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Ghosts in the Machine? Textual Self-Presentation from Conversion Narratives to Contemporary (Auto)biographical Fiction

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ABSTRACT

Sabine Ursula Mercer: Ghosts in the Machine? Textual Self-Presentation from Conversion Narratives to Contemporary (Auto)biographical Fiction

Although the quest for authenticity has been particularly foregrounded in self-narratives from the nineteen-sixties onwards, its long tradition goes back to St Augustine. This thesis endeavours to trace a genealogy of texts that foreground the problematics of locating and narrating a self: from the confessional to the legacies of the literature of the double, through to the modern and postmodern novel.

Ever since Augustine's *Confessions*, the preoccupation with the transformation and shaping of subjective experience into narrative forms has wrestled with the problem of whether the activity is one of locating the essence of a presumed unitary ontological self or of a continuous process of rewriting and constructing that self through narrative itself. The inherent contradiction in the activity of writing a self has long been understood by writers who, over the last seven centuries, have addressed the problem of doubling the self in and as text. Paradoxically, the inevitable dividedness that arises out of this process appears to reify the self even as it seeks to retain the illusion of presence.

In this thesis, I intend to demonstrate, how preoccupations regarded as 'postmodern' or as 'post-postmodern' emerge out of a long tradition of problematizing the writing of the self. Given the ephemeral nature of subjectivity as part of the on-going process of invention and projection, the impossibility of grasping any essential reality that can be located behind constructed textual masks serves to compound the problem. The emergent textual self, or selves, disappoint as mere approximations of verisimilitude; they essentially fail to provide a valid rendition of the idea of the self in the mind: an homunculus within the supposed "Ghost in the Machine".

Ghosts in the Machine?

Textual Self-Presentation from Conversion Narratives to Contemporary (Auto)biographical Fiction

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CONTENTS

List of Abbreviations

AR	Paul de Man. *Allegories of Reading*.
BM	Mark Johnson. *The Body in the Mind*.
C	Saint Augustine. *Confessions.*
CC	Patrick Riley. *Character and Conversion in Autobiography.*
CONF	Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.*
DP	David Attwell. *Doubling the Point.*
E	Michel de Montaigne. *Essays*.
EA	Charles Taylor. *The Ethics of Authenticity.*
HS	Patricia Waugh. *The Harvest of the Sixties.*
IC	Patrick Riley. "The Inversion of Conversion".
JC	Henry James. "The Jolly Corner".
JH	Robert Louis Stevenson. "The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde".
L	Vladimir Nabokov. *The Annotated Lolita*.
MD	Virginia Woolf. *Mrs. Dalloway*.
MF	Patricia Waugh. *Metafiction*.
MI	Mark Johnson. "Mind Incarnate: From Dewy to Damasio".
P	A. S. Byatt. *Possession.*
PF	Vladimir Nabokov. *Pale Fire*.
PM	A. S. Byatt. *Passions of the Mind.*
R	Tom McCarthy. *Remainder*.
RTP	Marcel Proust. *Remembrance of Things Past.*
S	J. M. Coetzee. *Summertime*.
SS	Charles Taylor. *Sources of the Self.*
TF	Antonio Damasio. *The Feeling of What Happens.*
TGN	Doris Lessing. *The Golden Notebook*.
TN	Paul Ricœur. *Time and Narrative*.
WP	Patricia Waugh. "Creative Writers and Psychopathology"

Statement of Copyright

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Finally, this work was done in love to my mother and in loving memory of my father.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary fictionalized self-narratives can look back at a long history of self-representation in textualized form. My thesis examines this complex tradition of thinking about selfhood in texts and the perennial problems of life writing: how writers at particular moments have tried to articulate a self – to model, embody, conceptualize and textualize selves – and how different strategies for self-construction may be seen both to manifest and challenge extant ideas about what it means to "have" a self. Constructing a trajectory consisting of selected representative literary texts, from the earliest extant reflections on selfhood to the postmodern constant problematization and overt fictionalization of the self, my thesis offers a taxonomy of life-narratives that analyses the reworking of earlier conceptualizations of selfhood to reveal a continuous morphing into hybrid forms. Explicit reflection on the intricacies inherent in process of writing about the self has been especially foregrounded in the contemporary period.

Beyond this, the thesis attempts to offer a genealogy of self-representation through reflections on key literary and philosophical writings that have centrally concerned themselves with the problem of the self, from the moment of the very emergence of a concept of self to its current suppression, occlusion or dispersal in the discourses of postmodernism and neuroscience. The thesis shows that "[v]iews coexist with those which have arisen later in reaction to them […] rival outlooks go on influencing and shaping each other."[1]

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[1] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 1989 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 497; Abbreviation used in parenthetical references henceforth is *SS.*

The centrality of narrative and the problematic role of memory in shaping self-narratives has become one of the most fertile areas of interdisciplinary study in the last twenty years. My thesis engages extensively with theories of memory, with textual constructionism and with phenomenological, psychological and psychoanalytical models, as well as those of contemporary cognitive neuroscience, in order to investigate how, at particular key historical moments, textual selves are constructed through intentionally emergent frameworks of understanding. Through a close reading of texts that I consider to be pivotal for each historical moment, the thesis attempts to elicit the nature of the shifts as well as the continuations in an on-going preoccupation with self-reference and introspection that is built into the Western tradition of literary autobiographical fiction and other self-reflexive modes of life-writing that relate the narrative self to larger constructs in history, society, and philosophy.

My investigation offers a chronological and historical overview up to and including Part Two, but one which is interpretative and selective. One aim of my thesis is to build up a sense of distinctive trajectories of self-representation that provide a genealogical entry into current and contemporary fictional modes and preoccupations of address. This is designed to establish a foundation for the central argument of the thesis: I argue that the idea of conferring a distinct identity upon the self through self-reflexive construction in narrative is problematic, not only because the act of narration becomes part of the process of making a self, but also, as more recent texts demonstrate, textual structure and generic convention, social discourse and literary modes, shape and determine or constrain ways that a subject might present itself to itself, as a self.

However, writing as a mode of enquiry – how individuals convey to others who they are and how they transform life into narrative – is not just a postmodern phenomenon or preoccupation, but one that begins with St Augustine, "who introduced the inwardness of radical reflexivity and bequeathed it to the Western tradition of thought." (Taylor, *SS* 131).

Historical Frameworks and Dominant Discourses

Part One of the thesis traces the earliest accounts of self-fashioning in different frameworks: from the religious confession to the intellectual reflection in essay form, to the application of the confessional mode in defence of the autonomous self. The journey inward sought to explore the particularities of an individual or, more generally, to explain human nature, but instead of discovering wholeness, pre-modern writers became increasingly aware of the distance between the self that writes from the self that is written which, from the nineteenth century onwards, becomes overt in the production of split, doubled, aesthetized or socially constructed selves.

The first three sections give a diachronic development of self-presentation from pre-modernism to Romanticism. The shaping of modern identities, of the extended self in time, goes back to the inward turn of St Augustine in the fourth century. This was followed by self-narratives in later centuries that captured and addressed the on-going concern with self-reflexive subjectivity in a variety of modes.

The Western idea of 'self' equated personal identity with the continuity of memory – the ability to think of oneself as being one and the same indivisible self at different times and in different places. From the position of the convert, St Augustine recasts his life in a religious context in which confession demonstrates the transition from sinner to believer. Memory integrates and transforms experience; it shapes and patterns the interior sense of the self, such that the conversion to Christianity is understood as a restoration of the unity of the self in the salvation of the soul.

However, by the sixteenth century, the medieval faith in God's grace and the immortal soul as the central aspect of a self began to be replaced with an enquiry into the conditions of the moral life. To turn inward to the mind in order to explore largely secular issues, rather than to meditate on the soul and the works of God, was a new way of thinking about and reflecting on the self, which was part of the humanistic project that fused public and private aspects. Montaigne, who took himself as the object of his studies, came to the conclusion that the self is a work in progress, elusive and never at one with itself, but continually shaped in the process of writing.

Rousseau moved away from the Augustinian idea of confession as an articulation directed at God and turned it into a vindication for the preservation of individual autonomy opposing societal pressures. The moral self is now based on the purity of feelings, which society purportedly corrupts or misinterprets. Instead of Montaigne's rational investigation, writing became a romantic aesthetic strategy of making the self, but the incongruence of inner life and outer appearances only manifested the rift

between the self that writes and the self that is written, thereby irremediably split in and by language.

Psychoanalytic Doubling of the Repressed Self in a Moral Context

Section four of Part One outlines the modification of confessional writing for the emergence of the fictionalized 'split-self', the double of nineteenth-century literature that was influenced by post-Darwinian theory, late-Victorian dual brain and dissociation theory. The focus of the modern sciences of memory on pathological states and multiple personality was mirrored in the novels of that time in which dark impulses were exorcised and given ontological solidity; the double became an emblem of self-estrangement in a morally repressive culture that constitutes a rigid framework that makes imperious demands on the individual.

Part One of this thesis provides a comprehensive overview for Part Two and Part Three in which these particular historical moments and their dominant discourses will be identified as precursors of modern and postmodern conceptions about the self. The on-going revision of ideas about selfhood came about in successive looping movements in which previous ways of conceiving the self were reworked and reformulated. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Augustine's examination of the light within – his immaterial, yet intelligible soul – could be seen to become the focus of an emergent epistemic paradigm, at a time "when knowledge about memory became a surrogate for spiritual understanding of the soul."[2] Increasingly from 1900, and especially in our own

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[2] Ian Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995) 197.

time, however, the soul is conceived as located in the brain and in the nervous system, that "adapts, is tailored, evolves, so that experience, will, sensibility, moral sense, and all that one would call personality or soul becomes engraved in the nervous system."[3] Accordingly, mid-twentieth-century literature can be seen to reconfigure the double theme with its convention of good and evil 'dual selves' by examining this material through verbal play that parodies the traditional relationship of psychological identity in mirror selves or by applying narrative structural doublings that show the crisis of the fragmented modern individual and the distorting power of memory.

Competing models of the self contributed to increasing complexity in the ways of writing about the self. Part Two and Three explore some of the connections between scientific and postmodern theorising by providing a study of twentieth- and twenty-first-century autobiographical fictions, from Marcel Proust to Doris Lessing, to the contemporary writers A. S. Byatt and J. M. Coetzee. Key connections between the sections concern the on-going preoccupation with the function of memory, intentionality and the role of belief and desire in the intersubjective and introspective constitution of self. For example: just as nineteenth-century realist writing about the self was displaced by a shift to meta-representational reflection as the vehicle for a renewed engagement with ethical responsibilities, so too, more recently, postmodern texts become increasingly preoccupied with the unreliability and enactive reconstruction of memories of the past revealed in the new sciences of memory.

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[3] Paul John Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1999) 17.

Memory in Early Modernists' Embodied Selves: Minds, Souls or Brains?

Part Two examines the shift in the intellectual framework of early twentieth-century literature to aesthetic modes of impressionism and post-impressionism. Whilst still continuing with confessional narratives and reworking the double tradition, modernist writers like Marcel Proust in *À la recherché du temps perdu* (1913-1927) and Virginia Woolf in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) shift their emphasis to phenomenological issues around perception, which are exemplified in the temporal and spatial complication and situatedness of their protagonists. Both novels foreground the question of the continuity of the self and both writers propose that the self might achieve a kind of transcendence of time when recovered through alternative mechanisms of memory to those of explicit or 'conscious' memory. Instead of expressing the alienation of the self in or through writing, the early modernists' self-understanding shows an awareness of temporal depth in which the self is constituted by and recovers self-presence through the aesthetic transformation of experience through images and metaphorical language that formulate concepts of soul, consciousness and the extended mind.

Half a century later, cognitive linguistics posits a sophisticated model of metaphor production and comprehension that is central to the mind's meaning-making capacities. The new focus on the experiential self highlights the limitations of an objectivist stance that is ontologically problematic because of its disembodied rationality. In order to deal adequately with human activity, the neo-phenomenological approach[4] seeks to integrate phenomenology with cognitive science and neuroscience by suggesting that thinking

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[4] The term neo-phenomenology is used by Patricia Waugh in her essay "The Naturalistic Turn, the Syndrome, and the Rise of the Neo-Phenomenological Novel" in which she argues that some of the most interesting developments in contemporary fiction reflect a phenomenological turn, which "is part of a project to rescue the singularity of human experience from phantom objectivity, to understand the intersubjective processes that constitute our sense of self-presence or loss of it."

originates in bodily experience and that the task is "to find some way to bridge this gap, to connect mind and body."[5] Furthermore, the philosopher Mark Johnson emphasizes the role of metaphor in language and non-linguistic cognition and puts forward arguments for the embodied nature of imaginative structures of understanding: "Imagination is our capacity to organize mental representations (especially percepts, images, and image schemata) into meaningful coherent unities. It thus includes our ability to generate novel order" (Johnson 140). The existential-phenomenological approach develops a constructive theory of the ways in which imagination links cognitive and bodily structures for the generation of significant experiences, a preoccupation that is also evident in the works of Marcel Proust and Virginia Woolf.

Confession and the Paranoid Doubling in Late Modernism

Section three of Part Two concentrates on two late modernist texts that show a configuration of the Rousseauian confessional mode and the return to double themes in a parody of Freudian psychology. In Vladimir Nabokov's novels *Lolita* (1955) and *Pale Fire* (1962), the split between body and mind is portrayed in pathological states of paranoia and narcissism that imprison the self in a solipsistic universe in which the ontological nature of the real becomes problematic. The dark side of the creative mind stylizes the self in aesthetic performances as a mode of defensive projection and introjection that obscures desires and manipulates others. References to psychoanalytic therapy open up an ironic gap between acts and excuses, ultimately aimed at absolving the self from moral responsibility.

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[5] Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987) xxvii; Abbreviation used in parenthetical references henceforth is *BM*.

The Turn towards Postmodernism: Story-telling and Form-finding for The Multiple Self

Section one of Part Three looks at a pivotal novel of the nineteen-sixties that might be regarded, retrospectively, as a turning point of entry into the postmodern in its application of metafictional modes to articulate the feelings of disenchantment of the modern fragmented self as a mirror of a fragmented society. In Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962), the alienated post-war self is conceived primarily as socially constructed, multiplied into false selves that mirror the imperative demand to perform in different roles in an advanced capitalist society. The compartmentalization of experiences into different frameworks fails to explicate what makes sense of moral responses and meaning and thus creates an unresolvable tension in which all frameworks for writing the self appear as inadequate models to continue with in the future.

This seems like a major reorientation, but twenty-first-century neuroscience still holds on to the idea that the self is made through acts of language and some scientists, who take a strong position on the link between narrative and self, still back up the idea that selfhood or identity emerges through the lifelong trajectory of self-narration; their scientific model underscores the postmodernist view that there is no subject and that the self is made up of sheer narration, but is a self which is under constant conscious as well as non-conscious revision.

The Postmodern Self: Multiplicity in the Narrative Perspective

Section two and three of Part Three examine postmodernist fictional works by A. S. Byatt and J. M. Coetzee that show the tendency to deliberately fragment the self by

structuring multiple perspectives around pluralist viewpoints. Through the employment

of biographers as central characters, story-telling becomes a species of form-finding: in

Byatt's *Possession* (1990), the disenchantment with the nineteenth-century novel is

reworked by applying a temporal double plot structure in which present-day identity is

constructed though engagement with the literary past.

J. M. Coetzee's *Summertime* (2009) juxtaposes diary fragments with interviews

that are manipulated by the biographer. The interviewees, who remember primarily their

past selves, evidently confabulate; their account of the subject remains incongruent and

conflicting, but the overall structure of the novel allows the author to give an ethical

reflection on society. The novels display that the self cannot be apprehended in the form

of some recognized narrative genre and that narrativity is essentially compromised by

revision.

The multiple drafts model of consciousness is one theory posed by empiricists and

philosophical eliminativists, who question the very existence of a self and claim that the

self has no substantial reality but is illusory in character as "the product of the stories that

we tell ourselves about our lives so that we can knit together our experiences into a

continuous plot."[6] From the premise that the narrative self is an abstraction, always

subject to revision and "edited to accommodate fresh data", reductionists deduce that

the self is simply "the protagonist of all these narratives – a fictional object that Dennett

compares with the center of gravity of a physical entity" (Woody 331).

The model of the self without a substance is under critique for its exclusive

allegiance to narrative: it is merely "real enough as a product of narrative, just as the

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[6] Melvin J. Woody, "When Narrative Fails," *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology* 10.4 (2003): 329-345, at 329.

center of gravity is a real product of theory. But neither would be real apart from the narrative or theoretical fictions that posit them" (Woody 331). Woody points out the *ex nihilo* character of narrative theory and the reversal of agency: by neglecting the experiential self as the producer of the story, the self is the product of narrative, affected by its own reinterpretation and rewriting: "[f]or if the self is wholly constituted by narratives, there is no room for an identical narrator who stands outside those narratives like a transcendental ego […] If the narratives produce the self, then the tale wags the dog: a change of story means a change of self." (Woody 332).

The Anxiety for Authenticity: A Return to the Romantic in Contemporary Aesthetics?

The final section of Part Three serves as a conclusion that attempts to provide an outlook on how the notion of the self will continue to evolve through the awareness of bodily knowing and the relation to language that goes beyond the scope of 'the linguistic turn' of postmodernism with its scepticism and supposedly moral indifference.

Twenty-first-century literature seems to rework romantic and modernist ideas about the importance of the emotional life. My conclusion examines the contemporary novel *Remainder* (2005) by Tom McCarthy that points in the direction of an emergent neoromantic sensibility within the historical particularities of the new millennium. The post-postmodern appears to demonstrate a return to realism through a mode of hyperrealism, albeit one that seems to call for a renewal of engagement with the social world through the structure of the feeling body.[7] Humans are made aware of their

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[7] My use of the term post-postmodernism is based on Robert L. McLaughlin's definition in his essay **"Post-Postmodern Discontent: Contemporary Fiction and the Social World"** in which he suggests that some

insignificance vis-à-vis the powers of an abstract global economy for, as individuals, they

are situated in a technological network that has territorialized the social sphere and the

private world: authenticity becomes the product of experience management in a culture

of neo-corporatism. *Remainder* provides an ethical criticism of the de-humanizing effects

of neo-capitalism and its materialist assumption: no matter how much compensation

money the narrator lavishes on his gargantuan projects of recreating memories, all efforts

to make him feel as part of and being situated in reality fail to transcend the materiality of

his re-enactments. The tragedy of controlling reality through aesthetic realizations of the

self becomes a parable for the contemporary world in which meaning and being have lost

their depth value to surfaces and reproductions.

Post-postmodernist writing seems to question the value of the authentic as the

cornerstone of subjectivity in the absence of memory and takes a new direction with the

phenomenon of experiencing oneself as a self in the absence of narrative. This provides a

distinctively changed conceptualization of the subject as oscillating between the attempt

to define oneself through memory and the failure of the need to get back to a genuine

understanding of the self.

The mind's capacity for figurative thought, creative leaps, and fictional

representation is becoming an increasingly important focus for cognitive scientists,

philosophers of mind and scholars of literature alike: "Literature documents and records

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writers, who came to prominence in the late nineteen-eighties, have been "responding to the perceived
dead end of postmodernism, a dead end that has been reached because of postmodernism's detachment
from the social world and immersion in a world of nonreferential language." *Symplokē* 12.1-2 (2004): 53-68,
at 55.

cognitive and neural processes of self with an intimacy that may be otherwise unavailable

to neuroscience."[8]

Return of the Soul: Can a Self be more than just Brain and Nervous System?

Against Cartesian dualism – the idea of a disembodied mind – and the reductionist

narrative self, Antonio Damasio posits the rootedness of thinking in bodily experience

and, like William James before him, understands mind as "an emergent process, never

separate from body."[9] Neuroscientists argue for an embodied theory of the self in which

"self and memory as interdependent dimensions of consciousness, [are] anchored in the

life of the body" (Eakin, *Lives Become Stories* 21). The conceptual biological framework

hinges on the irreducible relationship between body and brain without equating the

physical brain with the experiential self. Damasio points away from the notion of the soul

as an absolute spiritual being with particularized faculties of its own by suggesting, as

Rousseau had done before**,** that "[f]eelings form the base for what humans have

described for millennia as the human soul or spirit."[10]

The contemporary turn to neuroscience as demonstrated in Damasio is a major

reorientation to the body as the nexus of an affective core that resists the reductionist

assumption of the soul or mind as locatable in the neural structure of the brain.

Neuroscientific research strongly suggests that the mind is dependent on brain-body

interactions in which the body provides a ground reference: "the body, as represented in

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[8] Aaron L. Mishara, "Kafka, paranoic doubles and the brain: hypnagogic vs. hyper-reflexive models of disrupted self in neuropsychiatric disorders and anomalous conscious states," *Philosophy, Ethics, and Humanities in Medicine* 5:13 (2010): 1-37, at 3.
[9] Mark Johnson, "Mind Incarnate: From Dewey to Damasio," *Daedalus* 135.3 (2006): 46-54, at 48; Abbreviation used in parenthetical references henceforth is *MI*.
[10] Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes' Errors: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*, 1994 (London: Papermac, 1996) xviii.

the brain, may constitute the indispensable frame of reference for the neural processes that we experience as the mind" (Damasio, *Descartes' Error* xviii).

According to Damasio, a sense of self emerges first at a simple level that over time develops on a more complex level into an autobiographical self, but the basic biological phenomenon of human consciousness is the feeling, experiencing self.[11] The primary awareness of a self as a self is grounded in a stable representation of individual continuity, which serves as a mental reference for the organism within the conscious mind: the core self that represents body states is "the feeling essence of our sense of self; the other [autobiographical or extended self] is the enhancement of the image of the causative object, which dominates core consciousness" (*TF* 171).

The autobiographical self is equated with identity, personhood and authenticity; it depends on memory for the representation of key events in an organized form. Past experiences provide "a consistent set of previously memorized objects pertaining to the organism's history, whose relentless recall is consistently illuminated by core consciousness and constitutes the autobiographical self" (*TF* 198). Autobiographical memories are treated as objects of an organism's biography such that the feeling of knowing in the "relationship between any object and the organism becomes the feeling of a feeling" (*TF* 313).

Meaning, understanding, and rationality are seen to arise from, and are conditioned by, patterns of bodily experience; this experiential dimension connects the writing of Damasio to that of the philosopher Mark Johnson, who both acknowledge the role of narrative and the linguistic construction of the self but they also contribute to a

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[11] Antonio Damasio defines core consciousness as "stable across the lifetime of the organism; it is not exclusively human; and is not dependent on conventional memory, working memory, reasoning, or language." *The Feeling of What Happens: Body, Emotion and the Making of Consciousness* (London: Vintage, 2000) 16; Abbreviation used in parenthetical references henceforth is *TF*.

more integral view of mind/body theories by connecting cognition with emotion and reason with active imagination. My contention is that literature has a role to play in continuing to bridge the explanatory gap between neural processes and qualia, i.e., what it is like to experience phenomenal states. The conclusion shows that the move away from postmodernism responds to its perceived detachment from a social context and nonreferential language, reflected in the change from the narrative self to a phenomenological and neurobiological 'affective' model of the self: this move towards the recovery of emotion links back with Romantic and modernist preoccupations. However, as writers such as McCarthy demonstrate, fiction is still a verbal world, and the post-postmodern novel might be viewed as one that is attempting to reconcile the narrative self of the postmodern with the 'affective' self of the current moment of neurobiological preoccupation.

PART ONE: PRE-MODERNIST PROJECT OF 'WRITING THE SELF'

Section 1: Confessional Narrative and Religious Conversion in Saint Augustine's Confessions

The *Confessions* (397 A.D.) is regarded as one of the first autobiographical narratives that follow the journey of the self through time. Augustine recalls what he can still remember about his earliest years and attempts to narrate his life by imposing order on his experiences. His account illuminates the development of his beliefs and the formation of his character in the form of a story that shows the ascent from the opacity of ignorance towards the illumination of his soul by the sovereignty of God. Albert Outler claims, in the introduction to his translation of the *Confessions,* that it was not intended as an autobiography, but shows that Augustine made "a deliberate effort, in the permissive atmosphere of God's felt presence, to recall those crucial episodes and events in which he can now see and celebrate the mysterious actions of God's prevenient and provident grace."[12]

By retracing the crucial turning points of his life, Augustine comes to understand his experiences through the lens of the religious convert's imperative concern for the complete disclosure of his sins and to understand himself as separated from God by his own position in time. In this respect, the *Confessions* illustrates a paradigm of self-analysis that connects two aspects of thinking about the past and present; it is through retrospection and introspection that Augustine generates "a creative story in which key

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[12] Albert C. Outler, introd., Saint Augustine, *Confessions and Enchiridion,* Christian Classics Ethereal Library, n. pag.

recollections are linked to form a therapeutic autobiographical narrative."[13]   The

confusion that ensued from his confessed powerful impulse to iniquity leads Augustine to

plead for help and illumination in an extended monologue directed at God as his

interlocutor; he appeals for salvation from what he describes as his infirmity: "[t]he

house of my soul is too narrow for thee to come in to me; let it be enlarged by thee. It is

in ruins; do thou restore it."[14] It is evident that he wants to recompose and heal himself

from what he perceives as a 'shattered' and 'disordered' state; a condition that in the

twentieth century will also be described as 'split' or 'fragmented'.

The spiritual journey towards conversion shows the transformation of the self

which is conveyed to the reader through a transformation of the text itself: at the end of

Book 9, the *Confessions* shifts abruptly from the narration of Augustine's early life to an

atemporal introspective exploration of spirituality. At this crucial point in the narrative,

Augustine is able to reconcile his finite self with the infinite God and Book 10

demonstrates that the whole of the *Confessions* can be seen "an exploration of *man's*

way to God, a way which begins in sense experience but swiftly passes beyond it, through

and beyond the awesome mystery of memory, to the ineffable encounter between God

and the soul in man's inmost subject-self" (Outler 7). Augustinian interiority has an

intellectual dimension in which God becomes an object of discovery to the inner man, but

also an ethical dimension, where the *Confessions* is concerned with "the moral,

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[13] Paul Jay, *Being in the Text: Self-representation from Wordsworth to Roland Barthes* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1984) 24-25.

[14] Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, *Confessions and Enchiridion*, ed. Albert C. Outler (1955), Bk. I. Ch. v. paragraph 6, *Christian Classics Ethereal Library;* Abbreviation used in parenthetical references henceforth is *C.*

intellectual, and spiritual matters through its author's act of baring the heart, mind, and soul."[15]

The narrative is as much about the act of remembering as it is a narrative about the act of narrating in which experience is transformed with the hindsight of a Christian who experienced conversion "as effected as it were from outside himself, [which] left him with a conviction of man's utter dependence on Divine grace which became the mainspring of his theology."[16] The disclosure of the motivation behind the theft of the pears reveals that it was not caused by hunger, as bodily needs would excuse the deed, but was brought about by wickedness, an insatiable desire for immorality itself: "I did not desire to enjoy what I stole, but only the theft and the sin itself [...] A depraved soul, falling away from security in thee to destruction in itself, seeking nothing from the shameful deed but shame itself" (*C* II. iv. 9). The *Confessions* shows the struggle to overcome profligacy and the religious endeavour that "governs Augustine's decisions in selecting those events from his life that would best represent the experience of a Christian mortal – one unworthy of salvation but hopeful of receiving divine Grace" (Goodwin 4). The professed sincerity offers a testimony about the self in the rhetoric of confession, which suggests that a human subject is not only able to provide an account of past actions and their consequences but that through autobiographical writing in the confessional mode, "the writer bares the soul or the heart in an attempt to reveal those truth about the self that are intrinsic and, possibly, eternal" (Goodwin 7).

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[15] James Goodwin, *Autobiography: The Self Made Text* (New York: Twayne, 1993) 4.
[16] John Herdman, *The Double in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990) 8.

The Paradox of Conversion: Time effects a Division within the Self

With the *Confessions* begins the historical, philosophical, psychological process of writing about the self in the dialogue between the self and the other, which takes the form of an address to God. Augustine makes a deliberate effort to recall the crucial episodes and events that show God's providence and he constantly evokes the presence of God as witness, judge, and addressee of the narrative, which shows the urgency of the confessional imperative for "justification, validation, necessity, and indeed exemplary instance of writing one's life, of finding the words that signify the self and its history."[17] Conversion is a fundamental change that affects the present consciousness of the self by setting up a new relationship to God and the world with the effect that Augustine "arrived at historical and self-understanding by coming to recognize its contrast with the eternal present of God."[18]

The rhetorical and psychological structure of conversion aims at making life retrospectively intelligible by creating "a reference point for the literary construction of identity" and it "offers a language and an epistemological framework for the elaboration of a fundamental project."[19] The spiritual pilgrimage celebrates and praises the greatness and goodness of God to the point where Augustine comes to realize that "[t]he Creator is the Redeemer! Man's end and the beginning meet at a single point!" (Outler 7). Augustine's motivation and justification for writing an autobiographical confession, more than a decade after his dramatic conversion in the garden at Milan, is to show how his

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[17] James Olney, "Memory and the Narrative Imperative: St. Augustine and Samuel Beckett", *New Literary History* 24.4 (1993): 857-880, at 858.

[18] Patricia Waugh, *The Harvest of the Sixties: English Literature and its Background 1960-1990* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995) 1; Abbreviation used in parenthetical references henceforth is *HS*.

[19] Patrick Riley, *Character and Conversion in Autobiography: Augustine, Montaigne, Descartes, Rousseau, and Sartre* (Charlottesville; London: U of Virginia P, 2004) 2, 3; Abbreviation used in parenthetical references henceforth is *CC*.

conversion had been achieved and he relates each of his outward experiences to the

development of his inner life by ordering the disparate materials of his story into

significant form such that, finally, "the circle is closed, the life completed, but all at a

higher level of value or being."[20] The act of submitting to God is the starting point for the

genuine life and allows Augustine the first glimpse of his soul redeemed; as a convert, he

has become pure immanence before an other-worldly future. Although his interior world

is cut off from other people, he realizes that his soul lies open before God.

The process of self-analysis is disrupted when Augustine encounters aesthetic

problems in his attempts to translate the psychological subject into a literary one: time

has distanced him from his past and he is no longer the young man that he tries to

recapture in the narrative. Moreover, the moment of conversion to Christianity has

complicated self-identity by dividing Augustine's life into distinct and conflicting parts: he

is at once the Augustine of "before" and the one of "after" the event. The separation of

the narrative voice after conversion, from the sinning subject of before to the reformed

Augustine, introduces a temporal problem that indicates the difficulty for understanding

the nature of temporal change as such: the very act of narrating creates a version of the

self, which Augustine tries to explain from the vantage point of the present moment, until

he realizes that neither the future nor the past exist as such but all times are present

simultaneously in consciousness:

> But even now it is manifest and clear that there are neither times future nor times past.
> Thus it is not properly said that there are three times, past, present, and future. Perhaps it
> might be said rightly that there are three times: a time present of things past; a time
> present of things present; and a time present of things future. For these three do coexist
> somehow in the soul, for otherwise I could not see them. The time present of things past

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[20] M. H. Abrams in Avrom Fleishman, *Figures of Autobiography: The Language of Self-Writing in Victorian and Modern England* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1983) 69.

is memory; the time present of things present is direct experience; the time present of things future is expectation. (*C* XI. xx. 26)

Augustine's meditation on the passage of time shows that he is conscious about the phenomenon of tension "according to which an object is presented to consciousness […] the presence to mind of future, of the present, and of the past."[21] Lyotard continues with an evaluation of the existence of the different temporal modes as presenting a threat of nonbeing, as "[a]nnihilating acts of intention since they set up their object, diversely but constantly, as absent: not yet there, no longer there, and the there now of the present, ungraspable" (45). The self is caught between separation in time and union in consciousness with the effect that "the past, present, and future are related only by an intentional act such as the writing of autobiography" (Waugh, *HS* 1). Memory gives continuity of being or provides an overall sense of being and the sense of who I am rests on the ability to recollect who I have been; it validates the contention that memory does not contain an event as such, but is a process in which the rememberer deliberately tries to make sense of past events.

Self-reflexive Consciousness, Memory and Emotions

Augustine's road to God took the passage through a "reflexive awareness of himself."[22] It was therefore imperative for him to understand the working of his memory, which he regarded as the chief faculty of the soul. He explores and analyses the nature of memory in Book 10 of the *Confessions* where he claims that memory is part of the soul

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[21] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Confession of Augustine* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2000) 45.
[22] Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1991) 27; Abbreviation used in parenthetical references henceforth is *EA.*

and the source of knowledge in all its forms: it contains perceptual knowledge, self-knowledge and knowledge of God. But part of his claim is that memory not only encompasses mind or soul but is identical with mind or soul.   Memory is at once a part of the self and constitutive of the self; Augustine says that remembering "I do within myself, in that huge hall of my memory [...] I meet myself and recall myself – what, when, or where I did a thing, and how I felt when I did it. [...] I can meditate on all these things as if they were present" (*C* X. viii. 14). To regard memory as a deliberate act that constitutes something new points to its power of transformation in which feelings are retained "as images imprinted on the memory by the senses of the body, but also the idea of the emotions themselves."[23] Augustine points out his agency in that he is the one who selects and assigns meaning to memories; he says that it was he himself, who did or felt what he remembers. He seems to be aware that in the process of remembering "there still remains an irreducible 'I' that is doing the remembering" and from that premise, it is logical to conclude that if the self were "consubstantial with its memories, there would be no agency external enough to collect and identify with these memories. The self would simply be a swarm of narratives without a subjective center." [24]

The faculty of memory is more than just the ability to remember or the act of remembering; it also encompasses cognition and acts as a repository of experiences and knowledge; it includes sensations and perceptions, imaginations and dreams, emotions, and an awareness of self. Augustine blurs the concepts of memory, soul, self and mind:

> But even as this memory is experienced, it is identical with the mind – as when we tell someone to remember something we say, "See that you bear this in mind"; and when we

[23] Siri Hustvedt, *Living, Thinking, Looking: Essays* (London: Sceptre; New York: Henry Holt, 2012) 176.
[24] Didier Maleuvre, rev. of Evelyne Ender's *Architexts of Memory: Literature, Science, and Autobiography*, *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 35.3-4 (2007): 665-667, at 666.

forget a thing, we say, "It did not enter my mind" or "It slipped my mind." Thus we call memory itself mind. (*C* X. xiv. 21)

It is through memory that the self is illuminated by God and becomes knowledgeable to itself. By recalling the subject 'Augustine', the author 'Augustine' is transformed, but he does not become fully transparent to himself as he says:

> Great is this power of memory, exceedingly great, O my God – a large and boundless inner hall! Who has plumbed the depths of it? Yet it is a power of my mind, and it belongs to my nature. But I do not myself grasp all that I am. Thus the mind is far too narrow to contain itself. (*C* X. viii. 15)

Augustine puts forward an existential argument: for him the existence of God is not so much a matter of reason but rather of faith, but reason, properly directed, reveals the soul's vices. The God of faith exists in memory and allows the retelling of his path of conversion, the direct address to God also acts as a paradigm of the conversion mechanism. As a literary text, the *Confessions* comprises a single speech act – one that is enacted in the presence of the silence of God – but one which might be fruitful to others, the readers, who are permitted "to overhear his admissions of guilt and his appeals for forgiveness. He does so in an effort to persuade fellow mortals to follow his example" (Goodwin 4). Augustine's telling about the agonizing struggles that he had waged with himself is illustrative of a profound philosophical investigation through an intimate revelation, which he directs at readers to induce their spiritual awakening. Looking at the process of recomposition from a disordered state and the reconstruction of Augustine's life through writing, Fleishman proposes that the *Confessions* was written to have a didactic impact on readers: "not only does the hero of the tale achieve this uplifting or sublimation,

but the theoretical register of the text is raised from the personal to the generic, from the

historical to the philosophic, from the experiential to the metaphysical" (69).

The Self as the Reflection of God in the Soul

Augustine sees his life only in its relation to the divine and his conversion is the

turning point that gives a rhetorical and psychological structure to his sense of the chaos

of experience, where it creates "a reference point for the literary construction of identity"

(*CC* 2). The will to record indelibly testifies to Augustine's conviction that the soul

transcends the biological entity and consequently, after his transformation through

conversion and his turn to God, Augustine abandons his narrative, "which is a sign of the

fact that the self that conversion produces cannot be squared with the self that

conversion leaves behind. The essence of the convert as immanent to divine otherness

defies narrative" (*CC* 174).

Augustine's epiphany is proof for himself that human nature can only be

understood in the light of God's perfection and that the self is the reflection of God and

the source of the soul. The objective of writing the *Confessions* is to make his mind

present to itself and this is preliminary to making the workings of his mind present to his

readers as well but, it is also a move in which Augustine "simultaneously seeks to know

the God who is the embracement of his inner self" (Olney 871). To gain knowledge of God

means to transcend the bodily senses and perceptions:

> What is it, then, that I love when I love my God? Who is he that is beyond the topmost
> point of my soul? Yet by this very soul will I mount up to him. I will soar beyond that

power of mine by which I am united to the body, and by which the whole structure of it is filled with life. (C X. vii. 11)

Augustine takes the mind or the soul as the object of knowledge, but as one which also gives him the certainty of self-presence, which shows that for him the self is "contingent on the fact that knower and known are the same" (Taylor, *SS* 133). The problem of translating a psychological subject into a literary one will intensify for his literary successors. The confessional impulse provides a link between Augustine and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, but one in which the spiritual significance of redemption is turned into a worldly defence as part of explaining a self that is apparently misunderstood by others. Rousseau's anxiousness to justify his deeds will develop into more overtly performative confessional acts that seem now almost to parody the modern idea of the narcissistic self and thereby provide an implicit critique of the penchant to immoralism as transgression, understood through the more psychological frameworks of the twentieth century.

Section 2: The Emergence of the Modern Subject in Michel de Montaigne's Essays

Between the spiritual individuality of Saint Augustine and the later insistence on authenticity as the source of the self in Jean-Jacques Rousseau stands Michel de Montaigne – the most important figure in the bridging from the medieval confessor to the modern self. Although Montaigne turns away from the rhetoric of conversion as the mode of writing about the self in time, he adopts the Augustinian stance of personal introspection. Moreover, he does not organize the *Essays* around a central event, but develops the portrait of himself through a series of discontinuous fragments in which he

moves from one topic to another. Montaigne is preoccupied with scepticism about the

possibility of positive empirical knowledge and when he questions the first principle of

knowledge, the reliability of the senses, he arrives at an understanding of its

shortcomings. He states that "our knowledge is weak in all senses; we neither see far

forward nor far backward; our understanding comprehends little, and lives but a little

while; 'tis short both in extent of time and extent of matter."[25] However, the essay form

allows Montaigne to merge serious intellectual speculation, philosophical explanation,

and the justification of beliefs with casual anecdotes that digress into personal

ruminations. By taking himself as the subject under investigation, he deduces from the

particulars of his existence the universality of the human condition; he recognizes that

"there is nothing in the world that is believed by all men with universal consent. Even

within one and the same man, opinions change, sometimes because the judgment is

affected by the changing condition of the body and of the passions of the soul itself."[26]

The Shaping of Modern Identity

Montaigne follows the changing reality of his being through writing about topics

and commenting on the variety of opinions; it is a self-exploration that "inaugurates a

new kind of reflection which is intensely individual, a self-explanation, the aim of which is

to reach self-knowledge by coming to see through the screens of self-delusion which

passion or spiritual pride have erected" (Taylor, *SS* 181). Montaigne discovers the

uniqueness of each individual within the limits that nature imposes on the human form,

[25] Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Michel de Montaigne*, 1580, ed. William Carew Hazlitt, 1877, *Project Gutenberg* EBook, Bk. III, Ch. vi; Abbreviation used in parenthetical references henceforth is *E.*
[26] Ann Hartle, "Montaigne and Skepticism," *Cambridge Companion to Montaigne,* ed. Ullrich Langer. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005) 183-206 at 188.

which is a decisive move away from Augustine's spiritual search for the unity of the human soul and the perfection of an ideal self. In fixing his thoughts on paper, Montaigne finds that the self is essentially unstable and, moreover, that the mind or soul is essentially incommunicable; a notion that will itself come to the fore in Rousseau's *The Confessions*.

The Fashioning of the Self and Sincerity in Personal Judgement

The *Essays*, which were revised by Montaigne almost continuously until his death in 1592, are exercises in personal judgment made over matters of concern to every individual with an awareness of life's complexity and significance. They offer a picture of a self-made Renaissance man, who demonstrates an increased sense of subjectivity whilst maintaining common sense scepticism. Montaigne does not attempt to present a continuous or detailed narrative history of his life, but he tells stories about the ills he suffers, the ideas he develops, the emotions he feels, and the books he reads. His prolific writing aims to show that introspection is the key to understand oneself and others and he emphasizes that he writes not of men in general but of a particular one when he says: "I very much desire that we may be judged every man by himself and would not be drawn into the consequence of common examples" (*E* I. xxxvi). The *Essays* constitute neither an autobiography in discontinuous parts nor are they written as sequential confessions but they give a distilled account of ideas and impressions that the author gained from personal experience and reflection: in "Of experience", Montaigne remarks, "I study myself more than any other subject; 'tis my metaphysic, my physic" (E III. xiii).

Montaigne's project is to gain self-knowledge through a detailed observation of his thoughts and feelings about ordinary experiences, which shows that his essaying is a decisive move away from Augustine's spiritual search for the unity of the human soul through the reconciliation with God. The psyche of the modern self is characterized by an inner distance from the self within the self, where the self turns its gaze upon itself as its own object of regard and which makes "it receptive to a notion of law that is no longer guided and imposed by the divine."[27] The self-discovery proceeds concurrently with the critique of self-interpretation and the proffering of doubt to the effect that the self-portrait appears only indirectly through personal tone, attitude, or judgement. Nevertheless, Montaigne considers individual experience as fundamental for arriving at general truth and, in assigning truthfulness as the basis for virtue, Montaigne neither makes a radical break with the moral tradition, nor does he simply submit to the authority of custom; instead he claims that judgement is "the faculty responsible for all thought and interpretation, both discursive and intuitive. Moreover, he identifies his thoughts with his very self, and so in a sense we can say that Montaigne's *Essais* are the essays of himself. To essay oneself is to critically study oneself."[28] His underlying humanistic principle is sincerity, which can be translated as self-consistency or truth to oneself. Sincerity emphasises the value of the moral life by establishing congruence between actual feeling and avowal and Montaigne opens his book with a claim to sincerity: "Reader, thou hast here an honest book." During the Renaissance, the emerging ideal of sincerity was frequently evoked to critique a political culture in which

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[27] Alain Ehrenberg, *The Weariness of the Self: Diagnosing the History of Depression in the Contemporary Age* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2010) 24.
[28] Christopher Edelman, "Montaigne's Moral Objectivism," *Philosophy and Literature* 35.1 (2011): 32-50, at 45.

humans were caught between the religious ideals of the Reformation and those of the Counter-Reformation, producing a culture hardly conducive to direct and honest speech.

By the sixteenth century, urban developments and an increase in social mobility had effected changes in the psyche of the individual; it was a time when "men turned in upon themselves, sought privacy, withdrew for privileged moments from urban pressures."[29] According to Lionel Trilling, "the enterprise of sincerity became a salient, perhaps a definitive, characteristic of Western culture for some four hundred years."[30] The emergence of an introspective mood allowed doubt to be freely entertained and writing became a personal activity that responded to the "draining of value from public action, at least when the action accords with conventional expectations – for the latter tends increasingly to be seen as irredeemably inauthentic, somehow compromised and contaminated by the demands of conformism and theatricality."[31] The heightened awareness of a potential discrepancy between public appearance and private essence induced Montaigne to attempt an examination of the world's affairs by relying on his own judgement. Nevertheless, the ethic of the private life still emphasized the honesty and integrity required for the performance of public roles and, although Montaigne believed that it is possible, with sufficient curiosity, to "pry into the souls and the natural and true opinions of the authors", for Montaigne, it would appear to be fallacious to conflate what is written with the author and expect a disclosure of personality: "[a] man may indeed judge of their parts, but not of their manners nor of themselves, by the writings they

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[29] Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980) 46.

[30] Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1972) 6.

[31] Louis A. Sass, *Madness and Modernism: Insanity in the Light of Modern Art, Literature, and Thought* (New York: Basic, 1992) 99.

exhibit upon the theatre of the world […] the matter preached and the preacher are different things" (*E* II. x).

Montaigne seems to be prescient in seeing that writing can work as a textual illusion in which "subjects are themselves fictions, fashioned in reiterated acts of self-naming" and that the problem of writing the self was "already understood in its full complexity by Montaigne" (Greenblatt 218-9). In Greenblatt's view, Montaigne "invents in effect a brilliant mode of *non-narrative* self-fashioning" (Greenblatt 252).

Writing as Making: Documenting the Changes in the Self

The withdrawal from society was a decisive stance that allowed Montaigne to concentrate on the workings of his mind, which he came to understand as the highest human faculty. After discovering the uniqueness of his thoughts, he recognized that his writing had produced not only the *Essays* as a work of art, but that he himself had become a work in progress; identity is continually shaped in and through the process of writing. Montaigne seems not to distinguish between mind, soul and self and, similarly to Augustine, he uses these terms interchangeably for describing an idea of the self that is never at one with itself. He writes that "whoever will look narrowly into his own bosom, will hardly find himself twice in the same condition. I give to my soul sometimes one face and sometimes another, according to the side I turn her to" (*E* II. i). Montaigne's subjectivity is an awareness of himself without a stable content during the time of his life; every moment of contemplation brings a different 'self' to light. In "Of the Inconstancy of Our Actions", he effectively concludes with the insight that "man has attained no knowledge, not even about what is closest to him, his own self" (Hartle 187).

Instead of following religious dogma, Montaigne ponders about the inconsistency that he finds everywhere in the startling variety of opinions that is made about every subject; he calls it the "shifting and inconsistency" in which "[w]e fluctuate betwixt various inclinations; we will nothing freely, nothing absolutely, nothing constantly" (*E* II. i).

Rather than connecting the self with an Augustinian principle of perfection and eternal unchanging truth, Montaigne takes a radical self-reflexive stance in writing about the self as a self to the effect that he "is able to reject the subjective break that radical conversion demands only because he views experience as an unbroken continuum of micro-conversions" (*CC* 61). The self-portrait is conceived as a serial representation that documents on-going change and constant flux, which Montaigne accepts as his condition that partakes in the changeable nature of being. However, the fluency of the self does not stand in violation of a perceived essence that emerges as the sum of experience and he attempts to find a constant identity in the unity of body, mind, and soul, when he asks:

> [t]o what end do we dismember by divorce a building united by so close and brotherly a correspondence? Let us, on the contrary, confirm it by mutual offices; let the mind rouse and quicken the heaviness of the body, and the body stay and fix the levity of the soul. (*E* III. xiii)

Riley evaluates and explains Montaigne's idea about the union of the self and his insistence of the indivisibility of the self:

> The *Essays* is an attempt to give a voice to that totality, to represent the fullness and the indivisibility of the self. And yet the very stability of character depends on the constant, momentary variability of mental life, so much so that it is an open question whether one is ever 'self-identical'. (*CC* 61)

The realization of the 'man' is the 'Book of the Self', which also becomes the source of Montaigne's paradoxical sense of being: the nature of the self is both made and explored with words and therefore, book and self are inseparable. He concludes that "I have no more made my book than my book has made me: 'tis a book consubstantial with the author, of a peculiar design, a parcel of my life" (*E* II. xviii). The making is not only of the book, but of the self of the writer *through* making the book; Goodwin argues that "[t]hrough analogies that develop over the course of the *Essays*, Montaigne makes his book stand for the 'body' of his life experience, and the writing within it stand for the 'voice' that speaks from experience. Language makes experience and thought incarnate" (Goodwin 90). The correlation of text with self is complete and unmediated, thus the self is presented as something created in or transformed by the process of fashioning, which echoes Heidegger's understanding that "the artist is the origin of the work. The work is the origin of the artist. Neither is without the other."[32]

Artistic Self-Fashioning in Writing

Montaigne described his ever-changing nature as the force that produces originality. From this insight, he deduced that every human being has a unique design for representing a particular way of life in which the limits of the self are drawn by self-knowledge that functions as an antidote to self-delusion, which provides an "indispensable key to self-acceptance" (Taylor, *SS* 179). By means of experimenting with and by observing the subtlest of his changes, Montaigne became aware of the perpetual

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[32] Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 1935, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001) 17-87, 17.

change inside and outside of himself. He noticed that everything is always shifting,

changing, becoming, and he concluded that impermanence is the true nature of being.

He spoke of the minute-to-minute changes within him, which made him wonder whether

a person can ever be self-identical:

> I cannot fix my object; 'tis always tottering and reeling by a natural giddiness; I take it as it is at the instant I consider it; I do not paint its being, I paint its passage; not a passing from one age to another, or, as the people say, from seven to seven years, but from day to day, from minute to minute, I must accommodate my history to the hour: I may presently change, not only by fortune, but also by intention. (*E* III. ii)

According to Riley, Montaigne views the writing of himself as "painting passage

[peindre le passage], collapsing portrait and story into a single metaphor," that gives "a

tension between a conception of the self as a reified product and a dynamic process" (*CC*

12). Montaigne recognizes the impossibility of freezing the self in time, which stands in

opposition to the mobility and causal irreversibility involved in narrating one's life and the

understanding of all its contradictions. Movement and change are the essence of being;

not only is Montaigne affected and moved by circumstances, but he is inherently unstable

and immersed in the flow of time. The conflicting but equal, impulses that show the self

both as a portrait and a story, help to account for a disjuncture between what Montaigne

perceives as his subjective core and the narrative of the events and emotions that

supposedly constitute it. The written self has indeed become another self, a self that

once was him, but is no longer as that self is absorbed into its own description. With

Montaigne's *Essays*, identity starts to take its shape from the outside, which confirms that

"in the sixteenth century there appears to be an increased self-consciousness about the

fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process" (Greenblatt 2). The

Renaissance artist began to impose a textual shape upon himself in which the self

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becomes present to itself in the words written on a page, words "that claim not access to the inner life but existence as the inner life. And the characteristic of these words – as opposed to modern attempts to record the discourse of interiority – is their public character, the apparent impersonality of their rhetorical structure, their performative mode" (Greenblatt 87).

Modern Scepticism: Attack on Reason, Judgement and the Defence of Faith

For Augustine, knowledge began through the senses, but for Montaigne, perception is reduced by human intentionality that shapes reason to suit various needs of the individual. He says that "[o]ur senses are not only depraved, but very often stupefied by the passions of the soul; how many things do we see that we do not take notice of, if the mind be occupied with other thoughts?" (*E* II. xii). Reasoning is swayed by passions and feelings such that what is known today will be doubted tomorrow; he therefore questions the attainability of knowledge through the soul:

> What assurance then can we take of a thing so mobile and unstable, subject by its condition to the dominion of trouble, and never going other than a forced and borrowed pace? If our judgment be in the power even of sickness and perturbation; if it be from folly and rashness that it is to receive the impression of things, what security can we expect from it? (*E* II. xii)

Virginia Woolf attributed the contradictions in Montaigne to the complexity of the soul, indicative of a more searching scrutiny of the inner life and she writes that although he "attempt[s] to communicate a soul," the soul remains basically unknowable; we

cannot know "how she works or what she is except that of all things she is the most

mysterious, and one's self the greatest monster and miracle in the world."[33]

Montaigne sees an epistemological dilemma of defending faith on the grounds of reason

because reason relies on individual judgement, which in turn relies on the senses and the

senses cannot be trusted to grasp the truth. In the "Apology for Raymond Sebond", he

defends the Catholic faith against Raymond Sebond's natural theology and against the

attacks of atheists, who construct their argumentation equally by appealing to reason:

> I always call that appearance of meditation which every one forges in himself reason; this reason, of the condition of which there may be a hundred contrary ones about one and the same subject, is an instrument of lead and of wax, ductile, pliable, and accommodate to all sorts of biases, and to all measures. (*E* II. xii)

The critique of presumptuousness rests on the conviction that, "[t]o treat one's

conception of 'reason' as an objective standard for judgment, moral or otherwise, is to

fail to be sufficiently self-critical" (Edelman 35). But Montaigne's project was to discover

the nature of the self and part of his aim of essaying is to question judgement, to become

self-conscious how those judgements developed and changed over time. In his

"Apology", Montaigne contemplates the impermanence of received opinions:

> So that when any new doctrine presents itself to us, we have great reason to mistrust, and to consider that, before that was set on foot, the contrary had been generally received; and that, as that has been overthrown by this, a third invention, in time to come, may start up which may damn the second. (E II. xii)

He recognizes that nothing certain can be established about one thing by another and, if

neither senses nor reason can be trusted, then it is difficult to be sure that anything exists

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[33] Virginia Woolf, "Montaigne," first published in *Times Literary Supplement,* January, 1924, reprinted *in The Common Reader* (London: Hogarth P, 1925), *Project Gutenberg Australia* Ebook, n.pag.

or is present in some substantial and permanent way, whether it is the self, or anything external to the self, the objects in the world. Universal agreements are phenomena with limited temporal validity but in essaying himself, Montaigne takes reflective ownership of his moral beliefs, which then become part of his very self. Edelman elaborates on Montaigne's sense of self-discovery and self-constitution in text:

> In reflectively re-affirming or rejecting his customary judgments, he is able, in a sense, to actively constitute himself as an individual, taking over as his own that which was merely given to him pre-reflectively, and eliminating what he comes to recognize as merely adventitious. (46)

Edelman suggests that the process of doubt arrives at certainty about a moral self. Yet, though the ideal of self-responsibility led Montaigne to explore his inner world, in writing about the self he also sets up an impasse where the affirmation of self-presence is haunted by the absence of the other: although he attempts to find his continued identity, he ultimately has to confesses the failure of "recover[ing] contact with the permanent, stable, unchanging core of being" (Taylor, *SS* 178). His most salient insight is the realization that human beings cannot know anything to a level of certainty nor can they sense beyond the phenomena of experience and Montaigne concludes the "Apology" with scepticism about how knowledge could produce an understanding or could even provide proof for the existence of God:

> We do not satisfy ourselves with serving God with our souls and understandings only, we moreover owe and render him a corporal reverence, and apply our limbs and motions, and external things to do him honour; we must here do the same, and accompany our faith with all the reason we have, but always with this reservation, not to fancy that it is upon us that it depends, nor that our arguments and endeavours can arrive at so supernatural and divine a knowledge. […] God owes his extraordinary assistance to faith and religion; not to our passions. (*E* II. xii)

Montaigne's argumentation in the "Apology" seeks to elucidate the error in reasoning for the existence of God. On the contrary, he says, the lack of knowledge of God is a predicament of the human condition, which can only be overcome by faith. His argument for transcendence is directed against "the hubristic presumption that reason, unaided by faith, is enough to validate the belief that God exists and has the properties traditionally attributed to him."[34]

Ann Hartle argues that to regard Montaigne as a sceptic–fideist is an attempt to reconcile his presumed scepticism with his apparently sincere expressions of religious belief, which becomes, as she says, "in fact a double-edged sword: at the same time that it destroys the presumption of the atheists, it undercuts Sebond's project of a rational defense of the faith" (Hartle 191). According to Lionel Trilling, sincerity can be defined as "the absence of dissimulation or feigning or pretence" (13). With Montaigne, the notion of a timeless and transcendent self began to fade and with it, the belief that it is necessary to communicate private thoughts in order to make a contribution to public life. Montaigne inaugurated the individual exploration of both the world and the particularity of the self; his ethics of identity challenged the repressive mechanisms of both Church and State in early modern Europe. Sass states that at this time the "polarization of inner from outer or public man has strong evaluative implications, for there is an increasing tendency to value the inner self above its 'mere' social roles", and he continues with the assertion that " the sixteenth-century ideal of sincerity came, by the nineteenth century, to be replaced by an emphasis on a rival ethic – authenticity […] where the point is not so

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[34] Bruce Silver, "Montaigne, *An Apology for Raymond Sebond*: Happiness and the Poverty of Reason," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 26.1 (2002): 94-110 at 95.

much to be true to other human beings as to be true to oneself, to fulfill one's own inherent being and potential" (Sass 99). For Rousseau, the issue of morality hinges on the question of how to recover authentic moral contact with oneself and he answers it by demanding the freedom to follow the voice of nature within himself, what Taylor describes as "self-determining freedom. It is the idea that I am free when I decide for myself what concerns me, rather than being shaped by external influences" (Taylor, *EA* 27).

Section 3: Autonomy of the Self and the Sentiment of Being in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's The Confessions *(1781-88)*

By naming his autobiographical project *The Confessions*, Rousseau inscribes himself in the long tradition of confessional narratives, but he reworks the Augustinian conversionary paradigm – his conversion is intellectual rather than religious – and he also departs from Montaigne's self-representational enterprise that aimed to reach self-knowledge. *The Confessions* shifts the external act of confessing to God to an internal struggle of consciousness based on feelings, which shows Rousseau's determination "to separate his book from the spiritual tradition of confession as well as from the humanist tradition of self-study" (Goodwin 91). Confession takes the form of a narrative about oneself but it is not self-analysis in a clinical sense. Rousseau writes according to a protestant tradition that locates the self in interiority; he believes in making himself transparent to an extent that would allow his readers to gain access to his very soul. Rousseau contrasted the inherent good of nature within mankind to the corrupting

influence of society. Consequently, he turns inward in the search for his authentic self, to write an account of "a man as he was within."[35]

The Freedom to be Authentic

The sixteenth-century ideal of sincerity, adhered to by Montaigne, was replaced by the new ethic of authenticity in the increasingly secular society of the late eighteenth century. The idea of a fixed and immortal *soul* began to be displaced by the transitory *self*; therefore, in his writing Rousseau replaces the religious polarity of God and subject with a new antithesis in which God is exterior: instead of turning to God, he advocates a return to nature, where absolute freedom could be enjoyed in the state of self-sufficiency, if man could shed his pretences of perfection, which Rousseau sees as "the true source of his misery" (*CONF* 362). His sentimental idealism assumed a fundamental likeness of all men in their natural state and he persists in regarding autonomy for man as the only possible route to a happy life, but it might be argued that Rousseau fails to recognise that dependence on others is inevitable. Although he regards his uniqueness as the quality that separates him from others, at the same time, he sees himself as part of a common human nature that includes virtues as well as vices. This leads Rousseau to doubt the sincerity of Montaigne because, in his *Essais,* Montaigne only confessed what Rousseau regards as likable faults. Rousseau, however, believes that his project of authenticity is pre-eminent, because "there is no human heart, however pure, that does not conceal some odious vice" (*CONF* 479). Thus, he praises the virtue of sincerity "itself

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[35] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau,* 1781, (London: Penguin, 1953) 478; Abbreviation used in parenthetical references henceforth is *CONF*.

and by itself. In other words, Rousseau is the first to define the good as being oneself regardless of what one may be. And that is a radically new position."[36]

Accordingly, Rousseau sets out to write a superior autobiography by including all the facets of his personality in order to give a total account of his life that would explain how he came to be this particular human being, Jean-Jacques Rousseau; he does not even shrink back – or so it would appear – from injuring himself in the eyes of the world. Ann Hartle argues that Rousseau offers a subjectified portrait of himself, one which "while aiming squarely at Augustine both on the level of structure and of an ideology of subjectivity, creates a radically different, modern version of the self" (Hartle in Riley, *CC* 89). Rousseau sets his inner experiences as examples meant to show the opposition between the natural self and the deformed cultural self in order to reveal the artificiality of contemporary society that has lost its touch with nature by its obsession with manners and possessions. On the one hand, he is eager to show his individual autonomy and writes *The Confessions* according to the paradigm of a self that is constituted by its "natural" feelings, memories and reflections; whilst on the other, he sets himself up as the archetype that represents humanity at large. The search for nature becomes a search for paradise lost; it shows the gulf between an ideal autonomous self, based on essence, and the real self that is forced into self-policing under the disciplining gaze of a society where the self "is subjected to a field of visibility" and thus the internalized consciousness of man "becomes the principle of his own subjection."[37] Although Rousseau emphasises his need to remove himself from the influences of a society which he regards as degenerate and artificial, his project is doomed to fail, because the confession of guilt and

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[36] Arthur M. Melzer, "Rousseau and the Modern Cult of Sincerity," *Harvard Review of Philosophy* V (Spring 1995): 4-21, at 14.

[37] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin, 1977) 202-3.

shame shows his need to exonerate himself in the very eyes of the society he rejects.

Repentance is a social act and Rousseau responds according to the conventions of his

time in which the compulsive need to examine how he is judged by others finally

culminates in a condition of persecutory paranoia. So, Rousseau's obsession alternates

between the realization that his insistence on an autonomous self is no more than a self-

preserving fantasy, directed to defend the self from a progressive possession by others,

and his own persistent need for the possession of others in order to control what is not-

himself.

David Hume, in his study of human nature, writes that the real state of the self

"independent of the perception of every other object, is in reality nothing."[38] Passion is

the agent that takes the self as an object and constitutes the individual. Hume's idea

accords with Paul De Man's later views in that Rousseau writes his autobiography in order

to fill the void within the self by recalling his emotional states in every situation. But the

emerging self in all its contradictions is not rendered as an empty entity, as De Man would

see it, as "pure nothingness [...] nothingness stated and restated by a subject that is the

agent of its own instability."[39] Because Rousseau's narration states how he felt in certain

situations and towards people, he posits himself and gradually builds his identity in

relation to others. What emerges in Rousseau's sustained self-revelation is not mere

"nothingness," but an ironic polarity between the acclaimed ideal of a "natural" integrity

of the self and an emerging debased and corrupted historical self. *The Confessions* shows

the contrast between Rousseau's sentimental idealism and the social reality of

eighteenth-century society, where mannerism governs social conduct by rules of

etiquette and the preoccupation with appearances induces a continuous self-fashioning,

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[38] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 1739, Bk II, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon, 1896) 340.
[39] De Man in Stanley Corngold, "Error in Paul de Man," *Critical Inquiry* 8.3 (1982): 489-507, at 497.

necessary to integrate individuals in an increasingly commercialized society.[40] The self is

continuously formed and changed in its relations with others, who act as mirrors for the

theatrical representation that the self performs on the stage of social life.

Rousseau sees the deformation of the self as an effect of social interaction with

others who have lost their natural sensibility for simple pleasures through a

preoccupation with money and position in society. In the service of the intelligent,

sophisticated Countess de Vercellis, Rousseau suffers from the effects of her egotism and

coldness of manners and deplores that she "always seemed to me to have as little feeling

for others as for herself; and when she did a kindness to anyone in misfortune, it was in

order to do something good on principle, rather than out of any true compassion" (*CONF*

84). The Countess is presented as a rational being who calculates the effects of her

actions to suit her purposes: she is the classical example of the calculating rationalist of

modernity. In being reduced to the status of a servant, Rousseau acutely senses that he is

judged on his utility value for her rather than on his intrinsic value, which he sees as a

deformation and denial of his true nature. He suffers from the inequality that his position

entails and her judgment of outward appearances that obliterates his true self, "since she

saw nothing in me but a servant she prevented my appearing to her in any other light"

(*CONF* 85). Rousseau concludes that society's prejudice corrupts the self's natural

disposition, whereas, as an outsider, his judgment of others is more profound in that he is

able to maintain "a very natural aversion for the apparent order of things" (*CONF* 85).

But his aloof impartiality does not ignore the usefulness of others to himself, which

becomes obvious when he repeatedly states that he made "some sound acquaintances,

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[40] Charles Taylor writes that "As we move into the eighteenth century, the ends of legislation come more
and more to incorporate the ideas of the Enlightenment, putting increasing emphasis on the productive,
material aspects of human activity, in the name of the benefits which would accrue to individuals and to
society as a whole" (*A Secular Age* 111).

who have subsequently been either pleasant or useful to me;" and regrets his neglect in

this respect, "for not having cultivated sufficiently," (*CONF* 206) or deplores the limited

success of introductions where "only three were useful to me" (*CONF* 266). His aversion

only extends to his own self being judged on appearances, and he ridicules what he sees

as pretences in others, who successfully navigate between obliging appearance and self-

interest. M. de Gauffecourt is the example of one, who in serving "his friends zealously, or

rather making friends of those whom he could serve" is looking after his own interest; he

is "capable of cleverly managing his own affairs whilst warmly pursuing the interests of

others" (*CONF* 204). Rousseau is aware that man in a social setting, "is a mere histrionic

representation – every man takes one or another 'position' as the choreography of

society directs" (Trilling 31). To serve his self-interest, Rousseau maintains useful

contacts in society; to some extent he realizes that his idea of an autonomous self is a

fantasy, but it is a desired state to which he repeatedly returns. He stubbornly insists that

he wants to remain "free and virtuous, superior to fortune and man's opinion, and

independent of all external circumstances" (*CONF* 332). This desire to exercise free will is

in opposition to a social reality where his emotional and economic dependency on others

is indeed excessive, especially in the case of women who are his means of psychological

and often financial well-being.

The Impossibility to be without the Other

Rousseau desires to be understood and to be loved by others, especially women,

who embody what he wants to possess. But the subjective limitations of Rousseau's gaze

prevent him from seeing women objectively and from connecting with anything outside

himself; his subjectivity refuses alterity. Mme de Warens combines mother-figure and lover to such an extent that Rousseau must incorporate her entirely: "I did not think, feel, or breathe except through her" (*CONF* 194). In this exclusive symbiotic relationship, Rousseau sees the possibility for a complete possession of the other:

> We began imperceptibly to become inseparable and, in a sense, to share our whole existence in common. Feeling that we were not only necessary but sufficient to one another, we grew accustomed to thinking of nothing outside ourselves, completely to confine our happiness and our desires to our possession of one another. (*CONF* 213)

Only when money squandering threatens to ruin his life with Mme de Warens, does Rousseau decide to leave for Montpellier with the overt intent of curing his ailments, but as soon as he sets out for the journey, he starts an affair in which he claims to be the passive party, who succumbs to the conquest of Mme de Larnage. Whenever Rousseau needs closeness to satisfy his needs, he conforms to the expectations of others: In being described as charming, he gets his reassurance so that he "became charming indeed" (*CONF* 237). His chameleonic behaviour is indicative of his narcissistic dependence on others and shows that he is more than willing to conform as long as changes are in accordance with his own needs. He desires Thérèse as an intimate companion, but thinks of her merely as a substitute for Mme de Warens, as "a successor to Mamma," thus, he poignantly calls her "aunt" (*CONF* 310). But even she cannot fill the void that Rousseau feels in himself, which he describes as a singular need for assimilating "two souls in the same body" (*CONF* 386). Incapable of moderation in distance or closeness to others, he craves "all or nothing," and consequently spoils all his relationships with impossible demands for total submission (*CONF* 483). As no mortal woman can match his ideal, he gets momentary satisfaction from dreaming of ideal

objects, his "celestial amours" are the nymphs of nature (*CONF* 398). The narcissistic

transference of desires on to others, who remain mysterious, distorts Rousseau's relation

with the world and imprisons him in his private consciousness. Waugh explains that the

"other" is constructed though the projection of our own desire with the result that "the

'Other' thus becomes a sacred but empty category – a relation of difference with no

positive terms – as inaccessible to reasonable understanding as to careful observation or

even old-fashioned human sympathy."[41] Rousseau's underlying problem is otherness on

a moral as well as on an existential level; morality is the voice of nature within us, but

"[t]his voice is most often drowned out by the passions induced by our dependence on

others, of which the key one is 'amour propre' or pride. Our moral salvation comes from

recovering authentic moral contact with ourselves" (Taylor, *EA* 27). *The Confessions*

shows the life-time struggle within himself. Thus, he is neither able to overcome his

distance from others, nor to create unity in his own self. Instead, the self is continually

displaced by Rousseau pointing to his unrealized potential self:

> [T]he natural self he could have become had an encounter with mediation not intervened
> to change its trajectory. In other words, he has to content himself with suggesting a
> *possible*, hypothetical self impervious to the aleatory that would exist if only there were
> no world, no other, no mediation.[42]

In a capitalist society, the individual has lost the sense of its fundamental needs

and Rousseau seeks to reinstate the goodness of a natural self by insisting on the purity of

nature to which the exchange value of money becomes an obstacle: "I am less tempted

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[41] Patricia Waugh, "Revising the Two Cultures Debate" in *The Arts and Sciences of Modern Criticism*, ed.
David Fuller and Patricia Waugh (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999) 33-59, 49.
[42] Patrick Riley, "The Inversion of Conversion: Rousseau's Rewriting of Augustinian Autobiography," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 28 (1999): 229-255, at 243; Abbreviation used in parenthetical references henceforth is *IC.*

by money than by things, because between money and the desired object there is always an intermediary, whereas between a thing and its enjoyment there is none" (*CONF* 46). Freedom and independence are found in the enjoyment of things which are readily available or cheap, but when society repeatedly denies Rousseau the bare necessities, due to his lack of money, he is compelled to act against his conscience: he trades his religion for money and converts to Catholicism (*CONF* 65-74). His desperate attempts to extricate himself from the influence of society and thus preserve a sense of wholeness are thwarted and he realizes that it is impossible to live outside the social framework that governs social norms: on his return to Geneva, Rousseau states that shame compels him to revert back to Protestantism, but he also admits that re-conversion was necessary to re-establish his rights as a citizen (*CONF* 366). Rousseau deplores that his social existence depends upon others, who drive him into inauthenticity.

The Performative in Representation

De Man argues that Rousseau's self is displaced by staging his guilt and shame, which points to the fact that the confession of sins is not necessarily a disinterested act of sincerity. In "Autobiography as De-Facement," he describes what he sees as a slippage from the cognitive to the performative: "as soon as the performative function is asserted, it is at once reinscribed within cognitive constraints."[43] *The Confessions* employs a style of language that effectively effaces its subject by hiding and revealing the subject at the same time which inscribes tension throughout the text between representation and

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[43] Paul de Man, "Autobiography as De-Facement," *MLN* 94.5 (1979): 919-930, at 923.

misrepresentation. Although Rousseau asserts that his character is unitary and consistent

in its purity of feeling, he nevertheless frequently claims that his life is marked by crises

and change that makes it impossible to express his motives in narrative form without

including "some hint of censure or apology" (*CONF* 352). As time and circumstances

change, the self also changes in its relations to others. Rousseau must defend his altered

feelings in order to assert the self at each moment in time by retrospectively explaining

what caused his repeated conversion, how he was affected by circumstances outside his

control. For the description of these subjective upheavals, he employs a "hyperbolic

rhetoric" (*IC* 238) to smooth over the contradictions in his reasoning; for example, what

caused his alienation from his friends. At first, he proposes that they shunned him

because of what he describes as changes in his behaviour towards them: "It was less my

literary fame than my personal reformation […] that drew upon me their jealousy;" but

then he is adamant that it was envy about his success as a writer: "As long as I lived

unknown to the public I was beloved by all my private acquaintance, and I had not a

single enemy. But the moment I acquired literary fame, I had no longer a friend" (*CONF*

363). Rousseau's writing aims at regaining what he has lost, only to discover that

conversion is irreversible and that "the repeatedly converted self […] becomes immanent

to a lost version of its own essence" (*IC* 239).

Rousseau's dilemma is that he attempts to get beyond the medium of language

for the articulation of his feelings, but he does not realize that in the very instance of

articulation he produces a version of the self that exists merely as a textual

representation. He sets up textual versions of himself at different times of his life that

show his inconsistencies and contradictions. Goodwin states that Rousseau's portrait of

the self's doubleness is due to "the interplay between the original turbulence of past

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experience and its present dramatization in writing," (95) and Saunders agrees that "the

view of the self as process produces a text that is itself in process."[44] The self cannot be

represented in its totality, but rather as a layered text with multiple impressions "that

combine and overlap in continual self-eclipse – and that must be reproduced in the

reactions and representations of other minds."[45] It is the responsibility of the reader to

see through the multifarious textual representations and re-construct the wholeness of

Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Morrissey summarizes that Rousseau's romantic project fails to

recognize that the written self exists only as a linguistic construction:

> On the one hand, he refuses to recognize that language, by definition, is convention,
> hence inhabited by Otherness, and that writing is a way of being-for-others; on the other
> hand, in having recourse to writing, he is making of the immediacy of his intimate life a
> means to justify himself in the eyes of others and thus he loses his own authenticity.[46]

Authenticity as a Feeling Self

The ideal of authentic personal being stands at the very centre of Rousseau's

thought, but he inevitably fails to realize himself in language. Hume takes the conscious

subject to be a bundle of states of the soul that constitutes our perceptions or sensations.

Rousseau experiences himself as a self-enclosed individual whose non-reflective feelings

are known only to himself; he describes them as a succession of "confused emotions […]

giving me the strangest and most romantic notions about human life, which neither

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[44] Max Saunders, *Self Impression: Life-Writing, Autobiografiction, and the Forms of Modern Literature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010) 34-35.
[45] David Marshall, "Rousseau and the State of Theater," *Representations* 13 (1986): 84-114, at 108.
[46] Robert J. Morrissey in Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988) xxv.

experience nor reflection has ever succeeded in curing me of" (*CONF* 20).[47] Emotions

that make him different from others are the proof for his uniqueness as a human being: "I

am made unlike any one I have ever met […] I am like no one in the whole world" (*CONF*

17). In reference to Wordsworth and Rousseau, Trilling states that "[f]or both men the

sentiment of being was an unassailable intuition […] it is through our conscious certitude

of our personal selfhood that we reach our knowledge of others" (92). Rousseau takes

the unmediated flow of individual feeling as the locus of genuine selfhood and self-

knowledge: "I have only one faithful guide on which I can count; the succession of feelings

which have marked the development of my being, and thereby recall the events that have

acted upon it as cause or effect" (*CONF* 262). For him, passions are the universal essence

of the self and not the rational thought of modern learning; therefore, he refutes the

ideas of the Count de Saint-Pierre for the enlightenment of mankind through knowledge

as a selfish and futile desire that seeks "to make all men like himself instead of taking

them as they are and as they will continue to be" (*CONF* 393). In the words of Goodwin,

Rousseau gives "priority of feeling over reason, the importance of inner truth over

worldly success" (9). Rousseau's replacement of Descartes's famous maxim "I think

therefore I exist", signals "a radical shift from a rational and instrumentalist to a more

consciously aesthetic strategy for realizing Enlightenment aims."[48] Therefore, it is

imperative that in telling his life history, Rousseau applies what he considers to be the

highest standard of truth, the standard of a "sensitive heart" (*CONF* 19). What he does

not realize is firstly, the impossibility of making his feelings transparent to others and

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[47] Hume speaks of Rousseau's radical anti-rational idealism as hyperbolic sentiments: "He has only *felt*
during the whole course of his life, and in this respect his sensibility rises to a pitch beyond what I have seen
any example of." Bertrand Russell, "Rousseau," *History of Western Philosophy* (London; New York:
Routledge 2006) 628.
[48] David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford;
Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1989) 19.

secondly, that his actions are always judged by public opinion. Rousseau's self-absorbed

individualism constructs a world of his own, which remains inaccessible to others.

Others, who are unable to read his heart, consequently accuse him of misanthropy and

other traits that he cannot recognize in himself (*CONF* 398). Rousseau's outer

appearance and his inner truth are perpetually disjointed.

Desire and Guilt

Temptation always proves irresistible to Rousseau; he is easily affected by the

immediacy of fulfilling his desires, which leads him to exchange his security and prospects

for advancement in society for the freedom to follow his inclinations. Although the Solar

family finally assures his position to be "a young man of the highest expectations, who

was not in his proper place but was expected to get there," Rousseau decides to leave

their service for the prospect of recovering "all the joys of independence" (*CONF* 99-100).

Loss of autonomy threatens to throw the romantic self into the service of the other,

whereas Rousseau seeks freedom from the imposition of external codes of conduct: by

rejecting his duty to others, he paradoxically becomes self-alienated. Trilling could be

equally speaking of Rousseau, as he says of the young Rameau:

> His thwarted passion for what society has to offer goes along with a scornful nihilism
> which overwhelms every prudential consideration; he is the victim of an irresistible
> impulse to offend those with whom he seeks to ingratiate himself. And stronger than his
> desire for respect is his appetite for demonstrative self-abasement. (29)

Guilt about his decision leads him to neglect his duties and, rather than blaming

himself for his misconduct, he constructs an argument that stresses the agency of his

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employers, who react to his negligence by threatening him with dismissal, which he then takes as an excuse for complete defiance. Rousseau's invocation of the emotional intends to show the true self, to present himself as he believes how he actually was, but he does not understand that his "truth of the heart" is merely a reflection of his own desire for purity and innocence but not how he appears to others. In writing *The Confessions*, Rousseau tries "to recuperate and articulate what is lost in the self's encounters with the world" (*IC* 238). Indeed, what is always lost is the honesty of his motives in dealing with others by concealing his true motives. Thus, in order to avert his apparent guilt, Rousseau disguises his motives for leaving the service by pretending that the actions of his benefactors have compromised his dignity. The result is the creation of a subjectivity more concerned with how he actually *felt* in his relations to others, than with his actual relations to others as such. De Man describes the double epistemological perspective in which confessional language and inner truth work together:

> It functions as a verifiable referential cognition, but it also functions as a statement whose reliability cannot be verified by empirical means. The convergence of the two modes is not a priori given, and it is because of the possibility of a discrepancy between them that the possibility of excuse arises.[49]

Interestingly, he argues further, that the relation between guilt and excuse in *The Confessions* might be a reversal of cause and effect:

> It is no longer certain that language, as excuse, exists because of a prior guilt but just as possible that since language, as a machine, performs anyway, we have to produce guilt (and all its train of psychic consequences) in order to make the excuse meaningful. *Excuses generate the very guilt they exonerate,* though always in excess or by default. (*AR* 299, emphasis added)

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[49] Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979) 278-301 at 281; Abbreviation used in parenthetical references henceforth is *AR*.

Looking at the above example, it seems to be more likely that the sequence of excuse

followed by guilt is not quite as De Man explains. The guilt comes first, because Rousseau

knows that he deliberately behaved badly in order to force his employers to dismiss him.

Rather than to appear ungrateful and morally in the wrong, his guilt provokes him to put

agency in the hands of others, to relieve himself from having to act; he coaxes them to

provide the excuse that he needs for leaving their service. Retrospectively, Rousseau

admits that he had behaved with injustice and ingratitude "in order to provide myself

with an excuse […] I imagined that I could put them in the wrong and justify myself in my

own eyes by claiming that my action had been forced upon me" (*CONF* 101). In writing

about his guilt that needed an excuse, he excuses himself in the eyes of his readers by

pointing out that his on-going motive for extracting himself from the impositions of

society is because he is weak, "easily discouraged, particularly in difficult and lengthy

enterprises […] I looked on distant objectives as decoys for fools" (*CONF* 385). This

explains his character, which lacks the stamina for a steady advancement in society.

Instead of slow progress, he prefers outbursts of energy, which always gratify his needs

immediately but which leave him oblivious to the consequences that his actions have on

himself or others.

Inauthenticity in Representation

In order to represent himself to others, Rousseau must act and he sets the stage

for the protagonist he is devising: in the double role of narrator and protagonist he has

the power to manipulate the point of view of others. He claims to have made his soul

transparent to the world, to have truthfully depicted himself as he was then, but he manages to appear as he wishes to be seen. Marshall explains that the creation of a self projects Rousseau into inauthenticity, into role playing, and although Rousseau writes in a variant beginning of *The Confessions* that "no one can write the life of a man but himself," he also acknowledges that "in writing it he disguises it; under the name of his life story he makes his apology; he shows himself as he wants to be seen" (Rousseau in Marshall 105). Reality manifests itself in appearances, which can be true or false, but they have to be read correctly by others. The evil of false appearance separates Rousseau from "the people he loves best" in moments which mark the end of his serenity and pure childhood happiness. Although he is innocent and persistent in assuring his honesty, he is accused of having broken a hair comb and severely punished for the deed (*CONF* 29). Rousseau suffers unjust punishment due to the incongruence between inner self and outer appearances and the impossibility to "communicate the immediate evidence of inward conviction. From that moment paradise is lost, for paradise was the state of transparent communication between mind and mind, the conviction that total, reliable communication is possible" (Starobinski 8). The episode ends in the psychological trauma of no longer knowing who he is because of his inability to reconcile the two conflicting representations: innocence and guilt. Rousseau now realizes that his true self is inaccessible to others, because it remains "hidden, invisible, covered over by exterior traits that mask its true character with a type of false representation" (Marshall 108). Rousseau is misperceived by others and the self suffers for its appearance that other people do not share his truth. Before the self senses its distance from the world, it experiences its distance from others through loss of respect for and confidence in others, resulting in secrecy, rebellion and lies (*CONF* 31). Misperceived appearances increasingly

lead to social anxiety, a sign of the problematic relationship between the self and its representation in the world.

Rousseau constantly aims at overcoming the difference between self and others in conforming to the thoughts and expectations of others, by fitting himself into "the representational grid governed by the other" (*IC* 238). Initially, Rousseau characterizes himself as an ultra-modest man that "there was never, I believe, a creature of our kind with less vanity than I" (*CONF* 25). The effect of this claim makes Rousseau appear unnaturally vain as he sets himself up as an example for others to follow. After his success as a writer it becomes obvious that his vanity was always hidden when he tells that his greatest misfortune was the "inability to resist flattery" (*CONF* 346). Rousseau claims moderation as his virtue but always aims at extremes in order to be popular: "Anyone who excels in something […] is always sure to be sought after […] I shall be sought after, opportunities will present themselves, and my merit will do the rest" (*CONF* 271). But it is not always aggrandizement that leads him to pretend: repeatedly, Rousseau is driven by poverty or fate to present himself in a favourable light in order to coax others into fulfilling his needs. He not only wants to be recognized as an equal, but needs to impress others, even if he has to resort to lying in "certain moments of incomprehensible delirium in which I was not myself" (*CONF* 144). Thus, he pretends to possess abilities, even when it is evident that he has no talent at all to fulfil the expectations of others. By imitating a composer he once knew and admired, Rousseau thinks that he could actually write musical scores himself: "I was so fired by this idea that without thinking that I had neither his charm nor his talents I took it into my head to play the little Venture at Lausanne, to teach music, of which I was ignorant, and to say that I came from Paris, where I had never been" (*CONF* 144). Evidently, the actual performance

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of his composition turned out disastrously, except for a short melody at the end, which

Rousseau had plagiarized from his model composer.

Marshall explains that Rousseau is aware of acting and making a spectacle of

himself to the extent that *The Confessions* "both narrate and enact Rousseau's

exhibitionism and his obsessive concern with public opinion and the eyes of the world"

(Marshall 102). Ensuing feelings of shame and guilt provoke him to confess his sham to a

member of the orchestra, but – as Rousseau might have anticipated – the man makes his

secret public. Public opinion is judgemental, therefore Rousseau makes his self-

revelations with the view to winning acceptance in society, but his honesty is not

accepted; and he is ignored and humiliated. Self-revelation offers the truth of the self, a

truth that others might be persuaded to see, especially when vices are included which

Rousseau intends as the proof for "his genuine innocence within fashionable society,

which he regularly denounces as counterfeit and conspiratorial" (Goodwin 98). By

revealing his vices, he aspires to the status of the confessant as a hero, although under

the proviso that his account might suffer from "defects of memory," which do not trouble

him too much as he tells his readers on the opening page of *The Confessions,* Book One:

> Here is what I have done, and if by chance I have used some immaterial embellishment it has been only to fill a void due to a defect of memory. I may have taken for fact what was no more than probability, but I have never put down as true what I knew to be false and veracity have I related what was laudable or wicked, I have concealed no crimes, added no virtues; and if I have sometimes introduced superfluous ornament, it was merely to occupy a void occasioned by defect of memory: I may have supposed that certain, which I only knew to be probable, but have never asserted as truth, a conscious falsehood. (*CONF* 17)

Sentimental Memory

Unlike Proust, Rousseau does not believe that a forgotten event could hide an essential truth; rather, memories have sentimental values that remind him of happiness past: the sight of a periwinkle is joyful because it reminds him of the simple delights he had shared with Mme de Warens in the countryside at Les Charmettes thirty years ago (*CONF* 216). Retrospectively, he judges that "true happiness is quite indescribable; it can only be felt, and the stronger the feeling the less it can be described, because it is not the result of a collection of facts but a permanent state" (*CONF* 224-225). But instead of stopping his narrative, he immediately continues his reminiscences over the next nine pages. Even if memories are unreliable, they give opportunity for the writer to select true as well as false memories to create his own subjective truth, to present the plausible and to conceal the inconvenient.

Rousseau is in the paradoxical position of revealing and concealing himself in his writing because he must write and hide himself simultaneously: "[b]eing forced to speak in spite of myself, I am also obliged to conceal myself, to be cunning, to try to deceive, and to abase myself to conduct that is not in my nature" (*CONF* 263). Rousseau not only views and experiences himself as an autonomous individual, a separate and unique self, but also as a self that is divided into a true inner self and a false outer self. The false self appears in relations to others, through contact with society, whilst the true self experiences its separation from others.

Society corrupts the Innocent Self

Rousseau discovers "that other people do not share his truth, his innocence, and his good faith [...] Before the self senses its distance from the world, it experiences its

distance from others" (Starobinski 10). When other people's perceptions fail to recognize

what he knows to be his true nature and the true reason for acting or not acting, he

concludes that the loss of the self is the effect of a depraved culture, which forces him to

perform in roles that alienate him from others. Linda Anderson explains what Rousseau

gains from assigning a persecutory role to other people: it "confirms his shame and thus

also, perversely, increases his pleasure; and it is because the pleasure is shameful and

secret that it becomes all the more gratifying for him to reveal by confessing to it in his

text."[50] Rousseau critiques the display of great passions in others as false appearances

that intend to mask self-interest or vanity (*CONF* 144). He does not realize that his own

display of passionate feelings could be regarded as hypocritical. Consequently, his project

of presenting himself as a unified, autonomous subject is bound to fail. Saunders

describes the result as "a deferral, a displacement, a sense of fictionalization, which

seems to conceal as much as it reveals, the self feels like an imaginary other" (190). This

"imaginary other" shows the disparity between ideal and outcome: it is the result of

encounters with the world that lead the self increasingly further afield from integrity in a

"repeatable chain of deaths which the self always somehow survives, but from which it

emerges in an increasingly disfigured guise" (*IC* 236). Marshall concludes that Rousseau's

obsession with public revelation makes *The Confessions* "an avowedly theatrical book"

(Marshall 102). Rousseau is acutely aware that the intelligibility of his book rests on how

he represents his life. Thus, the book has become the stand-in for the individual it

portrays.

Rousseau replaces Augustine's address to a transcendent being with himself in the

role of the confessing subject that addresses readers with pathos. His act of penance is

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[50] Linda R. Anderson, *Autobiography* (New York; London: Routledge, 2001) 50.

not conducted in privacy, "but before a forum of his future readers," with guilt and shame

intended as proof for the veracity of his confession (Goodwin 94). Veliki explains the

paradox that puts an end to Rousseau's autobiographical project: it fails "because

Rousseau has to use language to express his self and he remains irremediably split in and

by language. His autobiographical texts aspire to truth but truth remains secondary to

staging the drama of the self."[51] Words are the only means available to explain what he

felt and Rousseau repeatedly asks the reader to sympathize or to share his feelings.

Furthermore, he seeks to transfer his feelings on to the reader, to make him feel what he

felt. But from the point of view of the reader, the facts of feeling cannot be verified by

anyone but the writer. The significant truth of *The Confessions* is always relative to the

self, which demonstrates Rousseau's essentially solipsistic attitude of self-importance.

Feelings are Rousseau's absolute authority, thus, feeling inaugurates the truth and

demonstrates his sincerity. But inner certainty is not enough; it must be revealed to

others and he writes for an imaginary audience, "the public which society created"

(Trilling 25).

Frequently, Rousseau offers incidences to his readers which he intends to be

iconic representations of his character, but he takes no responsibility for the resulting

image. Instead, he repeatedly appeals to the reader to suspend judgement (*CONF* 261) or

asks the reader to "sympathize with me in my grief" (*CONF* 42). He defers the possibility

of a final verdict by pointing out that he can never say enough to complete the picture of

himself and his misfortunes, "I shall have only too much to say to my readers on that

melancholy subject" (*CONF* 51). He even warns his readers about the dangers of

misunderstanding his testimony by pointing out: "my function is to tell the truth, not to

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[51] Martina Domines Veliki, "Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Dramatization of the Self," *Studia Romanica et Anglica Zagrabiensia* 54 (2010): 307-328, at 307.

make people believe it" (*CONF* 192). His pleadings shift the responsibility of assessing his

character to the reader's ability for correct interpretation: "The summing-up must be his,

and if he comes to wrong conclusions, the fault will be of his own making" (*CONF* 169). It

is evident that Rousseau's primary goal is to demonstrate the veracity of the narrative

with reference to intimate feeling by insisting on the strict contemporaneity of every

emotion that he communicates to his readers. Whether the link between "inner" feeling

and "outer" action is intentional remains a matter of interpretation, although it is obvious

that Rousseau wants to be judged by his own standards and he seeks to justify his actions

by referring to his emotions; thus it becomes possible to vindicate his betrayal of Marion

by pointing to his good intentions:

> Never was deliberate wickedness further from my intention than at that cruel moment. When I accused that poor girl, it is strange but true that my friendship for her was the cause. She was present in my thoughts, and I threw the blame on the first person who occurred to me. I accused her of having done what I intended to do myself. I said that she had given the ribbon to me because I meant to give it to her. (*CONF* 88)

His justification shows a paradoxical transference of his desire for Marion: He tells

the reader that the stolen ribbon was intended as a gift for Marion, but in the moment of

accusation, Rousseau had to deflect the disgrace of being a thief, a deed which he does

not want to hide from his readers, only from the people present at the time of the

incident. Furthermore, for his reading audience only, he twists his argumentation so as to

vindicate his accusation of Marion by revealing that he wanted to be desired by her and

thus to believe that she would have stolen the ribbon for him. Rousseau deflects his guilt

and exonerates himself by appealing to the reader to take into consideration the

unbearable state of shame he experienced at a young age, his weakness and confusion in

being intimidated at the scene; he even rationalizes that he has derived the moral benefit

of having been cured for life "against any act that might prove criminal in its result"

(*CONF* 89). In other words, he excuses the cruelty of his action with specious reasoning

that exonerates him from guilt. Rousseau has to devise a system of internal coherence

that can explain his action. Joshua Landy describes the psychological process in which the

intellect is corrupted by desire: "when an emotional investment is at stake, it does not so

much reason as *rationalize*, constructing endless 'pretexts' for doing what we already

wanted to do and believing what we had already decided to believe."[52]

De Man explains that words create rather than reflect the subject, which shows

his suspicion regarding any claim to truth that is based on individual feeling, which is

communicable but always unverifiable. Thus, he states that "Rousseau can convey his

'inner feeling' to us only if we take, as we say, his *word* for it, whereas the evidence for

his theft is, at least in theory, literally available" (*AR* 280). The same logic applies to

Rousseau's excuse for the abandonment of his five children to the Foundling Hospital,

where he justifies the cruel deed by firstly stating that he acted virtuously in not

concealing what he did, and secondly, by insisting that he "really saw nothing wrong in it"

(*CONF* 334). Furthermore, he presumes altruistic intentions in that the welfare of his

children was at the forefront of his mind in stating that "I could have wished, and still do

wish, that I had been brought up and nurtured as they have been" (*CONF* 334). The

excuse is empty rhetoric as the adult Rousseau cannot wish for a different childhood,

especially for one which is unknowable to him in all its dire consequences. De Man

reveals that the excuse is always unverifiable, because it exists only as an act of speech,

which is "verbal in its utterance, in its effect and in its authority," and its "purpose is not

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[52] Joshua Landy, *Philosophy as Fiction: Self, Deception, and Knowledge in Proust,* 2004, *Oxford Scholarship Online* 2007, 10. Although the context of the argument is on Marcel Proust, it describes and illuminates the workings of Rousseau's desire for Marion.

to state but to convince, itself an 'inner' process to which only words can bear witness"

(*AR* 281-2). Convincing his readers of his moral superiority, Rousseau wishes not to

apologize but to tell the truth, which compels him to compare his negligence as a father

to the malice of others, who subsequently betrayed his confidence. He twists his

argumentation in order to play down his responsibility and claims that the lack of feeling

justifies his action, because "a father's feelings cannot speak very loudly for children he

has never seen" (*CONF* 335).   Instead, he insists that the abandonment of his children

was far less abominable than the disclosure of his secret to the public by his friends, a

breach of trust, which he condemns vociferously:

> But to betray a friend's confidences, to violate the most sacred of all bonds, to
> publish secrets entrusted to our bosom, deliberately to dishonour the friends we
> have deceived and who still respect us as they say good-bye – those are not faults;
> they are utter baseness and infamy. (*CONF* 335)

The rhetorical trick of comparing two different deeds – the disposal of his children and his

friends' reactions – not only turns Rousseau into a victim but also deflects his own moral

failure. Rather than restoring a hidden chain of feelings, Rousseau presents an elaborate

chain of reasoning in his defence against anticipated accusations.[53]

De Man explains that the rhetorical act allegorizes the self which "disrupts

continuity between cognitive and performative rhetorics. Confession produces truth

(cognitive) by disclosing the deeds of the one confessing, but undermines itself as

confession when this cognitive truth functions as excuse (performative)." It is language

that performs the truth in writing. De Man relates to the Derridean "performative

promise" and argues that the performative act is a necessity for the constitution of text,

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[53] On a moral level, Bertrand Russell views the particular Rousseauian ethic as extremely skewed towards
the irrational, where exalted sensibilities take "the place of all the ordinary virtues" 624.

because "language itself dissociates the cognition from the act. *Die Sprache verspricht (sich)*; to the extent that is necessarily misleading, language just as necessarily conveys the promise of its own truth" (*AR* 277). The act of writing a public self-portrait is twofold for Rousseau: To tell a subjective truth about his personal history and to explain his actions by excusing himself, an act in which the truth counts less than the oath.

According to Derrida, Rousseau makes a performative promise, which is his "written promise to write this book in such and such a way, to sign it in conformity with a promise."[54] His intent to confess is Rousseau's promise to perform an action, to tell the world about his misfortunes. The excuse counts as a performative utterance, which does not just describe but has the potential to create reality and, in this respect, is not subject to the conventional true/false dichotomy. Excuses in speech-act theory are subject to "felicity conditions," where they depend on the sincerity of the speaker.[55] Rousseau is caught between the two functions of language, the rhetorical performative that excuses and the performative self-fashioning of the self in language, in the trope of allegory. It is the figurative nature of allegory that always refers to something other than itself. Thus, in a Derridian sense, it is allegory which deconstructs the text and reveals the self as a construct of language and writing as a linguistic performance which inevitably fictionalizes the self. The tropological structure that underlies all cognitions, including knowledge of the self, denies the possibility of a connection between language and subject. The impossible act of putting the self into language inevitably entails a disfigurement of the self, which De Man ascribes to rhetoricity:

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[54] Jacques Derrida, "Typewriter Ribbon: Limited Ink," *Without Alibi*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2002) 139.
[55] Mary Louise Pratt, "Ideology and Speech-Act Theory," *Poetics Today* 7.1 (1986): 59-72, at 62.

> [While Rousseau's text] accounts for its own mode of writing, it states at the same time the necessity of making this statement itself in an indirect, figural way that knows it will be misunderstood by being taken literally. Accounting for the "rhetoricity" of its own mode, the text also postulates the necessity of its own misreading. It knows and asserts it will be misunderstood.[56]

Indeed, Rousseau's feelings of being misunderstood grow exponentially and reach such an extent that he feels under constant surveillance and persecution in writing *The Confessions*; he imagines being surrounded by spies, friends have become enemies who weave their intrigues, throwing him into an "impenetrable darkness" in which the intentions of others remain mysterious, their minds opaque to him (*CONF* 458). Rousseau avoids the confrontation with others through the projection of his own desire on to others with the result that he can "understand neither the world nor [his] place in it: in losing the Other, Rousseau loses himself" (Morrissey in Starobinski xxiv). This mounting pressure of imaginary barriers between himself and society compels him to complete his version of events before others can stop him. Rousseau sees himself as the victim of a society in which "public authority exists for the oppression of the weak and the iniquity of the strong" (*CONF* 306). Lionel Trilling explains Rousseau's dilemma in writing *The Confessions*; it "was not a gratuitous undertaking. It was the painstaking demonstration of the author's authority to speak plain, to bring into question every aspect of society [...] he is the subject of *The Confessions*. He is the man; he suffered; he was there" (24).

Enfeebled by repeated attacks on his autonomy, Rousseau renews his resolve for independence by relying on his talent as a composer of operas, a task in which he had previously failed (*CONF* 308-309). In the quarrels that surround his eventual success as a composer, he feels himself to be victimized by others who conspire against his

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[56] Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Blindness: Jacques Derrida's Reading of Rousseau," *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1983) 136.

advancement in society. His anxiety increases to such an extent that even after his

success as a writer he feels alienated from his friends and the subject of their intrigues

(*CONF* 338). Every opponent turns into a grave enemy; he even feels besieged by his

admirers, who avenge themselves when rejected by accusing Rousseau of arrogance and

ostentation. He feels persecuted by the public and even alienated from his own family,

who also seem to conspire against him: "There were continual whisperings with my

friends; everything was a secret and a mystery to me in my own house" (*CONF* 343). The

incomprehensible behaviour of others becomes an unbearable burden that threatens his

autonomy: "I had hung a chain around my neck, and that only friendship had so far

prevented me from feeling its weight" (*CONF* 382).

Incongruence between Private Self and Public Self

Rousseau develops a paranoid obsession with the other's gaze that reflects the

public's opinion. Consequently, he "can only claim identity with his natural self because

his public image has become so aberrant that not even he could possibly resemble it" (*IC*

245). The theatrical aspect is Rousseau's negotiating of the relation between the private

self and public self by attempting to exhibit himself completely to the point that nothing

"must remain hidden or obscure" (*CONF* 65). Repeatedly, Rousseau's confused

revelations intensify to such an extent that he refers to or includes letters verbatim as

supplementary evidence, aimed to support his claims of innocence against the evil of

others, but the exchange of correspondence only shows that he constantly misreads

others and is in turn being misread by them. Diderot writes, in a well-meaning letter, that

his ignorance of public opinion turns his behaviour into a subject for misinterpretation,

that he will be "suspected of ingratitude or of some other secret motive," if he continues to rely on the testimony of his conscience as the sole source for conveying his motives (*CONF* 442). Diderot's lucid insight into Rousseau's psyche is not only seen as an impertinent judgement, but Rousseau also detects "some underhand dealings" that point to Diderot's involvement in a conspiracy against him (*CONF* 443).[57] Increasing paranoia even leads to his belief that Voltaire wrote *Candide* as a sly reply to one of his letters, which seems all the more ridiculous because Rousseau also says that he had never read the novel (*CONF* 400). Undoubtedly, Rousseau suffered from paranoia, but in some instances he, the son of a watch-maker, who had ventured into a society in which he did not belong by right of birth, had cause to feel that society persecuted him repeatedly by thwarting his ambitions.

Rousseau pursues a transcendent self that desires to merge with some absolute ideal of self and, above all, he desires to justify his individual existence. The result is a fictionalized self that at once remains incongruent for the author and strangely puzzles readers with all its inconsistencies and contradictions of character. "From Rousseau we learned that what destroys our authenticity is society – our sentiment of being depends upon the opinion of other people" (Trilling 93). The negotiating between the disparate private and public selves, inaugurated by Rousseau, will be further elaborated in the consciously aestheticized self-portraits of twentieth-century modernist and postmodernist writings that emphasise the invented and projected nature of the self. Rousseau's work effectively introduced the concept of the divided self of narcissism that becomes the preoccupation of writers from Virginia Woolf and Marcel Proust to Doris

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[57] David Hume summarizes the state of Rousseau's absurd frenzy in defending himself and accusing others: "He is like a man who was stripped not only of his clothes, but of his skin, and turned out in this situation to combat with the rude and boisterous elements" (Hume in Russell 628).

Lessing and Vladimir Nabokov. However, his narrative is expressive of the self's elusive relations with its 'selves' may also be seen not only as kindling in time the idea of the self as a dissenter to itself, but also the idea of the self and its double.

The range of primary source extracts that are available to show the evolving and often conflicting ideas about social identity that emerged from the new mental sciences between 1830 and 1890 is amply illustrated by Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth's *Embodied Selves: An Anthology of Psychological Texts* (1998). Section four will examine the literature of "The Double," in which the repressed "Other" returns as an exteriorized split self. The idea emerges first in the novels of Thomas De Quincey and James Hogg and was later explored by Robert Louis Stevenson and Henry James. These texts are intended – albeit as a brief sketch – to show the transition between the eighteenth and nineteenth century, from a predominantly moral, social, metaphysical idea of the self to one that is increasingly complicated by the rise of modern psychological theories of the self in medical and psychological accounts of human nature in the new psychophysical, Darwinian and biological discourses of the nineteenth century. This will show how the "split" selves of Augustine, Montaigne and Rousseau are reinterpreted through the rise of psychoanalysis and the materialist account of the self. By the twentieth century, the "self" emerges as a narrative, moral, biological, psychological, social, metaphysical subject and out of this complex legacy, the "decentred" subject of postmodern autobiografiction will emerge.

Section 4: The Dissociation of the Self in the Literature of the Double

Since Immanuel Kant aimed to provide a "metaphysics of morals" by *a priori*

reasoning from the concept of human beings seen as rational agents with autonomous

wills,[58] the question of one's identity has become more and more part of the investigation

into human nature. The Romantic era had opened up the vast interiors of the self and

Victorian writers began to dramatize the wider metaphysical question about the

constitution of the self in the framework of moral and legal systems. Jenny Bourne Taylor

specifies the crux of the nineteenth-century enquiry into the nature of the self:

> Is there a co-ordinating power within each individual, formed through memory and
> shaping individual will, that constitutes the core of the self? Or are we nothing but a
> series of bodily sensations, cerebral reflexes and fragmented memories that together
> constitute the fiction of individuality?[59]

The literature of the double attempts to give imaginative representation of "man's

relation to himself – and the fateful disturbance of this relation –."[60] In Victorian culture,

the double becomes an emblem of self-estrangement that expresses the burden of a

rigid, morally repressive culture, where evil is unconsciously designated to the half that is

different, external, or other from oneself. In 1914, the psychoanalyst Otto Rank

proposed, in "Der Doppelgänger" ("The Double", published in book form 1925), that "the

'double' was originally an insurance against the destruction of the ego, an 'energetic

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[58] According to Kant, morality for the autonomous self in not based on feelings, natural impulses or individual inclinations. He presupposes that the freedom of the will acts as the supreme principle and that "the moral law interests us because it is valid for us as men, since it has sprung from our will as intelligence and hence from our proper self," *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals,* 1785, trans. James W. Ellington, *Kant's Ethical Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983) 60.

[59] Jenny Bourne Taylor, "Psychology at the fin de siècle" in *Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle,* ed. Gail Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007) 26.

[60] Otto Rank, *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study,* ed. Harry Tucker, Jr. (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1971) 7.

denial of the power of death', and probably the 'immortal' soul was the first 'double' of the body."[61] James Hogg dramatizes the literary motif of the double as the internal split between conflicting selves. The psychological authenticity in the portrayal of Robert Wringhim's double personality could be an effect of Hogg's knowledge about split personality and hallucinatory mental disturbance that he gained during his visits to the Edinburgh Asylum. Rank explains further that modern man, who developed "an over-civilized ego" in an increasingly secularized civilization, "disintegrates by splitting up […] into two opposing selves."[62] Thomas De Quincey shows this split in the description of himself as he was before and after his descent into the hell of addiction. The justification for seeking out an artificial paradise controls his confessional narrative and hinges on the excuse that "[i]t was not for the purpose of creating pleasure, but of mitigating pain in the severest degree, that I first began to use opium as an article of daily diet" (*Opium Eater* 6).

The Psychological Double and Dual Brain Theory

The theme of the *Doppelgänger* or "Double" abounds in nineteenth-century literature. Other writers, such as Robert Louis Stevenson and Henry James inherited psychological insights for their imaginative exploration of mental and moral dualisms from James Hogg and Thomas De Quincey, picking up the form of 'splitting' that was laid bare in Rousseau of a self, struggling to articulate its 'essence' or autonomy against the pressure of social conformism and construction. Nineteenth-century novelists captured

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[61] Otto Rank in *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York: Norton, 2001) 940.
[62] Otto Rank, "The Double as Immortal Self," *Beyond Psychology,* 1941 (New York: Dover 1958) 65.

the growing sense of dissociation that ensued from an anxiety that orthodox beliefs and values could no longer be taken as factual truth. In response to secularization and agnosticism, their writings became "predominantly concerned with moral conflict, with conflict in the human will, with the dialectic of spiritual pride, and especially with the problem of evil and the issue of free will" (Herdman 3-4).

In James Hogg's *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), the evil Gill-Martin is a projection of Robert Wingham's anxiousness over his legitimacy; he can be seen as a double psychological entity that allows Robert to dissociate himself "from that part of his ego of which his conscious thoughts disapprove and from which he is trying to escape."[63] Hogg's narrative may be read in the religious tradition, because it reworks the question of salvation in the setting of rigorous Puritan Christianity in which the elected were thought of as incapable of doing wrong. To the Calvinist mind, the double posed an evocative metaphor for the contradictions inherent in the problem of salvation and to the Romantic sensibility of Hogg, the doubling of identity allows him to portray how the person marked out for salvation may indeed be the worst of sinners. But paradoxically, the very assurance of being in an unassailable state of grace seemed only to confirm the sinfulness of such a belief when, at the pivotal moment of Robert's internal conflict, Gil-Martin appears as the personification of his darker side. Hogg's splitting and doubling of character provides a metaphor for the essentially contradictory nature of the role set out in his title: a justified sinner is the paradox of the sinner immediately exonerated from his sins and therefore is both sinner and not sinner.

Thomas De Quincey still uses the word confession in the title *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821), but he inverts both the confessional paradigm and the

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[63] Barbara Bloedé, "*The Confessions of a Justified Sinner*: The Paranoiac Nucleus," *Papers Given at the First Conference of the James Hogg Society*, ed. Gillian Hughes (Stirling: James Hogg Soc., 1983) 15-28 at 19.

Romantic ideal of self-expression by presenting himself as a medical case rather than an autobiographical project. The anti-confessional rhetorical style shows a transgressing subject who substitutes opium for God and intoxication for the Christian experience of religious conversion:

> This is the doctrine of the true church on the subject of opium: of which church I acknowledge myself to be the only member—the alpha and the omega [...] Thou only givest these gifts to man; and thou hast the keys of Paradise, oh, just, subtle, and mighty opium![64]

In undermining the Christian context, confession becomes a mechanism for self-fashioning, an "impulse to confirm the self as it is (the same) and the impulse to become or to make it strange, ideal, or permanent (the other)" (Fleishman 33). By proclaiming that "[n]ot the opium-eater, but the opium, is the true hero of the tale" (*Opium Eater* 78), De Quincey decentres and destabilizes his biographical self with the intention of becoming an observer of visions produced through the consciousness-altering effects of the drug. The digressive mode of writing allows for a continuous elaboration of the self, which creates an essentially modern form of subjectivity in which "space swells endlessly, and time expands to eons of consciousness, 'far beyond the limits of any human experience.'"[65] In a secular age, intoxication seems to promise the possibility of re-establishing contact with the ineffable self.

The reforming qualities of the confessional mode are undermined by the convoluted apology that seeks to pre-empt readers' objections to his opium experiments. He shows a persistent fascination with the antagonistic forces of the drug: it is both a

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[64] Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater and Other Writings,* ed. Grevel Lindop (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) 42, 49.

[65] Jerome Hamilton Buckley, *The Turning Key: Autobiography and the Subjective Impulse since 1800*, (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984) 64.

demonic and destructive source of terror and one which gives unadulterated happiness, an "abyss of divine enjoyment" (*Opium Eater* 39). According to De Quincey, opium acts as a tonic for the corrupted heart; it gives "a healthy restoration to that state which the mind would naturally recover upon the removal of any deep-seated irritation of pain that had disturbed and quarrelled with the impulses of a heart originally just and good" (*Opium Eater* 41). Opium reorganizes the past through the reconfiguration of painful memories with the effect that they are "no longer painful to dwell upon: but the detail of its incidents removed, or blended in some hazy abstraction; and its passions exalted, spiritualised, and sublimed" (*Opium Eater* 45-46). The pleasures of opium-taking "offer not merely the prospect of immediate relief from pain and anxiety but also an entirely new perspective from which to 'consume the world'" and furthermore, "opium becomes a metaphor for aesthetic experience in general, a mode of seeing in which ethical considerations are laid aside and life can be viewed through the lens of art."[66]

A number of critics have argued that early nineteenth-century novelists, in order to address questions about human nature, began to initiate "a renaissance of fantastic fiction by discovering a strategy to articulate some of the most alarming anxieties of the age."[67] The literature of the double became one of the privileged ways of exploring the mysteries of the modern self, viewing subjectivity as marked less by rationality, order, and coherence, than by dream, nightmare, and psychical multiplicity, in which the contentious arena of post-Darwinian theory would eventually give impetus to the concept of degeneration.

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[66] Gregory Dart, "Opium as Hero," rev. of *The Works of Thomas de Quincey*, *TLS*, 1 Jun 2001, Web.
[67] Nicholas Ruddick, "The fantastic fiction of the fin de siècle" in *Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle,* ed. Gail Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007) 191.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, two modes of science vied to explain the split self: late-Victorian psychophysical science developed the dual-brain theory, which posited the brain as a double organ in which "the left and right hemispheres of the brain could function independently."[68] As early as 1884, Hall and Hartwell proposed that "so far as the brain represents it, the soul must be double."[69] But in France, there also emerged a new science that sought to explore the psyche: the emerging science of clinical psychiatry (1874-1886) that was also fascinated by double consciousness, split subjectivity and the phenomenon of multiple personality. As modes of dissociations are medicalized, Ian Hacking states that during this period "a whole new discourse of memory came into being," which quickly developed into the modern "sciences of memory," and he argues further that the "purported knowledge of memory, quite self-consciously was created in order to secularize the soul" (4, 5). Dissociation theory hovers somewhere between the experiential, the physical and the metaphysical, disturbing the Cartesian categories of mind and body. The 'double' may be read as expressive of this new scientific and philosophical contestation of the metaphysical idea of a self.

Scientific Psychology and Dissociation Theory

The use of doubles in late nineteenth-century novels has often been associated with the rise of psychoanalysis and Sigmund Freud, but some years before Freud published his earlier writings, Stevenson implemented the dualistic occult in his writings to show humanity's essential doubleness by seizing upon "the new discoveries of

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[68] Anne Stiles, "Robert Louis Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde* and the Double Brain," *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 46.4 (2006): 879-900 at 884.

[69] Stanley G. Hall and E.M. Hartwell, "Bilateral Asymmetry of Function," *Mind* 9.33 (1884): 93-109 at 102.

scientific psychology" (Herdman 127). In his introduction to "The Double as Immortal Self", Harry Tucker writes that Rank posits that "[t]he primitive concept of the soul as a duality (the person and his shadow) appears in modern man in the motif of the double, assuring him, on the one hand, of immortality and, on the other, threateningly announcing his death" (*The Double* xvi). In his seminal work, *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), William James – who trained in medicine and philosophy and is the founder of modern psychology – also shifts away "from psycho-physiological paradigms towards a more dynamic psychology, in which subjective mental states are not immediately tied to biology" (*Fin de Siècle* 268).

Rather than attempting to extend an already well-established scholarly discussion of the early scientific context of late nineteenth-century doubling, therefore, this section will seek to relate this material and medical shift to focus on the double in relation to the performative, moral, metaphysical and narrative issues that have already been established as emerging out of the earlier confessional tradition. Rousseau's idealism of "nature" is increasingly underpinned by the biological idea of instinct that found expression in many theorists after Darwin. The double and the idea of multiple personality laid the foundations for the later shifts in the twentieth century, from the idea of a divided to a modern self in writers such as Vladimir Nabokov and Doris Lessing. The literature of the double might be seen as positioned between the legacies of the confessional tradition and the rise of modern conceptualisation of the self in the writing of the twentieth century.

In *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Dr Jekyll's double-consciousness produces a physical double: Mr Hyde. Stevenson represents the paradox of one man, who is two, but essentially one: Dr Jekyll splits into two distinct beings, but the death which he intends for

his double kills the self. In "The Jolly Corner," Spencer Brydon encounters his ghostly

alter-ego that shows a likeness which has been detached from the ego and has become a

shadow, reflection or portrait of an alternative 'Other.' Pierre Janet's theory of

dissociated consciousness provides a compelling conceptual framework for understanding

Stevenson's and James's representation of duality. Janet formulated his theory of

multiplicity in his first psychological papers (1886-1887), where he "invented the very

word *dissociation* in its present psychiatric sense" (Hacking 44). Today, the medical

syndrome, built out of Janet's work on dissociation and traumatic re-enactments in

hysterical patients, is termed "dissociative identity disorder," which emphasises the

"disintegration, the loss of wholeness, the absence of person" (Hacking 266). Of

importance and interest is Janet's theory of dissociation, where the lack of synthesis

between a traumatic past event – an integrated experience that has bearing on the

present – and the repetition of the past as an isolated event without any association with

a personal sense of self, does not suggest the loss of identity, but rather the splitting or

doubling of identity. The medical and historical contexts of this new psychology have

been explored in detail in many contemporary studies, for example by Anne Harrington in

Medicine, Mind, and the Double Brain (1989), an examination of the neurological sciences

in the period 1860-1900, a time when philosophical concepts and scientific rigor were

combined in the studies of the brain, and by Rick Rylance in *Victorian Psychology and*

British Culture 1850-1880 (2000), in which he traces the historical development of

psychological debates, from a theory of the soul to one which understands the human

mind as a part of the natural world, by referring to the works of some of the nineteenth-

century central figures of early brain research: the psychologist Alexander Bain, who was

an early proponent of scientific psychology and published *Mental and Moral Science: A*

Compendium of Psychology and Ethics (1868); and the philosopher G. H. Lewes, who

published a multi-volume work on *The Problems of Life and Mind*, which includes *The*

Physical Basis of Mind (1877) and *Mind as a Function of Organism* (1879). However, my

aim in this section is to contextualize the work done by these early brain researchers, who

concentrated on the biological aspect of the mind and reduced it to the materiality of the

brain, with some of the literary reflections on the duality of human nature that emerged

in the second part of the nineteenth century.

Doubling and Dual Brain Theory in Robert Louis Stevenson's "The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde" (1886)

As early as 1878, Robert Louis Stevenson anticipates the psychology of the double,

when he concludes that "man is twofold at least; that he is not a rounded and

autonomous empire; but that in the same body with him there dwell other powers,

tributary but independent."[70] In "The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde", Stevenson

explores the idea of dual personality in an imaginative allegory in which the

interdependent relation between the good and the evil parts in one person is chemically

revoked. The story's structure is based on late nineteenth-century medical case studies

about the duality of the brain and thereby gives "literary intelligibility to late-Victorian

psychological theories of the 1870s and 1880s that differed markedly from psychoanalytic

understandings of the drives, as well as the conflict between the conscious and

unconscious realms of psychic life" (Stiles 882). Dual-brain theory posited that the left

and right hemispheres of the brain could function independently; figuratively speaking, Dr

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[70] Robert Louis Stevenson, *Lay Morals and Other Papers*, *Classic Literature Library* EBook, 10.

Jekyll's chemical experiment separates and segregates the incongruous parts of his self as if he "performs a fictional corpus callosotomy, splitting the nerve fibers that connect two brain hemispheres, thereby giving each hemisphere an independent and unchecked life of its own" (Stiles 885). The artificial division of a compound human nature into dual hemispheres splits the self into separate entities; the double, Mr Hyde, appears as the reified product of Dr Jekyll's (and Stevenson's) notion that "man is not truly one, but truly two."[71]

Stevenson explores the potentially heretical possibility that all human beings have a double nature and the story may be read as "a fictional case-study in what was known at the time as 'morbid psychology.'"[72] Morbid is Jekyll's desire to violate natural law, to annihilate the "curse of mankind" (*JH* 82) that binds good and evil together, or in psychological terms, to force the split between the ego (rational side) that stands for the soul and the id (instinctive side) that is primitive animalistic and stands for the body.

Degeneration Theory

Hyde is the product of a Calvinistic pride that needs to suppress the dark side of human nature in order to maintain peace in the soul, but he is also "the expression of moral lowness according to post-Darwinian thought" (Mighall xxiv). Max Nordau published his major work *Entartung* in 1892 (*Degeneration* 1895), in which he sought to

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[71] Robert Louis Stevenson, "The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde," 1886, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and Other Stories* (London: Penguin, 1979) 82; Abbreviation used in parenthetical references henceforth is *JH*.
[72] Robert Mighall, "Diagnosing Jekyll: the Scientific Context to Dr Jekyll's Experiment and Mr Hyde's Embodiment," *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and Other Tales of Terror* (London: Penguin, 2002) 143-161 at 145.

pinpoint the insidious forces of modernity. Degeneracy represented the shadow side of

the philosopher Herbert Spencer's optimistic imagining of evolution: it was the very

opposite of received ideas of progression and instead, it predicted the rise of disease,

insanity, feebleness, idiocy, sterility, and extinction. Jekyll represents the peak of

evolution, while Hyde stands for its lowest point: he may be read as a presentation of the

product of social and scientific discourses of "degeneration theory." In this perspective,

Jekyll's overdeveloped sense of sinfulness urges him to transfer his animalistic drives on

to the "other", so that he can be morally absolved from Hyde's crimes; Jekyll's economy

calls for each self to be "housed in separate identities," so that his "life would be relieved

of all that was unbearable" (*JH* 82). Rank explains that the undesirable primitive side that

frightens us "is to a large extent the product of our own imagination" and that "the fear

of this 'primitiveness' within ourselves is obviously the result of an unsuccessful attempt

to deny it" (*Beyond Psychology* 63). In separating the antagonistic elements within, Jekyll

believes that he is liberating himself and, at the beginning of his experiment, Hyde

appears benign, he is "merely Jekyll's unrepressed spontaneous existence" (Miyoshi in

Herdman 135).

Hyde's unmixed essence of evil makes him appear more animal than human

being; unlike other men, he is not composed of varying degrees of good and evil and his

defectiveness is physical. Stevenson evokes animal forms and repeatedly describes Hyde

as a primitive being, "ape-like," (*JH* 47, 96, 97) who hisses like a snake and snarls like a

beast (*JH* 39, 40). For the characterization of Hyde, Stevenson draws on the concept of

degeneration as developed in Nordau, who situates evil in "certain physical

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characteristics, which are denominated 'stigmata,' or brandmarks."[73] Hyde is indeed

described as "particularly small and particularly wicked-looking" (*JH* 48) but, without any

particular physical details that would corroborate the theory of degeneration as being

written on face and body, Hyde's deformity is a "deformity without any nameable

malformation" (*JH* 40). Stevenson seems to imply that it is in the opinion of others that

Hyde gives "a strong feeling of deformity" and has "a haunting sense of unexpressed

deformity," (*JH* 34, 50) whereas for Jekyll, his other self "seemed natural and human" (*JH*

84). In *The Decent of Man*, first published in 1871, Charles Darwin argued that human

beings have evolved from higher primates. This argument gives a new perspective to the

Rousseauean idealism of man epitomized in a natural state of innocence. After the

psychology of the late nineteenth century had established a causative link between

automation, the loss of one's will, and the fragmentation of oneself due to the incapacity

to maintain a unified identity without the exercise of conscious volition, the closeness of

man to nature becomes a threat to the understanding of the rational mind of civilization

and the belief in advancement though culture.

The psychological double Jekyll/Hyde juxtaposes the two characters within Dr

Jekyll: one represents the socially acceptable personality; the other externalizes the

uninhibited and primitive self. Jekyll symbolizes the conscious, rational and restrained

part of the mind that acts with respectable professionalism in daylight; Hyde signifies the

unconscious suppressed counterpart that comes to the fore in nocturnal transgression. By

assigning irrational excesses to the other, Jekyll's consciousness can stay undisturbed and

he is adamant about his moral appearance in public; in order to carry his "head high," he

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[73] Max Nordau, *Degeneration,* 1895, in *The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History c. 1880-1900,* ed. Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst (New York: Oxford UP, 2000) 13-17 at 15.

has to disguise his "impatient gaiety of disposition" with a mask of "more than commonly grave countenance" (*JH* 81). What begins as a sober observation about Jekyll's personality becomes a general theory about the dual nature of man, which Stevenson explores in a form that mocks the genre of Gothic romance.[74] In her introduction to *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Jenni Calder explains that "the point about Jekyll is not that he is a moral and decent man, but that he has always been leading a double life. And he is leading a double life because he has aimed so high" (11). Stevenson depicts the climate of Victorian society as universally repressive, where nobody can escape the fear of guilt. Even the undemonstrative lawyer Utterson is in the grip of a rigid morality that haunts the self with unsubstantiated qualms, he feels "some touch of that terror of the law and the law's officers which may at times assail the most honest" (*JH* 48).

Duplicity and Repression

Ambitious morality forces Jekyll to live in a "profound duplicity" that splits his self into an outer moral self and, at the same time, dictates a systematic repression of the immoral self (*JH* 81). Only by turning himself into the person of Mr Hyde can Dr Jekyll enjoy transgression without guilt, because the "lower elements of [his] soul" have been fully assigned to Hyde, thereby freeing Jekyll from moral responsibility for the evil deeds of his other self (*JH* 83). Stevenson chose to split the self physically rather than to relegate evil drives to a Freudian unconscious, which a few decades later would serve as "a kind of receptacle of the individual's 'badness'; the unconscious became a kind of

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[74] Anne Stiles proposes that the novella was written as a parody, in "the form of the case study in order to reveal the weaknesses of late-Victorian narrative and theoretical models. […] Stevenson lays bare the limitations of scientific prose, particularly its inadequacy in light of complex moral and social realities impossible to relate in purely empirical terms." (881)

private hell which housed the evil self" (Rank, *Beyond Psychology* 38). Paradoxically, the dual personality of Jekyll with his counterpart Hyde means that there are two characters and one character at the same time, which can be explained by the twofold nature of the concept of duality. Dury explains that Jekyll and Hyde "form a clear dualistic opposition yet are also seen as a complementary pair making a unity, so that boundaries disappear and fixed meaning (based on oppositions) is challenged."[75] In his confession, Jekyll illuminates the paradox of his "two natures," that he was always "either [...] radically both" (*JH* 82). Karl Miller comments that duality has two meanings, that "there are two of something," but also "that some one thing or person is to be perceived as two."[76] The component parts can be partners or antagonists; they may complete, resemble or repel one another. At first, Jekyll and Hyde share the full consciousness of each other's character and motives so that the evil double initially appears to be a relief for the suffering self that is burdened with an almost morbid sense of shame.

In the double Hyde, Jekyll personifies his own evil impulses as an attempt to form an ethical contrast and to dispel the evil safely away from the self. Initially, Hyde begins as the weaker side of the two; he appears as the "incredibly sweet" companion under Jekyll's control: "the moment I choose, I can be rid of my Hyde" (*JH* 44). But with each instant of transgression, Hyde grows stronger in equal measure as Dr Jekyll gets weaker, until Hyde dominates once he is unleashed with greater frequency. Arata explains that in the final stage of transformation in the laboratory the changes of personality have become fluid and "Hyde is no longer Jekyll's opposite but his mirror image [...] the doctor's body metamorphoses continually from Jekyll to Hyde and back again, as if to

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[75] Richard Dury, introd. *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde,* ed. Richard Dury (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2004) xxvii.
[76] Karl Miller, *Doubles: Studies in Literary History* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985) 21.

indicate that we need no longer distinguish between them."[77] Now Jekyll is

disadvantaged in that evil and weakness still persist in him, whereas Hyde is "freed from

"Jekyll's countervailing good qualities, [he] can exploit the weakness to gain the upper

hand" (Herdman 135). Hyde splits from Jekyll and gains autonomy to such a degree that

he is able to dominate and eventually arrogate Jekyll. The hierarchical relationship

between Jekyll and Hyde hinges on Jekyll's excessive conformity to the codes of

respectability and public opinion, which defeats him, because " while there is always a

part of himself that wants to be Hyde, there is nothing in Hyde that wants to be Jekyll"

(Herdman 136). Despite Dr Jekyll's initial statement that he was attracted to Hyde by

feeling "younger, lighter, happier in body," he nevertheless soon realizes that the juvenile

Hyde is an inferior self (*JH* 83).

The House as a Metaphor for Duality

The house that Jekyll and Hyde share is a metaphor for the two personalities:

Hyde's entrance is on the ravaged side of the building, blind with no windows; it is the

back-door of Dr Jekyll's property that seems inaccessible with "neither bell nor knocker"

(*JH* 30). One side presents the surface of respectability, the secret and blind side points

to the hidden self and to the unspeakable. When Utterson speculates about the relation

between Jekyll and Hyde, "I thought it was madness […] and now I begin to fear it is

disgrace" (*JH* 36), his suspicion is confirmed by Dr Lanyon's judgement of Dr Jekyll's

change, "too fanciful for me. He began to go wrong, wrong in mind" (*JH* 36). The

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[77] Stephen D. Arata, "The Sedulous Ape: Atavism, Professionalism and Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde*," *Criticism* 37.2 (1995): 233-259 at 240.

suspense about two identities instead of one continues until the ninth chapter, when Dr

Lanyon witnesses the transformation of Hyde into his friend Jekyll. Before then, the story

had involved two individuals, Jekyll and Hyde and up to that point, it is feasible to

speculate that Hyde was indeed blackmailing Jekyll for some former misdeeds. Initially,

Utterson suspected that Jekyll's acquiescence was forced by "the ghost of some old sin,

the cancer of some concealed disgrace" (*JH* 41). Speculation on the nature of past deeds

that cannot be spoken of point towards perverted forms of behaviour as defined at the

time; it could suggest homosexuality, but Jekyll averts Utterson's hint at this subject by

replying that "it isn't what you fancy; it is not so bad as that" (*JH* 44). What "that" stands

for is left unexplained, which invites readers to supply their own interpretation about the

nature of the relations between Jekyll and Hyde. The technique of suspense delays the

complete explanation until Dr Lanyon reveals that two people are in fact only one person:

that the impeccable Dr Jekyll also includes the abnormal Mr Hyde. At that point the

dichotomy of evil and good is revealed as a myth and the final pages of Dr Jekyll's

confession illuminate the narrative retrospectively. The central argument of the story

explicates the dilemma of moral life in the Victorian era; a morality that is threatened by

the unconscious workings of the mind and the eruption of repressed or denied aspects of

the self.

The Uncanny Other in Henry James's "The Jolly Corner" (1908)

In Rank's evaluation, novels such as *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*

dramatize the terror of the double as a "moral aspect of the subject in a hero possessed

by an evil self" (*Beyond Psychology* 69) and he continues that "[i]n such psychological and

moralistic presentation of the Double, their authors are dealing with illusions in a more or less split personality" (*Beyond Psychology* 70). In Henry James's short story "The Jolly Corner", the double appears as a disfigured ghostlike twin, a dreaded mirror of Spencer Brydon's fear of unrealized otherness. The central theme is Brydon's return to the house of his childhood and confrontation with the ghost of an unrealized but possible future self. Brydon is preoccupied with phantasies about himself as a different other and Millicent Bell aptly summarizes James's tale of unrealized possibility as a fable that deals with the psychological condition of disavowal where "the presence of the unlived life in the life that is lived," eventually leads to an identity crisis.[78] In a critical moment, Brydon actively projects his fantasy of his other possible self onto a 'double', who has "a capacity for business and a sense of construction. These virtues, so common all round him now, had been dormant in his own organism – where it might be said of them perhaps that they had slept the sleep of the just."[79] In his consciousness, Brydon constructs *his alter ego*, the self he would have become, had he stayed and followed the prescribed path of commerce in America.

Brydon is safe with his childhood-acquaintance Alice Staverton as both share nostalgia for the past and Alice acts as his "mirror", who reflects his thoughts and feelings. Brydon's desire to know about the other that might have been him is essentially a metaphysical search to understand and accept who he is now. James's use of a 'double' foregrounds the insecurity of personal identity and questions our belief in a single, unified identity by staging the drama of the present self in confrontation with a possible past self.

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[78] Bell in Thompson, "James's 'The Jolly Corner,'" *The Explicator* 56.4 (1998): 192-5 at 194.
[79] Henry James, "The Jolly Corner (1908)," *The Jolly Corner and Other Tales,* ed. Roger Gard (London: Penguin, 1990) 163; Abbreviation used in parenthetical references henceforth is *JC*.

The Uncanny Other as a Possible Alternative to the Present Self

The tension between past and present emerges in Brydon's comparison of the old

New York of his childhood with the modern city of the present. After thirty-three years of

his adult life, spent in different parts of Europe, Brydon strongly feels the startling

contrast between the onset of modernity and his memories of the past preoccupation,

which intensifies his consciousness of the present. The present environment has changed

and instead of revisiting a familiar urban landscape, everything seems strange. In a

Freudian sense, Brydon's frightening personal experience is a classic example of Freud's

uncanny: "that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known

and had long been familiar."[80] In his introduction to *The Uncanny*, Hugh Haughton

explains the frightening quality of the Freudian 'uncanny': it is a concept that "reminds us

not only that there is no place like home, but that, in another sense, there is no other place. For

Freud, our most haunting experiences of otherness tell us that the alien begins at home, wherever

that may be" (xlix).

Alice Staverton is Brydon's ally in his nostalgic hankering for a bygone era, a trait

which Brydon did not value earlier, but now, confronted with its memories, he feels

comforted by "the ugly things of his far-away youth," which have taken on a charming

appearance when compared to "the modern, the monstrous, the famous things" (*JC* 162).

During the time of his sojourn in Europe, New York has changed into a "vast wilderness of

the wholesale," (*JC* 164), and now Brydon's traditional values and proportions "are under

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[80] Sigmund Freud, " The Uncanny," 1919, *The Uncanny,* introd. Hugh Haughton (London: Penguin, 2003)
124.

siege by the crudely palpable facts of modern economic and urban reality."[81]   The once

familiar city has lost its familiarity and turned into an uncanny place that Brydon cannot

reconcile with the New York of his childhood memories. The uncanny is associated with

situations in which different models of reality clash and the resultant incongruities denote

"a paradoxical mark of modernity" (Haughton xlix).

Feeling like a stranger in his home, Brydon dissociates himself from the place,

which turns unreal in the terms of the two semantic contents of the word 'uncanny' with

its roots in the double-notion of *unheimlich* as in 'uncanny' or 'eerie' and also meaning

'unhomely' (Freud 124). Brydon is haunted by the idea of having become another person,

which finally leads to an uncanny encounter with himself as the "other", which has always

been a possibility, his potential American self. In Brydon's case, the "other" is not a

return of a repressed self, but rather born out of prolonged introspection with

melancholy and nostalgia, in which "the uncanny derives from intellectual uncertainty"

(Haughton xliii).

Nostalgia and Guilt

The obsession with the possibility of having become another person, if he had

made a different choice at a crucial point in his adolescence, indicates Brydon's guilt

about his European past and his feeling of inferiority in the money economy of America:

"I believe I'm thought in a hundred quarters to have been barely decent" (*JC* 171). His

remorse is directed at the opinion of others, who define his public self, and he compares

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[81] Russell J. Reising, "Figuring Himself Out: Spencer Brydon, 'The Jolly Corner,' and Cultural Change," *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 19.1 (1989): 116-129 at 117.

his past "selfish frivolous scandalous life" with an idealized image of himself as a possible

American tycoon, who "would have anticipated the inventor of the skyscraper" (*JC* 165).

Thus, in speculating about the lost opportunity, Brydon dissociates and projects himself

"into the other, the real, the waiting life; the life that […] began for him, on the jolly

corner" (*JC* 174). The jolly corner resonates with memories of his early childhood and

family life; it is associated with the personal and the intimate, it is "the opposite extreme

to the modern" (*JC* 181). The jolly corner is Brydon's refuge and an "alternative to the

world of cultural change" (Reising 118). Furthermore, in Henry James's view, houses are

symbols for the self; he describes the self as "a haunted tenement" with an expansive

interior (Fogel in Thompson 193). Following James's analogy, the old house is a

substantiation of Brydon's psyche; it gives a metaphorical setting where the psychological

drama of Brydon's encounter with his ghostly double takes place. The space of the house

is transformed metaphorically into a mystical other world, surreal and warped as a

"watery under-world," contained in a "glass-bowl" (*JC* 186, 174). There are several

distorted visions in the story, which indicate Brydon's unsettled state of mind and giving

evidence of the discord he feels within himself. Since his repatriation, time has become

distorted in his feelings to such an extent that it seems that "he would have lived longer

than is often allotted to man" (*JC* 161). Brydon needs to explore his mental state of

disconnection with the past through repeated wanderings inside the old family home,

which contains the memories of old relations, but the interior appears unfamiliar and

"immense, the scale of space again inordinate" (*JC* 185). The lower ground with its black-

and-white marble squares anchors him safely in childhood, but the upper floors, the

depth of the empty rooms, symbolize Brydon's "forsworn possibilities," the "mystical

other world that might have flourished for him had he not, for weal or woe, abandoned

it" (*JC* 174). In Brydon's mind, the house at once contains memories of birth, childhood, and adolescence and the possible "other". Now, with growing uncertainty about his true self, Brydon is prone to idealize the "other." In contrast to Brydon's distress, Alice shows the serenity of a unified person, who has always been destined to become herself; in Brydon's view, she is a wholesome being, a "perfection nothing else could have blighted" (*JC* 171). In a conversation, Brydon reveals that as a young man he had perversely refused "to agree to a 'deal'," which would have predetermined his future career in commerce (*JC* 168). He imagines that following the path of money-making in New York would have made of him "what it has made of dozens of others" (JC 170). His character would have developed differently if he had obeyed his father's wishes regarding his future and indeed, by staying in New York he would have become another person, "something nearer to one of these types who have been hammered so hard and made so keen by their conditions" (*JC* 170). Passion for money as a main objective would have deformed his nature, a deformation which he later sees in the missing two fingers of his ghostly double.

In their conversations, Brydon and Alice play their projections and introjections of each other back and forth with Alice as the reassuring partner. Alice had repeatedly dreamt about the "other," which Brydon interprets that she had dreamt about him, but Alice insists that her dream was about this other and not him and avoids giving Brydon any details (*JC* 172). Brydon hints at his unchanged love for Alice in that he would have married her long ago, that "without my exile, I shouldn't have been waiting till now - ?" (*JC* 171). Alice in return intimates that his absence has spoilt none of her feelings towards him. Brydon recoils from openly declaring his love by diverting the subject; instead, he doubts that he is good enough for her. But in this matter, Alice wants him to trust her

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judgement so that he doesn't have to torment himself any longer. Finally, she senses that

her assurance alone does not satisfy Brydon; that indeed, no one can answer this

essential question of the "other" except Brydon himself. Alice tries to communicate that

she doesn't care for Brydon's unrealized potential, that she loves Brydon as he is in the

present and not his spectre. But immediately, she senses an ulterior motive; that it is

Brydon's narcissism that needs to know: "Oh, you don't care either – but very differently:

You don't care of anything but yourself" (*JC* 172). Brydon negates a possible connection

between what he is now and what he might have been: "*He* isn't myself. He's the just so

totally other person," (*JC* 172) which Alice later confirms in her last sentence, "and he

isn't – no, he isn't – you" (*JC* 193). In the dénouement, Alice adopts Brydon's

differentiation between himself and the 'other' but states that he reached the ultimate

aim of his experience in saying that "you came to yourself" (*JC* 192). This could be

interpreted that Brydon encountered his own dark side that exists in opposition to his

conscious principles.

Brydon is inexplicably drawn towards his old family house where he spends most

of his nights searching for his other self. The house is now an empty shell, but for Brydon,

the house is still filled with presences of deceased family members, which for him,

represent "within the walls, ineffaceable life," and Brydon wants to find his place (*JC* 169).

He seeks to overcome what he sees at this moment as the loss of a "fantastic, yet

perfectly possible development" and metaphorically describes the resulting other self as a

"full-blown flower," which in his youth laid dormant as a "small tight bud" (*JC* 170).

The house is the place where Brydon believes that his other self can be found and

he wants an encounter, even if he were to come to face with something monstrous,

hideous and offensive, but Alice assures him that even in such form, he would,

nevertheless, have appealed to her as someone "powerful and quite splendid" (*JC* 171).

At first, Brydon grows increasingly confident in his exploration, with "the assurance of

calm proprietorship" (*JC* 173) and feels prepared to meet the other. Sensing that "his

alter ego walked," Brydon is eager to meet him and expose the unknown "other self" (*JC*

175). The pursuit becomes a surreal quest in which Brydon enjoys his instinctive impulses

and imagines himself in the role of a primeval hunter with "a consciousness, unique in the

experience of man" (*JC* 176). But his confidence as master of the situation is lost in the

moment he suspects that the encounter with his other self is imminent: suddenly he

realizes the danger to the self immanent in such knowledge, even to possibly drive him to

suicide by jumping out of a nearby window. He resolves "never, on my honour, to try

again" (*JC* 183). He can ameliorate his feelings of cowardice by thinking that he has done

the other a favour in giving up the idea of confrontation, but whilst passing a door on his

way out, which he had seen closed before, he is now convinced that "*should* he see the

door open, it would all too abjectly be [his] end" (*JC* 185). The shame about his former

indecisiveness leads him to recoil from pursuing again the assurance he had previously

sought in the encounter with the spectre. Brydon is now in a defensive mode and no

longer wishes to see his other self. When his alter-ego confronts him, he refuses to

recognize himself in the other's face; instead the face appears monstrous, "unknown,

inconceivable, awful, disconnected from any possibility" (*JC* 188). The face of Brydon's

would-be American identity appears distorted, therefore unrecognizable, and in this

decisive moment "he denies it to be *him* as the only possible means of psychic escape."[82]

It is necessary for Brydon to dissociate himself from a deformed self that would have

resulted from his acquiescence to his father. Brydon bemoans that this "other" is the

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[82] Shalyn Claggett, "Narcissism and the Conditions of Self-knowledge in James's 'The Jolly Corner,'" *Henry James Review* 26.2 (2005): 189-200 at 190.

unhappy one in that "*he* had been sold" (*JC* 188, emphasis added). His vis-à-vis is now an

opponent, who bears the "face of a stranger" (*JC* 188). What he had desired to reveal

now horrifies him and he faints; but, parodying the Narcissus legend, he does not die

from his desire to see his other self but is resuscitated by Alice. It is possible to read this

episode as a meeting of complementary aspects of the self: the conventional

businessman meets the bohemian outsider in himself. Both aspects are present in

Brydon, although in unequal portions. Whilst assisting with the renovation of his other

house, Brydon discovers that some commercial skills are also part of his character,

although they are buried "in a compartment of mind never yet penetrated" (*JC* 163).

Such an interpretation again points to the bud-and-flower analogy, where both selves

share the same bud as their origin, but differ in their maturity.

    After regaining consciousness the next day, Brydon senses that it is "really the

great thing, he had come back to" (*JC* 189). There is ambiguity in this statement: What is

the great thing that Brydon came back to? I argue that Brydon is immensely relieved to

have come back to his own self, that he is finally reconciled with his past life. He feels the

beauty of his mental rebirth in that it has "brought him to knowledge," which sets his

mind at peace so that at last he can enjoy "the serenity of certitude" (*JC* 189). His second

discovery is his love for Alice; now that he has been reassured that he is good enough for

her, he can reciprocate her feelings and allow her to "keep" him (*JC* 190). Still, Brydon

reproaches himself for his inability to connect to the image of his other self: "I was to

have known myself" (*JC* 192). Again, it is Alice, who reassures him and explains that his

nightmarish experience and her dreams of the other were mere mental constructions of

possible alternatives. She insists that Brydon is unique and distinct from the other: "isn't

the whole point that you'd have been different?" (*JC* 192). Contrary to Brydon, Alice is

not horrified by the possible other, she states that she nevertheless would have

"accepted him" (*JC* 193). And she makes clear that her acceptance is not focused on the

millionaire Brydon, but comes out of sympathy for the unhappy, ravaged man with ruined

eyesight and a severed right hand; that she could and would have loved *this* Brydon all

the same.

Critics disagree about the significance of the missing two fingers. Auchincloss sees

them as a sacrificial disfigurement, the price one has to pay for success in American

capitalism (Auchincloss in Thompson). Under the premise that Brydon can be read as an

autobiographical character (James had returned to his birthplace New York, in 1904, after

twenty-one years spent in Europe), I argue that one interpretation might be that the

severed right hand stands for castration angst: the dream-like body image speaks of

castration as a penalty for unrealized artistic potential, or more specifically, the castration

of the writing hand could be read as the manifestation of an unconscious artistic anxiety.

The story of the self as a fictionalized monstrous ghost-like figure plays with the

transference and countertransference of an unrealized possibility that James articulates

from a safe distance. Imaginative fiction substantiates his dreaded alternative future, but

fortunately, for an author "[w]riting fiction is like remembering what never happened"

(Hustvedt 175). In this sense, the story is both a fable about the modern self and an

'autobiografiction' about the emergence of the writing self.

"The Jolly Corner" is a parable about the modern condition of impermanence and

transience, the loss of ontological security and the negative side of a cosmopolitan

existence. Brydon's preoccupation with his desires and nostalgia for the past induces a

narcissistic and sentimental self-reflexiveness that projects the self onto the 'other'.

From a Freudian point of view, Brydon's alter-ego embodies a possible outcome, the

alternative which "had [he] been realized might have shaped [Brydon's] destiny, and to which [his] imagination still clings" (Freud 143). Brydon's destabilized psyche initially produces the double as an intriguing figure, who turns unacceptably wicked in the moment of imminent encounter and threatens the annihilation of the self. Otto Rank explains that historically the meaning of the double has shifted from "a symbol of eternal life in the primitive," to "an omen of death in the self-conscious individual of modern civilisation" (*Beyond Psychology* 76).

Rousseau's idealized loss of his "natural" other is reworked and becomes part of a fictional other self in James, who, like Stevenson, dramatizes the split-self as the moral and existential condition in the modern world through the motif of the double, the evocation of place, the development of modes of meta-representation. Characters like Brydon and Alice attempt to read each other's motives and intentions, which leads to a dramatization of the self as both intersubjectively related in externalized behaviour and as an internalized psychic object relational structure. Continuing from the standpoint of the emergent psychology of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Part Two and Three of this thesis will engage with the perspectives established in Part One, whilst also entertaining alternate theories that were proposed as counterpoints to the physiological psychology that made up the orthodox opinion at the turn of the century. The emergent problematic split self will become the prototype for the portrayal of narcissistic paranoid selves in Vladimir Nabokov's novels.

PART TWO: MODERNIST CONCEPTION OF THE SELF – POST-ROMANTIC AESTHETIC AUTOBIOGRAPY

As seen in the last section of Part One (The Dissociation of the Self in the Literature of the Double), the late nineteenth-century understanding of the self in was moving from the notion of a given, stable, and singular self, towards the possibility of the self as being unstable, fragmented, and multiple. These changing concepts of subjectivity found expression in textual strategies that employed psychological and moralistic presentations in the literature of the Double, in which the self was understood to exist as a duality. Stevenson regarded the splitting of a person into the socially accepted form and its clandestine opposite as the result of an unbearable Victorian moral repression and he dramatized the moral aspect of the subject in a hero possessed by an evil self; Henry James imagined the conflict between a possible other self and the conscious self as the mourning for the unrealized potential of the self. These authors explored the idea of a conflict between the conscious and the unconscious realms of psychic life and their literary representation of the self is conscious of the fact that the written self is inevitably alienated from the ontological self through the act of writing.

The later post-Edwardian writers explicitly repudiated their predecessors as old-fashioned materialists, who ignored the interior of the mind and focussed instead on objective descriptions of events and perceptions: Virginia Woolf valued "Mr. Wells, Mr. Bennett, and Mr. Galsworthy" as authors who "spend immense skill and immense industry making the trivial and the transitory appear the true and the enduring."[83] Virginia Woolf and

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[83] Virginia Woolf, "Modern Fiction," first published as "Modern Novels," *Times Literary Supplement*, April 1919, reprinted as "Modern Fiction" in *The Common Reader* (London: Hogarth Press, 1925), *Project Gutenberg Australia* Ebook, n.pag.

Marcel Proust sought to revive the power of the aesthetic for redeeming and

transforming the self in a modernist style in order to recover any kind of self-presence.

Both tried to overcome the gap between writing and the self, the problem of, in Paul Jay's

words, "how to use one medium – language – to represent another medium – being" by

moving self-reflexively into the aesthetic (Jay 21). Both wrote imaginatively in fictional

narratives about their temporal experiences by freeing themselves from the linear

aspects of time and thus exploring the depth of temporal experience in "tales about

time."[84] David Harvey proposes that somewhere between 1910 and 1915 the relations

between representation and knowledge underwent a fundamental transformation, which

he ascribes to "a radical change in the experience of space and time in Western

capitalism" (Harvey 29). Montaigne, in his time, did not fully grasp the central

contradiction inherent in any autobiographical project, that there is an ever-present

ontological gap between the self who is writing and the self-reflexive protagonist of the

work. But he had touched on the notion that the self is formed in writing and connected

to the work, which becomes even more prominent in Proust, who transformed his life

through the construction of an aesthetic subjectivity, and in this respect, found the

meaning of his own existence embodied in the artwork he had created. The work

subsumes the writer by converting his transitory actual existence into the eternal realm

of art: "Proust proclaims the permanent triumph of literature over time; *A la recherche*

succeeds in the creation of an enduring identity and fiction."[85] Proust not only saw

writing as a continuation of life by other means, but also as a possible means for

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[84] Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 2 (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1985) 101; Abbreviation used in parenthetical references henceforth is *TN.*
[85] Steven G. Kellman, "The Fiction of Self-Begetting," *MLN* 91.6 *Comparative Literature* (1976): 1243-1256, at 1255.

transcending his own mortality through the enduring artwork, a project that Marcel

contemplates in *Time Regained*:

> How much more worth living did it appear to me now, now that I seemed to see that this life that we live in half-darkness can be illumined, this life that at every moment we distort can be restored to its true pristine shape, that a life, in short, can be realised within the confines of a book. (Proust in Ricœur, *TN* 147).

His work can be said to inaugurate an era where the self is as much written as

writing, and where the paradoxes of the written self constituting the self of writing will

eventually become foregrounded as the axis of the postmodern text and such

poststructuralist themes as that of Roland Barthes in "The Death of the Author" (1967),

Michel Foucault in "What is an Author?" (1969), and Jacques Derrida in "Structure, Sign

and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" (1967).

Section 1: Expressivist Turn in Marcel Proust 's À la Recherche du Temps Perdu *(1913-27)*

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the view of the self as self-present can be

seen as moving to a view of the self as a construct. The creative fashioning in the process

of expression reinvents a life, which echoes the general cultural phenomenon of

individualization that transformed West European and American societies. Again, one

might argue that, following Rousseau, to understand the self was not simply to describe

what was evident in a reflexive analysis of the mind, but constituted a task of discovering

and bringing to light what was hidden within. Art became a process of expressing, of

making manifest, a hidden nature and, by so doing, creating and completing the discovery

within the form of artistic expression. Modernist writers tried to present the self

aesthetically with the effect that "life begins to be perceived as having a form, like the

form of a work of art" (Saunders 77). An interesting tension begins to develop between

the idea of the self as 'discovered' and the idea that the self might only be discovered

through its invention, i.e. that style creates what it expresses and that the 'self' exists only

through infinite modes of interpretation and even misinterpretation.

Rising urbanization saw the advent of a consumer culture, where the reinvention

and re-creation of identity became essential for establishing a sense of self. A new

commodity culture emerged, one which compensated for the individual's feeling of a loss

of self-determination at the end of the nineteenth century when "the market economy

became reconstituted as a corporate economy and society became reorganized as a

'capitalist' society – i.e., a society configured as much around market relations as

community relations."[86] As writers tried to capture the elusive and unstable identity of

the self, autobiography moved toward one of its most characteristic twentieth-century

forms, the autobiographical novel. Max Saunders states that "from the 1870s to the

1930s autobiography increasingly aspires to the condition of fiction" (21). Therefore, it

became increasingly difficult to distinguish between "autobiography invaded by fiction

and the first-person fiction involving the autobiography of the author" (Buckley 115).

Modern autobiographical novelists seek to solve the problem of literary self-

representation by consciously fictionalizing the self, which supports the artistic conviction

that the essential self is only accessible through the aesthetic: this is Proust's central idea

as he understood the impossibility of capturing the self in a straightforward expressive

autobiography. Through aesthetic production, Proust endeavours to access and to

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[86] Robert Goldman, "A Theoretical Sketch of the History of Commodity Signs", Web, n. pag.

communicate his inner essence. This led Middleton Murry, for example, to suggest that,

even before Proust's death, his work "marks the arrival of a new sensibility to which the

only parallel is Rousseau's *Confessions*."[87] However, as the true self is too individual to be

represented in direct language and is, in any case, hidden even from its owner, artistic

transformation of experience thereby becomes the key for authentic introspection.

Proust does not merely recount events in a straightforward narrative; instead, he seeks

out the specific access routes to the retrieval of long-term memories. He uses involuntary

memory**,** which is recollection recovered through sensations, as well as impressions and

metaphorical language, to write about the elusive self, which, according to Landy,

"cannot be *expressed in* but only *revealed through* language" (115).

William James explains that changes in the self are a result of the constant flow of

impressions that shape the self. Repetition plays an important role as it allows an

accumulation of stimuli over time, a build-up of effect:

> In every sphere of sense, an intermittent stimulus, often enough repeated, produces a continuous sensation. This is because the after-image of the impression just gone by blends with the new impression coming in. The effects of stimuli may thus be superposed upon each other many stages deep, the total result in consciousness being an increase in the feeling's intensity, and in all probability, […] an elementary sense of the lapse of time.[88]

À la Recherche du Temps Perdu is a modernist text that examines the working of

memory and time and, in this respect, now seems prescient in its foreshadowing of many

of the findings of cognitive neuroscientists a half-century later. The narration flows along

with the recurrence of memories evoked by stimuli that constantly promise to reveal and

shape the character of the narrator, which shows not only that "Proust achieved the

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[87] Middleton Murry in Havelock Ellis, *From Rousseau to Proust* (London: Constable, 1936) 395.
[88] William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 1890, *Classics in the History of Psychology*, 645.

penetrating insight that feelings of remembering result from a subtle interplay between past and present," but also that the role of memories is vital for identity, because "our sense of ourselves depends crucially on the subjective experience of remembering our pasts."[89]

Rediscovering what is Real

Half a century before Proust wrote about his special moments of sudden happiness, Wordsworth, after having inadvertently crossed the summit of the Alps, recorded a moment of heightened experience after an initial disappointment. In "The Prelude or, Growth of a Poet's Mind", some hidden essence is suddenly revealed and brought to the poet's consciousness in "a flash":

> I was lost;
> Halted without an effort to break through;
> But to my conscious soul I now can say--
> "I recognise thy glory:" in such strength
> Of usurpation, when the light of sense
> Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed
> The invisible world, doth greatness make abode[90]

This moment attains a personal dimension when "the light of sense goes out" and it suggests the suspension of the poet's intellectual efforts at the moment when his inner vision takes over, allowing an insight into "the invisible world." Now, with renewed artistic vigour he can continue with the composition of the poem. Similarly, Proust locates truth within the mind of the perceiving subject and states that the past cannot be recaptured through intellectual efforts, but lies buried in lost sensations. A successful

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[89] Daniel Schacter, *Searching for Memory: The Brain, the Mind, and the Past* (New York: Basic, 1996) 28, 33.
[90] *Poetical Works of William Wordsworth,* 1896*,* ed. William Knight*,* Vol. III: *The Prelude*, Book VI: lines 596-602*, Project Gutenberg* EBook.

rediscovery relies on chance and needs a serendipitous occurrence, stimulated by an

object or a sensory experience in the present that reveals that hidden past:

> And so it is with our own past. It is a labour in vain to attempt to recapture it: all the efforts of our intellect must prove futile. The past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of intellect, in some material object (in the sensation which that material object will give us) which we do not suspect. And as for that object, it depends on chance whether we come upon it or not before we ourselves must die.[91]

The chance combination of sensation with a material object is the Proustian 'formula' for

involuntary memory, when his sense of an entire childhood seems to spring up as he

tastes the famous madeleine with tea. In this moment, what Proust foregrounds is the

problem of 'qualia' for the modernist writer: if I only can describe what I feel or

experience, how can words convey this apparently private and ineffable experience?

This problem will be discussed later in this section.

Expressing Impressions

Writers like Proust come to face the problem of rendering experience artistically

and in order to investigate how they became artists, to develop new aesthetic forms for

autobiographic novels: the *Künstlerroman* is based on autobiographical experiences and

thematizes the question of life-writing, of how to write the autobiographical. "*A la*

recherche is the progenitor of a family of twentieth-century novels which conclude with

their protagonists' decision to produce a novel" (Kellman 1247). Goodwin explains

Proust's conceptual framework: "through a narrator named Marcel, Proust renders in

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[91] Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way* 1922, *Remembrance of Things Past,* vol. 1 of 12 vols. (London: Chatto, 1941) 57-58; Abbreviation used in parenthetical references henceforth is *RTP*.

these books a personal account of experience and, centrally, of the evolution of a writer's consciousness" (14). The fictional life of the protagonist closely parallels Proust's actual life, but ultimately, it is an artistic version and therefore Landy cautions against the temptation to conflate the life of Proust with that of the protagonist Marcel, because although "many of the episodes in the novel have echoes in Proust's own experience [...] this is only to say that Proust, like other artists, fashioned something beautiful out of that experience – not that he fashioned himself in the process" (18). Landy lists enough facts that would prevent a strict equation of Marcel the character with Marcel Proust the author and points out the fallacy of confusing two ontological levels: to resist the temptation to attribute the novel to Marcel, who is just about to write the novel at the end, instead of Proust, who wrote the novel in which a character named Marcel will write the novel that we have just read. It is the paradox of the self-begetting novel, which "projects the illusion of art creating itself" (Kellman 1245). The closure of the novel evidences the trajectory that developed the artist "to the point at which he is able to take up his pen and compose the novel we have just finished reading" (1245). Landy regards the circular logic of the self-begetting novel as too simplistic, because ultimately, "it is Proust's novel, and it is Marcel's autobiography, but it is not Marcel's novel" (42). Instead, he advocates separating the novel into discrete entities, which, when read according to "a system of meanings, expressions, and effects," can be classified as "autobiography, fictionalized autobiography and fiction with autobiographical borrowings" (Landy 43). Marcel's signature is evident in one part as opposed to that of Proust in another, which reveals the author's intention to write the novel from the perspectives of different persona, an author-figure and a Marcel-figure, but they all are ultimately, "artistic choices made by Proust" (Landy 44). The impossibility of making

classifications regarding what could or could not count as autobiography has been pointed out by Goodwin who, (in citing Northorp Frye), "finds that autobiography 'merges with the novel by a series of insensible gradations'" (14).

Similar to the spiritual autobiography of St. Augustine, Marcel's vocational transformation compels him to write an account of his conversion in which he re-creates his experiences by putting them into words. As in St. Augustine's *Confessions*, his writing is inspired by "a creative, and therefore fictional, impulse to select only those events and experiences [...] that go to build up an integrated pattern" (Goodwin 14). The meaning-making of memory has been developed in the framework of neural network models in the theory of neuroscience, where it is "known as connectionism", which "has abandoned the idea that memory is an activated picture of a past event" (Schacter 71). Instead of a mere replica of past events, memory works and constructs "a unique pattern", such that information is combined "in the present environment with patterns that have been stored in the past, and the resulting mixture of the two is what the network remembers" (Schacter 71).

Proust's autobiographical writing is a complex process of creating a stable self through narrative and stylization. And, as it is Proust's final work, it is the artist-persona who wrote himself into existence through the construction of a textual world, as Kellman sees it philosophically: "the self-begetting novel begets both a self and itself. It recounts the creation of a work very much like itself, but it is also the portrait of a fictive artist being born" (Kellman 1251). Landy is more cautious in his judgment of Proust's success in capturing the totality of a self, but at least, through the fictional Marcel, Proust makes "a successful (or at least preliminary) effort at self-fashioning" (47). But Landy also proposes that the search for a finite self is illusory because the living self always remains incomplete,

contingent and subject to infinite revision and he therefore recommends that the reader

views the novel "not as Proust's own life 'realised in a book,' all of its individual acts and

aspects forged into a unity, but precisely as *one more act* in that life" (126).

The Fictive Experience of Time unfolds within a Fictive World

Proust wrote his novel at a time of intellectual fecundity that saw a sudden

proliferation of new theories about memory, the self and time. The intellectual tenor of

the historical moment was dominated by a network of competing theories that took

different vantage points: metaphysical, psychological and medical frameworks each tried

to give an exhaustive explanation of a phenomena that was named alternatively either

mind, or soul or brain.[92]

Proust seeks to fulfil two objectives: to create art and to write about the self. Art

must articulate and transcend the essence or reality of life below appearances and, being

a post-Freudian autobiographical novelist, he investigates and analyses the workings of

time and memory in order to uncover a new way of understanding the self. Jack Jordan

explains Proust's creative invention that makes a three-dimensional account possible by

introducing the new dimension of time: "As Einstein's theories helped move Euclidean

geometry from two ('plane' geometry) and three ('solid' geometry) dimensions into the

curvature of his four-dimensional space-time continuum, so do Proust's theories

concerning memory – with the introduction of time – result in this new view of

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[92] Although Proust does not acknowledge any influence from his contemporary theorists, his works are
frequently read as showing traces of the ideas of Henri Bergson or William James. Suzanne Nalbantian
states that "Proust seems to have constructed his own view of the memory process from adaptions of
Bergson's work" 63.

psychology."[93] Before neuroscience discovered that memory is actually a ceaseless process and not just "a repository of inert information," Proust had "presciently anticipated the discovery of memory reconsolidation" (Lehrer 85).

Transformation by artistic subjectivity re-creates the consciousness of an artist at any given time in the past and thereby gives meaning to that life. As the self cannot observe itself directly, it needs the reflexive power of consciousness that looks at itself looking and what Proust discovers in looking back is his constantly changing self. Proust reflects on the experiences and consciousness of his past selves and explores what caused the self to change in its history, how it became a plurality of selves. But it seems that Proust still believes "that these selves hide an indivisible, core self – an unconscious, metaphysical essence beneath the conscious self that lies at the surface, divided by the contingencies of time, space, society, emotions – of any phenomenological situation" (Jordan 111). Yet, the self is always relational and always in temporal change, personal identity is no more than a fleeting concept: because the self is only a self in relation to others and because the present self exists always in relation to its own past selves, personal identity is never stable or complete but rather in a process of constant built-up.

A new perspective on memory was given by William James in *The Principles of Psychology*, when he focussed on memory as a conscious phenomenon of association. He regarded memory as a "psychophysical phenomenon," which shares a bodily and mental side and he explained that "[t]he bodily side is the functional excitement of the tracts and paths in question; the mental side is the conscious vision of the past occurrence, and the belief that we experienced it before" (655). At the end of the twentieth century, the

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[93] Jack Jordan, "The Unconscious," *Cambridge Companions Online* (Cambridge UP, 2006) 100-116 at 110.

psychologist Endel Tulving described the conscious experience of remembering as "mental time travel, a sort of reliving of something that happened in the past."[94]

Memory lies latent and is ready to be recovered at any time and, in this respect, the past can be recalled to the present. William James declared the physical existence of what he calls the "primary memory" and he described it as a permanent substratum that consists of neural pathways, which are the physical traces that habit has forged into the brain:

> But an object of primary memory is not thus brought back; it never was lost; its date was never cut off in consciousness from that of the immediately present moment. In fact it comes to us as belonging to the rearward portion of the present space of time, and not to the genuine past. (646-647)

Landy lucidly explains how selfhood is structured and expanded in a multitude of overlaid strata:

> Not only do we change over time […] but we cannot achieve unanimity within ourselves at any given moment. In fact, the simultaneous multiplicity is even greater […] since on [Proust's] model the diachronic becomes synchronic: our various incarnations do not simply replace one another but remain with us forever, in the background of our consciousness, forming a complex geological structure of several superposed strata." (101-2)

The self grows by encompassing all the diachronic selves accumulated over time and Proust accommodates both synchronic and diachronic variations of the self that show the self in its consecutive states as they are "sedimented over time; at any given instant, we are the sum of an extremely large set of existences, many of which are entirely unknown to us, and all of which cohabit simultaneously in the mind" (Landy 110). Roger Shattuck affirms the succession of selves, but negates the possibility of the mind becoming aware of this plurality. He writes that "[n]o matter how we go about it, we

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[94] Tulving in Evelyne Ender, *Architexts of Memory: Literature, Science, and Autobiography* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2005) 2.

cannot be all of ourselves all at once […] to summon our entire self into simultaneous existence lies beyond our powers. We live by synechdoche, by cycles of being.[95]

À la Recherche du Temps Perdu, (*In Search of Lost Time,* also translated as *Remembrance of Things Past*) was published between 1913 and 1927, and it opens with a long and detailed description of the semi-dream state in which the narrator gradually reconstructs his physical surroundings. Proust evokes an earlier time that has no date and no place in which moments integrate in fragmentary impressions. The memories of how his body had felt during previous occasions of waking up in different locations provide an entry to and make available details of that past:

> My body, still too heavy with sleep to move, would make an effort to construe the form which its tiredness took as an orientation of its various members, so as to induce from that where the wall lay and the furniture stood, to piece together and to give a name to the house in which it must be living. Its memory, the composite memory of its ribs, knees, and shoulder-blades offered it a whole series of rooms in which it had at one time or another slept; […] my body, would recall from each room in succession what the bed was like, where the doors were, how daylight came in at the windows, whether there was a passage outside, what I had had in my mind when I went to sleep, and had found there when I awoke. (*RTP* 5)

Proust gives an example of how memory resides within the body and recalls a whole series of rooms in which Marcel had previously slept. In those fluid moments without boundaries, between the conscious and the unconscious, the chronology of time can be transcended; as Marcel notes: "perhaps, while I was asleep I had returned without the least effort to an earlier stage in my life, now for ever outgrown" (*RTP* 2). Sleep seems to break the thread of the self such that "with the loss of an internal, subjective reality founded on a solid notion of self, the narrator also loses the external reality of an objective world anchored in fixed notions of time and space" (Jordan 100). Time is lost in

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[95] Roger Shattuck, "The Work and Its Author," Chapter I of *Marcel Proust,* 1974, online, n. pag.

the sense of time gone, but in reality, the echo of memories has never ceased and whilst asleep, memories of the past, in principle, become all available at once, because the sequence of time no longer exists when consciousness is suspended. Henri Bergson attempted a detailed study of consciousness as it is experienced and Proust's idea of transcending time in sleep comes close to Bergson's idea of duration (*la durée*), which is enfolded time of inner consciousness where present and past are interwoven and made available at the same time. *La durée* is a "qualitative multiplicity", which is "heterogeneous and yet interpenetrating, it cannot be adequately represented by a symbol; indeed, for Bergson, a qualitative multiplicity is inexpressible."[96] Bergson's ideas in *Time and Free Will,* 1889, and in *Matter and Memory*, 1896, suggest that memories remain stored within us indefinitely, albeit most of them are not accessible until reactivated or recreated by events or thought in the present. Bergson's insight that "a human being who should *dream* his life instead of living it would no doubt thus keep before his eyes at each moment the infinite multitude of the details of his past history,"[97] is turned into a metaphor for lost time revived in the sense of contemplation by inscribing it within duration: "When a man is asleep, he has in a circle round him the chain of the hours, the sequence of the years, the order of the heavenly host" (*RTP* 3). The positivistic world-view, based on fixed references in time and space disintegrates in sleep, when memories that were stored indefinitely may suddenly become available all at once in dreams. Thus, Landy sees in Proust's line a striking echo of Henri Bergson's claim that memories can return unbidden and the novel exemplifies the modernist turn from the

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[96] Leonard Lawlor and Valentine Moulard, "Henri Bergson," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* online, n. pag.
[97] Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory,* 1908, 5th ed. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (New York: Macmillan; London: Sonnenschein, 1911) 201.

bipartite notion of the self to a changeable self that exists in the flow of experience, between the present perception of itself in the world and the memories of its past.

The novel is concerned with the operations of the mind: the relationship between the mind and time; how time changes memory. Proust picks up Montaigne's idea of living in the flow of time, but whereas Montaigne sees his former selves as locked in the past, as something that has-been, Proust experiences the flow between the past and the present self, which echoes Henri Bergson's placement of experience in memory. But reality shifts not only within the self, change is also a characteristic of the world outside the self. Proust believed that "only the artist was able to describe reality as it was actually experienced."[98] Judith Ryan points out that there is a fundamental division that runs throughout the novel: "a profound split between the quest for the elusive reality behind appearances and a belief in the value of present sensation, between an adherence to a dualist metaphysics on the one hand and empiricist associationism on the other." As such, she states that conflicts emerge due to the seeming incompatibility of "two ways of seeing reality, one in terms of what we 'know,' one in terms of what we 'see.'" [99] Similarly, Landy explains that the fragmentation of seeing the world and others is due to the constant changes of the self, of its knowledge and its attitudes (105).

Ortega y Gasset, however, evaluated the success of Proust's artistic work quite differently. He claimed that Proust discovered a new way of seeing, that he indeed invented "a new way of treating time and situating oneself in space."[100] Rather than using his memories as materials for reconstructing former realities, in his view, Proust

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[98] Jonah Lehrer, *Proust Was a Neuroscientist* (New York: Houghton, 2007) 77.
[99] Judith Ryan, *The Vanishing Subject: Early Psychology and Literary Modernism* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1991) 179.
[100] José Ortega y Gasset and Irving Singer, "Time, Distance, and Form in Proust," *The Hudson Review* 11.4 (1958-1959): 504-513, at 505.

does the opposite, "he wants literally to reconstruct the very memories themselves. Thus, it is not things that are remembered, but the memory of things, which is the central theme of Proust" (Ortega y Gasset 506). Proust intuitively knew that memories require a transformative process because memories can never directly represent reality, "they are imperfect copies of what actually happened" (Lehrer 89). Lehrer explains the theory of remembering according to neuroscience: Memory is not a repository of inert information that accumulates over time but has the property of plasticity, which continually transforms what is remembered and is itself altered as a result of remembering: "every time we remember anything, the neuronal structure of the memory is delicately transformed, a process called reconsolidation" (Lehrer 85). Thus, with each act of remembering, the memory itself changes; it moves further and further away from the objective becoming increasingly idiosyncratic, each time the content reveals "less about what you remember and more about you" (Lehrer 85).

The Narrative Self is the Self in Time

Proust applies a fundamental distinction between the sources of sensations that stimulate memory**.** Visual sensations are extensive: they describe spatial relations between the observer and the object; all others are intensive and Lennon claims that "what we taste, smell, hear, feel is, it might be argued, only in time. In the search after lost time, the visual is irrelevant."[101] Vision works differently to taste, sound or odours: because of the distance between viewer and object, visual sensations are projected onto

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[101] Thomas M. Lennon, "Proust and the Phenomenology of Memory," *Philosophy and Literature* 31.1 (2007): 52-66, at 60.

the object, whereas all other sensations are perceived as if they originated within the

body. This explains the different workings of the mind in viewing the church steeples (this

episode will be discussed later) as opposed to the overwhelming reaction to the

taste/smell sensation of the madeleine with tea.

Proust distinguishes between two modes of memory: he demeans voluntary

memory that is at the service of the intellect and therefore cannot revive the past

authentically; the will only produces pictures, but "nothing of the past itself" (*RTP* 57).

Lehrer states that "one of Proust's deep insights was that our senses of smell and taste

bear a unique burden of memory" (Lehrer 80). The taste and scent of the madeleine

steeped in tea is not only an example of the workings of involuntary memory that acts as

a catalyst between the present and the past, but the experience also channels Proust's

childhood by releasing hitherto buried memories through a sensation common to both

the present and the past and, in this way, memory does not restore lost time, but

restores a self that was lost. The entry into the past that these moments make possible is

deeply significant, as in such moments the fragments of his past begin slowly to

reassemble themselves and the ecstasy of the madeleine opens up the recaptured time of

childhood; thus a *moment bienheureux* intuits an essential self by an act of momentary

transcendence of human constraint, which comes close to a religious epiphany:

> And at once the vicissitudes of life had become indifferent to me, its disasters innocuous,
> its brevity illusory—this new sensation having had on me the effect which love has of
> filling me with a precious essence; or rather this essence was not in me, it was *myself*. I
> had ceased now to feel mediocre, accidental, mortal. (*RTP* 58, emphasis added)

Memories, which the body contains in the form of sensorial traces, are uniquely

sentimental; they are feelings that open the narrator to memories of his childhood by

connecting him to a hidden region of the self. The record of the remembered taste needs

to make contact with some other fragment of experience, an experience that

immediately accesses the structure of the brain, "directly to the hippocampus, the center

of the brain's long-term memory" (Lehrer 80). Landy explains the effect of sense stimuli

that circumvent the intellect: "[w]hen an odor, texture, or sound returns us to a former

state, we are not dragging into the light a set of impressions that have long since

departed but, instead, summoning up a part of us that is still very much present within

our mind" (110). The taste of the madeleine in the present does not immediately propel

him back into the past, but the sensation provides a link to all the memories of Marcel's

childhood in the village of Combray:

> But when from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the
> things are broken and scattered, still, alone, more fragile, but with more vitality, more
> unsubstantial, more persistent, more faithful, the smell and taste of things remain poised a
> long time, like souls, ready to remind us, waiting and hoping for their moment, amid the
> ruins of all the rest; and bear unfaltering, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their
> essence, the vast structure of recollection. (*RTP* 61)

For Proust, the senses of smell and taste are the most stimulating, for they give

access to the vast structure of memory and put the present into the vicinity of events in

which the experience was originally ingrained. It is the result of the sensual effect in the

present that the memory of the many madeleines, eaten as a child, can return. William

James explains that firm and repeated exposure to a stimulus is the precondition for

future remembering:

> The first condition which makes a thing susceptible of recall after it has been forgotten is
> that the original impression of it should have been prolonged enough to give rise to a
> *recurrent* image of it, as distinguished from one of those primary after-images which very

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fleeting impressions may leave behind, and which contain in themselves no guarantee that they will ever come back after having once faded away. (*Principles of Psychology*)

A *moment bienheureux* does not give a replica of the past, but rather the past itself; it brings back the entire associative context, which briefly gives the impression that the present is effaced. Unique to the individual, it reveals an individual truth through a sensation in the present that is not visual but gustatory. Landy explains the emotional self in space and time: "if today's madeleine tastes the same as it did thirty years ago, it is because there must be a part of us at least that has not changed in between times, *a permanent aspect underlying all of the mutable selves*" (112). Proust seems to agree with the view that smell and taste provide a shortcut to the memories of a past self without the involvement of the intellect; that involuntary memory is beyond the control of the conscious mind and therefore occurs arbitrarily and unexpectedly; it lies dormant in the unconscious waiting to be recalled by a particular taste, sound or smell which then "recreates some part of the past with a sensory immediacy and reality that the conscious act of memorizing is unable to capture" (Cruickshank 227). Cruickshank continues to explain the amplifying effect of involuntary memory, because it abolishes "time (in the chronometric sense)," whereby "a greater unity is restored to the self and the moment of memory takes on a unique richness and multiplicity" (Cruickshank 227). Landy proposes that it is involuntary memory which "indicates the existence of, and affords access to, a unique and diachronically stable self" (113). Involuntary memory connects the present self with its past self**.**

That the past exists somewhere beyond the reach of the intellect was formerly explored by Henri Bergson. In 1888, Bergson argued that the intellect alone cannot

grasp the concept of time that governs the reality of duration and change. His belief

that we could only understand ourselves through intuition also became a cornerstone

for Proust's understanding of reality. The madeleine episode is an example of Bergson's

concept of *durée* in which involuntary memory is Proust's aesthetic device to express

the interpenetration of moments of time in order to remove the barriers between

reality and the consciousness of that reality. Involuntary memories have a greater

authenticity than voluntary memories, because they are understood to have no

intermediary.

Truth has an essential Relationship to Time

It is sense perception and not intellect which is the instrument of truth; therefore

Proust values sensations over intellect, involuntary memory over voluntary memory,

because "voluntary memory does not recall the experience itself; it recalls the experience

as reworked by intelligence and at least partially translated into concepts."[102] Landy

summarizes Proust's position as being that "the only type of knowledge we care about,

the only kind that can transform our life, is knowledge of subjective 'truths,' and such

knowledge is granted by intuition" (10). Intuition needs sensory cues in order to produce

the vividness of involuntary memory**,** to open the way toward recollection. A physical

sensation in the present can stimulate a forgotten sensation of the past, which prompts

the re-creation of the circumstances that surrounded the original sensation with the

result that the past becomes alive in the present. The claim is that involuntary memories

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[102] Russell Epstein, "Consciousness, art, and the brain: Lessons from Marcel Proust," *Consciousness and Cognition* 13 (2004): 213-240, at 218.

are more vivid than those which are recalled voluntarily, because the former retain their

freshness and detail in the unconscious mind, hermetically sealed and thus unmodified by

time, until the moment when they are recalled into the waking consciousness by chance.

Beckett explains involuntary memory as that which "has been registered by our extreme

inattention and stored in that ultimate and inaccessible dungeon of our being […] the

essence of ourselves, the best of our many selves."[103] In other words, the truth that was

buried in lost sensation becomes the basis for the self when recovered at a later time,

when time that was lost is regained. With the becoming present of the past, the

phenomenological structure of time is broken, overcome and transcended. Thus, Proust

realizes that the unity of the self in time is fictional; the self does not exist *in* time but

outside the contingencies of time.

Proust calls his experiences, these special moments of revelation in which the self

transcends the flow of chronological time**,** *moments bienheureux,* (fortunate moments),

which have the power to bring the self into contact with the essence of reality. As a

modernist writer, he "could speak about his experiences of the eternal only by freezing

time and all its fleeting qualities" (Harvey 21). Involuntary memory not only replicates

the past but also reveals what was hidden in the recesses of the mind. These privileged

moments liberate the self from the order of time by affording "a true re-instantiation of

an earlier experience" (Epstein 217). Landy explains the connection between knowledge

and involuntary memory: "The knowledge yielded by involuntary memory (including the

understanding of involuntary memory itself!) comes not through reasoning but through

epiphanic *insight*. It is thus 'more precious' than 'truths which the intellect educes directly

from reality'" (164). Similarly, Lennon explains that "a *moment bienheureux* [...] always

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[103] Samuel Beckett, *Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit* (London: Calder, 1965) 31.

relates to the real – indeed, to what is most real. Even more importantly, a *moment bienheureux* relates to presence, not absence, to knowledge, not ignorance. In fact, a *moment bienheureux* is an absence overcome" (Lennon 57). His assessment is not incompatible with Ryan's view that Proust's epiphanies do not transcend the order of reality but are psychic phenomena that reveal the relation between two experiences: "[w]hat seem like epiphanies are not insights into another realm but the re-emergence and reintegration of portions of his consciousness that have become temporarily disconnected. The narrator is unable to make these connections until involuntary recollections actually make the past present for him" (Ryan 188).

The question is whether essences are tangible and can be found in the mind through memory. Bergson had written that the self is unaware of itself most of the time: "[t]he greater part of the time we live outside ourselves, hardly perceiving anything of ourselves but our own ghost, a colourless shadow which pure duration projects into homogeneous space."[104] Freud concurs with Proust's insight that the gleam of his own projections is bouncing back because "the self is like a slide in a magic lantern. By looking at its projection in a work of art (here the written word), one can study the nature of the unconscious that produced it" (Baudry in Jordan 113).

Epstein states that each sensation takes part in a chain of associations and that it is the power of involuntary memory to foreground "the contextual information that shaped the remembered episode" (Epstein 220). Furthermore, Epstein claims that an experience of involuntary memory adds something to and enriches the self by raising awareness to something that has been forgotten, but which suddenly returns and takes on new meaning:

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[104] Bergson, Henri. *Time and Free Will,* 1889, ed. J. H. Muirhead, *Library of Philosophy* (London: Sonnenschein; New York: Macmillan, 1910) 231.

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We become aware of aspects of a period of time that we were not previously aware of, and we feel that we are experiencing it in a way that we never experienced it before. In fact, we have experienced it before, but with different emphasis: the contextual information that had fallen into the background has now been brought into the foreground. The passage of time has made this information novel once again, and thus we attend to it. (221)

Beckett describes the instances of involuntary memory as an immediate, explosive and total deflagration, in which the past object is not merely restored but "in its brightness revealed what the mock reality of experience never can and never will reveal – the real" (Beckett 33). Similarly, Morrison and Stack explain that the taste sensation of the present "stimulated the recollection of the past taste sensation and hence the past occasion itself" (605). But they continue to state that the consciousness experiences a conflation of past and present; in this moment, both events are not merely experienced as similar but as identical, whereby the past has become absorbed into the present:

The two modes of temporality have *merged* into a new kind of synthetic unity and experience. The past has been both re-called and pre-served. As recalled and preserved, the past is not only *in* the present. It has become, in Heidegger's language, a *presence* (*Anwesen*), a presence which is unique insofar as it is *of* the past and hence retains its essential quality of 'been-ness' (*Gewesenheit*). The remembrance and the memory are thus a 'been-presence'. The ordinary experience of time as a succession of discrete moments – of 'nows' – has been transformed by virtue of a mergence of two moments, a past and a present one, into a bipolarized unity.[105]

Proust recovered the problematic Romantic notion of lost unity, which Beckett phrases in a more dramatic, but poetic language: "the total past sensation, not its echo nor its copy, but the sensation itself, annihilating every spatial and temporal restriction,

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[105] James C. Morrison and George J. Stack, "Proust and Phenomenology," *Man and World* 1 (1968): 604-617, at 606.

comes in a rush to engulf the subject in all the beauty of its infallible proportion" (Beckett 72-73). Epstein claims that Proust's *moments bienheureux* can be understood as an experience in which the "dimly-felt contextual information that surrounds the more salient sensory information in the focus of consciousness," (219) comes to the surface of consciousness and thus, in these privileged moments, "we become aware of the network of memories and goals that guides the stream of thought – a network that is usually only vaguely sensed in the 'fringe' of consciousness" (Epstein 222). He further argues that Proust's division of awareness into two components roughly corresponds to William James's ideas about the structure of consciousness with distinct elements termed "the 'nucleus' and 'fringe'" (Epstein 214).

Lehrer examines the material basis for this view of memory in the work of the contemporary brain sciences. Contemporary neuroscience looks at prions, a class of proteins that displays an astonishing amount of plasticity: although prions have a particularly sturdy structure, they also have an element of randomness built-in, which makes them unpredictable. These properties lead scientists to assume that prions and their neighbouring dendrites are essential for the functioning of memory: in the prions, memories are preserved as almost immortal, but it needs neurotransmitters to change the dendritic details and cause a cellular shudder, for memory to reappear, but each time slightly altered. Lehrer explains that "every time we conjure up our pasts, the branches of our recollections become malleable again," which makes the past "at once perpetual and ephemeral" (Lehrer 94).

Proust's knowledge of the self is that self is transcendental and relational; it is based on existence in the flux of time and on relations between the self and the external world. To put an ephemeral world into order, Proust's language is preoccupied with

significations and metaphorical allusions that give an instantaneous effect. External

objects and other people are always seen in their relation to the narrator, relative to his

own consciousness and subjectivity that shapes individual perspective. Marcel's

awareness about the nature of his own self takes place among the 'otherness' of things.

The recognition of his own centrality as the originator of experience turns everything

outside himself into perspectival appearances. Nothing exists independently, but only as

a phenomenon that can be felt and lived through. Morrison and Stack state that "the

world for Proust is not an objective being-in-itself, but a lived-world (*Lebenswelt*). What is

sought in this 'world' is its *meaning"* (Morrison and Stack 613). Proust's novel is

preoccupied with temporality and with subjectivity that connects former memories with

sensory impressions in the present. Thus, white hawthorn hedges are perceived as

having an architecture associated with churches, chapels and altars (*RTP* 188), but

moreover, they take the narrator back to after dinner church services on Saturdays,

specifically in the month of May, when the altar was perennially decorated with

hawthorns (*RTP* 151). Proust's remembering stems from comparing and combining a

present sensation with a past one. Roger Shattuck explains the particularity of perception

that involves going back in time:

> Proust set about to make us *see* time. […] Merely to remember something is meaningless
> unless the remembered image is combined with a moment in the present affording a view
> of the same object or objects. Like our eyes, our memories must see double; these two
> images then converge in our minds into a single heightened reality.[106]

But the white hawthorns do not reveal a deeper meaning. Even though Marcel

tries to relax his mind by first concentrating on other objects and then returning to the

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[106] Roger Shattuck, *Proust's binoculars: A Study of Memory, Time, and Recognition in À* la Recherche du
Temps Perdu (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983) 46-7.

hawthorn-blossoms, this time fixing them more intensely. Indeed, voluntary efforts fail to

produce the desired effect; the renewed experience does not offer enlightenment and

the images need to be deciphered: "the sentiment which they aroused in me remained

obscure and vague, struggling and failing to free itself, to float across and become one

with the flowers" (*RTP* 190). The rapture only happens shortly afterwards through the

discovery of the pink blossoms that reverberate and intensify Marcel's festive mood:

> And, indeed, I had felt at once, as I had felt before the white blossom, but now still more
> marvelling, that it was in no artificial manner, by no device of human construction, that
> the festal intention of these flowers was revealed, but that it was Nature herself who had
> spontaneously expressed it. (*RTP* 191)

By connecting the memory of looking at the hawthorns to his emotional state, the

pink blossoms take on a new meaning; they become an emblem of holiday festivity in an

episodic memory. Schacter explains the working of memory, where the blossoms are

stored as a fragment of an episode, which is then transformed in "the recollective

experience of the rememberer" (70). In Marcel's memory, nature seems to celebrate the

holy day and the image of the hawthorns gives a privileged access to reality in which the

hawthorns become transformed into "a Catholic bush indeed" (*RTP* 192). Proust explores

the phenomena of consciousness where consciousness arises by first becoming aware of

objects**,** followed by the act of deforming and recreating the object, a process which

Landy describes as a "perspectival distortion imposed by intuition" (82). Epstein too sees

it as the result of an "associative network within which the stream of thought meanders"

(Epstein 224). Both explanations reveal that the hawthorn bushes are nothing in

themselves. They can only convey a message to Marcel if he allows them to take on

significance; thus he imbues them with specific values that mirror back his own mood so

that he can "discover in things, endeared to us on that account, the spiritual glamour which we ourselves have cast upon them" (*RTP* 115). Beckett speaks of Proust's representation of perception in almost religious language; it is one in which objects of the physical world are described as Proust's potential "elements of communion," if they become part of "some immediate and fortuitous act of perception," which is a "sacred action," in a process of "intellectualised animism" (Beckett 36). Epstein explains the perspectival nature of knowledge in more prosaic linguistic terms. He claims that many of Proust's comparisons are not standard metaphors based on similar features, "but something one might term narrative metaphor, in which one event is compared to another event that has a similar social or emotional structure" (Epstein 223).

Perceived reality in which the shifting nature of objects is experienced through mutable sensations is similar to Jean-Paul Sartre's thought that because consciousness is essentially void, it needs encounters with external objects in order to accrue identity over time. John Cruickshank makes the connection between Sartre and Proust: "Similarly, the finding of our identity through objects recalls the statement in *L'Etre et le néant* that 'consciousness is a void except in so far as it can project itself into objects in the outer world.'"[107] Sartre's self must *project* itself *into* objects, whereas for Hume the self has to *introject* objects, because otherwise, the self "independent of the perception of every other object, is in reality nothing" (Hume 340). Cruickshank explains how the two protean elements – the shifts, which simultaneously take place inside individuals and outside in reality – work together: "Our knowledge of others, which has now become a shifting personal perspective on a shifting external reality, will ultimately be

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[107] John Cruickshank, "The Shifting World of Proust," *Critical Quarterly* 8.3 (1966): 220-230 at 221.

impressionistic. The impressionism inherent in our knowledge of people arises from the fact of subjectivity operating in a restlessly shifting human world" (223).

Ortega y Gasset noted the parallelism of impressionism as a pictorial style, which negates the external form of real objects in order to reproduce their internal form, with the world-view of impressionist philosophers at the end of the nineteenth century. Landy agrees that Marcel's intuition stems not from the intellect but rather from immediate insight that places him "directly in touch with objects of cognition. As a result, the prose poem is very close to impressionist paintings" (58). Ortega y Gasset explains that "the impressionist does not *draw* the object; he attains it by accumulating tiny dabs of color, each one of which is formless in itself, but all of which together, in combination, are able to engender before half-closed eyes the vibrant presence of the object," which is similar to the impressionist philosopher, who maintains that reality is made up of emotive and sensory states, "a flux of odors, tastes, lights, pains, and desires, a never-ending procession of unstable inward reverberations" (508). Through the projection of sensations, which are qualities of the mind, onto objects that are external to it, objects become unstable because their appearance changes in space, through time, and also under the observer's subjectivity, his instinct, or personal presuppositions, which forge more idiosyncratic associations.

Although vision is direct, it distorts through reductions in point of view. Bergson had noted that the distance between the self and objects plays a crucial role in our perception, that "the size, shape, even the colour, of external objects is modified according as my body approaches or recedes from them" (*Matter and Memory* 6).

Bergson's thinking here is close to that of the phenomenological philosopher Edmund Husserl, who had also provided explanations for the phenomenon.[108]

Proust also writes about the plurality of perspectives, experiences in space and time. He starts with the alternation between three-dimensional and two-dimensional perception as a paradigm for his inquiry into the nature of reality. Three church steeples change their position in relation to each other, an effect of change in perspective or point of view through the movement of a carriage, but the appearance of the steeples also changes in time. Cruickshank explains that Marcel's impressionistic account involves a second movement in which "each spire itself changes in appearance as the light and atmosphere alter throughout the day" (224). The narrator describes the changing appearance of the spires as he visually perceives them, as an optical illusion that shifts external reality: the steeples cease to be merely static objects but present new aspects with every movement of the perceiver in space and, simultaneously, also through the passage of time:

> I caught sight of the twin steeples of Martinville, on which the setting sun was playing, while the movement of the carriage and the windings of the road seemed to keep them continually changing their position; and then of a third steeple, that of Vieuxvicq, which, although separated from them by a hill and a valley, and rising from rather higher ground in the distance, appeared none the less to be standing by their side. (*RTP* 247)

Proust is not merely stating the optical illusion of three steeples standing next to each other but more importantly, he raises our awareness of two possible ways that reality can be perceived: the steeples can be seen through the intellect that knows that

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[108] Edmund Husserl, "Perception, Spatiality and the Body": "At first, the same unchanged objects appear, according to the changing circumstances, now this way, now in another way. The same unchanged form has a *changing appearance*, according to its relation to my Body," (quoted in Hustvedt, 238).

the steeple of Vieuxvicq is some distance from the steeples of Martinville, or they can be seen as they appear as phenomena – as though they stand on the same plane – which is the result of having been "filtered through a standard human subjectivity at a particular set of spatiotemporal positions" (Landy 58). The brain conceives of phenomena in the context of a specific environment and Morrison and Stack explain that phenomena arise out of perspective, they are "momentary transitory appearances relative to consciousness" (612). But Landy points out that "perspective itself breaks down into two aspects, the *universal* (one shared, or potentially shared, by any member of the human race) and the *individual* (one that varies from person to person)" (57, emphasis added). Optical illusions are universal, mundane occurrences, based on the biological human apparatus for perceiving the world, whereas the individual perspective is singular. Early cognitive psychologists sought to demonstrate "that perception is a *constructive* process dependent not only on the information inherent in a stimulus but also on the mental processing of the perceiver."[109]

Proust writes about a special artistic ability in perceiving that uncovers meaning in physical phenomena when, later that afternoon, Marcel suddenly feels a strange sensation in looking at the spires of Martinville for a second time. Now the spires seem to have lost their material surface and appear to reveal their essence:

> And presently their outlines and their sunlit surface, as though they had been a sort of rind, were stripped apart; a little of what they had concealed from me became apparent; an idea came into my mind which had not existed for me a moment earlier, framed itself in words in my head. (*RTP* 248)

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[109] Brenda Milner, Larry R. Squire, and Eric R. Kandel, "Cognitive Neuroscience and the Study of Memory," *Neuron* 20.3 (1998): 445-468, at 445.

Marcel had intuited something beneath the surface of the spires which he describes as "something analogous to a charming phrase, since it was in the form of words which gave me pleasure," (*RTP* 249) and in his essay he expresses what for him "lay buried within the steeples of Martinville" (*RTP* 249). Proust seems to be convinced that external reality can be known better through the artistic reconstitution of the original experience and Morrison and Stack explain that "the surface features of actual objects hold within them, as it were, something more real than their phenomenal, mutable aspects. The capacity to attend to the essences of things is gradually developed in the narrator [...] an evolution which parallels his development as an artist" (610-11). The appearance of the church steeples is a general observation that differs from Marcel's subsequent personal appropriation of the steeples through idiosyncratic metaphorical language. His mind makes them unique, thus "*the* steeples" can become "*my* steeples" (*RTP* 248, emphasis added). Beckett views Proust as an artist who is able to capture essence, because he is able to suspend briefly the "death of habit" in perception, whereby he grasps the essence of objects and gives them a particular aesthetic form, in which "the object is perceived as particular and unique and not merely the member of a family" (Beckett 22,23). The perceptual distortion of objects makes it possible to write about the spires in a new way; once their depths have turned into surfaces, they are appropriated into stylistic expression that Marcel can claim as emanating from himself as he is the one who perceives them**.**

Artistic transformation of experience liberates the habitually concealed essence of objects. According to Gilles Deleuze, Proust's art achieves a veritable transmutation of matter through style, as Proust explains:

> [T]ruth – and life too – can be attained by us only when, by comparing a quality common to two sensations, we succeed in extracting their common essence and in reuniting them to each other, liberated from the contingencies of time, within a metaphor.[110]

In order to convey the experience of touching on essence, Proust must reconstruct the connection of associations and he achieves this task by the metaphorical use of language that works in chains and links. Metaphor is a key role, not simply a stylistic frill, in the Proustian perspectival knowledge-system that sees causation as the result of the connection between the metaphysical world of the psyche and the external, physical world. Epstein explains Proust's thinking with metaphors as existing at a complex level that "allows the writer to do more than just describe individual sensations: by comparing one experience to another, the entire network of thoughts, memories and inferences common to both can be evoked" (Epstein 223). Ryan denies the possibility of getting behind the veil of appearances and states that it is a delusion to look for essences. And because there is no access to the "thing in itself," what is left is "nothing more than impressions" (Ryan 180). But impressions play a crucial role in the creative process and therefore Epstein argues that Proust is not merely recounting his past, but that "he also observes his memory in action, and he uses these observations to develop a comprehensive theory of conscious experience and artistic creation that potentially has profound implications for any scientific theory of consciousness." (214).

Impressions Regained

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[110] Marcel Proust quoted in Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze on Literature*, (New York; London: Routledge, 2003) 38.

Proust understood that memories are always a fiction about ourselves. In his paper, Epstein argues for putting both aesthetic experience and conscious phenomenology on a neural basis by elucidating "some tentative connections between three very different domains of observation: Proustian aesthetics, Jamesian phenomenology, and neuroscience" (Epstein 214). Proust seems to argue that it is precisely the artistic process that transforms the memory of impressions with imagination, which reveals truth, although this truth is not only strictly personal but moreover, it becomes mutable through time. According to Jordan, Proust is able to unite "the internal, subjective truth of the 'plaisir spécial' with an external, 'objective' truth of some seemingly insignificant object in the world, ties them together in a metaphor, creating a bond as strong as that of causality in the sciences" (Jordan 113). Indeed, Proust brings together two disparate objects by means of a subjectively necessary connection that reworks experience, which generally means that sensory impressions have to be translated into language and his use of metaphor lends some kind of timelessness to his style.

The viewing of the steeples of Martinville is one example of a privileged moment that in turn generates writing. Marcel's composition tells of his happiness in having found this medium for channelling his experiences that he "felt that it had so entirely relieved my mind of the obsession of the steeples, and of the mystery which they concealed" (*RTP* 250). Evidently, Marcel's perspective on the mystery is highly imaginative; his poetic account is verbose with its numerous metaphors and animation of objects, so the imagery tells us almost nothing about the steeples themselves, but only about their place in Marcel's subjective conceptual framework. In juxtaposing the narrative with the "prose poem," Landy elucidates the significant differences between the prose account and the

poetic version of Marcel's experience where the steeples have lost their initial thing-like

aspect and are now linked through contiguity and analogy:

> The poem brings two fresh features into the description, a series of images and a set of
> personifications [...] The steeples resemble birds, pivots, flowers, and girls; they are
> capable of autonomous movement ("timidly seeking their way,...drawing close to one
> another"), equipped with distinguishing character traits (Vieuxvicq is "bold" and also
> disdainful, "taking its proper distance" from the other two) and endowed with agency—to
> the point, indeed, of bearing responsibility for their "actions" (Vieuxvicq being censured
> as "dilatory"). (56)

Landy explains further that the heterogeneity of the imagery is due to the time of the day

leaving a fourfold impression on Marcel's mind that creates a new sort of order:

> The steeples remind Marcel of birds while the sun still gilds their peaks, but when the sun,
> having set, gives them a rosy glow, they are "*no more now than* three flowers painted
> upon the sky" [...] And when, finally, the steeples suggest legendary maidens, they are
> completely bathed in darkness. (69)

Marcel's metaphors indicate features of his perspective and, to that extent,

metaphors are necessary within his subjective world, but they are not standards of

objective truth. Proust communicates that there is only one universal objective truth that

is essential to every human being: it is the uniqueness of each perspective and thus,

Marcel's metaphors simply reveal himself. Landy agrees that "Proust does not set out to

produce metaphors that illuminate the objects concerned [...] instead he sets out to

produce metaphors that illuminate the subjectivity of the character he has created" (74).

Cruickshank claims that Proust assimilates his impressions, memory and imagination into

his fiction and thereby "reveals the authentic nature of reality and, by doing so, genuinely

exists himself" (227). If his concept about "the authentic nature of reality" includes the

subjectivity of the character and moreover, also extends to include the author it could be

said that through writing, Proust brings his subjective self into being. The metaphorical imagery expresses the mind of its creator or, in the laconic assessment of Judith Ryan, Proust's idiosyncratic description of the towers reveals "simply the person he was when he wrote the piece" (183). Time is regained in style, in a vision or in an internalized impression that is again lost when time is eternalized by putting it into a metaphor, which is extra-temporal: "[i]n order to be regained, the impression must first have been lost as an immediate pleasure, prisoner to its external object" (Ricœur, *TN* 149-50).

Reality changes, even when viewed from a fixed position, due to varying light conditions at different times. The passage of time affects the appearance of objects, which is prominently described as changes in colour. On the stonework of the church of Saint-Hilaire different colours can be perceived, as the light and atmosphere alter throughout the day and also take on different aspects according to the seasons: on "a misty morning in autumn" the stones appear as "a ruin of purple, almost the colour of the wild vine," which changes in the evenings to "violet velvet," and the slates of the base "in the hot light of a summer morning, blaze like a black sun" (RTP 83-85). Proust expresses that time cannot be understood in its objective aspect – the time of the world – but only subjectively and phenomenologically: time can only be experienced as change.

The many instances of involuntary memory in Proust's novel provide a rhythmic structure in the novel, an artistic patterning that unites the various strands of Proust's view of the memory process. Pierre Janet, amongst others, had offered a metaphysical reaction to positivistic trends and had put forward claims for the existence of a spiritual realm. In resurrecting large blocks of time through the involuntary process, the Bergsonian *durée* is simulated, but the past self is not reconstituted in the process.

Malpas quotes Lyotard, who considered that Proust's "excess of time" in the text finally

eludes consciousness, which has the effect that

> the true character of the narrator remains finally unpresentable. However, despite this gap in presentation, the narrative itself retains a traditional form that presents the story as a unified whole. For Lyotard, this makes Proust's work nostalgic, and therefore modern: "it allows the unpresentable to be invoked only as absent content, while form, thanks to its recognisable consistency, continues to offer the reader or spectator material for consolation and pleasure."[111]

Section 2: The Self in Post-Impressionist Writing – Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway *(1925)*

Modernity is equated with a certain mode of experience of space and time, which

might be seen to become the primary aesthetic problem for early twentieth-century

writers. Impressionist writers such as Proust constructed their narrative by drawing on,

and attempting to convey in writing, sensations that stimulate memory; in this respect, he

"tried to recover past time and to create a sense of individuality and place that rested on

a conception of experience across a space of time" (Harvey 267). Woolf admired Proust's

work and how he had described experienced time subjectively as sequential time of

consciousness which "breaks with traditional models [and] is closely related to the rise of

new kind of individualism."[112] In *Mrs. Dalloway*, characters plunge into their pasts,

continually retaining and projecting themselves; Paul Ricœur writes that "[t]he art of

fiction here consists in weaving together the world of action and that of introspection, of

mixing together the sense of everydayness and that of the inner self" (*TN* 104).

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[111] Jean-François Lyotard cited in Simon Malpas, *Jean-François Lyotard* in *Routledge Critical Thinkers,* ed. Robert Eaglestone (London: Routledge 2003) 48.
[112] Terry Eagleton, *The English Novel: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell 2005) 7.

Modernist Subjective Consciousness: Turn to the Inner Life

Virginia Woolf engaged with the artistic theories of her time, linking her responses to a much wider literary and cultural context, evident in her fascination with the post-impressionist exhibition of 1910 (Jane Goldman, *The Feminist Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf: Modernism, Post-Impressionism, and the Politics of the Visual* 2001).

Post-impressionist writers such as Woolf sought to transgress mere impressionism by implementing a structural framework that makes explicit the frictions and tensions that are constantly at work in the self as it constitutes itself in space and time. Although individual identity is "formed in a nexus of relationships and influences without which it cannot emerge from the background of the crowd […] there is a tension between the desire for autonomy, and the necessity, in forming identity, of both interrelationships with others, and the boundaries of space and time."[113] Modernist writers experimented with new literary forms that would express their view of the self as fragmented by and through time and, more particularly, they wanted to show how the mind works for the constitution of the self through memory that connects the self with its past and with others. For the depiction of the changes they witnessed in their respective societies during the years 1890-1920, their fiction blends personal experiences with cultural memory; Max Saunders states that Virginia Woolf's writing was particularly concerned with a rejection of authority, "the patriarchal-institutional complex that binds us into its structures of linearity, time and authority" (271).

Woolf breaks these structures by describing experience as fragmented and fluid without coming to a conclusion about its meaning. The major characters in *Mrs.*

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[113] Mark Hussey, *The Singing of the Real World: The Philosophy of Virginia Woolf's Fiction* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1986) 27.

Dalloway perceive their identity as fragmented and inconclusive as they oscillate between experiences in the past and present. Paul Sheenan argues that Woolf attempts to capture the flux of modern life in new ways by articulating "not one but two interpretations of experience, as both flux and fragmentation." [114] He further asserts, however, that the wavelike fluidity and isolated particularity stand not in opposition to each other, but are "bound in a relationship of meaningful tension," where they operate "along an axis, as covariant properties of experience. Like wave-particle dualism, the two modalities do not cancel each other out but exist in tandem, coextensive of each other. The chief consequence of this variability is to render meaning radically unstable" (Sheenan 128). Instead of copying established novelistic forms, Woolf experiments with a structured narrative style, which is "a literary form that brings the transcendent into the actual," (Hussey 154) or, in other words, her novels bring into being the shape that she saw lurking behind the shimmering veil of appearances: the flowing streams of sensation and the particularity of the heterogeneous moment. Her artistic vision sought to make a textual contingency from fragments through echoes and reverberations in themes and characters.

Modernist writers like Woolf began to understand the impossibility of representing the world in a single language and consequently, their art "took on multiple perspectivism and relativism as its epistemology for revealing what it still took to be the true nature of a unified, though complex, underlying reality" (Harvey 30). Woolf's sense of reality is somewhat contradictory in that it is both fragmented and whole; the self is fragmented, but desires and imagines unity.

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[114] Paul Sheehan, *Modernism, Narrative and Humanism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002) 128.

Individual Identity over Time

In *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) the unity results from Woolf forging an aesthetic

connection between the simultaneity of moments. She borrowed the concept of

geometrical forms from post-impressionist painters, who had moved away from the

traditional view that the unity of the form is first and foremost a decorative and stylistic

aspect of the work and had consciously arranged the constituent parts of their work in a

structural patterning, which influenced Woolf's literary technique. Another influence was

the art critic Roger Fry, who had organized the first post-impressionist exhibition in 1910,

and his particular interest in Paul Cézanne, which he expressed in *Vision and Design*

(1920). Ann Banfield sees Fry's visual art theory as dualistic, "the product of a thinking

which also gave rise to Moore's, Russell's and Whitehead's persisting dualism, in which

'the world of universals' coexists with 'the world of existence.' There are two realities,

one sensible and the other inaccessible to the senses; nonetheless, 'both are real and

both are important to the metaphysician'" (Bertrand Russell at page 100 in *The Problems

of Philosophy*, cited in Banfield 13). Woolf recognized the potential for expressing the

effects that modernism had on the human consciousness and the possibility for a novel

aesthetic structure for our "ever-changing impressions that are held together by the thin

veneer of identity" (Lehrer 172). In painting, the symmetry in formal design

communicates and, according to Roger Fry, it conveys, "the intensity of a dramatic

conflict by the sublime balance of two opposed poles."[115] In order to achieve such an

effect in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf arranges the different strands of the plot and connects the

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[115] *Roger Fry Reader*, ed. Christopher Reed (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996) 70.
Fry's theories formulate the emerging importance of formalism in modern painting and he points out that pure Impressionists, like Monet, were preoccupied with "that aspect of appearance in which separate forms are lost in the whole continuum of sensation" (72).

characters in patterns of doublings, parallels, echoes and reverberations. Fry's art

criticism credits Cézanne with the transformation of Impressionism into Post-

Impressionism, because in his art "Cézanne thus showed how it was possible to pass from

the complexity of the appearance of things to the geometrical simplicity which design

demands" (*Roger Fry Reader* 83).

Fictive Temporal Experiences

Woolf took the paradigm shift in Post-Impressionistic design and applied it to *Mrs.*

Dalloway, where an intricate system of formal relations adds depth to the portrayed

characters and, furthermore, it shows the hidden spatiotemporal relations between

them. The structure allows Woolf to describe the temporal and spatial confusion that

exists within the self; her main characters are concerned with the present, they are

shown as situated in the here and now, but sudden transportations back to the past

frequently interrupt their present thoughts in "a series of loops that gives its specific

distension to the narrated time's extension" (*TN* 104). Woolf follows her characters in

their day-to-day activities and thus "manages to expose the profound in the quotidian"

(Lehrer 172) or, as Ricœur says, "the art of fiction here consists in weaving together the

world of action and that of introspection, of mixing together the sense of everydayness

and that of the inner self" (*TN* 104). Clarissa Dalloway is an ordinary woman on an

ordinary day and, although Woolf makes her a representative of a social group, she is

shown as having affinities with other characters from different classes. Woolf describes

life as it appears outwardly by giving an account of how a character is seen by another,

but she also gives a detailed psychological picture of the inner life with its moments of

insight as well as the deepest concerns and anxieties that are normally hidden in social conduct. How and to what effect the past influences the present becomes a major subject in *Mrs. Dalloway*; Woolf's post-impressionistic writing style makes explicit that there is "a potential in human experience for perceiving a time out of time, for overcoming the limits of actual life through apprehension of a different mode of being altogether" (Hussey 117). It is Woolf's aesthetic goal to point out that the self is never absolutely situated in the present but dispersed in time and space. Clarissa Dalloway's notion of being everywhere, not just "here, here, here,"[116] exemplifies how Woolf apprehends a reality behind appearances. She believes in a transcendent order beyond the self; that beyond appearances there exists an unchanging self, which has no name but can be intuited in special moments that allow access to an inner world that she describes as being normally "hidden behind the cotton wool of daily life."[117]

Fictive Refiguration of Time: Double Awareness through Memory

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf constructs a sense of past and present subjectivity through the memories of characters that allows each of them to imaginatively unite their past and present selves in their own minds. Clarissa herself is doubled into an interior and exterior self – her private self and her social self – and she cannot decide which one is the more real. Her memories of Bourton play a double role: they interrupt the present moment, restore her sense of identity by connecting the present self with her past youth, with the time before she became Mrs Dalloway. The decision to marry Richard instead of Peter still

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[116] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway,* 1925, ed. Stella McNichol (London: Penguin, 2000) 167; Abbreviation used in parenthetical references henceforth is *MD.*
[117] Virginia Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," *Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings*, ed., introd. Jeanne Schulkind (London: Chatto, 1976) 72.

unsettles her thoughts, "[f]or they might be parted for hundreds of years, she and Peter […] but suddenly it would come over her" (*MD* 7). "[C]ontrary to a Proustian return to the past, where the present seems to be temporarily effaced, the Woolfian memory process integrates the past and present in the search for a definition of selfhood."[118] Spoken or written phrases echo when remembered or reflected on by someone. Clarissa greets Peter by exclaiming "[h]ow heavenly it is to see you again!" (*MD* 44), followed by an evening letter that tells Peter "[h]ow heavenly it was to see him" (*MD* 169). Her words annoy him in that they bring the loneliness of his hotel-room to the forefront of his mind. The reflective movement of Peter's thoughts extends to imagine Clarissa's emotions and actions after he had left her that afternoon and to thoughts about his past. Roberts explains the dynamic of Woolf's recurring sentences that allow the mental movement backwards and forwards in time with the example of the strokes of Big Ben that mirror the experience that various characters have of time:

> "The leaden circles dissolve in the air," unites with each iteration a specific place with a given hour; with each repetition it also moves us forward along the stream of the June day. And as the leaden circles dissolve farther and farther out into space (like the circular ripples set in motion by a pebble thrown into a pond, or a shilling into the Serpentine), the present, the past, the future-London, India, Bourton – coalesce in the various streams of thought that form the fabric of the novel.[119]

Woolf seeks for a formal shape that could present the self as constituted through past and present selves and also to show an order that is beyond the self, to express something that exists beyond the limits of space and time. She found inspiration in the works of post-impressionist painters for whom formal design is the principal trademark

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[118] Suzanne Nalbantian, *Memory in Literature: From Rousseau to Neuroscience* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) 85.

[119] John Hawley Roberts, "'Vision and Design' in Virginia Woolf," *PMLA* 61.3 (1946): 835-847, at 840-1.

and, according to Roger Fry, its profound effect is in giving the onlooker – or reader in Woolf's case – a pleasurable aesthetic experience through the "recognition of order, of inevitability in relations." In post-impressionist works of art, meaning emerges from an intricate system of relations which are reconfigured through the aesthetic emotional response of the onlooker to the formal arrangements of the work rather than from passing on more kinetic "sensations or objects or persons or events" (Fry in Roberts 836-837). Memory stretches time from past to present, which repudiates clock time in favour of time lived and experienced in the individual mind. In this sense, Proust and Woolf support Bergson's idea that the mind has a reality of its own, where time is in flux and present only in the sense experience of the observer.

Irreconcilable Perspectives on Time

The manifold correlations, echoes and reverberations between the characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* provide a framework around each individual that shows them as being part of an architectural whole. The formal meta-structure of this whole is figured through the striking of Big Ben that "manifests the horizon of time by which all actual being is bounded," (Hussey 116-117) and, according to Showalter, it "acts as a temporal grid to organize the narrative."[120] Big Ben's clock time is the same for everyone, but the sound of the leaden circle of Big Ben is echoed by the bell of St. Margaret's that always rings two minutes after Big Ben. Hussey suggests that the belated bells of St. Margaret are a metaphor for individual time that works according to its own measure that "[i]f Big Ben

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[120] Elaine Showalter, introd. *Mrs. Dalloway,* 1925, ed. Stella McNichol (London: Penguin, 2000) xi-xlviii at xxx.

strikes clock time, the bell of St. Margaret's seems to sound lived time: it does not coincide with the authoritative strokes of Big Ben, but seems 'like something alive'" (Hussey 122). Big Ben's public and irrevocable chimes suggests that human chronological time must end with death, which Clarissa identifies as her own time, as she feels threatened by her recent illness.

Both mechanical clocks are accurate from their own point of view and each clock gives a correct measure of its own proper time. Big Ben measures time absolute, "indifferent, inconsiderate," and gives "first the warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable" (*MD* 52, 128). In contrast, St. Margaret's clock seems like a moody organism that is "shuffling in with its lap full of odds and ends, which it dumped down as if Big Ben were all very well with his majesty" (*MD* 193) and "the late clock sounded, coming in on the wake of Big Ben […] like the spray of an exhausted wave" (*MD* 140) or "like a hostess who comes into her drawing-room on the very stroke of the hour and finds her guests there already" (*MD* 54). The tension between bodily lived time and mechanical clock time arises from the workings of the mind that can change instantly between past and present, which explicitly emphasizes "both the *temporal* and *social dimension* of selfhood. As Ricœur has argued, the time of human existence is neither the subjective time of consciousness nor the objective time of the cosmos. Rather, human time bridges the gap between phenomenological and cosmological time."[121]

After leaving the house in the morning, Clarissa is immediately transported back to a crucial time in her youth at Bourton and to the memory of Peter Walsh and his ever-present pocket-knife. At the next moment, she reappears on a street in Westminster,

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[121] Paul Ricœur in Dan Zahavi, "Self and Other: The Limits of Narrative Understanding," *Narrative and Understanding Persons*, ed. Daniel D. Hutto, *Royal Institute of Philosophy*. Supplement, Vol. 60 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007): 179-201 at 180.

seen through the perspective of an onlooker and suddenly, Clarissa is flung back into the present by the sound of Big Ben. This is an example of the phenomena that Otto Rank described as a "clash between two worlds in which man attempts to live simultaneously, the natural world and the man-made world," (*Beyond Psychology* 13) and Woolf's doubling of clocks emphasises that there is a "the great discrepancy that exists between the time of the waking mind and that ticked off by clocks" (Hussey 121). The chiming of Big Ben is a constant reminder of mortality and the fact of death that temporalizes human beings is strongly felt by many characters.

Temporal Configuration: Resonances and Ruptures

Woolf takes over the idea of doubles from Stevenson and James but she develops further their ideas of the split self and the ghostly alter-ego.   Doubling appears as a structuring device for streams of consciousness and places; different minds are occupied with similar concerns and often present in the same locations: "[t]he unity of place, the face-to-face discussion on the bench in the same park, is equivalent to the unity of a single instant onto which the narrator grafts the extension of a span of memory" (*TN* 104). "A bridge is built between these souls both through the continuity of place and the reverberation of an internal discourse in another person" (*TN* 105).

Modernist fiction continues to experiment with the externalization and internalization of the double as a literary device in order to write about the psychology of the self, its relation to society and how society shapes the self. In a diary entry for 14 October 1922, Woolf writes that she intended *Mrs. Dalloway* as "a study of insanity & suicide: [...] Mrs. D. seeing the truth, SS seeing the insane truth. The pace to be given by

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the gradual increase of SS's insanity on the one side; by the approach of the party on the other" (Showalter xxvii). Woolf links the minds of characters by shared themes that exist in their thoughts and by similar or different reactions to phenomena. The fundamental affinity between Septimus Smith and Clarissa Dalloway emerges through their explicit awareness of being isolated from others and their textual kinship is substantiated in their reflections on loss and death. Both are characterized primarily through their distinctive modes of thought such that the description of their inner world "presents not the mimesis of a world, not even the self-conscious mimesis of a world, but the self-conscious mimesis of the *perception* and *constitution* of a world through minds that are also constituted in and through that world (ordinary minds on an ordinary day)."[122] This ordinary day in June 1923 is coloured by physical and spiritual death in the aftermath of the First World War: the shadow of the millions, who died in the war, and the threat of imminent death is felt by everybody; Clarissa "always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day" (*MD* 9). Peter's thoughts about Clarissa's recent illness are linked to the final stroke of St. Margaret's bells that toll "for death that surprised in the midst of life" (*MD* 54). In his view, Clarissa's decision to marry Richard Dalloway had "stifle[d] her soul," (*MD* 83) just as he had predicted at Bourton that her predilection for convention and propriety would bring about "the death of her soul" (*MD* 65). Septimus, on the one hand despairs about his inability to feel, that "human nature had condemned him to death" (*MD* 99) and, on the other, he completely repudiates the possibility of death by affirming that "there is no death" (*MD* 26).

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[122] Patricia Waugh, "Thinking in literature: modernism and contemporary neuroscience," in *The Legacies of Modernism: Historicising Postwar and Contemporary Fiction,* ed. David James (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012) 75-95, 79.

Both Septimus and Clarissa have a potential to perceive "a time out of time, for overcoming the limits of actual life through apprehension of a different mode of being altogether" (Hussey 117). Clarissa assuages her "horror of death" by following a transcendental theory in which death does not reduce the self to an ultimate state of nothingness but liberates something hidden, from "the recesses of the heart" (*MD* 74). Some core self disseminates through the world, partaking in other people and places, Clarissa hopes "that somehow in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other, she being part, she was positive, of the trees at home; of the house there […] part of people she had never met" (*MD* 9-10). Something hidden might transgress the borders of the body that in life isolate one being from another: she calls it "the privacy of the soul" (*MD* 139). Clarissa hopes that essence might continue to exist in other people, the "unseen part of us, which spreads wide, the unseen might survive, be recovered somehow attached to this person or that, or even haunting certain places after death […] perhaps – perhaps" (*MD* 167). Hussey writes that "Clarissa suggests an 'essence' that is somehow 'truer' than the 'apparitions' of it which are identities in the shared world," but he also states that "[t]he novel does not attempt to analyse what this essence might be" (Hussey 28). Whatever it is that remains after death, it is liberating and beyond pain, love or religion, which explains Clarissa's emotional response to Septimus's suicide, why "she felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away" (*MD* 204). To others, Clarissa appears blasé and, by putting on the mask of a cultivated and domesticated wife, she conceals the suffering that links her to Septimus. Her empathy with the dying Septimus is a bodily sensation that reconstructs his jumping out of the window, "[u]p had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes. There he lay with a thud, thud, thud in his

brain, and then a suffocation of blackness. So she saw it" (*MD* 201-2). Death emerges as a

possible solution to overcome the limits of the body, the isolation of the self in the body,

and Clarissa hopes that her theory could "explain the feeling they had of dissatisfaction;

not knowing people; not being known. For how could they know each other?" (*MD* 167).

Sally Seton mirrors Clarissa when she admits that knowledge is limited to speculation and

haphazard conclusions about others, "for what can one know even of the people one lives

with every day? [...] Are we not all prisoners?" (*MD* 211). Hussey explains that "[t]he

problem of identity is intricately bound up with that of knowing others, and because

relationships form such a constantly shifting and widening web of interconnections there

is no way of isolating one identity" (Hussey 28). It is true that one cannot live without

others and society, but it is equally true that the self is imprisoned in the body and

restricted in perception. In "A Sketch of the Past", Woolf describes the wall that is

between the self, the world and others; she imagines it metaphorically, as "lying in a

grape and seeing through a film of semi-transparent yellow" (65). Peter Walsh thinks in a

similar metaphor about the mind/soul that moves around murky waters but he also

acknowledges the need for catching up with the world:

> For this is the truth about our soul, he thought, our self, who fish-like inhabits deep seas
> and plies among obscurities threading her way between the boles of giant weeds, over
> sun-flickered spaces and on and on into gloom, cold, deep, inscrutable; suddenly she
> shoots to the surface and sports on the wind-wrinkled waves; that is, has a positive need
> to brush, scrape, kindle herself, gossiping." (*MD* 176)

Peter thinks of what is affecting our lives, individually and socially. Otto Rank aptly

describes how the mind is not restricted to processing phenomena intellectually, but is

also "actual living in and with the flow of events following its changing currents as we

swim along fully aware of its dangerous under-currents" (Rank 18).

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Clarissa's youthful ideas about identity are the result of the world's intricate inter-connectivity, which lets her believe in odd affinities, "that to know her, or any one, one must seek out the people who completed them; even the places" (*MD* 167). Clarissa fears death because she genuinely loves "life; London; this moment of June" (*MD* 3). It is Septimus "who kills himself, and who serves as Clarissa's double. He is linked to Clarissa through his anxieties about sexuality and marriage; his anguish about mortality and immortality; and his acute sensitivities to his surroundings, which have gone over the line into madness" (Showalter xxxvii). Clarissa's meditations on ageing and death are contrasted with those of Peter Walsh, who responds to the subject very differently. He attempted to recapture his sense of youth and virility by proposing to a young woman already married in India, but now he hopes that Daisy will reconsider the plan, because he fears that he might "fail to come up to the scratch" (*MD* 173). Although he is only six month older than Clarissa, the maid perceives him as being "elderly" and later, alone in his hotel room, and in his dream, Peter thinks of himself repeatedly as a "solitary traveller," who is "elderly, past fifty now" (*MD* 62, 63). His disappointment about unfulfilled ambitions, the waning of youth and virility, is compensated for by following women in the street, fantasizing about the possibility of a sexual adventure, and his compulsion of "constantly fiddling with the pocket-knife which symbolizes his masculinity" (Showalter xiv).

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, lost or denied names are significant markers for lack of confidence and Hussey observes that names have a positive as well as a negative side, "they can not only help form identity, but can also disperse it" (Hussey 32). For Clarissa the thought of being regarded as Mrs Richard Dalloway is a source of inner insecurity; she feels that she is "not even Clarissa any more," which gives her "the oddest sense of being

herself invisible" (*MD* 11). The name Dalloway alienates and threatens her sense of

selfhood, reducing her to an adjunct of her husband. The importance of a name as an

assurance for identity becomes clear when Richard exasperatedly insists that his name is

"Dalloway" and not "Wickham" (*MD* 67). Peter Walsh feels that his real self is hidden in a

secret name that he likes to think might be known to the young woman he follows in the

street, "his private name which he called himself in his own thoughts" (*MD* 57-58).

Although his parents had given him an unusual Christian name to make him unique

amongst the many men called Smith, Septimus cannot draw identity from it (*MD* 92).

The Dissolution of Identity: Madness as Reason's opposing Concept

Woolf sets the emotionally struggling Clarissa against the clearly insane Septimus,

who withdraws from reality and builds up an inner world of his own. Whereas Clarissa

can look back to her youth and sheltered life at Bourton, for her memory retains "the

sunnier landscape of the *belle époque*, in full knowledge of its ravaging in the war,"[123]

Septimus's disturbed perception of reality is an after-effect of wartime shell-shock; an

experience that has made it impossible for him to feel himself in the present or actualize

himself in relation to others. He is isolated in a timeless world in which he denies the

death of his friend Evans. Hussey explains that "Septimus's sense of the oneness of the

world is a refusal to admit death: if he does not recognize the passage of time, he need

not admit death" (Hussey 124). Initially, Septimus regards with equanimity his inability to

grieve, perceiving it as a correct masculine response, socially appropriate: "far from

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[123] Randall Stevenson, "Not what it used to be: nostalgia and the legacies of modernism" in *The Legacies of Modernism: Historicising Postwar and Contemporary Fiction,* ed. David James (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012) 23-39, 24.

showing any emotion or recognising that here was the end of a friendship, congratulated himself upon feeling very little and very reasonably" (*MD* 95). When numbness becomes his general condition, it devastates his relations with his wife and alienates him further; Septimus feels punished and cut off from life. Woolf describes him early on as "lately taken from life to death" and Septimus sees himself as a "drowned sailor" (*MD* 27, 74).

In this shattered world, Septimus feels disembodied, ghostlike; the world outside begins to disintegrate into unreality with no distinction between life and death. The loss of existential feeling annihilates his sense of selfhood: Septimus's "body is one more object in that world, bobbing up and down in the breeze along with the trees, feathers, and birds" (Hussey 14). As he walks among the living as a skeleton, his arm is nothing more than "a piece of bone" (*MD* 17). Septimus lacks an affective orientation towards the world to the point where his "unembodiment causes a serious disjunction between his perceptions and those of others around him" (Hussey 14). He cannot take interest in reality, although Rezia implores him to look at the playing children and at the sheep in the park, because "such attention would necessitate embodiment for him, and thus feeling and recognizing death" (Hussey 15). Instead of having a body that could experience what Damasio terms, the "feeling of a feeling" (*Descartes' Error* xiii), Septimus has lost his fundamental sense of self and cannot readjust to the world around him and lives "behind a pane of glass," (*MD* 96) or, to borrow an expression from William James, he feels "as if there were 'a wall between me and the world' or as if I were 'sheathed in India Rubber.'"[124] Septimus needs to build up a world of his own in order to protect himself, but instead of gaining relief, he suffers from the imagination of terrible guilt that

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[124] William James in Patricia Waugh, "Thinking in literature: modernism and contemporary neuroscience" in *The Legacies of Modernism: Historicising Postwar and Contemporary Fiction,* ed. David James (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012) 75-95, 84.

alternates with delusions of grandeur. He believes that he is in communication with the dead that "Evans was speaking. The dead were with him" (*MD* 102). He lives a mystical union between his self and all that is beyond the self and he has completely become part of the larger whole where the birds reveal to him the secrets of the world that "in the meadow of life beyond a river where the dead walk, how there is no death" (*MD* 26). Hussey explains that "in order to stave off the madness that Septimus feels this disjunction threatens him with, he translates his sensations into an inexpressible 'religion' of which he is the prophet, and gives meaning to a world that he sees might well be meaningless." (Hussey 14). His belief in transcendence is the insane mirror of Clarissa's theory and whereas Septimus can no longer relate to the actual world and he "sees himself as wholly essence, as *soul*, […] Clarissa remains rooted in her embodied, time-bound, actual life" (Hussey 124). Woolf exemplifies in the struggling characters of Clarissa and Septimus the conflict of living in a modern metropolis, where "[t]he deepest problems of modern life flow from the attempt of the individual to maintain the independence and individuality of his existence against the sovereign powers of society, against the weight of the historical heritage and the external culture and technique of life."[125] Septimus distorts reality to the point of madness because he feels threatened not only from within but also from without: although outwardly he appears to be physically intact, his sense of self has disintegrated and lost "that complex feeling of being rooted in the body and its sense of proprioceptive situatedness in a world" (Waugh 10). Drs Holmes and Bradshaw only treat the physical aspects of the body and as they cannot find anything wrong in that respect, there is no prescription other than rest and reflection in isolation. Bradshaw recognizes the severity of his condition, but turns Septimus into an

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[125] Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," 1903, in *The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History c. 1880-1900,* ed. Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst (New York: Oxford UP, 2000) 61-66 at 61.

impersonal case, because "doctors like Bradshaw deny the self" (Lehrer 173).

Consequently, he fails to see Septimus as an individual and simply groups him with similar

men who, affected by war, often threaten to kill themselves. Sir William Bradshaw is a

figure of authority with an interest in maintaining the social order and fighting the

uncontrollable that threatens that order. Septimus's madness is not seen as mental

suffering but as the loss of reason and "[i]t is this sense of proportion that sets [Sir

William Bradshaw's] entire professional and social life within monumental time" (Ricœur,

TN 106). The intellectualization of mental alienation as an illness of judgment or

understanding "could not conceive of delirium as being the manifestation of profound

emotional suffering, the way in which the madman could speak out – albeit deliriously –

to interpret his pain" (Ehrenberg 16). Septimus cannot express himself readily enough

within Bradshaw's consultation timeframe of "three-quarters of an hour," he can only

stammer "I – I – –" (*MD* 107, 108). "Bradshaw's imposition of his middle-class and

middlebrow ideology on his patients resembles imperialism in the violence it does to

existing ways of believing, thinking, feeling, and living."[126] Septimus is a morbid individual

who suffers in a seemingly healthy civilization and Bradshaw's goal is to adjust deviants

like Septimus to the accepted norm in the prevailing social order. Similarly to Septimus,

Richard wants to but cannot say that he loves Clarissa; instead of speaking the words, he

conveys his message symbolically by presenting her with a large bunch of roses. The

bourgeois ideology allows for substitutes. Clarissa can accept the roses as a token of love

and they make her happy, "she loved her roses" (*MD* 132). Rezia's roses are not

symbolic; she bought them out of pity when they "were almost dead already" (*MD* 102).

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[126] Molly Hite, "Tonal Cues and Uncertain Values: Affect and Ethics in *Mrs. Dalloway*," *Narrative* 18.3 (2010): 249-275 at 255.

In contrast to Septimus, who has lost his connection with the world, Clarissa's precarious sense of belonging to the world is compensated for by her participation in social rituals. She is part of a leisure-class where there is no economic struggle for existence and Woolf points out the social gulf between people as typified by the 'Dalloways' and the millions of 'Smiths.' Woolf succeeds in depicting the class isolation and the separate worlds of social reality, but moreover, she shows that emotional repression is a common characteristic. Zwerdling notes that the central concept in *Mrs. Dalloway* is concerned with "solidity, rigidity, stasis, the inability to communicate feelings."[127] Clarissa is the victim of the English class-system that compels her to live in the boredom of polite society and she is aware that she has had to pay a price for her complacent and secure lifestyle: by rejecting the adventurous Peter and marrying the dependable Richard, she relinquished the possibility for fulfilment in a passionate relationship for the social role of a society hostess. Although Richard has not been as successful in his career as was originally envisaged, Clarissa finds security as his wife and refuge in the shelter of their home where she can "crouch like a bird and gradually revive" (*MD* 203). The nuclei of Clarissa's social life are the parties, which are emblematic of Clarissa's drive to conform to the existing social order by restricting the guest list to the socially acceptable and beneficial people, but furthermore, the parties attest to Clarissa's creative will, which tries to "mak[e] order out of apparent disorder."[128] Her role as a hostess of social gatherings satisfies her inherent desire to construct her world by combining people who – in her view – should know each other:

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[127] Alex Zwerdling, "*Mrs. Dalloway* and the Social System," *Virginia Woolf and the Real World* (Berkeley LA: U of California P, 1986) 122.
[128] James Naremore, "A World Without a Self: The Novels of Virginia Woolf," *NOVEL: A forum on Fiction* 5.2 (1972): 122-134 at 123.

Here was So-and-so in South Kensington; some one up in Bayswater; and somebody else, say, in Mayfair. And she felt quite continuously a sense of their existence; and she felt what a waste; and she felt what a pity; and she felt if only they could be brought together; so she did it. And it was an offering; to combine, to create; but to whom? An offering for the sake of offering, perhaps. (*MD* 133-134)

Poor cousin Ellie Henderson mirrors Clarissa's fear of gradually becoming invisible in society. Although Ellie is also past fifty and belongs to the same social strata, her lack of money means that she will not add glamour to the party. Therefore, in Clarissa's opinion, Richard "did not see the reasons against asking Ellie Henderson," (*MD* 132) but Clarissa understands that Ellie's "three hundred pounds' income" is not sufficient to dress fashionably (*MD* 185). Seeing Ellie at the party, both Sally and Peter are united in their thinking that Clarissa was hard on people, which they had first noticed many years ago at Bourton in Clarissa's dismissive attitude towards a young woman who had a baby before she was married. Clarissa's social ambition ranges from people who might be able to foster her husband's career to people with money and aristocratic affiliations, "[s]he loved Lords; she loved youth, and Nancy, dressed at enormous expense by the greatest artists in Paris" (*MD* 194-5). The superficiality of ritualized social conduct and utility value is symptomatic of the alienation of the self from feeling and Simmel explains that the metropolitan person substitutes emotional conduct for rationality and mannerism, a significant shift "to a sphere of mental activity which is least sensitive and which is furthest removed from the depths of the personality" (62).

Memory unites Present and Past Selves

"Clarissa has an inherent desire to combine, in the hope of somehow discovering a revelatory order to the world. As this hope is perpetually defeated, the combinative instinct doubles on itself: her parties become 'an offering for the sake of offering, perhaps.'" (Hussey 50). Her self-esteem rests on being part of London's social scene as a facilitator who kindles, illuminates and socially creates by giving people a chance to meet and connect. Hussey continues to explain that Clarissa's urge to combine people is a characteristic activity for self-preservation; in socializing she can see her own reflection, through being with others Clarissa finds her identity. Her social function gives meaning to her life and, although Peter uses the term derogatively, it defines Clarissa's being:

> That was her self when some effort, some call on her to be her self, drew the parts together, she alone knew how different, how incompatible and composed so for the world only into one centre, one diamond, one woman who sat in her drawing-room and made a meeting-point, a radiancy no doubt in some dull lives, a refuge for the lonely to come to, perhaps; she had helped young people, who were grateful to her; had tried to be the same always, never showing a sign of all the other sides of her – faults, jealousies, vanities, suspicions […]. (*MD* 40)

This drawing herself together is necessary for Clarissa to balance her fear of invisibility against her public appearances. Each day, Clarissa has to draw herself together and assemble into her "diamond shape" (*MD* 41). According to Peter, Clarissa has the gift to make herself real to others with her "extraordinary gift, that woman's gift, of making a world of her own wherever she happened to be" (*MD* 83). Lehrer points out that we continually create our presence, "[t]his is what we all do every day. We take our scattered thoughts and inconstant sensations and we bind them into something solid. The self invents itself" (Lehrer 174). Woolf uses the diamond metaphorically; it is not only Clarissa's symbol for the unity of the self but it also denotes the moment of the seminal kiss she once received from Sally Seton. In her memory, the kiss attains a tangible quality,

"[a]nd she felt that she had been given a present, wrapped up, and told just to keep it, not to look at it – a diamond, something infinitely precious, wrapped up" (*MD* 38-39). The diamond stands for something obscured but pure, a symbol for the uncorrupted self that is buried beneath appearances. Clarissa thinks of Septimus's suicide as the heroic act of "defiance," for the preservation of something most precious, the thing that really matters (*MD* 202). The motive for suicide is "the resistance of the individual to being levelled, swallowed up in the social-technological mechanism" (Simmel 62).

Both Septimus and Clarissa also mirror other characters: Miss Kilman's repressed lesbianism mirrors Clarissa's fleeting lesbian experience with Sally Seton, in which Clarissa also mirrors masculine desire: "She did undoubtedly then feel what men felt. Only for a moment; but it was enough" (*MD* 34). The university-educated Miss Kilman, who is not allowed to lead an intellectual life in a male-oriented society, but has to content herself with teaching privately for a living, is the opposite of Clarissa and her leisurely life-style. The tension between the two women is class resentment on Miss Kilman's side, which prompts her to wish for Clarissa to be "in a factory; behind a counter" (*MD* 136). Clarissa rejects Miss Kilman, because she evokes an uncomfortable social awareness that fate had been fortunate:

> For it was not her one hated but the idea of her, which undoubtedly had gathered in to itself a great deal that was not Miss Kilman; had become one of those spectres with which one battles in the night; one of those spectres who stand astride us and suck up half our life-blood, dominators and tyrants; for no doubt with another throw of the dice, had the black been uppermost and not the white, she would have loved Miss Kilman! But not in this world. No. (*MD* 12-13)

Social conventions force Miss Kilman to deflect her desire for Elisabeth and project it onto objects she can safely devour, but even the pleasure of eating a pink éclair is denied to

her, whereas Clarissa can indulge her passion for gloves at any time. Social refinement

prevails and through reaching for her gloves, Elisabeth finally breaks away from Miss

Kilman. Gloves, shoes and dresses protect as well as extend the body and appear to

Clarissa more real than her body. Her torn green evening dress is a second skin which

Clarissa impulsively hides from Peter, "like a virgin protecting chastity, respecting privacy"

(*MD* 43). Symbolically, she protects herself with her scissors against Peter's pocket-knife.

Temporal and Spatial Experience

Woolf is interested in revealing the ordering principle that connects the two

different concepts of reality: on the one hand, each individual constitutes reality through

understanding relationships with others, and on the other, the world exists outside and

independent of the self. In connecting the two theories, Woolf aimed to reveal the hidden

pattern that lies behind the "cotton wool" in order to get at "some real thing behind

appearances" ("A Sketch of the Past" 72). Her metaphysical belief system acknowledges

an underlying connectiveness between our understanding of being in the world and the

world that exists outside us:

> I might call it a philosophy; at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we – I mean all human beings – are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of work of art. […] there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself. ("A Sketch of the Past" 72)

In *Mrs. Dalloway* the principal literary device that shows the relations between

the characters is their connection through a polarity that complements Woolf's view of

the self. Although Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Smith sometimes move in close

proximity to each other, they remain unaware of the other and never meet on the streets of London on that fateful day. Their separate movement emphasizes their different class memberships: Septimus belongs to the lower strata, whereas Clarissa's social relations mirror her status of being the wife of a member of the Parliament. By plotting them in a doubling mode, Woolf shows that Septimus and Clarissa as individuals belong to some kind of order beyond themselves. Although they are divided by class, they are connected by their thoughts, which appear as reverberations of phrases and in the image of the sun that appears in both minds.

The general prospect of life with all its imponderability is a constant source of terror for Clarissa. She is depressed by prospects of ageing and death, "the dwindling of life; how year by year her share was sliced," (*MD* 32) with the result that "narrower and narrower would her bed be" (*MD* 33-4). In moments that threaten her sense of stability, for example when Clarissa learns that she hasn't been invited to Lady Bruton's luncheon, a quotation from *Cymbeline* calms her fear of insubstantiality and social invisibility, "Fear no more the heat of the sun / Nor the furious winter's rages" (*MD* 10). Although Clarissa feels disturbed and compulsively returns to the past, she manages to keep her fears in check and to hold on to her sanity by slipping into her social self. Roberts explains that Clarissa and Septimus are "not separate and individualized characters, but opposite phases of an idea of life itself. Their reality consists not of themselves as persons, but of their relationship to each other as forms" (Roberts 837). On the afternoon before his imminent suicide, Septimus hesitates for a moment thinking that he need not do it and "did not want to die. Life was good. The sun hot" (*MD* 164).

Identity continually and psychologically expands and re-creates itself when the present and the past are juxtaposed, because every emotion or sensation deriving from "exceptional moments" – the intense images of scenes and objects that are retained in memory freshly through time – the past changes its shape continuously in response to the present forces. Thus, human identity is always in process without a final form in time and space. The flashes of illumination display a view of consciousness that establishes continuity of the past within the present.

In *Mrs. Dalloway,* Woolf reveals "the 'emotional significance in the [relationship between] time and space' by making time and space an integral part of the novel's form" (Roberts 840). Clarissa's calm, happy stream of consciousness, triggered by her looking at and smelling the flowers in a flower shop, is suddenly interrupted by the disruptive and uncanny appearance of a motor car, which sounds like "a pistol shot in the street outside!" (*MD* 14). The automobile invades both the city and the modernist text and signifies the changing experience of time and space. An example of time that stretches into space is Lady Bruton dozing on a sofa after the lunch she has just shared with Richard and Hugh. At first, her thoughts wander back to scenes from her youth and then follow Richard and Hugh as they walk across London. Ann Banfield explains that while she dozes "the text presents to us their simultaneous existence far from her, never threatened by her temporary extinction in a snore."[129] Woolf describes the gradual diminishing of Lady Bruton's consciousness during the process of falling asleep as the thinning of a spider's thread:

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[129] Ann Banfield, *The Phantom Table: Woolf, Fry, Russell and the Epistemology of Modernism,* 2000 (New York: Cambridge UP, 2006) 221.

> And they went further and further from her, being attached to her by a thin thread (since they had lunched with her) which would stretch and stretch, get thinner and thinner as they walked across London; as if one's friends were attached to one's body, after lunching with them, by a thin thread, which (as she dozed there) became hazy with the sound of bells, striking the hour or ringing to service, as a single spider's thread is blotted with rain-drops, and, burdened, sags down. So she slept. (*MD* 123)

The stretching and sagging of the thread imaginatively visualizes the receding of Lady Bruton's consciousness at the same time as Richard and Hugh gain spatial distance. Lady Bruton's thin thread "is consciousness itself, attached by immediate memory to the receding lunch guests, by sensation to the sounds of afternoon; its stretching and unwinding measures the increasing distance of sleeper from world" (Banfield 221). During the time it takes her to fall asleep, Lady Bruton's mind is still connected to the two men until the sudden moment when her mind is erased by sleep and the thread snaps. The narration combines the movement of Lady Bruton's mind in time and space with the physical movements of Richard and Hugh.

In this novel, Virginia Woolf extends her interest in memory, a theme which Proust had reintroduced a few years before. Whereas Marcel's involuntary memory needed stimulation from specific sensory reminders, Clarissa Dalloway experiences intermittent instances of being transported back in time. When memories of her past flare up, the present moment is overpowered by the thoughts of her past. Similarly to Proust, Woolf continues with the aesthetic shaping of the self in text and, by reading *Mrs. Dalloway* as a fictional autobiography, it becomes obvious that she is acutely aware of the invasiveness of social forces, a theme that had been introduced by Rousseau. Woolf emphasizes the embeddedness of each individual in their social strata by describing the protagonists' obsession with clothes, dress codes and manners. All these performative aspects of the

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self point to Woolf's belief that the self is shaped out of culture and has to respond to cultural and social pressures; the feeling of the need to conform is pervasive and is internalized in the same way in which speech is constantly being internalized as thought by characters, who seem to echo the thoughts of the narrator as well as those of other characters. Woolf reworks the double theme: rather than exteriorizing the good and bad aspects of a self, as was the custom in the nineteenth-century literature of the double, her doubling(s) seeks to explain damaging aspects of controlling social and medical authorities that divided people into sane or insane beings: Clarissa and Septimus embody a psychological doubling, the ego and alter-ego, the externalisation of acceptable and non-acceptable aspects of a self.

In the next section, the double theme enters into a further evolution that started with Rousseau's narcissism and then intensifies into a pathological paranoid self: the portrayal of solipsistic and paranoid minds in literature moves closer to a postmodern view of self as doubled, fragmented and split.

Section 3: Emotional Blindness, Narcissistic Doubling and Paranoia

Vladimir Nabokov, asked in an interview with Alfred Appel, about the role of the Doppelgänger motif in his fictions, dismissed the notion that he consciously employed a doubling of characters in his novels; he insisted that "[t]here are no 'real' doubles in my novels," and even claimed that "[t]he Doppelgänger subject is a frightful bore."[130] It is

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[130] Alfred Appel Jr. and Vladimir Nabokov, "An Interview with Vladimir Nabokov," *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature* 8.2 (1967): 127-152 at 145.

certainly true that Nabokov's characters are not just simple double figures in the traditional sense: in *Lolita* and *Pale Fire* there are no ghostly split-selves or psychological exteriorised evil selves, as was the convention in nineteenth-century Doppelgänger literature. Instead of doubles that embody opposed aspects of a single individual, Nabokov's doublings are mirrors of narcissistic desire. Appel states that "[t]he unified, definitive self is a joke to Nabokov, for the infinite possibilities of its development are circumscribed by the warped mirror in which we perceive ourselves and the world."[131] The warped mirror of the deluded mind obfuscates reality: it severs the self from the world and others and replaces reality with an artistic order. Nabokov is concerned with the solipsistic self that is preoccupied with the centrality of his own consciousness that creates an individually aestheticized reality with the artist-as-hero self at its centre: the protagonists in *Lolita* and *Pale Fire* suffer from insatiable desires that are outside of accepted norms and, consequently, they try to pacify their consciousness and cover up guilt by turning to artistic pretensions in the hope that a transfiguration of their actions into an artwork could exonerate their deeds. Humbert Humbert constructs a moral plane for his obsession by associating himself with well-known artists and his main argument of defence is that he is not a "brutal scoundrel" but a poet, who writes transcendent poetry of nymphet love, which is special because "it belongs to another class, another plane of sensitivity."[132] In his obsession with John Shade's poem "Pale Fire" Charles Kinbote appropriates the intended meaning – Shade's reflection on his life – and claims that it is the glorification of himself as the king and of the kingdom of Zembla. His elaborate and monomaniacal interpretation is full of homosexual innuendos and the fantasy world

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[131] Alfred Appel Jr., "'Lolita': The Springboard of Parody," *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature* 8.2 (1967): 204-241, at 224.
[132] Vladimir Nabokov, *The Annotated Lolita*, ed. Alfred Appel, Jr. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970) 133, 168; Abbreviation used in parenthetical references henceforth is *L*.

becomes Kinbote's surrogate for his sad reality. Ellen Pifer writes that "only in his dreams and his wildest Zemblan fancies does mad Kinbote manage to transmute the 'drab prose' of his unhappy existence into 'strong and strange poetry'."[133]

Doublings and Mirrors in Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955)

Although all events and dialogues are narrated in the idiosyncratic voices of Humbert and Kinbote, the author Nabokov is never absent. In his introduction to *The Annotated Lolita*, Alfred Appel observes that "[w]hen perceived by the reader, the involuted design of each novel reveals that these characters all exist in a universe of fiction arrayed around the consciousness of Vladimir Nabokov, the only artist of major stature who appears in Nabokov's work" (*L* lvi). The novels reveal Nabokov's fascination with literal and metaphorical doubling and mirroring techniques, which produce "layer after tantalizing layer of images, shapes and grades of associations and connections that create alluring patterns of meaning and significance."[134] Similarly to Woolf's structural patterning, "verbal cross references" weave an intricate design that deliberately challenges the relationship between the reality of life and the narrative that tells about that life (Appel, *L* lix). In *Pale Fire*, the attentive reader can discern an intriguing pattern of interlacing themes and details between the lives and works of John Shade and Charles Kinbote and in *Lolita*, Clare Quilty's farcical depravity mirrors Humbert's obsession; they are united in their artistic, but ultimately self-centred ambitions.

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[133] Ellen Pifer, *Nabokov and the Novel* (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1980) 113.
[134] *Vladimir Nabokov's Lolita: A Casebook,* ed., introd. Ellen Pifer (New York: Oxford UP, 2003) 9.

The magnitude of verbal play and supposedly serendipitous repetitions creates a matrix of mirrors – a stylistic device that makes the reader conscious that every page is pronounced and self-conscious art, evident in word-games: the metaphors, puns, anagrams, palindromes and alliterations parody the traditional double literature and, according to Michael Wood, the narration divided into different narrative planes turns the novels into textual games: "*Lolita* […] is a novel pretending to be a memoir with a foreword; as *Pale Fire* is a novel pretending to be a critical edition of a poem."[135] The prevalent novelistic form is parody and Appel enumerates the different types of form that can be discerned:

> *Pale Fire* is a grotesque scholarly edition, while *Lolita* is a burlesque of the confessional mode, the literary diary, the Romantic novel that chronicles the effects of a debilitating love, the Doppelgänger tale, and in parts, a Duncan Hines tour of America conducted by a guide with a black imagination, a parodic case study. (Appel, "The Springboard of Parody" 213)

Reading Nabokov's novels as textually involuted games gives pleasure only to readers who are willing and able to play the game, so the interplay of text and audience avoids the Scylla of looking for authorial intention as well as the Charybdis of undecidability; this interpretation leads Wood to claim that "[t]he author is not dead in Barthes' sense: [he is] just crazy, or conspiratorial, like the narrators we are looking at" (Wood 118). In *Lolita* and in *Pale Fire*, the solipsistic protagonists pursue "a fantasy kingdom, an absolute realm of being where […] reality loses 'the quotes it wears like claws.'"[136] Clearly, Humbert Humbert's narcissistic mind projects his desires onto the

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[135] Michael Wood, *The Magician's Doubts: Nabokov and the Risks of Fiction,* 1994 (London: Pimlico, 1995) 103.
[136] Ellen Pifer, "Shades of Love: Nabokov's Intimations of Immortality," *Kenyon Review* 11.2 (1989): 75-86 at 76-77.

world, which solipsizes and distorts others; his delusions come close to insanity, whereas *Pale Fire's* Kinbote appears to have crossed the border and gone beyond the pale of sanity: his paranoid mind builds its own solipsistic world so that he constantly has to defend his fantasy kingdom against the asserted reality of others. Anything that does not fit his self-made universe becomes a threat against his self.

Humbert's imaginary memoir parodies the confessional tradition: in the style of De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, the putative editor, John Ray, Jr. subtitles the text in his foreword as "the Confession of a White Widowed Male," (*L* 5). Similarly to Rousseau's *Confessions*, *Lolita* is also permeated with self-analysis, self-castigation, and self-justification, but it parodies De Quincey's preface of 1821 in which he does not acknowledge any guilt. John Ray Jr.'s critical assessment condemns H. H. as "a shining example of moral leprosy" (*L* 7). Humbert writes his defence for an imaginary trial, in which he imagines readers in different roles and consequently, his tone shifts and he frequently "addresses his readers in a whole array of voices: respectful, diffident, confidential, insulting. He pictures us as his judge and jury" (Wood 113). Humbert is a double in himself, as his name Humbert Humbert suggests, who writes his confession as "Humbert's novelisation of Humbert's life" (Wood 118). The doubling of his name immediately alludes to Humbert's narcissistic ego that reduces the outside world and others to a reflection of his self, his dreams and desires:

> There was a double *bed*, a mirror, a double *bed* in the mirror, a closet door with mirror, a bathroom door ditto, a blue-dark window, a reflected *bed* there, the *same* in the closet mirror, two chairs, a glass-topped table, two *bed* tables, a double *bed*." (*L* 121, emphasis added)

Appel describes the room at *The Enchanted Hunters* as a hall of mirrors in which the

reflections of the double-bed is an externalization of Humbert's state of mind; the

multiplied image of the bed becomes a haunting presence in "a bewildering little prison

of mirrors, a metaphor for [Humbert's] solipsism and circumscribing obsession" (Appel,

"The Springboard of Parody" 205).

Regularly, however, Humbert also addresses the reader as his double, thereby

inviting him to share his point of view or, at the very least, to be drawn into unwitting

complicity with it. The narration shows Humbert's compelling manipulation of his

audience: he turns his unknown readership into something familiar, first by exclaiming

"my reader," (*L* 76) then adding successively more personal touches that range from an

intimate "comrade," (*L* 169) to the capitalization of the word reader to give the

impression of a name, "O, Reader, my Reader," (*L* 205) and finally, he invokes Baudelaire

in his appellation "Reader! *Bruder*!" (*L* 264). This implicit allusion to the poem "Au

lecteur" that prefaces *Les Fleurs du mal*, in which Baudelaire accuses his readers of

hypocrisy, suggests a cautionary function: readers should stop pretending moral

indignation and acknowledge the alluring aspects of the protagonist's and his alter-ego's

depravity. Humbert and Quilty mirror the readerships' interest in voyeurism and the

pornographic and the textual titillation parodies and appears to pander to their penchant

for explicit pornographic content. Baudelaire, who was identified with the Decadent

Movement in France in the late nineteenth century, mirrors Humbert's own decadence,

which is even more prominently mirrored in his nemesis Claire Quilty. Frosch explains the

decadent reflections in *Lolita*:

> Described as the American Maeterlinck, Quilty is a fin-de-siècle decadent and thus the final, weak form of Humbert's romanticism; his plays reduce the themes of the novel to the sentimental and the banal; the message of one of them is that "mirage and reality merge in love" (*L* 203). Quilty [...] incarnates the ironies of Humbert's quest: to possess is to be possessed; to hunt is to be hunted.[137]

The figure of the decadent dandy personifies self-centred opulence and the wealthy playwright Quilty fits this profile: he indulges in eccentric unsavoury hobbies, such as gluttony, sexual and sartorial excesses. But he remains coarse in comparison to Humbert, who appears as a parody of Baudelaire's metaphysical dandyism that elevated aesthetics to a cult for the satisfaction of refined passions: Humbert's prose is arty when he displays a "dandyish taste for alliteration" (Wood, 112).

For the justification of his deeds, Humbert connects himself with artists as the precursors of his obsession in order to convince the reader that his desire is nothing out of the ordinary. He claims, in the manner of Rousseau, that "I have but followed nature" (*L* 137). He also mentions Poe, who had married his thirteen year old cousin and he will later, on two occasions, add the name "Edgar" as his middle name, and he refers to Dante, who "fell madly in love with his Beatrice when she was nine" as well as Petrarch, who "fell madly in love with his Laureen" when she was twelve (*L* 21). Humbert insists that the large age difference between man and nymphet is a natural condition, and therefore, his desire is – again invoking Rousseau – the desire of a natural man. He even employs anthropological arguments to justify the intercourse between different generations as an existing phenomenon: "marriage and cohabitation before puberty are still not uncommon in certain East Indian provinces. Lepcha old men of eighty copulate with girls of eight, and nobody minds" (*L* 21). Humbert seeks to excuse by giving skewed

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[137] Thomas R. Frosch, "Parody and Authenticity in *Lolita*," *Vladimir Nabokov's Lolita: A Casebook* (New York: Oxford UP, 2003) 39-56, 47.

examples: it is not known when, or in what form exactly, the historical couples actually had physical contact. Besides the far-fetched exotic examples, Poe was twenty-six when he married Virginia and not thirty-seven as Humbert was in the year when he first met Dolores. Humbert seeks to prove that moral judgment is a question of attitude and that the mores of Western society mark him as "an unfortunate victim of an arbitrary social convention."[138] Only for a moment does Humbert's argument convince, but on reflection, the reader is left with the suspicion that Humbert tries to deceive himself and others. He presents his desire for nymphets as a primordial condition that is the prerequisite and prerogative of all artists; consequently Humbert's objectifying and appropriating Dolores is justified when he turns her from daemon into muse by stating "and what is most singular is that she, *this* Lolita, *my* Lolita, has individualized the writer's ancient lust, so that above and over everything there is – Lolita" (*L* 46-47).

Stylization of the Self and Others

Humbert's exaggerated aestheticism is comparable to the modern sensibility termed Camp, which Susan Sontag describes as the modern dandyism of the twentieth century. Camp understands the world through stylization: it transforms the natural into the unnatural, which has the effect that "things-being-what-they-are-not … Camp sees everything in quotation marks."[139] The rhetorical framing with quotation marks imbues things with desire-driven significance and turns them into products of culture that stops them from being merely things-in-themselves. Nabokov concedes that novels are self-

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[138] Nomi Tamir-Ghez, "The Art of Persuasion in Nabokov's Lolita," *Poetics Today* 1.1-2 (1979): 65-83, at 76.
[139] Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp," *Against Interpretation and Other Essays,* 1961 (London: Deutsch, 1987) 279-280, 280.

contained artificial worlds but he also points to the phenomenological nature of reality in which a work of literature exists "like a picture in a picture" (Appel, 'Interview with Nabokov' 136). Nabokov asserts that "there is an average reality, perceived by all of us, but that is not true reality: it is only the reality of general ideas […] Average reality begins to rot and stink as soon as the act of individual creation ceases to animate a subjectively perceived texture."[140] In stressing the "act of individual creation," he comes to understand reality as "one of the few words which mean nothing without quotes" (Nabokov in Connolly 15). A metaphysical statement in *Pale Fire* confirms this world-view and Nabokov actually uses quotation marks: "the basic fact that 'reality' is neither the subject nor the object of true art […] creates its own special reality having nothing to do with the average 'reality' perceived by the communal eye"[141] (*PF* 106). Camp, as a cultural phenomenon, expresses the human agency in creating reality and understands "Being-as-Playing-a-Role. It is the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theatre" (Sontag 280). It follows that identity can only be understood as "a kind of artistic construct, however imperfect the created product" (Appel, *L* lvii). Furthermore, Humbert Humbert's and Charles Kinbote's exhilarating aesthetic stylizations are directed at readers; both attempt "to dethrone the serious, to annihilate hierarchies of judgement" (Waugh, *HS* 43).

Humbert's affinity with Poe is obvious when he re-enacts Poe's poem 'Annabel Lee' and it adds a poetic notion to his obsession with "a certain initial girl-child," also named Annabel, who is Lolita's precursor (*L* 11). His grief following Annabel's sudden death mirrors Poe's lamentation for his cousin, who also died very young; Humbert makes

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[140] Nabokov in Julian W. Connolly, *A Reader's Guide to Nabokov's* Lolita (Boston: Academic Studies, 2009) 15.
[141] Vladimir Nabokov, *Pale Fire*, 1962, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973) 106; Abbreviation used in parenthetical references henceforth is *PF*.

it explicit that this tragic event ended his emotional development. From that moment on, he is haunted by her ghostly presence which prevents him from entering into an adult erotic relationship. He grows into Humbert, the misanthropist and marries the adult Valeria, who is for him merely "a soothing presence, a glorified *pot-au-feu*, and animated merkin," with one important, albeit short-lived attraction, that is to say for "the imitation she gave of a little girl" (*L* 27). But as soon as the impression of "little girl" has worn off, he realizes that he has married "a large, puffy, short-legged, big-breasted and practically brainless baba" (*L* 28). Humbert's cynical and angry narration clearly accuses Valeria of deceit; he presents himself as the victim of a lewd woman and makes a strange excuse that claims innocence and corruption at once, "I, on my part, was as naïve as only a pervert can be" (*L* 27). A "naïve pervert" is a strange oxymoron that gives a partly comical and partly unsettling effect, but is indicative of Humbert's complex negotiation between his mental struggle with the moral and psychological issues that conflict with his desire: there is a "great tension sustained between Humbert's mute despair and his compensatory jollity" (Appel, "The Springboard of Parody" 211). Rhetoric is the mask behind which Humbert hides moral responsibility by interpellation directed at his audience asking to "[i]magine me, reader […] masking the frenzy of my grief with a trembling ingratiation smile." (*L* 249)[142] He sometimes slips into a comic role that puts the joke on him, which emphasizes his alleged innocence, but more often, he tries to blot out the cruelty of his actions by seeking approval from outside himself: he appeals to readers' complicity with his "verbal vaudeville" (Appel, "The Springboard of Parody" 211). Humbert ridicules others, especially women, with dark eloquence and stylish snobbery.

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[142] Interpellation in the sense that Nabokov anticipates the Althusserian concept of interpellation: Humbert hails the reader to accept his condition as natural and, possibly to identify and recognize that they also might share his desires.

His reduction of an adult woman to a girl-child clearly deprives Valeria of identity and his

aside shows that he deprecates women as such: "(in whom I see, maybe, the coffin of

coarse female flesh within which my nymphets are buried alive)" (*L* 177). According to

Humbert's design, Valeria is turned into a laughable figure when she no longer functions

in her role of "the stock character she was supposed to impersonate" (*L* 29). His

description of Valeria reflects society's hypocritical evaluation of women, which oscillates

between the female viewed as either childlike or monstrous. In either case, the myth of

woman as 'other' presents an intractable problem with the effect that it denies women

the faculty of reasoning and consequently, it justifies male dominance and validates male

superiority over them. Thus, it becomes possible for a male, confused by female

behaviour, "to substitute an objective resistance for a subjective deficiency of mind;

instead of admitting his ignorance, he perceives the presence of a 'mystery' outside

himself."[143] Earlier on, Humbert had stated that he is cursed with a special sensibility that

divides females into normal girls and nymphets; he suffered in a "world [that] was split. I

was not aware of not one but two sexes, neither of which was mine; both would be

termed female by the anatomist" (*L* 20). For Humbert, a woman is something aberrant

and abominable *per se*, and his potentially flattering comparison of Charlotte Haze's

features to Marlene Dietrich immediately becomes a sardonic critique of both women.

Charlotte is described reservedly in a double negative, she is "not unattractive," but

nevertheless, she is only a "weak solution of Marlene Dietrich" (*L* 39), which "is a brilliant

and dismissive metaphor, since it manages to turn both Charlotte and Marlene Dietrich

into chemical concoctions" (Wood, *The Magician's Doubts* 23-24). Deprecating others is

Humbert's first strategic step in his self-defence: his sneering protects him from entering

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[143] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* 1949, ed. H. M. Parshley (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1972) 285.

into authentic relationships with women and justifies his callousness. Through his use of

language, alternating between elegant but misogynistic irony and insincere contrition,

Humbert controls the narrative: his goal is to win the readers' sympathy.

Not only Valeria's, and later Charlotte's positioning is assigned by Humbert, the

misogynist, but he also imagines for himself different roles: "Humbert the Terrible

deliberated with Humbert the Small whether Humbert Humbert should kill her or her

lover, or both, or neither" (*L* 31). Furthermore, Connolly argues that Humbert's solipsism

excludes his actual role as a husband and that his phrase "the Humberts" refers only to

himself:

> Normally one would think that the phrase 'the Humberts' would refer to the couple,
> Humbert and Valeria, but the ensuing comment on the debate between Humbert the
> Terrible and Humbert the Small leads to another possibility, that the phrase refers solely
> to Humbert and his warring impulses. This would be consistent with his fundamental self-
> absorption. (Connolly 79)

Humbert's self-obsession knows only its present state and is blind to others, which

excludes him from social relationships and prevents empathetic knowledge. After Valeria

had revealed that there is another man in her life, Humbert cannot recognize the taxi-

driver in their presence as her paramour. This foreshadows Humbert's blindness towards

Quilty as the man to whom Lolita is attracted. Because Humbert lives in a universe of

fiction, he constantly misjudges and misperceives others and himself. Lacking a unified

self, his many disguises reflect his desires and megalomania: opposite Lolita he appears in

his "adult disguise (a great big handsome hunk of movieland manhood)," (*L* 41) and calls

himself "Humbert le Bel," (*L* 43) and thinks of himself as "the glamorous lodger" (*L* 51).

Humbert often refers to himself in the third person so he can shift agency to another

Humbert: he is not responsible, it was the other, "Humbert the Cubus [who] schemed and reamed" (*L* 73). By splitting off the unsavoury part of his personality, Humbert attempts to "create the impression that it was not he, but the 'other' in him who stealthily fondled Lolita, who plotted the crime" (Tamir-Ghez 81). Moreover, Humbert assigns to his body an eerie agency of its own; instead of saying "I", he uses synecdoche to deflect moral agency: "my glance slithered," (*L* 41) "my hand creep up," (*L* 48), and finally, on the bed in the hotel room with Lolita, his fingers metamorphose into "tentacles," which suggests animal-like qualities (*L* 132). Tamir-Ghez suggests that "[t]he split is between body and mind, and the body is presented as acting on its own, against the inclinations of the soul, or, as he himself summarizes it: 'While my body knew what it craved for, my mind rejected my body's every plea'" (81). Humbert feels haunted by his urge to break the taboo and fears that his cravings are the "forerunners of insanity" (*L* 20).

His prolonged craving for Lolita turns him into "Humbert the Wounded Spider," (*L* 56) who then becomes a defeated "Humbert the Humble" (*L* 57) after Lolita had rejected his advances. In his delusion he thinks of himself as having "all the characteristics which, according to writers on the sex interests of children, start the responses stirring in a little girl: clean-cut jaw, muscular hand, deep sonorous voice, broad shoulder" (*L* 45). In repeatedly pointing out the attractiveness of his "manly looks" (*L* 55), Humbert appears sickly conceited and consequently, the judgement of his appearance remains questionable, especially when he describes his set of teeth early on as "a cesspoolful of rotting monsters behind his slow boyish smile" (*L* 46). Whether the description of his teeth is simply a metaphor for his moral depravity, or his actual dental condition, or both, is unclear, but will later be confirmed in both senses, when Humbert describes a serious dental operation, which had left him with "only a few upper and

lower front teeth" (*L* 293). That the only healthy teeth he retains are his canines, points

to Humbert's dark and predatory nature, which also emerges in a sinister metaphor that

describes his eye in close proximity to Lolita; his eye becomes an aggressive weapon, a

"bared eyetooth" (*L* 50). Part of Humbert's delusion is claiming the power of

omniscience and omnipotence that makes him the epicentre of the Haze household. He

imagines himself as an inflated pale spider who presides by "sitting in the middle of a

luminous web and giving little jerks to this or that strand" (*L* 51). In this regard,

Humbert's egotism resembles the spider who spins his cobweb out of "materials

extracted altogether out of [its] own person."[144] In an allegorical debate between the

spider and the bee, Jonathan Swift sets the modern writers' claims to superiority in a

satirical parable and personifies the moderns in the figure of the spider. Like the spider,

who feeds on other creatures and uses his digestive products for his architecture,

Humbert's conceited ignorance (attributes that are personified as father and mother of

the deity Criticism in Swift) obliterates the value of others in his narrative.

To reconcile his grandiose self-image with his puny reality, he needs the

affirmation of other minds that mirror back his monstrously inflated ego, or it will be

proven that he is merely a pathetic individual. Sass explains the absurdity of self-

enclosure in a separate world where the solipsist is "[c]aught up in the intensity and

seriousness of his own scrutinizing effort […] thus cutting himself off from any possibility

of effective action, of real discovery, or of meaningful communication with his fellow

human beings" (Sass 73). Humbert fails miserably in his eerie game of mental

deduction: after he had wrongly concluded that Lolita was not in the house but

immediately heard Lolita's voice, he is turned into a deflated spider. Humbert the

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[144] Jonathan Swift, *The Battle of the Books and Other Short Pieces,* ed. Henry Morley, *Project Gutenberg* EBook, n. pag.

Spider, who draws other creatures into his web, is an appropriate image for the traps

that Humbert concocts for Lolita. As grandeur alternates with self-accusation in the

text, Humbert's peculiar sardonic eloquence produces intriguing and amusing effects,

but also an unsettling disgust in the reader. Moral questions are raised only to be

immediately covered by Humbert's justifications, which show that he is indeed "a vain

and cruel wretch who manages to appear 'touching'" (Nabokov in Wood 107).

The Blindness of Desire in an Over-Aestheticized Solipsism

Since the death of Annabel, Humbert had had to live with her haunting presence,

"until at last, twenty-four years later, [he] broke her spell by incarnating her in another"

(*L* 17). The suggestion, or at least his implicit understanding of it, is that the trauma of

losing Annabel has fixed his sexual desires on pre-pubescent girls. He claims that his first

love affair has damaged him and catapulted him out of time. At the time, he was

Annabel's peer, but afterwards he "found [him]self maturing amid a civilization which

allows a man of twenty-five to court a girl of sixteen but not a girl of twelve" (*L* 20).

Again, he is confused about his place in time: he is not twenty-five but thirty-seven at the

time he meets Dolores. His obsession with finding another Annabel leads Humbert to

seek her in girls' features that are characteristic of what Humbert coins "nymphets" (*L*

18). But what are *nymphets*? In her introduction *to Vladimir Nabokov's Lolita: A

Casebook*, Pifer explains the etymology of the word and its special connotation in the

novel as something supernatural and restricted in growth:

> [t]he word *nymphet*, which Nabokov was proud of contributing to the English language,
> hints at the dire consequences this imaginative transformation has for the child. [It has]

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many associations with myth, particularly the wood or water sprites of Greek mythology and religion. (9)

Pifer then cites Johnson and Coates, who explain the meaning in entomological terms, as "'an immature stage of a hemimetabolic insect' which, unlike a butterfly, 'does not undergo complete metamorphosis'" (Pifer 9). Time is arrested and Humbert lives in a fantasy where time is enchanted; his transformation of the twelve-year-old Dolores Haze into a bewitching nymphet reminds one of Rousseau's ideal objects: instead of mortal women, Rousseau preferred the nymphs of nature, who became his "celestial amours" (*CONF* 398). Nabokov stresses the affinities between Rousseau and Humbert when he has Humbert refer to himself as Jean-Jacques Humbert. Humbert's self can wear many masks and choose many roles, but for him, nymphets must remain static, which mirrors his endeavour to keep Lolita in the present immature stage of development, through his artistic pretensions that attempt "to fix once and for all the perilous magic of nymphets" (*L* 136). It is not Humbert himself or other men who are seen to be dangerous, but it is the nymphets themselves, and he has therefore to protect himself by controlling them.

Humbert's terminology underscores the exotic and disturbing quality of nymphets, but this term also indicates a stunted being. He claims that he can distinguish nymphets from ordinary girls:

> Between the age of nine and fourteen there occur maidens who, to certain *bewitched travelers*, twice or many times older than they, reveal th*eir true nature which is not human, but nymphic (that is demoniac)*. You have to be an *artist* and a *madman*, a creature of infinite melancholy, with a bubble of hot poison in your loins and a super-voluptuous flame permanently aglow in your subtle spine [...] in order to discern at once, by ineffable signs [...] the little deadly demon among the wholesome children. (*L* 19, emphasis by Tamin-Ghez)

Humbert's use of fairy-tale language suggests a mysterious, dark and dangerous

nature that only affects men with certain sensibilities: artists and madmen, two groups that

are compatible and even become synonymous in the concept of artistic madness seen as

god-like creativity. Nabokov mocks the Nietzschean idea of *Dionysian* madness that

rebukes morality in favour of a powerful "transfiguration of genius and the world of art; in

order to glorify themselves, its creatures had to feel themselves worthy of glory; they had

to behold themselves again in a higher sphere […] This is the sphere of beauty."[145]

However, that does not mean to say that, as Martin Green argues, *Lolita* contains a

straightforward utilitarian moralistic message: Nabokov "energetically avoids every

suspicion of the ordinary, of the obvious, of the morally or intellectually banal."[146] For

Nabokov, the artist is a kind of hero, whose genius is above and beyond ordinary morality,

because his art is able to "confer immortality, of a consciously limited and conditional kind,

by 'singing' its subject, 'celebrating' the experience it describes, however painful or ignoble

that may be" (Green 371). The irony of *Lolita* is the failure of Humbert's artistic aspiration:

the book is not written in the spirit of "an ethical openness to the other,"[147] it is not, as

Humbert declares, "about Lolita" (*L* 255), but about his own demons, the anguish and

delusion he suffers as a self-diagnosed "nympholept." He celebrates himself as the

narcissistic subject of his art. The narcissistic transference of his desires on to Dolores

distorts the real world of adults and children and perverts their relationship. As Lolita,

Dolores is no longer human but becomes a mythical being, a figment of Humbert's

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[145] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner* (New York: Random, 1967) 44.
[146] Martin Green, "The Morality of Lolita", *Kenyon Review* 28.3 (1966): 352-377 at 353.
[147] Patricia Waugh, "Creative Writers and Psychopathology: The Cultural Consolations of 'The Wound and the Bow' Thesis" in *Madness and Creativity in Literature and Culture,* ed. Corinne Saunders and Jane Macnaughton (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 177-193, 192; Abbreviation used in parenthetical references henceforth is *WP.*

imagination. Nabokov parodies the narcissistic desire to arrest time in making Humbert

Humbert an inverted double of Oscar Wilde's Dorian Gray. The wish to remain forever

young is displaced in Humbert, who desires that time will not pass for Lolita so that she will

never outgrow her "magic nymphage" (*L* 176). But even Humbert must admit that time

passes for everyone, that "she would not be forever Lolita. The word 'forever' referred only

to my own passion, to the eternal Lolita as reflected in my blood" (*L* 67). He contemplates

a monstrous incest scenario that would generate Lolita doubles for his entire life (*L* 176).

Thus, Humbert tries to fix the image of his nymphet onto a definite developmental stage

that denies Lolita's autonomy; she is only of interest to him as long as she conforms to "his

fantasy of the nymphet – a fairytale 'girl-child' who must 'never grow up'" (Pifer 9). Time is

the enemy and if it were possible, Humbert would keep his "aging mistress" (*L* 192) in a

deep-freezer with an expiry label that dates "around 1950" (*L* 176).

Anxiety and Moral Responsibility

Nabokov's protagonist foreshadows a trend in the general belief that emerged "in

the 1960s and '70s when art and mental disturbance seemed closely linked."[148] Alvarez

describes the revival of the Dionysus myth as a "new and disturbing" development, in

which madness becomes a device for the liberation and renewal of the self. Waugh

argues that the myth of the artist mirrors contemporary anxiety and expresses the

ubiquitous social resistance to an instrumental rationality that purports to offer an escape

from "the iron cage of rationality." (Waugh, *WP* 181). The myth became powerful by a

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[148] Al Alvarez, "The Myth of the Artist" in *Madness and Creativity in Literature and Culture,* ed. Corinne
Saunders and Jane Macnaughton (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 194-201, 194.

consensus of public and artists "that the work and the life are not only inextricable but also virtually indistinguishable" (Alvarez 195-6). Against the magical power of nymphets, Humbert declares himself to be helpless and, as one of their victims, he becomes one of the "nympholepts" (*L* 19). There appears to be a method in Humbert's madness in that he replaces responsibility and free will by admitting mental illness, because "insanity places the madman outside the realm of ethical responsibility – legally, the mad are not held responsible for their actions" (Waugh, *WP* 183). In his writing, Humbert may seek to embrace creative madness as an excuse for what he did to Lolita, but as Alvarez concludes, there is no therapeutic remedy in writing because it merely churns up sickness and perversely gratifies through repetition. Humbert's declaration that he is not the only sufferer who is overpowered by "some immortal daemon disguised as a female child" (*L* 141) is a strategy that seeks to exonerate his actions and to absolve him from moral responsibility. Similarly to Rousseau's self-justificatory convolutions, Humbert's excuse is that nymphs are a fetish and that he cannot control himself *vis-à-vis* their seductive power; they condemn him to live a "life of pederosis" (*L* 57). In meeting Dolores Haze, Humbert rediscovers the image of Annabel; he instantly identifies her as "my Riviera love peering at me over dark glasses. It was the same child" (*L* 41). In resurrecting and replicating Annabel in Lolita's body, Humbert enters a mythical world of "awe and delight," with himself in an imagined role as "the fairy-tale nurse of some little princess" (*L* 41). His blindness to the real American child Dolores is convenient, because it allows him, as he intimates to the reader, "to ignore Lolita's states of mind while comforting my own base self" (*L* 289). From his first emotional response to Dolores, Humbert confuses time, identity and his younger self with his present self. He thinks that Dolores "had been safely solipsized" as Lolita on the Haze sofa (*L* 62) but, viewed from her perspective,

Humbert had "condemn[ed] her to the solitary confinement of his obsessional

shadowland" (Appel, "The Springboard of Parody" 207**).** After Humbert had gained full

control over Lolita in the hotel room at "The Enchanted Hunters," he takes on the role of

a poet and becomes an "enchanted traveler" *(L* 117, 168). Humbert's artistic pretext

obfuscates his desire to possess her and since desire precludes a necessary detachment,

he cannot perceive her non-conceptually, or in Kantian terms 'disinterested' as the child

she really is.

Ironically, Lolita's first step to free herself from Humbert will be her encounter

with Quilty, the author of a play with the title "The Enchanted Hunters" (*L* 202). When

Quilty follows them on their journey, Humbert will indeed experience a nightmare and

turn into a "hunted enchanter," as was foreshadowed in Miss Pratt's misnomer of Quilty's

play (*L* 198). Humbert contemplates obliteration of Lolita's autonomous identity by

drugging her so that he might possess her in an inert state on their first night in the hotel:

her unawareness of the act would stop time for her, keep his conscience clean, and fit his

earlier fantasy of an "intangible island of entranced time where Lolita plays with her likes"

(*L* 19). Only with one difference: Humbert wants to play with her, whilst he forces time to

stand still for Dolores. His warped sense of time and place displaces the actual child, the

person whom he cannot see but through the eyes of desire. His idea of Arcadia, where

nymphets dwell and time stands still is the key to understand Humbert's crime, which "is

to lock this girl out of *her* history, to shut this lively but not exceptional persona away

from *her* time and *her* place and *her* peers (Wood 116, emphasis added). In a lucid

moment, Humbert almost realizes that he actually "sees very little of Lolita through the

haze of his obsession" (Wood 115). He briefly acknowledges the difference between the

real person and his fantasy: "What I had madly possessed was not she, but my own

creation, another fanciful Lolita – perhaps, more real than Lolita; overlapping, encasing

her; floating between me and her, and having no will, no consciousness – indeed, no life

of her own" (*L* 64).

Humbert puts forward a more convincing theory about what had started his

perversion. Similarly to Rousseau's account about the loss of his childhood innocence

when he was disbelieved and wrongly accused, Humbert asks the reader "to believe that

Annabel prefigures Lolita; that the interruption of his affair with Annabel at just the

wrong moment caused his fixation on little girls, opened the obsession into which Lolita

will fall" (Wood 119). The damage he suffered in his adolescence caused an on-going

urge for pre-pubescent girls; a pattern of obsession that he cannot escape; repeatedly, he

tells us that he suffers from mental breakdowns. When Humbert diagnoses himself, he

probably gives a correct assessment, which results in a paradoxical situation: if he is a

madman who "is sane enough to identify his affliction," his lucid awareness could testify

to his sanity (Wood 120). Humbert's rhetoric and his artistic pretensions alternate

between the glorification of his guilt and despondency, which puts a veil between the

avowed honesty of his confession and the ethical implications of his actions; it raises

moral questions in the reader's mind about responsibility: can Humbert be exonerated,

even though he denies others the freedom to be themselves and does not notice the

suffering he inflicts on them? He is lucid enough to occupy both the role of patient and

analyst in one person and claims that he was able to hide from others "his real sexual

predicament" (*L* 36).

The game of manoeuvring these roles mocks the psychiatric profession, which

mirrors Nabokov's repeated attacks on Freud and psychoanalysis. Furthermore, the

devilish delight in subverting analysis lets Humbert appear as "slightly crazy, as well as

very funny," but also sinister and shocking as in the connection between psychotherapist

and rapist in his aside to the reader, "(as the psychotherapist, as well as the rapist, will tell

you)" (*L* 115). Humbert seems to say that he has his share in both good and bad and his

exaggerated self-conscious assessment of his character can convince the reader through

its twists and turns to the effect that "he really is saying what he pretends he is only

pretending to say" (Wood 120). Apart from the Foreword with Ray Jr.'s excessive

moralizing, Humbert's continuous discourse mutes others by his exclusive control over

the narration, which mirrors his impulse for attaining power over others.

Mirroring can also produce humorous effects in order to deflect from the

seriousness of an action, as in Humbert's prolonged fight scene with Quilty, but more

importantly, doubles and mirrors are Nabokov's aesthetic strategy for the conveyance of

his ethical outlook that imbues his work with deep moral resonances without Nabokov

having to employ crude didacticism. In a letter to Edmund Wilson, Nabokov defends his

position against narrow-minded criticism that reduces the meaning of his book to a

depiction of social phenomena and advises that "[w]hen you do read LOLITA, please mark

that it is a highly moral affair and does not portray American kulaks."[149] Appel also sees

that there is an intended morality, which is not expressed in overt statements; however,

"*Lolita* is a moral novel in the fullest sense. Humbert is both victimizer and victim, culprit

and judge. Throughout the narrative he is literally and figuratively pursued by his Double,

Clare Quilty, who is by turns ludicrous and absurd, sinister and grotesque" (Appel, "The

Springboard of Parody" 225). Nabokov's moral message is that Humbert is guilty of

extreme narcissism, but that he leaves the moralizing to Humbert, who is marred with

solipsistic blindness that reduces people to "constituent elements of his own designs,

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[149] *Nabokov-Wilson Letters: Correspondence between Vladimir Nabokov and Edmund Wilson 1940-1971*, ed. Simon Karlinski (London: Weidenfeld, 1979) 298.

designs that he believes to be artistic" (Connolly 39). Humbert uses certain deeds and characteristics of Lolita to twist his arguments and to deflect his guilt. Finding out that Lolita is not a virgin alleviates his guilt and it seems ironic that after Humbert's slow stalking of Lolita, it is she who seduces him – at least this is what Humbert claims had happened – but he also states mysteriously that "she was not quite prepared for certain discrepancies between a kid's life and mine" (*L* 136). He might not have raped her in the strictest sense, but there remains a palpable uneasiness that he might have misread her advances; even his ensuing frantic fantasy of redecorating the hotel dining room with murals is full of disturbing and violent images, which end with the sinister line that evokes the pain he has inflicted on Lolita: "stinging red, smarting pink, a sigh, a wincing child" (*L* 137). Wood points out that "[t]he larger effect of the games in *Lolita* is to make the text, or anything resembling a text, into a metaphor, an image for what is readable and misreadable in the world" (Wood 104).

In the second half of the novel, Humbert projects his self-reflexive narcissism on to a pursuer, who will in turn become the pursued. The shadow of Quilty's car follows Humbert and Lolita around and Humbert will later address Quilty as his double. Otto Rank speaks of the mirror and the shadow "as images, both of which appear to the ego as its likeness" (Rank, *The Double* 10). Claire Quilty is not only a name that makes a pun on 'clearly guilty' and a figure for the projection of Humbert's guilt, but according to Appel, he is also "a parody of the psychological Double" (Appel, *L* lxiii). Appel summarizes that *Lolita* is a game of doublings in which Quilty is "both a parody of the Double as a convention of modern fiction, and a Double who formulates the horror in Humbert's life" (Appel, "The Springboard of Parody" 213). The shadow of the unknown pursuer obsesses Humbert's thoughts, he suspects that "another Humbert was avidly following Humbert

and Humbert's nymphet" (*L* 219). Ironically, he decides to dismiss his suspicion as a

figment of his persecution mania, although it will turn out that there was indeed another

"heterosexual Erlkönig in pursuit" (*L* 242). After Humbert learns the identity of this

pursuer, Quilty doubles as his imaginary evil fugitive brother, whom he is "free to trace

[…] free to destroy" (*L* 249). After detecting in various hotel-registers Quilty's traces in

sophisticated allusions and word-plays, Humbert acknowledges that "his type of humor

[…] the tone of his brain, had affinities with my own" (*L* 251). He notices other similarities

in sexual taste and appearance: Quilty prefers young girls, (and boys), has a purple

bathrobe and a peculiar way of interlacing his speech with French expressions (*L* 296,

299-300).

Nabokov attacks the convention of the good and the evil, the dual selves of the

traditional Doppelgänger fictions. Humbert undermines the doubling by reversing the

person in question when he describes himself as having ape-like features: he is "lanky, big

boned, wooly-chested", has "thick black eye-brows," (*L* 46) and an "ape-ear" (*L* 50).

During their confrontation, Quilty also calls Humbert "you ape, you" (*L* 300). Frosch

lucidly points out that "an ape is not only a beast but an imitator" and both characters are

mirrors in the "matrix of doubleness," where "the double serves as a second-order reality,

or parody. The double Quilty parodies Humbert who parodies Edgar Allan Poe" (Frosch

46). The maze of mirrors holds the animal Humbert captive, as the phrase "legal captivity"

in John Ray Jr.'s Foreword had suggested (*L* 5). In his Afterword, Nabokov remarks that

his inspiration for writing *Lolita* came from "a newspaper story about an ape in the Jardin

des Plantes who, after months of coaxing by a scientist, produced the first drawing ever

charcoaled by an animal: this sketch showed the bars of the poor creature's cage (*L* 313).

Similarly to the ape in the Jardin des Plantes, Humbert sits in the cage of his narcissistic frame of mind and cannot get beyond what separates him from the world of others. In order not be the only ape in that cage, he perceives in Dolores ape-like features: she has "long-toed, monkeyish feet," a "monkeyish nimbleness," and he will later buy "a bunch of bananas for my monkey" (*L* 53, 60, 215). Humbert draws Dolores into his cage, but he is dimly aware that he has damaged the child in his "obsessive dream of Lolita which captured the actual child and took her away" (Wood 115). It is the mind that designs the inner world and also explains the outer world, which emerges in John Shade's poem in his description of the visible phenomenon of a rainbow as a reflection caused by a thunderstorm in a different location. This reflection on the human condition lets Shade conclude that "we are most artistically caged" (*PF* 32).

Consequently, the shadow of the unknown pursuer becomes a haunting presence for Humbert and, after learning the identity of Quilty and his perverted sexual designs for Lolita, he sets out to pursue his nemesis. Humbert projects his own guilt onto Quilty, who becomes an ideal scapegoat for Humbert's qualms. But Humbert's weak effort to position himself as the slightly morally better of the two fails, because the novel's design refutes the dichotomy of good and evil and shows instead various levels of uncertainty. During their verbal confrontation they accuse each other of Lolita's corruption. Quilty denies that he had kidnaped Lolita, and his defence points back to Humbert when he claims to have "saved her from a beastly pervert;" Humbert insists on his "inner essential innocence" in his disturbed "poetical justice" poem, in which he condemns Quilty to death (*L* 300-2). Overall, Clare Quilty's deranged appearance and frankness in admitting that he likes to make private movies, so-called "sexcapades" repulses the reader.   He appears even more farcical when he hysterically tries to avert Humbert's wrath with

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bizarre offers of a freakish lady, the charwoman's daughters and granddaughters, his wardrobe and house, a photographic collection of "eight hundred and something male organs," and the final promise to be able to attend executions (*L* 300-4). Quilty's depravity presents an obvious mirror for Humbert's tormented conscience and in vilifying Quilty he seeks to exonerate himself: "Humbert would let some of us believe that when he kills Quilty [...] the good poet has exorcised the bad monster, but the two are finally not to be clearly distinguished" (Appel, "The Springboard of Parody", 229). During the ensuing confrontation, Humbert discovers that there are more similarities between himself and Quilty.

Humbert's identification with Quilty and his desire to purge himself becomes evident when he targets at his own sweater for shooting practice. The sweater is a powerful symbol for Humbert's desperate act of projection and "[i]t may well be true that in killing Quilty Humbert seeks to kill himself, or that part of himself he hates [...] Humbert's murder of Quilty is symbolically interpreted – as a paradigm for the process of art" (Pifer, *Nabokov and the Novel*, 107). Humbert kills Quilty for the abstract good of art – as he understands art as the basis of his existence – because "[o]ne had to choose between him and H.H., and one wanted H. H. to exist at least a couple of months longer so as to have him make you [Lolita] live in the minds of later generations" (*L* 311). The act of murder is turned into artwork and the horror of killing is undermined in Humbert's account of the fight with Quilty that ends in a comical jumbling of personal pronouns, "[h]e rolled over me. I rolled over him. We rolled over me. They rolled over him. We rolled over us" (*L* 301). The entanglement of their bodies, expressed as a linguistic confusion, adds irony to the bathetic description of Quilty's murder, which reaches its apogee in the bizarre chase around the house. The effect of Quilty's refusal to die is to

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render the idea of exorcism absurd "by his comically prolonged death throes, which […]

burlesque the gore and rhetoric of literary death scenes" (Appel, "The Springboard of

Parody" 231). The act of killing Quilty also parodies the traditional simultaneous deaths

of literary doubles: Humbert does not drop dead the very moment Quilty dies, but

immediately senses his failed attempt to make a sinister 'second self' responsible for his

immoral deeds. After he realizes that his guilt is morally non-transferable he knows that

he is inescapably trapped in and engulfed by it, such that "[f]ar from feeling any relief, a

burden even weightier than the one I had hoped to get rid of was with me, upon me, over

me" (*L* 304). The last words echo the earlier wrestling scene, but now there is no more

differentiation between the two men and instead of the shifting between 'him,' 'me' or

'us', he says merely 'me,' three times over. His own guilt is reflected back to Humbert,

which literally sticks to him, when his body is "all covered with Quilty" and his dead alter-

ego is maimed in a linguistic jumbling as "Quilted Quilty" and "Clare Obscure" (*L* 308).

Identity emerges not in the form of a simple duality or as "a neatly divisible self," but as a

"patchwork self" (Appel, *L* lxvi). Humbert is Quilty and vice versa, but Quilty is also a

separate character and not a mere projection of Humbert's confused mind, which makes

him into "that mind's nasty analogue, a material *semblable* and *frère*. He is an aspect of

Humbert's self-image which has got loose, seceded, and taken over a part of the plot"

(Wood 127).

Both Humbert and Quilty claim that they meant well and had no intention to harm

Lolita, which clearly is not true. Quilty poses in the mask of the good uncle and insists

that he "gave her a splendid vacation. She met some remarkable people" (*L* 300). He

conveniently leaves out that he is also, according to Lolita, "a complete freak in sex

matters, and his friends were his slaves" (*L* 278). Humbert hides behind a paternal role

and compares his concern with sick Lolita to that of "any American parent," but in his following sentence he reveals that her illness caused his inconvenience in that he had to give up "all hope of intercourse" (*L* 242). He even applies concealed force, disguised as parental care, to impose his sexual demands on her and tells us that whilst "thrusting my fatherly fingers deep into Lo's hair from behind, and then gently but firmly clasping them around the nape of her neck, I would lead my reluctant pet to our small home for a quick connection before dinner" (*L* 166). Factually, Lolita is his private slave and Humbert exploits her sexually and exclusively. By contrasting his deeds with Quilty, he tries to convince the reader that he is not quite as evil as the decadent Quilty, who wanted Lolita to participate in pornographic films and orgies. But his arguments remain unconvincing, considering that Lolita was free to leave when she disagreed with Quilty's proposal, whereas Humbert's threats held her in terror and captivity for two years.

Nabokov is highly conscious of the ways in which the imagination can distort the world, envelop a person in a solipsistic bubble, and impair the capacity for authentic relationships with other people. Nabokov implies that Humbert Humbert misuses the imagination to conjure up nymphets and that he claims madness in order to circumvent moral qualms in his misuse of Dolores: Humbert's desire wants to triumph over social reality with its moral code of forbidden relationships. In *Lolita,* Nabokov is preoccupied with the way in which the Nietzschean aesthetic of *Dionysian* madness that goes beyond good and evil is appropriated through the myth of the artist to exonerate and cover up personal responsibility. In that sense, he is exposing the darker side of the camp mentality. In *Pale Fire*, Nabokov develops this critique through an inverted mirror, reflecting on the Freudian reductionism that is used to perpetuate the irrationality of the myth of creative madness and the view of the artist as driven by

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excessively powerful instinctual needs. He desires to win honour, power, wealth, fame and the love of women, but he lacks the means for achieving these satisfactions. Consequently, like any other unsatisfied man, he turns away from reality and transfers all his interest, and his libido too, to the wishful construction of his life of phantasy, whence the path might lead to neurosis. (Freud in Waugh, *WP* 188)

Psychosis and Schizophrenia in *Pale Fire* (1962)

Pale Fire is explicit about the dangers of creating and entering deluded artistic world(s) that displace the real and substitute for authentic art. It shows not the artist but his critic as the madman, who is trapped in his delusions and resorts to a fantastic world he controls and is at its centre. Imagination seems to have a double-edged effect on mental health: it can express innermost ideas and concerns in an artistic context with a liberating and therapeutic effect that reasserts the self, but the artist also needs to be able to step back and leave his creation behind, otherwise he risks bending reality into a solipsistic fantasy. In a conversation with A.S. Byatt, Ignês Sodré refutes the idealized notion of madness as a prerequisite for an artist and proposes instead that "to create something you have to be at your sanest: that part of you is the part that creates."[150] With regard to Gustave Flaubert and Thomas Mann, Sodré sees madness not as an essential part of the artist, but as something that both writers were acquainted with and could transform successfully into art.

Whereas a certain degree of solipsism is a desirable prerequisite for creativity, when excessive fantasy takes over the mind, is becomes the hallmark of psychosis and disconnects the subject from reality. Reality comprises both what is outside, the external

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[150] A.S. Byatt, and Ignês Sodré, "On Writing Madness" in *Madness and Creativity in Literature and Culture,* ed. Corinne Saunders and Jane Macnaughton (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 202-221, 216.

reality and also the internal, psychic reality of an individual and if psychic reality no longer

relates to the external, the mind will suffer from paranoiac and schizophrenic states. The

epistemological centrality of the schizoid mind questions the ontological nature of the

real, thus reality itself starts to become problematic and challenging to such an extent

that epistemological processes are reified into ontological certainties. This solipsistic

creation of a reality apart is similar to the process of reading, when readers enter a

fictional world in which every detail must be of significance. With its cross-references

between its four parts and multiple identities of Kinbote, *Pale Fire* is explicitly about the

dangers of diegetic and non-diegetic interpretation and shows them as activities that lend

themselves to paranoia and delusion. When realities blur and one fictional world

impinges upon another, it also questions the ontological basis of our world.

In the Foreword, Charles Kinbote betrays his disturbed mind from the first page,

when he intrudes on the reader with his preposterous assumption that Canto Two is

"your favourite" (*PF* 13). His irrelevant comments on John Shade's poem "Pale Fire" are

either banal, "medium-sized index cards […] pink upper line […] fourteen light-blue lines",

or simply absurd, "[t]here is a very loud amusement park right in front of my present

lodgings" (*PF* 13). It is clear that the Foreword is not a disengaged critical appraisal of

John Shade's autobiographical poem; instead, the following pages show Kinbote's

bewildering mixture of self-centred objectives and his over-elaborate interpretation of his

relations to others. Kinbote believes that it is his prerogative to annotate the poem

because of his supposedly deep friendship with the celebrated American poet. The

reader starts to doubt the reality of a close bond between the two when Kinbote states

that the friendship was "precious for its tenderness being intentionally concealed" (*PF*

23). Kinbote also finds it unacceptable to share the work with "Prof. H. (!) and Prof. C.

(!!)" (*PF* 17). He gives no reasons, but the punctuation speaks of his indignation about possible outside interference that would jeopardize his appropriation of the poem and could rival his aberrant exegesis. Kinbote is well aware that the poem's meaning is solely in relation to John Shade's life, which is unacceptable for mad Kinbote, who "suffers from classical paranoia in all its three main forms, namely "delusions of grandeur" (he believes that he is the exiled king of Zembla, that the poem is about him), "erotic paranoia" (he is convinced of Shade's deep esteem: "John Shade valued my society above that of all other people," (*PF* 22) although Shade is merely benevolent towards him), and "persecution mania" (his fear of assassination).[151] Delusions of grandeur turn Kinbote into a parallel universe, a virtual reality.

Similarly to Humbert Humbert, Kinbote prepares the reader to acknowledge him in the mask of an exiled king by asking to "imagine […] a historical personage whose knowledge of money is limited to the abstract billions of a national debt; imagine an exiled prince" (*PF* 17). In advising his readers to imagine him in this way, he insinuates that the image is actually true and that the poem will reveal the mystery about his person. Nabokov challenges the notion of fictional reality by creating three imaginary worlds that interlink: the fictional reality of New Wyre in America in which the fictional country Zembla is known to exist, so it is not fictional on an intra-diegetic plane; but there is also another fictional Zembla inside Kinbote's mind with himself as "the Zemblan King, Charles the Beloved" (*PF* 62). This king leaves Zembla with "the Zemblan translation of *Timon of Athens*, which he takes with him all the way […] to New Wye, and on to the desolate log cabin," where Kinbote subsequently writes his commentary.[152] Charles Kinbote invents himself as king and Wood argues that "Kinbote's self *is* invented,

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[151] Brian Boyd, *Nabokov's* Pale Fire*: The Magic of Artistic Discovery* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999) 60.

[152] Brian Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991) 437.

precarious; that it has a past or has a double" (*The Magician's Doubts* 178). Kinbote

invented a mask to conceal an unhappy and unfortunate past and "Botkin is the past

Kinbote has peeled off" (*The Magician's Doubts* 179). The past double only rarely and

obliquely shines through the narrative and without much significance: in an explanation

of the Zemblan word Botkin "(one who makes bottekins, fancy footwear)" (*PF* 83); in a

personal experience evaluated as happy, which betrays an intimacy that overlaps the

Kinbote/Botkin construct, "(happily, Prof. Botkin, who taught in another department, was

not subordinated to that grotesque 'perfectionist')" (*PF* 125); a double is hinted at in the

question if the name Kinbote "was a kind of anagram of Botkin or Botkine" (*PF* 210).

More is revealed in the Index, which gives a strange prominence to the pale character of

Botkin, with descriptions that all allude to Kinbote and in parts (the V. and American

scholar of Russian descent), could even refer to Nabokov:

> *Botkin, V.,* American scholar of Russian descent, *894*; kingbot, maggot of extinct fly that once bred in mammoths and is thought to have hastened their phylogenetic end, *247*; bottekin-maker, *71*; *bot*, plop, and *boteliy*, big-bellied (Russ.); botkin or bodkin, a, Danish stiletto. (*PF* 240)

Wood explains that Bodkin is "the creature beneath the floor of Kinbote's double fiction"

(Wood 185).

In *Pale Fire,* Kinbote not only contends the position of John Shade, but actively

seeks to obliterate the primacy of the poet in order to impose the contents of his inner

world on Shade's poem "Pale Fire". Only the first few lines of his elaborate Commentary

are concerned with its autobiographical meaning in relation to Shade; immediately

Kinbote swerves from the waxwing in the poem to himself observing birds in New Wye,

and before the end of the page, he begins to connect the waxwing with "the armorial

bearings of the Zemblan King" (*PF* 61-2). From then on, the Commentary is merely the

pretext for an interpretation that Kinbote imposes on the text:

> By the end of May *I* could make out the outlines of some of *my* images in the shape his genius might give them; by mid-June *I* felt sure at last that he would recreate in a poem the dazzling Zembla burning in *my* brain [...] At length *I* knew he was ripe with *my* Zembla. (*PF* 66-7, emphasis added)

Kinbote seemingly justifies his appropriation of the poem by presuming that his

influence actually resulted in a priming of Shade, although he then coyly foreshadows his

role as interpreter, because the poem "cannot be regarded as a direct echo of my

narrative" (*PF* 67). Throughout the Commentary, it is in fact grandiosity that Kinbote

displays by repeatedly invoking modesty; moreover, he claims that he acted as the poet's

muse who inspired the poem: "the sunset glow of the story acted as a catalytic agent

upon the very process of the sustained creative effervescence that enabled Shade to

produce a 1000-line poem in three weeks" (*PF* 67). Kinbote draws the two texts even

closer together by asserting that they reflect each other:

> There is, moreover, a symptomatic family resemblance in the coloration of both poem and story. I have reread, not without pleasure, my comments to his lines, and in many cases have caught myself borrowing a kind of opalescent light from my poet's fiery orb, and unconsciously aping the prose style of his own critical essays. (*PF* 67)

Kinbote thinks that he is privy to the intended meaning of the poem by claiming to

have been Shade's confidant: "let me add in all modesty, he intended to ask my advice

after reading his poem to me as I know he planned to do" (*PF* 15). According to Kinbote,

the exegesis of the poem is clear, there cannot be "one doubtful reading" (*PF* 14). He

states as fact that his "own past intercoils [in the poem] with the fate of the innocent

author" (*PF* 16). It soon becomes clear that Kinbote expected to find his own fantastic

story, which he had told Shade over the few months of their acquaintance, transformed

into a paean of praise for Zembla and its king, that is Kinbote himself. Kinbote's "lonely

mind invents the fantastic landscape of Zembla, which mirrors the psychological state of

its self-styled 'king'" (Pifer, *Nabokov and the Novel* 113). The character Kinbote is set up

as a parody of the Freudian analyst in that he "draws exclusively from his own

repressions, obsessions, and desires in interpreting the latent content behind the

manifest material of 'Pale Fire', constructing a self-validating narrative aimed at his own

glorification and immortalization."[153]

The obstacle to Kinbote's possession of the poem and a rival for John's attention is

Sybil, who is her husband's true confidante. Kinbote regards her influence as

counterproductive to his designs and concludes that "she made him tone down or

remove from his Fair Copy everything connected with the magnificent Zemblan theme"

(*PF* 75). His statement presupposes that Shade had actually intended to use the Zemblan

story, but that it is due to Sybil's interference that John was dissuaded from including it.

It is the fame, the genius of Shade, as well as the utilitarian value of his poem that Kinbote

wants, not true friendship. Kinbote's obsessive desire to establish himself as a constant

presence is driven by his determination to make Shade the agent, who brings into being

what Kinbote desires most: the acknowledgement of his Zemblan fantasy kingdom.

Kinbote clearly harbours misgivings and deliberately aims to induce doubts about

Shade's genius by pointing out his physical lack of likeness to the ideal of Romanticism

that saw the reflection of great minds in graceful features. The elaborate description of

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[153] David G. Cohen, "My Potential Patients: Origins, Detection, and Transference in *Pale Fire* and Freud's *Case of the Wolf-Man,*" *Zembla,* online.

Shade's appearance makes Kinbote appear witty and turns Shade into a laughingstock. The picture of a "fleshy Hogarthian tippler of indeterminate sex," effectively denies genius and ends with ridicule, "[h]e was his own cancellation" (*PF* 23). Although Kinbote claims to have been the closest of his friends, his account betrays indifference to the person by mocking Shade's appearance and also shows his intent to diminish and undermine the artistic importance of Shade in relation to "Pale Fire". In the Commentary, Kinbote defends his usurpation of the text by a fantastically elaborated interpretation of each line that affects a metaphorical link between Kinbote, Shakespeare, and the title of the poem: Shakespeare's play, in which the moon stands for an arrant thief who snatches his pale fire from the sun, is comparable to Kinbote, who steals the lines from another man's work and interprets them to accommodate his delusion of grandeur. Kinbote wants pre-eminence for his Zemblan world and the poem to reflect what he had told Shade, therefore he has to construct "a symptomatic family resemblance in the coloration of both poem and story" (*PF* 67). Kinbote equates his real crime regarding the poem with his stylistic mimicking of Shade's scholarly writings. Although he has done more than just borrowing "a kind of opalescent light from my poet's fiery orb," he condescendingly confesses only to "unconsciously aping the prose style of his own critical essays" (*PF* 67).

Kinbote will use the poem as a vehicle for the transmission of his own narrative by covering the intended meaning – mature reflections on a poet's life. The last lines of his Foreword foreshadow the mad ambition for his Commentary:

> without my notes Shade's text simply has no human reality at all since the human reality of such a poem as his (being too skittish and reticent for an autobiographical work), with the omission of many pithy lines carelessly rejected by him, has to depend entirely on the reality of its author and his surroundings, attachments and so forth, a reality that only my notes can provide. To this statement my dear poet would probably not have subscribed, but, for better or worse, it is the commentator who has the last word. (*PF* 25)

Kinbote takes his conviction that the content must be what *he* wants it to be as an excuse for a mad crime: "Kinbote has literally, arrantly, stolen the poem […] and metaphorically stolen it too, since he wants to endow it with a meaning which is all his own" (*The Magician's Doubts* 180). After Shade's death, Kinbote feels a "bitter hot mist of disappointment" (*PF* 164) because the poem turns out not to be "[t]he complex contribution I had been pressing upon him with a hypnotist's patience and a lover's urge" (*PF* 232-233). Kinbote cannot accept that the poem reflects merely John Shade's autobiography and thoughts in verse-form; when he realizes that his world has been left out, he turns into Shade's "mad amanuensis" (Pifer, *Nabokov and The Novel* 112). Sass explains the disappointment as an effect of "the phenomenology of solipsism: solipsistic experience seems to demand the felt presence of an other consciousness who, in a sense (and paradoxically), seems to constitute the solipsist."[154] Because Shade has denied Kinbote's solipsistic fantasy, Kinbote takes his revenge.

Similarly to Humbert, who manipulates the reader with his absolute control over the diegesis, Kinbote attempts to control all stylistic parts of *Pale Fire,* including – more or less ingeniously – John Shade's poem. Although in the Foreword and Commentary Kinbote asserts his right as annotator, the texts betray Kinbote's chaotic mind and show his compulsion to impose himself on the text of the poem. The Index shows an even tighter grip by listing keywords that amount to an inventory of his solipsistic reality:

> Kinbote's egotism, never more comically to the fore than in the Index, explodes itself, explodes his pretext for surrounding Shade's poem with Zembla, but what does it matter,

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[154] Louis A. Sass, *The Paradoxes of Delusion: Wittgenstein, Schreber, and the Schizophrenic Mind* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP) 71.

he almost seems to think, here is Zembla, and nothing but Zembla, and he is its king. (Boyd, *Nabokov's Pale Fire* 65)

The index does not reference the ontological world of New Wye and its people, but subsumes everything and everybody in relation to himself under the entries "Kinbote, Charles, Dr." and "Shade, John Francis" (*PF* 242-3, 245-6). Naturally, most incidents mentioned under Shade's entry also emphasize Kinbote's agency and he even preposterously refers to Shade's poem as "their joint composition" (*PF* 246).

Paranoid Criticism

Criticks I saw, that other's names efface,
And fix their own, with labour, in the place;
Their own, like others, soon their place resign'd,
Or disappear'd, and left the first behind.[155]

Alexander Pope, Preface to Edition of Shakespeare (1725).

The antagonism between the poet and his critic is the Leitmotif in *Pale Fire* that Nabokov treats with irony by casting the critic in a paranoid role. The mad Kinbote is Nabokov's personification of a critic who usurps the role of the artist with ultimately dire consequences. Nabokov satirizes the collapse of the distinction between creative and critical writer and seems to agree with Matthew Arnold, cited by David Lodge, in that "[t]his view is antithetical to the view of criticism as complementary to creative writing, aiming at objectivity, striving 'to see the object as it really is.'"[156] Kinbote's blatantly aberrant interpretation that deliberately twists and turns the words of Shade's poem to fit his Zemblan fantasy becomes Nabokov's attack on New Criticism's literary theorists

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[155] Alexander Pope in Samuel Johnson, *Dictionary of the English Language,* 1786, 290.
[156] David Lodge, "Literary Criticism and Literary Creation" in *The Arts and Sciences of Modern Criticism,* ed. David Fuller and Patricia Waugh (New York: Oxford UP, 1999) 145.

and their attempt to divide the literary text from its creator by postulating that it is "a free-standing, autonomous object, containing meanings that are specific to the context provided by the text."[157] Nabokov points to the dangers of limiting criticism to merely contextual interpretation that shows no respect for the author: in completely ignoring Shade's autobiographical intention and by stating that the poem is really only a pale reflection of Kinbote's artistic genius, the Commentary is Kinbote's attempt "to sort out those echoes and wavelets of fire, and pale phosphorescent hints, and all the many subliminal debts to me" (*PF* 233). Kinbote's hubris parodies deconstructive literary critics who produce meaning by constructing their own tales out of a text and thereby adding to it "the product of [their] own ingenuity, wit, and resourcefulness in the exercise of semantic freeplay" (Lodge 146). The Commentary and Index neatly connect to and cross-reference every line of the poem, which could be interpreted as Nabokov's intention to carry Derrida's idea of 'play' to extremes; *Pale Fire* does not celebrate playfulness, there is a sombre undertone: Kinbote literally steals the poem and then imposes the might of his exegesis over the dead body of the poet. Kinbote is clearly an opportunist, but beyond that, he is a dangerous and deluded artist *manqué*. Lodge could be equally speaking of Kinbote's elaborately confused Zemblan story as he says of Derrida's work: "a kind of avant-garde literary discourse – punning, allusive, exhibitionistic, and teasingly provocative to those who are not simply baffled and bored by it" (146). Distaste for professional criticism shows in the figure of the paranoid Charles Kinbote and Nabokov implicitly critiques the tendency in modernism to put pressure on artists as well as on art

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[157] Stephen Matterson, "The New Criticism", *Literary Theory and Criticism: An Oxford Guide* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006) 171.

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critics as professional classes by imposing "collective expectations."[158] David Trotter

explains the symptoms of professional anxiety:

> Paranoia is a delusion of magical power. One of the curious side-effects of the professionalization which transformed psychiatric theory and practice during the concluding decades of the nineteenth century was a systematic analysis of the ways in which professional people go mad. Paranoia, the psychiatrists maintained, was the professional person's madness of choice. (7)

Kinbote replaces the reality of New Wye with numerous entries that build up a

genealogy and geography of his fantastic Zembla, but his last entry gives a mythical

account of Zembla without any context to other countries in the world, it becomes a

short and vague "distant northern land" (*PF* 248). Louis A. Sass calls the oscillation of the

mind between different realities the "'double bookkeeping' of schizophrenia, [in which]

the two worlds of experience differ according to their felt ontological status. One,

experienced as objective, is perceived in the normal fashion. But the other realm is felt by

the patient to exist only 'in the mind's eye'" (Sass, *Paradoxes of Delusion* 43). The reality

of the external world is acknowledged but is put in the service of the reality of the mind.

In contact with others, schizophrenics appear elusive, even uncanny, and in New Wye,

Kinbote appeases hostility towards him with polite smiles and by discounting it as

"nonsense" (*PF* 23). Others cannot penetrate and damage his self-esteem, because he

lives in the grandeur of "Charles the Beloved" (*PF* 62). The withdrawal into Zemblan

fantasy, where promiscuous homosexuality is the norm, frees Kinbote of his anxiety and

constraint that govern American reality, where "[a]t a level beneath his unshakeable self-

satisfaction he is aware of the intense dislike he generates around him for his

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[158] David Trotter, *Paranoid Modernism: Literary Experiment, Psychosis, and the Professionalization of English Society* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001) 7.

homosexuality and his megalomanic narcissism" (Boyd, *Nabokov's Pale Fire* 60). Zembla

is the exteriorized landscape of Kinbote's schizophrenia; his reality is blurred and

although he knows that he exists in the world of New Wye, he is also present in the world

of Zembla: as the former king, who is now in America and as the assassin Gradus/Botkin,

who sets off to kill the king, but who will kill the poet instead. The death of Shade is most

fortuitous, because it presents Kinbote with the opportunity to physically seize the index

cards, which reflects the depth of his desire for the completed poem and his belief that it

could substantiate his delusion and act as a textual proof that Zembla, and by extension

he as King of Zembla, actually exist. The substitution of meaning substantiates *his* world

and defines the limits of Kinbote's imprisonment within a chaotic life that forces him to

dream up a freedom and order beyond ordinary reality. Sass points out the paradox that

lies at the centre of schizophrenic solipsism: there is still a need for others, who are

willing to testify that the delusional world exists, which "undermines or contradicts the

solipsistic sense of power and security" (*Madness and Modernism* 300).

PART THREE: POSTMODERN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SELVES

Nabokov parodied the traditional double literature by putting his narcissistic and paranoid protagonists into a "matrix of doubleness" with regard to other characters. Lessing uses pervasive structural doublings that turn the text into a network, which makes the novel more than the sum of its component parts; it shows "the relation of the parts to each other."[159] A double reflexivity occurs "both structurally (insofar as the narrative is implicitly derived from preparatory notebooks concerned with attempts to write fiction)" and politically, because it is "thematically about Leftist politics […] exploring communism and its contractions, adopting a stance explicitly critical of war and Stalinism."[160]

Moreover, *The Golden Notebook* shows affinity with Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* in that both "overturn the "characteristic 'doubles' novel of the nineteenth century […] they explode the male doubles novel of the last century."[161] Woolf's protagonist thinks of herself as simultaneously being the Clarissa of the past and the Mrs Dalloway of the present, who is split into a private self and social self, but Lessing moves away from this earlier dualistic representation of the self to entertain a concept of self splintered into multiple roles and identities.

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[159] Lessing in an Interview with Raskin, 1969, in *A Small Personal Voice: Essays, Reviews, Interviews,* ed. Paul Schlueter (New York: Knopf, 1974) 51.

[160] Philip Tew, "Moving beyond modernism in the fiction of B. S. Johnson: charting influences and comparisons" in *The Legacies of Modernism: Historicising Postwar and Contemporary Fiction,* ed. David James (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012) 53-71, 64-5.

[161] Claire Sprague, "Multipersonal and Dialogic Modes in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Golden Notebook*" in *Woolf and Lessing: Breaking the Mold*, ed. Ruth Saxton and Jean Tobin (New York: St. Martin's, 1994) 3-14, 6.

Section 1: Doris Lessing's The Golden Notebook *(1962)*

In the nineteen-fifties, theoretical approaches to the self in its social-cognitive

context were preoccupied with developmental psychology and the concept of the

'relational self', in which knowledge about the self is linked with knowledge about

significant others and each linkage embodies a self-other relationship. William James had

already articulated that the self is fundamentally interpersonal (*The Principles of*

Psychology 1890) and the American psychiatrist Harry Stack Sullivan developed a theory

of psychiatry based on interpersonal relationships and he conceptualized that the self is

in fact an interpersonal self-system (*The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry* 1953). In the

nineteen-sixties began a counter-culture with the work of R.D. Laing and others on the

divided self; a self that is split into a suppressed authentic essence and an outer

inauthentic self-construction that conforms, or appears to conform to social expectations.

Both trajectories fed into a new socio-political concern with roles and performativity,

associated with the work of the sociologist Erving Goffman, who conceptualized the

presentation of self in everyday life as an on-going process of impression management in

which performance, interpretation and adjustment are altered to fit the particular social

situatedness of the individual.[162]

Lessing, however, can be seen to move beyond R. D. Laing's notion of the divided

self, which re-articulated the double in psychoanalytical/existential terms, drawn from

Sartre's reading of Hegel. Instead, she constructs Anna Wolf diachronically out of the

multiplicity of her different selves at different times, "the many selves Anna is in her own

name (e.g., 'the "Anna" of that time, 'that other Anna's eye is on me', 'the Anna who goes

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[162] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, 1959,* (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1969).

to the office', 'younger, stronger Annas', 'sick Anna'" (Sprague 5). The "other self" is in

fact a temporal self that is unified by her name, but Anna is also a subject without a

centre, who exists in many versions on several narrative levels; literally she is "a

composite of various socially constructed roles or positions that cannot be reconciled:

social self, political self, sexual self, gendered self, parenting self, artistic self."[163] The self

operates in multiple contexts and in each context the self is constituted differently,

because it is "caught within incommensurable language games only ever offering a

knowledge of the world relative to the scope of their conceptual frameworks."[164]

Wittgenstein introduced the idea of language games in 1951 in his *Philosophical*

Investigations, introducing a further dimension to the mid-century rethinking of self,

roles, performance and play, already seen at work in the context of Nabokov's writing.

According to Lyotard's reading of Wittgenstein, different sets of rules make up the whole

of who we are:

> A *self* does not amount to much, but no self is an island; […] even before he is born, if only
> by virtue of the name he is given, the human child is already positioned as the referent of
> a story recounted by those around him, in relation to which he will inevitably chart his
> course.[165]

Over the course of life, identity is built up and changed by taking up and leaving

frameworks; identity is made up by the different roles in which the self is socially situated

in different discourses, or what Lyotard calls "language games", at any one time. Because

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[163] Magali Cornier Michael, "Woolf's *Between the Acts* and Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*: From Modern to Postmodern Subjectivity" in *Woolf and Lessing Breaking the Mold,* ed. Ruth Saxton and Jean Tobin (New York: St. Martin's, 1994) 39-56, 48.

[164] Patricia Waugh, "Postmodern Fiction and the Rise of Critical Theory," *Companion to the British and Irish Novel 1945-2000*, ed. Brian W. Shaffer (Malden MA: Blackwell, 2005), 72.

[165] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,* 1984, *Theory and History of Literature* Vol. 10 (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1987) 15.

there is an indeterminate number of "language games" this experiential heterogeneity makes it potentially difficult for the self to reconcile its conflicting positions, a situation that "Lyotard calls the differend, which is the experience of incommensurability and the conflict that implies."[166] The term *differend* describes a situation that cannot be reconciled because it is characterized by a clash of absolute differences. According to Lyotard, the experience of incommensurability is connected to the sublime; in both cases, when language fails to represent what is essentially unrepresentable, the self is left without the possibility of expressing his or her own perspective or feelings. In this respect, Lessing writes about the dilemma of postmodern subjectivity and accepts formlessness as an alternative to "the traditional humanist notion of the centered, rational, self-determining subject" (Michael 40). While *The Golden Notebook* carries a modernist nostalgia for unity, it also shows a postmodern understanding of the fragmentation of the self.

Writing at this particular moment in 1962, Doris Lessing became a prophet of the crisis of the modern individual and to this effect, *The Golden Notebook* is a prescient novel which accommodates, for the first time, the sense of discontinuity in the self that came as a result of the dissolution of certainties, the loss of faith and the omnipresence of terror: the shadows of apocalyptic experience in a new age of global violence. It could be said that "Lessing introduces a theme she pursues throughout her career: the spiritual and moral bankruptcy of the West in its blind adherence to a narrow and instrumental concept of rationality" (Waugh, "Postmodern Fiction and the Rise of Critical Theory" 76). *The Golden Notebook* is positioned at a crossroads between late modernist and the emergence of postmodernist writing: Lessing shows a profound nostalgia for, rather than

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[166] Allen Dunn, "A Tyranny of Justice: The Ethics of Lyotard's Differend," *boundary 2* 20.1 (1993): 192-220 at 195.

rejection of, the great novels of the past, through Anna's wish to complete the modernist project by writing a book that is "powered with an intellectual or moral passion strong enough to create order, to create a new way of looking at life."[167] In her frame novel "Free Women", Anna adheres to realism and its strong moral attachment to values, mirroring Lessing's own reflection on herself as a writer. Lessing is aware of the difficulty of writing in the form of realism and yet she is reluctant to eschew its values; she discusses this conundrum in *A Small Personal Voice*, a collection of essays and interviews covering three decades. However, by embedding the modernist nostalgia for stability that grand narratives had promised in a postmodernist structure these narratives are implicitly questioned, which disrupts and undermines the various language games. The rules of modernism are broken by invoking the unpresentable in presentation itself and Lessing starts to formulate what Lyotard later describes as the postmodern sublime, where "the accent can fall on the power of the faculty to conceive, on what one might call its 'inhumanity' […] and on the extension of being and jubilation that come from inventing new rules of the game."[168] *The Golden Notebook* shows the failure of the old rules and the emergence of postmodern aesthetics, it sets up an inquiry "into new presentations" for the unpresentable. But instead of the sense of "joy" that Lyotard attributes to postmodern writers who wrote in the two decades after the publication of *The Golden Notebook*, Lessing, in the nineteen-sixties considered her novel a failure, because it reproduced scepticism without finding a solution to the chaos of competing narratives. In this sense, Lessing realized the impossibility of reconciling the different language games that make up a culture. The German philosopher Jürgen Habermas opposed Lyotard's

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[167] Doris Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, 1962 (London: Joseph, 1982) 80; Abbreviation used in parenthetical references henceforth is *TGN*.

[168] Jean-François Lyotard, "Answer to the question: what is the Postmodern?" *The Postmodern Explained to Children,* 1986 (London: Turnaround, 1992) 22.

postmodernism and argued for the need to continue the rationalist Enlightenment project of modernity. Art should provide reconciliation and Habermas insisted that the experiences of art must form a bridge over "the gap between cognitive, ethical, and political discourses, thus opening the way to a unity of experience" (Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* 72). Lessing's novel situates itself in the dilemma of whether to continue the project of modernity, or to become 'post'modern.

Lessing, among other intellectuals and writers, eventually dissented from the Communist Party because of growing disillusionment with Communist ideals, betrayed under Stalin's repressive leadership, but also rejecting a rationalizing modernity in spirit. The New Left Movement was inaugurated in the nineteen-sixties in England because of the failure of orthodox Communist Parties to come to terms with their own past, especially after they had learned about the brutality of the Soviet forces' retaliation against public protesters, who had rallied against Soviet-imposed politics in the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. In the view of many Western intellectuals, the authoritarian character of Stalin's communism had betrayed the values of humanism. Writing of the time of the post-Stalin 'thaw' (1954-55), Lessing describes her growing scepticism towards ideologies in general and in particular her torment when the horrific details began to emerge about the grim Russian reality: a newspaper snippet in the red notebook states that it was unknown "how many people were executed, imprisoned, sent to labour camps or died during months of interrogation in the great Soviet purges of 1937–39, nor whether a million or twenty million people are engaged in forced labour in Russia today. *Statesman"* (*TNG* 244).

Lessing conveys her intensely conflicted relationship with the British Communist Party in the aftermath of these events: her disappointment with the belief in Communism

as an inspirational force that unites people through its dedicated faith in humanity. The

short report that brought out the truth about the horror of the labour camps made it

impossible for Anna to accept the self-deceptive myths of Communist aesthetics any

longer and in the red notebook, she is shown moving towards a recognition that

Communists engage in a totalizing Lyotardian "language game" that seeks to explain

everything in a single grand narrative with the consequence that dissidents are

suppressed, excluded or wiped out.

Communism had failed to provide political answers to human misery, which

meant that the struggle for a sustainable existence had seemed to fall back on the

resources of the individual self for liberation. Retrospectively, Anna writes about her

informal identification with Communism in Africa as a moral obligation, but without an

ability to provide any unifying power to compose a self, "there were always two

personalities in me, the 'communist' and Anna, and Anna judged the communist all the

time" (*TGN* 87). Lessing seeks to explore the fictional problem of what kind of structures

a novelist can devise that might possibly transpose the complexity of individual

experience accurately into aesthetic form, without relying on the essentially linear form

of narrative fiction. The writer Anna Wulf mirrors in many ways Lessing's own concerns

as a female writer: she too is torn between the contradictions of her role as a woman and

her aspirations as an artist; through Anna, she tries "to understand and ultimately

transcend the biological and social expectations."[169]

As in the earlier novels, examined in this thesis, that foreground processes of

dissociation, the overarching leitmotif here is the psychological theme of splitting, but

here, dissociation is a deliberate strategy for survival, which is mirrored in the fragments

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[169] Roberta Rubenstein, *The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing: Breaking the Forms of Consciousness* (Urbana; Chicago; London: U of Illinois P, 1979) 5.

of the five notebooks which supposedly interrupt Anna's autobiographical novel. The

construct of the autobiographical frame novel presents a paradox in so far as the whole

structure of the novel becomes circular and this becomes evident to the reader towards

the end of the novel when Saul gives Anna the first sentence of "Free Women": the novel

that she will write, but which at this point, the reader has nearly finished reading. Lessing

thus remakes the self-begetting structure of Proust's novel, but confines it to a single

frame narrative.

The notebooks are a reification of Anna's fragmented consciousness; they

substantiate her frustration with and the conflicts of having to perform in different

social roles, the frames that govern the self in social context, according to the sociologist

Erving Goffman. Each sequence of the five notebooks sections is framed by a section of

the conventional novel, which is ironically titled "Free Women." The interruption of the

restrictive form of linear narration develops a formal dynamic that mirrors the

psychological movement of Anna; it "symbolizes her relation to herself, her body, to

other people, and to society in general."[170] *The Golden Notebook* as a whole is

composed as "a critical exploration of the nature of fiction and the mechanism by which

a novel communicates its meaning in a specific cultural environment."[171] Lessing

critiques the requisite compartmentalization of so-called 'psychic normality' as

detrimental to the individual psyche, when she shows Anna's need "to divide herself up

for survival, as her author uses it to anatomize the West and expose the destruction

which breeds about its heart" (Waugh, *HS* 135). The discontinuity within the self mirrors

the increasing social fragmentation in the second half of the twentieth century and the

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[170] Sydney Janet Kaplan, "The Limits of Consciousness in the Novels of Doris Lessing," *Contemporary Literature* 14.4 (1973): 536-549 at 539.

[171] Nick Bentley, "Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*: An Experiment in Critical Fiction" in *Doris Lessing: Border Crossings*, ed. Susan Watkins and Alice Ridout (New York: Continuum, 2009) 45.

belief of many, including Lessing, that unprecedented violence was an apocalyptic

feature of life in an age of extremes.

Autobiography in and as Fiction

By 1960, autobiographical writing in the twentieth century had moved away from

the confessional format and also from the "unmediated casting of biography in the mode

of realist narrative."[172] Readers and reviewers of *The Golden Notebook* tended to read

the novel as autobiographical and to imply that Anna is one of Lessing's alter-ego figures

remarking that "there are ample parallels between the author's own remarkable life and

the lives and preoccupations of her characters" (Rubenstein 4). But in this novel, Lessing

moved away from traditional first-person singular autobiographical writing and instead,

chose to construct fictional selves that represent the plurality that make up an individual

"I". In this respect, it can be said that autobiographical fiction is a means of self-

revelation that seeks to capture the psychological truth of the writer at a particular

historical moment: that the self is at least in part the product of historically framed self-

interpretation. For – if the self can only ever be written in a fictional mode, then the

question of "autobiographical referentiality becomes altogether a matter of fiction,

whereas it should by definition be a matter of fact."[173] This suggests that

autobiographical writing is a performative act in which the self is created in language,

even if subjectivity is therefore inauthentic, Lessing states that "there was no way of *not*

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[172] Molly Hite, "(En)gendering Metafiction: Doris Lessing's Rehearsals for *The Golden Notebook*," *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 34.3 (1988): 481-500 at 483.

[173] John Paul Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985) 26.

being intensely subjective."[174] She realizes the irony that lies behind the endeavour to escape from subjectivity: it is impossible to write autobiographically, but equally, it is impossible *not* to write autobiographically, because if one writes "about oneself, one is writing about others, since your problems, pains, pleasures, emotions – and your extraordinary and remarkable ideas — can't be yours alone" (Lessing, Preface *TGN* 13). Lessing seems to feel responsible for transforming her experiences and emotions imaginatively in order to "speak representatively for the experiences of a wider humanity" (Waugh, *HS* 136). That concept of the self as historically shaped and profoundly influenced by outside forces is manifested in Anna's crisis when she feels surrounded by inexpressible forces of mass evil that stultify her mind: instead of writing, she covers her walls with newspaper reports about wars, revolutions and other atrocities. Reality has become too painful for a rational, or even written, narrative response. It is too complex to order so montage and assemblage take the place of storied orderliness.

Lessing clearly advocates the responsibility of artists in general and of novelists in particular, because the novelist has an advantage that is "denied to any of the other artists. The novel is the only popular art-form left where the artist speaks directly, in clear words, to his audience" ("The Small Personal Voice" 21). Her emphasis on speaking in "clear words" should not be mistaken as an invitation to return to the writing mode of nineteenth-century realism that was built against the backdrop of shared beliefs in the community, in God and the struggles of everyday existence. On the contrary, Lessing is well aware of the difficulty of traditional realism that is unable to "accommodate the complex of events and issues that her experience led her to regard as most pressing" (Hite, "(En)gendering Metafiction" 484). Experimental novelists like Woolf and Lessing

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[174] Doris Lessing, Preface to *The Golden Notebook*, 1962 (London: Joseph, 1982) 13.

relinquished the linear time sequences, reliable authorial perspective, and consistency of representational mode through which the nineteenth-century "realistic" novel created a seemingly accurate reproduction of the social world. For both writers, the assumed transparent window, the mirror of language, remains blind because of the overuse of linguistic concepts to such an extent that language is no longer adequate "to express the richness of our experience" (Lessing, "The Small Personal Voice" 5). Schwartz explains that "[w]hile the text loses its reference to the world as we ordinarily know it, it establishes a second-order reference to presenting us with a world whose unusual characteristics may lead us to further understanding of ourselves and our possibilities."[175]

In his essay of 1936, "The Storyteller," Walter Benjamin argued that the world had been transformed after the First World War by a general shift in experience, due to the traumatic events that people had witnessed, which had left them incapable of communicating with each other and therefore mutually alienated. At that time, according to Benjamin, the decline of the storyteller therefore correlated with a dramatic increase in the dissemination of information; unrelated news items took the place of 'story' and Benjamin writes that "never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power."[176] Without narrative as a source of wisdom, modern individuals had become unable to engage themselves in discourse and meaningfully connect their experiences; instead, artificial concepts had replaced natural experience in the new fast-paced and information-driven era. In addition to the short-lived news value that information

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[175] Sanford Schwartz, "Hermeneutics and the Productive Imagination: Paul Ricœur in the 1970s," *The Journal of Religion* 63.3 (1983): 290-300 at 291.

[176] Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov," *Illuminations,* ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Cape, 1970) 83-109, 84.

provided for the reader, Benjamin claims that narration broke away from the communal

oral tradition with the emergence of the novel that told of life out of the imagination of a

single individual. But storytelling is seen as having the power of communicating

experience, useful for giving timeless, transcendental moral or practical advice without

the addition of psychological analysis or interpretation. The openness of the story made

it flexible and adaptable to interpretation; thus it could become historically resituated,

reflecting on the changing conditions of different ages and cultures. Furthermore, each

specific listener was allowed to understand the story in relation to his or her own

situation, because "the psychological connection of the events is not forced on the

reader. It is left up to him to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the

narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks" (Benjamin 89). This personal

understanding and assimilation of the story enabled listeners – the storytellers of the

future – to change the story slightly and thereby to leave a trace of their individual

experiences and interpretations upon the framework of the story. Benjamin proposes

that the "traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter

cling to the clay vessel" (Benjamin 92). In this way, the storyteller contributed to the

vitality of a collective's memory, which gave the story organic and timeless qualities that

Benjamin misses in the modern novel, which, in his view, merely reflects the experience

of a solitary individual and does not allow for the integration of the story into the reader's

own experience: "Memory is the chief preserver of tradition and storytelling the chief

transmitter; but the privatisation of life characteristic of modern culture is proving fatal to

storytelling. Storytelling has become artificially confined to the novel, a creation of print

technology and of the bourgeoisie."[177] Whereas storytelling had a didactic purpose that

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[177] J. M. Coetzee, "Walter Benjamin, the Arcades Project," 2001, *Inner Workings: Literary Essays 2000-2005*

was rooted in community values and could be shared with others, novels merely indulge the individual reader, who is the counterpart of the isolated novelist:

> The birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual, who is no longer able to express himself by giving examples of his most important concerns, is himself uncounseled, and cannot counsel others. To write a novel means to carry the incommensurable to extremes in the representation of human life. In the midst of life's fullness, and through the representation of this fullness, the novel gives evidence of the profound perplexity of the living. (Benjamin 87)

Benjamin's scepticism about the ability of the novel to convey experience or expound moral issues is based on his view that the modern novel deliberately lacks any directive impetus; instead it takes an ironic distance that undermines grand narratives by exposing the frames of their discourses. In doing so, the novelist reveals the limitations of competing explanatory models by focussing on relations, whether they are social, economic, or personal. *The Golden Notebook* exposes the psychological need for grand narratives, for the continuity of the dream for a better world, even in the light of contradicting evidence: Anna is too scared to change her esteem for the father-like figure Stalin and wants to hold on to the possibility that he did not know about the atrocities that were committed under his rule, and, even if he had been mad and a murderer, she defends her position by stating that "we all have this need for the great man, and create him over and over again in the face of all the evidence" (*TGN* 172). However, the tentative disparity between idealism and disillusionment turns the enthusiastic story of a comrade's impressions of a larger-than-life Stalin in Anna's view into "an exercise in irony," "a very skilful parody of a certain attitude […] But what seemed to me important was that it could be read as parody, irony or seriously. It seems

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(London: Secker, 2007) 40-64, 50.

to me this fact is another expression of the fragmentation of everything, the painful

disintegration of something that is linked with what I feel to be true about language, the

thinning of language against the density of our experience" (*TGN* 301). The Communist

Party was more interested in perpetuating a myth in order to maintain a common ground

of solidarity, even if the romantic fictions betrayed the truth.

The point is that truth escapes any attempts to confine it in totalizing narratives,

which points out the profound insecurity of the modern individual, who realizes that

"anything might be true anywhere, there's never any way of really knowing the truth

about anything. Anything is possible — everything's so crazy, anything at all's possible"

(*TGN* 172-3). Anna understands that holding on to Communism would mean for her

participating in a discrete language game that perpetuates a view of the world that is only

comprehensible within the terms of its own ideology.

In addition to the inefficient medium of language, Anna experiences her memory

as distancing as well as selective. To write truthfully about her experiences in Africa

becomes impossible because she sees that her younger self is different from what she is

now:

> I get exasperated trying to remember – it's like wrestling with an obstinate other-self who insists on its own kind of privacy. Yet it's all there, in my brain if only I could get at it … How do I know that what I 'remember' was what was important? What I remember was chosen by Anna, of twenty years ago. I don't know what this Anna of now would choose. (*TGN* 148)

Anna's struggle with memory shows that Lessing is aware of the difficulty of writing

autobiographically. She takes it as a matter of fact that autobiography is the story of a

self, which depends on a temporal vantage-point that contains true and false memories

and in this respect it "has a good deal in common with a novel."[178] Lessing states that in

order to write, the novelist has to enter a character's frame of mind by drawing on

different levels of experience:

> When I wrote *The Golden Notebook* I deliberately evoked the different levels to write
> different parts of it. To write the part where two characters are a bit mad, I couldn't do it,
> I couldn't get to that level. Then I didn't eat for some time by accident (I forgot) and found
> that there I was, I'd got there. And other parts of *The Golden Notebook* needed to be
> written by 'I's' from other levels. That is a literary question, a problem to interest
> writers.[179]

The significance of the involvement of the "I" is finally dismissed as a literary technique,

which gives the impression that Lessing feels uneasy about autobiographical traces being

present in her fiction, but it can be argued that "[i]n the autobiographical epic the artist

understands that she has no right to speak for the age without attempting to depict the

self within that age" (Arlett 78). Like novels, autobiographies must have a shape;

memories need to be shaped by choices, which should conform to the "pattern in our

minds" (Lessing, "Writing Autobiography" 159). Looking back through the distance of

time on the past selves of different ages detaches the present self from its past so that

these selves seem to appear "as – almost – someone else. You float away from the

personal" (Lessing, "Writing Autobiography" 154).

The Dispute between Classical Realism and Modern Realism

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[178] Doris Lessing, "Writing Autobiography," in *The Arts and Sciences of Modern Criticism,* ed. David Fuller,
Patricia Waugh (New York: Oxford UP, 1999) 153-63, 153.
[179] Lessing in an Interview with Newquist, 1963 in *A Small Personal Voice: Essays, Reviews, Interviews,* ed.
Paul Schlueter (New York: Knopf, 1974) 60.

Though emerging out of earlier controversies within Marxism, it was in the nineteen-thirties that the debate, largely though not wholly, between Georg Lukács and Bertolt Brecht about the conception of realism and its relation to modernism, entered the critical mainstream. Lukács essentially argued that Brecht's desired "estrangement" effect was an artificially imposed formalistic device, which, in his view, only served to alienate further an already alienated audience. In Lukács' view, Brecht prevented the development of a true socialist realism by relying on abstract functions that lack "the treatment of representative, yet individualized, characters in psychological conflict."[180] Lukács, the socialist writer, championed the continuation of classical bourgeois realism for its ability to mirror society in its entirety and to reveal the economic system responsible for the human plight. Objective, yet critical, realism must embrace commitment to the point where "the reader vicariously experiences the reintegration of a seemingly fragmented, dehumanized world" (Lunn 15). Lukács critiqued the modernists for their overemphasising of formal aspects over content; in his view, their neglect meant that they recorded only appearances and mirrored irrational subjectivism. Thus, they lacked critical impetus as well as humanist values by merely reflecting "the immediate experience of chaos, alienation and dehumanization in advanced capitalist society, instead of carefully indicating their sources and the historical forces working towards overcoming them" (Lunn 13-14).

Brecht argued against the finished unchangeable art-object that Lukácsian realism favoured as being conceptually too narrow. He regarded the attempt at closure of conflict through the reconciliation of contradictions as a naïve position, driven by an aesthetic harmonizing humanism without regard for historical reality; he called it Lukács'

[180] Eugene Lunn, "Marxism and Art in the Era of Stalin and Hitler: A Comparison of Brecht and Lukács," *New German Critique* 3 (1974): 12-44 at 14.

"utopian idealism."[181] Brecht sought to dismantle the illusion of reality in realism with his

new experimental theatre and argued that it did not employ a dehumanising formalism

but was "wide and political, sovereign over all conventions" (Brecht 50). He went on to

justify the discontinuity between art and life by claiming that art should not merely reflect

existing patterns of thought, action and feeling, but project a world with a peculiar logic

of its own, which echoes T. S. Eliot, who wrote in his essay collection on poetry and

criticism, *The Sacred Wood*, that "the worlds created by artists like Jonson are like

systems of non-Euclidean geometry. They are not fancy, because they have a logic of their

own; and this logic illuminates the actual world, because it gives us a new point of view

from which to inspect it" ("Ben Jonson" 116-17). Brecht wanted not only to portray the

changes in the social environment, but moreover, to reveal the causal complexes of

society, the interconnection of private and public life, psychology and history. His device

of "estrangement" was aimed to disrupt the expectations of the audience through the

foregrounding of the materiality of aesthetic production and Brecht stated that "[t]he

parts of the story have to be carefully set off one against another by giving each its own

structure as a play within a play" (Brecht in *Doris Lessing: Border Crossings,* 53).

"Estrangement" affects the audience; firstly, it compels them to engage with the

performance; secondly, it stimulates them to reconsider their relationship with the socio-

political world outside the theatre. In short, Brecht did not endorse passive consumption,

but rather, he incited the audience to find the meaning of the performance outside the

performance in the real world by shocking them "out of their involuntary adjustment to

lives 'reified into things,' *Verfremdung* ('estrangement') effects [are] designed to actively

overcome *Entfremdung* ('alienation')" (Lunn 26). Brecht's modern humanism

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[181] Bertolt Brecht, "Against Georg Lukács," 1938, *New Left Review* 84 (1974): 39-53 at 40.

encompassed a political and philosophical vision of the world, where humanity is embroiled in "a process of continual historical change," which contrasted with Lukács' teleological view that sought "the realization of some 'essence'" (Lunn 28).

By the nineteen-sixties, there was a widespread feeling that novelty and innovation in the arts had reached its apogee in the aesthetic of high modernism. In 1967, John Barth lamented that the present state of writing has degenerated into a "literature of exhausted possibility."[182] At this time he prophesised that the future of the novel was at a dead end, because "the forms and modes of art live in human history and are therefore subject to used-upness." In 1984, he specified his former view and declared that "the effective 'exhaustion' [is] not of language or of literature but of the aesthetic of high modernism."[183] Postmodernist fiction takes off from modernism but moves beyond, invigorated with "an essentially parodic mode of replenishment."[184] This is similar to Brecht's axiom that contemporary writing must develop its own forms, because new problems "demand new methods. Reality changes; in order to represent it, modes of representation must change. Nothing comes from nothing; the new comes from the old, but that is why it is new […] for the people today are not what they were yesterday." (Brecht 51). *The Golden Notebook* both responds to and challenges its modernist predecessors by putting a realist narration into a metafictional structure; it marks the transition from modernism to a new kind of literature, the postmodern.

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[182] John Barth, "The Literature of Exhaustion," *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Non-Fiction* (London: Hopkins UP, 1984) 64.

[183] John Barth, "The Literature of Replenishment," *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Non-Fiction* (London: Hopkins UP, 1984) 206.

[184] Patricia Waugh, "Postmodernism," *Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, Vol. 9, ed. Christa Knellwolf, Christopher Norris (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001) 293.

The Crisis in Experience and an Experiment with a New Form of Fiction

Political writers such as Lessing, in the nineteen-fifties, had turned away from

what Brecht had indicated as high modernism's alienated subject and individual ego-self,

but equally found problematic the idea of a return to a realistic/naturalistic

descriptiveness or the mimetic value of conventional realism. In the late nineteen-fifties,

the discussion about the political meaning and the value of the realistic novel reached

another peak. The cultural critic Raymond Williams argued for the revival of the realistic

novel in which every aspect of personal life is radically affected by the quality of life in

general and this new form would "represent a particular kind of mature realism in

experience."[185] However, in his 1962 introduction to *The New Poetry*, Al Alvarez

defended modern experimental techniques by arguing that "[t]he great moderns

experimented not just to make it new formally, but to open poetry up to new areas of

experience." [186] He argued that the political violences of the modern period left an

imprint on modern consciousness, which made it even more pertinent to express that

new kind of experience and he attacked Robert Conquest's verse collection, the *New*

Lines anthology, by claiming that it merely perpetuated the concept of rational gentility

by ignoring the mass evil that had been perpetrated in the last half of the twentieth

century. In his introduction to *New Lines II* (1963), Conquest retaliated by refuting the

idea that profound changes in modern life and attitudes had taken place; even if this

were true, there was "no reason whatever to draw from it the conclusion commonly

seen, that poetry should 'reflect' it, or 'cope with' it by itself falling into violence and

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[185] Raymond Williams, "Realism and the Contemporary Novel," *Universities & Left Review* 4 (1958): 22-25 at 22, rpt.in *Partisan Review* 26 (1972): 200-231.
[186] A. Alvarez, introd., *The New Poetry: An Anthology,* 1962 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966) 21.

disproportion."[187] Alvarez evaluated Conquest's favouring of "the cardinal traditions of

English verse" as an attempt to preserve English politeness for the status quo against

what he perceived to be raw and violent emotions, deemed out of proportion and written

in a style judged as "gross and extreme" (Conquest xiii, xxiii). In defence of his collection,

Alvarez argued for a renewed seriousness that did not shy away from dealing with the

impact of two world wars, the concentration camps, genocide and the threats of nuclear

war, "the forces of disintegration which destroy[ed] the old standards of civilization"

(Alvarez 23). Outside, evil forces had reached proportions beyond individual

comprehension by being "magnified to match the scale of mass society" (Alvarez 26).

Furthermore, the incommensurability of these atrocities with the individual capacity for

reflection and containment produced profound insecurities in individuals, such that their

psychological states became mirrors of the mood of the social world. Alvarez writes that

the "recognition of a mass evil outside us has developed precisely parallel with

psychoanalysis; that is, with our recognition of the ways in which the same forces are at

work within us" (Alvarez 27).

In *The Golden Notebook,* Lessing leaves behind an earlier orientation toward

realism as her favoured form, aesthetically and politically, because the conventions of

realism seemed "entirely inadequate vehicles for the expression of *any* contemporary

experience and, in particular, the experience of women."[188] At this point in time, Lessing

was both dissatisfied with the limiting narrowness of mimesis, characteristic of the

conventional nineteenth-century realist novel and with the atrophy of the modernist

novel with its perceived aestheticism and lack of ethical or political emphasis because of

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[187] Robert Conquest, introd., *New Lines – II: An Anthology,* 1963 (London: Macmillan, 1963) xxiii.

[188] Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1984) 76; Abbreviation used in parenthetical references henceforth is *MF.*

an intense focus on subjective experience at the expense of objective or external reality: what Lukács identified as "a major tendency in modernist literature: the attenuation of actuality" and "the dissolution of personality."[189] Contrary to Lukács' negative evaluation of modernism, however, Lessing values the power of formal innovations and in this respect, *The Golden Notebook* is written as "a critical and philosophical investigation into the nature of fiction itself and the relationship between literary form and politics" (Bentley 44). Lessing's artistic vision demanded a more complex novel form that could incorporate the paradigm of ethical complexity and portray the changing nature of the evolving contemporary Western consciousness in its relation to social, political and material realities.

Lessing recognized the profound social and cultural changes that had taken place in the late 1950s and, although she thought of realism as flawed, she held on to its usefulness as a vehicle with which to articulate political imperatives. In this respect, realism appeared to provide the most obvious aesthetic correlative to her ethics, her sympathy for humankind, and her socio-political commitment to broader social sympathy: "[l]ike Anna in the world, Lessing in her novel takes upon herself the unglamorous role of a 'boulder-pusher', of one who with little faith and scarcely more hope strives to understand and to act responsibly."[190] For Lessing, to write is to act and it is better to work stubbornly as a "boulder-pusher," though not in the sense of the absurd heroism of Sisyphus, whose labour was caught in a futile circle of hopeless repetition. Lessing, through Anna, believes that modern boulder-pushers work together in the hope for slow progress such that when "they've got a few feet up, there's a war, or the wrong

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[189] Georg Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism,* 1963 (London: Merlin, 1972) 25, 26.
[190] Dennis Porter, "Realism and Failure in *The Golden Notebook,*" *Modern Language Quarterly* 35.1 (1974): 56-65 at 61.

sort of revolution, and the boulder rolls down — not to the bottom, it always manages to end a few inches higher than when it started" (*TGN* 604). While Lessing appears to question the grand narrative and the idea of the 'universal intellectual' behind it, she believes in the capacity of the novelist to find a form in which to encompass and critique the age.

Accordingly, Lessing combines experimental form with a committed agenda in order to reflect the human condition as she saw it in the 1950s and 1960s. Like Anna, she wants to respond to the new world of violence and terror by writing a novel that is "powered with an intellectual or moral passion strong enough to create order, to create a new way of looking at life" (*TGN* 80). In this respect, the novel manifests her belief that "one must have a vision to build towards […] a vision of good which might defeat the evil." ("The Small Personal Voice" 7). Lessing has faith "in historical progress through collective engagements which do not require foundations of truth or value" (Waugh in Bentley, *Contemporary British Fiction* 114).

Lessing portrays contemporary writers' anxieties about the commitment of the artist and the inefficacy of traditional realism to adequately express political consciousness. Anna is set up in the role of the "artist-as-exemplar", who examines the collision of the individual consciousness with events outside the self; just as with Lessing, Anna is aware of the incomprehensibility of the world and of her feeling of impotence to effect change; Lessing speaks of "the disparity between the overwhelming problems of war, famine, poverty, and the tiny individual who was trying to mirror them" (Preface to *TGN* 12). Anna suffers from political disillusionment as much as from failed personal relationships; she feels that both her social and private selves are under threat and her crisis in experience is the result of her struggling to assert and preserve the unity and

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wholeness of her self against feelings of isolation and alienation. *The Golden Notebook* experiments with metafiction for the structural undermining of convention that could result in a new committed literary form, an attempt to depict the complexity of the modern individual in relation to society because society had changed such that people are not merely linked "by one kind of relationship – work, friendship, family – but in many, interlocking kinds" (Williams 24). In this respect, the novel shows a distinct movement from the modernist focus on personality to a postmodernist notion of the decentred subject by employing a "particular method of realism as discussed by Lukács [which] involves a surface/depth model in terms of the expression of a subjective personal experience set against and underlying objective socio-economic framework" (Bentley 46-47).

Formal Structure: Making a Statement through the Shape of the Novel

Lessing claims that she intended to give primacy to formal aspects so that the structure could make an argument – an implicit statement about the alienation of the modern individual – through the actual shape of the narrative. *The Golden Notebook* breaks through the form by combining "two projected books, a fictional work dealing with a novelist suffering from a 'writer's block,' and a book of literary criticism which would employ various styles so that 'the shape of the book and the juxtaposition of the styles would provide the criticism'."[191] The fragmented structure is predicated on Anna's inability to overcome her "writer's block" and the novel at once explores its causes and

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[191] John L. Carey, "Art and Reality in 'The Golden Notebook,'" *Contemporary Literature* 14.4 (1973): 437-456 at 437.

the problems of the artist. In order to infer the intended meaning of the novel through its shape, Schweickart draws on Derrida's example of the double meaning inherent in the word *brisure,* which combines "broken, cracked part […] split, fragment" with a hinge, "the *brisure* [folding-joint] of a shutter […] The single term *la brisure* designates both 'difference' and 'articulation,' both the fact of division into distinguishable parts and the fact of connectedness."[192] The proposition is that the meaning of the novel is articulated structurally in a double-function through the hinge that holds together the broken parts in folding joints. Thus, the hinge at once joins together and separates the different planes; it is the point where "[e]ach part hinges (depends) on the others, but because the hinge is not a rigid joint, each part remains differentiated; each enjoys a relative autonomy" (Schweickart 268).

As a structural feature, the independent notebooks not only separate Anna's experiences, they also succeed in "fixing life" inside a framework where each frame reveals its interconnectedness through the juxtaposition of the private realm and the political sphere. The yellow notebook traces the personal relationship between Ella and Paul, which is a fictional reworking of Anna's troubled relationship with Michael in "Free Women". In this respect, the fictionalized love affair articulates "feelings about the social situation […] expressed in apolitical terms, or more precisely, without reference to Marxist theory" (Schweickart 268). The relation of an individual notebook that is part of the whole of the novel is quite different from the relation of the other notebooks to the whole: the red notebook focusses on Anna's struggle with political ideology and the Communist Party; it exemplifies the political power structure that also governs the

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[192] Patrocinio P. Schweickart, "Reading a Wordless Statement: The Structure of Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook,*" *Modern Fiction Studies* 31.2 (1985): 263-79 at 267.

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private realm. The placement of the two texts, the yellow and the red notebook, side by side, makes it possible for Lessing to make a wordless statement, where "each account shows us what has been omitted or slighted by the other" (Schweickart 268). The hinge that connects the two frames is the place where the relational dimension of meaning is produced, "so that the truth may be articulated through the play of meaning made possible by their difference" (Schweickart 270). The Derridian *brisure* is the point in a structural system that "renders visible the space *between* frames."[193] The hinge is the structural backbone of the novel that at once connects and separates so that each notebook creates the space for the organization of Anna's different roles; but, at the same time, it also divides her experiences as writer, mother, lover, friend and political activist. The conflict between her gendered roles produces a conscious and perpetual torment on an individual level that seeks release through separation. Anna splits herself up and at one point she realizes that the "two personalities – Janet's mother, Michael's mistress, are happier separated. It is a strain having to be both at once." (*TGN* 332). Charles Taylor similarly describes the series of changing but essentially deterministic ends that make up identity: "We end up relating to each other through a series of partial roles" (Taylor, *SS* 502).

Framing of Social Roles

Each of her roles requires Anna to "wear" a different mask and according to Goffman, social behaviour is conducted as a performance in roles that represent "the

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[193] Roger Luckhurst, *'The Angle Between Two Walls': The Fiction of J. G. Ballard* (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1997) xiii.

conception we have formed of ourselves – the role we are striving to live up to – this mask is our truer self, the self we would like to be."[194] The myth of an inherent self is replaced by splitting roles into the notebooks, giving an outer form to the idea "that in each one of us live several personalities" (Lessing, "Writing Autobiography" 160). Anna sees herself as a role player who becomes a calibrated counterpart in response to the role of another when Michael

> was speaking in his role of East European exile, ex-revolutionary, toughened by real political experience, to me in my role as 'political innocent'. And I replied in that role, producing all sorts of liberal inanities. Fascinating – the roles we play, the way we play parts. (*TGN* 167)

Anna's heightened analytical self-consciousness makes her and Michael caricatures of role-play which, seen together with the device of splitting herself into the textual framework of notebooks, constitutes "almost a parody of Goffmanesque theories of the fragmentation of social roles and subjective identity and their collapse and failure can be interpreted as Lessing's indictment of such rationalistic and sociological dissections of the self" (Waugh, *HS* 135).

Anna discovers the inescapable contradictions inherent in every form of writing or presenting, because once the frame is chosen, it governs the work:

> What both Goffman and metafictional novels highlight through the foregrounding and analysis of framing activities is the extent to which we have become aware that neither historical experiences nor literary fictions are unmediated or unprocessed […] Frames are

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[194] Robert Ezra Park in Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life,* 1959 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978) 30.

essential in all fiction. They become more perceptible as one moves from realist to modernist modes and are explicitly laid bare in metafiction. (Waugh, *MF* 30)

The Golden Notebook pushes beyond modernism and challenges modernist notions of

subjectivity by presenting

fragmentation as a function of *Being* itself rather than as the result of a plethora of subjective interpretations, the novel has stepped decisively from modernism to postmodernism […] Postmodern identity can in fact be viewed as a set of dynamic roles, since postmodernism insists that human beings constantly take up and give up various sociocultural subject positions and thus have no singular, unified, stable subjecthood." (Michael 50)

Parody of Realism in the Form of Literary Critique

The Golden Notebook is genuinely experimental and presents a conceptual

breakthrough in writing, it is "a metafictional text which draws on a whole plethora of

parodistic effects, both stylistic and structural" (Waugh, *MF* 74). Writing implies the

intervention of a human subject: it is the writer, who attempts to give experiences a form.

A. S. Byatt said that "Lessing's novel is about the breakdown of language and of fictive

forms adequate to describe the sexual and political reality of the immediate present

[Anna] expresses exasperation that a text is no longer possible that can draw the whole

world together as Tolstoi could."[195] Anna comes to realize that she cannot invent fictional

analogues that could adequately represent the disorder she encounters and her

suggestion of using symbols instead of words is an ironical hint at language's inadequacy

to represent authentic experience; she thinks "bitterly, that a row of asterisks, like an old-

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[195]A. S. Byatt, *On Histories and Stories: Selected Essays* (London: Chatto, 2000) 97; Abbreviation used in parenthetical references henceforth is *OHAS.*

fashioned novel, might be better. Or a symbol of some kind, a circle perhaps, or a square. Anything at all, but not words." (*TGN* 609). Lessing tries to overcome the limits of language by amalgamating Lukács' realism with Brecht's theory for a new responsible social drama. The preeminence of style in the notebooks is shown ironically as an impasse, marked at the end of each book with double black lines. By putting the mimesis of conventional realism in fictional frames with editorial notes that introduce and order the fragments, realism is put into quotation marks and takes on a parodic mode that reveals "the extent of the inadequacy of realist writing, [and] it also represents the ironic end of self-discovery for Doris Lessing the novelist" (Waugh, *MF* 76).

The disparate and fragmented texts function as a meta-commentary on each other whereby an ethical basis and a dialogue with realism is maintained, although Lessing reminds readers that they are reading fiction and not viewing a world without meditation. Realism fails because it is governed by a retrospective pattern and is therefore deemed inauthentic; it gives an "analysis after the event" (*TGN* 231). In this respect, the novel contains its own critique by "self-consciously challenging the realist techniques in which it seemed initially to put its trust" (Porter 57). Anna's self-critical review of her successful novel *Frontiers of War* mirrors Lessing's own literary criticism, "Lessing, through Anna, begins to question the validity and veracity of realism as a form of writing" (Bentley 47-48). After rereading the text, the novel seems to have nothing in common with her past experience, it appears to Anna "[a]s if it had been written by someone else" (*TGN* 78). She realizes that it was written through a filter of nostalgic sensibility, a false consciousness that precluded her from giving a correct account of the political and emotional realities as a young woman living in South Africa. Now she judges it as too personal, contaminated with and corrupted by imaginings that turns it into "an

immoral novel because that terrible lying nostalgia lights every sentence" (*TGN* 82).

Anna's parody synopsis, written in a style that mocks populist film scripts, further rejects

the authenticity of her past experiences and shows that the attempt to capture the truth

in writing "is far from a simple process and is inevitably caught up in the ideology of the

form in which one chooses to write. Truth becomes contingent and dependent on the

way in which it is presented" (Bentley 48).

The staggered sequence and interpenetrations of the conventional novel and the

notebooks achieve a distancing and ironic detachment, which Arlett links to Brecht's

dialectical theatre and describes as Lessing's "own system of dialectics."[196] The

poststructuralist model of hinged articulation is supplemented by a dialectical model,

based on the "motif of naivete", and Schweickart argues that naivete must be

distinguished from innocence because it comes as the consequence of loss and therefore

it "is not innocence but nostalgia for lost innocence" (271). It could equally be argued

that Lessing, through Anna, is nostalgic for a faded dream of wholeness, which is now

counterbalanced by writing with cynicism:

> On the one hand, then, we have naive nostalgia for lost innocence, and on the other, the nihilistic, petulant – and *equally naive* – readiness, in relation to a major defeat, to 'throw everything overboard,' or to seek comfort in dry, sterile irony. Every aspect of Anna's life is blocked by naivete in this dual aspect as nostalgia and nihilism. (Schweickart 271)

Anna remembers the double feeling shared by the leftist group of friends at the

beginning of the war, when they were at once complacent and ironic about the situation

in Africa: the war gave an economic boost and did not "interfere with the enjoyment of

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[196] Robert Arlett, "The Dialectical Epic: Brecht and Lessing," *Twentieth-Century Literature* 33.1 (1987): 67-79 at 72.

life" (*TGN* 83). But at the same time, the war amplified the hypocrisy of Apartheid politics, when white men went to defend *their* African soil against a racialist regime elsewhere. Looking back reveals that her nostalgia was never innocent because it had always been tainted by guilt and shame about their inability to effect changes, their escapist fantasies at the Mashopi hotel. Anna questions her emotions, "Nostalgia for what? I don't know. Because I'd rather die than have to live through any of that again." (*TGN* 162). Her memory of Africa is not a retrospective valorisation of a group of young people in concert; at the time there was already an uneasiness about the Communist view. The novel "Free Women" is written in a style that parodies conventional realism by revealing its inadequacies with the effect that "'reality *par excellence*' is represented by the misrepresentational, inauthentic language […] which freezes the everyday – 'British life at its roots' – into a mocking parody of itself" (Waugh, *MF* 53). Parody culminates in the last part of the "Free Women" narrative when major characters suddenly show ironic detachment from former beliefs: instead of living with and battling out their conflicts, they submit to conventionality and make compromising adjustments. At this point, the "Free Women" narrative "has returned to the ironical nature of its title, has become 'a comment about the conventional novel'" (Arlett 77).

Tommy's blindness ironically turns out to be a liberating force which enables him to take over his father's business, because it has resolved "the problem of too many options – figured as a problem of identity, of too many possible people to become" (Hite, "(En)gendering Metafiction" 488). Anna remarks that some people "are whole at all because they've chosen to block off at this stage or that. People stay sane by blocking off, by limiting themselves" (*TGN* 456). Blocking off is exactly what many characters choose at the end of "Free Women" when they decide to slip back into conventional roles.

Reintegration into the fabric of society signals that the idea of a free woman is as illusory as that of a free society. So Anna's decision to abandon her career as a writer and to go back to traditional female occupations indicates an ironic negation of her exclusive commitment to writing as well as her resignation as a "boulder-pusher." However, the soppy conventionalism of "Free Women" stands in ironic contradiction to the fact that ostensibly, and according to the inner logic of the text, "Free Women" is the second novel that Anna will write, which makes the whole of *The Golden Notebook* a novel that was written by Anna Wulf.

Moving into Postmodernism: Presenting the Unpresentable

Ostensibly, the notebooks contain the compartmentalized experiences of Anna that make up the raw material for "Free Women". It also divides the narration into five different perspectives, which produces a complex pattern of repetitions and variations on ideas, images and events that link the frame novel with the notebooks. The division produces a duality that mirrors the formal organization of the novel in the psychological state of its protagonist such that "the structure of the novel becomes an objective correlative of the central character's consciousness" (Rubenstein 76).

Lessing's dissatisfaction with the limitations of conventional novels to express the postmodern paradigm[197] induced her to explore different formal techniques in the hope of finding one that could become the aesthetic equivalent of social reality and the ways in which it shapes the modern individual, "the fragmented society, the fragmented

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[197] In 1970, Thomas Kuhn defined "paradigm" as a "'constellation' of values, beliefs, and methodological assumptions, whether tacit or explicit, inscribed in a larger worldview," Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, xi.

consciousness" (*TGN* 79). The novel moves into a postmodernist mode of writing that is

concerned with presenting the unpresentable. To capture the essence of individuals in

writing is a moral imperative for Anna, she says that "I should describe Willi and Maryrose

so that a reader can feel their reality. […] the human personality, that unique flame, is so

sacred to me, that everything else becomes unimportant" (*TGN* 89). At this point, a

postmodern paradox emerges when Lessing, through Anna, discovers the impossibility of

capturing the reality of human existence in writing. In consequence, the human

personality takes on the quality of the sublime, which can be connected to Lyotard's

reading of the Kantian sublime:

> For Lyotard, the sublime is identified by the impossibility of presenting it to the human
> consciousness, and it is its very unpresentable nature that established its power […] What
> Lessing takes from this moment, however, is the necessity to continue writing despite the
> inadequacy of the medium in which she is working. (Bentley 55-6)

Lessing's persistence in continuing to write allows Bentley to argue that "the novel

parallels Lyotard's sense of the postmodernist (rather than modernist) response to the

unpresentability of the sublime" (Bentley 45). In his seminal essay "What Is

Postmodernism?" Lyotard describes postmodern art as "that which searches for new

presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the

unpresentable" (*The Postmodern Condition* 81).   Although Lessing continues to prefer "a

Brechtian model of political engagement through experiment with form," Bentley

concludes that her metacritical engagement with the nature and limitations of writing

reflects the postmodern impasse, which "remains as an unsettling presence in the novel"

(Bentley 56).

The Divided Self in Opposition to Formlessness and Chaos

Poststructuralist theories of subjectivity posit "a centerless, dispersed subject who is literally a composite of various socially and culturally constructed roles or positions – not perspectives – that cannot be reconciled" (Michael 40). The different roles that a modern subject has to fulfil lead increasingly to inner conflicts that undermine any achieved sense of unity. Self-alienation results from the tensions that the self experiences in trying to live up to contradictory roles, which divide human beings such that they "are becoming more and more divided, and more subdivided in themselves, reflecting the world […] It is a blind grasping out for their own wholeness" (*TGN* 79). So authenticity in *The Golden Notebook* is associated with formlessness: "Anna appears to understand her world and her experience of that world as fragmenting and fragmented and to see 'unity' as a totalizing fiction."[198] Her attempt to contain her different selves in the rigid structure of the notebooks gives her merely a factitious and precarious order aimed as a protection

> against *real* madness; but, in the end, she cannot sustain the inherent contradictions of this enforced division in the name of an illusion of wholeness. Not until Anna deliberately ends her four separate notebooks and begins to write in a single notebook does she finally accept the formlessness of life and of the individual. (Michael 49-50)

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[198] Tonya Krouse, "Freedom as Effacement in 'The Golden Notebook': Theorizing Pleasure, Subjectivity, and Authority," *Journal of Modern Literature* 29.3 (2006): 39-56 at 40.

Anna's inability to write coherently in just one big book is a sign of her proliferating disorder that will culminate in an existential crisis: the room in which she breaks down is a mirror of the chaos that rages in her mind. Lessing shows chaos as the ordering principle: the fragmented form of the novel reflects the final stage of Anna's psyche in which "the chaotic fragmentation of her mad thoughts and hallucinations is essentially an exaggeration of her usually fragmented existence."[199] There seems to be a meaning in madness when Lessing shows that anxieties are shared by mad people and by society at large: a mad person's paranoia is not unique to itself but draws upon outside information and influences, which are then reworked in the break-down.

Saul's repeated assertion of his masculinity threatens Anna when he spits bullets of egoism at her. His volley of "I"s is a sign of his thinking in terms of exclusion of the other, for the preservation of his ego "against women. Women the jailors, the consciences, the voice of society, and he was directing a pure stream of hatred against me, for being a woman" (*TGN* 606). Virginia Woolf pointed to the preeminence of the male ego in literature that obliterates the female other. Famously, she criticized the single-sexed mind as uncreative and likened its dominance to "a straight dark bar, a shadow shaped something like the letter 'I.'"[200] Saul needs to protect himself against Anna's presumption that he is like herself a mere "boulder-pusher", which is in sharp contrast to his aspiration to become "one of the great men on top of the mountain" and consequently, Anna feels that "he was not seeing me, except as an enemy he had to shout down" (*TGN* 604-5).

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[199] Marion Vlastos, "Doris Lessing and R.D. Laing: Psychopolitics and Prophecy," PMLA 91.2 (1976): 245-258, at 246.

[200] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own,* 1929 (London: Hogarth, 1935) 150.

Lessing explains that before Anna and Saul can regain their unity, they have to "break through the false patterns they have made of their pasts, the patterns and formulas they have made to shore up themselves and each other" (Lessing, Preface to *TGN* 7). The chaos or "cracking up" accompanies the breakdown of social conventions and the writing of the inner golden notebook becomes central to Anna's reorganization of the different narratives of herself. Her breakdown into madness initiates a process of healing that exorcises the false selves and by uncoupling from any single identity, she achieves formlessness.

Sass writes that the act of uncoupling breaks up "two different selves: a hidden, 'inner' self that watches or controls, usually associated with the mind, and a public, outer self that is more closely identified with bodily appearance and social role and that tends to be felt as somehow false or unreal" (*Madness and Modernism* 33). The disintegration of her individual subjectivities can be viewed as a struggle toward self-realization that is related to the Hegelian concept of the accession of Spirit to a higher level of conscious life. Sass explains:

> Hegel can speak of the existence of the self 'on its own account' as being 'strictly speaking, the loss of itself' (meaning the loss of any *particular* identity). In this sense, to negate the self is the only way to find it, the only way to affirm its true (if paradoxical) nature." (104-5)

First, to give up on the unity of the self and second, to acknowledge chaos as the principally ordering factor in the world, brings to the fore that fragmentation and chaos lie at the root of life and this essential formlessness constitutes "a terrible irony, a terrible shrug of the shoulders and it's not a question of fighting it, or disowning it, or of right or wrong, but simply knowing it is there, always" (*TGN* 609-10).

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Breaking Down and Breaking Through

Lessing was influenced by the intellectual anti-rationalist and anti-psychiatric counterculture of the sixties that stood in opposition to the dominant modes of technocracy, clinical psychiatry, and institutionalized psychoanalytical explanatory models. *The Golden Notebook* is Lessing's exegesis of "the countercultural Laingian notion of psychic breakdown as a means to break through to new psychic wholeness" (Waugh, *HS* 133-4). Laing's proposal that schizophrenia could be a sane response to an insane world would be criticised as a romantic idealization of madness by more traditional psychoanalysts, who were conservatively focussed on the ideal of a normal functioning organism. Anna critiques their values; in her view, any psychoanalytic methodology "stands or falls on whether it makes better human beings, morally better, not clinically more healthy" (*TGN* 457).

Laing had argued against the dominant psychiatric and psychoanalytic paradigms, because in his view, none of their theories considered the relational dimension of experience: Freud's theory of ego psychology focussed too narrowly on individual experience in that it lacked the concept of a 'me', except as an objectified 'ego' and behaviourist theories were predominantly concerned with the interactions or transactions between people conceived as rationalized machines. Neither concept was able to identify what experience really was and, moreover, nor could they articulate the relationship between experience and behaviour in social collectivities of experience, which Laing saw as crucial for bridging "the gap *between* persons", and he identified that it is precisely "the relation *between persons* that is central in theory, and in practice.

Persons are related to one another through their experience and through their

behaviour."[201] In *Politics of Experience*, Laing favours an overarching structure that places

"all theories and practices within the scope of a total vision of the ontological structure of

being human" in a framework that examines at once the impact that one person has on

another, what happens in "the meeting of an 'I' with 'an other'" (41, 42).

Opposition to psychoanalytic interpretation is evident in Anna's conviction that

psychoanalysis uses explanatory models in order to normalize and, as Porter elucidates,

she "detects at the heart of psychoanalysis the will to anesthetize individual experience

by defining it in terms of mythic precedents" (59). In speaking out against the therapeutic

universalization of experience, Anna suggests the failure of the Jungian viewpoint: Anna

cannot believe that people in the past were as terrified by the crossbow as people are

today by nuclear weapons and she rejects the consolation that her therapist had offered

in her advice that mental equilibrium must be obtained at the price of blindness towards

the growing possibility of annihilation. Instead, she refuses to be normalized by

mollification and considers "that perhaps the word neurotic means the condition of being

highly conscious and developed. The essence of neurosis is conflict. But the essence of

living now, fully, not blocking off to what goes on, is conflict" (*TGN* 456).

For Lessing and Laing, the schizoid contemporary subject is essentially a healthy

subject, but the pathological split personality is in effect an extreme version of the same

that developed out of an "intensification of the divisions within the normal self" (Vlastos

247). Laing examined the transition from sanity to madness by employing an existential

phenomenological approach, based on an evaluation of "the nature of a person's

experience of his world and himself" that lets him differentiate between a "sane schizoid

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[201] R. D. Laing, *The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise,* 1967 (London: Penguin, 1967) 42.

way of being-in-the-world" and a "psychotic way of being-in-the-world."[202] Lessing shows

madness as a painful catharsis with a potentially therapeutic effect when Anna "emerges

from insanity to a tentative but fresh state of balance, self-respect, and independence"

(Vlastos 245). Tentative is a cautionary word that indicates the precariousness of her

newly found balance, because it becomes questionable when at the end of "Free

Women" she "reconnects herself to the same social structures that had initially prompted

her self-estrangement" (Rubenstein 217). Despite her return to relative health, she has

not solved her problem as a writer, which points to the dilemma that Lessing faced: like

Anna, Lessing has not found a form of fiction in which she can believe. Viewed

optimistically, Anna's breakdown into madness confronted her fears; she examined the

hidden aspects of her nature and, in this respect, it might have been liberating. The

revelation of evil within herself and her acceptance that evil forces exist in the world

provide a new kind of knowledge and her "understanding of the real movement of the

world towards dark, hardening power" (*TGN* 568).

The idea that self-division is a prerequisite for the survival of the modern self was

first made evident in Rousseau's *Confessions*, when he attributed his suffering to the

disparity between his public appearance and what he saw as his inner true self. Laing

examined mental illness under a new auspice: the psychotic breakout is a sign of the

breakdown of the false self and the first step in liberating the repressed essential self.

The split personality might be a feature of a new development in the evolution of men,

and Anna tells her psychoanalyst that she perceives cracks in persons "like a gap in a dam,

and through that gap the future might pour in a different shape — terrible perhaps, or

marvellous, but something new" (*TGN* 460). For Lessing, the loss of her ideals

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[202] R. D. Laing, *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness*, 1960 (London: Penguin, 1990) 17.

consequently meant the loss of her vision for a better future, the promised Communist

paradise. In an interview with Lesley Hazelton in 1982, she confirmed that in the past

she had been an idealistic, utopian Communist: "I and the people around me really

believed – but, of course, this makes us certifiable – that something like 10 years after

World War II, the world would be Communist and perfect."[203]

In accordance with the Laingian notion that sees the mad person at once as a

symptom and a victim of modern society, Lessing had explored the causes of the complex

fragmentation of late modernity and had tentatively implied "that insanity is not an

abandonment of the real but a potentially intelligible attempt to achieve ontological

security through the expression of a self fragmented by the pressures and violences of a

competitive and exploitative society" (Waugh, *HS* 6). In *Politics of Experience*, R. D. Laing

had argued that so-called normality is achieved through estrangement from the structure

of being and is in fact "a product of repression, denial, splitting, projection, introjection

and other forms of destructive action on experience" (23-4). Laing goes on to explain that

"[w]e are potentially men, but are in an alienated state, and this state is not simply a

natural system. Alienation as our present destiny is achieved only by outrageous violence

perpetrated by human beings on human beings." (12).

Lessing explained to Lesley Hazelton that Laing had failed her just as Communism

had, because he had no larger philosophy to offer, no sense of purpose or ontological

security: ''I was once an idealistic and utopian Communist [...] I am not proud of it. The

real politicos are a very different animal, and I'm angry that I didn't notice that very

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[203] Lesley Hazelton, Interview with Doris Lessing, "Doris Lessing on Feminism, Communism and 'Space Fiction,'" 1982, *New York Times on the Web*.

evident fact." Anna's disillusionment with Communism results from the realization that

the Party employs anti-humanist totalizing language games, which she senses in her

reading of Comrade Ted's story: at first, she thinks of it as "an exercise in irony", until she

realizes that it was in effect seriously intended, but be read otherwise, "as parody, irony

or seriously" (*TGN* 302). In this respect, *The Golden Notebook* shows a move towards a

postmodern sensibility where "[t]he grand narrative has lost its credibility" (Lyotard, *The*

Postmodern Condition 37).

 The interview concludes with Lessing illuminating her turn to the mystic

philosophy of Sufism with its goal of universal harmony that acknowledges the spirit of an

"Absolute Being" but furthermore seeks to maintain involvement in worldly affairs. Both

preoccupations aim for the development of mankind into a higher stage of evolution.

Hazelton summarizes Lessing's gloomy prediction that conceives the future of the world

as one that is

> plowed under by economic, environmental and nuclear disaster. Now the end is in itself a
> beginning. The writer who espoused R.D. Laing's concept of mental breakdown as a
> breakthrough to a higher plane of reality has now expanded that same idea to global
> proportions. 'Look,' she says: ''we live in a world of incredible suffering. This brief
> paradise in the West since the end of the last war, which is about to end, has educated
> two generations into thinking we live in some sort of Shangri-La. As usual we – that is, the
> human race – are in for a hard time. But that is our history. When have we not had a hard
> time? (Interview with Doris Lessing, 1982)

Lessing's disenchantment with both politics and the power of novels written in a mode of

realism to express the fragmentation of the self is a turning-point in late modernist

literature. *The Golden Notebook* is positioned on the threshold to post-modernists' self-

conscious reworking of realism in new structural forms and it could be viewed as opening

the way for subsequent writers and their reworking of previous genres for expressing the condition of the postmodern self.

In the next section, A. S. Byatt and J. M. Coetzee provide examples of postmodernist fiction that continue with realism in a new mode: in *Possession*, the temporal double plot structure connects the formation of present-day identity through the engagement with nineteenth-century fictional writers; *Summertime* builds up a fictional identity that is constructed by and seemingly dependent on the opinions of others.

Section 2: Self-Conscious Realism: Filling in the Gap of History in A.S. Byatt's Possession *(1990)*

> Novels are romances – but romances which have to negotiate the prosaic world of modern civilization […] If the novel is a romance, however, it is a disenchanted one, which has nothing to learn about baffled desires and recalcitrant realities. (Eagleton 2-3)

Shortly after writing *Possession: A Romance* in 1990, A. S. Byatt comments, in her introduction to a collection of essays, *Passions of the Mind*, on her ambitions for employing a particular structure of narration that "would explore the continuities and discontinuities between the forms of nineteenth- and twentieth-century art and thought."[204] Described as a neo-Victorian novel, *Possession* is also an example of postmodern biographic metafiction that reworks past authors, voices, and styles, and which highlights the palimpsest texture of life-writing and the ways in which it is shaped

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[204] A. S. Byatt, *Passions of the Mind: Selected Writings,* 1991 (London: Vintage, 1993) 6; Abbreviation used in parenthetical references henceforth is *PM.*

by other texts. Neo-Victorianism's imaginative (re)turn to the Victorian past enacts and

simultaneously undercuts its performance of textual illusionism**.** Traces of intertextuality

are interwoven in the double structure of two different temporal narratives: one

narrative is set in the late twentieth century and the other in the mid-nineteenth century;

Possession is a novel in which romantic idealism and disenchanted realism meet. Susanne

Becker goes further and argues that "*Possession* marks the end of postmodernism, or, at

least, the threshold between postmodern thought and new forms of more realist

representation."[205] Byatt uses an expanded frame of realism for keeping the Victorian as

well as the modern world self-contained and separate, but with one exception: the novel

ends with a "Postscript 1868", in which an omniscient narrator claims to disclose an

event, unknown to the contemporary biographers of the novel, to tell readers "how it

was."[206] The knowledge-gap about the Victorians consists in a message that did not get

into the possession of its addressee because it was lost by a child. Catherine Burgass

concludes that the ending of *Possession* shows that there is always something omitted

from knowledge about the past and "this final scene drives home the point that while the

truth of a real life will elude the most committed sleuth-biographer, fiction can provide

the reader with imaginative access to a different kind of truth."[207] Throughout the novel,

the truth about the Victorian poets is refined by textual discoveries until after the

conclusion of the main plot, a last piece of knowledge emerges for "the readers' eyes

only" regarding a serendipitous encounter between father and child, which produces a

truth which, in a postmodern twist, has become inaccessible to later generations.

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[205] Susanne Becker, "Postmodernism's Happy Ending: *Possession*!" *Postmodern Studies* 32 (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2001) 17-30, 17.
[206] A.S. Byatt, *Possession: A Romance* (London: Chatto, 1990) 508; Abbreviation used in parenthetical references henceforth is *P.*
[207] Catherine Burgass, *A. S. Byatt's* Possession*: A Reader's Guide* (London: Continuum, 2002) 45.

The two narratives are connected through the engagement of the twentieth-century protagonists with documents of the past which have effects on the present. In particular, the novel is concerned with re-assessing the identities of two famous, but fictional Victorian writers: although in the context of *Possession*, the works of Randolph Ash and Christabel LaMotte have been studied extensively by literary critics, the prevailing interpretations are to be overturned in the light of new textual evidence that reveals a heretofore unknown connection between the two Victorian writers. The discovery of hidden letters by two twentieth-century literary scholars, Maud Bailey and Roland Michell, not only gradually reveals the personal relationship between Ash and LaMotte, but also leads to a rereading and reinterpretation of their imaginative and poetic writings. The cooperation in the investigation gives Maud and Roland opportunity to probe and address their own personal insecurities and doubts by engaging with the Victorian subjects through their textual remains. They discover that underneath the previously assumed surface of poised Victorian appearance simmered a clandestine affair and this knowledge emerges from the juxtaposition of different kinds of texts whose hermeneutic significance is read differently once new facts about the writers' lives are revealed.

The presentation of the Victorians as being devoted to their work emphasises their strong self-conceptions as poets, which shows that Byatt sees a close link between a literary text and the identity of the author. Ash and LaMotte are described as intricately tied to, and, at the same time, constituted by their texts. LaMotte writes: "I am a creature of my Pen, Mr Ash, my Pen is the best of me," and Ash affirms that he recognizes the unity of work and self when he writes, "dearest, I love your soul and with that your poetry [...] your thought clothed with your words is uniquely you, came with you, would

vanish if you vanished" (*P* 87, 200). Both believe that the intrinsic self finds expression in poetry and thoughts; Ash claims that "where my thoughts are, there I am, in truth" (*P* 181). At the end of the novel, the modern researchers Roland and Maud succeed in constructing their own identities through their engagement with the past and Steveker concludes that "*Possession* thus conceptualizes literary texts, which as cultural texts form part of the content of British cultural memory, as decisive elements of individual identity formation."[208]

Opposite the Victorian poets, the modern couple appear reluctant, self-doubting and self-consciously concerned with the question of identity. Roland suffers from a highly insecure sense of selfhood that is partly due to his living in poor socio-economic circumstances: as an unemployed literary researcher, who depends on his girlfriend's income, he conceives of "himself as a failure" (*P* 11) and is described that "he hardly qualified as a full-blooded departmental male" (*P* 118). Another impediment to gaining a sense of stable identity is Roland's academic intellectual training; prevailing literary theory has trained him to repress notions of selfhood according to "the post-structuralist deconstruction of the subject" (*P* 9), which resulted in his detached and ironic view of the self as being dispersed in different systems:

> Roland had learned to see himself, theoretically, as a crossing-place for a number of systems, all loosely connected. He had been trained to see his idea of his 'self' as an illusion, to be replaced by a discontinuous machinery and electrical message-network of various desires, ideological beliefs and responses, language-forms and hormones and pheromones. Mostly he liked this. He had no desire for any strenuous Romantic self-assertion. (*P* 424)

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[208] Lena Steveker, I*dentity and Cultural Memory in the Fiction of A.S. Byatt: Knitting the Net of Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) 100.

Roland betrays his nostalgia for a more grounded and material sense of self when he turns to Randolph Ash as a model of identification in order to escape from a disappointing life. Although the respected feminist scholar Maud is financially secure, she too is deeply insecure about postmodern theories that render the self as an unstable entity, which is caught in "a nexus of competing discursive formations."[209] Maud expresses her anxiousness about:

> Narcissism, the unstable self, the fractured ego, Maud thought, who am I? A matrix for a susurration of texts and codes? (*P* 251)

> We are very knowing. We know all sorts of other things, too – about how there isn't a unitary ego – how we're made up of conflicting, interacting systems of things – and I suppose we *believe* that? (*P* 267)

Both think of themselves as decentred and deconstructed through the paradigms of poststructualist theory, which does not address "the question of the awkward body": Maud ponders her own physical reality, "[t]he skin, the breath, the eyes, the hair, their history, which did seem to exist" (*P* 251). The Victorians' seemingly secure self-esteem is juxtaposed with the insecure sense of self felt by both Roland and Maud.

Thinking Minds and Feeling Bodies

In juxtaposition to the dry language-world of post-structuralism, the third person narrator lavishly describes sensuous experience and declares that "[i]t is possible for a

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[209] Jackie Buxton, "'What's Love Got to Do with It?': Postmodernism and *Possession*," *English Studies in Canada* 22. 2 (1996): 199-219 at 212.

writer to make, or remake at least, for a reader, the primary pleasures of eating, or

drinking, or looking on, or sex" (*P* 470). Alexa Alfer states that

> *Possession* does indeed invite us to imagine a fictional world we can see, hear, smell, taste
> and touch. This emphasis on sensuous experience not least proved a foil to Maud and
> Roland's rather dry and intellectualised vision of reality as a discursive phenomenon, and
> of themselves as constructed subjects.[210]

Byatt blends a modernist attachment to 'qualia' with a postmodern awareness of

the questioning of language as able to render the experiential, through a neo-Victorian

novel that again interrogates fundamental questions about the genre. Her detailed

descriptions of the gargantuan quantities of food, rich landscapes and settings are

characteristic of formal realism that shows "'language as plenitude', a language that

joyously defies Derrida's claim that language never denotes, but only defers" (Alfer 98).

The richness of Byatt's language is characteristic of her belief in the possibility of

representing some aspects of the world accurately; she believes that "language has

denotative as well as connotative powers" (*PM* 24) and although it has no "privileged

relationship to truth, social or psychological […] it leaves space for thinking minds as well

as feeling bodies" (*PM* 4). *Possession* extends "the premise, or primary convention, that

the novel is a full and authentic report of human experience" (Watt in Sheehan 1).

Moreover, meals served in hotel restaurants, compatible rhythms in walking together or

the description of the countryside are all examples for the many parallels in action and

linking imagery that make the reader aware of the connections between the Victorian

and the modern plot in "a series of images, motifs and meaning that float across the

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[210] Alexa Alfer and Amy J. Edwards de Campos, *A. S. Byatt: Critical Storytelling* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2010) 97.

various texts."[211] Many occasions and experiences are mirrored in the past and present

sojourns and it happens at such points that the reader becomes aware that "the plot lines

converge and the lives of the protagonists mimic each other […] the past abuts and

intrudes upon the present" (Burgass 48). La Motte's enclosed princess in her story 'The

Glass Coffin' becomes significant in the context of the narration of Roland's overnight stay

at Maud's flat and the description of her bathroom as a "chill green glassy place" (*P* 56).

Not only do glass and impenetrable surfaces later become metaphorically connected to

the description of Maud as "a chilly mortal" (*P* 144), but they are also linked with other

motifs and themes in the novel that have mythical or folk-tale roots. The place of the

bathroom is connected to the myth of Melusina, which was the inspiration behind

LaMotte's poem 'The Fairy Melusina', in which a woman in the privacy of her bathroom

changes into a mermaid, which her husband discovers by spying through a peephole with

disastrous consequences for the woman. The revelation of Melusine's 'real' identity is

transferred to Maud at the scene at Seal Court, when Roland looks through the keyhole of

the bathroom and sees her emerging like a modern Melusine but without a slivery tail;

instead, she wears a silk kimono with hair "running all over her shoulders and neck" and

her whole appearance gives the impression of a mermaid: "running with water, all the

runnels of silk twisted about her body" (*P* 147). Roland feels an electric shock but has

doubts whether Maud felt the same, for "[h]e did not trust his body", although "[h]is

body knew perfectly well that she felt it" (*P* 147). Burgass explains that "[t]he tragic end

of *Melusine* does not prefigure a similar conclusion to Maud and Roland's incipient affair,

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[211] Nick Bentley, "A.S. Byatt, *Possession*: *A Romance* (1990)," *Contemporary British Fiction (*Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2008) 140-147 at 142.

but the correspondences between Victorian poem and contemporary action further reinforces the connection between the two couples" (54).

Self and Other: Self-Possession as a Defence against being Possessed

The myth's central metaphor is the bathroom as a space of privacy, the only place where Melusine can be "her 'true' self – half woman, half snake" and Steveker explains that it is a spatial metaphor that connotes independence: "this room symbolizes the autonomy on which her identity depends" (57). The violation of that space by her husband is connected to Ash's attentions that would jeopardize the autonomy of LaMotte and Blanche Glover in their cottage as independent women artists. Initially, LaMotte thinks of Ash as a threat to her autonomy (*P* 170) and fears with good reason that her affair with Ash will actually result in the loss of her financial independence and ruin her "self-possession" (*P* 502). LaMotte describes her loss in a spatial metaphor when she asks herself how her ambition to become a great poet might have come true if she had closed herself up and resisted giving in to Ash's advances: "*I wonder – if I had kept to my closed castle, behind my motte-and-bailey defences – should I have been a great poet – as you are?*" (*P* 502). Her story fits Virginia Woolf's dictum that it is necessary for a writer "to have five hundred a year and a room with a lock on the door" (*A Room of One's Own* 158). LaMotte's cottage is her protective egg just as Maud's flat protects her, although it equally distances her from others: "Why could she do nothing with ease and grace except work alone, inside these walls and curtains, her bright safe box? Christabel, defending Christabel, redefined and alarmed Maud" (*P* 136-7). Burgass summarizes that the metaphorical correspondence links the symbols of glass coffin, closed castle and safe box

in the three narrative strands: "the princess in the story is literally imprisoned, Christabel

is constrained by circumstance and convention, and Maud is metaphorically imprisoned,

bent on self-preservation […] a learned defence" (58).

There is another meaning implicit in the closed space of castle, egg, or flat, which

paradoxically implies both freedom and captivity not only for the three women, but also

in connection to the hidden letters that contain a mystery and therefore stand for the

vitality of the past. Roland is motivated to take the letters in order to rescue them from

oblivion: "[I]t was suddenly quite impossible to put these living words back into page 300

of Vico and return them to Safe 5" (*P* 8). The letters promise to tell a story that could

change the prevailing interpretation of Ash's and LaMotte's works but only if their voices

are allowed to be read in the present instead of being locked away safely.

The connection between different descriptions of self-possession and the violation

of autonomy through metaphorical "eggs" occur in three different narratives:

remembering her affair with Fergus Wolff, Maud again feels discomfort about the bed

they shared in an image of broken eggs; the sheets on the "empty battlefield" (*P* 56)

remind her of " old whipped eggs, like dirty snow" (*P* 141). The image of "a bed like dirty

egg-white" is later connected to the kind of possessive twentieth-century literary

scholarship represented by Fergus Wolff and Leonora Stern (*P* 222). The spoiled egg

metaphor with its unsavoury sexual connotation contrasts with La Motte's fairy tale in

which a tailor describes the smoothness of the coffin that contains the princess as "a

green ice egg, a tiny keyhole. And he knew that this was the keyhole for his wondrous

delicate key, and with a little sigh he put it in and waited for what should ensue" (*P* 63).

The tailor's gentleness in the romance of the fairy story echoes in Maud's mind when she

thinks of Roland as "a gentle and unthreatening being" (*P* 141). The analogy of two

unlikely heroes, who win over a princess, also extends to Ash and his successful wooing of

LaMotte. The romantic connotations of the story find their apex in the last scene that

describes Roland's tentative but finally successful amorous advances towards Maud: "And

very slowly and with infinite gentle delays and delicate diversions and variations of

indirect assault Roland finally, to use an outdated phrase, entered and took possession of

all her white coolness that grew warm against him" (*P* 507). The fairy tale predicted the

short-lived happiness that the Victorians enjoyed and the happy ending for the modern

couple on the last page of the novel, but the fairy story's unconventional ending is

prophetic of the anxiety for lost independence that is characteristic of both LaMotte and

Maud.

In one of her earliest letter to Ash, Christabel implores him to respect her way of

life and explains that she must remain impenetrable like an egg in order to feel whole and

secure, even if it means solitary imprisonment:

> *An Egg is my answer. What is the Riddle?*
>
> *I am my own riddle. Oh, Sir, you must not kindly seek to ameliorate or steal away my solitude. It is a thing we women are taught to dread – oh the terrible tower, oh the thickets round it - no companionable Nest - but a donjon.* (*P* 137)

In her last letter to Ash, Christabel reminds him that their affair had dire

consequences: the birth of a child destroyed her precarious financial and consequently

intellectual independence and forced her to rely on the mercy of her sister's family in

order to avoid social ostracism. She explains that her image of an egg is an idealized form

of solitude and self-possession, which is echoed when Maud tells Roland that she

identifies with Christabel's feelings: "I feel as she did. I keep my defences up because I

must go on doing my work. I know how she felt about her unbroken egg. Her self-possession, her autonomy. I don't want to think of that going" (*P* 506). The discovery of meaning behind various images of eggs – Ash's allegorical penetration of the egg as a life-giving act and LaMotte's metaphor of seeing herself as an egg in fear of being destroyed by Ash – connect with Maud's disturbing sense of broken eggs; her sense of having been spoilt by Fergus Wolff: she comprehends the significance of Ash's and LaMotte's thoughts in relation to her own conflicting impulses.

Sexual Desire hampered by Postmodern Awareness

Both Roland and Maud are reluctant to acknowledge sexual desire but draw closer to each other when they discover a shared vision of "a clean empty bed in a clean room, where nothing is asked or to be asked" (*P* 267). Burgass understands their scepticism that is directed towards "romantic love, romance *in toto*" (*P* 423) as "excessive self-possession […] highly resistant to any aspect of love, including sexual involvement, which threatens autonomy, hence the tentative progress of their romance" (31). Through authorial intervention and remarks that betray a post-Freudian awareness in sexual matters, the couple is described as "children of a time and culture which mistrusted love" (*P* 423). Ironic intrusion and metafictional remarks "complicate and diversify the treatment of the Romantic subplot from a post-modernist point of view."[212]

It is indeed symptomatic that their awareness of theoretical knowledge has become an impediment to their identity as sexual beings and they feel overpowered by poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theories, and the scientific explanatory models that

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[212] Giuliana Giobbi, "Know the Past, Know Thyself: Literary Pursuits and the Quest for Identity in A. S. Byatt's *Possession* and in F. Duranti's *Effetti Personali*," *Journal of European Studies* 24 (1994): 41-54 at 46.

govern consciousness in an anonymous structure of language: "sexual language, linguistic

sexuality, analysis, dissection, deconstruction, exposure" (*P* 423). Byatt challenges anti-

humanistic models of hermeneutics that regard language not as a medium by means of

which man expresses himself, or gives meaning to his world, but instead, reduces being

human to codes that deny the networks of myths and texts that constitute culture and

the social structures that constitute society.

In *Possession*, the Victorian cousin of LaMotte, Sabine de Kercoz, writes about the

progression of the phallus myth in time: women used to dance around the Standing

Stones "to have strong sons", today, the village girls' vile dance is performed as a rite, a

"relic of an ancient sacrifice, perhaps Druidic", which is also connected to Christianity:

"the church spire was only this ancient stone in a metamorphic form – a slate column […]

instead of granite […] and the women huddled beneath it like white hens, as in earlier

times they danced before the other" (*P* 351).

Leonora Stern's allegiance to psychoanalytic feminist interpretation regards

Christabel's sexuality as the single most important factor in her poetry and her

interpretation is preoccupied with lesbian sexuality that is also her own sexual

predilection, which Roland objects to: "it all reduced like boiling jam to – human sexuality.

Just as Leonora Stern makes the whole earth read as the female body – and language – all

language. And all vegetation is pubic hair" (*P* 253). Indeed, Leonora is clearly a caricature

of intellectualized sexuality, "the epitome of the new feminist criticism, insisting as she

does on seeing everything LaMotte wrote as a metaphor for feminine sexuality" (Buxton

205). In the voice of an omniscient narrator, Byatt reflects on literary theory that wants

to ignore the possibility of original meaning and concentrates instead on the significance

of a text for the reader who dissects it through "personal readings, that snatch for

personal meanings" (*P* 471). Narrow-minded criticism that focuses on sex at the expense of the literary text confirms Leonora's satiric status in her convoluted psychoanalytic analysis of LaMotte's poem "Melusina":

> the drowned women in the city might represent the totality of the female body as an erogenous zone if the circumambient fluid were seen as an undifferentiated eroticism, and this might be possible to connect to the erotic totality of the woman/dragon stirring the waters of the large marble bath, or submerging her person in it as LaM. tellingly describes her. (*P* 154)

Ironically, Fergus Wolff epitomizes the circularity of hermeneutic interpretative models: his current textual project faces him with "the challenge" of "deconstruct[ing] something that had apparently already deconstructed itself" (*P* 37). The method of deconstruction is mocked as a futile, destructive and focussed on superimposing meaning. Louisa Hadley summarizes Byatt's treatment of postmodern theorists:

> These theoretical readings are revealed to be reductive in their focus on a single concern, usually sexuality. Moreover, the novel suggests that these approaches are motivated more by contemporary concerns; consequently, such readings wrench the nineteenth-century texts out of their historical context and impose present structures of understanding onto them.[213]

Textual possessiveness is at its core and sexual possessiveness is also part of Fergus Wolff's character: he once succeeded in luring Maud into an affair with insincere language that mimics Romance: "You are the most beautiful thing I have ever seen or dreamed about. I want you, I need you, can't you feel it, it's irresistible" (*P* 64).

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[213] Louisa Hadley, *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative: The Victorians and Us* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) 127.

Postmodern Storytelling

Byatt describes herself as a "self-conscious realist", who wants to write tales and stories in "the alternative tradition of the literary tale, or fairy tale" (*OHAS* 4). Through the juxtaposition of the Victorians and the symbolism in their texts with the concerns of the late twentieth-century characters, Byatt shows that their preoccupation bears a strong resemblance to the problems of the present time. The Victorians are different from Roland and Maud, but are also the same in their need to find love and independence. The "childe" who chooses the mysterious and rather restrained third lady in Christabel's fairy tale "The Threshold" can be linked to Roland through literary allusion. The lady, who wore "her hair, unlike that of the others [...] caught back under a masking veil" (*P* 152) alludes to Maud, who hides her hair under various covers. The golden lady promises the riches of world, the silver fairy beguiles with the pleasures of the night, but the childe remembers the wise words of the father and chooses the unimposing and withdrawn third lady at the end of story, because she "tender[s] The Herb of Rest" (*P* 154). Byatt was interested to employ "small discrete stories rather than pervasive and metamorphic metaphors as ways of patterning and thinking out a text" (*OHAS* 130). Apparently, the story is told by LaMotte, who comments on the choice of the childe that in all fairy tales the third choice must be the right one, and Byatt states that by retelling the story in a new context, she partakes in the continuity of the tale, "Christabel's commentary was 'knowing' about inevitability; my own writing was 'knowing' about Freud. But the *story* was primary and had its own life" (*OHAS* 131). Byatt states that the third leaden fairy offers mystery instead of power or sex, but she also offers tranquillity

"the herb of rest" which connects to Roland's and Maud's longing for solitude and self-possession.

It is no coincidence that *Possession* bears the subtitle "a Romance", because its plot is interspersed with fairy stories and poems that relate to the development in the twentieth century. Furthermore, the novel has a conventional ending that recognizes the personal growth of the main characters and a wish-fulfilling postscript that provides an element of fantasy. Thus, *Possession* is preoccupied with fabulation and the various ways in which history and selves are constructed, which matches Nathaniel Hawthorne's definition of the Romantic tale that "attempt[s] to connect a bygone time with the very present that is flitting away from us."[214]

The Quest for Identity in a Double Plot

The progress of Maud and Roland's investigations provides a double plot structure where the preoccupation with the Victorian past affects the twentieth-century characters; it shows that their personal quest for identity is interwoven with a literary search. Byatt explains that her main motive for writing *Possession* was to show "the relations between living and dead minds […] there should be two couples, a man and woman, one alive and one dead. The novel would concern the complex relations between these two pairs."[215] United in their research, Maud and Roland gradually uncover the previously hidden relationship between Ash and LaMotte; the discovery of textual clues moves along as a parallel development to their own growth and tentative romance, which

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[214] Julian Gitzen, "A. S. Byatt's self-mirroring art," *Critique* 36.2 (1995): 83-95, n. pag. *Literature Online.* Web.
[215] A. S. Byatt, "Choices: The Writing of Possession," *Threepenny Review* 63 (1995): 17.

"can be read as a double quest for identity […] the protagonists' search for their biographical subjects is closely connected to their own search for themselves" (Steveker 1). The detective story involves the discovery of a secret Victorian relationship analogous to the progress of Roland and Maud in finding out who they are and who they want to be in the future. Nick Bentley summarizes Byatt's construction of a fictional image of the Victorian epoch by including examples of the poets' works that act "as a textual and historical hinge between the two narratives" (140). Steveker concludes that "Byatt's rendering of the Victorian Age represents a means of reshaping identity in the present" (124). *Possession* combines two kinds of romances or quests: the research into the past reveals a romance that is closely linked to the development of a romance in the present.

The genre patterns of quest, thriller and romance provide an intertextual net that links the various texts that make up *Possession* to each other. Moreover, Byatt's creation of fictional Victorians for the pseudo-Victorian texts is a strategy to authenticate the neo-Victorian world, which stresses the intertextual links with the past. Hadley goes beyond the argument that *Possession* is written as a pastiche or parody of the past; instead she proposes that it gives a resurrection of historical characters that shows the continuity of the present with the past which takes the "form of ventriloquism" that "involves both 'speaking like' and 'speaking as' a Victorian" (160). Employing ventriloquism circumvents, as Byatt explains, the use of parody "in a sneering or mocking way, but as 'rewriting' or 'representing' the past" (*Choices* 17).

Writing in the Mode of Ventriloquism

Similarly to Byatt's seriousness, Ash remarks on the difference between the bogusness of séances that aim to entice the dead to speak directly and the duty to pass on the stories of the past in the tradition of the storyteller:

> *I myself with the aid of the imagination, have worked a little in that line, have ventriloquised, have lent my voice to, and mixt my life with, those past voices and lives whose resuscitation in our own lives as warnings, as examples, as the life of the past* persisting in us*, is the business of every thinking man and woman.* (P 104)

Byatt defends storytelling as a perpetuating and reworking of something true that is transcendent:

> Narration is as much part of human nature as breath and the circulation of the blood. Modernist literature tried to do away with storytelling, which it thought was vulgar, replacing it with flashbacks, epiphanies, streams of consciousness. But storytelling is intrinsic to biological time, which we cannot escape. [...] Storytelling in general [...] consoles us for endings with endless new beginnings [...] Stories are like genes, they keep part of us alive after the end of our story. (*OHAS* 166)

The distinguishing factor between ventriloquism and parodic modes of writing is that the fictional characters Ash and LaMotte "are clearly based on historical models" (Hadley 160): Randolph Ash is closely modelled on Robert Browning and the intertextual connection between the two is highlighted by the inclusion of an extract from Browning's poem "Mr Sludge, 'the Medium'" as an epitaph to chapter one, which echoes Ash's spiritualist poem "Mummy Possest," that makes up the whole chapter twenty-one, which in turn takes its title from the last two words of "Love's Alchemy" and is therefore, as Professor Blackadder knows, "a quotation from John Donne" (P 299). Many of Ash's poems have intertextual links to Browning's poems and "Ash's use of the dramatic monologue can be seen as a ventriloquism of the form perfected by Browning" (Hadley 161). Instead of ironic playfulness, Byatt's ventriloquism shows her inclination to sincerity

that is similar to Browning's idea of authorial function. Browning claimed that in his works he "only make[s] men and women speak, – give you truth broken into prismatic hues", which "describes his art as a process through which 'something dead may get to live again' (*The Ring and the Book* 1.729)."[216]

Byatt rereads Victorian poetry and internalizes "the rhythms of Tennyson and Browning, Rossetti and Keats" for writing the poems of Ash and LaMotte, which is a process of "'inventing' the self of another person" (Sturrock 20). The resurrection of past voices shows that the artistry of the writer acts as an intermediary between the living and the dead. Byatt describes the strangeness she experienced in the process of writing the poetry in *Possession*: "I found I was possessed – it was actually quite frightening. The nineteenth-century poems *wrote themselves*, hardly blotted, fitting into the metaphorical structure of my novel, but not mine, as my prose is mine" (*Choices* 17). Elsewhere, Byatt explains that *Possession* is about respect for the dead and she sees her role as a mediator, who intends to give authenticity to "the presence of literary texts as the voices of persistent ghosts or spirits. […] ventriloquism became necessary because of what I felt was the increasing gulf between current literary criticism and the words of the literary texts it in some sense discusses" (*OHAS* 45). Burgass explains that acting as a medium, Byatt makes the Victorian voice "'live' for the reader in a fictional context in the way that a critical commentary could not, just as she can present the life of a poet to the reader in a way which would be presumptuous in a conventional biography" (51). Through the fictive Ash and LaMotte, Byatt resurrects the Victorian frame of mind, which includes nineteenth-century preoccupations with faith and doubt, exemplified in the Victorians interest in amateur biology, Darwinism and spiritualism.

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[216] June Sturrock, "How Browning and Byatt Bring Back the Dead: 'Mr. Sludge, the "Medium"' and 'The Conjugial Angel,'" *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 7.1 (2009): 19-30 at 20.

Negative Ways of Possessing and Being Possessed

The double meaning of the word possession plays an important role for positing

an ethical reflection on possessiveness: most characters either show a penchant to

possess – objects or people – or they desire to be possessed by others. Some scholars and

biographers become entangled with their biographical subject to such an extent that they

are reduced to a life in the shadow of their admired object. This is the case with

Mortimer Cropper, whose morbid obsession with Ash drives him to own every object

connected to the poet. Cropper's attachment to objects shows that he needs to fill his

feeble sense of identity by transferring Ash's remains onto himself: "he believed the

watch had come to him, that it had been meant to come to him, that he had and held

something of R. H. Ash. It ticked near his heart. He would have liked to be a poet" (*P* 387).

Cropper builds his identity on collecting, possessing and assimilation, as if wearing Ash's

pocket watch and signet ring could turn him into the object of his desire, but apart from

the satisfaction of owning, Cropper experiences the stifling of his creative energy: his own

autobiographical project comes regularly to a halt after the inclusion of an inherited letter

from Ash to his great-grandmother; at this point, he feels overpowered, "as though he

had no existence, no separate existence of his own after that first contact with the

paper's electric rustle and the ink's energetic black looping" (*P* 105). Hadley summarizes

that Cropper's attitude violates the past, because "it is not the collector who gives a

coherent identity to the collection, but rather the collection which gives an identity to the

collector" (129). In comparison with Maud's and Roland's passionate research and

respect for the Victorian poets, the sarcastic and possessive Cropper is a caricature of an egotistical academic, who has a negative relationship with the past.

Criticism of Modern Literary Theory: Against the Hermeneutics of Suspicion

In their novels, Doris Lessing and Vladimir Nabokov critiqued the models of culture in which humans are situated and the ways in which identities are shaped by assigning names to ontological selves. They pointed out why the literary pursuit of writing novels still provides an important instrument for examining, explicating and challenging the different possibilities that are available in the quest to arrive at a sense of authenticity for a self that is situated in the (post)modern world. The importance of looking back on the whole tradition of writing about the self can be evaluated on its ability to keep open other ways of thinking about the self.

Possession exemplifies Byatt's ideas about the proper role of criticism that involves a positive engagement with the past and, what she describes as misguided reductionist criticism that is centred on any particular theoretical model and reads literary texts through the lenses of feminism, Marxism, or post-colonialism. Roland and Maud are identified as historical and textual researchers, as "old-fashioned textual crititc[s]" (*P* 50), who engage in a positive way with the past in that both try to reimagine the beliefs and attitudes of their Victorian subjects instead of constructing them from a modern viewpoint. Roland suggests that "[i]t makes an interesting effort of imagination to think how they [Ash and LaMotte] saw the world" (*P* 254), which is echoed in Maud's phrase that "we have to make a real effort of imagination to know what it felt like to be them" (*P*

267). Hadley concludes that both "combine a scholarly approach that is committed to the

historical specificity of the past with an emotional response to the past that stems from

the past itself, rather than from the present" (129). Similarly, Steveker evaluates their

interpretive approach as an imaginative reconstruction of the author's intention as the

source of meaning by "relating to other individuals. Hermeneutically speaking, *Possession*

represents imagination as a means that allows for understanding the other by sharing

her/his experience" (27). The positive appreciation of the author shifts from a concern

with establishing the meaning of the text to a concern with the acts of understanding, a

theory that goes back to Johann Herder, who believed that with sufficient effort of the

imagination one could feel one's way into different mentalities (*Einfühlung*), a strive to

'live in the spirit of the author'. E.D. Hirsch elaborated on the distinction between

meaning and understanding by insisting that an interpreter must distinguish between the

meaning of a text and its significance. He claims that textual meaning is an effect of the

author and is therefore permanent, self-identical and reproducible through "objective

interpretation."[217] Significance, in contrast, is variable: the value or relevance of a text

always depends on changing historical, social, and personal conditions and is produced by

readers who project their own attitudes onto the text. Hirsch explains the difference:

> *Meaning* is that which is represented by a text; it is what the author meant by his use of
> particular sign sequence; it is what the signs represent. *Significance*, on the other hand,
> names a relationship between that meaning and a person, or a conception, or a situation,
> or indeed anything imaginable. […] Significance always implies a relationship, and one
> constant, unchanging pole of that relationship is what the text means. (8)

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[217] E. D. Hirsch Jr, *Validity in Interpretation,* 1967 (New Haven: Yale UP, 1971) 210.

Thus, Hirsch asks to go back to the "unchanging pole" of the author as the only valid source for meaning, but he also concedes that there is latitude for variation in interpretation; a responsibility that rests with the reading subject. In opposition to New Critic's "radical historicism" (Hirsch viii), and their "theory of authorial irrelevance" (Hirsch 3), which implicitly denies the accessibility of the author's meaning, Hirsch advocates a reconstructive process for determining the "author's horizon" in order to circumvent the conundrum of critics projecting their own preoccupations on to the text. Once the historical set of typical expectations, prohibitions, norms, and limits that define the author's intentions as a whole is established, it would ground and sanction inferences about probable textual meaning(s) since genuine certainty in interpretation is impossible. Hirsch cautions not to confuse "the impossibility of certainty in understanding with the *impossibility of understanding*" (17, emphasis added). Understanding, he says, results from "the imaginative reconstruction of the speaking subject" which, in Hirsch's view, is the proper function of the interpreter, whose "primary task is to reproduce in himself the author's 'logic,' his attitudes, his cultural givens, in short his world" (242). It follows that the author does not possess a text in any absolute sense but should be respected as a source; as the person who had a definite meaning in mind at the time of writing.

Against Hirsch's project of going back to the author as the original source, Jacques Derrida, in the same year (1967), claimed that any text is discourse and therefore confined in the "structurality of structure" that makes up a language system in which "the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the

domain and the play of signification infinitely."[218] The freeplay of language constitutes a

world of its own, a network of signs, without any reference either outside itself or to a

centre within; in effect it abandons "all reference to a *center*, to a *subject*, to a privileged

reference, to an origin, or to an absolute *archia*" ("Structure, Sign and Play in the

Discourse of the Human Sciences" 361). Structuralism argues against the presence of the

human voice, because meaning is contained in a closed system that explains everything

from within: "the structures of language are powerful as systems with their own rules and

do not need to take account of the referent (the real life object to which the language

refers)."[219]

Maud and Roland believe in the integrity of the Victorians and read that integrity

in their texts. Byatt's sympathies clearly are with them: at the end of the novel, Roland

not only receives offers from several universities, but also starts to free himself from the

shadow of Randolph Ash. Burgass explains that there is "a thematic opposition set up

between the artist and the critic, which moves towards resolution" in the moment when

Roland finds his own creative voice; at that point, "Roland effectively grows out of

structuralism" (15, 17). Roland has detached himself from the shadow of the nineteenth-

century poet and from the reductionism of Leonora Stern and Fergus Wolff, who hide

behind the ostensible objectivity of interpretive models that are based on scientific

methods or ideology. Academics who read the texts of the past through the lens of

psychoanalytic theory are followers of the "hermeneutics of suspicion" in which

scepticism creates "a dichotomy between a text as it is presented and the possible deeper

meaning of that text that go beyond what the author intended" (Scott-Baumann 68).

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[218] Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," *Writing and Difference,* 1967 (London; New York: Routledge 2005) 351-370, 352 and 354.
[219] Alison Scott-Baumann, *Ricœur and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion,* ed. James Fieser, *Continuum Studies in Continental Philosophy* (London; New York: Continuum, 2009) 36.

Byatt satirizes their contemporary concern with and focus on sexuality as destructive to the specific meaning that the writer had intended and Hadley concludes that "such readings wrench the nineteenth-century texts out of their historical context and impose present structures of understanding onto them" (127). Byatt's scepticism is directed towards "artistic stances which say we explore only our own subjectivity" and poststructual "theories of language as a self-referring system of signs, which doesn't touch the world" (*PM* 11).

The Defence of the Nineteenth-Century Novel

Possession shows a postmodern fascination with the past by presenting characters in the present preoccupied with the reconstruction of selves from the past as a pathway for constructing their own selves. The novel respects the radical difference of a bygone era but also critiques possessive postmodern attitudes by presenting scholars who have a critical predilection to find their own meanings in the texts of others. Their possessiveness reveals a desire to gain power and fame for their critical work, or they seek financial benefits from owning the legal rights to documents, or they turn Victorian objects into fetishes in order to prop up a weak ego. These self-centred preoccupations frame the Victorian subjects in a postmodern ironic way that at once explores the fictionality of the past and the boundaries of an acceptable sense of possession/interpretation. Byatt implicitly critiques Roland Barthes' apocalyptic suggestion that "the author is absent"[220], which would allow new readings that would eliminate the author at all levels.

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[220] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," 1967, *Image, Music, Text* (London: Fontana, 1977) 42-148, 145.

Contrary to Barthes' poststructuralist theories, Byatt, like Lessing, believes that the nineteenth-century realist novel is inherently bound up with an interest in character building and in giving representative examples of human nature. In *Possession*, she defends the use of the third-person narrator as the voice of the writer, whose intrusion functions similarly to a Greek chorus, in order to tell "what can be told about the world of the fiction" (*OHAS* 102). The narrator's voice is deliberately used three times to complete past events, "to tell what the historians and biographers […] never discovered, always to heighten the reader's imaginative entry into the world of the text (*OHAS* 56). Similarly to Doris Lessing, Byatt shows nostalgia for writing in the mode of the nineteenth-century novel that could portray a coherent world. According to Alexa Alfer, the third-person narrator "invites readers temporarily to suspend their twentieth-century scepticism and imagine themselves into a world in which spiritualism, the science of phrenology and the realist novel are all still part of the intellectual landscape" (96).

Moreover, the contemporary quest narrative shows that nostalgia for the past is born out of exhaustion with the present, "a state that we turn to at the end of the century: 'Where we fear the chaos of the contemporary, with its bombs at airports and other uncontrollable threats, we turn to a nostalgia for a past that suggests order and familiarity.'" (Interview with A. S. Byatt in Becker 24). Byatt and Lessing share an awareness about the impossible task of re-using the nineteenth-century form without reflecting the ironic distance that has become part of the human condition in the twentieth century. Kathleen Kelly analyses the tensions between realist and postmodern modes in Byatt's work and notes that she is caught between sceptic impulses; she "is a realist novelist who questions the project of realism; at the same time, she is also a

postmodern novelist who questions the postmodern project."[221] In their different ways,

both writers seek to position themselves as writers who still believe in the traditional

novel and its potential for further development.

Doris Lessing's parody of the conventional realist novel reflects on the future of

the novel form: realism is extended through formal invention in order to present the

changed condition of the post-war era. Through the fictional author Anna Wulf, *The*

Golden Notebook questions the process and possibilities of writing in a new form, which,

as Max Saunders states, "shows the author Doris Lessing moving […] from the

conventional novel to the breakdown of convention" (495). Lessing's novel stands

uneasily at the dawn of the age of metafiction and evokes her conflicting impulses: the

wish to continue to write realism but in a reformed and self-conscious mode.

Byatt successfully merges realism and experimentation in *Possession*, and, as a

defence of realism against poststructuralist nihilism, she places within the fiction an

authorial commentary which extends the possibilities of realism; thus she stands in the

mainstream of realism whilst also exploring postmodern alternatives for self-reflexive

awareness. Celia Wallhead summarizes her stance as being "at the fore of the impulse to

reconceptualise realism in the wake of modernist and postmodernist critique."[222] In

Possession, Byatt continues Nabokov's critique of New Critics' attempts to postulate the

autonomy of a literary text only to superimpose the text with individual meaning.

Kinbote fails to read the poem and succeeds only in reading himself; he fails to respect

the integrity of the poet in the same manner as the literary critics do in *Possession*. The

denial of alterity, the difference of another individual, results from a self-serving

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[221] Kathleen Coyne Kelly, *A.S. Byatt* (New York: Twayne, 1996) ix.
[222] Celia M. Wallhead, *The Old, the New and the Metaphor: A Critical Study of the Novels of A.S. Byatt* (London: Minerva, 1999) 19.

insistence on personal themes at the expense of the poet: *Pale Fire* is a prescient novel

that shows that the author is not quite dead yet, as Roland Barthes would later argue in

the postmodern turn, but that he is already irrelevant to interpretation.

The future role of the writer is another theme that preoccupies Lessing and Byatt

and both engaged with reclaiming authorial presence in their texts. In this respect, both

novels show auto/biographical contents on several levels: "*The Golden Notebook* is a

portrait of the artist as a woman, in which Anna Wulf is an imaginary self-portrait of

Lessing, and Anna's imaginary fiction, *Free Women* is the imaginary self-portrait of a

fictional character" (Saunders 498-9). Whereas Lessing was preoccupied with truth and

fictiveness, exploring writing styles in various degrees of realism and searching for her

position as a writer, Byatt breaks the conventions of realism by including her own

metanarrative comments and those of the twentieth-century characters on the various

perspectives of criticism. Both echo a scepticism toward traditional biography. Saunders

concludes that *Possession* "not only creates portraits of its two imaginary Victorian

authors, but reads their imaginary writings as imaginary self-portraits of their authors,

while showing their biographer-readers discerning these portraits, and thus furnishing

their own imaginary self-portraits in the process" (498). In this sense, *Possession* focusses

on the role of interpretation in narrating the past, which shows that Byatt is occupied

with the act of reinterpretation and profoundly defies "the aesthetic imperative that all

good fiction now is overtly fictive and about fictiveness" (*PM* 25).

Section 3: Autre-Biography, or Meta-Autobiographiction? J. M. Coetzee's Summertime *(2009)*

J. M. Coetzee's earlier novels show his persistent interest in pushing the boundaries between fiction and autobiography by introducing Coetzee-like characters that allow a return to the metaphysical and moral preoccupations that link Augustine, Rousseau, Montaigne and the literature of the double. *Summertime* takes the distancing of the authorial voice a step further by merging the fictional and the biographical genres completely and thereby creating a new sub-genre that Coetzee terms *autre*-biography.

The postmodern contention that universal statements are inevitably partial and relative is imaginatively elaborated in *Summertime*, which exemplifies the postmodern idea that the self is never constituted simply by itself but through its relations with the other and through its engagement with the other. The paradigmatic shift in postmodern characterization explores perspectivism from a higher vantage point that presents an alter-ego-character as an absence or objectified as a "he" instead of a subject "I". *Summertime* explores the interchangeable object-subject relation that exists within the self (John) and also opposite others who in turn perceive and objectify (John) in a double narrative structure: "According to Sartre, it is crucial to distinguish between the other, whom I perceive, and the other, who perceives me, that is, it is crucial to distinguish between the other as object, and the other as subject."[223] The novel begins and ends with diary excerpts of a fictional self perceiving itself in stories that offer a fragmentary

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[223] Dan Zahavi, "Self and Other: The Limits of Narrative Understanding," *Narrative and Understanding Persons*, ed. Daniel D. Hutto, *Royal Institute of Philosophy,* Supplement, Vol. 60 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007): 179-201 at 198.

portrait of an unnamed writer who is troubled by his conscience and who ends his entries with notes to himself. In the interviews, the subject John stands as a blank surface, an object for others, who project their memories onto him and the interviewees remember primarily their past selves and secondarily their relations with John. The accounts written down by the unnamed self are juxtaposed with the stories that others tell about him; they partly confirm each other in facts, however, they emerge incongruent in regard to the different motivations that are applied to the subject.

The character John comes to stand in for a voiceless, absent being, which can be interpreted as an extension of Coetzee's efforts to excavate some fundamental truth about human experience "by searching for ways in which the novel might recover an ethical basis, in full appreciation of the political context."[224] The notion of art as critique that once characterized modernism becomes again a crucial preoccupation in postmodern ultra-realism, which chimes with ethical responsibilities that are elaborated in Coetzee's oeuvre, where he repeatedly generates "a discussion of ethics in fiction or of the relationships between ethical and fictional discourses."[225] In this respect, Coetzee redefines the possibilities of critique in postmodern terms. Literature has to fulfill at once a social responsibility and an ethical responsibility and Coetzee does this by presenting different perspectives: firstly, he embodies ideas in characters and secondly, he represents ideas thematically in different contexts.

The negation of the self in presenting the self as an absence is a radical decentring, but it allows the author to start up an epistemological enquiry by recreating himself as an imagined other and to construct different characters opposite that other; a

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[224] David Attwell, introd., *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992) 4; Abbreviation used in parenthetical references henceforth is *DP*.

[225] David Attwell, "The Life and Times of Elizabeth Costello: J. M. Coetzee and the Public Sphere" in *J. M. Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual,* ed. Jane Poyner (Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 2006) 25-41, 25.

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writer demonstrates his artistic sensibility by assuming "a negative capability which can imaginatively project itself into and inhabit the view of other embodied subjects in the world" (Waugh, "Postmodernism" 302). The writing of oneself as another explores the concept of personal identity by investigating the subjectivity of the self, or, what being oneself implies and *Summertime* shows a two-pronged approach on two narrative planes: firstly, the diary excerpts explore how a sense of self can be gained through self-investigation and self-interpretation, according to Charles Taylor's dictum that "[h]uman beings are self-interpreting animals" and it follows that "our interpretation of ourselves and our experience is constitutive of what we are, and therefore cannot be considered as merely a view on reality."[226] Secondly, the interview section expands on that view and shows how the self is seen by others and the subject John is constructed through the memories of five interviewees. Imagined otherness is doubled and gives a double vision in which the author imagines truth(s) about himself: how he thinks that he is seen, or, in the case of the fictional John, how he is mostly misperceived by others.

Formal Aesthetic in Postmodern Autobiography: Political Engagement and Philosophical Critique

Although the formal strategy disrupts the novel's ontological status and obscures the idea of an auto/biographical subject, the author remains as the mastermind behind the whole of the book: he controls the time and perspectives that shift from diary excerpts, written by a supposedly dead author in the early nineteen-seventies, to the recollections of acquaintances about that time. Their memories appear to be

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[226] Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985) 45, 47.

manipulated by individual interests or subsequently altered in form by the interviewer by either rewriting them or by translation. The author distances himself by handing over the agency of telling to others, but in effect, he obscures himself to the point where he "seems to be saying on the one hand that this is an objective view, but then on the other hand that this *is* a work by Coetzee."[227] Postmodern autobiography has no unified subject that can be transparently present to itself through a simple reflective consciousness and in consequence, the character John emerges as different selves, depending on the different perspectives of five acquaintances and through the textual remainder of supposedly authentic diary entries, written by a deceased author with the name John Coetzee. The author depersonalizes himself by assuming that he is dead; he therefore literally embodies T.S. Eliot's idea that "[t]he progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality."[228] The fictional negation of a self allows realism to be understood in another way: by embodying ideas in characters and inventing situations that exemplify abstract ideas that cannot be simply expressed in conventional realism.

Realism as Embodying: "Fictioneering" the Self – The Centrality of Narrative

In an interview, Coetzee states that "[a]ll autobiography is storytelling, all writing is autobiography" and although autobiographers have "privileged access to information", their capacity for telling the truth is hampered by self-interest that brings about a

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[227] Gillian Dooley, *J. M. Coetzee and the Power of Narrative* (Amherst: Cambria P, 2010) 70.
[228] T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism,* 1920 (London: Methuen; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1960) 47-59, 53.

"selective vision, even a degree of blindness" (*DP* 391). Assessing the self in the way of

direct introspection is open to myopic indulgence and the biographer Vincent suspects

John Coetzee made up a fiction for himself in his diaries, "for his own eyes, or perhaps for

posterity" and therefore it contains little truth, which should be excused "because he was

a fictioneer."[229] Virginia Woolf had already stated that the self is changeable in the flux of

time and that in thinking about one's past it is necessary for memory to make scenes that

order past moments of being from the perspective of the present: "one's life is not

confined to one's body and what one says and does; one is living all the time in relation to

certain background rods or conceptions" ("A Sketch of the Past" 73).

Contemporary cognitive neuroscience found evidence for an intimate connection

between remembering and storytelling: both activities take place in similar neural

systems and both need language for expression. But moreover, autobiographical

memories are mental constructions that change over time, because they are affected by

processes of reconstruction as well as by reconsolidation. The mutability of memory in

combination with the need to give a coherent account in the present, results in the

confabulation of past events. The importance of narrative in weaving a story that fits the

reality of the rememberer is a "key organizational force in autobiographical memory,

allowing memories to represent the passage of time and the human push towards the

reaching of personal goals. Memories are told like stories, to others and to oneself."[230]

The importance of personal goals points to the idea of the writer as a public

intellectual, who has the critical power that can bring into being ideas about the self in a

personal, social and political context and in this way, the writer reconnects with reality.

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[229] J. M. Coetzee, *Summertime: Scenes from Provincial Life (*Sydney: Random, 2009) 225; Abbreviation used in parenthetical references henceforth is *S*.
[230] Charles Fernyhough, *Pieces of Light: The New Science of Memory* (London: Profile, 2012) 272**.**

The alter-ego character John in the diary fragments embodies ideas that amount to a subjective account of historical experience in South Africa, but not in the sense of traditional realism:

> Realism has never been comfortable with ideas. It could not be otherwise: realism is premised on the idea that ideas have no separate existence, can exist only in things. So when it needs to debate ideas, as here, it is driven to invent situations – walks in the countryside, conversations – in which characters give voice to contending ideas and thereby in a certain sense embody them. The notion of embodying is cardinal. In these debates, ideas do not and indeed cannot float free: they are tied to the speakers by whom they are enounced, are generated from the matrix of individual interests out of which their speakers act in the world. [231]

It is the concept of embodiment that fuses realism with postmodern narration, but John lacks bodily presence in the memory of others, who describe him as disembodied, a "wooden man", which suggests a clinical picture of a deficit of bodily proprioception, a deficiency in coordinating parts of the body; this is even succinctly stated by Adriana, observing John trying to dance: "He moved as though his body were a horse that he was riding, a horse that did not like its rider and was resisting" (*S* 183). But Adriana's family name, Nascimento, also hints at the idea that her scathing characterisation of John is a creative act; in her account she is "giving birth", as her name translates, and brings into being a "John" of her own making, which displaces the other John, the one who was already there.

The Importance of Subjective Experience in Remembering

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[231] Anthony Uhlmann, "J.M. Coetzee and the uses of anachronism in *Summertime*," *Textual Practice* 26.4 (2012): 747-761 at 750.

The interviewee Martin embodies a paradox: he supposedly obtained the teaching appointment at the University of Cape Town that J. M. Coetzee held at that time and comments on Coetzee as a former departmental colleague, although they first met as applicants to be interviewed for the same position. His reluctance to speak about John's personal relations mirrors John's "strain of secretiveness that seemed to be engrained in him" (*S* 212). He also seems to be speaking for the author when he queries the scope of only five sources – four of them women, who comment on John's sexual presence – and summarizes that the result will be "an account that is slanted towards the personal and the intimate at the expense of the man's actual achievements as a writer" (*S* 218).

Summertime gives a perfectly plausible portrait of the writer in the sense that readers' expectations are reaffirmed, albeit the scale of ridicule enlarges that image out of proportion and the self-critical memos to himself pick up on many topics that are then retold as stories in the interviews. For example: the diary entry of 1 September 1972 describes the confusion of mistaking cubic metres for square metres (*S* 7), and this event is later retold by Julia in dialogue form:

> 'I was out by a factor of six', he was saying (or maybe it was sixteen, I was only half listening). 'Instead of one ton of sand, six (or sixteen) tons of sand. Instead of one and a half tons of gravel, ten tons of gravel. I must have been out of my mind.' (*S* 30)

The constant self-deprecation and repetition of failures in exercising practical skills and emotional remoteness paint a portrait of interpersonal ineptitude that makes the novel an exaggerated mirror of Coetzee's public image, which some critics have disseminated over the years. Doubts that personal interests obscure the **truth** are everywhere: all interviewees suspect that Mr Vincent's biographical project is skewed: it

does not engage with the works of the writer and focusses solely on the opinions of randomly selected acquaintances.

Meta-Representations and Autobiographical Self-knowledge

In *Summertime*, the author removes himself from the position of a subject and becomes an object that can be analysed and discussed in a sequence of hermeneutic conversations in which the subject is reconstructed in a particular way. By occupying the position of others, subjective experience can be articulated through the act of meaning-making in a narrative structure, a concept that Coetzee subscribed to when he "insisted on literature as a specific kind of discourse, distinct from the discourses of history, politics, and ethics, or, as he put it, 'storytelling as another, an other mode of thinking.'"[232] The structural form of *Summertime* challenges conventional expectations of realism in autobiography; it is a new form of telling the story of the self, which allows for new forms of experiential insight. The episode of interpreting a legal clause, related early on in John's diary, could be read as a metaphorical cue for the idea behind the construction of the novel and how it should be read. When narrative is used to express human subjectivity, it does so symbolically and indirectly and this idea goes back to Paul Ricœur's conviction "that metaphorical statements and narrative plots function not for their own sake – for the self-celebration of the creative act – but 'to bring into language

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[232] Peter McDonald, "The Writer, the Critic, and the Censor: J.M. Coetzee and the Question of Literature," *Book History* 7 (2004): 285-302 at 294.

an experience, a way of living in and of Being-in-the-world that precedes it and demands to be said.'"[233]

The widow's self-interest constructs meaning by focussing on a single aspect and she insists that "notwithstanding" can only mean that her demands cannot be refused, but in fact she misapprehends the phrase as a whole: "notwithstanding the aforesaid" (*S* 11). Similarly, various ideas about the subject John are patterned throughout the novel, but the reference point that emerges in *Summertime* is not a biological subject, or the author J.M. Coetzee, but his ideas about thinking about himself and how he thinks that he is thought of from the outside. *Summertime* could be said to undertake a phenomenological enquiry that is part of philosophical anthropology that attempts

> to elucidate the basic constitution of human subjectivity, where the human subject is understood as a being whose own being is a matter of self-interpretation. The fact that the subject is a self-interpreting being means that it can only be understood through its modes of mediation and externalization, rather than in an immediate conscious self-presence. (Nicholas Smith 23)

The writing of the self in the form of an other converts autobiography to a different mode of narration that Coetzee termed *autre*biography (*DP* 394). *Autre*biography involves the conscious fictionalizing of the self, and, to use a term from cognitive science and from the philosophy of cognition, it allows the metarepresentation of past experiences. Coetzee attempts to escape his own ego and assumes a position that negates the self, which is similar to John Keats's concept that the literary artist must have a negative capability that defines the poetical character as a self that rejects an egotistic centre: the poet willingly surrenders himself and thus is able to fill himself with different

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[233] Paul Ricœur in Nicholas Smith, *Strong Hermeneutics: Contingency and Moral identity* (London: Routledge, 1997) 24.

characters. Linking the poetic identity-void to the character of a chameleon, Keats writes

that "[a] Poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no Identity

– he is continually in for – and filling some other Body."[234] *Summertime* meta-represents

Coetzee's own as well as other people's thoughts about himself. Charles Fernyhough

writes about novelists and their making of fictional memories that "they are putting

together many different kinds of information, from the conceptual to the immediately

experiential and arranging them in a way that meets the needs of the present act of

storytelling" (274-5).

Postmodern Truth and the Conscience of the Writer

Although the story about the self is inevitably a mixture of historic and poetic

truth, the difference in genre between novel and autobiography becomes evident in the

intentionality of the author, in his attempt to convey an authentic impression of reality.

The articulation of truth in fiction

> can be identified or interpreted through a close attention to stylistic and rhetorical
> devices. These devices will betray or carry the signature of the one who means or at least
> the relation of the one who is trying to express the meaning to the meaning one is
> seeking to express. (Uhlmann 751)

Uhlmann's view of intentionality comes closer to the older notion of sincerity, which does

not involve so much an adherence to an objective truth but is a subjective expression of

the truth of the self, a sincere appeal to the metaphysical, which goes beyond the social

duty of a writer. Coetzee points to the transcendental aspect in his writing:

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[234] John Keats, Letter to Richard Woodhouse, 27 Oct. 1818, *English Romantic Writers* (New York: Harcourt, 1967) 1220.

duty can be of two kinds: it can be an obligation imposed on the writer by society, by the soul of the society, by society in its hopes and dreams; or it can be something constitutional to the writer, what one might loosely call conscience but what I would tentatively prefer to call an imperative, a transcendental imperative. (*DP* 340)

A writer has a duty to society, but as an individual, he also has a duty to his own conscience. *Summertime* moves beyond the modernist impasse, the infinite regress of reflexive self-consciousness, by writing from the "outside, or perhaps alongside, rationality with a particular kind of ethical consciousness, a consciousness that does not belong to formal philosophy and that includes a recognition of one's participation in the precariousness of being" (Attwell 37). Author-identity is the sum of an entire oeuvre, but "[t]o deny any relation between creator and creation would be as foolish as to identify the two. The reality is, one might say, that they are embedded in one another."[235] The textual body provides a reflective stance on life; the art of storytelling gives, what Susan Barton in *Foe* calls, "the substance of the truth."[236]

Writing the Self as the Other: Autobiography as *Autre*biography

In his first two autobiographical memoirs, J. M. Coetzee reflected on the way in which narrative modes and "telling" a story affect the reader. The uncategorized third-person voice produced a distance between the writer and the "he" on the page, which served "to alienate the author from a self he reluctantly claims as his own while simultaneously disrupting our notion of authorial and narratorial verisimilitude in the

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[235] Stephen Mulhall, *The Wounded Animal: J. M. Coetzee and the Difficulty of Reality in Literature and Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2009) 167.
[236] J. M. Coetzee, *Foe*, 1986 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987) 51.

realm of autobiography."[237] In *Boyhood* and *Youth*, the protagonist John appeared to be a biographical object rather than an autobiographical subject. This effect of distancing allowed the contemplation of a past self from a higher vantage point by turning the self into another, which indicates a "slippage of remembering and imagining, always in the service of emotional truths, but from another perspective than one's own." (Hustvedt 111). The first three interviewees in *Summertime* give emotional accounts; unanimous in their verdict that John was practically, socially and sexually inept. The question-and-answer sections, which are bracketed by diary excerpts, disturb the genre of autobiographical writing and cut through any simple notion of narrative and temporal coherence. *Summertime* might thus be described as an assemblage of unfinished texts or as a fictional biography in the process of becoming. It stands as a mere collection of raw material and in this respect, the novel makes a formal statement through its apparent incompleteness in which the autobiographical character is displaced in diary fragments and working documents. The naming of the subject as John Coetzee confuses in its slight deviation from the proper name of the author with the effect that autobiographical reading is further complicated. The subject John Coetzee is deliberately set up as a postmodern figure that differs from the putative author-self and Thomas Docherty explains that the negation of coherent identity in postmodern narrative is an effect of the preoccupation with representation in which "character as such is never produced (it 'disappears'); rather, we have the seduction of the process of characterization, a scenario of seduction which radically involves the confusion of the ontological status of character

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[237] Laura Wright, "A Feminist-Vegetarian Defense of Elizabeth Costello: A Rant from the Ethical Adademic on J. J. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals*," in *J. M. Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual,* ed. Jane Poyner (Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 2006) 193-216, 198.

with that of reader and author."[238] It could therefore be argued that throughout the text the subject John makes "a series of 'appearances' which do not act as the cover for a 'deeper' reality for it is that very notion of a material or essential reality which postmodern characterization denies" (Docherty 64).

The interview structure of the novel also raises the question of who is authorized to speak when the authorial voice is seemingly displaced. Anthony Uhlmann sees the purpose of anachronism in auto/biography as "a deliberate strategy of distorting relations with a view to moving as close as possible to an inexpressible 'higher truth'" (749). *Summertime* can be read as an imaginatively elaborated allegory of the plurality of the self, evident in the postmodern contention that universal statements are inevitably partial and relative with the effect that the character John emerges as a farcical, almost pathological, subject. *Summertime* only pretends to be an autobiography and, similarly to *Pale Fire*, the repetition of themes creates a matrix of mirrors that is intrinsically self-conscious and parodies the literary forms of biography and autobiography.

Paul Ricœur enquires about the reference of the individual self in relation to itself and suggests that "the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other, that instead one passes into the other."[239] The importance of thinking about oneself as an other, opposite and yet engaged with others, is evident in Vincent's answer to Margot's question why he wants to include so much about her and other family members in a biography about Coetzee: "You were part of your cousin. He was part of you. That is plain enough, surely" (*S* 152).

But instead of revealing facts that could be taken as a serious autobiography, *Summertime* constructs an eccentric alter-ego figure through the accounts of others, who

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[238] Thomas Docherty, *Alterities: Criticism, History, Representation* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996) 40.
[239] Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992) 3.

attribute neurological deficiencies to the fictive John, that are somewhat reminiscent of

Oliver Sacks' case studies (*The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat and Other Clinical

Tales***,** 1985). Women, especially, mistake his intentions and motivations: Julia declares

that she was offended by John's proposal to accompany their love-making with

Schubert's music and she suggests that he suffers from visual agnosia: "The man who

mistook his mistress for a violin" (*S* 83). Adriana is indignant about John's suggestion of

the sublime power of music and cannot understand what it meant "that listening to

Schubert had taught him one of the great secrets of love" (*S* 175). Evidently, the women

cannot understand the concept behind John's feelings.

The Truth of the Self: Phenomenology of Self-Reflexive Subjectivity

The central question in autobiography is the nature of the truth of the self, or,

how one can express some kind of truth of the self in writing. Coetzee supposes that the

search for the truth about oneself is a salient preoccupation, "because we are born with

the idea of the truth" (*DP* 395) and David Attwell explains this idea further by relating it to

the self-reflexivity of writing: "all writing is autobiographical; but for a novelist the two

genres cannot be on the same footing: autobiography is secondary to fiction" (*DP* 3).

Coetzee's first two memoirs, *Boyhood* (1997) and *Youth (*2002), showed elements of a

traditional, confessional mode of writing and a return to the tradition of modernist

writers, evident in repeated allusions to Stephen Dedalus's phrase "Agenbite of inwit".

Joyce's phrase is also used by the fictional John in *Summertime,* where it signifies his

particular 'prick of consciousness': "How to escape the filth: not a new question. An old

rat-question that will not let go, that leaves its nasty, suppurating wound. Agenbite of

inwit" (*S* 4). After reading the news about atrocities, committed by South African

politicians, John initially responds emotionally with "fits of rage and despair" (*S* 5), but he

also makes a resolve to do private penance in the hope of fending off his shame: instead

of using black labourers to concrete an insulation apron around the house, he decides to

do "his own dirty work" (*S* 7). Alas, his good intentions go awry in the miscalculation of

material and time involved in completing the task. In his essay "Self-interpreting

animals", Charles Taylor claims "that our interpretation of ourselves and our experience is

constitutive of what we are, and therefore cannot be considered as merely a view on

reality, separable from reality, nor as an epiphenomenon, which can be by-passed in our

understanding of reality" (Taylor, *Human Agency* 47). John's failure shows the

helplessness of an individual response to social problems with insurmountable

proportions; the simple compassion that he feels towards the subjects of cruelty proves

to be not only helpless, but also useless and pointless. The background to that

experience is given by Martin, the only male interviewee, who embodies another alter-

ego figure of Coetzee: he is a twin in the sense that they "are the same kind of person […]

both are white South Africans" (*S* 208). In their precarious position as legal aliens and

intruders, both feel guilt in taking part as successors to colonialism: "We were reluctant

to invest too deeply in the country, since sooner or later our ties to it would have to be

cut, our investment in it annulled" (*S* 211). Cutting his ties with South Africa is precisely

what J. M. Coetzee did by emigrating to Australia and it seems that Martin is a

mouthpiece for a larger historical guilt**.**

    The notion of guilt gets even more complicated in John's emotional responses to

the country: although an original feeling of ontological security in childhood was already

expressed by the narrator in *Boyhood*, who says "*I belong on the farm*" (95), this

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sentiment has changed in the retrospective account of the adult John in *Summertime*,

who still feels nostalgic, but is also mourning for something that he has lost: "this place

wrenches my heart […] It wrenched my heart when I was a child, and I have never been

right since" (97). The moral quandary in deciding whether to stay or to leave South Africa

is metaphorically expressed in the stultified response to the terminally ill father's need for

care: *"I cannot face the prospect of ministering to you day and night. I am going to*

abandon you. Goodbye. One or the other: there is no third way" (*S* 266). John is trapped

in a moment of choice where he has to accept responsibility or leave with shame: the

father-figure in the novel stands for South Africa, Coetzee's "fatherland".

Charles Taylor explains that feelings such as shame are irreducible emotions that

require an irreducible language to name them; they are part of the ethical position of self-

esteem or moral obligation and they define the self as a human subject: "[s]ubject-

referring properties are experience-dependent […] in fact shame is about an aspect of the

life of the subject *qua* subject" (Taylor, *Human Agency* 54). Language is essential for

subject-referring emotions to be articulated, "because our sense of dignity, and shame,

and moral remorse, and so on, are all shaped by language**"** (Taylor, *Human Agency* 69).

Self-interpretation is an ongoing process and essential to human existence, which

depends on language to constitute emotions, which in turn define the understanding of

the self: "To say that man is a self-interpreting animal is not just to say that he has some

compulsive tendency to form reflexive views of himself, but rather that as he is, he is

always partly constituted by self-interpretation, that is, by his understanding of the

imports which impinge on him" (Taylor, *Human Agency* 72).

The subject of John's shame is his Afrikaner identity, his belonging to and being

implicitly involved in a political system that offends his feelings of moral justice. As a

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writer, Coetzee articulates his struggle against apartheid obliquely as an internal conflict of conscience and overtly in the words of Martin, another white South African, who, speaking in the third person plural, includes the fictional John and, by extension, the author: "our presence there was legal but illegitimate [...] grounded in a crime, namely colonial conquest, perpetuated by apartheid" (*S* 209). The character of Martin represents a political stance that relates to Coetzee's political consciousness and guilt.

The Truth-revealing Mode of Confessional Fictioneering

Derek Attridge states that for Coetzee "confession is never simple or direct, it is always what Derrida calls a circumfession, an avoidance as well as an admission, a staging of confession as well as a confessing."[240] The open-endedness of guilt, the ineffectiveness of confession, and the impossibility of attaining forgiveness or grace whilst alive, is a major theme of *Summertime*: John recounts in his notebooks a struggle between his father's love of Italian opera and what he calls a teenage obstinacy in preferring Bach. As a youth, he simply thought that his taste in music was superior, but now he understands that there is another truth that needs to be confessed:

> What has been wrong with him all these years? Why has he not been listening to Verdi, to Puccini? Has he been deaf? Or is the truth worse than that: did he, even as a youth, hear and recognize perfectly well the call of Tebaldi, and then with tight-lipped primness ("I won't") refuse to heed it? (*S* 251)

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[240] Derek Attridge, *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2004) 136-7.

Gillian Dooley regards this passage as "one of the most amusing passages in *Summertime*: once again using the comic device of a string of rhetorical questions, he mocks not only his former intolerant attitude but also his present agony over what that attitude might betoken" (111). Comical on the surface perhaps, but *Summertime* is filled with guilt and shameful memories that are the result of meanness or ignorance towards living subjects: Margot reminds John of his cruel treatment of a locust when they were children and he confesses that since that time he has been haunted by shame, although he asks every day for "the poor things forgiveness" (S 96), but he knows that he cannot be forgiven.

The figure of the father is a problematic figure in Coetzee's obliquely autobiographical writing where the father becomes a mirror of the son and vice-versa. On the last page, the ethical question of love for a parent is stated but not answered and it remains questionable whether John's decision will be based on a guilty conscience or compassion. Guilt as motive would concur with Julia's critique of John's filial affection: "John did not love his father [...] But he did feel guilty and therefore behaved dutifully" (*S* 48). Julia does not explain why he felt guilty, but the final notebook section relates a childhood episode when John deliberately destroyed his father's favourite record, and he confesses that "[f]or that mean and petty deed of his he has for the past twenty years felt the bitterest remorse, remorse that has not receded with the passage of time but on the contrary grown keener" (*S* 249). When Julia tells Vincent that her decision to become a therapist resulted from her witnessing the suffering of her father in a sanatorium, it is a projection of her guilt at having failed her responsibility as a daughter and to her patients; as a professional, she wants to "save people from being treated as my father was treated there" (*S* 49). Guilt about her lack of compassion in relation to her father is also projected

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in her judgement of John's relation with his father; she suggests that the sadness of the old Mr Coetzee was caused by "that cold fish his elder son", although she admits that "[a]t least he was looking after his father" (*S* 47).

The Truth of Others: Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity

The salient question to ask is not how much verifiable autobiographical data is set against inventions in *Summertime;* besides, the text foregrounds its own distance from any simple correspondence to reality. The picture of John Coetzee exists only in different imaginary worlds, invented by each of the various narrators, who are evidently bent on presenting their own selves in a particular light and some truths about themselves emerge in their stories. The continued exploration of the relationship between selfhood, self-identity and otherness is at the core of *Summertime.* The character John is portrayed subjectively in the realm of social interaction, where the self is constituted by and through the experiences of others. In this sense, the viewpoints of others displace the autobiographical subject, but in return, their opinions allow the author to escape writing about himself directly; instead, he is written by others, who misperceive and misinterpret the fictional John.

Charles Taylor writes about the emotional life of man that it "incorporates a sense of what is really important to him, of the shape of his aspirations, which asks to be understood, and which is never adequately understood" (*Human Agency* 74). In *Summertime*, an ethical position of self-esteem is gained through self-interpretation, but both positions are susceptible to the risk of provoking "controversy, dispute, rivalry […] The adequation of interpretation involves an exercise of judgement which, at best, can

aspire to plausibility in the eyes of others" (Ricœur, *Oneself as Another* 179-80). The

postmodern notion of being emerges as a construct out of the continuous dialogical

relation between the self that is interpreting the self and the self as seen and interpreted

by others. Thus, in the narratives of the first three interviewees, John emerges as a

hopelessly overdeveloped mental specimen, a "homo sapiens sapiens" (*S* 58), which

stands for a man capable of thinking about himself, a metaphor for self-knowledge or for

the human ability to think reflexively, which according to Julia, makes John less human,

because his idealistic principles deprive him of "his animal self" (*S* 58).

Postmodern Comedy and Irony

Gillian Dooley says that her initial perception of the novel was that of "an

unrelievedly grim, self-lacerating work," which changed after a second reading: "I could

see moments of humor and even began to wonder whether the whole book were not in

fact intended as an extended joke directed against all the earnest and humorless readings

his novels have attracted" (88). Comic effects are the product of supplanting the voice of

the author with opinions of people who are perplexed by the suggestion that they played

significant parts in his life. None of them cares about Coetzee's literary career or shares

Mr. Vincent's admiration of the artist. Within the context of the novel, J. M. Coetzee

repeatedly deprecates the man and his work, which is judged to be lacking in "ambition.

The control of the elements is too tight" (*S* 242). This harsh statement might be an

allusion to Harold Bloom's suggestion, as Coetzee purports, that "Borges would have been a greater writer if he had exercised a less iron control over his creative impulse."[241]

The irony is that the tight structure in layers makes *Summertime* a very ambitious novel that only purports to give authority over to fictional characters, who comment on incidences and character traits that reflect the self-doubts of an imaginary other in fictional diary fragments. Their stories about John's inadequacies in different contexts effectively back up the negative image, which is then reinforced by John's self-reflexive mirroring of how he feels opposite others: "A gloomy fellow: that must be how the world sees him, when it sees him at all. A gloomy fellow; a wet blanket; a stick in the mud" (*S* 248). But every retelling hardens the facts in the mind of readers until the build-up of derogatory remarks raises doubt about the truth-value of every statement that is made about John, which again, undermines any autobiographical intention. Instead, a composite self emerges out of a synthesis of revised and edited stories.

The self-lacerating confession of shameful or careless deeds and the unflattering assessments of those actions from multiple viewpoints correspond and therefore enforce a negative picture that confirms Coetzee's public image as a loner and loser, which can be interpreted as the author's satirical reply to the body of criticism that tends to focus on the personal level instead of engaging with his works. It confirms negative opinions of critics who describe Coetzee as obscure, unsociable and emotionally withdrawn. In portraying John as a young artist-to-be who embodies the preconceptions that circulate about the real writer, self-critical autobiography becomes clichéd vaudeville. That some of the interviewees' memories double back on the diaries entries and expand on them is

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[241] J. M. Coetzee, "Borges's Dark Mirror," *New York Review of Books* 45.16 (1998): 80-82, at 81.

more than mere repetition; it is characteristic of "the reflexive self-consciousness which characterizes all Coetzee's work" (Introd. *DP* 3).

Although *Summertime* mirrors the recluse image of J. M. Coetzee in the testimonies of fictional characters about a fictional John, the author also makes a self-reflexive protest through Julia's poignant comment: "I know he had a reputation for being dour, but John Coetzee was actually quite funny" (*S* 63). Although the character John does not come across as funny, the author seems to have fun in playing with the transference and countertransference of opinions between Vincent, the interviewees and the diary; ultimately, however, the author-figure, and by extension the author, remains mysterious and inconclusive, a mere subject-matter for interpretation. *Summertime* eclipses personal identity and John Rees Moore notes that Coetzee indulges in "the delicious irony of writing about his younger self after he is dead."[242] Barthes's proposition of the "Death of the Author" is taken literally and expanded in order to undermine the truth-value of Coetzee's accepted public image. Beyond the structuralists' declaration of "the death of the Author", there emerges one of the paradoxes of the postmodernist crisis of representation and *Summertime* is at once a reinvestment in the authorial voice and a parody of believing in such a proposition: the premise of the novel is that only the notebook sections with additional italicized comments were written by the dead author as "*memos to himself, written in 1999 or 2000 when he was thinking of adapting those particular entries for a book*" (*S* 20). But ironically, the book in front of the reader is the realization of the comments on the page, which Sue Kossew sees as an example of the book's ironic humour, a "teasing self-referentiality (the book we are reading is, of course,

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[242] John Rees Moore, "Looking Backward," Rev. of *Summertime, Sewanee Review* 118.3 (2010): lxxxiv-lxxxvi, at lxxxiv.

the third memoir that never saw the light of day disguised as a partial and perhaps even

unfinished biography)."[243]

The Subjective Experience of Remembering: Memories of the Past

In *Summertime*, Coetzee satirizes the reader's search for a stable, originating voice

by structuring the novel in three distinct frames: the outer framework is the dust jacket,

which states that the book is the third instalment of Coetzee's memoirs, the narrative

opens with dated and ends with undated diary fragments that frame the kernel of the five

interviews. Uhlmann argues that *Summertime* shows an original response to the question

of how the self can tell the truth about the self and that Coetzee opens an unpassable

path of aporia by using a stylistic device that deliberately distorts by employing "error and

anachronism as a formal strategy for generating the truth" (748). The errors made with

regard to J. M Coetzee's life are evident in all layers of the book: in Julia's interview the

reader learns that the author of *Duskland* is dead, which confirms the blurb on the dust

jacket that states that *Summertime* is "about the late writer John Coetzee." When the

reader learns that the unnamed "he" of the notebook section shares a house with his

widowed father, the combination of false premises turns the text into a provocative

thought-experiment with regard to the biography of the real author: firstly, the blatant

fact is that J. M. Coetzee cannot be dead because he wrote the book, and secondly, in the

nineteen-seventies, he did not live as a bachelor with his father, but had his own family.

The displacement of autobiographical data provokes readers to suspect that "many other

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[243] Sue Kossew, "Scenes from Provincial Life (1997-2009)," *Companion to the Works of J. M. Coetzee* (Rochester: Camden 2011) 9-22, 20.

details, which, in the absence of a detailed biography of Coetzee, readers do not yet have access to, are also wrong in small or large part" (Uhlmann 759).

Because biographical concordances and discordances are mingled in *Summertime*, autobiographical reading is unsettled and "the truth-value of autobiography is doubly displaced […]: firstly, onto Mr. Vincent, the biographer, who is supposedly transcribing but also editing the interviews, and, secondly, onto the interviewees whose own memories make up the text" (Kossew 17). It seems that Coetzee denies his readers an overt and easily consumable autobiography by pointing to the futility of attempting to fully represent a past self that can only be accessed through memory. Cognitive neuroscience engages with a new science of mind and proposes that past experience is always encoded in the brain, a perspective that leads to the insight that "memories are records of how we have experienced events, not replicas of the events themselves." (Schacter 6). By extending the work on memory to the formation of the self in time, cognitive neuroscientists have put forward a new conception of autobiography that assumes that the autobiographical subject is constructed from fragments of experience that change over time. The interviewees in *Summertime* retell episodes from their past and by remembering the subject John they remember themselves in a "mental time travel" that allows the rememberer to re-experience the past (Schacter 17). Julia remarks that her recollections of John cannot be separated from the totality of her experiences of that time: "You asked me to give an idea of John as he was in those days, but I can't give you a picture of him alone without any background, otherwise there are things you will fail to understand" (*S* 23).

Daniel Schacter explains how the self is involved in the working of episodic memory: "[i]n order to be experienced as a memory, the retrieved information must be

recollected in the context of a particular time and place and with some reference to oneself as a participant in the episode" (17). Julia remembers many details and can even quote dialogues that had been passed between herself and others, although she recognizes that her memories cannot be a verbatim recollection. Charles Fernyhough writes that "memory doesn't allow for that kind of faithful representation of past events [and] vividness does not guarantee authenticity" (275). Although memories are mutable, Julia assures Vincent that her memories have a true meaning, not ultimately true, but emotionally true, they are "true to the spirit" (*S* 32). She remembers herself as being part of the scenes that she recounts, which indicates an original perspective, what Schacter terms remembering from a "field perspective" (21). Memory works along "the ways in which we think about and analyze the world" which points to the mutability of memories in repeated acts of their recall.

Fernyhough explains that confabulation is necessary not only for the story-teller, but also for the memoirist, because memory cannot give a faithful representation of past events and therefore "the force of coherence can win over the force of correspondence, leading individuals to weave stories that fit their own reality better than they fit the reality out there" (273). Before the interview, Julia read John's notebook pages, which means that she received retrieval cues for her remembering and "successful recall depends heavily on the availability of appropriate retrieval cues" (Schacter 63). It seems that Julia edits her memories according to her self-importance, but she also confirms almost verbatim John's account of his calculation mistake in the diary (*S* 6-7).

There is a visibly notable editorial transition in typeset between the part that Julia controls to the story of Margot in which Vincent's agency takes over. By italicizing Margot's comments, the subject is turned into an object and Margot is reduced to the

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same level as John: it is significant that Vincent changed the shape from question-and-answer format to story-telling so that it can read "as an uninterrupted narrative spoken in your voice" (*S* 87). Under the pretense that he has made improvements on her recollections, Vincent has not only edited out her direct voice, but has also denied Margot the status of a subject, even though he insists that "the *she* I use is like *I* but is not *I*" (*S* 89). By replacing Margot's original memories with his own confabulation, Margot is reduced to an actress in her own memories. The effect of Vincent's transformation is not only a stylistic change but gives in fact a different point of view, one that produces an altered version of Margot's original recount. Vincent occupies a position of power for representation, which exemplifies Coetzee's conviction that changes in style affect the substance because styles have ethical implications; therefore, "[s]tyle and content are not separable" (*DP* vii).

Confabulation of the Self: The Present Self imagines the Past Self

Autobiographical memory acts as a mirror in which we become others to ourselves through the projection of the self to another point in time. "Giambattista Vico regarded memory and imagination as part of the same faculty rooted in sense perceptions. The imagination, he wrote, is 'expanded or compounded memory,' and memory, sensation, and imagination are skills of the body" (Hustvedt 176). Not only the author or the author-figure John are fictioneers, but everybody makes up his or her own fiction in remembering past incidents from their own vantage-point. Daniel Schacter explains the process of remembering the past: "In order to be experienced as a memory, the retrieved information must be recollected in the context of a particular time and

place and with some reference to oneself as a participant in the episode" (17). Julia

remembers herself as the dominant partner in her affair with John and her confessional

digressions are motivated by an impulse to explain her feelings of isolation and

frustration about her role of accommodating hostess for her husband's business partners

in the White South African coterie. Fernyhough explains that "[m]emory narrativises us;

it turns us into characters in a novel. It makes motives and context matter. What we

remember is shaped by the people we were then – not just what happened to us, but

what kind of individuals we were – as well as by the people we are now" (239). Julia's

memories state her boredom at being trapped in a domestic role and her fits of rage after

learning about the clandestine affair of her husband. She frankly admits that her memory

imaginatively reconstructs episodes and she senses a similar impulse in Vincent. She

explicitly warns him against appropriating her story to suit his own agenda:

> You commit a grave error if you think to yourself that the difference between the two
> stories, the story you wanted to hear and the story you are getting, will be nothing more
> than matter of perspective – that […] by dint of a quick flip, a quick manipulation of
> perspective, followed by some clever editing, you can transform it into a story about John
> and one of the women who passed through his life. (S 43-44)

Julia's story is permeated with her own emotional valence and the need to show her

motives in a good light. Therefore, she has to defend the reasons for her own infidelity,

which she does by foregrounding her bodily needs: she proudly remembers her sexual

prowess and the thrill of having relations with two men at the same time: "I was not one of

his conquests. If anything, he was one of mine […] I fed him lasagne and then I completed

my conquest of him […] a woman at the peak of her womanly powers, living a heightened

sexual life" (S 35-6, 37, 43). Her view of sexual conduct at that time was highly

competitive, a bodily challenge in "a contest, a variety of wrestling in which you do your

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best to subject your opponent to your erotic will" (*S* 52). In portraying herself as an expert

in sexual matters, she hints at her obsession with sexual dominance, which she makes

explicit: "my verdict on John Coetzee, after seven nights of testing, was that he was not in

my league, not as I was then" (*S* 52). Remembering her sexual self as a supreme sports

buddy, sex with John was a disappointment, "I never had the feeling that he was with me,

me in all my reality" (*S* 52). On the one hand, she likens John's love-making to an autistic

automaton, on the other hand, she plays down her own emotional investment, admitting

that she was self-centred, focussing merely on the "erotic" (*S* 59). Her self-esteem was

built on her ability to attract men, but her preference for vigorous physicality also shows

undertones of a predilection for violence and exhibitionism that her husband fulfilled, but

not her lover John, which becomes explicit in her pejorative judgement of John's

gentleness, "he was going to block cruel and violent impulses in every arena of his life –

including his love life, I might say" (*S* 58). Her memories show bitterness and are clouded

by disappointment about the break-up of her marriage and John's final refusal to become

her "Prince Charming" (*S* 83). Fernyhough writes that in the story we tell ourselves,

"confabulations serve the needs of the self. [...] Memory wants to be true to the way things

are, but it also wants to tell a story that suits the teller." (186).

Intertextuality, Literary Tradition and the Value of Literature

Summertime has a structural conception of the work as a whole in which the

different planes of narrative mirror each other: the writer of the diary appears to be the

same John who is talked about in interviews and both characters are connected by a

pattern of interlacing themes. Intertextual references foreground that for a writer the

memory of texts exert an influence on the present; what has been read becomes part of the self, which inevitably influences the work; in *Summertime*, John's identity emerges as a text, as a confabulation depending on intersubjective meaning-making: John states that the character of Jacobus Coetzee in *Duskland* was modeled on a real illiterate ancestor and Julia observes that he quoted Nietzsche. Although Julia studied German literature, which she derogatorily judges a waste of time, "a preparation for my life as housewife and mother" (S 57), she fails to pick up the teasing in John's reply that spells out the anachronism of a nineteenth-century philosopher being quoted in the eighteenth century: "'Well, they were surprising fellows, those eighteenth-century frontiersmen. You never knew what they would come up with next'" (S 56). Furthermore, what Julia really fails to understand is that the character Jacobus is a fictional creation, a confabulation built out of historical facts and textual knowledge. The life of a writer is always constituted in relation to his literary precursors and Coetzee subverts all the opinionated voices by making erudite intertextual references that betray his thinking presence: after Julia has introduced herself, John cites a line from *Upon Julia's Clothes* by the seventeenth-century poet Robert Herrick which she does not understand (*S* 33). Margot is baffled by her cousin's seemingly nonsensical utterance, which is a citation from Lucky's soliloquy, taken from Beckett's *Waiting for Godot,* (*S* 112), and is confused by his invocation of "*Kaggen* […] The mantis god. He has lost her" (*S* 96). Although John appears emotionally withdrawn, even autistic, the intertextual remarks defend his position as an intellectual writer. They foreground the way that a writer thinks of himself as constituted by and being part of a literary tradition such that literature is as real to the mind as any experience, because it is part of a "semantic memory, which contains conceptual and factual knowledge" (Schacter 17).

The interviewees are preoccupied with their own history and they reveal more

about their own past than about John, which makes it seem unlikely that the novel was

written, like Wordsworth's *The Prelude,* in the mode of autobiography, "in which the

dead man speaks to us, addressing us, as it were, from his own tombstone" (Anderson

13). The blurb on the cover makes the anachronistic premise that the author of the book

is already dead, and in this light, it seems that *Summertime: Scenes from Provincial Life* at

once caricatures and confirms Derrida's redefinition of "autobiography as 'thanatography'

(thanatos gk: death), a writing not of a living but a dead author [...] since the name with

which one signs will always outlive the bearer of that name." (Anderson 81). The John in

the diary ponders if "[t]he slabs he is laying will outlast his tenancy of the house, may

even outlast his spell on earth; in which case he will in a certain sense have cheated

death" (S 7). There is a noticeable change from the John in the diary to Julia's story,

where John states that a book is a writer's "bid for immortality", because it survives

"beyond one's physical demise" (*S* 61). Hoping that his name as the author of *Dusklands*

will live on as part of a literary canon shows confidence about the value of books in

general, because even people of the future "will still like to read books that are well

written" (*S* 62). Literature has its own value and transcends time but is detached from its

originator, as Jorge Luis Borges wrote in his self-reflexive essay "Borges and I": good

writing "belongs to no one, not even to him, [that is not even to my other] but rather to

the language and to tradition."[244]

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[244] Jorge Luis Borges, "Borges and I," *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings* (New York: New Directions, 1964) 246-47.

Section 4: Trajectory from Narrative Self to Experiential Self and the Condition of Inauthenticity: Tom McCarthy's Remainder *(2005)*

The Condition of Inauthenticity

The need to establish the unity of a personal Identity through autobiographical narratives has a long philosophical tradition that interprets actions and events of the past and gathers them into a coherent story. The narrative model emphasizes the temporal dimension of selfhood, based on the hypothesis that memory is the locus of the self and it follows that "[i]f I were unable to form memories of my life history, or were unable to access such memories, then I have nothing to interpret, nothing to narrate sufficient for the formation of self-identity."[245] Ironically, the narrator in *Remainder* attempts a reverse path to authenticity by reclaiming or reconstructing memories in order to build up an autobiographical self in the hope to regain an unadulterated feeling of being alive.

Narrative certainly plays an important role, but there are other elements in the on-going flow of experiencing being and having a self, and indeed, "there are limits to the kind of understanding of self and others that narratives can provide." (Zahavi in *Narrative and Understanding Persons*, 201). The phenomenological dimension of the self takes into account the world in which the perceiver is situated, which is closer to the Husserlian notion of an ego that "constitutes itself for itself in the unity of a (his)story [*Geschichte*]'" (Zahavi 181). The "itself for itself" points to the experience of the self as a conscious embodied agent for whom the body is at once subject and object: the feeling body is also a body that is felt and is therefore constitutive for human experience. Certainly, there is

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[245] Shaun Gallagher, "Pathologies in Narrative Structures," in *Narrative and Understanding Persons*, ed. Daniel D. Hutto, *Royal Institute of Philosophy*. Supplement, Vol. 60 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007): 203-224 at 209.

an interrelationship between the self in time, the "*autobiographic self* or *extended self*"

and its store of autobiographical memories, but the self also has biological roots in

consciousness on a minimal level that entails a more primitive and fundamental notion of

a "core self."[246] In *Remainder*, the narrator calls the feeling of having a presence to

oneself, "the background noise we all have in our head that stops us from forgetting

we're alive"[247]; it is the feeling of existence that he has lost. Antonio Damasio claims that

the experiential structure of human perception is grounded in the feeling body that is

aware of itself, it is "our own perception of our own being, at any given moment" (256).

Mark Johnson firmly situates the mind in the body and postulates: "What could be more

self-evident than the fact that the human mind is intrinsically incarnate?" (46). Bodies are

physical substances, extended in space and time, and Cartesian dualism should give way

to the representation of mind as inexorably connected to body. The tradition of seeing

the self as connected to a representation of the body has a long tradition in

phenomenological and existentialist philosophers such as Nietzsche, William James,

Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre, or the analytical psychologist Carl Jung,

who regarded "psychic phenomena as largely dependent on the body. Somewhere the

psyche is living body, and the living body is animated matter; somehow and somewhere

there is an undiscoverable unity of psyche and body."[248]

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[246] Antonio Damasio, "Feelings of Emotion and the Self," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1001 (2003): 253-261, at 254.
[247] Tom McCarthy, *Remainder,* 2005 (Richmond: Alma, 2007) 185; Abbreviation used in parenthetical references henceforth is *R*.
[248] C. G. Jung, "Psychological Types," 1923, *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung,* 1971, Vol. 6 (London: Routledge, 1971) 543.

A New "Age of Authenticity"? [249]

The narrator is obsessed with matter and material remainders that he regards as clues which constitute the remnants and signifiers of genuine authentic experiences: for the recreation of a shooting scene he uses a drop of his own blood on a scaled street model as a marker for the spilt blood to signify that events "must leave some kind of mark" (*R* 185). The close alliance between art and life is made visible in an analogy of structure between the two subjects: the blood on the street is represented by the fingerprint of blood on a model, an aesthetic self-enhancement that stands as a paradigm for the post-postmodern project of reconstituting an authentic self through acts of imaginative remembering.

Bodily experiences as embodied schemata manipulate abstract structure in mental space where "understanding is an evolving process or activity in which image schemata (as organizing structures) partially order and form our experience and are modified by their embodiment in concrete experiences" (Johnson 30). Imagination links cognitive and bodily structures in patterns and Merleau-Ponty explains the affective relation of the body to "the fabric of the visible and world", where sensation aims to grasp "the nature of 'sensory matter', the 'sensible for itself', (*sensible pour soi*), the world which is made up of the same stuff that I am. I experience 'a segment of the durable flesh of the world.'"[250] Putting a blood-red fingerprint on cardboard gives the narrator the closest phenomenological experience to the puddle of blood that was left on the street after a shooting. *Remainder* critiques models of authenticity by investigating the value of the authentic as the cornerstone of subjectivity and challenges reductionist

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[249] We have entered what Charles Taylor describes as "the Age of Authenticity" in *A Secular Age* (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 2007) 473.

[250] Dermon Morat, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London: Routledge, 2000) 403, 422.

or exclusive biological, phenomenological and cognitive constructions of identity by pointing out that aesthetic concepts form and constitute an irreducible part of the human condition:

> The narrator's conscious and painstaking self-recreation does not negate the possibility of an inner core, nor does it illegitimize the profundity of his epiphanies of belonging, but it does imply that the path to authenticity for the postdeconstructive and posttraumatic subject involves the intricate micromanagement of the aestheticized object of the self.[251]

Proust's aesthetics of perception accounts for modernity's visual sense of speed; he invented "a new way of treating time and situating oneself in space", which put "a new distance between us and things" (Ortega y Gasset 505, 507). Modernist aestheticism explored the plurality of perspectives and the changing internal experience of the self as situated in space and time, which has its post-postmodern equivalent in *Remainder's* foregrounding of materiality where the need to collapse the distance between the self and the object world speaks of the need to find an immanence of an imaginary attachment by mimicking the blood-stained street surface on a miniature copy. But the narrator's experiments with compacting the space between self and the material world fail repeatedly; in the above instance, the giant blood print is on the wrong scale, "legible only from above, a landing field for elevated, more enlightened beings" (*R* 186).

The traumatized narrator suffers from an altered state of perception in which the lost sense of unity between body and mind leads to feelings of insufficiency. In this respect, he is more than a novelistic character, but a prototype for the ultimate sovereign individual who is only governed by projects of self-realization and the novel shows the

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[251] Daniel Lea, "The Anxieties of Authenticity in Post-2000 British Fiction," *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 58.3 (2012): 459-476, at 468.

fundamental transformation in the way postmodern subjectivity can be understood in the context of contemporary neo-corporatism and the economic and social pressures on individuals living under its sway.

Remainder, however, is not so much concerned with a postmodern textual hermeneutics, but more with the investigation of the material and immaterial realms, where the mind constructs patterns that transubstantiate into matter like prints that can be captured by pouring plaster into a mould that turns "space hollowed out by action into solid matter" (R 175). Remainder's obsessive reconstruction of dislocated memory offers patterns of meaning which inspire the reader to expand on these patterns and to extrapolate meaning, to reflect on the pervasive spatial dimension that gestures beyond the postmodern fascination with fiction and simulacra. The novel is much concerned with the physicality of the world that clashes with idealism; it shows a world in which material objects obstinately resist conforming to the concepts that the mind constructs and where physical events can "speak about the thing itself and not just ideas about the thing", a new form of realism that indicates that "matter *matter*[s]."[252] The unnamed narrator resembles a tragicomic Beckettian character, who is obsessed with endless mechanical reproduction, which goes back to the tradition of the Theatre of the Absurd where Krapp's life is reduced to a series of independent details, fixed on physical remainders, but the tapes that he replays sporadically have become devoid of personal significance over the years of his life. In contrast to Krapp's chronic disillusionment with his recorded memory, Remainder's narrator becomes emotionally attached to the only specific memory he still possesses, a moment that is "defined through a collection of sounds, images, smells and other sensations, [...] then played out indefinitely, as an ongoing

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[252] Zadie Smith, "Two Paths for the Novel," *The New York Review of Books* 55.18 (2008), n. pag.

reconstruction. Memory, in this case, is not just a product of the past, but also a singular, defining narrative of the present."[253]

There is no evidence that would suggest that what the protagonist is attempting to reconstruct has actually happened. The project of remembering can be linked to imagining which, according to Husserl, is "a special way of making objects present", but imagination should recognise the absence of the object and Sartre specifies the dichotomy that underlies reality and the mental act: "the imagined object is rather limited, never fully itself, possessing an 'essential poverty'" that is to say "we find in the image only what we have put there" (Morat 381, 382). Against these somewhat disparaging accounts regarding the usefulness of imagination, Johnson posits the phenomenological valence of embodied imagination in image-schematic experiential structures that he regards as central and indispensable for human meaning and rationality: "there is the functioning of preconceptually meaningful structures of experience, schematic patterns, and figurative projections by which our experience achieves meaningful organization and connection, such that we can both comprehend and reason about it" (Johnson 17). The brain works not only through a merely passive reflection on external influences but engages in process of organizing and, for the narrator, in painful re-programming. The recovery of fluent bodily experiences demands a self-steering effort in imaginatively breaking down the sequence of movement and anticipatory imagining: "picturing yourself lifting the carrot to your mouth, again and again and again, [which] cuts circuits through your brain that will eventually allow you to perform the act itself" (*R* 20).

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[253] Jim Byatt, "Being Dead? Trauma and the Liminal Narrative in J. G. Ballard's *Crash* and Tom McCarthy's *Remainder*," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 48.3 (2012): 245-259 at 255.

*Remainder'*s narrator believes that imagination can order the chaos of the world in meaningful repetitive patterns, but during his last journey he comes to realize that all matter is bound to move towards exhaustion and death: at some point in time, the world will ultimately cease to exist. The frenzied image of a plane looping without end or, at least until the fuel runs out, gives a final image of imaginatively structured wholeness, only to become "undercut, as is every other example in the text, with the failure of transcendence and a pained scepticism toward the possibility of authenticity as anything other than a momentary appearance of self-coherence" (Lea 469). The impossibility of recovery at the threshold of death marks the significance of the moment and the novel ends in a postmodern non-teleological aesthetic imaginary: "Eventually the sun would set forever – burn out, pop, extinguish – and the universe would run down like a Fisher Price toy whose spring has unwound to its very end. Then there'd be no more music, no more loops" (*R* 284). As death is imminent, the attainment of authenticity seems to become "a genuine possibility. Yet this death is itself doomed to fail, the act of 'falling from the sky', if indeed it occurs, closing the loop of the text and resetting the character's situation to where he was at the start of the novel" (Jim Byatt 257).

Failed Transcendence

The story of a brain damaged trauma victim, who has a pathological compulsion to repeat remembered or imagined scenes, theatricalizes memory to reveal that there are several conceptual levels of existence that seem to violate each other: the various phenomenal, existential and metaphysical dimensions of human consciousness never quite make up a unifying whole. According to Tom McCarthy, the novel is "about history and time, simulation, questions of authenticity and, by extension, of our whole state of

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being-in-the-world […] the world's state of being-in-the-universe as well: the world,

matter, this shard left over from some unnameably violent disaster - a remainder."[254]

McCarthy says elsewhere that at the core of the novel is "the experience of failed

transcendence." The narrator's desire to accommodate the idea of subjectivity as self-

identical and/or as a self-fashioned is shown as a failed project:

> Where the inherence of biological authenticity fails the test of its own interiority, so self-posited authenticity fails the test of artistic transcendence. And yet neither is dismissed by the novel as a fantasy; indeed, both are presented as somehow irreducibly part of the human condition, without which the concept of subjectivity is fatally impoverished. (Lea 469)

McCarthy shows the difficulty in our accepting that existence is seemingly

meaningless in the narrator's persistence in trying to transcend the physical and temporal

limits of the body in some form or other. Yet the need to overcome the human condition

by accepting its limitedness and finiteness is a notion which comes close to Simon

Critchley's disillusionment with meaning and interpretation, which leaves a fascination for

"the sheer mereness of things. In other words, when we learn to shake off the delusions

of meaning and achieve meaninglessness, then we might see that things merely are and

we are things too."[255] To ascribe to the basic meaninglessness of life seems to be a

safeguard against transcendence theories which, according to Simon Critchley, are just

"competing narratives of redemption" (Critchley 32).

Much of the comic irony in *Remainder* comes from the narrator's belief that the

wholeness of his former existence can be restored through the financial compensation

received for an unspecified accident and the story proceeds as an allegory of neo-

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[254] Tom McCarthy, Interview with Mark Thwaite, *ReadySteadyBook*, n. pag.
[255] Simon Critchley, *Very Little … Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature,* 1997, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2004) xxiv; emphasis added.

corporatism, where existence becomes a project that is mediated and aesthetically manipulated through professionals, who facilitate obsessive and amoral re-enactments. The narrator's depression increases in the same measure as his projects of self-realization become unmanageable and frustrating; all re-enactments turn out to be comically stained by materiality and contingency.

The first project of materializing emotionally affective memories in an imaginary space with scenes that the protagonist can inhabit turns out to be ineffective: the external world invades when the smell of cordite prevails and the cats fall off the roof. Then, his obsessive reconstruction extends from the remembered past to newly acquired memories: the second project restages scenes from a tyre shop, but the evaporation of the car's washer fluid fails to become a miraculous transubstantiation of matter. In his next project, the narrator attempts to merge with matter that surrounds his body by lying on the ground, which leaves him in a stupor for days. *Remainder*'s terminal movement from re-enactment to real event in the climactic bank heist actually affects reality: when a re-enactor misses his studied trip over a carpet edge, the fictional enactment impinges on reality and results in the death of a man.

Materializing Memories

Patricia Waugh states in her essay "The Naturalistic Turn, the Syndrome, and the Rise of the Neo-Phenomenological Novel" that the rediscovery of the felt body as a crucial medium and vehicle of personal life led to a significant revival of phenomenology in philosophy and she argues further that contemporary fiction shows a strong affinity with phenomenological philosophy. This current movement towards embodied, embedded, extended and enactive approaches in philosophy of mind and cognitive

science has emerged out of the growing dissatisfaction with medical materialism and the

neurobiological treatment of mind and culture. Neo-phenomenology is concerned with a

more inclusive perspective on human experience and seeks to explain the corporeal

communication between the body and the world of experiences with the aim to regain an

undistorted access to the phenomena of lived human experience. In the contemporary

novel of mental alienation and suffering in a bio-medical age the literary and the

phenomenological come self-consciously together. McCarthy's novel extrapolates the

materialist philosophy of the self as reduced to the property of the brain and its neural

networks that orchestrates the confabulation of the real as memory, dream and

perception.

In order to compensate for the loss of his bodily and affective attunement to the

world and in the hope to gain access to the content of his lost autobiographical self, the

narrator decides to control his reality by physically bringing into being what he can

remember from his past. According to Merleau-Ponty there is always a disturbance in the

network of relations between time, memory and the self:

> our temporal existence is both a condition for and an obstacle to our self-comprehension. Temporality contains an internal fracture that permits us to return to our past experiences in order to investigate them reflectively, yet this very fracture also prevents us from fully coinciding with ourselves. There will always remain a difference between the lived and the understood.[256]

The staged scenarios might be a delusion or a confabulation built on remainders

from his previous life, but they come together in a meaningful structure of embodied

patterns, which "operate as organizing structures of our experience and understanding at

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[256] Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science* (London: Routledge, 2008) 65.

the level of bodily perception and movement" (Johnson, *BM* 20). The ability to manipulate abstract structure in mental space becomes even more salient in subsequent projects that are determined to turn reality into a series of stylized events by breaking physical reality into its constituent parts of time and space as a purely phenomenological experience. The temporal extension of movements tend towards stasis: "My two assassins took their time in killing me. The slowed-down pace at which they raised and fired their guns, the lack of concern or interest this seemed to imply, the total absence on my part of any attempt to escape although I had plenty of time to do so –all these made our actions passive. We weren't doing them: they were being done" (*R* 199-200).
The logic of *Remainder's* re-enactments is specifically cinematic in that they depend on the temporal reversibility and manipulation of time. The rewinding and slowing down of movements fragments the event to such an extent that the narrator at the core of the action can participate in their impersonal unreality.

On the other hand, a road surface is perceived minutely and full of detail: "There's too much here, too much to process, just too much" (*R* 188). It seems as if the narrator is overwhelmed by the density of information that exceeds his mind's ability to deal with it. The complexity of reality seems to have become unmanageable and the narrator seeks to control the physical impact by analytically breaking down time. The breaking of physical movements into their component parts and slowing them down is a specific post-postmodern aesthetic that "forces us to recognize space as a nonneutral thing – unlike Realism, which ignores the specificities of space" (Zadie Smith). The slowing down of time and the extension of space explodes the structure into an infinite number of perceptions, images and events that the narrator hopes to understand as fragments that will come together in a whole. Since his accident, a sense of unreality had prevailed, which could be

taken as a sign of contemporary depression in which symptoms are manifested in "the

slowing of the movements of both body and mind" (Ehrenberg 166).

Ironically, the narrator takes the slowing down of time and spatial expansion

literally, so that he can encounter objects perspectively in an almost meta-ethical way:

"I felt a huge wave of sadness for the three men who'd been killed, and an even greater

one at not having managed, in my re-enactments, to fill the instant of their death with

so much space that it retrieved them, kinked them back to life. Impossible, I know, but I

still felt responsible, and sad" (*R* 221-2).   Ehrenberg writes that "Depression is a

pathology of time (the depressed person has no future) and a pathology of motivation

(the depressed person has no energy, his movement is slowed, his words slurred)"

(Ehrenberg 233).

Nostalgia for a Lost Self and the Authenticating Feeling of Remembering

The narrator mourns the loss of the most concrete and particular core of

subjectivity: the existential feeling of being unselfconsciously or pre-reflectively embodied

in a fluent, unrehearsed, and therefore authentic way, "what phenomenologists call the

sense of ipseity, which is a pre-reflective (proprioceptive), ecological sense of self"

(Gallagher in *Narrative and Understanding Persons* 207). The cognitive impairment after

suffering traumatic brain injuries makes it difficult for some people to remember "what

they were or were not capable of, and they compared their present status to their pre-

injury status while mourning their 'lost' past self."[257]

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[257] Maria Medved and Jens Brockmeier, "Continuity Amid Chaos: Neurotrauma, Loss of Memory, and Sense of Self," *Qualitative Health Research* 18.4 (2008): 469-479; at 470-1.

Ipseity or selfhood is the basic phenomenal self-consciousness. Jean-Paul Sartre argues "that consciousness is at bottom characterized by a fundamental self-givenness or self-referentiality" (Zahavi 187). Shaun Gallagher argues that selfhood is not only constituted as narrative, but that there is also the phenomenological concept of the minimal sense of self; an immediate and present self that not only retains experiences, but knows about itself experiencing and therefore, "Ipseity is the sense that this experience is *my* experience" (*Narrative and Understanding Persons* 208, emphasis added). In a parody of Cartesian Dualism, the narrator laments that he cannot understand how the body is supposed to function after the accident as he describes the struggle to retrain his motor system: "each movement: I had to learn them all. I had to understand how they work first, break them down into each constituent part, then execute them" (*R* 21). The necessity for conceptualizing actions before they can be transformed into physical acts underscores the Cartesian belief that the workings of the mind govern the body. Antonio Damasio talks about a "*background feeling* because it originates in 'background' body states rather than in emotional states [...] a minimalist in tone and beat, the feeling of life itself, the sense of being." (*Descartes' Error* 150). For the narrator, the detached body has become a screen between the self and the world, which is a loss of his primary way of being-in-the-world, the authenticity of feeling.

Although after the accident some autobiographical memories eventually return, they come back in a cinematic quality of "instalments, like back episodes of some mundane soap opera" (*R* 6). Even though mobility is regained, the narrator perceives his own movements as unnatural and inauthentic and ironically, movie actors come to embody the authentic ideal: Robert De Niro was perfect because "he seemed to execute the action perfectly, to live it, to merge with it until he was it and it was him and there

was nothing in between" (*R* 23). Daniel Lea explains that contemporary society longs for

genuine and unvarnished experiences as part of the "New Realism" movement in art and

life: in "the second decade of the twenty-first century, the reemergence of authenticity as

an ethical marker of contemporary subjectivity is gaining significant traction" (Lea 459).

Authenticity is equated with minimum distance that allows one to live in an

undifferentiated pure presence that is not conscious of itself, which is the motivation for

the narrator to materialize his memories so that he could "merge […] with them, run

through them and let them run through me until there'd been no space between us.

They'd been real; I'd been real – been without first understanding how to try to be: cut

out the detour" (*R* 62).

In *Remainder*, the representation of this selfhood is a symptom of and stands in

for a poststructuralist allegory of neo-corporatism: the settlement is large enough to fund

a project which can build more than a static locale that simply *looks* like what he

remembers, but attempts to recreate an entire slice of lost life, complete with people

who inhabit the scenery, as if they too were part of a movie-set turned real. Whereas the

taste and smell of tea and cake gave Proust's Marcel access to buried memories through a

sensation in the present, the narrator has a visual experience through a pattern of colours

and lines on the wall that gives him access to what his body remembers. He experiences

his self in the setting, "how all this had felt […] in these spaces, all my movements had

been fluent and unforced. Not awkward, acquired, second-hand, but natural" (*R* 62). The

present and the past merge in a single moment of déjà vu, which gives "both an illusory

sense of the repetition of a previous experience and an actual repetition, a simultaneous

reliving of that which both does and does not precede it" (Nicholas Royle in Jim Byatt

255).

Gallagher writes about the pathological disruption in the sense of self where something "goes wrong at the metacognitival level and problems with ipseity are generated in the resulting narrative" (*Narrative and Understanding Persons* 223). Like the schizoid character Kinbote in *Pale Fire*, the narrator hopes to appropriate an aestheticized reality for the substantiation of what he remembers or imagines about a particular environment, which to him, seems to be the locus of selfhood, the confirmation of his being, "by forging fragile human intimacies with it."[258] The building with its surrounding aims to exteriorize the remainders from his memory *in toto*, to improve on his state after the accident, which had been "a blank: a white slate, a black hole" (*R* 5). No wonder that the building resembles a design set for movies with partial décor with "loads of neutral space – after all, you only have to make the bit the camera sees look real; the rest you leave unpainted, without detail, blank" (*R* 114). Through the reproduction of memory in matter, the narrator struggles to articulate himself as anything other than a mechanical reproduction.

Postmodern Anxiety of Inauthenticity: Creating Reality through Simulations

McCarthy portrays the postmodern anxiety of inauthenticity, the feeling of the loss of selfhood that reduces the world to "an aesthetic environment where to be oneself is to be an imitation of others" (Lea 460). The narrator is a depressed individual with an acute sense of his inability to measure up and has a hyperawareness of appearing as a second-rate model. The idea of being and living as a degenerated reproduction is a reference to Plato's philosophy that relegates art to an ontological reality – three steps

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[258] Justus Nieland, "Dirty Media: Tom McCarthy and the Afterlife of Modernism," *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 58.3 (2012): 569-599, at 583.

removed from the ideal form. The postmodern conception of art sees reproductions as parody, and the self-consciously faked as a response to the exhaustion of representation. The portrayal of the self as an artistic self-construction becomes an "explicit value judgement in the second-rate-ness of inauthenticity [which] implies McCarthy's discomfort with postmodernism's ludic self-reflexivity, and his confidence in a core that renders matters *[sic]* **"fundamental"** suggests [that he is] writing back to older traditions of phenomenology" (Lea 465).

The novel is much concerned with the opposition between form and matter: in Platonic philosophy, matter is imperfection or inauthentic: it calls for forms that transcend it through a conceptual or spiritual striving. *Remainder* emphasizes matter and what it means subjectively: only the extra free coffee that comes after the sequence of paid cups is worth having, as the narrator tries to communicate to the coffee shop assistant: "'You can strip the other eight away. The other nine, I mean. It's only the remaining one I want. The extra one'" (*R* 269). Repetition is the locus of inauthenticity and the on-going repetition of a repetition induces a waning of affect; the narrator wants to get out of the *mise en abyme* of inauthenticity by insisting on the cup outside the pattern, which, ironically is in no respect different in form or substance to the coffees he could have had before. The extra cup that comes gratuitously stands symbolically outside the circle of stamped loyalty cards and the mechanism of repetition. Economically, the logic of getting something for free is false, and in this respect, the novel caricatures the culture of neo-corporatism with customer cards that entice a repetitive experience of standardized consuming in ubiquitous franchised businesses. For the narrator, the circuitry of coffee cards promises a never ending experience of completing a circle, an ending that is followed immediately by a new beginning: "if I got all ten of its cups

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stamped then I'd get an extra cup – plus a new card with ten more cups on it. The idea

excited me: clocking the counter, going right round through the zero, starting again" (*R*

49). The picture of a full circle points to a mocking version of redemption, the possibility

of eternal life in the loop of consumerism that becomes an end in itself.

In the absence of emotion and empathy for an African development project, the

narrator imagines Africans and their continent as an abstraction from a higher-level when

he tries "to visualize a grid around the earth, a kind of ribbed wire cage like on the

champagne bottle, with lines of latitude and longitude that ran all over, linking one place

to another, weaving the whole terrain into one smooth, articulated network" (*R* 35-6).

In the afterlife of modernism, media and information technology's promise to overcome

insularity through globalization was at first valued positively as a welcomed mechanical

extension of human faculties. The narrator in *Remainder* explores the fantasy of total and

seamless connectivity in which the grid is a metaphor for the postmodern dystopian

infrastructure: "I looked down at the interlocking, hemmed-in fields, and had a vision of

the whole world's surface cordoned off, demarcated, broken into grids in which self-

duplicating patterns endlessly repeated" (*R* 282). In McCarthy's view, the postmodern

self sees itself as part of the universal, it "is 'not a self, but a network' of transmissions"

(quoted in Nieland**,** 580).

The Doubling of Reality in Simulations

The re-enactment of a bank heist, which is again meticulously rehearsed *ad*

nauseam in a warehouse, does not differ in its procedure from all the re-enactments that

went on before, but it still shows "obsessions with walls and structures, with systems and

fantasies, and above all with repetition and reproducibility serving as persistent

reminders of the protagonist's dependence upon the artificial, a dependence which suggests a terminal departure from the real, authentic world." (Jim Byatt 247). But the narrator also realizes that there is a possibility for this particular re-enactment to become a pre-enactment, a marker that promises the merging of art and reality by

> lifting the re-enactment out of its demarcated zone and slotting it back into the world, into an actual bank whose staff didn't know it was a re-enactment: that would return my motions and my gestures to ground zero and hour zero, to the point at which the re-enactment merged with the event. It would let me penetrate and live inside the core, be seamless, perfect, real. (*R* 244-5)

Remainder's movement from re-enactment to real event exemplifies Baudrillard's theory that a faked hold up effaces the borders between simulation and reality and that a simulation can actually interfere "with the very principle of reality."[259] Baudrillard emphasizes that a faked hold up provokes a confrontation with the real by infiltrating reality with simulacra where reality takes over: "such a simulated hold up cannot avoid leaking into the realm of the real, as there can be no objective difference between a real and a simulated hold up."[260] As a variation on Baudrillard's possible scenarios, *Remainder* underlines not the merging but the doubling of reality, which produces a material remainder that connects back to the "reality" of the re-enactment. Pieter Vermeulen explains:

> [T]he simulation does not fail when it is confronted with the real, or even with the resistance of something substantial, but rather when the friction between the real simulation and the rehearsals for this simulation produce a material remainder. In the rehearsals, one of the reenactors always trips on a "kink in the carpet"; in the real reenactment of these rehearsals, there is no such kink, and as the "half-trip" has become

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[259] Jean Baudrillard, "Simulacra and Simulations" in *Selected Writings,* ed. Mark Poster (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1998) 166–84 at 177.
[260] Pieter Vermeulen, "The Critique of Trauma and the Afterlife of the Novel in Tom McCarthy's *Remainder,*" *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 58.3 (2012): 549-568, at 560.

"instinctive, second nature" for the actor, he falls over when he fails to encounter the kink he had anticipated (267). The actor falls against another actor, and the clash sets off the latter's gun, which kills a third actor. The novel here offers another instance of its signature logic; a residue is generated through the friction generated by an attempt to cancel one reality by the imposition of another. The simulation generates real-world effects "Thanks to the ghost kink, mainly—the kink the other kink left when we took it away" (273). Even if the friction between the rehearsals and the reenactment is nothing substantial (such as a real, tangible kink in a real carpet), it does generate real-world effects." (560-1)

As the re-enactments encompass more and more space of reality they nevertheless become more frustrating: the short moments of harmony and oneness with the world that he can experience during re-enactments do not last, which leads to depression: "Melancholia is a disturbance of *élan vital*, while depression is a mood disorder that turns all feelings grey and, for that reason, affects movement" (Ehrenberg 167). Ironically, the narrator thinks that he can escape his predicament of feeling inauthentic in the present by recreating what he remembers as having felt authentic in his post-traumatic past. The crack in wall plaster extends into a Baudrillardian simulacra, an aesthetic space of simulation that feels more real than actual reality. Before Baudrillard wrote his concept of postmodern hyperreality and about the threat that it poses to the self, José Ortega y Gasset had already stated that artistic creation "gives rise to an unreal, "virtual" world. The poetic metaphor is key to such virtuality as long as it takes human reality away from the object and links it to a new world without any references to the real."[261] Another level of hyperreality replaces the existing artificial setting when the narrator requests a small-scale model of his recreated building that he can control and manipulate on his own: "I placed my model on my living-room floor. I moved the figures around once more and issued instructions down the phone to Naz [...]

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[261] *Handbook of Phenomenological Aesthetics,* Vol. 59, ed. Nicolas de Warren and Dermot Moran, (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010) xxi.

Just knowing it was happening was enough" (*R* 165). The manipulations executed on a

model scale collapse space to an ideal of instantaneous transmission and reception to the

actors via Naz.

The differences in scale and scope between models, re-enactments and reality,

are still apparent as they are in the Platonic distinction between likenesses ("eikons") and

semblances ("phantasms"). They are bridged at the end of the novel when the likeness of

the re-enactment setting is identical with reality. Now the real world seems to have

become an imitation of the former re-enactment such that the narrator remarks that the

real van has "a perfect likeness of the van we'd used up at the warehouse. More than

perfect: it was identical in make and size and registration, in the faded finish on its sides,

the way its edges turned" (*R* 284). Suddenly the real van conforms to the Platonian sense

of likeness-making, as an "eikon" it was "executed according to the proportions of the

original, similar in length and breadth and depth […] its appropriate colour."[262]

Paradoxically, the van used in the simulations is regarded as an original and the real van is

relegated to be no more than an excellent full-scale copy, indistinguishable from the one

that was built specifically for the re-enactment. According to Maurice Blanchot, "to

whom McCarthy attributes the premise, the simulation being less a replication of that

which already exists than a unique event in itself" (Jim Byatt 255). The simulation

penetrates the real and subverts the dichotomy of model and copy, original and

reproduction, which also reverses the order of priority: the re-enactment is no longer a

secondary event but comes first, it is a "preenactment" (*R* 241).

Idealized Form and Surplus Matter

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[262] Plato, *Sophist, Project Gutenberg* EBook.

Art is conceived here with the imagination that takes away the inessential properties of things and turns them into purely intentional objects. Aesthetic reality is fictitious and the protagonist remembers his art teacher's advice that the form is always already there, it is only concealed to the mind and the "task isn't to create the sculpture […] it's to strip all the other stuff away, get rid of it. The surplus matter" (*R* 87). Classically, the imperfection of reality is due to matter that form must transcend either in a conceptual or in a spiritual striving, which goes back to Plato's idealism and his theory of forms in which he describes the world as a mere reflection of a more complete and true essential reality on a higher plane of existence. This world of ideas resembles a blueprint after which the objects of the physical world are fashioned and *Remainder* treats the self-sustained concept of ideal form ironically in the literal disfigurement of the narrator's bank account: "The eight was perfect, neat: a curved figure infinitely turning back into itself. But then the half. Why had they added the half? It seemed to me so messy, this half: a leftover fragment, a shard of detritus" (*R* 9). The extra half million is regarded as a surplus, an excess of matter that refuses to be contained within an idealistic system where it violates the unity of a perfect loop that symbolizes infinity and eternity. The structure of eight is embedded throughout the novel as an emblem that stands for the desire to define oneself: "the perfection of the authenticity that the narrator seeks, a closed circuit that refers to nothing outside itself and yet sustains its own energy" (Lea 468). The dynamic of entropic spatio-temporal systems, such as endless regression in re-enactments, is symbolized in the loop and in the doubling of the loop.

Modernism emphasized the perfection of the work of art at the expense of social engagement and was, in particular, accused of political abstention that came out of a "belief in the autonomy of art; the artist was free to pursue purely aesthetic goals without

having to worry about morality, religion, and politics."[263] The artistic Imagination creates

images of perfection, a notion which *Remainder* treats with irony, but also with a hint of

nostalgia for something that ultimately remains elusive and cerebral.

Tom McCarthy is a founding member of the International Necronautical Society

(INS), who declare themselves to be the "modern lovers of debris, radio and jetstreams",

which points to their view that it is matter that matters foremost and their manifesto

states that "[w]hat is most real for us is not form, or God, but matter, the brute

materiality of the external world. We celebrate the imperfection of matter and somatize

that imperfection on a daily basis."[264] Humans, as corporeal beings, partake in the

material condition of the world and share the inherent imperfections of all creatures;

they cannot know anything to a level of certainty nor can humans sense beyond the

phenomena of their experience. The surplus matter is part of realism and not idealism, a

reminder of the tendency for all matter and energy in the universe to evolve toward a

state of inert uniformity and formlessness as opposed to the Platonic world of forms.

The narrator becomes obsessed with transcending the material plane after he

experiences the accidental disappearance of the car's washer fluid in almost religious

terms: "[i]t was as though I'd just witnessed a miracle: matter – these two litres of liquid –

becoming un-matter – not surplus matter, mess or clutter, but pure, bodiless blueness" (*R*

159). For a moment, mundane matter seems to have become immaterial through a

process of transubstantiation that left nothing behind, but without technical

manipulation there is no repetition in dematerializing the liquid so it can indeed "become

sky" (*R* 223). The transubstantiation of matter turned out to be no more than a

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[263] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Theology and the condition of postmodernity," *Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology,* ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Cambridge UP, 2003) 3-25, 7.
[264] Simon Critchley and Tom McCarthy, "Tate Declaration on Inauthenticity" (2009), ed. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Ten Point Manifesto:* Number 6.

momentary illusion, but the transcendence of material plane is still a driving motivation for the narrator. The totalizing, mystical transcendence in space between living and dead matter, that the narrator experiences during the killing scene re-enactments, again promises the merging of the self with matter, but it turns out to be deceptive and, as before, the narrator is left only with short moments of "feeling intense and serene" (*R* 11, 101). *Remainder* is a comedy of failure in which the narrator insists on applying aesthetic processes that reproduce human concepts in matter without realizing that inauthenticity is intrinsically bound up with the repetitive mechanism of art that functions through copies or performances. Aesthetic manipulations may attempt to hide the imperfection of matter and the narrator may want to feel connected, but "there is always 'a remainder that remains: a shard, a leftover, a trace, a residual,' and this remainder is the 'mark of inauthenticity'" (Schwenger in Lea 467).

The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience in Re-enactments

The pursuit of authenticity takes an aesthetic form of highly stylized formal operations mapped out on a grid , which remind the narrator of **"**abstract paintings, avant-garde ones from the last century […] But they're not abstract at all. They're records of atrocities. Each line, each figure, every angle – the ink itself vibrates with an almost intolerable violence, darkly screaming from the silence of white paper: something has happened here, someone has died" (*R* 173). Art makes it possible to structure contingency through manipulation and the repetitive loops of re-enactments strive for an ever-increasing perfection similar to the forensics of death that in *Remainder* become an aesthetic project of performance art in calculated measures where the "narrator grows increasingly aware of the tendency of forensic science to break down each event, each

symbol and each trace, into its constituent parts, in a process which can conceivably bring time to a near-standstill" (Jim Byatt 256). The narrator is fascinated by the structuring of time and movement: "you do it slowly, breaking down your movements into phases that have sections and sub-sections, each one governed by rigorous rules. You even wear special suits when you do it, like Japanese people wearing kimonos as they perform the tea ceremony" (*R* 174).

Justus Nieland writes that the formalism of forensics is linked to the modernist grid with its abstract system of ordering in patterns and recording them to approximate a "degree zero of representation [which] is bound tightly to death" (589). From a phenomenological perspective, embodiment starts at birth and ends in death and the experience of dying entails passivity in the face of death. The INS manifesto states "[t]hat death is a type of space, which we intend to map, enter, colonise and, eventually, inhabit," and furthermore that "[o]ur very bodies are no more than vehicles carrying us ineluctably towards death. We are all necronauts, always, already."[265] Death transcends the anxiety of the fundamental existential condition of finality and Heidegger had already described the human condition as "being-towards-death *(Sein-zum-Tode)"* under the premise that "death can only be authentically experienced by us if we become totally secure with our first-person experience of dying – our genuine anticipation of death. We cannot experience other people's deaths in the same authentic manner" (Moran 241). The repeated re-enactments of a death scene, in which the narrator takes on the role of the victim, indicate his desire for the fusion of the self with matter. He hopes to achieve authenticity in being-towards-death, or a state of pure being, by transcending the space between living and dead matter. He envies the dead man because

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[265] Tom McCarthy, "International Necronautical Society – First Manifesto," *Times*, 14 December 1999, 1.

> In dying beside the bollards on the tarmac he'd done what I wanted to do: merged with the space around him, sunk and flowed into it until there was no distance between it and him – and merged, too, with his actions, merged to the extent of having no more consciousness of them. He'd stopped being separate, removed, imperfect. Cut out the detour. Then both mind and actions had resolved themselves into pure stasis. (*R* 184-5)

The sensation of connectedness encompasses not only the consciousness of another person, but also the substrata of the material world, which could imply that the creative imagination could bridge the split between the Cartesian picture of the two distinct entities – body and mind – with an embodied view of imaginative structures of understanding that extends the "Kantian view of imagination as a capacity for ordering mental representations into unified, coherent, meaningful wholes that we can understand and reason about" (Johnson, *BM* 194). The salience of the human imagination, understood as acquired evolutionary image schemata in which the physical world of surfaces, distances and forces exist, manipulates and transforms matter into metaphorical extensions: "Imagination, in this sense, mediates between sense perception and our more abstractive conceptualizing capacities: it makes it possible for us to conceptualize various structural aspects of our experience and to formulate propositional descriptions of them" (Johnson, *BM* 194).

The Experiential Dimension of Selfhood: Building a Self and a World

The highest human challenge is to live authentically. Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy of existentialism claims that there is "no blueprint for human existence, no framework which could be adopted to make life meaningful. Rather we must face up to the dizzying formlessness and groundlessness of our existence, an experience which provokes

anxiety" (Morat 362). At various times the narrator feels dizzy when he is faced with instants of contingency and he believes that his remembered building must be found systematically by his staff circling in on it; their joint efforts "would scare my building out, like beaters scaring pheasants out of bushes for a Lord to shoot – six beaters advancing in formation, beating to the same rhythms, their movements duplicating one another" (*R* 91). Ironically, the strategic plan of eliminating possibilities rationally and systematically seems too rational to him to be successful and he decides to search for himself, because "it wouldn't be my building unless I found it myself" (*R* 91). It happens in a vivid dream, when buildings and streets flash past, that the narrator gets glimpses of his remembered building: "I sensed the rhythm things were moving at, the patterns they were following, and let my imagination slip inside them. I could sense when my building was about to come by. I waited for it to go by twice, and just before it reappeared a third time shouted: "Stop!" (*R* 94). In the next moment, the narrator not only experiences seeing the building with inner eyes, but he is also gripped by a corporeal experience: he can move around freely and occupy the space. Although he is in a dream, he feels that his body has become manifested in a "corporeal orientation in the world in contexts of perception, action and spatial navigation."[266] In his random search through London, the narrator avoids entering Plato road, which "might have short-circuited things" (*R* 97). Instead, he concentrates on his walking body and instantly recognizes a building as the one that had appeared in his dream (*R* 99). The fact that many features inside and outside are different to what he remembers is irrelevant as he believes that the money at his disposal gives him the power to change anything that does not fit. The diffuse meaningfulness of

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[266] Hermann Schmitz, Rudolf Owen Müllan and Jan Slaby, "Emotions outside the box – the new phenomenology of feeling and corporeality," *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 10.2 (2011): 241-259, at 244.

imagining, of "projecting all this in" (*R* 102) promises a rich mode of experience, and the tingling in his body that he feels during simulations could be interpreted as the manifestation of "holistic corporeal impressions", which, according to Schmitz et al., are the result of "sensing by means of the felt body [which] is a holistic exchange of corporeal dynamics, a vibrant attunement to meaningful surroundings. Correspondingly, the world shows up not as a neutral realm of already separate entities but as the atmospheric fields of significant situations" (244).

The narrator's first project of finding "his" building inverses the Madeleine episode and the name of the location for the re-enactment, Madlyn Mansions, is a nod to the serendipitous Proustian Epiphany that precipitated a flood of memories in Marcel. But instead of remembering after tasting tea and cake, the protagonist becomes obsessively proactive in changing the basic building to make the space fit what he remembers with the aim to turn it into a defining environment where he can "relieve his affective neutrality by reliving moments of presence, plenitude, or authenticity" (Nieland 588). To feel nothing or neutral means to be cut off from experiencing the body, whereas the tingling gives the narrator an almost erotic feeling, it is "both intense and serene at the same time" (*R* 11). The expansion of the body and the inhabitation of space are characteristic of immediate affective involvement in a pre-reflective and not yet articulated self-consciousness that has "the quality of *mineness* [where] experiences are characterized by first-personal *givenness*. That is, the experiences are given (at least tacitly) as *my* experiences, as experiences *I* am undergoing or living through" (Zahavi "Self and Other" 189).

Eventually, the narrator comes to reflect on his re-enactments that have failed to provide him with the permanence of feeling authentic or real, because "[t]he realness I

was after wasn't something you could just 'do' once and then have 'got': it was a state, a

mode – one that I needed to return to again and again and again" (*R* 223). The parody of

transcendence is pervasive throughout the novel and even after every detail is perfect

and the timing is finally minutely executed, the feeling of the building with all its props

and smells can satisfy the narrator only to a point, until reality interferes with the illusion.

Post-Postmodern Imperative for Ethical Self-Determination

Neurosis – the individual divided by his conflicts – dominated the clinical diagnosis

of mental disorders in the first half of the twentieth century. The terminology appears to

have been replaced by the pathology of the depressed self; a self that is ceaselessly

challenged by its own sovereignty: Alain Ehrenberg distinguishes between the terms and

explains that "[i]f neurosis is the tragedy of guilt, depression is the tragedy of inadequacy"

(11). The narrator's self is essentially narcissistic: "My project was a programme, not a

hobby or a sideline: a programme to which I'd given myself over body and soul. The

relationships within this programme would be between me and my staff. Exclusively.

Staff: not friends" (*R* 118).

As the narrator lacks all affective relations, he feels insulated and seeks to limit

himself to professionalized relationships that he can control. In postmodern society, the

individual is faced with the ethos of self-realisation and responsibility in which the ability

to articulate a self has become a social imperative. The consumerist milieu of neo-

corporatism, Foucault's society of disciplinary obedience and prohibition, has been

replaced by one of personal decision, initiative and networking, and the vast amount of

compensation money gives the narrator the economic power and opportunity to

instrumentalize others. The self has become a new management project. The narrator's

own project of building a completely aestheticized world in search of a different kind of

self is a parody of contemporary consumer technology in which the self is situated in a

culture of networking and information management: "the walls of Naz's office became

caked with charts: planning charts, flow charts and Venn diagrams, lists and indexes and

keys to charts and indexes to lists" (*R* 236). Art and technology seem to offer, however

superficially and illusorily, a solution for filling the void of weariness by making "each of

us the center of our own universe of choices and gratifications."[267] The effect is that an

individual "becomes depressed because he must tolerate the illusion that everything is

possible for him" (Ehrenberg 232). The project management for bringing the narrator's

vision into being starts in the restaurant of the Design Museum, aptly named Blueprint

Café, in a meeting with the executive of Time Control UK, Nazrul Ram Vyas, who manages

excessive logistical details and massive amounts of information with the precision of a

computer networker: "Naz facilitated everything for me. Made it all happen. He was like

an extra set of limbs – eight extra sets of limbs, tentacles spreading out in all directions,

coordinating projects, issuing instructions, executing commands. My executor" (*R* 73)**.**

Managing the lives of their clients logistically, the company takes a managerial approach

that parodies an existential view of the self as "not something given, but something

evolving, something that is realized through my projects. There is no such thing as who (in

contrast to what) I am independently of how I understand and interpret myself" (Zahavi,

"Self and Other" 179). The narrator induces and facilitates a merely instrumental stance

of total control towards his "enlisted" re-enactors: "My pyramid was like a Pharaoh's

pyramid. I was the Pharaoh. They were my loyal servants, all the others; my reward to

them was to allow them to accompany me on the first segment of my final voyage" (*R*

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[267] Jonathan Franzen quoted in Robert L. McLaughlin, 60.

255). As he projects his meanings onto the world, he is oblivious to the underlying

amorality of dehumanizing others as fixed and dead objects in his *tableau vivant:* "I

generally put the building into *on* mode for between six and eight hours each day –

mostly in stretches of two hours" (*R* 149). The thought of a plane exploding with his re-

enactors on board reminds him of an artistic act "a pillow ripping open, its stuffing of

feathers rushing outwards, merging with the air" (*R* 255).

The Dark Side of Limitless Possibilities: The Break with Reality

Remainder portrays the human condition of the postmodern self which has the

freedom of an autonomous individual, but lives in a pathological tension of being equally

burdened with the project of realising himself and the threat of failing to do so. The

feeling of estrangement from inner reality has its equivalent in outside reality: the world

feels as unreal as the narrator himself, who thinks that his movements appear distorted:

"jerking back and forth like paused video images do on low-quality machines. It must

have looked strange. I felt self-conscious, embarrassed. […] It was a performance for the

two men watching me, to make my movements come across as more authentic" (*R* 15).

The narrator becomes increasingly and catatonically disconnected from reality as his

consciousness drifts in and out of his private fantasies, or "waking comas: I wouldn't

move for long stretches of time, or register any stimuli around me – sound, light, anything

– and yet I'd be fully conscious: my eyes would be wide open and I'd seem engrossed in

something. I'd remain in this state for several hours on end" (*R* 219).

A borough councillor takes on a double persona that appears several times

unexpectedly in the narrator's presence. That the short councillor is part of the narrator's

increasingly delusional state becomes clear when his existence is subsequently

questioned by Naz: "What short councillor?" (*R* 270). Their dialogues bring to mind the

situation between psychiatrist and patient; his 'slightly' Scottish voice might even be a

reference to the radical psychiatrist of the nineteen-sixties, R. D. Laing. It was Laing who

connected individual to social pathology. In Ehrenberg's view, the pathology of

irresponsible freedom in an individualistic society now produces a condition of depression

and dependency: "Depression, then, is melancholia plus equality, the perfect disorder of

the democratic human being. It is the inexorable counterpart of the human being who is

her/his own sovereign" (219). The pathology of depression acknowledges the

responsibility of the self to realize its potential, but the self is hampered and fatigued with

becoming itself.   From a sociological point of view, the postmodern individual is

threatened with the dissolution of identity, and depression ensues when "the distance

between the self and the self is at its maximum. On the other hand, dependency tends

towards an identity fusion, with distance being minimal" (Ehrenberg 220).   The trajectory

of *Remainder* encompasses both extremes: a longing for unity that leaves no distance

between the self and the physical world and an addiction to increasingly elaborated

simulations that replace any semblance of formal reality. He lives in a simulation and

works tirelessly to create new simulations, but his movements *in situ* and his participation

in projects do not provide in any on-going way the sought after feeling of being real. Only

occasionally does he experience a sensory response in his body, the atavistic "tingling"

that signals the "perfect convergence where the consciousness of existence falls away,

and he is left in a condition of messianic transportation […] rare moments of transcendent

being, when he feels instrumental to the moment, that he comes closest to achieving a

form of authenticity as an experience of immanence" (Lea 466). The tingling is a signal

that portrays "the actual state of the body as modified by emotions in response to

interactions with the environment" (Damasio, "Feelings of Emotion and the Self" 253).

CONCLUSION

Whilst I had initially hoped to find some evidence for a unified or, at least a conclusive self, now, at the end of this thesis, I have arrived at the position that from the first instance of human awareness about the profound temporal split of the ontological self into past, present and future through memory and anticipation, there has always been a desire to articulate the self in terms that reflect that fundamental experience. Writing about the self has served since Augustine both as the vehicle to express that split and to show the dilemma of substantiating the self in text where it emerges as the product of a writer's inevitable self-reflexivity.

In the present post-postmodern condition, it is not only the narrative self that is in disarray: the very core of the self – understood as a kind of affective proto-self – seems also to be emptied out too. I chose to end my thesis, therefore, with a text that explicitly traces its origins through Platonic ideas, religious and secular confessional narratives, material psychology, aesthetic and phenomenological accounts, paranoia and postmodern autobiografiction. *Remainder* curiously and ironically re-enacts almost all of the positions on writing the self that I have covered in this thesis.

I have tried to demonstrate that the (post)-postmodern self neither arrived *ex nihilo*, nor descended from a single line of development, or from the rupture with modernism, as Al Alvarez had claimed. Increasingly, critics and writers are recognizing the need to exceed postmodernist frameworks and, rather than assigning novelty to the post-postmodern self, I have tried to explicate the self's situatedness in a complex network of ideas; the history of ideas that was and still is perennially revisited and

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reworked by the cultural, intellectual and scientific forces of each period that has shaped

and continues to shape the ways in which ideas about the self were and are expressed.

The Moral Self in the Twenty-first Century and the Future of Literature

Whilst literary writing has always provided data about the structure of the human

self**,** cognitive neuroscience provides an empirically well-supported set of theories and

hypotheses that can benefit literary studies generally. The future orientation of the novel

in the aftermath of the theory wars can be thought of in terms of an "aesthetic sea

change, then, as being inspired by a desire to reconnect language to the social sphere or,

to put it another way, to reenergize literature's social mission, its ability to intervene in

the social world, to have an impact on actual people and the actual social institutions in

which they live their lives." (McLaughlin 55).

The examination of the dominant discourses for articulating the self, from St

Augustine to contemporary life-writing, shows that a moral function has always been a

central aspect of its definition. It is therefore pertinent to understand the preoccupation

with ethical issues as a further key concept for understanding the self. In his seminal

work *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*, Charles Taylor claims that the

autonomy of the self rests on the idea that the self is exclusively to be understood as

"something that can exist only in a space of moral issues" (49). He views constitutive

goods as subject-transcending sources that have a "capacity to empower us morally" and

goes on to explain that, once their value has been acknowledged, they become an ethical

response to reductive strains of the Enlightenment that "functions in a field of moral

assessment along with our antecedent sense of what is right, and our identification of the

possible illusions which could vitiate our moral intuitions."[268] Constitutive goods are

paradigmatic for the shifts that have taken place in the modern period and every

individual moral stance is viewed as potentially authentic as part of the process of self-

interpretation. The personal dimension is significant because "what I am as a self is

essentially defined by the ways things have significance for me" (*SS* 34). Self-

understanding is achieved through articulating the visions that direct one's life such that

"[r]ecovering moral sources opens us to something which empowers [...] the metaphysics

or theology comes indexed to a personal vision, or refracted through a particular

sensibility" (*SS* 490, 491).

Taylor's idea about moral sources as constitutive for selfhood is echoed in Antonio

Damasio's hypothesis regarding the value of art for the articulation of thoughts and

feelings, which provide "the biological counterpart of a spiritual dimension in human

affairs [...] a way to explore one's own mind and the minds of others, a means to rehearse

specific aspects of life, and a means to exercise moral judgment and moral action."[269]

A crucial characteristic of post-postmodern literature is its specific treatment of

subjectivity and there seems to be an emerging movement against the postmodern

hermeneutics of suspicion and its anti-essentialist, anti-humanist notion of

fragmentation, undecidables and social constructivism. In evaluating the critical potential

of poetics in the contemporary social world, Jeffrey Nealon suggests that artists are now

concerned with a "post-postmodern hermeneutics of situation."[270] Literature appears to

be at a historical juncture where it can take on a synoptic role by staying in close contact

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[268] Charles Taylor, "Reply to Commentators", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 54.1 (1994):203-213, at 213.
[269] Antonio Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain* (New York: Pantheon, 2010) 296.
[270] Jeffrey T. Nealon, *Post-Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Just-in-Time Capitalism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2012) 150.

with other disciplines, without the risk of being entirely assimilated by them. Literature

must therefore put up resistances to being subsumed and subordinated to other

institutional or academic forces and show that it is not a passive recipient but has a

productive function of its own, "a life of its own, but one which is not in opposition to all

other forms of life. On the contrary, the life that literature evinces comes from its ever-

shifting modes of dealing with and transforming whatever lies outside it. Every individual

work of literature seeks to address us in its own manner and for its own ends."[271]

Contemporary literature goes beyond the power of interrupting reified truth

claims and subverting them; the critical engagement works in subtler ways: it is a product

that comes out of "those features of the work which institutionalism cannot assimilate

and digest, and which for want of better words, we had better call its imaginative, formal,

and moral elements." (Lansdown 7). Contemporary writing hints at another structure of

feeling, intimating another discourse and in this view, literary works can act as an

incubator for speculative ideas that have a potential to cross over into the cognitive

sciences or stimulate and enrich empirical and philosophical research. By positing

themselves as alternative paradigms for accounts of human life, works of literature have

cognitive value. Jeffrey Nealon puts forward the idea of literature as an "equipmental"

force for post-postmodern life in a globalized world and, as such, sees it affecting readers

by "intensifying and expanding our sense of 'the poetic' as a robust form of cultural

engagement or analysis, whose force is enabled not by its *distance from* dominant

culture, but its *imbrication with* contemporary socioeconomic forces" (154).

The dominant mode of irony, apathy, plurality and scepticism that had

characterized the condition under which much of postmodernist literature was produced

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[271] Richard Lansdown, *The Autonomy of Literature* (Basingstoke: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin's, 2001) 7.

seems to have been abandoned by postmillennial writers. Writers like Tom McCarthy

engage in political and ethical objectives in an age in which the self is confronted with

radical economic instability on a global scale, increasing ubiquity and dominance of new

communications technologies, and widespread anxieties set against a backdrop of

profound political disillusionment. Contemporary writing gives a renewed impetus to the

belief that literature still is the preeminent discourse in which art, ethics, and politics are

inextricably linked.

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