer ha[s] recourse to the grand narratives ... of the Dialectic of Spirit or even the emancipation of humanity” (Lyotard 60), or as “an attempt to think the present historically in an age that has forgotten to think historically” (Jameson ix). We have become immersed in a mediascape (the neologism is Appadurai’s) which privileges spatiality over temporality yet, ironically, increasingly reduces the need for corporeal travel – Google Street View can now take you to Machu Picchu without having to leave your armchair – as technology ostensibly brings the world ever closer. However, as I shall argue, it also makes that world increasingly limited by serving to further an atomising self-absorption which makes the *here* and now of paramount importance.

According to Appadurai, mediascapes “tend to be image-centred, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality, and what they offer to those who experience and transform them is a series of elements (such as characters, plots, textual forms) out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives, their own as well as others living in other places” (35). Yet, I submit, such “image-centred, narrative based accounts

of strips of reality” can but ineluctably lead to a culture that venerates images of beauty and consequentially prescribes the concept of success as beauty’s natural offshoot: desire thereof. Such a claim would appear wholly substantiated by the recent explosion of dating apps such as Tinder whereby intimate (and immediate) rendezvous are arranged purely on the basis of photographic representation: swipe right if the candidate’s visage is deemed worth meeting in the flesh, swipe left to dismiss. Arguably the finest contemporary novel to capture the insanity of a world obsessed by a visual culture in obeisance to the image, and the image made flesh in the form of celebrity, is Bret Easton Ellis’ *Glamorama* (1998).

Much has already been written on the augury of Bret Easton Ellis’ *Glamorama* (1998) in relation to the terrorist atrocities of 11 September 2001 (see Houen 2004; Petersen 2005; Stephenson 2007). These theses, however, by aligning the novel with the philosophical meditations of 9/11 by Jean Baudrillard (2002), Paul Virilio (2003) and Slavoj Žižek (2002), deal with *Glamorama* proleptically, hence interpreting the terroristic aspect of the novel literally. In contrast, without refuting the relevance of a literal reading of the novel’s terrorist aspect, I focus on novel’s terrorism figuratively as a trope for the (self-)destructive influence of the image and celebrity lifestyle obsession propagated by the prevalence of reality TV and documentary *vérité* voyeurism in western capitalist culture. The *Oxford English Dictionary* has as its first definition of terrorism: “Government by intimidation as directed and carried out by the party in power in France during the Revolution of 1789–94; the system of the ‘Terror’ (1793–4).” The etymological origin of “terrorism” is therefore “*terrorisme*: system of the ‘Terror,’” which is a reminder that from the outset the obverse of (modern) democracy, whether explicitly or implicitly, has always harboured an innate form of *intimidation*. Fredric Jameson,

in *Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, makes a similar claim “that this whole global, yet American, postmodern culture is the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world: in this sense, as throughout class history, the underside of culture is blood, torture, death, and terror” (5). I argue that the power of the image in postmodern culture, by hijacking the democratic principle of individual expression, compels the individual’s conformity through reinforcement of an “economic domination” that intimidates by threat of ostracism; of being “excluded” from the pursuit of happiness.

In order to illustrate Bret Easton Ellis’ connection to *vérité* voyeurism and the onslaught of the image I shall have recourse to the following premises:

1. “Image Terrorism” describes the perpetual bombardment of idealised, yet for the most part unattainable, images of beauty, body, wealth, etc. disseminated through film, television, and advertising that corrupt the individual’s comprehension of self. These ostensibly benign images infect the spectator with the fatal drive towards achieving the hyperperfection to which they purport. Considering the quest for the idealised body alone exposes the degree to which “individuals” are prepared to torture themselves to the extremes of bulimia, botox treatment, skin lightening or darkening, and cosmetic surgery. Even to ignore these extreme effects, the most acute symptom of Image Terrorism is an overwhelming burden of inadequacy and body alienation for the spectator. In which regard, it is rather apposite one of the most successful models of the nineties was called Elle “The Body” Macpherson!
2. “Vicarious Projection” I employ to define a consequence of the seduction of the image and the phantasmal pleasure derived from the belief that the coveted lifestyle

of celebrities is imminently accessible to all regardless of how unrealistic such ambition actually is. “Vicarious Projection” is engendered by what I shall term a “False Proximity” of the spectator to the celebrity imposed by the television or computer screen which, rather than simply bringing the celebrity into the comfort of the spectator’s home, draws the spectator *into* the screen. Thus false proximity ultimately creates an inauthentic intimacy between spectator and celebrity that surpasses even the relation of spectator to close colleague. The coupling of vicarious living and false proximity is further exacerbated by the late twentieth century explosion of televisual reality shows and talent competitions which transform ciphers into (ephemeral) global stars by interpellating the spectator with the message: *You!* Yes, you at home, regardless of your lack of talent, *You!* can be next star of today! It is no longer even a question of being the star of *tomorrow*, time compression being such that the spectator is always already on the very cusp of success *qua* stardom. All that is required of the spectator, as a certain sportswear brand would have you believe, is “Just Do It!”

3. “Inverted Bildung” argues that the effects of “Image Terrorism,” “Vicarious Projection” and “False Proximity” combine to reduce the scope of individual development through a conflation of figure and (back)ground, ultimately destroying critical perspective and, consequently, subjectivity. Inverted Bildung therefore requires the *unlearning*, or disburdenment of cultural *idées reçues* which, I maintain, can only be attempted by corporeal displacement.

*Glamorama* takes the reader on a hallucinatory journey through the postmodern condition narrated by the “protagonist,” ironically named Victor as he is anything but victorious, who desires nothing more than the ubiquitous recognition enjoyed by the world’s most prominent celebrities. The novel

allegorises the *fin-de-siècle* vacuity of celebrity culture and its abject consumerism which, the novel implies, empties the participant of substance. Born Victor Johnson, the narrator reinvents himself as the model Victor Ward (as a suffix, of course, *ward* denotes spatial and temporal direction) and is actually attributed the much sought after appellation of “It Boy of the moment” by the fashion industry. Yet, despite the honorific “It Boy of the moment” we soon realise he is more accurately described by an MTV video director as a “[n]obody, up-and-comer, star, has-been. Not necessarily in that order” (G 158). Hence, Victor’s status of “It boy of the moment” is literally that, momentary. Consequently, the ephemerality of his title denies it any value as his clandestine girlfriend, Alison Poole, tries to explain: “Victor, you auditioned for all three ‘Real World’s, and MTV rejected you *all three times* ... What does that tell you?” (G 28; original emphasis). That tells the reader that this aspiring star is incapable of even passing an audition for a reality show open to the general public. However, it doesn’t tell Victor anything. As we shall see, self-reflection, unless interpreted literally, is not an activity in which Victor engages.

“It Boy of the moment” appellation aside, we very quickly discover that Victor is far from alone in the category of up-and-coming-has-beens. As he, in his characteristic self-aggrandising manner, attests: “I represent a pretty big pie-wedge of the generation. Maybe I’m a symbol ... An icon?” (G 150). The contemporary cult of consumer inspired individuality is aptly captured by the title of Hal Niedzviecki’s 2004 study of popular culture *Hello, I’m Special: How Individuality Became the New Conformity*. According to Niedzviecki, a condition known as celebrity worship syndrome has been identified as a bona fide mental disorder by psychologists at the University of Leicester (82). In the *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* Dr John Maltby claims, “Our findings suggest the possibility that

many people do not engage in celebrity worship for mere entertainment. Rather, there appears to be a clear clinical component to attitudes and behaviors associated with celebrity worshipping” (qtd in Niedzwiecki 82-3). I suggest my notion of vicarious projection can be allied to Maltby’s appraisal by the manner in which celebrity worship is motivated by the belief of attainment. Victor’s change of surname from Johnson to Ward can be interpreted as a symptom of this cultural condition and the simplicity with which success is expected to be achieved. Despite the disparity in talent, Victor and the pie-wedge of his generation he represents seem to believe that by simply mimicking the technique of identity reinvention espoused by David Bowie they can also achieve similar star status. What they refuse to acknowledge is that such reinvention also requires originality and substance.

Attributing such an overriding value to how one is perceived by the public gaze eviscerates ipseity and ultimately renders a schizoid disorientation whereby any sense of stable identity becomes impossible. This identity crisis is limned by Victor Ward’s transatlantic journey from hubristic pseudo-celebrity in New York to the disconsolate cypher in Milan who eventually comprehends the vacuity his image obsessed existence has stood for. Victor’s journey can therefore be interpreted as a Bildungsroman which appropriately traverses the fashion circuit of New York, London, Paris and Rome as symbols of the empty visual rhetoric propounded by fashion magazines and advertising. As the voyage progresses, the pseudo-reality of the celebrity spectacle is torturously excoriated to reveal a far less glamorous sub-narrative of political connivance, terrorism and decay. The reality revealed is a sadistic world in which subjects are ultimately treated as objects to be exploited, abused, and eviscerated. As the architecture of Victor’s febrile existence within the spectacle gradually erodes before his eyes the process is narratively

paralleled by a downward mental spiral that precipitously gathers momentum within the realm of paranoia and culminates in acute schizophrenia. At the novel's conclusion, when Victor calls his sister from Milan only to be connected with "himself" in Washington D.C, the reader is left in as ambiguous a state as Victor as to whether his identity has indeed been usurped by a doppelganger, or whether this is simply a delusion symptomatic of his complete mental collapse. *Glamorama*, therefore, brilliantly reflects a generation that have become individual facsimiles, a generation who perceive themselves as models of authentic individuality but whom in reality are simply models of conformism, or models *tout court*. It depicts a generation in which everyone resembles someone else. Before progressing with an interpretation of the novel, it will first be useful to offer a brief overview of the theoretical approaches which trace this cultural phenomenon.

Guy Debord's *La Société du spectacle* (1967) was the first major critical theory to claim that an ontological "loss of quality" presents itself in "societies in which modern conditions of production prevail...as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. All that was once directly lived has become mere representation" (12; original emphasis). For Debord, the spectacle is "a negation of life that has *invented a visual form for itself*" (14; original emphasis). The spectacle, however, is not merely a collection of images, "rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images" (12). Debord suggests that the spectacle of modern society has replaced the sacred of pre-modern society, yet with the prominent distinction that, "[i]n former times the category of the sacred justified the cosmic and ontological ordering of things that best served the interests of the masters, expounding upon and embellishing what society *could not deliver*" (20; original emphasis). Thus, power regarded in the religious sphere was simply an

acknowledgement of universal post-lapsarian loss brought about by the Fall as studied in my first chapter on *Paradise Lost*. However, Debord explains “[t]hat the modern spectacle, by contrast, depicts what society *can deliver*, but within this depiction what is permitted is rigidly distinguished from what is possible” (20; original emphasis). Hence the influence of Media stars who have become “spectacular representations of living human beings, distilling the essence of the spectacle’s banality into images of possible roles” (38). This marks a downward trajectory of *being* into *having* then *having* into *appearing* whereby “all effective ‘having’ must now derive both its immediate prestige and its ultimate raison d’être from appearances” (16). The pursuit of Stardom therefore manifests as “an identification with mere appearance which is intended to compensate for the crumbling of directly experienced diversifications of productive activity” (20). Of course, the desire for stardom, or the mere appearance thereof by emulating the celebrity lifestyle, is propagated by technology as medium or commodity acquisition which ineluctably instigates social division. Debord is adamant that, “Separation is the alpha and omega of the spectacle” (20). Hence “isolation underpins technology, and technology isolates in its turn; all *goods* proposed by the spectacular system, from cars to televisions, also serve as weapons for that system as it strives to reinforce the isolation of ‘the lonely crowd’” (22; original emphasis). Once “isolated” the acting subject is compelled to adopt the prescribed roles which permit reintegration to the social model, however, “the individual’s own gestures are no longer his own, but rather those of someone else who represents them to him.” Consequentially, due to the ubiquity of the spectacle the “spectator feels at home nowhere, because the spectacle is everywhere” (23).

The ubiquitous influence of the spectacle is in turn modified by Michel Foucault as the politicized panoptic gaze in *Surveiller et punir* (1975). Foucault argues that institutions subject individuals to such a rigid yet insidious form of discipline that it becomes internalized to the point where the self controls the self. The origin of this concept is, of course, Jeremy Bentham's 18<sup>th</sup> century architectural prison design of the Panopticon. The structure of the panopticon's design allowed prisons to economise on warders as from the warder's vantage point prisoners would be constantly within purview, however, the prisoner would never be able to know when s/he was being observed. Hence, the prisoner's "blindness" would subject them to a sense of perpetual scrutiny. Foucault claimed that this model had been transposed to all state institutions from the military to schools to factories as a technology of discipline. Interestingly, however, Foucault claims in "The Eye of Power," an interview with Jean-Pierre Barou and Michelle Perrot, that the precursor to Bentham's panopticon was to be found at the Military Academy of Paris in 1751 where "Each pupil there was assigned a glassed-in cell where he could be observed throughout the night without being able to have the slightest contact with his fellows or even with the domestics." (147). The glass "screen" of the cell wall is telling here with regard to the control a constant threat of being perceived administers on the incarcerated student. The prisoner becomes passively conscious of their every act and their behaviour is therefore conditioned by the threat of being caught *en flagrant délit*. Metaphorically this situation can be expanded to describe the social control surveillance had on all aspects of social life even, as with the Military school, as far as sexuality as in such a case "the very walls speak the struggle against homosexuality and masturbation" (Foucault 150). Foucault makes another

interesting observation regarding the between architectural space and its relation to power:

The working-class family is to be fixed; by assigning it a living space with a room that serves as kitchen and dining-room, a room for the parents which is the place of procreation, and a room for the children, one prescribes a form of morality for the family. Sometimes, in the more favourable cases, you have a boys' and a girls' room. A whole history remains to be written of *spaces* - which would at the same time be the history of *powers*. (Foucault 149; original emphasis)

Yet, what happens to the structure of power when the walls of the working-class family are replaced with transparent screens by *choice*? I submit that the edifice of power crumbles, or is reversed. If the divide between private and public is wilfully abolished then the control of the intrusive gaze is neutralised. And this is precisely what occurs with the inception of reality TV. Hence, I suggest that the wilful intrusion of reality TV offers one reason why Jean Baudrillard would become one Foucault's staunchest critics regarding the panopticon.

In *Simulations* (1983), Baudrillard proclaimed "The End of the Panopticon" (49) with reference to the 1971 TV-*vérité* experiment, or reality TV as we call it today, on the Loud family. Baudrillard describes this experiment as an example of the "ideology of the lived experience, of exhumation, of the real in its fundamental banality, in its radical authenticity" (49). The "show" consisted of 300 hours of non-stop broadcasting which captured the vicissitudes of this model upper middle class American family as a "'raw' historical document" (Baudrillard 49). Commercially the emission was a huge success. For the Louds it resulted in catastrophe as during

production the family structure precipitously disintegrated. Baudrillard hypothetically responds to the questions: “was TV responsible? What would have happened *if TV hadn’t been there?*” (49; original emphasis) with the observation that “more interesting is the phantasm of filming the Louds *as if TV wasn’t there*” (50; original emphasis). The television camera’s presence/absence of course implies a presence/absence on the part of “us” the viewer and Baudrillard rightly identifies this fact by stating “‘as if *we* weren’t there’ is equivalent to ‘as if *you* were there’” (50; original emphasis). Thus the disciplinary gaze of the panopticon is usurped by “an aesthetics of the hyperreal, a thrill of vertiginous and phony exactitude, a thrill of alienation and of magnification, of distortion in scale, of excessive transparency all at the same time” (50). For Baudrillard, then, the real never *really* existed in this contrived situation as the conditional “as if you were there” obliterates any critical perspective of depth or distance.

### **Merleau-Ponty**

What all of the aforementioned theses ignore is a notion of perception based on a distinctly embodied interpretation of reality (the world). Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* constructs a mediatory stance between the traditional rationalist and empiricist philosophies of the modern epoch. Hence, the basis of phenomenology is to learn to see the world in a new way, to “step back” from our habitual perception of the world and reinterpret that world from a more detached viewpoint. This means that the perceiver puts into question the *accepted* worldview, therefore opening avenues of interrogation which concern how the world we inhabit actually is. However, in doing so, phenomenology does not claim to *explain* that

world, but rather to *describe* the world in such a way that facilitates a clearer understanding of it. Phenomenology, as Edmund Husserl first stated, requires a “return to things themselves” which in Merleau-Ponty’s opinion implies a return to this world “prior to knowledge in the way that independently of geography we first learn what a forest, a meadow, or a river is with regard to the landscape” (*PP* xxii). This implies a conscious refusal of taking our world and our position within it for granted; it urges a *re-view* of our existential situation. Hence, Merleau-Ponty’s position would refute the ostensible passivity of the Foucauldian subject by promoting a mutual reciprocity between subject and world which presents avenues of agency:

I am the absolute source, my existence does not stem from my antecedents, from my physical and social environment; instead it moves out towards them and sustains them, for I alone bring into being for myself (and therefore into being in the only sense that the word can have for me) the tradition which I elect to carry on, or the horizon whose distance from me would be abolished—since that distance is not one of its properties—if I were not there to scan it with my gaze. (*PP* ix).

In *Glamorama* Victor has entirely succumbed to the influence of a visual culture which has expropriated his gaze. It is from this lassitude his problems begin and from them that he shall be obliged to redirect his gaze towards recognition of who he really is.

**“The Better You Look, the More You See**

“Specks – specks all over the third panel, see? – no, *that* one – the second one up from the floor and I wanted to point this out to someone yesterday but a photo shoot intervened and Yaki Nakamari or whatever the hell the designer's name is – a master craftsman *not* – mistook me for someone else so I couldn't register the complaint, but, gentlemen – and ladies – there they are: *specks*, annoying, tiny specks, and they *don't* look accidental but like they were somehow done by a machine – so I don't want a lot of description, just the story, streamlined, no frills, the lowdown: who, what, where, when and don't leave out why, though I'm getting the distinct impression by the looks on your sorry faces that *why* won't get answered – now, come on, goddamnit, what's the *story*?” (G 5; original emphasis)

So begins *Glamorama*, and the inaugural paragraph may be both interpreted as a précis of the entire novel, the “*story*” Victor himself is central to yet ignorant of, and a historical anchoring of when the narrative is to unfold. Such intense inspection of surface appearance reflects the “supreme formal feature” of the postmodern era Fredric Jameson describes as “the emergence of a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense” (9). Suitably explicit in the narrator’s opening address are the novel’s central themes: a banal fascination with surface detail, the name as brand, mechanical reproduction, and reality as a conceited narrative. Obsessive in his attention to surface detail, Victor is an inversion the traditional voyeur of literature and film, the detectives, or the journalists, or the Private Investigators who engaged in an ocular quest for the truth. These traditional types focused their gaze on the intricacies and anomalies of the investigated scene, prodding and palpating the facade to uncover the true reality, whereas Victor merely glimpses the surface. Yet, interestingly is Victor’s use of the

classic journalistic pentad “who, what, where, when and don't leave out why” suggesting an interrogative or inquisitive narrator. Indeed, as the novel begins in medias res Victor is kind enough to comply with his own journalistic demands and “report” the background context of the present scene to the reader. However, while revealing the “who, what, where and when,” he conspicuously fails to provide the “why”:

The "reporter" from *Details* stands with us. Assignment: follow me around for a week. Headline: THE MAKING OF A CLUB. Girl: push-up bra, scads of eyeliner, a Soviet sailor's cap, plastic flower jewelry, rolled-up copy of *W* tucked under a pale, worked-out arm. Uma Thurman if Uma Thurman was five feet two and asleep. Behind her, some guy wearing a Velcro vest over a rugby shirt and a leather windjammer follows us, camcording the scene. (G 6)

Victor’s lack of extrospection means he is only ever capable of attaining a journalistic tetrad, the most important compliment of the pentad remaining forever beyond his ken. Instead of broaching an explanation of *why*, he merely offers the reader a detailed description of the spectacle immediately confronting him. Later, Victor’s personal assistant, JD, will make the same observation, “Did anyone catch that he didn’t ask the most important question: why?” (G 74). Furthermore, rather than presented as a whole, the specifics of the scene are catalogued in a staccato which gives the impression that for Victor although these entities exist within the same context there really is nothing which suggests their interconnectivity. The irony is that Victor prides himself on his all-too-clever catchphrase: “The better you look, the more you see” (G 31). Imbued with the pop culture sense of self-importance, Victor defines perception on the basis of being seen rather than seeing.

As he repeats this catchphrase several times throughout the novel he obviously considers it to be a wonderfully witty *jeu de mots* which places the emphasis of “the better you look” on physical appearance rather than perceptual act. Looking therefore becomes a purely self-referential act. Hence, the biggest problem Victor has is with perception. Victor’s keen visual awareness of surface detail belies an equally severe myopia concerning depth. In other words, although Victor may be a *seer* of detail par excellence, focusing on the fractured minutiae of his surroundings – and on himself - is much to the detriment of his faculty of *perception* as it renders him incapable of seeing the “whole picture.” As Wittgenstein explicates, “If you search in a figure (1) for another figure (2), and then find it, you see (1) in a new way. Not only can you give a new kind of description of it, but noticing the second figure was a new visual experience” (199e). As Victor never searches for the second figure, his visual experience cannot develop.

Unable to extend his perspective beyond the immediate given, Victor is incapable of achieving what Gestalt psychologists term the “Aha! moment” of identifying the figure embedded in the (back)ground. In other words, Victor sees one-dimensionally. The important thing about the Gestalt is that, as a perceptual experience, it is a whole that cannot be reduced to its constituent parts; the Gestalt is always more than the sum of its parts. As with Wittgenstein, for Merleau-Ponty figure and background are both necessary for experience. When we perceive a figure we focus upon it, however, that figure presupposes a background which is always present even when obscured, and that background at its most rudimentary conception would be the world. Victor is so preoccupied with the superficiality of the figure that he loses all perception of background *qua* situational context, or world. To put it bluntly, Victor is unable to see the wood for the trees. Victor cannot

“grasp” the world as he should. Things “stand out” for him not in contrast to a background, not with regard to surface and depth *per se*, but merely because they glitter. In other words, he perceives surface *reflections*, never questioning the significance of what he sees, nor *why* it stands out. As reflections, the images he perceives are therefore always inverted or “erroneous,” hence reminding us of Debord’s claim that “[i]n a world that *really has been turned on its head*, truth is a moment of falsehood” (14; original emphasis). The effort required to investigate beyond what is immediately presented is too much for Victor as he candidly admits: “Please, give me some space. This is all very hard. Those specks almost made me literally sick” (G 8).

Throughout the first chapter Victor is firmly posited at the centre of his narrative. With his own self-image as cynosure and *non plus ultra* he parades around the nightclub organising the preparations for opening night like a camp general on the battlefield, ordering his minions here and there, supremely confident in his right to command. Damien, Victor’s gangster business partner (and Alison Poole’s fiancée), is as equally deluded by self-importance with the claim, “Opening this club, Victor, is tantamount to making a political statement” (G 52). They have no sense of proportion as they treat the opening of a nightclub with the gravity of a presidential campaign, “I suddenly turn around to face the group. ‘I’m calling a side bar. Bongo, you are excused. Do not discuss your testimony with anyone. Go. JD, come over here. I need to whisper something to you. The rest of you may stand by that bar and look for specks. Camcorder man – turn that away from us’” (G 14). Even more disconcertingly, it becomes clear from the very outset that Victor’s world entails a complete distortion of ethical values as the banality of his world eclipses that of graver social issues. When JD asks Victor whether they should

support a cause on opening night such as “global warming or the Amazon? Something. Anything” Victor’s disinterested response is: “Passé. Passé. Passé” (G 11). Inculcated with the rapid, flickering frame-cut sequences of MTV culture Victor’s attention deficit and self-absorption prevent him considering anything which does not directly affect him. In fact, all JD’s question achieves is a cognitive link between Victor’s retort and his preoccupation with the party’s guest list, “Wait - Beau! Is Suzanne DePasse coming?” (G 11).

Victor’s supreme display of confidence in public is betrayed by a lack of self-esteem he exposes in private narration. It is clear that the glamorous lifestyle he covets creates nothing but anhedonia. His “official” girlfriend, the successful supermodel Chloe Byrnes who has reached the apex of their profession, illustrates this sad phenomenon. Chloe, Victor informs us, who “hates herself but probably shouldn’t,” was discovered “dancing on the beach in Miami and has been half-naked in an *Aerosmith* video, in *Playboy* and twice on the cover of the *Sports Illustrated* swimwear issue as well as in the cover of four hundred magazines” (G 36). She has also written a “book called *The Real Me*, ghostwritten with Bill Zehme” which “was on the New York Times best-seller list for something like twelve weeks” (G 36-37; emphasis added). Yet, despite these “accomplishments” she reminds Victor she “was suicidal” because “I’m twenty-six. That’s a hundred and five in model years” (G 45).

Nothing is ever enough to satisfy this glamorous breed. Even dating one of the most beautiful women in the world will not suffice for Victor. His dangerous liaisons with Alison Poole are both exhilarating and paranoia inducing but ultimately self-fixated. Or rather, it would be more accurate to say that Victor is fixated on his own image: “Walking up Lafayette unable to shake off the feeling of

being followed and stopping on the corner of East Forth I catch my reflection superimposed in the glass covering of an Armani Exchange ad” reflects both this paranoid self-absorption and his fantasy of becoming the A-list Armani model that his face has replaced (*G* 102). He constantly sees, or imagines to see, Damian’s two bodyguards, Digby and Duke, following his movements to and from his rendezvous with Alison. His paranoia, however, seems to derive from constantly being surrounded by the MTV camera crew documenting the opening of his club. Constantly being the subject of the MTV camera gaze accentuates his self-absorption to the point where it becomes difficult for him to distinguish between on-set and off-set “reality.” It is almost as if Digby and Duke become extensions of the camera who follow him through the streets of Manhattan. At times the situations he narrates are so outlandish in their hyperbole that the reader is inclined to interpret them as mere manifestations of his imagination. Black jeeps with the registration plates SI-CO 1 and SI-CO 2 pursue him down high street boulevards which he evades in a sequence remarkably similar to the obligatory chase scene of an 80’s police drama:

I maneuver the Vespa onto the sidewalk but the jeep doesn’t care and careens right behind me, halfway on the street, its two right wheels riding the curb, and I’m yelling at people to get out of the way, the bike’s wheels kicking up bursts of confetti that litters the sidewalk in layers, businessmen lashing out at me with briefcases, cabdrivers shouting obscenities, blaring their horns at me, a domino effect. (*G* 128)

Victor’s place of refuge is the Byana restaurant where, gasping, he tries to get past the doorman. “Did you see that?” he shouts, “Those assholes tried to kill me” (*G* 129). The doorman’s reply is a simple, “What else is new?” (*G* 129), which is

ambiguous as to whether this is confirmation he witnessed the event, or whether he is sarcastically responding to Victor's claim that his life was threatened. That the chase was an imagined construction is hinted at by the incongruous bursts of confetti littering the sidewalk and the "SI-CO" registration plates which could be pronounced either PSYCHO or SICKO. At this point in the novel it is difficult for the reader to decide.

Yet, when Victor does have authentic proof that something clearly is awry, he is incapable of interpreting it as a definite threat. Arriving back at his club JD hands him a number of faxes addressed to him and with the content printed in capitalised type: "I KNOW WHO YOU ARE AND I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOING" (G 119). Nonplussed, he casually brushes it aside, "'Jesus, it could apply to anything,' I mutter. 'So ultimately it's like meaningless.' I crumple it up. 'Would you please eat this? Chew carefully.'" (G 119). Again we are reminded of Debord's earlier remark that, "[i]n a world that *really has been turned on its head*, truth is a moment of falsehood" (14; original emphasis). If Victor believes the basic statement on the fax has multiple levels of meaning, then he clearly is living in an inverted reality.

The new club Victor is opening is a metaphor of his world which, being the creator, places him both at the centre and above it. However, the MTV disclaimer written above the entrance to Victor's club states: "This Event Is Being Videotaped. By Entering You Consent to the Cablecast and Other Exhibition of Your Name, Voice and Likeness" (G 166). This disclaimer makes explicit that the moment you enter this world you are dispossessed of your identity: "Your Name, Voice and Likeness." I suggest this disclaimer is a wry allusion to the inscription over Dante's Hell, "ABANDON EVERY HOPE, WHO ENTER HERE," therefore implying

that this celebrity world is an infernal domain peopled by those “who have lost the good of intellect” (*Inferno* 3.9, 3.17-18; original emphasis). Furthermore, Victor really does appear to have had his identity usurped when people he meets repeatedly claim to have either seen or been with him at fashion shows or restaurants in other parts of the country. The first time this occurs is upon a chance meeting with a model colleague on Madison. She claims to have seen him at a Calvin Klein show, “I saw you in the second row next to Stephen Dorff and David Salle and Roy Liebenthal” (*G* 20). After a brief, pause his response is “The *second* fucking row? No way, baby” (*G* 21; original emphasis). For Victor, the case of mistaken identity is easily explained by the absurd notion that he would deign to be seated in the second row. However, not long after he is at a photo-shoot and another colleague makes the same observation. Again, his reply is similar if slightly irritated, “‘I wasn’t at the Calvin Klein show,’ I say calmly, then shout, ‘I *wasn’t* at the fucking Calvin Klein show’” (*G* 68; original emphasis). This time, however, his refutation is contested, “‘There’s a picture of you at the show in WWD, baby,’ Rick says. ‘You’re with David and Stephen. In the second row’” (*G* 68). Begrudgingly, he inspects the magazine, “It’s not a clear photograph; Stephen Dorff, David Salle and myself, all wearing ‘50s knit shirts and sunglasses, slouching in our seats, stone-faced. Our names are in bold type beneath the photo, and after mine, as if an explanation was necessary, the words ‘It Boy’” (*G* 68). As with the faxes, this arouses no uneasiness or curiosity in Victor, only surprise that clarification of his identity would be required for the reader of such a hip fashion magazine. For him the situation is clear: he is right and, despite visual evidence to the contrary, everyone else is wrong. Besides, Victor has more pressing engagements. He learns that his DJ has disappeared and must urgently find a replacement for the club

opening that night. Annoyed, but full of confidence, he heads off in search of a DJ, hence solving yet another of the world's grave problems.

In Cartesian fashion Victor deludes himself that he is an integrated, acting subject. In conversation with his father this conceit comes to the fore when he proclaims, "I'm a knockout, Dad. A total knockout. I'm rippin'. Things are happening. I'm in control of all the elements" (*G* 88). Nothing could be further from the truth when, after a brief lunch with his father, F. Fred Palakon enters the scene. Palakon is dissembling character who, due to his malefic generation of events within the narrative, functions in the same manner as Milton's Satan. Appearing as if from the ether on the pretext of assuring Victor the best DJ in town for the club's opening, he quickly changes subject by offering to pay Victor to travel to London and convince one of Victor's ex-girlfriends, Jaime Fields, to return to the United States. Victor was apparently in love with Jaime Fields when they were students at Camden in 1985, however, even though only a decade has passed, he answers, "Listen, unless you have a photo—no dice, my man" (*G* 131). In fact, being so absorbed in the present, again underscored by his moniker "It Boy of the Moment," proves Victor has an extremely limited faculty of memory. Just before the meeting with Palakon, he met his band to tell them he was quitting to pursue more essential projects. His argument is based on the belief the band are unproductive and, to buttress his claim, asks his band member Conrad when the last time they made a demo was. "'Last week, Victor,' I hear Conrad say through gritted teeth" (*G* 105). "That's a million years ago" is Victor's response (*G* 105). With such short-term memory, I maintain it is impossible for Victor to make any kind of authentic choice. His fleeting sense of identity would prohibit any means of engaging in a conscious, self-defining future project. This claim is supported by his interaction with Palakon.

Victor is completely disinterested in any kind of enterprise that would remove him from his zone of comfort. However, when Palakon finally offers \$300,000 for the task and confirms that he has secured the services of the best DJ in town for Victor's opening night, the financial lure stimulates him into passive acceptance. He agrees in his typically non-committed manner more as an excuse to extricate himself from the current situation after getting his DJ than with the intention of following through with his agreement. Palakon senses Victor's apathy and ostensibly manipulates certain background events in order to sabotage Victor's opening night. First, Victor's absent DJ's body is discovered eviscerated in a dumpster. Then, a concatenation of circumstance insure the opening night is a disaster and Victor's glorified existence is suddenly reduced to tatters. Faced with no other option, he morosely accepts Palakon's deal. From the moment he commences his trans-Atlantic voyage, so too does his life-altering character transition. The journey he embarks upon will force him to reinterpret his whole world.

### **Das Narrenschiff**

Victor's transition from (modern) paranoiac to (postmodern) schizophrenic is symbolised by his trans-Atlantic voyage aboard the *QE2*. Victor's passivity is illustrated perfectly by his embarkation: "I was so stoned by the time the driver Palakon had sent dropped me off at the passenger terminal on West 50<sup>th</sup> Street that how I actually got on the ship is a blur of images so imprecise you couldn't really even classify them as a montage" (*G* 216). His disorientation remains with him in varying degrees for the duration of the voyage. Hence, I interpret it as a symbolic

voyage which alludes to Sebastian Brant's moral satire of 1494 *Das Narrenschiff*, or *Ship of Fools*.

Brant's moral allegory tells of a ship loaded with the archetypal cretins of society that sails without rudder towards the fool's paradise of Narragonien (Foolsland). The characters symbolise all the vices of Brant's society and the rudderless ship signifies the lunacy of relinquishing one's agency and abandoning oneself to the direction of uncertain, external forces. Obviously, it would have been far simpler and quicker for Victor to have flown to London, so Ellis' inclusion of the *QE2* in the novel, I submit, is a subtle pastiche of Brant's *Narrenschiff*. As there are only about two other passengers of Victor's age, the other passengers, being old and very rich, symbolise the generation who really do have the capital and influence to control society. Yet, they sail insouciantly across the ocean no doubt in a similar state of reverie as Victor: "One day a normal-looking rainbow appears and you vaguely notice it, thinking about ... enormous sums of money ... It's easy to feel safe, for people to look at you and think someone's going somewhere" (G 216). The sense of detachment is further symbolised by the fog which shrouds the ship during the entire crossing. As perceptive as ever, Victor doesn't even realise until he is informed, "'Really—there's fog?' I ask, having assumed that I had been staring at a giant wall but actually it's a huge window that overlooks the starboard deck. 'Whoa,' I mutter" (G 245).

Ensnared tightly in his integument of self-denial Victor wanders the ship predominantly in an intoxicated state until he discovers the only woman of his age on-board. She introduces herself as Marina Cannon (only, later, she shall introduce herself to others as Marina Gibson). Immediately, his attention is redirected to his preferred subject: himself. His approach is to charm her with the prestige of his

glossy image. He shows her a copy of *W*, “flipping it open to the Star Spotting section.” To which, “‘You’re...Christian Slater?’ she asks, confused” (G 224). This scene is actually a repeat of an incident during his MTV House of Style interview back in New York. Striving for recognition, when Victor asked his interviewer if she had seen him on the cover of *YouthQuake* magazine she could only hesitantly respond: “‘No, ah...’ Waverly says, then realizes something and adds, ‘Oh, that was *you*? *You* looked great’” (G 59; original emphasis). Hence, in this airbrushed world of magazine glamour figures meld into one another thereby eliminating both distinction and a corresponding point of reference. Without a point of reference one is quite literally adrift, therefore Victor is ultimately supine as regards his course of direction. When Marina explains that she is disembarking at Cherbourg, Victor instantly decides to renege on his deal with Palakon and take a detour to Paris instead. Palakon, understandably unimpressed by Victor’s decision, attempts to persuade him otherwise. When Victor remains steadfast, Palakon once again reverts to other means of persuasion. A middle aged couple who conveniently claim to be friends of Victor’s father ingratiate themselves in the company of Victor and Marina. They, too, subtly try to influence Victor’s decision. However, when they prove unsuccessful the *QE2* mysteriously stops in thick fog, apparently to aid a stranded vessel. During this pause someone boards the *QE2* and shortly afterwards Marina disappears.

At this stage in the narrative, Victor’s ability to distinguish between reality and fantasy becomes almost non-existent. Naturally, there is still the omnipresent MTV camera crew documenting his life, but who is directing the shoot starts to become very unclear. Felix the MTV cinematographer repeatedly warns Victor to read the script. Naturally, he ignores the sage advice. That changes, however, upon

discovering photo-shopped polaroids of himself in Marina Cannon/Gibson's abandoned cabin. These are images of him with people and in places he couldn't possibly have been:

This place I recognise from various magazines as the Sky Bar at the recently opened Mondrian Hotel. But my nose is different—wider, slightly flatter—and my eyes are set too close together; the chin is dimpled, more defined; my hair has never been cut so that it parts easily to one side ... I've never been to the Sky Bar in Los Angeles. (*G* 256)

He slowly begins to comprehend his predicament before discovering traces of blood and then a tooth lodged in the wall of the abandoned cabin. He is abruptly seized with horrified understanding, but deals with the situation the only way he knows how: "For courage I just kept telling myself that I was a model, that CAA represented me, that I'm really good in bed, that I had good genes, that Victor *ruled*; but on deck I started to semi-consciously doubt this" (*G* 265; original emphasis).

Discovering Felix drunk at the bar, the cinematographer confirms that the photos have been doctored. Felix asks Victor about the script, "Haven't you read the new draft?" Victor's response, "I think the script keeps changing, Felix ... I don't think this is what I signed on for" (*G* 263). The plot takes a further drastic twist when Victor asks Felix how Palakon is involved. Felix denies any knowledge of Palakon. Victor then tries to aid Felix's memory by reminding him of the jeep chase and subsequent meeting with Palakon at the restaurant. Felix turns to Victor, "looking more worried than bemused and finally says, 'We didn't shoot a chase scene, Victor.' A long pause. 'We didn't shoot anything at fashion Café ... There's no Palakon in the shooting script'" (*G* 264).

## Meat and Bone

When Victor arrives in London his world literally explodes. Walking down a street he sees “a new Gap, a Starbucks, a McDonald’s’ when, suddenly, “Jamie Fields emerges on the street in Notting Hill, running out an alley, desperately waving her arms, yelling garbled warnings at people ... And then buildings start exploding” (*G* 269-70). In sequence, “the Crunch gym, seconds later the Gap and immediately after that the Starbucks evaporate and then, finally, the McDonald’s” (*G* 270). Victor then observes “mangled bodies” however:

the gore surrounding them looks inauthentic, as if someone had dumped barrels containing smashed tomatoes across sidewalks, splattered this mixture on top of body parts and mannequins still standing behind decimated storefront windows ... and it just seems too red. But later I will find out that this particular color looks more real than I could have ever imagined (*G* 271).

This carnage is not *real*. It transpires that the scene has been created by the special effects team of a film crew. However, the manner in which Victor has narrated the scene, by delaying the revelation of its artifice, suggests that Victor had indeed initially interpreted it as authentic. Hence, walking onto a *real* fictional set implies a deepened obfuscation between reality and fantasy as the fantasy is no longer strictly in Victor’s mind. It is almost like the melding of dimensions or the collapse of metaphor, the result of which is the onset of total disorientation. Shortly after this incident, Victor shows clear signs of this disorientation “trying to formulate a new game plan in order to halt vacuous wandering, I proceed to various

newsstands in desperate need of a *New York Post* or a *New York News* to check out what course my life is taking back in Manhattan” (G 274). As Victor is only capable of identifying with his image he essentially becomes *disembodied*. The real Victor is in London, however, his point of reference is back in New York in the pages of a newspaper. Disembodiment and dismemberment now become central motifs serving to link the fashion industry with terrorism.

In the novel people are often both referred to and identified as or by body parts as in the party scene at “some industrial billionaire’s warehouse” when Victor asks Jamie the identity of the “guy in a three-buttoned Prada suit” she is waving at her reply is, “Someone who did the legs in that new Tommy Hilfiger ad” (G 289). Here we see that not only does the industry render individuals incomplete, i.e. dismembered, partial, but those being rendered partial passively accept it. Earlier in the novel we are first exposed to this reduction when even Victor is unable to identify parts of his own anatomy:

In the office photos of pecs and tanned abs and thighs and bone-white butts are plastered over an entire wall along with an occasional face—everyone from Joel West to Hurley Thompson to Marky Mark to Justin Lazard to Kirk Cameron (for god’s sake) to Freedom Williams to *body parts that could or could not be mine* ... all the guys are so similar-looking it’s getting tougher to tell them apart.” (G 72; emphasis added)

Victor’s inability to identify his own fragmented body reflects metaphorically his fragmented sense of disembodied self. In a way Victor illustrates a particularly Cartesian mind and body disjuncture which relegates the body to the *partes extra partes* (parts outside of parts) composition of a machine. Yet, where Descartes saw

the mind *qua* soul as the captain of the corporeal vessel, Victor is conducted by his mere image which detaches him even further from himself. Without the body we have no anchoring in the world which again explains why despite being physically in London, Victor must orientate himself by means of a visually mediated self in the *New York Post*. The problem with this lack of identification is that it erodes any form of subjectivity. With the reduction of the individual to mere body parts we therefore arrive at a dismembering objectification of the human engaged in by both terrorist and fashion guru.

The metaphor of dismemberment is expanded upon the further Victor becomes unconsciously complicit with the group of models-turned-terrorists affiliated with Jamie Fields. The leader of this group is Victor's idol, the legendary ex-model Bobby Hughes, whose mere presence is enough to discombobulate Victor as his initial description illustrates:

And now he's *here in the flesh*—four years older than me, just a foot away, tapping keys on a computer terminal, sipping Diet Coke, wearing white athletic socks—and since I'm not really used to being around guys who are so much better looking than Victor Ward, it's all kind of nerve-racking and I'm listening more intently to him than any man I've ever met because the unavoidable fact is: he's too good-looking to resist. He can't help but lure me. (*G* 305; emphasis added)

Even though Victor remarks that Bobby is "here in the flesh" it would appear by the mystification of Bobby's good looks - which "can't help but lure" Victor - that Victor still hasn't come to grips with the corporeal here and now. The fact that Victor listens to Bobby more intently than anyone he's ever met would support the

claim that Victor remains transfixed by surface appearances. However, it is not long before Victor will be forced to comprehend the gruesome effects lurking behind this image obsessed world. When Bobby asks Victor to pick up an Asian model by the name of Sam Ho at a nightclub Victor naturally acquiesces. Upon returning to the house Sam Ho immediately disappears with Bobby and the others leaving Victor alone. Yet, later Victor hears some muffled noises escaping from the fitness room in the cellar. When Victor opens the door he observes:

What looks like a soundproofed room and a mannequin made from wax covered in either oil or Vaseline, slathered with it, lies twisted on its back in some kind of horrible position on a steel examination table, naked, both legs spread open and chained to stirrups, its scrotum and anus completely exposed, both arms, locked back behind its head, which is held up by a rope connected to a hook in the ceiling. (G 322)

Surrounding this examination table are the other models and someone wearing a ski mask. The event is being filmed by someone with a camcorder. Victor looks on bewildered at “how gruesome and inauthentic the waxwork looks” until it suddenly springs to life when what “looks like an intestine is slowly emerging, of its own accord, from another, wider slit across the mannequin’s belly” (G 323). The “mannequin” is, of course, Sam Ho and the torture of his body stands as a metaphor for the devastating consequences a society based upon objectification ultimately results in. Such a society, as Christopher Lasch reminds us in *The Culture of Narcissism*, becomes the realisation of the Sadean ideal as, “His [Sade’s] ideal society thus reaffirmed the capitalist principle that human beings are ultimately reducible to interchangeable objects” (69).

## Flesh

Hence, in order to avoid the metaphor of “image terrorism” which portrays humans stripped of personality and reduced to “interchangeable objects,” we would do better to replace it with Merleau-Ponty’s metaphor of the “chiasm” which joins the visibility of objectivity with the invisibility of subjectivity. Merleau-Ponty’s metaphor of the chiasm, which suggests an intertwining between self and world by piercing the superficiality of the surface, would seem to be the only means of returning Victor to any degree of authentic selfhood. Only by disburdening himself of his solipsistic fantasy and returning to a conscious appreciation of the world he both inhabits and is part of can he discover any egress from the sadistic inauthenticity of western consumerist society. As Komarine Romdenh-Romluc clarifies:

An important aspect of conscious existence is the existence of others. I experience myself as just one of many selves who share a common world. Merleau-Ponty holds that for this to be so, experience cannot present me as in some way privileged or it will tend towards solipsism: experience of being the only self, or of being the only one of a special kind of self. I must experience others as subjects in the same ways that I experience myself.  
(109-10)

Furthermore, with the adoption of the chiasm Merleau-Ponty employs in *The Visible and the Invisible*, and the acceptance of our essential intercorporeality, we can finally understand that:

There is here no problem of the *alter ego* because it is not *I* who sees, not *he* who sees, because an anonymous visibility inhabits both of us, a vision in general, in virtue of that primordial property that belongs to the flesh, being here and now, of radiating everywhere and forever, being an individual, of being also a dimension and a universal. (VI 142; original emphasis)

Hence, it is only with the acceptance of our unavoidable connectedness with others that I suggest any degree of authentic selfhood may ever be attained. And, as with Victor, travel is required in order for the individual to understand the other empirically. Only by leaving one's comfort zone and avoiding the barrage of mediatised images is one able to experience reality – no matter how cruel that reality may actually be.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONCLUSION

In the introduction I gave an account of established work on the concepts of travel and authenticity and showed how my methodology builds on and expands established work.

In the first chapter I established the Satanic trope by examining the catalytic yet necessary effect Satan had on the existential consequences of the Fall. In the course of laying out the trope I highlighted the modern individual's "lack of *place*" in the social order, and how this existential displacement links mobility to authenticity in *Paradise Lost*.

The second chapter traced the notions of solipsism and confession in *Robinson Crusoe* by use of an "island" trope. I employed this trope with reference to the preceding chapter concerning *Paradise Lost*: the ostracized transgressor returning to the celestial order of a substitute Eden. I argued that in a postlapsarian world, granted even the most ideal conditions for solipsism, the self is not only embodied self, but dialogic self too. Paradoxically, however, when isolated or alone the individual fears attack from the imaginary other, as in Crusoe's pathological anxiety of being cannibalised on his *uninhabited* island. In addressing this paradox, I argued that authenticity was placed in question by the need to define oneself through attachment to a specific location, and how this phenomenon could lead to the imperialist project of land acquisition from others.

Chapter 3 dealt with the trope of "voice" and its relation to restraint. Restraint is clearly a quality Kurtz lacks; indeed, this lack precipitated his fall into

the abyss of oblivion. The interpretation of voice, which is a starkly recurrent theme in *Heart of Darkness*, was scrutinised with regard to the peripheries of imperialist ideology. I argued that the imaginative and physical mobility of Marlow's journey, by remaining open to dialogical alterity, provided the means of inscribing an authentic narrative. Marlow's interrogative journey was juxtaposed with Kurtz's colonialist proto-fascist narrative which, as he denied discourse with the other, collapsed into static monologue. Essentially Kurtz's ivory station became a metaphor of his own psychological penal island. Kurtz, by becoming a pseudo-dictator, rather than elevating himself above society, simply reinforced the *dependence* the self has on the collective identity. The chapter illustrated the sado-masochistic tendency inherent in fascist ideology which requires the symbiosis of the individual with the mass, hence signifying the hollowness of the selves engaged in such a relationship. Collective identities, I argued, can provide the individual with a false haven from the painful, disillusioned isolation of striving for the authentic and thinking for *oneself*. I contended that any ideological state message assuaging bad conscience promotes the image of greater social liberty and strength through the cohesion of the group, yet the reality is often the reduction of the self to a bureaucratic cog in the conformist machine. As Hannah Arendt has argued, the consequence of this reduction beckons the banality of evil.

In chapter 4 I assert that travel in *Tropic of Cancer* serves as revolt and emancipatory leap into the unexpected; the affirmation of the individual's sense of self in consciously embracing the fear of freedom. Miller's narrator abandons his American *oikos* under the impression "I was sent here for a reason I have not yet been able to fathom" (1). In other words, under both an illusion and an elusion, yet the elusion is precisely the point as authenticity of the self must be striven for *en*

*route* as a form of self-becoming. What the “dream” trope—which refers particularly to Miller’s employment of surrealist metaphor—reflects through the unpredictable encounters and adventures in its pursuit are the stimulatory effects of the imaginary. Imagination, I maintained, is a greatly overlooked component of individuality as an individual can only ever imagine by herself, it being absurd to think that two people could possibly know whether they had the exact same images in their minds, and hence also represents a consolidation of what Stirner termed “*der Einzige*,” or what is generally translated as the “unique one” or “unique ego.” The daydreams one has are entirely unique to the dreamer and facilitate the projection of possible alternatives to the real situation of one’s existence, hence they can also be considered a form of rebellion against the self’s actual condition—as Lucifer illustrated in *Paradise Lost*. I argued that *Tropic of Cancer* celebrates an authenticity of non-conformism in the wake of World War I and prelude to World War II; two wars effectuated by a conformist banality of evil. The egocentrism of Miller’s protagonist in *Tropic of Cancer* was offered as an exit from the state’s dehumanising reduction of the individual to a simple cog in the collective machine. I argued that what Miller illuminates in *Tropic of Cancer* is that by the twentieth century it was becoming more difficult to dismiss as madness Max Stirner’s philosophy of egocentrism as the only salvation of the individual. It was illustrated that Miller’s character shared the same belief as Stirner’s egoist insofar as the individual should perpetually *consume* himself while destroying the conditions of social subjection; hence reconstructing himself ever anew.

In my final chapter on *Glamorama* I argued that the cult of the celebrity was also the cult of the image. The collapse of the *hero*—as admired in the fashion of Carlyle—at the end of the nineteenth century, which ceded to the twentieth century

*star* (film, rock, etc.) has finally been usurped by the non-entity of the *celebrity*. Popular culture's adoration of the celebrity—the reality TV celebrity in particular—who is famous simply for being famous is a perfect metaphor for vacuity itself, and is reflective of what Christopher Lasch described as “the culture of narcissism.” This veneration of a world of appearances and superficiality, as presented in *Glamorama*, prescribes a worldview that implies the way we are perceived by others must reflect the authentic interior: hence photogenic impressions count. The flattening of horizons of significance results in a virtually indistinguishable world with no fixed points of reference by which the self may orientate itself. With no points of reference I argued that such disorientation leads to a fragmentation of self which only a return to intercorporeality with others can remedy.

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