# Tracks in Literary Modernism

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# Introduction: Modernism Still

## James Joyce

These, mostly, are surprising in the formality of the essay style adopted by Joyce. His use of formal rhetorical tropes, such as reversal however, is deceptive in that it is often syllogistic so that the prose becomes both political and analytical ("Mangan can tell of the beauty of hate; and pure hate is as excellent as pure love"). Thus, he criticizes Wilde for preferring 'sophism to syllogism'. There is also a somewhat patrician element in Joyce in these essays, particularly where he espouses the autonomy of the artist in contrast to the fumbling commitment of Yeats – echoing Joyce's long-standing criticism of patriotism, seen in the Cyclops chapter of Ulysses and elsewhere. Buck Mulligan's desire to Hellenize Ireland is seen in these essays in Joyce's concern for Irish myths and the roots of Irish in the Phoenicians. Interesting number of reflections on the status of the aesthetic, even though his concern with Mangan appears minor today. There are elements in these writings, also, that bear witness to Ellman's view that the paradigmatic rule in Joyce's fictional world is that of coincidence (seen particularly in the essay 'Drama and Life').

## Virginia Woolf

I feel much guiltier about Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*. I must have attempted this novel at least four times and always given up on it. I just cannot stand the primness prissiness of the narrative voice – don't forget this writer was a class snob and that, for instance, Joyce might be a genius but *Ulysses* was 'brackish' and 'underbred' (Diary entry, 6 September 1922). The voice in this novel is , unlike Joyce's, sexless and it has a vision that flutters around and lights like a butterfly on London as if the city was an English garden full of wonderfully scented plants. It's depth is about the same as those tourist t-shirts that say **I love London**, even though Woolf is fully conscious of the terrible legacy of the first world war, and the trajectory of the 20th century. And the names, so middle class, so wanting to be classical or medieval figures in the landscape: Clarissa, Septimus (I ask you!), aunt Helena, Richard, Elizabeth and the countless curtsying in the prose to Lords and Ladies This and That, the taking for granted of the legitimacy of having servants and landed estates. The other end of the narrative bow bends to take in the low lives, but these are inevitably characterless, thin, the objects of observation. And as a whole it seems to me to be a novel which tends to have an almost stiff-upper-lip tone when it comes to conveying human emotions:

*Since she was so unhappy, for weeks and weeks now, Rezia had given meanings to things that happened, almost felt sometimes that she must stop people in the street, if they looked good, kind people, just to say to them "I am unhappy"*

Although in the first person, in contrast to Woolf's adoption of the third (but it is always *her* voice), the immediacy, the emotional tensioning of the prose in Greene's novels has a profound impact on me:

*I was pushing, pushing the only thing I loved out of my life. As long as I could make-believe that love last, I was happy – I think I was even good to live with, and so love did last. But if love had to die, I wanted it to die quickly. It was as though our love were a small creature caught in a trap and bleeding to death: I had to shut my eyes and wring its neck. (End of the Affair)*

*God save us always, I said, from the innocent and the good…Innocence is like the dumb leper who has lost his bell, wandering the world, meaning no harm. (The Quiet American*)

## Mechanization and Modernism

Like Doblin's *Wadek* Léger's art illustrates the powerful impact of mechanization on 20th century visual art and literature, particularly in their modernist forms. If one reads one or other of the key exhibition guides, such as Vallye's *Léger – Modern Art and the Metropolis* emphasis is usually given to the influence of cinema and the stenciled street advertising hoardings on the artist, as well as direct aesthetic sources from Apollinaire's 'aesthetics of surprise'. But, more simply, mechanization provided Léger with an instant iconography: the signs of towers, industrial elevators, articulated segmented pipe bends, metal staircases running outside square functional factory buildings., the forms of key icons that figure in paintings like 'Tugboat' (1923).

Part of the compulsive appeal of modernism to me is just this - that it deals with the world of mechanized labour I was initiated into when I worked as an engineering apprentice in Trafford Park, Manchester. In Léger one sees both human and material signs of that world, as indeed one finds then in constructionist and cubist art, and the re-articulation of the commercial objects of the time in dada. It is easy to forget the profound impact that the mature years of mechanized society had on experience and its interpretation in art and literature, in contradistinction to industrialization as a more general historical force. In 19th century realist art the industrial sublime figured largely in painters like Joseph Wright, Turner, up to Seurat and the impressionists. But in early to mid-20th century art, it wasn't so much the impact of industrialization on agrarian society and its associated genre of landscape that was the concern so much as the mechanization of experience. We can see how the mechanization of the body in paintings like 'Men in the city' (1919) and even in the most theatrical-coordinated tumbling of 'Acrobats at the circus' (1918) points to this pervasiveness. But, art after Auschwitz changed again and Léger's 'Tree Trunk on Yellow Ground' (1945) obviously illustrates this change – his mechanical images give way to those of the barbed wire of the concentration camp.

# Originals

## Alfred Döblin's Spiritual Modernism

Alfred Döblin's '1918 novels' about the German revolution (abridged and translated by John E. Woods in two volumes: *A People Betrayed* and *Karl and Rosa* 1948-51 and (the original volume 1) *Citizens and Soldiers* by Chris Godwin) are political novels interleaved with Christian themes of faith, redemption, grace. More long-standing themes in Döblin's work are also found in these novels' concern with materialism and rationalism, Döblin also relating these themes, however, to underline the bitter results of the faithlessness of 20th century society. To an extent these themes associate him with the 'spiritual' modernism of T.S. Eliot or, perhaps, John Cowper Powys.

The 1918 novels, published post-second world war but started in that war, coincide with Döblin's conversion to Roman Catholicism and a comparison with, his near contemporary, the Roman Catholic writer Graham Greene inevitably comes to mind. Greene, however, was 'late to the scene' of modernism and soon abandoned it after his early novels like *England Made Me*. Greene's early foray into modernism was essentially limited to a few stylistic tropes such as coincident narrative timelines, and his maturity as a 'writer of faith' came after abandoning modernism. In contrast, the style of Döblin's 1918 novels continues with the mature modernism of his *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929) whilst still able to address in a Christian spiritual manner themes like the domination of science and rationalization marking the modern megalopolis: out-of-human-control-mechanized technology, mass communication, and the mass slaughter of the trenches.

Döblin's religious concerns mark the 1918 novels, particularly as they revolve around the major character in the novel, Lieutenant Friedrich Becker (it might be argued he is the *only* fully developed, 'rounded', character, at least in terms of usual understandings of character in conventional novels. However, Döblin rejected conventional characterization, a point of view seen in his essay 'Remarks on the Novel'. Döblin's characters are generally, but consciously, 'flat') In *Karl and Rosa* we find Becker recovering from his war wounds and returning to teaching the classics at a boy's gymnasium. Due to his classics-background, as well as his convoluted (but inevitable) reproachment with Christianity, Becker is a symbolic figure allowing Döblin to address the faithlessness in the social and political roots of war and its immediate, revolutionary, aftermath.

Earlier, in volume 1 of Wood's and Godwin's translation we find Becker in hospital but soon to be repatriated with the hospital itself when Alsace was ceded to France. Back in Berlin, his friend Maus, also a veteran and thus a parallel figure (they both fall in love with the same nurse, Hilde, at the hospital) soon gets drawn into the German revolution of November 1918. Becker hasn't the temperament for revolutionary politics and will not be lured in by Maus, a character more easily led by ideology, even if he was in any physical shape to become involved.

In *Karl and Rosa* we see him in recovery, at least in terms of regaining mobility, and he eventually returns to teaching. But, ironically, he finds that his pre-war pedagogic interpretation of classical Greek tragedy seems no longer relevant to his pupils. Most of the students have become cynical in the face of being on the losing side of the war - they represent a new generation, forced into a radical break, with the values of pre-war Bismarckian aristocratic-paternal German culture. Döblin shows how this pervasive sense of post-war trauma and alienation puts Becker's ethical concerns with Sophoclean themes of redemption and conciliation into eclipse. Becker believes the ethical concerns of the classics can offer a source of post-war solace, but to the boys these ideas seem far too distant, abstract, perhaps too imbued with an ancient sense of *faithfulness*, and fall on their death ears.

Intermittently, Becker is shown to be visited by symbolic figures who tempt him towards suicide. To explain these as 'hallucination' is probably not right because in Döblin's work from 1912 onwards it is not unusual to find characters engaging with 'spirits' which, however, have no lack of material presence. We cannot explain this away, either, that Becker is suffering from 'shell shock' - now PTSD – because that would be to *rationalize* his state of mind which would also go against the grain of Döblin's spiritual modernism. These symbolic figures are stand-ins for the Devil and attempt to lure Becker to deep despair and suicide. He is, however, also ministered to by the figure of the medieval mystic and priest Johannes Tauber who consoles him with Christian tenets of redemption - hope, faith and grace. Döblin has Becker emerging from these Christian debates finding a sense of purpose which he links to the theme of redemption in *Antigone*. At the same time, we see Becker becoming involved in defending the disgraced gymnasium director whose platonic relationship with the student Heinz is misinterpreted by students and staff as paedophilic. Becker gets drawn deep into the controversy after the director is killed by Heinz's father and he falls under the scandalized gaze of students, staff and the mass media of the Berlin press.

All around Becker's story Döblin, in an historically 'epic' and detailed (the tight narrative time-span and detail is reminiscent of Solzhenitsyn's Red Wheel cycle – although Döblin escapes Solzhenitsyn's somewhat pedestrian style) story traces the revolutionary six months from November 1918. It is a story of machinations of the right: army staff, aristocrats, bourgeois, bureaucrats, the interim liberal government. In opposition are the forces of the left: revolutionary (Kiel) sections of the navy as well as communists and Sparticists. The compressed but finely detailed historical narrative is, however, jumpy, chaotic - Döblin's modernism appropriate to reflecting the temper of the times, cinematic, shifting from location to location across Germany (and the Atlantic in the scenes covering Woodrow Wilson's voyage to Europe.) Groups of key characters (i.e. Egbert, Eisner, Schleicher, Groener, Liebknecht, Radek, Luxemburg) as well as tens of other more minor historical figures from the period are shown vying for political power. Döblin's modernism ensures that the reader's attention is deliberately scattered, fragmentary, the writing and structure

conveying an overall sense of the chaos of revolution: of shifting values, of liberalism, socialism, communism and Bismarckism not simply at odds with one another but internally fractured by internal suspicion and disorganization as well. Durkheim might have said (he died in November 1917) German society was at the time dangerously anomic - but in terms of Döblin's spiritual modernism it is a state and society riven by faithlessness and soullessness.

**Continuities: Spirits, symbiosis, rebellious bodies**

The Christian themes that appear in the 1918 novels, as well as Döblin's modernism appear in other forms in his earlier novels and stories. In his early stories (*The Murder of a Buttercup* (1912) such as 'Bluebeard the Knight' we find in the character Ilsebill who exhibits contrasting but similarly motivated spiritual beliefs in paganism and Christianity:

*[P]raying at one tree, hanging her cross upon it and from the tree came a fire, fire smoke, smelling sweeter than lilacs.*

Döblin's 'pre-Christian' spiritual modernism figures in the ghost of the drowned lover in the story 'The sailboat ride'. A more sceptical side of spiritualism is seen in Döblin's 1945 story 'Traffic with the beyond'. But before that, in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929) we find Biberkopf overseen by Sarug and Terah, 'guardian angels' who chat together about his fate and character. They choose not to intervene and are actually damning because although Biberkopf, admittedly no intellectual, endures, lives through much experience he lacks 'grace' and is tragically too easily inclined:

*…towards mere knowledge, and then – towards escape, and death. He is no longer interested. He has passed along the road of experience and grown weary. His journey has outwearied body and soul. (345)*

In this novel, also, we find the wheeler-dealer Meck ('business is the best thing', 49) suggesting that Germany itself is belaboured by 'something on its conscience' (54). The recurring images Döblin evokes in the slaughterhouse sections of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* reverberate with the deeply primal state of German post-war guilt and social trauma. This is also felt in the precariousness of narrative voice and the symbiotic manner in which Biberkopf goes from pillar to post. Biberkopf's life is ruined by his unwilling (but resistless) involvement with gangsters, in particular with his spiteful animus Rheinhold. The latter may represent, a 'cold force of life', but Biberkopf is one amongst thieves and, symbiotically, implicated in his girlfriend's Sonia's death.

The idea of symbiosis is important in Döblin. Even in his early essay (1913) 'To novelists and their critics' Döblin writes of the need for the modern novelist to reject

romantic-rationalised concepts of human behaviour for more ‘concrete’ or natural ones:

*Rationalism was always the death of Art; nowadays the most importunate and cosseted rationalism is called psychology. Many a so-called “fine” novel or novella – the same goes for the drama – consists almost entirely of analyses of the characters’ trains of thought: conflicts arise in these trains of thought, leading to paltry or concocted “plots”. Maybe such trains of thought do occur, but not so isolated; in themselves they say nothing, cannot be represented: an amputated arm, breath without the breathing person, glances without eyes. Real motives come from quite another place; these, lacking a living totality, are humbug, aesthetic froth: a bored doctrinaire author bereft of ideas blathering to educated people desirous of instruction. (Essays-on-Literature-and-Autobiography.pdf (beyond-alexanderplatz.com) https://beyond-alexanderplatz.com accessed 17/11/2023)*

In the early articulation of his modernism, ‘To Novelists and Their Critics’ (1913), Döblin called for a ‘cinematic’ prose style in order to give a sense of concurrency, not just of events but of states of consciousness, or of a ‘sequence of complexes’. In *Two Women and a Poisoning* (1924) Döblin formulates a ‘symbiotic’ analysis of how instinctual drives are equal if not more important than psychological motives or ‘inclinations’ when describing why characters act in a novel or, more generally, when analysing human behaviour:

*If we want to examine closely the way we act, we would do well to turn our attention to unorganized matter and the general forces of nature (121).*

In the ‘Afterword’ to this intriguing hybrid documentary-novel (appearing almost forty years before Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood*), Döblin posits a literary modernist spin on symbiosis: to see characters reacting to one another (and their environment) rather than them each following their ego-individual orbits or psychological-motivations. Döblin prefigures here the aesthetic aims of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* by also arguing in *Two Women* that ‘disorder is knowledge’ (119). By 1929 symbiosis becomes a key aspect of this novel in which Franz Biberkopf (interestingly, given the above quote, missing an arm) effectively bounces-off or into one character’s orbit and another’s - going from pillar to post.

Another, stylistic, aspect of symbiosis the regular attributing of volatility in characters’ behaviour - their somewhat ‘jumpy’ motility. In the early (1914) novel *Wadek’s Battle with the Steam Turbine*, a comically wildly inchoate story with a fragmentary, sometimes bewildering, narrative, we find a bunch of madcap and conflicting materialists and rationalists in chain-reaction. Characters typically ‘thrust’ and ‘Shriek’ or ‘ricochet’ off one-another. This characteristic is also found, less regularly, in *A People Betrayed* where many characters are depicted as being in states of hyperactivity, they ‘leap’ about (32), they don’t visit but ‘disturb’ one another (44).

From the time of the early stories we find descriptions of bodies exhibiting, also, a certain ‘independence of action’ whilst in appearance they seem somewhat surreal and cubist (perhaps Döblin was influenced by contemporary developments in artistic representation.) Characters’ bodies are described as contorted and hollowed-out reminiscent of Henry Moore’ sculptures. Wadek’s wife has a ‘chest tightly compressed – a bit like the kicks in a tyre’, she is ‘a deformed heap of flesh’, her body’s geometry unruly:

*Her head fell forward into its hollow between the breasts, so that her jowls pushed the two flabby bulges out of shape.*

Similar images of contorted bodies appear in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*:

*The girl daintily, then serpentines along the wall, and, dangling her buttocks, slithers sweetly across to Willy.*

A man’s moustache is described as bending:

*At a table sat two couples looking at the passers-by. The gentleman in the salt and pepper suit, his moustache bent over the prominent bosom of a dark, stout woman.* (67)

The distinctive narrative voice in this novel is characterized by a somewhat soi-distant narrator, multifarious, difficult to pin down, dynamic and in its own right symbiotic. At times it is straightforwardly omniscient, but then by turns it is also an unnamed character, an onlooker or caught up in the events it depicts. Sometimes, also, it is the voice of Franz, or perhaps his voice being mimicked by the narrator:

*Now it’s going to start, the four of them want to get me…*(79)

In the episode in this novel of the ‘bald pate’ paedophile, we also find a manipulative voice characteristic of 1920s advertising and promotion interjecting itself:

*Inverts: after many years of experiment I have at last found a radical antidote against the growth of the beard. Every part of the body can be depilated. Furthermore I have discovered the means of developing a truly feminine breast within an astonishingly short time. No medicines, absolutely safe and harmless. As proof: myself. (64)*

The dynamism of narrative voice in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* even exhibits insecurity about the status of pronomination itself:

*Pigs, oxen, calves – they are slaughtered. There is no reason why we should concern ourselves with them. Where are we? We? (195)*

In his early story, *The Death of a Buttercup*, Döblin describes the entirely self-absorbed Fischer as being positioned by what might seem like the scenery – by nature: ‘The trees strode quickly past him’. This somewhat odd grammatical

construction has the effect of endowing nature with agency and reversing the reader's conventional assumptions of humans as subjects of sentences or primary agents acting on the natural environment. Fischer also exhibits what will become a regular trope in Döblin - a recalcitrant body, a body that seems to have a somewhat independent and unsettling mien:

*One foot stepped ahead of the other, arms swung from his shoulders. […] This [buttercup] called to his eye, his hand, his stick. (52)*

In *Wadek's Battle with the Steam Turbine*, a novel contemporary with this early story, we find the industrialist Rommel watching his fist acting independently of him (228). And in 'The ballerina and the body', the ballerina's body has being beyond our usual sense of it as secondary to self: we see it recalcitrant, obdurate to the dancer's will. The body, in effect, has its own spirit, a view of corporality that phenomenologists like Merleau-Ponty were developing at the same time as Döblin. This theme continues as late as *Karl and Rosa* where we still find nature, the material of technology, rearing up in rebellious technologies (coinciding with Döblin's 1945 story, 'Materialism, a fable') such as bullets and guns having 'preferences' (121-4), 'automatic weapons, which, angry at not being used, discharged themselves' (365).

## Conclusion

Like other spiritual modernists such as T.S. Eliot, the late novels of Döblin pit the eternal, faith and spirit against worldly transitory ideals of rationality, state and party. There are summary statements of this in the 1918 novels, like in this from the mouth of the aristocrat Baron Wylinski where both sides of the dynamic, faith and society, are in play:

*'If one understands the world as a totality,' he explained to Motz, 'as a sensual and existential context affecting each individual soul, then one cannot help but view it as a religious concept. The soul remains independent, apart from it, retaining a sense of its own value. But man has long attempted to build bridges across that gulf. And indeed the state as an organized, collective power has found its place at that juncture and is more than merely a negative concept.'* (*A People Betrayed* 431)

The 1918 novels are monuments to Döblin's more particularly Christian reaction to 20th century politics – seen in the extensive depictions of political mechanization of Egbert, the army hierarchy, the police, the Sparticists and the communists, and the representative figures of delusional misplaced-idealists in Liebknecht and Luxemburg. There was an inevitable tincture of reactionism in Döblin's post-war conversion to Christianity but, thankfully, this didn't lead to the sort of espousal of organized right-wing reactionary groups, like Eliot's with Maurras' Action Francaise. But Döblin's long-standing concern with human spirituality was a key aspect to his

foregoing of the depleted genres of 19th century realist literature and to his becoming one of the key figures in the formation of modernism in the early 20th century.

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## Eliot: Poet-Phenomenologist

Eliot's spiritual modernism aims to convey to the reader an experience of the presence of moral, religious, and philosophical ideas as they find currency in everyday life. We experience this in his poetry by the relational-effect of various ideas, positions, forms of language at play in and against one another. The ideas that we find at play in the poetry are, however, specific to the poetic realm, they like ideas in a novel have a literary 'reality of its own' (*Knowledge and Experience*. 98), they are not untranslated. For the relationalist Eliot all of reality is constituted as a result of 'several points of view', a position found in *Knowledge and Experience* and bluntly stated in draft title of *The Waste Land* 'He do the police in different voices'.

Eliot, then, rejects a representational theory of knowledge (98) and furthermore extends his adoption of relationality to his understanding consciousness (130). Our consciousness of the world of things, objects or reality/actuality, the feelings we experience, are never in direct relationship to it but sensation, is always abstract because it is we that 'validate' them in various ways (*Knowledge and Experience* 20). Eliot thus sees words/language/ concepts as the means by which we discern, differentiate, conceptualize our perception of things or feelings about things in the

world. Words are, however, related to actuality in a non-arbitrary way (i.e. as de Saussure views the relationship, or Pierce whom Eliot cites in this context (Kande 132)). But Eliot does not hold with a reductionist view of words just having dictionary meanings - see for example his reflections on the word 'concitation' in Gerontion (Ricks and McCue, 480). For the Christian Eliot part of his reason for this is that there are things that have no words but nevertheless exist in the realm of belief (Ricks and McCue, 475). But in our experience of everyday life common understandings are consolidated in words and concepts - they are 'bundles of experiences'.

In his view of experience of the world in *Knowledge and Experience* there are several 'different planes of reality' (Ricks and McCue, 1099) that we all live amongst in various ways but in which our voices are individual:

*It's only when they see nothing/That people can always show the suitable emotions -/And so far as they feel at all, their emotions are suitable,/The don't understand what it is to be awake,/To be living on several planes at once/Though one cannot speak with several voices at once. (The Family Reunion 324)*

This suggests what the role of the modernist poet is for Eliot. The poet must produce forms of verse that enable us to experience these different planes of reality, to move from one to another, to juxtapose them, to place them in contradiction, in sequence, in incoherent relationships. Just as words are formulations of our experiences of the world, so poetry formulates our experience of the world in order that the reader may, in a way, re-experience phenomena in that way. This is why we find Eliot talking of 'shuffling/mixing memories and desires' (in *The Cocktail Party*, *The Waste Land*) and why we sense so many different voices within his major poems, different points of view or opinions of reality, the situations in which they find themselves.

This is particularly the case in the Sweeney poems as well as The Wasteland and, of course, his dramas. There is in Eliot a latent sociologist who accompanies the phenomenological thinker. But the phenomenological poet's job is to create poetic forms in which to 'pack' together the fragmentary elements that we experience of reality. The aim of poetry is not to philosophize and produce ideas but rather to *realize* contemporary ideas (see his essay 'Dante' in *The Sacred Wood*), to 'state a vision' of the everyday reality in which we can assess the currency or redundancy of those ideas. Eliot thus suggested that there were no philosophical ideas in The Waste Land (Ricks and McCue, 614). The particular ideas that the *modernist* poet deals with are in particular the contemporaneous, the sociologically relevant.

The early 1970s' BBC dramatization of *Sweeney Agonistes* is a marvellous voicing of the poem, giving thematic recognizability to the *demotic* nature of the voices being raised in this very conversational poetry. In this poem, and of course *The Waste Land*, Eliot articulates different voices one after/against another in order to produce a vision of how contemporary ideas of reality, of (a)morality are circulating in various social milieus, in the case of the Sweeney poems, in a brothel. In Ricks and McCue's *Composite Wasteland* we find:

*The sailor, attentive to the chart or to the sheets,/A concentrated will against the tempest and the tide,/Retains, even ashore, in public bars or streets/Something inhuman, clean and dignified.*

As Eliot stated to his wife Vivien about the cockney phrase 'Something o' he wanted to avoid marking demotic speech by spelling (Ricks and McCue, 639) because different voices, be it class gender, race, are not really found in differences in pronunciations of words but in aggregates of words, in grammars, or the characteristic denunciatory patterns that Eliot, the intuitive sociolinguist heard in pubs or in domestic servants, in the banking ambassadors which he came across whilst working for Lloyds as well, of course, the milieu of Bloomsbury aesthetes he knew intimately. Eliot noted that what may on its face seem to be simple language is one of the richest grounds for the poet to tilt against ordinary language's natural tendency to dissipate, dissolve particularity:

*Great simplicity is only won by an intense moment or by years of intelligent effort, or by both. It represents one of the most arduous conquests of human spirit: the triumph of feeling and thought over the natural sin of language. (Quoted from The Post-Georgians in Ricks and McCue, 1042)*

Sweeney is probably Eliot's key protagonist in which he explores the demotic for evidence of mid-20th century philosophical ideas 'at large' in the everyday world. Sweeney is narcissistic and selfish and violent in nature whom Eliot commented on as being a one-time pugilist who'd retired to keep a pub. But Sweeney is an intellectual of sorts, at least a low-life manifestation of an intellectual, someone in whom intellectual ideas find expression in a more instinctual, preternaturally-violent character. He makes only a fleeting appearance in *The Waste Land* but he preceded that in the 1920 poems in 'Sweeney Erect' and post-dated both in the 'Agonistes' episodes in 1932, all years marked by the impact of the first world war and the flu pandemic and, in the case of Sweeney Agonistes, the Depression. And what better venue to explore contemporary morality and its working into everyday life than a brothel! Baudelaire is a critical figure for Eliot in this respect, whom Eliot notes had argued that 'all first class poetry is concerned with morality' (Baudelaire), a poet who:

*'perceived that what distinguishes the relations of man and woman from the copulation of beasts is the knowledge of good and evil…He was at least able to understand that the sexual act as evil is more dignified, less boring, than as the natural, 'life-giving', cheery automatism of the modern world. For Baudelaire, sexual operation is at least*

*something not analogous to Kruschen Salts…he was capable of a damnation denied to the politicians and the newspaper editors of Paris' (quoted in Ricks and McCue, 814)*

In this poem the debates on murder ('any man might do a girl in', or the proposed scene of the 'resurrection' of Mrs. Porter in Eliot's later tilt at reworking the poem ('The Superior Landlord' - Ricks and McCue, II 449), reflections on the occult, birth copulation and death, the sin of language ('I've gotta use words when I talk to you', admittedly an instance of Eliot marking working class speech in a way of which he was usually critical), technology (telephones, gramophones).

This is the 'doing in different voices' that Eliot's modernist aesthetic - that element in much of his key poetry up until the late 1930s that marked him as a mid-20th century 'colloquial Petronius' (see Ricks and McCue for this influence on the young Eliot, 594). As Eliot stated in his essay on Dante, the aim of the poet is to state a vision, and the poet realizes the ideas that are dealt with more abstractly in philosophy. Much later in life, in *Notes to the Definition of Culture* Eliot makes the point that it is in everyday life, in the demotic, that cultural analysis needs to proceed because it is representative of the more general culture: it will reveal how more general moral ideas have become diffused (or not) (41)

## Proust

It is surprising the repercussions of Proust's assumption of the first-person singular narrator. It is often pointed out the absurd ways Proust has to 'position' his narrator in order to observe or overhear the goings on of other characters. Nowhere is this more underlined than when Charlus and Jupien have their fling. One can sense in the writing (even in translation) that the writer, Proust, is aware of the difficulties he is putting his narrator into, contradictory in that his is a nature that is somewhat withdrawing, reflective and yet in the onerous position of sneak.

And yet it is interesting how hypocrisy and contradiction actually become important themes of the novel. The reader senses this in the way narrator adopts a somewhat crassly simplistic psychology in his comments on homosexuality. But then, ironically, in just a few lines the narrator is seen to move from cod-psychology to an astute and balanced, highly perceptive understanding of the interplay between social oblique and sexual preference. Thus when Cottard has his hand stroked by Charlus:

*And, not only without any physical pleasure, but having first to overcome physical repulsion – as a Guermantes, not as an invert – in taking leave of the Doctor he clasped his hand and caressed it for a moment with the kindly affection of a master stroking his horse's nose and giving it a lump of sugar. But Cottard, who had never allowed the Baron to see that he had so much as heard the vaguest rumours as to his morals, but nevertheless regarded him in his heart of hearts as belonging to the*

*category of 'abnormals' […] persons of whom he had little personal experience, imagined that this stroking of his hand was the immediate prelude to an act of rape…p546.*

The narrator regularly reflects on the hypocrisy of his fellow characters, almost reflexively adjudging that hypocrisy is fundamental to human nature, as intrinsic to all the avenues of social and political life that have become established, routinized. Early in the novel it is noted how homosexuals and Jews, in the opinion of the narrator (in 'cod' mode) yearn for social acceptance and yet they remain imprisoned and impassioned by the driving forces of their 'innate' natures. This contradiction, one may say societal force, leads them to deliberately shunning others like themselves and 'seeking out those who are most directly their opposite.' (19)

All the way through *Remembrance* Proust subjects the reader to long passages where the narrator or, more usually, the Combray Cure or Professor Brichot, go into the etymology of names and the process of naming of places and people's family names. This can be tedious, particularly in Volume 4, but at the base of this is Proust's almost messianic view of believing that there was a point in the past before cultures began to overly concern themselves with naming things, that names really meant something, were clearly denotative. But names now are habits and disguise the need for analysis, such that when we hear the narrator adopt the terms 'pervert', 'Sapphic' and 'invert', we realize that Proust sees this, in his narrator, as betraying the complexities of sexuality. So, very early on in this novel it is suggested, as if not in the narrator's cod-voice, that there will be a future state where the dominant polarities of sexual identity 'shall die, each in a place apart!' (18-19)

Proust further develops this theme dialectically as one of stasis and change in his concern with naming and issues of the splitting of particular personalities and abnormal forms of morality. This, again, is a reflection on the simplifying, ignorant position Proust puts his narrator into. Thus the homosexual Proust adopts the guise of a commentator-narrator who abhors 'inverts' but he knows he is much like the uncle he instances who lectures his nephew on the basis of a morality he himself does not keep to (106), or compares this to a major writer like St Simon who is betrayed by his appropriating models of behavior and character that are not his own (424). Like names, then, which change either as a result of the lapses of memory or the *longue durée* of historical progression towards a time when all names might vanish, so, too, all contradictions arising from habituated morality might yet become redundant. In this vein Proust thus suggests gossip has a role because it leads to the undermining of names, questioning the social status given to them (either family or place names). We must undermine habit and break through conventional nominations of places and people. Thus the narrator complains about familiarity of the Balbec landscape in producing a 'corrupting effect' - it becoming a land of 'familiar acquaintances' (592)

However, at other places the narrator states that there is a core to human beings, but this is not so much as ‘natures’, as historically-relative ‘social types’. This is seen in his comments on Cottard’s way of rubbing his hands together, part of what he calls “the ‘genus’ of Cottard”. This is where the sociologist in Proust also comes forward, and like Bourdieu and Merleau-Ponty, he sees class as embodied. Proust sees individual character as historic demarcated and ultimately shaped by class and perhaps, more fundamentally, by epochal types:

*The truth is that similarity of dress and also the reflexion of the spirit of the age in facial composition occupy so much more important a place in a person’s make up than his caste, which bulks large only in his own self-esteem and the imagination of other people, that in order to realize that a nobleman of the time of Louis-Phillipe differs less from an ordinary citizen of the time of Louis-Philippe than from a nobleman of the time of Louis XV, it is not necessary to visit the galleries of the Louvre.’ (95)*

There is in Proust, also, an almost Bourdieusian strain in the way he creates finely graduated communities of taste, particularly in his depiction of the Verduruns. He also uses a type of Husserlian form of ‘imaginary variation’ as he traces the different viewpoints that constitute various characters’ personalities (in the face of other’s views of them.) Proust also characterizes things/objects with human moods, and as constituting human moods. In contrast to embodied knowledge, it is the *images* of others that give singularity, whereas the ‘real’ is just a ‘type’. Thus for Swann, life is more novelistic than a novel, but it is the opposite for the narrator (399)

It is also interesting to see the concern Proust has with invalids in the family, how characters like Leonie constitute/magnetize a family’s world, and isn’t it the case that nearly all families have some version of this type of ‘disabled’ character whom they must necessarily circulate around.

Proust is a sociological novelist and his quite donnish learning reminds me of Bellow’s. proust’s concern is not particularly time or memory, but jealousy and envy and how time and memory relate to these themes. I read avidly and make numerous underlingins. Novels provide us with working throughs of the social and emotional codes that hem us in, providing imaginative and demonstratable forms of truthfulness to emotions we experience as inviduals but have their origins in our social environment. He is so good, also, on the forms of reflections we make when brooding after we are snubbed or slighted in heavy or light ways (page 536 of vol 1)

But I experience longeur when reading the middle section of *Within a Budding Grove* which nearly defeates me. But the Balbec episode and the characters spinning around Charlus swave it. I imagine very little ‘happened’ to Proust, just as so very little happens to most of us in the sense of significant movement in life. But our mental lives are similar in narrative structures and it is this that Proust communicates to us. The continuous process of social monitoring and manouvering and reflecting on our actions, thoughts and those of others (a little like the sociology of Goffman).

Proust seems almost to be carrying out a process of social psychological mapping of our mental processing of social life. Similarly, in terms of the 'object field' of these relations, the rooms and conveyances of our lives, the artifacts and clothing, he brings a phenomenologist's insight into social life.

There is in *Sodom and Gomorrah* a certain bravado in addressing the theme itself in early 20th century French Literature? I found it necessary to dismiss the Moncreif-Kilmartiin-Enright version in hard copy for Sturrock's version (in ebook). Proust in translation is a slog, and ebooks at least provide some companionship in this, notes immediately accessible, the ability to we-search obscure references to the culture of the period. But an ebook is no lighter than the fat Vintage paperback volumes because the readers have a kind of dead weight in one's hands whereas books distribute weight over a broader area, one's hand(s) can grip them firmly with less force, and the feel of paper/card is more natural.

In *The Prisoner* Proust displaces the usual male focus (Ford, Roth, Updike) of jealousy to that of lesbianism. But is jealousy not always about the challenge of the similarity of the violator to the possessive one rather than a question of gender?

And *The Fugitive*'s silly mix-up about Albertine's death, seems so repetitive. But, I guess so much richness of the experience of reading Proust is lost in translation. I enjoy how Proust is not afraid to theorize 'out loud' in this novel – such as his discussion of the diplomat Norpois's journalistic language. And despite the longeurs it is very true that reading Proust changes the reader, has a quite radical impact on one's consciousness, of the depth of life even when nothing seems to be happening.

Yes, Proust sometimes can come out with remarkably trite observations and opinions. But his ability to address the univesal out of the particular malaise of the French fin de siècle bourgeoisie is stunning.

## Thomas Mann

In Mann's *Confessions of Felix Krull* Krull is depicted as having a natural understanding of the arbitrary nature of social status and professional roles, and this gives him little conscience about assuming the role of Marquise de Venosta - the key confidence trick occurring in the novel. And in the more lowly roles that he has as an employee: kitchen hand, hotel liftboy and waiter, he has a tendency for consciously *acting in* them, rather like what 1960's sociologists of class and status referred to as 'role-distance'. But Krull's key confidences, as pimp, call boy, and as Marquise are more or less pushed on him by other characters. Even when Krull actively assumes the role of well-off 'man of distinction' in his hours off from being lift-boy this is really enabled by the money he gets from selling jewels that had been dropped into his case at a French border control.

Mid-way in the novel Krull is shown reflecting that ‘the real I could not be identified because it actually did not exist’ (205.) Later, in the role of the Marquise he visits a circus in Lisbon and identifies with the clowns, seeing himself as an ‘entertainer and illusionist’ (174). He also distances himself from the dominant, bourgeois, ‘ordinary bad taste’ (169) which has the effect of making him regard himself as ‘asocial’ (94). Deeming himself outside of social morals, and as an illusionist, he thus sees freedom as ‘a necessity completely irreconcilable with any kind of commitment to a grossly factual situation’ because to ‘live symbolically spells true freedom ‘(93-4).

Living symbolically makes Krull aware of the arbitrary status of (mainly Bourgeois) status symbols and when he is with his peer Stanko, another hotel employee, he recalls his grandfather’s advice to avoid the ‘standardization of the world through bourgeois taste’ (166). More radically, Krull extends this attitude to culture as a whole, for example to standardized written language. Thus Krull sees orality as a more honest form of communication, preferring the ‘natural’ signs of non-verbal communication being closer to a ‘primordial condition’ (73.) This is a theme in the *Joseph* books and *Dr Faustus*).

These attitudes, crypto-philosophies and quasi-moral reflections explain why Krull is sympathetic to and easily assumes the roles that aristocratic characters push on to him: he has an affinity for aristos (except for Lord Strathbogie’s importuning that he be his valet/lover.) This contrasts to other episodes in the novel when we see Krull encountering people in the professions and lowly occupations, what he refers to as ‘genres’ (198) of roles. In these instances Krull boorishly seeks to socially-unsettle their representatives by ridicule, adopting a wilful idiocy in his dealings with them. This is seen in the longish section early in the novel when Krull seeks to avoid national service and bamboozles the regimental doctor by referring to him in mock-social servitude as ‘surgeon general’. At another point Krull appears more sympathetic to a train ticket guard but nevertheless cannot stop himself when he refers to hm as ‘chief inspector’ (109) - the motive is the same, an attitude of disparagement of roles that lack aristocratic glamour.

Upon the death of his father early in the novel Krull dismisses the idea of inherited dispositions and argues that we can form ourselves, that we can be, and look and sound, what we want to be if we egoistically-drive ourselves to pursue such attributes. Thus Krull reflects on the ministering cleric’s complements on his physical appearance:

*Had I not instead the assurance that they were my own work, to a significant degree, and that my voice might quite easily have turned out common, my eyes dull, my legs crooked, had my soul been less watchful? He who really loves the world shapes himself to please it. If, furthermore, the natural is a consequence of the moral, it was less unjust and capricious than might have appeared for the reverend gentleman to praise me for the pleasing quality of my voice. (57)*

Krull's later battle of wits with the recruiting doctor is an instance of these contrasting viewpoints – essentially nature versus nurture; the doctor seeing Krull as a product of biology-heredity which Krull plays up to.

But for all this, what is glaring in this novel is that it is getting rich that enables Krull to actually again the autonomy to role-distance himself, to see himself as a self-created confidence man:

*…as possessor of a cheque-book though I was, I remained a liftboy at the Hotel Saint James and Albany. There was a certain charm in playing this role against a background of secret wealth, thanks to which my becoming livery took on the quality of a costume my godfather might have had me try on. My secret wealth – for this is how my dream-acquired riches seemed to me – transformed my uniform and my job into a role, a simple extension of my talent for dressing-up. (164)*

However, in many ways Krull is a somewhat unmotivated confidence man: he may have a number of natural characteristics for the role but more than anything he is a magnet for the confidences tricks others want him to play and, except for serving as Rozsa's pimp, he is a man at the beck and call of aristos. And, if this, incomplete, novel proves anything it is that the getting of money is what enables Krull's 'interchangeability' (199) and his 'joy in images'. And having wealth is an attribute that is down to luck (at a border post, attracting the confidences of aristos, or the institutions of the stock exchange and inheritance.

In *Lotte in Weimar* Mann creates a novel which is complex in ideas and multi-layered. A fictional biography of Goethe, it is developed out of different character's accounts of the man, as well as a chapter devoted to letting Goethe speak for himself. Mann imagines the repercussions of the return of Charlotte, now aged, to Weimar and preparing to meet Goethe many years after he had based the character Lotte in *The Struggles of Young Werther* on her younger self. In that novel Werther is tragically besotted by Lotte. Mann uses this situation to address issues of biographical truth-fact versus imagination and poetic license (21). The other main concern (there are many others, it is a complex novel) is with what is past (here, essentially represented in the idea of youth) and how it might be re-experienced (in older age) as a type of emotional and intellectually-stimulated 'recurrence' (233) rather than, say, as simple memory or feeling of nostalgia.

The first perspective is Dr Reimer's, followed by Adele Schopenhauer, then Goethe's son August and finally the chapter devoted to Goethe's own ruminations. Throughout we see Charlotte's strongly opinionated character emerge and develop as she responds to the others, either in conversation or in her reflections and assessment of what they say. What emerges is an aesthetic-ethical contrast between what Charlotte comes to represent and the character and views of Goethe as reported by others, and the novel drives the reader on with wondering what sort of resolution will emerge when they actually meet.

The first chapter brings Reimer, Goethe's secretary and amanuensis, to Charlotte at her inn and this encounter broaches the key themes of the novel. Reimer gives wide moral scope to Goethe's powerful intellect such that he thinks it is only right to transform elements of Charlotte's 'real' character and appearance into the fictional Lotte. He sees Goethe's work as exemplifying a 'wicked mix of truth and make believe', a transgression of outward form into what is, in aesthetic-ethical terms, 'real' (22-24). Startlingly, Reimer accounts Goethe as a 'complaisant' man but this is not a benign type of affability, but 'coldly ironic'. The adjective 'wicked' that Reimer uses suggests that common ethical dualisms of right and wrong, that Charlotte is seen as adhering to, are displaced, reworked, in the mind of a genius like Goethe. Reimer uses a theological example to give the temper of Goethe's mind: 'If God is All, then he is also the Devil' (70), a paradox regularly encountered in Mann's novels, summed up by the title of *The Holy Sinner*.

The next two chapters concern the young woman Adele Schopenhauer who comes to visit Charlotte in order to seek her help in persuading Goethe to stifle his son August's courtship of her friend, Ottilie. Adele explains that August and his father espouse an anti-Prussian (nationalist) and Napoleonic politics which is radically at variance with Ottilie's own sympathies and can thus only lead to unhappiness in wedlock. In many ways this and August's own chapter, which follows, depict August as a somewhat tragic figure who leads an 'unfulfilled life' in the shadow of his father.

As the perspectives on Goethe multiply, Charlotte's own character increasingly seems to be in contrast to his. Goethe emerges as creative but ironically complaisant, demonical (in a bumbling sort of way – not like Leverkühn's devilishness in *Dr Faustus*) whilst Charlotte is identified with rationality (166). This has the ethical consequence that pits Charlotte as 'resolute' and sympathises with 'actuality' rather than with Goethe's own idealism (187-8). When it is Goethe's turn to 'speak' he does so directly through a rather clunky modernist stream of consciousness whilst he is preparing to meet Charlotte. He comes across as a figure that espouses views and concerns like to Mann's own: the 'demonical' – *Holy Sinner*; demonical and anti-nationalism (250) - *Dr Faustus*; identification with aristocratic values (253) - *Felix Krull*; Goethe is said to 'embody time' and time and recurrence are key themes in Mann (especially, *The Magic Mountain*). The ever-present disdain for bourgeois values in Mann's writing is also an opinion given to Goethe as he is depicted as an artist concerned to reawaken the sensual and erotic sides of human nature repressed by bourgeois conventions and mores (235-6) reminiscent of *Death in Venice*, in particular in the tone of passages around 264.

## Beckett and Unnameability

*Watt* is considered by Ackerley (*Obscure Locks, Simple Keys. The annotated* Watt) as a key text for understanding Beckett's novels and short stories. Beckett attained a more coherent philosophical and aesthetic position in *Watt* than in the early novel *Murphy*, particularly in its parodying of Cartesian rationalism. Ackerley painstakingly

traces out the ridiculing of Cartesian truth tables, the influence of Leibnitz and Schopenhauer, and Beckett's glosses on Proust's aesthetics and ideas of time.

Ackerley *explains Watt* immaculately, but somehow all of these annotations produce the feeling that they are beside the point of the chief burden of the novel, and of all Beckett's novels and short stories, which is to challenge monological readings. Most 'common' readers who persevere with Beckett's fiction do so because of the experience it provides of being adrift, of reflecting on that state, of encountering an eerie sense of the unnameable or what escapes being put adequately into words.

Different readers may engage any complex, polyvocal, text like *Watt* at one or a number of 'levels': the academic, the philosophical, theological, the literary, the diversionary, being just a few of the major ones. Beckett himself, after an initial encounter with academia soon rejected it (referring to '*Sorbonagres*' in his early *Letters Vol. 1* lxxxv). But it is the common reader's impression of the text, the aggregated outcome of his or her engagement with the characters and themes that become somehow 'aggregated', perhaps cohering, in the mind of the reader. This arises out of the fragmentary, the inchoate, the contradictory, the inherent multifariousness of the style, the text, produced by a complex mind of a writer like Beckett.

*The Unnameable*, the final part of the trilogy following *Molloy* and *Malone Dies* and *How it Is* seems to be central to this experience of Beckett's novels. As a concept the unnameable acts generally as a metaphor for that disturbingly eerie mental state of nothingness, often encountered when we are alone or ill, when we are at a loss for words - although we don't really feel it as simply verbal vacuity either. Beckett's singular, lonely, often ill or maimed characters, Watt, Molloy, Malone, and particularly the 'aphonic' Mahood of *The Unnameable* (1959/2003) are like Jonah's in the whale, raging against the darkness of language, of the loss of some form of language which might articulate, connote, unnameability. Beckett shows how conventional language fails us, and the unnameable remains unarticulated, and, for want of another locus, and unlike the prehistoric ululation-rebus which transformed sound into word, must therefore remain trapped, a *geist* in the iron-maiden machine of the, often, wracked body and tortured mind.

Of course, it is no secret that Beckett consciously set himself against rationalism in philosophy or in literary aesthetics, in the latter he was sympathetic but critical of both Proust and Joyce. He distanced himself from Joyce because, particularly in *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce was concerned with 'addition' whereas Beckett in contrast pursued subtraction. But in his monograph *Proust* Beckett cites favourably Schopenhauer's definition of artistic practice as 'the contemplation of the world independently of the principle of reason'. For Beckett Proust's failure was in his idea of a sort of contemplative state of remembrance as a form of recalling the essence of past experience, a pursuit which suggests 'a pure act of understanding, will-less'.

As Beckett writes about Proust we can see that he is actually working out his own aesthetic position, putting his own spin on Proust, writing that 'the unknown, choosing its weapons from a hoard of values, is also the unknowable.' In part, Beckett sees Proust's project against 19th century realism, as similar to his own, someone arguing against 'atrophied faculties'. But, ultimately for Beckett Proust's project fails because 'the artist is active, but negatively, shrinking from the nullity of the extracircumferential phenomena, drawn in to the core of the eddy' and, therefore 'we are alone. We cannot know and we cannot be known'. And, of course, for Beckett in contrast to (*twelve* volumes!) Proust's *Remembrance* his aesthetic project will be one that:

*… is not expansive, but a contraction. And art is the apotheosis of solitude. There is no communication because there are no vehicles of communication. Even on the rare occasions when word and gesture happen to be valid expressions of personality, they lose their significance on their passage through the cataract of the personality that is opposed to them. Either we speak and act for ourselves—in which case speech and action are distorted and emptied of their meaning by an intelligence that is not ours, or else we speak and act for others—in which case we speak and act a lie.*

### *No Words Nor Voice Nor Person*

*For no longer will I follow you obliquelike through the inspired form of the third person singular and hesitensies of the deponent but address myself to you, with the empirative of my vendettative provocative and out direct. (James Joyce* Finnegans Wake*)*

The literary novelist's weapon is prose, complex or stylistically sophisticated syntax, but for Beckett written words, syntactical conventions (grammar, person, etc.) are suspect – they get in the way of expressing the unnameable. The failure of conventional language is its inability to provide a name, that as discourse it cannot help us to account for – let's call it a 'phenomenal state' – unnameability. The figure of the Mandarin in Beckett's first novel *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* is said to reject the idea of being able to speak adequately, assuredly, from experience (101). And, as a young man's novel, Beckett was concerned with the inexpressibility of love, a concern we see in the central character Belacqua's floundering to formulate it as 'partly God, partly Devil, partly passion', love being a phenomenon which is 'indifferent to fake integrities' (27-8).

From this earliest novel to one of the last, *Mercier and Camier*, ('that pseudocouple' – *The Unnameable* 299) in which we find that 'words fail' (85) the latter character. Everything 'boils down to some unknown' (60) which isn't God or the Soul (often this latter concept arises in Beckett's fictions, another troubling unnameable, particularly if Beckett had in mind the sometime Catholic sense of the Soul as something having a material presence, a shadowy, unlocatable, *organ* of the body) but a 'blessed sense of nothingness, nothing to be done, nothing to be said' (87).

But this suspicion of the inherent inadequacy, even traitorousness, of words is not something that appeared late in Beckett, but was a regular theme in many of Beckett's early letters where we find him concerned with 'wordshed' (*Letters 1* 355). In these early letters we find him contrasting his literary project in ironic manner to that of Thomas á Kempis who wrote of being ensouled by the experience of being 'filled by' God. But for Beckett it is the body that provides:

*…the plenitude that he calls 'God' not by 'goodness' but by a pleroma only to be sought among my own feathers or entrails…' (Letters 1 257)*

Beckett saw himself as a 'logoclast' (*Letters 1* 521) and he considered it 'pointless to write in grammatical English…more and more my language appears to me like a veil which one has to tear apart in order to get to those things (or nothingness) lying behind it.' (*Letters 1* 518).

In *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* he has Belacqua consider an aesthetic in which 'The experience of my reader shall be between the phrases, the silence…' (138). Similarly in *Watt* words are said to 'tranquillize' (78) only having the validity of 'old credentials' (81). When Murphy speaks Celia feels *'splattered with words that were dead as they sounded, each word adulterated before it had time to make sense, by the word that came next; so that in the end she didn't know what had been said*' (31-2). Another female character, the symbolically-named Grace, in the late work, *Ill Seen Ill Said* (the clever title indicative of the individuality of the human verbal *and* visual experience of unnameability), is seen rejecting all of the conventional religious symbolizations (the cross, the skull, nail, the lamb) appearing, named, in the story because she 'needs nothing, nothing utterable' (13)

Beckett's fragmentary prose style exemplifies his suspicion of conventional literary syntax. What he conveys in his fictions are the vagaries, the silences, the gaps ('That missing word again' *Stirrings Still* 264) we are regularly confronted with in discourse. The difficulties of articulation, the echoes discerned in the quagmire that is regular prose/language and indescribable in it: 'all that all these words…that was without quaqua on all sides and murmur to the mud' (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 53). From the etymologically-lost words of unnameability Beckett goes further, rejecting syntax or extended literary discourse signified by voice – the conventional grammatical apparatuses of conveying 'person'.

Beckett's characters often reflect or offer cryptic literary remarks or comments about the idea of person. The narrator of *Texts for Nothing* rails at his writer:

*If he would dignify me with the third person, like his other figments, not he, he'll be satisfied with nothing less than me, for his me. (115)*

Beckett seems to endorse a type of conundrum whereby extending first person voice in the voice of the third may be a means to articulate the feeling of 'being' unable to name. The 'being' described as inhabiting the cramped space of *All Strange Away* is said to be 'talking to himself no sound in the last person' (11).

I am not sure if these syntactical conundrums are solutions to voicing the unnameable, but the problem of literary voice is constantly eruting in Beckett's fiction. In the entangled 'speechless' beings of Bom and Pim in *How it Is*, in which when speech might be attained it can only act as 'an affliction' (153) – the knots of their names remain unravelled. In this, his last novel, and acting a bit like the Book of Genesis of unnameability, Beckett creates a mythology of stages in the rise of (human?) voice, of how the voices of Pim and Bom, emerged from a kind of primeval swamp, and as they did so they displaced Kram, who has the comparative status as the primal voice of the mud, the voice of 'perfect nothingness' (89).

In *The Unnameable* the narrator yearns to speak of the disembodied things of which he cannot speak, a perpetual paradox of 'If I could speak and yet say nothing' (305). Proper nouns, the names of characters, are seen to change arbitrarily, at the whim of the narrator-writer because: 'any old pronoun will do provided no one sees through it' (345). And the/a narrator complains of the voice 'they have foistered on me' (300), voice as an imposition. It is as if the generalizing 'I' first person has displaced the no-person, an original voice that gets betrayed and what is lost is 'where one's true interest lies' (310).

Betraying linguistic conventions of voice turn speech and the mouth into an 'anus' (*Texts for Nothing* 141). This Beckettian polarity between 'real voice' and its betraying mouth/arse is found also in the narrator of *First Love* who in recounting his canal-side trysts describes his lover's:

*…voice, though out of tune, was not unpleasant. It breathed of a soul too soon wearied ever to conclude, that perhaps least arse-aching soul of all. (21)*

Love, we've seen, in Beckett's novels is assumed to be a highly complex emotional state but as such it indicates the broader linguistic (and, maybe, theocratic) quandaries of naming, seen above in relation to *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, a state which remains 'indifferent to fake integrities' (28).

In Beckett's later fictions bodily imagery is often focussed on the sexual organs (predominantly female rather than male) and the scatological. The mouth is compared to the anus as well as to that coarsely betraying means of communication – writing which is said to be 'ejaculation' or 'evacuation of pus' (*Letters* Vol. 1 xciv). *Molloy* when he founders on the rocks of unnameability, regularly articulates sexualized and scatological metaphors: '*I tried to remember the name of the plant that springs from the ejaculations of the hanged and shrieks when plucked'* (56), and: *'I seemed to be chewing towards it as the sands towards the wave…though I must say this image hardly fitted my situation, which was rather that of the turd waiting for the flush'* (163) and:

*When all fails images dreams sleep food for thought something wrong there//when the great needs fail the need to move on the need to shit and vomit and other great needs all my great categories of being (15)*

In the early novel *Murphy* there is the following exchange between Murphy and Celia:

*'I am what I do', said Celia.*

*'No,' said Murphy. 'You do what you are, you do a fraction of what you are, you suffer a dreary ooze of your being into doing.' (30)*

Beckett is articulates a somewhat grotesque or scatalogically-perverse Rabelaisianism, seen here in *Watt*:

*Let him be a small eater, a moderate eater, a heavy eater, a vegetarian, a naturist, a cannibal, a coprophile, let him look forward to his eating with pleasure or back on it with regret or both, let him eliminate well or let him eliminate ill, let him eructate, vomit, break wind or in other ways fail or scorn to constrain himself…(51)*

**Ending…Going On**

The conundrum of stating the first person in the third isn't something that can be settled in Beckett's fiction, except insofar as the persona of unnameability acts in place of person. For Beckett literary person must be conveyed as something that is a necessarily fractured, failed, signifier of the unknowable, the unutterable. Beckett makes us aware of the voice of the unnameable, the geist in the literary machine that is the modern(ist) novel. But perhaps it has something of the shadowy organic notions of soul mentioned above in relation to Catholic theology: it has an embodied dimension. In *Murphy*, the title character ever reflexive (Nixon: 2011 calls Murphy's mind 'self-observing', 23) about himself (a somewhat 'seedy solipsist' (59)) experiences his 'mind to be body light' (77).

It seems that in lieu of an embodied concept of person, in his despair of naming, Beckett resorted to the grotesque body alongside the sexualized and scatological bodily metaphors we see above. In that intriguing first novel *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* Belacqua describes his lover Smeraldina-Rina in amorphic, surreal terms: her hips are like a 'bowel' (65), and 'her body was all wrong…big breech Botticelli thighs, knock knees  ankles all fat nodule, wobby, mammose, slobbery-blubbery…' (15) and, 'She sat there …the legs broken at the knees…the droop of her trunk…' (23). These images evoke something like Dali's polymorphic (sometimes anamorphic) figures, for example his 'Enigma of William Tell' or 'William Tell and Gradiva'. Perhaps Beckett was struck by Dali's surrealist imagery of that time (1932-3), of sagging polyp-like bodies with wilting skeletons. The figures of Bim, Bom, Pim and Kram in *How it Is* are submerged in the pervasive trope of 'quag' in the novel, they are literally 'up shit creek' - the quagmire of semi-fluid indistinctiveness between person, body, mind and environment that nevertheless must remain unnameable.

Beckett writes, subsequent on moving from novel and short story writing to drama, in his letters that after the unnameable there was 'nothing left to utter about' (*Letters Vol.2* 319). Literary utterances have been shown by Beckett to be a dead-end in the

pursuit of voicing the unnameable, but, paradoxically, an impressive project contributing to a partial enunciation. And he did go on, returning to fiction in his last years.

Refs:


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## Interregnum Modernism

### Sartre: Metaphors of Sight and Smell in 'Roads to Freedom'

It is nearly 80 years since Sartre wrote the three novels collectively known as 'Roads to Freedom' and everything that could be said about them has pretty much been said. Jastor (an English online research and literature database) reveals an abrupt trailing-off of publications, reviews and literary analysis of the novels after the early 1980s. The perennially-in print Sartre novel remains *Nausea*, and the late autobiographical *Words* and posthumous publications like his *War Diaries* also remain in print, unlike the 'Road' novels which now only fitfully reappear (at least, in English translation.) Sartre's Roads and Camus' novel *The Stranger* (and, maybe

others of his like *The Fall*) were vehicles for exploring relatively new existentialist philosophical and political ideas in the realm of creative, imaginative literature.

Of course, these existentialist concerns, amongst which a sense of individual isolation and alienation seem predominant, have a longer currency - at least going back to Dostoyevsky's *Notes from the Underground* and the character of Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*, although the philosophical language to identify them as such is an early 20th century development (i.e., Kierkegaard, Heidegger). Politically, Camus and Sartre wanted either revolt or full-scale revolution and these concerns get into their novels - although key characters like Sartre's Mathieu or Camus' Meursault, tend to evoke despair rather than hope for the human condition. Sartre's Roads, however, gives a great depiction of French society and politics in the later years of the 'Devil's decade' of the 1930s.

The modernist touches (although heavy-handed) in the novels are also interesting: the parallel time lines of different characters' experiences of the era (this, particularly well done in The Reprieve); the thumbnails of major figures like Hitler, Chamberlain and Daladier at Munich; in Iron in the Soul the French soldiers often humdrum experience of war is strikingly authentic, clearly deriving from Sartre's personal experience. *

But at the syntactic level there appear interesting tropes in Sartre's writing which act as metaphors for his existentialist ideas about individual freedom and responsibility. Amongst these are fairly pervasive metaphors of sight and smell that at the textual level underline Sartre's didactic concern with the inevitability, the 'condemning' nature, of freedom of choice he believed each of us needs to face. We have a clear statement of this concern in *The Reprieve* when Sartre refers to the role that different odours and their strengths, as well as gradations in light, serve to differentiate objects in the world and to indicate the different ways in which lives might be lived: *'Each object in the world has its smell, its long pale evening shadow and its individual future.' 47*

Although we all learn to evaluate and discern different grades in visuality and smell, as senses they are closely associated with the instinctual than the intellectual. In *The Reprieve* the moralistic, yet hopelessly alienated, Mathieu despairs at how sex seems to dominate the thinking of most of his contemporaries and states: 'What animals we are to set such store upon instinct'. (318)

Mathieu the intellectual condemns lives that are lived instinctually and unreflectively, those that unerringly follow 'hives of schemes' (314) set out for them, by society, by their pasts. In the first novel, *The Age of Reason*, Jacques, Mathieu's well-to-do brother, ironicizes Mathieu's bohemian lifestyle. Interestingly, Sartre endows Jacques with strong arguments because he depicts both brothers, one a self-satisfied bourgeois and the other a listless and uncommitted intellectual, as living more or less unreflectively. Jacques and Mathieu are in their different ways living

their lives within the limiting roles/lives provided by the France of the Third Republic (Jacques a defensive bourgeois happy at the end of the Popular Front, Mathieu an alienated intellectual, despairing at the state of the Third Republic). Another key character in the novels is Daniel, a thorough cynic when it comes to either politics, ideals or bourgeois conventions, and he is presented by Sartre as a figure who lives following the compulsions of his body and sex (but not totally his sexuality – he's gay but cynically enters a sham conventional marriage with Mathieu's pregnant partner, Marcelle.)

In *The Reprieve* we 'listen-in' on Daniel's thoughts about sex and desire and, being driven by his sexual desires, he is a character Sartre associates with images and smell and who has no truck with the abstractions of words: 'Away with words…steadily, let each column of air smash like a piston each nascent word. Breathing-getting past the censorious nature of words – image without words…like the mouth of a sewer' (134-5) The metaphorical role of visuality and smell is clearly present here, associating Daniel's character with the instinctual, the unreflective.( Sartre tends to the Cartesian but phenomenologists like Merleau-Ponty would question any complete division between thought and feeling, mind and instinctual body, and therefore Daniel's endeavours might be seen in another light – especially in the context of his being gay in 1930's France (or, Europe.)

As Sartre's existentialism insists on the inevitability of choice instead of fate (i.e., fate in its usual Greek tragedy meaning as a condition beyond human control, that is choiceless) instinct, sexuality, behaviourism or psychology – are shown to be how the characters in these novels find their excuses. In *The Reprieve*, however, ordinary people's lives are thrown into question by the political juncture of Munich and the shadow of European war. This political condition brings into relief the life questions facing many of Sartre's characters, Bruno, Marcelle, Lola and, of course, Mathieu. Yet one has the sense that Sartre is critical of all these lives, that they are short sighted and victims of fate or roads already set out for them.

However, the later novels show a more shifting metaphoric role for the sense of smell. In the first two novels its role is similar to smell and indicative of the instinctual, superficial. In *Iron in the Soul,* the first novel, which is almost farcical at points (when it appears Lola has died, and Mathieu blunders around trying to get money for Marcelle's abortion) there is a scene at the Gauguin exhibition where Mathieu is also shown to be in a fatalistic state of mind. Mathieu is unable to think about the art outside of his political concerns, he is described as 'over-saturated' by this 'reality' and 'truth', his mind being permeated by the limiting context of the Third Republic:

*'…he saw all that was real, he saw – he saw everything that the classic light could clarify, the walls, the canvases in their frames, the scum-bled colours on the canvases. But not the pictures…' 91*

However, over the course of the novels we see Mathieu developing as a character, at least in existentialist terms. In The Age of Reason Mathieu seems buffeted by

circumstances beyond his control, Marcelle's pregnancy, lack of money, his idleness. But in the later pages of The Reprieve as he meditates upon the sight of the stones of a church, he sees or catches 'glimpses' of 'the Absolute without cause or purpose'. The stones are: 'without a past or future, save a gratuitous, fortuitous, splendid permanence. "I am free", he said suddenly.' 352. As an absolute, freedom, like that represented by the stones of the church, lies outside of time, outside of the belly-button concerns we have with our pasts or desired futures. Yet almost immediately after this realization, in the despairing mental state Mathieu is in at this point, he contemplates suicide, perhaps symbolizing an ultimate act of individual freedom of choice.

Sartre's tone in this episode indicates that he views this as a somewhat tired philosophical argument about freedom (discussed by, amongst others, Camus.) Because all forms of giving up, even suicide, are a mistaken understanding of the demands of freedom, Sartre associates the smell of formic acid and effluence with this get-out, with the stone:

*…there was nothing in contact with the stone but the familiar whiff of formic acid.*

It is here, as he steps back from a watery suicide, that Mathieu utters the famous words of abandonment of excuses and the realization that he is 'condemned' to be free. There is an interesting contrast in the character Brunet in *The Age of Reason*. He is a communist party official and union organizer and Brunet is described by Mathieu as having no smell:

*Mathieu every time he saw him, he was aware of a sort of uneasy curiosity in his nostrils, and he sniffed a little, in the expectation that he would suddenly inhale a strong animal smell. But Brunet had no smell. 153.*

Is this because, as a communist, Brunet has exercised his freedom, maybe mistakenly, but he has consciously committed to a cause and is someone who can now deal in 'brief, stern, truths' (119)? Odourless Brunet's 'lack of smell' is somewhat ironically underlined in *Iron in the Soul* where he is shown as calmly washing and shaving in readiness to surrender to the Germans.

However, in *Iron in the Soul*, the last novel of the Roads (I discount the concoction that was put together by Continuum and titled *Last Chance* a 'novel' developed from Sartre's notes), the metaphoric role of smell is more or less abandoned by Sartre and visual images predominate. Images also change, becoming more associated with the necessity of commitment, of reflectiveness, that war brings. Early on we have Mathieu stating how he was 'forgetting the smell of things' (54) as sight acts as the key existential trope.

Admittedly, most of the visual images in this novel are pretty much descriptive and free-standing - not having a didactic, existentialist metaphoric role. The French soldiers look up to the sky which might threaten at any minute Stukas as they retreat, and see its 'picturesque quality' (91). Sartre depicts Mathieu's reflections on how the

moonlight brings ‘pallid flowers’ onto the faces of his army buddies (122). Elsewhere Sartre describes how Gomez is alienated by the ‘incandescence’ of the streets of New York, which offer a frivolous ‘kaleidoscope’ of colour. As an exiled Spanish civil war republican, Gomez criticises the American crowd because it is ‘uncommitted’, neutral, and the people have dead eyes ‘like the eyes of portraits. (28). A key visual metaphor occurs at the critical point of *Iron in the Soul* when Mathieu confronts the reality of his own death in combat. In acting as a sniper in a church bell tower he becomes aware of how ‘eternity was upon him like a fixed stare’ (289) (a conscious contrast to the reflections he makes in response to the stones of the church building in *The Reprieve* in which suicide is prompted by the sight of the stones of the church building) .

Earlier, there is a poignant scene in the novel when the Divisional French officers sneak out of their billet as they treacherously make a run for their lives - abandoning Mathieu, his unit, the division. The changing gradation of interior light escaping from under the door acts as a metaphor for this realization, for Mathieu’s maturing consciousness as he bitterly confronts the choices now facing him and his buddies:

*They waited in silence. The night was cold and clear, the moon was shining. Opposite, in the dark entry, a confusion of shadows moved vaguely. Mathieu turned and looked toward the Doctor’s House [the officers’ billet]. The General’s eye was shut, but a faint light showed under the door. I am here. Time with its great fanning future collapsed. All that was left was a tiny flickering patch of local movements. There was no such thing as peace or war; no such thing as France or Germany, only a faint light under a door that might or might not open.’ 117*

The door does open, but only once the officers have put out the lights…

## Albert Camus

*‘Socratic equation reason = virtue = happiness…the bizarrest of equations and one which has in particular the older Hellenes against it’.*

*‘Morality as Anti-nature’: ‘the spiritualization of sensuality is called love: it is a great triumph over Christianity.’ Nietzsche The Twilight of the Gods*

I read Camus’ *Notebooks* and instantly get transported by the lyricism and the profound feeling of being alive and being in touch with a sense of the eternal in the everyday, yet conveyed in the quite plainest of language:

*All around, the hills and valleys vanish in wisps of smoke. After looking at it for a time, one becomes aware that this landscape, as it loses its colours, had suddenly aged. It is a very ancient landscape returning to us in a single morning through millennia…*

Camus is regularly sensitive to the historical echoes of the north African landscape, as something both present and past, urged into significance by what one might call the ‘prevailing conditions’ of a particular season, the position and relative heat and

shade of the sunlight, the prickle of the environmental conditions on skin, face and eyes. Further on he writes:

*Hegel: 'Only the modern city offers the mind the terrain in which it can be conscious of itself.' Significant. This is the time of big cities. The world has been amputated of a part of its truth, of what makes its permanence and its equilibrium: nature, the sea etc. there is consciousness only of city streets!*

He is dismissive of Hegel because Camus was totally convinced that reflectiveness, self-knowledge, arises in an embodied form, it is not just 'spirit' but mind and skin unified and body and brain must 'quiver', like a spring breeze in foliage, mutually, together. Trotsky says somewhere that our epoch is not a lyrical one, and Camus would have agreed. Politics and knowledge as a whole have become detached from human feeling, from emotion. In contrast to this (Aristotelian) prevailing mis-direction of western political thought, Camus preferred a lyrical sublime, the experience that nature can give to the body politics of being.

Zaretsky's book on Camus notes that Camus was always concerned to see foremost the impact on people – the body politic – arising from the easy labels of causes and issues. Everyman, he said, dies unknown. Camus thus not only rejected Aristotle's concept of the polis but also rejected Kantian ethics, the deontological and normative claims underlying modern politics. Camus wanted to see the activity of embodied action, in places and in time – the specificity of claims that may be individual, group or perhaps of larger forces, but never those hiding behind universality, modern political abstractions like the nation state and other institutionalized forms of injustice.

Camus reminds us of the lessons to be learned from nature, to blend in with the flow of life and its rhythms rather than to over-intellectualize life and fly high above it. Camus' attitude here reminds me of Joyce's Buck Milligan wanting to Hellenize Ireland - but Camus had his sights on the West, to repaganize Christianized lands. And a contemporary Christian thinker like Rowan Williams reveals a nostalgia for Camus' ethics, noted in this review of his book on Saint Augustine:

*'Rowan Williams defends Augustinian ideas of matter as charged by spirit, by 'materia prima' by sheer potentiality-to-be that never exists apart from spiritual activity…From an orthodox Christian perspective, creation from nothingness is in essence the peaceful summoning of this existence of all the dimensions of the world-material…*(David Bentley Hart 'Confessions of a Deft and Subtle Mind' *TLS* March 10 2017)

Camus, of course, would reject the Christian route to this taken by Williams. Camus' concern is not with transmitting the idea of the Holy Spirit in contemporary life. But there is a sense that, for Williams, there is a materiality in which the spiritual can be found. And the rise of Christianity on the back of paganism, the mysteries of their rituals and lore, the incorporation (very much with the stress on 'corpus') of pagan seasonal festivals, transmuted into, say, Christmas and Easter. Perhaps Williams is

thinking of the ‘centones’, the Christian stories that are actually based on the lives of pagan authors. Camus hints that that there could be a concordance if the suppressed memory of the Hellenic world was rediscovered:

*We help a person more by giving him a favourable image of himself than by constantly reminding him of his shortcomings…We are, for instance, the result of 2000 years of Christian imagery. For 2000 years man has been offered a humiliating image of himself. The result is obvious. Anyway, who can say what we should be if those twenty centuries had clung to the ancient ideal with its beautiful face?*

For Camus, the immediate problem is that of finding a new basis for ethics, a more embodied one, a more lyrical one. And this is seen as very much being a question of our understanding fate. Camus urges us to get away from Christian fatalism – we must see that there is a multiplicity of fates. And to energize this we must adopt values that are more provisional, dynamic, in nature rather than universal. In his essay, key to his thinking in this area of debate, ‘The Unbeliever and Christians’ Camus takes issue with censorious values that are presented as complete, universal, Christian:

*What M. Marcel wants is to defend absolute values, such as modesty and man’s divine truth, when the things that should be defended are the few provisional values that will allow M. Marcel to continue fighting someday…By what right, Monsieur, could a Christian or a Marxist accuse me, for example, of pessimism? I was not the one to invent the misery of the human being or the terrifying formulas of divine malediction.*

This reminds me of Bataille who in *The Secret Conspiracy* called for an anti-fascism based on ‘a sacred without transcendence, rooted in the intensity of experience, that the virulence of fascism could be countered…’ So, Camus called for values that avoid universalist tenets, that instead must infuse themselves with the intensity of nature, the experience of life in the active sense of *being* alive.

Further points on this:

*For Marx, nature is to be subjugated in order to obey history, for Nietzsche nature is to be obeyed in order to subjugate history. It is the difference between the Christian and the Greek. (The Rebel)*

But Robert C Solomon in *Dark Feelings* notes that Camus ‘cheated’ at philosophy and phenomenology because he insisted that our descriptions of the world were ‘less than adequate’. He also sees Camus adopting a concept of reflection that lay outside of experience, was antithetical to lived experience (47)

Contrast Camus’ North African lyricism based on sea and sky to that of Virginia Woolf’s metropolitanism, the garden, the town house, the holidaying party in a Cornish cottage at the seaside. When we read Camus we feel nature, landscape, flexing into thought and experience. In Woolf it is a lyricism based on observation without any substantive ethical message other than, perhaps, mirroring the mood of the characters.

## Pity in Graham Greene's novels

Greene's novels always perplex because those of us closer to the profane world usually want profane explanations of human behaviour. And yet Greene always deals, first and foremost with the profane – greed, power, lust, betrayal, adultery, cheats. In the mid-1990s I read most of the novels, many for a second time, and I was untroubled by the fleeting theological concerns at the margins. I remember liking *It's a Battlefield* for its, minor, modernist elements – the newspaper headlines, bill boards, the short staccato sentences, repetitions giving a sense of synchronicity across the metropolis. And the political Green was strong in this early novel, countless references to the British empire and the evils of colonialism, shown as working its way into the habits and nervous spasms of the Assistant Commissionaire (a title which, being both a colonial and domestic police title suited Greene's concerns.) Greene perhaps was a loss to modernism – offering a less tortured and intellectualized moral dimension than Eliot's'.

But at that time I had not read *The Ministry of Fear* one of Greene's more obviously proselytizing novels containing a large number of passages directly addressing 'pity'. Like Zweig Greene believes we must beware of pity. Syndar has noted the 'free indirect style' of the early novels like *England Made Me* and *It's a Battlefield* with its affinities for the modernism that was still relatively influential at the time – just at the start of the '30s. often one experiences a kind of dream-like atmosphere in these novels, a hint of the unreality in the atmosphere Greene creates, the indistinctiveness of characters who exhibit unconventional behaviour. His prose seems to evoke echoes, complex underlying reverberations, not conventional linguistic meaning but seeming that each word was acting more like a brush-stroke of a painting.

Of course, Greene is on record as rejecting the modernism of Eliot and Joyce – an aesthetic which he found, for example in Dorothy Richardson, as too individualized and ego-centric. Sharrock argues that Greene maybe adopted a type of 'diffuse modernism' or in De Costa's view Greene had a modernism in terms of the theory of history at work in *The Ministry of Fear* (although I find it hard to accept this idea as a history of violence and repetition.)

But Greene is right, one cannot think of him as a modernist because the ethical questions he deals with like outside of modernism's concern with embodied action, metropolis and experience conditioned by mass media and press of the 20th century. As Syndar notes, modernism challenged high-flown moralist concerns seen in the 19th century realists of Dickens or Zola. Syndar notes, also, how literary modernism also rejected the divide between the serious and the formulaic in fiction (205). But Greene could not be considered a modernist because he also considered religion fundamental in understanding the elements of human behaviour. For Greene, belief

in God is necessary to understand what he called ‘the Third Dimension’ of human behaviour, motivation and conscience. Whereas, in modernism:

*It was as if the world of fiction had lost a dimension: the characters of such distinguished writers as Virginia Woolf and Mr E.M. Forster wondered like cardboard symbols through a word that was paper-thin…[Trollop’s clergymen] exists in a way that Mrs Woolf’s Mr Ramsey never does, because we are aware that he exists not only to the woman he is addressing but also in God’s eye. (Essays, 115)*

And certainly, by the time of his mature novels like *The End of the Affair*, *The Power and the Glory* or *The Heart of the Matter*, we find characters that are not only three dimensional but also presented in direct prose, a prose contrasting both to the early stylistic indirectness and the somewhat stark lectures on pity that marked *The Ministry of Fear*. And it is pity which is probably the central concern of this early novel, as it is but in a much more complex way in *The Heart of the Matter*. *The Ministry of Fear* despite its melodrama and absurdity, its loopy plot, is obsessed with the issue of pity. Pity is seen as more ‘promiscuous than lust’, pity grows to ‘monstrous proportions’, it is a ‘horrifying emotion’ (66), it ‘kills’ (76). Pity is appropriate only in the reading of Dickens’ characters like Little Nell (87); love ‘isn’t safe when pity is around (218). And in the novel we see Rowe effectively destroying the two people he says he pities.

What is wrong with pity for Greene? In the preface to the Collected Edition’s *Heart of the Matter* Greene contrasts it with compassion:

*I had meant the story of Scobie to enlarge a theme which I had touched on* [!] *in The Ministry of Fear – the disastrous effect of pity as distinct from compassion…The character of Scobie was intended to show that pity can be the expression of almost monstrous pride.*

And Scobie is shown to be someone who seems to live with a stilted emotional distance from life. He is a sympathetic character insofar as he discerns the human in even the most despicable of characters, such as the traitorous Wilson, Louise his wife, the slimy Yusef. He is said to be ‘a good man’ but his goodness is formless, undirected, empty. Greene, writing about Henry James, finds in his approach to the egotistic, self-serving, money grubbing and perfidious characters found in, say, *The Spoils of Poynton* a ‘pity for the evil he denounces, and the final beauty of James’s stories lies in their pity: ‘the poetry is in the pity’. His egoists, poor souls, are as pitiable as Lucifer’ (Essays, 38).

Greene thus sees James as damning such characters just as Lucifer was damned as an angel. For Greene there can be no ‘happy endings’ to be had for characters like Scobie or Rowe, they are damned by their moral lack, that lack of compassion that Greene held as antonymic to pity. Greene was always aware of the distinct cruelty and lack of pity he experienced in his childhood, in school bullying and in children’s literature which exhibited ‘no pity’. In childhood individual development is closer to the real bodily and mental grain of suffering and fear, which becomes more

sublimated in adulthood where it becomes subject to rationalization. Toward the end of *The Ministry of Fear* Greene writes:

*There on the bookshelf stood the Tolstoy with the pencil marks ruled out. Knowledge was the great thing…not abstract knowledge which Dr Forester had been so rich…but detailed passionate trivial human knowledge. He opened the Tolstoy again: 'what seemed to me good and lofty – love of the fatherland, of one's own people – became to me repulsive and pitiable…' Idealism had ended up with a bullet in the stomach at the foot of the stairs… (183-4)*

This anti-idealism sometimes appears in other novels in the guise of anti-intellectualism (see *It's a Battlefield*, 59) but essentially is appears as a form of knowledge that is informed by Christian, Catholic belief in God as the ultimate redeemer – and to take the order of being pitiful on ourselves is like taking the pride of Lucifer's fall. In an essay from 1940, in the midst of the Blitz he writes:

*Life has become just and poetic, and if we believe this is the right end to the muddled thought, the sentimentality and selfishness of generations, we can also believe that justice doesn't end there. The innocent will be given their peace, and the unhappy will know more happiness than they have ever dreamt about, and poor muddled people will be given the answer they have to accept. We needn't feel pity for any of the innocent and as for the guilty we know in our hearts that they will just live as long as we do and no longer. (Collected Essays)*

For Greene, then, it is a sin to put our lives and loves in the wrong place(s) – we see this demonstrated most clearly, pathetically, in Scobie of *The Power and the Glory*. The ultimate model, the ideal love, is the love of Christ, and it is this measure that marks the nature of Greene's devout dismissal of pity:

*How often had the priest heard the same confession – Man was so limited he hadn't even the ingenuity to invent a new vice: the animals knew as much. It was for this world that Christ had died; the more evil you saw and heard about you, the greater glory lay around the death. It was easy to die for what was good or beautiful for home or children or a civilization – it needed God to die for the half-hearted and the corrupt. (114)*

## Carson McCullers's fiction

Carson McCuller's novels and stories often evoke the theme of the 'mismatching' of characters in their environment or society. In her essay 'Loneliness - an American Malady' she states:

*Fear is a primary source of evil. And when 'who am I? 'recurs and is unanswered, then fear and frustration project a negative attitude…" Writing of her admiration for Dostoyevsky and 'Russian Realism' she locates the source of this form of evil, unhappiness, as a key impulse in human motivation: 'Morally the attitude is this: human beings are neither good nor evil, they are only unhappy and more or less adjusted to their unhappiness.*

The great question of the source of evil in McCullers's fiction is when people do not really know who they are. In her 'Outline of the Mute', the proposal for The Heart is a Lonely Hunter, she states: 'each man must express himself in his own way, but this is often denied to him by a wasteful short-sighted society'. In the treatment for *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* Mick is presented as a girl struggling to make herself, form herself, against 'social forces working against her.'

But McCullers is not really a sociologically aware writer, instead her individual characters tend to embody either the repressive axis of the problem, or those that buck against social unhappiness, those confused resentful characters like Mick, like Amelia of *The Ballad of the Sad Cafe*, of Francis in the story 'Wunderkind', even Captain Pemberton, the murderer in *Reflections in a Golden Eye*.

Then, again, some of the figures in McCullers's stories never resolve the torturing core problem at the heart of their unhappiness, their deep fears being displaced by booze or illness - Howard, for example, the sodden failing author of 'Who has seen the wind?' Or Marianne in 'a domestic dilemma'; the invalided Alice Langdon in *Reflections in a Golden Eye*. All are characters presented as very unhappy and afraid, flailing against a dreadful destiny they've inherited by living, growing up into, a perverted society which, like Dostoyevsky's Russia, has a 'system of values…so uncertain that who can say if a man is worth more than a load of hay'.

The crucial time when we experience fear, when we are confused by society, by our parents as representatives of the larger world, is in childhood. And so many of McCullers' stories, and characters, are drawn from a child's point of view. The story 'Untitled piece' is like this, as is 'Wunderkind', 'The haunted boy', and 'The orphanage'. In the latter, McCullers states:

*The child knows two layers of reality - that of the world, which is accepted like an immense collusion of all adults - and the unacknowledged, hidden secret, the profound.*

Sometimes the concern with the roots of unhappiness, the lacking in human kindness, appears in relation to misdirected sexualities. This is clear in the story 'The Jockey' as well as in Captain Pemberton in *Reflections*. The jockey is a pugnacious character, clearly gay, who is seen by the straights - the trio of the bookie, owner/wealthy man, and trainer, as having a 'prim voice' and someone who has a 'particular friend'. But the reader feels that although McCullers wants us to identify with the Jockey, he is a deeply tormented character, an unresolved man, probably what we now call bulimic, who doesn't hold his drink well. He is on the downward path to the career of drunk, or maybe like Captain Pemberton, someone who externalises his sources of evil onto others.

Captain Pemberton is a complex character who has a bullying, brutish, attitude to everyone, in particular to his wife louche Leonora, perhaps someone who is well adjusted, too adjusted perhaps ('she had a gay cliche for everyone'). Pemberton is

presented as a repressed homosexual, although, really, McCullers rarely thinks of people's sexuality in a uni-dimensional way. There is a Laurentian episode in this novel when Pemberton comes upon the demonic Private Williams, resting stark naked after riding Firebird, Leonora's horse. Pemberton cannot speak, 'only a dry rattle came from his throat' and ultimately, although obsessed by this soothingly violent and dangerous man, he never can really 'speak' to him, ending up instead shooting him dead. But Pemberton actually is shown as knowing what the source of his unhappiness may be, of his conforming to his army career in spite of his ambivalent sexuality. Thus, discussing what to do with an effeminate, resentful, man-servant, we find Major Langdon suggesting that he should be treated to some hard army discipline to sort him out. But Pemberton replies:

You mean that any fulfilment obtained at the expense of normalcy is wrong, and should not be allowed to bring happiness. In short, it is better because it is morally honourable, for the square peg to keep scraping about the round hold rather than to discover and use the unorthodox square that would fit it?

Pemberton thus mouths the approach to human kindness seen in McCullers' essays and the treatment of The Heart is a Lonely Hunter. But he is one of the unresolved characters wherein society breeds its evils, because in the final paragraph of this novel, as Pemberton slumps down after shooting private Williams, he is described as looking like a 'broken and dissipated monk'. Whereas Williams himself has an expression of animal comfort.

But, although the axis of evil-unhappiness is often worked through in terms of misdirected, unformed, or perhaps 'uniformed' sexuality in adults, it is in the period of childhood that the crucial battles against unkindness take place. Nowhere is this more telling than in the long story 'Wunderkind' in which the child Francis, endures only for so long the bully music master Bilderbach, her music teacher. The story makes us realize early on that his music room is a room of correction, of discipline, of unkindness:

*Mister Bilderbach was not pleased; his guttural effulgence of German words had kind in it somewhere…*

But his type of kind-ness is seen through by Francis, she rejects the sexual and gender-stereotyping formulation he has of her. In fact, what comes across more than anything in the context, the encounters of the music room, is the way Francis is working on the scales of *herself* rather than the simpler practice pieces Bilderbach patronizingly makes her play (the 'Harmonious Blacksmith'), the music of innocence, unchallenging. Francis gives up her lessons, she can no longer 'play' in this way, she stumbles out into the street and McCullers shows her setting off for home taking initially the wrong direction. But we know it is the right decision, that she has rejected the hidden curriculum of womanhood:

*She felt that the marrows of her bones were hollow and there was no blood left in her.*

But she leaves Bilderbach no longer able to form her, ‘his hands held out from his body…relaxed and purposeless;

McCullers’s story ‘Madam Zilensky and the King of Finland’ is not about childhood, but the title character has something of a child about her. Like Francis we feel that this is a similar character who has had to learn to resist male music masters’ attempts to form her, in this story represented by the head of the music department, Mr Brook. Madam Zilensky is an accomplished composer and she has three boys fathered by different men, and is marked out as having had a bohemian life prior to coming to earth teaching at an America college. Mr. Brook is satisfied with her teaching but her somewhat masculine sense of confidence, garrulousness, is shown to perturb Brook – she worries him unaccountably. To expel this feeling, he latches on to her description of an encounter she says she once had with the King of Finland. Brook decides she is a ‘pathological liar’ on this flimsiest basis. But McCullers reverses our initial sympathy with Brook on this matter when the ends shows Brook hallucinating, seeing a dog walking backwards.

McCullers’ final novel, *Clock Without Hands* is based around this image (it occurs elsewhere in her work). In ‘Madame Zilensky’ we learn at the start that she has lost her metronome whilst travelling to take up her position at the college. And in McCullers’ poem ‘When we are Lost’ she writes:

Yet nothing
Is not blank. It is configured Hell;
Of noticed clocks on winter afternoons…

These similar images of time, of relentless regularity/regulation, of the metronome dictating time, are seen to be at odds with human time, with the body’s sense of rhythm, with unbalanced time associated with unhappiness.

In her story ‘Untitled Piece’ McCullers explores the theme of tutelage whilst at the same time revealing her genius which, as Baudelaire put it ‘is the ability to summon childhood at will." ‘Untitled Piece’ is about the awkwardness of adolescent experience and the threshold time of young adulthood. The title is a good one because at that stage of our lives we are all untitled pieces, not sure what we will become, what job or career title we will attain, what marital or other countless statuses we will acquire. Like Hamlet’s ‘what a piece of work is a man…’, we are still to be formed, to become a man or woman or nowadays something that doesn’t easily coincide with that classical desecration of humanity. At first this story seems to be all about Sara, the older sister in the family, the difficulties she faces in getting ‘launched’ like the glider which she and her brother build at the start of the story. McCullers’ notes how everyone at that age ‘wants to run away’ and Sara does run away, although the physical distance she goes from home is not so very far - just downtown. But it is the mental distance of this trial departure that indicates that the psychological break is happening as she becomes a woman.

But then Sara actually does go away and, left abandoned Andrew her brother runs riot with school friends on a building site. We see him climbing up onto the top of the frame of a roof, hollering out meaningless but defensive calls into the air. We see him searching for male models and latching on to a man called Harry, a jobbing jeweller at his father's store. Harry teaches Andrew chess and maybe he is the artificer he needs - McCullers draws our attention to his ability to carve wooden chessmen. But when Andrew tries to express his hopes and desires to Harry he gets no response - he isn't interested in being a surrogate father.

The story develops, seen from the 'formed piece' of view of Andrew in later years, as he is waiting at a roadside cafe, considering if he would continue his nostalgic journey home from his time at a New York college. I won't say if he will complete his journey. Maybe he will go back or not complete his journey home. But it doesn't matter because McCullers transmits to us in her intensely evocative prose, that he has come to understand himself, that the place where he began is not as important as the journey away from it. It is a story in which the truth to adolescent experience is so sharply conveyed (I think immediately of Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye* but there it is much more an attitude that is conveyed rather than an experience). I found this story quite unnerving as it puts the reader back to that time of physical, sexual and other turmoil of teenage life.

## Nabokov's lively objects

After a time Nabokov's supercilious tone can be wearying and in the later novels, especially *Ada*, the tone is pretty egotistical. The early novels, though, are marked by a quirky stylistic trope of animated objects which Nabokov used intriguingly in order to confront the readers' expectations of literary metaphor. Essentially, Nabokov pursues an original, highly individualistic, phenomenology of objects that makes the reader re-vision the world as a result of this defamiliarization.

In Nabokov's first novel, *Mary*, this characteristic is not much in evidence, but in the majority of Nabokov's novels up to *The Gift* (in which it reaches its apogee, a novel itself much centred on a number of questions of style and language) and *The real Life of Sebastian Knight*, and in the short stories of this period, destabilizing objects is a regular concern. Nabokov's essay 'Man and Things' (1928) sets out his thinking on this topic. In it he takes a kind of Berkeleyan viewpoint in which it is not the object itself that exists for the viewer but only what our perception makes of it. 'A thing, a thing made by someone, does not exist in itself' (69) he states, but is 'dependent upon who looks on it'. Things thus 'bring to mind' images which are the material of thought, of representation (he regularly criticized James Joyce for his over-estimation of the verbal-linguistic in the constitution of human thought or experience). Nabokov sees us as 'lending things our feelings' – which he calls 'anthropomorphic

ardour' (72). He even goes as far to argue that things die when we 'neglect' them, and we often mourn them when we have done so (73).

In *Invitation to a Beheading* the central character Cincinnatus is shown to be surrounded by a 'false logic of things', chimera, objects that are animated by others, by the agents of the state who are working to subjectify him. In his experience we see him feeling a 'general instability, …a certain flaw in all visible matter', even if the 'objects still observed an outward propriety' (172). In this Orwellian and Kafkaesque world there is a moral concern to address the political status of objects and to confront the issue of who or what is doing the primary seeing and defining along with the phenomenological status of everyday objects.

This concern is also prominent is many of the interviews and essays Nabokov made concerned with questions of his style. In his fragment-essays 'The creative writer' and 'style' (both circa. 1941) he shows a concern to 'dislocate the given world' (189), to make the reader see the 'whatness of things' (187), to 'move objects from their usual series' (198), and to bring things out of the domain of habitual modes of experience (188) (in this he shows an affinity for Proust). This concern is particularly marked in *Look at the Harlequins* with its performative 'look' in its title and where the aim is 'to make iniquity absurd' (197).

But Nabokov consciously rejected the type of politically-committed literature of writers like Sartre and Camus, the Soviet novelist-ideologues of the Stalinist era such as Sholokhov, or even novelists like Pasternak who were critical of the regime. Mostly, when objects crop up in his novels they do so apolitically, defamiliarizing, to 'reveal the most elementary things in their unique lustre' (*Think, Write, Speak* 132). The aim is to redefine domestic objects in their particularity, to give them a kind of agency, like the mirror 'that had plenty of work to do' in *Laughter in the Dark* (37). In *Despair*, Nabokov's Doestoyevskian novel about a Hermann Hermann and his double, Hermann laments the 'sick mirror' he has created of himself, the mirror representing an outside, perhaps narcissistic, view of himself that he has fallen for when he stumbles on his double. Hermann believes that having a double might allow him to escape the confines of the self he has created, that by killing his live reflection he can achieve freedom, to re-imagine himself. Hermann has an 'eye to eye monologue' with his double, but he is put into a critical light when Nabokov shows that in seeing just the outside of things, people as much and as like objects, Hermann is on a faltering path of redundant defamiliarization:

*I cannot recollect now if the 'monologue' was a slip or a joke. The thing is typed out on good, eggshell blue notepaper with a frigate for watermark: but it is now sadly creased and soiled at the corners; vague imprints of his fingers, perhaps. Thus it would seem that I were the receiver – not the sender. (45)*

Hermann is attempting to create a world of dead things that lack their own animation. It is also, in writing, what Nabokov sees as going on in the 'cooperatives of words' in

tired metaphors or, historically, the way objects from earlier periods become obsolescent because the generation that animated them has dissipated (338).

*The Gift* serves as the apogee of Nabokov's concern with reanimating things. In fact, the 'Gift' in the novel is the ability 'to go beyond the surface of things' (326). This is contrasted to the positivist scientific idea of objects, be they human, social or natural. In this novel Nabokov directly criticises cold German systematizing philosophical materialists like Feuerbach and Hegel. Fyodor, the protagonist artist sees 'things like words as [having] their cases' but commonly-understood dictionary-syntactical confinement of meaning 'must be displaced' (236-7) by a poetical imagination built upon 'chance and emotion' (198).

At one point around half-way through the novel, there is a sudden shift in the syntax and style (approximately 173 of the Penguin edition) when Nabokov's metaphors and his characterization of objects becomes somewhat tired, predictable, conventional – a blond woman is described woodenly as 'buxom' and 'whose soul was more like that of a replica of her apartment' (186). A little further on, Herzen (whom Nabokov associates with Russian revolutionary materialists) is described as a writer producing 'false glib glitter' (198). And the café in which Fyodor meets Zina is described in a kind of dead prose as 'an empty little café where the counter was painted in indigo colour and where dark blue gnomelike (the dull imprecise simile here underlined by merging with its marker – 'like') lamps…'.

Such prose contrasts with the earlier part of the novel in which a sustained defamiliarization of the object world is evident. In particular, Nabokov sees natural phenomena, such as 'the bent shadow of a poplar sitting there' (51); a 'young chestnut tree [is] unable to walk alone' (57) and 'dun birches…stood around blankly with all their attention turned inside themselves'. This latter instance continues to note 'a little man was tossing a stick into the water at the request of his dog' (45); and rain 'loses the ability to make any sound' (75).

Early on in *Despair* Hermann Hermann recounts the walk he took that led him to meet his doppelganger, Felix:

*I trod upon soft sticky soil: dandelions trembled in the wind and a shoe with a hole in it was basking in the sunshine under a fence. (3)*

The reader is struck by this shoe, abandoned, an object which has lost its pair and its 'use-value' but is still seen as being alive, animated by the verb 'basking'. The reader is, simultaneously, aware of the subtle contrast in the metaphoric language by the more conventional attribution of 'trembling' to a plant like a dandelion eddying in the breeze. This is juxtaposition in Nabokov's earlier work of conventional and animated metaphors is a regular one. It is Nabokov's way of disturbing the reader's literary sensibilities, to make them experience the 'Gift' of undermining cliched writing passing itself off as literature. In *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* this occurs regularly, thus we find 'letters resent being unfolded' (34), the author is described as

'budding' (46). Bookshelves are 'densely peopled' which seems conventional, in contrast to the following sentence in which a writing desk 'looked sullen and distant' (30). A reflection is seen, commonly, as 'live' but is quickly followed with the attribution of a window as being 'sick' (51)

That shoe basking and yet useless in the human world seems to be part-way back to returning to nature, which means in Nabokov's world to have lost its conventional meaning, that it can now only appeal to us to re-view it, reexperience its thingliness before it is lost to us. The idea of 'thingliness' is a key concept n Derrida's articles on Van Gogh's boots and what Heidegger made of them in his 'Origin of the work of Art'. Derrida, like Nabokov, was concerned with how Van Gogh's boots were non-functioning, and, as the shoe in *Despair* is subject to the novelist's revisioning, revivifying, so in Van Gogh the boots become reviewed, become a 'subject' in painting (301). Derrida partly is concerned with literary comparisons to the painterly, suggesting that Van Gogh's boots have a figurative value comparable to metonymy or synecdoche (302). But his main concern is how things are 'brought into the nameable' (306) in painting or literature, more generally in the artistic generation of cultural value.

Things like boots become nameable when they are disturbed from their (back)ground, related in the Aristotelian concept of an originary state *hypokeimenon* (305). In paintings like Van Gogh's boots this revisioning process occurs or, in literature like Nabokov's there is a detaching and estrangement of the objects of the natural world or shoes and other domestic(ated) objects. Nabokov's Gift, like Van Gogh's, is to bring objects out of their expected gaze, their ground, and into revision-ing. Derrida categorizes this more generally as disturbing objects' 'substantia': the thing no longer has the figure or value of 'an underneath' (308). Nabokov's early novels  thus sensitize us to the presence of things, to reexperience them by the activating light of his literary imagination.

## Kerouac, Proust, Time and Memory in *Visions of Cody*

There are scattered references to Proust in many of Kerouac's novels, alongside others in his journals and interviews. Although mostly slight, they serve Kerouac's locating of himself in the 20th century current of memoir-remembrance novel writing that Proust has come to symbolize. Commentators on Kerouac stress the compatibility of Kerouac's ideas on memory to those of Proust. Dezen Jones has cited Kerouac's fiction as 'The last great American novel in the form of an authentic search for lost time' whilst Nicosia in his Biography of Kerouac (*Memory Babe*- pps 303, 376) underlines the fact that Kerouac and Neal Cassidy read Proust aloud to one another, (described, also, in *Visions of Cody* (344). In the (online) Ginsberg Project there is to be found a transcript of a university seminar where Ginsberg underlines Proust's form of *mémoire involontaire*-epiphany as a key influence on Kerouac's *On the Road*.

But when we look at what Kerouac actually states about Proust, particularly in *Visions of Cody* and here and there in his other novels, the burden is to associate the writer with the Proust of the *roman flueve* than that of remembrance, the madeleine and involuntary memory. In the preface to *Big Sur* Kerouac states:

*…my work comprises one vast book like Proust's except that my remembrances are written on the run instead of afterwards in a sick bed.*

Anyone who reads all of Kerouac's novels will note the continuities, that the same characters appearing and even speaking the same sentences and acting in similar ways yet having different names. It was Kerouac's ambition to edit out these differences and comprehensively make his oeuvre a coherent whole.

One key thing about *Visions of Cody* is that it has an expansiveness that is missing in *On the Road*: it is the lopped-off other half of that novel. Kerouac was bullied by his editor Malcolm Cowley and know-it-all Beats like Ginsberg to cut-down the long roll that was the original of *On the Road*. In *Visions* he was in a position as a successful author to resist their advice to cut (particularly the tape transcripts). So where *On the Road* has something of a compressed spontaneity, with characters bouncing around the nucleus of Dean Moriarty, *Visions* was allowed to be more free flowing, the prose truly spontaneous and expansive.

So we see in *Visions of Cody* Kerouac's prose contrasting to the type of highly controlled, non-spontaneous writing that Proust produced in his pursuit of lost time, the weighty aesthetic means (a Bergsonian aspect – see below) to evoke remembrance. However, there is in Proust's idea of *mémoire involontaire* something that is uncontrolled as it impacts on the individual. This type of memory is 'unmotivated', something that flashes up and disturbs the present as a result of 'prompts' like the madeleine or other seemingly trivial objects (on this interpretation see Deleuze, *Proust and Signs* pps 49-96).

Proust's highly measured writing, his narrative structured (*avoiding* repetition!) contrasts to Kerouac's spontaneous prose which gets across to the reader the experience of present time, but one that is also pregnant with *future* as much as past memories. It is *Visions of Cody*, much more than *On the Road*, that shows that Kerouac has very different concerns than Proust when it comes to time, memory and remembrance. For one thing, the 'total' recall form of remembrance in Proust's terms of involuntary memory is not preeminent. For Kerouac it is *forced* memory, not involuntary memory, that dominates - memory as active recall in the 'and now' or hurly-burley of the present that is key. Thus we find Kerouac both lauding and rejecting Proust within a sentence, stressing at the end that all memory is ephemeral – all (i.e. all that was uniquely original) will inevitably be lost:

*Oh Proust! Had I been your kind of …writer, I'd give a description of that eaten and mungy face, prophecy of all men's sorrow, no rivers no lips no starlit cunts for that sweet old loser, and all is ephemeral, all is lost anyway. (Desolation Angels: 99)*

*

In *Visions of Cody* the tape transcripts of Kerouac's conversation with Cassidy are evidential, a modern, technological, *aide memoire* enabling an evaluation as well as an evoking of past time. For Kerouac, audiotaping offers a means to develop the 'sprawling logic' of his type of *roman flueve*:

*I could keep the most complete recording the world which in itself could be divided into twenty massive and pretty interesting volumes of tapes describing activities everywhere and excitements and thoughts of mad valuable me and it would really have a shape but a crazy big shape yet just as logical as a novel by Proust because I do keep on harkening back…128-9*

Kerouac here is placing himself consciously in contrast to Proust's highly individualistic-personal 'redemptive' understanding of *mémoire involontaire*. Kerouac more often than not in *Visions of Cody* sees the practice of writing about the present as a process of *enhancing* memory, apparent in this quote from dialogue about recall in the tape transcript section:

*…what it was -what it actually was, was a recalling right now on my part, a* recalling *of me having either told about it or thought about the bed* [*in Irwin's room, where he had a brief liaison with a woman*] *concretely before, see, so therefore I, all I did now was re – go back to that memory and bring up a little rehash of, ah, pertinent things, as far as I can remember, in little structure line, a skeletonized thing of the – what I thought earlier, and that's what one does you know, you know when you go back and remember about a thing that you clearly thought out and went around before, you know what I'm saying*

Of course, Proust would criticize these types of conscious reflections as 'forced memory' lacking the 'truth' to past experience found via involuntary memory, perhaps saying something like 'you can't tape smells or taste!'. But Kerouac likes the idea of taping because for him the moment is ultimately 'ungraspable':

*…we who make the mad night all the way (four-way sex orgies, three-day conversations, uninterrupted transcontinental drives) have that momentary glumness that advertises the need for sleep – reminds us it is possible to stop all this – more so reminds us that the moment is ungraspable, is already gone… (31)*

Nevertheless, in *Visions of Cody* 20th century technologies like the tape recorder and cinema are embraced by Kerouac as means to capture sight and sound in actuality. In the section based on Kerouac seeing Joan Crawford filming, 'Joan Rawshanks in the Fog', we find Kerouac welcoming these technologies as tools for assessing the actuality of what is past, their ability to record in real time. Kerouac underlines not so much the *flow* of still images at 24 fps in cinematic film but the time of production

‘Takes’. In takes time in the process of cinematic production is covered-up by the flow of images that gives audiences an illusion of immediacy.

*

This contrast between the two writers’ views on time and remembrance can be referenced in the different ways Bergson conceptualized time. Kerouac not only read Proust but also Bergson (on this see Nicosia: *Memory Babe* – 145) whose ideas of personal time, *durée*, is widely acknowledged as a key influence on Proust. But whilst Proust privileges *durée* and the novelist’s art as the means to convey the individual’s experience of regaining time, Kerouac is perhaps closer to the Bergson of time as ‘a continuum’, or the time of ‘creative evolution’. This is a type of *longue durée*, that might convey experiences that may only bear significance in the future. In his journals Kerouac remarks on how present experience may be influenced by the *longue durée*:

*When someone winks at me I take this as being a serious invocation to memory of some fact we both entertained, and still do entertain, in living, and has no limit. Therefore the wink may be a hint of several centuries old between us, or older with the intention of communicating to me something I have forgotten due to sheer prurience and inability to understand or be straight. (Brinkley, D (ed) Windblown World: the journals of Jack Kerouac 231)*

In *Visions of Cody* such intuitive feelings that Kerouac’s characters experience are suggestive that even their own personal present may provide fodder in the *longue durée* for *future* expression or recovery. In the transcripts section, we find Cody (in contrast to Cassidy’s manifestation as the time-tabling Dean Moriarty in *On the Road*) stressing how the time of past experience will be inevitably subject to reinterpretation in the process of active recall, or more generally subject to the concerns of the living in the present. This convoluted ‘real-time’ transcript of Kerouac’s recording of his and Cody’s rambling discussions about memory is mainly evidence of Cassidy’s thinking. But although Cassidy/Cody may appear to be lord of misrule, master of the moment (or, in the gambling sections of *Visions* and *On the Road*, someone who likes calculating odds on the future). But in his comments on the transcripts Kerouac, ironically, wraps Cody’s words around with classical, mythological and other *longue durée*-type historical references:

*Cody has a broken nose that gives a ridge to his bone, Grecian and slight, and a soft nose-end that only slightly Romanizes down but not like a banana nose, it is exactly the nose of a Roman warrior or prelate and like nose I once saw in the sketches of Leonardo da Vinci that he has made in the sunny streets of active day in old medieval Italy […] Cody’s cheekbones are smooth, makes an arcade-covering for his mouth whenever demurely he presses and prunes it together, or warps, or persimmons it, for a moment of patience, which usually comes after a statement like he made about Time, patience to await the foolish unconsidered words ever ready to blurt from the mouths not the minds of poor moral humankind. (343)*

In some of Kerouac's other novels this attitude to time and memory is also to be found. In *Desolation Angels* Kerouac refers to the role of irrelevant signs, rather than Proustian relevant signs like the madeleine, in evoking memory. These have the character of vague historical presences permeating themselves into personal experience:

[*Rose Wise Lazuli*] *Reminds me of my Aunt Clementine but not like her at all – 'Who does she remind me of?' I keep asking myself – she reminds me of an ancient lover I had in some other place… (184-5)*

In *Maggie Cassidy* Kerouac states that in 'the cables by the factory by the canal I understood future dreams' (55) or in the following quote that the dead might still have the ability to emit signs:

*Ah life, God – we wont find them any more the Nova Scotias of flowers! No more saved afternoons! The shadows, the ancestors, they've all walked in the dust of 1900 seeking the new toys of the twentieth century just as Celine says… (41)*

*

*Visions of Cody* is an important novel in conveying how far Kerouac is *different* from Proust in regard to time and memory. Whereas Proust stresses the personal experience of *durée* as being recovered by involuntary memory, Kerouac is much more about how recall is often an editing or enhancement of past time or experience. Whereas Bergsonian *longue durée* wasn't important for Proust, for Kerouac's approach to memory it is suggestive, relating to how he saw memories which may be impersonal in origin springing up in the present. Proust may be all about remembrance, but his stress is on personal memory. Kerouac, in contrast, may appear to be all about the present, but memory figures there, personal but also likely to be reconfigured or influenced by myths, visions or intuitive thoughts.

## Saul Bellow

In his essays Bellow regularly inquires into the nature of the sensibility of readers of novels. He sees them, naturally, as individuals isolated and experiencing literature – at that time, essentially the 1950s, there were few organized 'reading groups' as there are either face to face or online as there are today. For Bellow this situation was good – he sees the novel as essentially an isolate's experience and Bellow would despise contemporary literary bloggers, literary societies and reading groups. And often it is a clutch of members dominating the discussion, and between these there is a lot of intellectual points-scoring. Maybe the lone blogger position might have appealed to him, as a middle way between individual and public literary experience.

Bellow adopted an increasingly essentializing position on human nature in his later novels. Consider how in the early novel *The Actual* the main character believes that his long, Platonic love for Amy was based on 'an actual affinity'. Amy asks what he means by 'actual' and he replies that 'other women might remind me of you, but there

was only one actual Amy' (113). Three years later, in 2000 in a short piece he dismisses George Steiner's espousal of Walter Benjamin or Baudelaire's concern with developing a literature to deal with, universalize in fact, everyday life's 'ever-expanding experience of the minutia of consumer society'. He calls this endeavor a 'jungle of allusions' and asks if all this could be put into some sort of order, concluding 'I really can't say what the future of the novel is, but following Mr. Steiner's lead does not seem promising' (426). In *The Actual* both the person and the state of 'actuality' are posited against self-deceit and falsehood – for instance early on in the novel Harry believes Amy is projecting a false, 'historical' image to him. But it is what is behind this type of false image, the feeling projected ('I'm not going to let them lay all kinds of feeling on me' (107)). In many respects, this position is a defense of truth to character, and marks Bellow's return to the early novel *Augie March* where actuality is shows as something that has to be pursued against the world of now, of the structures of our modern life that have been created by earlier manifestations of actuality:

*That's the struggle of humanity, to recruit others to your vision of what's real. Then even the flowers and the moss and the stones become the moss and the flowers of a version. 438*

This is not to say that Truth isn't derived from personal experience, because soon after we find Augie stating:

> What personal need … is there in the investigations of the creep of light from the outermost stars…?

And at an earlier point in this novel when Augie and Happy are immersed in the everyday of Chicago city life we find the following reflection:

*in those sleepy and dark with heat joints where the very flies crept rather than flew…and from the heated emptiness and wood-block-knocking of the baseball broadcast that gave only more constriction to the unlocatable, undiagnosed wrong. If you thought toward something outside, it might be Padilla [a student] theorizing on the size of the universe; his scientific interest kept the subject from being grim. (249)*

Bellow contrasts this position with what I would call 'Planetary consciousness' which provides a kind of fixed point against the more transient concerns of actuality that Steiner was stressing of urban life. Where Baudelaire and Benjamin or Steiner see this type of urban actuality as the stuff of experience, Bellow, the Platonist, Kantian, looks to Archedemian points outside the transitory, outside time and space, as where to set such experience in perspective. For Augie Chicago life is seen as marked by 'too much history and culture to keep track of, too many details, too much news…all this hugeness, abundance, turbulence…' (495). This, early, position is not, as in later novels like *Humboldt's Gift* spiritualized. Thus, in *Herzog* we find Herzog reflecting:

*All children have cheeks and all mothers spittle to wipe them tenderly. These things either matter or they not matter. It depends upon the universe what it is. (39)*

But what happens about the time of *Mr. Sammler's Planet* is that this abstract planetary consciousness starts to become spiritualized. I'm not sure if at that time, the late '60s,

Rudolf Steiner's 'anthrosophism' had already started to influence Bellow, as it certainly had done by the time of *Humboldt*. But in *Sammler* we find Bellow reacting against the way planetary consciousness was being actualized by the space race. The novel is brimful of critical passes at the degradation of universal thinking into the socio-political actuality of Cold War projects. Sammler sees individual 'orbits' being displaced by too much information. Sammler is in many respects also a completely reactionary book: against the dark romantism of liberal permissiveness that was supplanting the older actualities of Calvinistic capitalism (25). In this way Herzog's (and Bellow's) planetary consciousness is displaced by a more 'telluric' form of consciousness – a fixation on the contemporary, the everyday. This is marked by forms of practical knowledgeability which overwhelms the abstract stellar planetary consciousness where there was purity, clearness, the exclusion of 'too much information'.

But then Bellow got taken in by Steiner's anthrophism as his new foundation for rising above the everyday. Anthrosophism acts as a kind of spiritualized proto-religious upending of Bellow's earlier Kantian abstract values as the measure to assess human actuality. In this phase the individual might move the planet – effect the rotation of the earth. The planets still exist outside of us but they guide the spirit:

*For in spirit, says Steiner, a man can step out of himself and let things speak about what has meaning, not for him alone but also for them. Thus the sun the moon and the stars will speak to non-astronomers in spite of their ignorance of science. 234*

Rather than step out of the morass of too much information, space, the planetary consciousness of the earlier novels, is now something that is actually moldable by our own spirit – the inner light/guide:
*For what is this sea, this atmosphere, doing within the 8inch diameter of your skull? (I say nothing of the sun and the galaxy which are also there). At the centre of the beholder there must be a space for the whole and this nothing space is not an empty nothing but a nothing reserved for everything. (313)*

Bellow seems to have eventually dropped Steiner because the essay on *George* Steiner suggests, along with his return to a conception of actuality in *The Actual*, a return to his position in the early novels of *Augie March* and *Herzog* of thinking in the context of planetary consciousness, a larger force lying totally outside the self, the mundane, the particular.

## John Updike: ethics and aesthetics of adultery

John Updike's fiction is noted for its exploration of adulterous, though conventional, heterosexual relationships. Along with those other literary 'Titans' and male-point-of-view novelists, Philip Roth and Saul Bellow, he dominated mid-late 20th century American literature. It is only relatively recently that all of these writers' varying degree of misogyny or chauvinism has been called to account, although all three are still read and much of the *how* or the style of what they wrote is still intriguing. In the case of Updike his Flaubertian dedication to the craft of writing is still honoured, and

maybe also there is something Flaubertian in his elaboration of adultery as a literary theme.

The first thing that strikes the reader of some of the early novels dealing with this theme, like *The Centaur* or *Marry Me*, is that Updike is very far from pursuing any kind of romantic treatment of adultery. Even in the later somewhat romantic novel *Brazil*, which teasingly reinterprets the classic romantic myth of Tristram and Isolde in its two young lovers Tristao and Isabel, we find they are fitfully unfaithful (and, at the end, are separated by death.) Updike's anti-romanticism directs his criticism of other writers like Hemingway:

*Hemingway's heroes make love without baring their bottoms, and the women as well as the men are falsified by a romantic severity, and exemption from odours and awkwardness that [Edmund] Wilson, with the dogged selfless honesty of a bookworm, presses his own nose, and ours, into such solemn satisfaction. Hugging the Shore 1984: 198*

In associating himself with Edmund Wilson's approach to sex (in his novel *Hecate Country*), Updike is declaring himself by inclination anti-romantic. Truth to human life when exploring extra-marital sex is, for Updike, to be truthful to underlining the primary role of carnal instinctiveness in it. Adultery, betrayal, and the pursuit of sexual ecstasy are what Updike calls 'that true life, the life of ecstasy and the spirits' (*Brazil 54*).

So the romantic is displaced by *amour* in Updike's adulterous world, a world in which we experience a detailed, refined, literary erotic of fleshed, naked, cheating bodies. But 'the spirits' referred to at the end of this quote from *Brazil* indicates, also, that for Updike the pursuit of sexual ecstasy provokes in his characters spiritual reflections on guilt and questions of right and wrong. Sexual passion brings in its wake knowledgeability -much like Adam and Eve discovering an awareness of sin and shame at their nakedness.

There is an aesthetic underpinning of this as well, seen across Updike's novels, in which the stimulation of the flesh by desire, the material basis of human sexuality, provokes considerations of form, of representation. In his essays on Vargas Llosa and Saul Bellow Updike underlines how the two writers whilst writing about sex over-stress the materiality of the body - the spiritless fleshliness of flesh. Llosa's *In Praise of the Stepmother*'s *exploring its sexual theme to rigorous, materialist extremes, brings the reader up against the possible limits of his or her own commitment to sensuality.* (*Odd Jobs*: 723). Similarly, in regard to Bellow's *Dean's December* Updike writes:

*And what Bellow does with human bodies! Visually seizing upon lumps of fat and hollows of bone and ridges of gristle no one has ever put into words before, he makes of each body a kind of physical myth, a flesh-and-blood ideogram. (Hugging the Shore 260)*

In contrast, the aesthetic and ethical are simultaneous dimensions of sexual desire in Updike's adultery novels. This is seen in, for example, *Seek My Face* where the elderly famous artist Hope Chafetz (associated with a Jackson Pollock-like figure) becomes excited by the body of her young interviewer. She finds herself particularly fascinated by the septum of the young woman's nose in which she 'glimpses' the 'live creatureliness [that] brings the girl's other features up into a feral glory' (188). In *The Poorhouse Fair* Updike again focuses on the septum, this time of the *dead* flesh of the lying-in-state patriarchal figure of Mendelssohn:

*Perfectly preserved his blind lids stretch above the crumbled smile. The skin that life has fled is calm as marble. Can we believe, who have seen his vital nostrils flare expressively, revealing in lifting the flaming septum, the secret wall red with pride within, that there is no resurrection? That bright bit of flesh; where would such a thing have gone? (The Poorhouse Fair 155)*

There is much direct discussion about right and wrong, about religion and doubt(ers) in Updike's novels. The advice that Dreaver, the Presbyterian moderator in *In the Beauty of the Lilies*, gives to the doubt-ridden minister Clarence is that *The soul needs something extra, a place outside of matter where it can stand* (79). But Updike does not mean by this some type of Platonic spirit realm but rather an accepting of the body as a means to, or an element in, the experience of ensoulment. So, early in this novel Updike describes how Clarence's doubts coincide with a loss of a proportionate sense of things:

*Without Biblical blessing the physical universe became sheerly horrible and disgusting. All fleshly acts became vile, rather than merely some. The reality of men slaying lambs and cattle, fish and fowl to sustain their own bodies took on an aspect of grisly comedy – the blood-soaked selfishness of a cosmic mayhem. (7)*

Clarence is a sympathetic figure because in Updike's view a loss of faith leads to questioning and reflection on petrifying morals, and when it's stimulated by passion so much the better. This is clearly, almost baldly, stated in the more lightly Doubting Thomas figure of Masefield, a lusty priest (having parallels with Greene's similarly ethically ambiguous 'whiskey priests') in *A Month of Sundays*.

Ethicality is not, then, found abstractly outside of materiality, of the flesh, of ecstasy or the mundane. This is personified in *The Poorhouse Fair*, by the contrasting figures of Hook, the irascible elderly incumbent of the old people's home, and Connor, the Prefect/administrator who takes over the reins after Mendelssohn. Connor is shown to be a humanist and prone to making mistakes – he is a very human figure (much like the self-deprecating George Caldwell in *The Centaur*). Sceptical, Connor likens the abstract idea of God to 'a hollow noun' (99), he is a religion-doubting figure in contrast to the religious and strongly opinionated, censorious Hook. Hook's complaining and rebelliousness against the post-Mendelsohn order at the home incites the other residents to 'stone' Connor at the fair. But through this experience of pain and ridicule Connor is shown attaining spiritual knowledge:

*The shock of the incident this afternoon had ebbed enough for him to dare open the door which he had slammed on the fresh memory. A monster of embarrassment, all membrane, sprang out and embraced him. The emotion clung to him in disgusting glutinous webs, as if he were being born and fully conscious. (135)*

But, for Hook, in contrast, 'Providence strikes. Virtue is a solid thing, as firm and workable as wood' – he is a character of habit who cannot reflect and therefore cannot change. (98)

When Updike's *Couples* was published he became associated with the permissive 'swinging' Sixties. But most of his novels of adultery are not peopled by randy, wife-swopping, thoughtless 'swingers'. In the novel *Marry Me* (ironically, I think, subtitled 'A Romance') Updike explores how adultery and unfaithfulness, makes Jerry and Sally extremely conscious of right and wrong – they are continually making choices about whether or not to continue their affair. At one point in the novel Updike keenly compares their position of fevered moral questioning to 'the only place where there is no choice is in paradise' (167). Updike consciously distanced himself from the commodified, tread-mill of Sixties sexual liberation, seen in his essay on Vargas Llosa:

*Without a surrounding society to defy, adulterous passion often wilts, and a daring elopement sinks into ranch-house funk of socially approved marriage. Sixties-style sexuality, with its hot tubs and bustling crash pads, was on to something; promiscuity, at least until it turns into a quasi-religious, obligatory form of exercise, suits our interior multiplicity. (Odd Jobs 725)*

Against mindless sex Updike also makes a more elaborate claim that there is to be found a kind of resurrectionary force derived in the always risky 'commitment' to committing adultery. In *A Month of Sundays* the over-sexed Thomas Masefield may be something of a unreliable narrator in his diaries that dominate the narrative, but I don't think Updike is being ironical when Masefield makes the following theological point about adultery:

*Adultery, my friends, is our inherent condition: 'Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart'. But who that has eyes to see cannot so lust? Was not the First Divine Commandment received by human ears, 'Be fruitful and multiply'? Adultery is not a choice to be avoided; it is a circumstance to be embraced. (44-45)*

(See, also, how this Biblical quotation 'parches' Clarence's throat when he delivers it in his sermon in *In the Beauty of Lilies* 52) Masefield's reflections on adultery baldly address theological questions that are usually more subtly treated in the early novels like *Marry Me* or *The Centaur.* It is well-known that later in life Updike took up Barth's theology, and the idea of 'sympathy' as the basis of faith. I don't think it is a coincidence that this interest might be related to how Barth faced a witch-hunt by the Church when his long-standing extra-marital relationship came to light. So, Masefield ruminates:

*Dear Tillich, that great amorous jellyfish, whose faith was a recession of beyond with thee two flecks in one or another pane: a sense of the word as 'theonomous', and a sense of something 'unconditional' within the mind. Kant's saving ledge pared finer than a fingernail. Better Barth, who gives us opacity triumphant, and bids us adore; we do adore, what we also live in the world is its residue of resistance – these mortal walls that hold us to this solitude, the woman who resists being rolled over, who is herself. (192)*

This Barthian-type attitude is also often accompanied by the adoption of animistic/Lawrentian tropes in Updike's novels. In the epigram to *The Centaur* Barth is quoted by Updike:

*Heaven is the creation inconceivable to man, earth the creation conceivable to him. He himself is the creature on the boundary between heaven and earth.*

This novel is page-by-page infused with references to the complex- ambiguous figures of classical mythology. And so at school George Caldwell's son is conscious of being 'the petty receptacle of a myth' that is spun around his late father. Early in the novel George is seen flirting with Vera Hummell in the school changing rooms where she likens him to a centaur, and he reflects that 'His nether half, an imperfect servant of his will, preened itself' (25).

Animism also crops up in the *Maples* stories. We find Richard Maples out one early morning in open countryside. Taking the wilderness as an opportunity:

*Richard took off his clothes, all; he sat on a rough worm rock. The pose of thinker palled. He stood and at the water's edge became a prophet, a Baptist; ripples of light reflected from the water onto his legs. He yearned to do something transcendent, something obscene… (104)*

Animism informs Updike's regular literary alternative spins on physics when describing the context of his characters' actions. In the *Maples* stories Richard takes a sceptical stance on arguments about the world based on Newtonian and Einsteinian physics (135-6). And in the late novel, *Villages*, Updike has the intuitively pragmatic Owen call the mathematical logic of Frege and Russell 'creepy' (82). Similarly, in *Seek My Face* a contrast is found between the 'soul's expectations and bottomless appetite to the measured world of science and matter' (65). But, of course, it is really human sexual agency in Updike's fictional world that is the prime shaper of the human very earthly experience of time and space - seen in *A Month of Sundays* where sexual attraction is described as something that 'curves space and time' (125). And in *Marry Me* we find:

*The world is composed of what we think it is; what we expect tends to happen; and what we expect is really what we desire. As a negative wills a print, she had willed Sally. 133*

(Updike, though, will give physical determinants of human behaviour its due – for example, in *Brazil*, where we find the henchmen's:

*…two guns had, like pencils, redrawn the space of the room, reducing the finitude of possibilities to a few shallow tunnels of warped choice. Their spirits had all become very thin, walking the taut wires of the situation. (63)*

Similarly, in the short story 'Unstuck', the snow-bound Mark hears his wife's words '"If you are young" come to him faint and late, as if, because of the warping after-effect of the storm sound crossed the street from her side against the grain.'

I have dug these rather abstractly-stated ideas out of a range of Updike's singular (i.e. not the series of 'Rabbit' Angstrom novels) novels. But I read them in the sway of Updike's compelling literary prose. Yes, Updike always wrote 'like a man's man', he was a writer of his time and place (reacting against the ingrained moral conservatism of 50s America – no small thing to do), and very few people now read him because the position he puts the reader into identifying with is, on the whole, probably politically incorrect. But the prose remains, despite so much of its content and positioning of the reader, and one cannot help but admire it for the way it conveys Updike's ideas, how it makes us reexperience our understanding of human relationships in provoking, original, and always interesting ways. Updike revels in the detail, the minutiae of the human world and its physical – generally suburban America - and natural contexts, so apparently effortlessly and yet what must have been the result of a concentrated Flaubertian-dedication to the production of literary prose.

Updike regularly refers to the impressionists and other artists when describing moods, places, skies and nature. It is said that he wanted to be a painter, and his prose is often deeply pointillist in its detail. But there is also an unabashed emotive-impressionist colouring to this detail. Updike might be described as a writer in the genre of realism because his detailed prose creates mood, contextualizes the 'action' and underwrites our identification with his particular 'truths to life'. But Updike is not a *realist*, and rejected a realist conception of 'representation', as is seen in the aesthetic discussions n *Seek My Face*:

*This so-called 'aesthetic', he stated in his rather, high, affected voice, honed on years of education, Stanford and Columbia and with some English vowels picked up from a post-grad year in Oxford, concentrating not in art but in philosophy, back to the Greeks, back to ontology, 'is merely the sensuous aspect of the world – it is not the end of art but a means, a means for egging at, let's call it, the infinite background of feeling in order to condense it into an object of perception, These objects of perception are basically relational structures, which obliterate the need for representation.' (Seek My Face 44)*

In all probability Updike's literary legacy will not be as a writer concerned with adultery in late 20th century America, but as one of the great writers of novelistic prose. In the Bech novellas Updike has his alter-ego, the writer Bech, consciously reflect on the process and aesthetics of writing and of being a writer. When Bech states that 'actuality is a running impoverishment of possibility' (*The Complete Henry*

*Bech* 58) it is hard not to think that Updike is, glancingly, referring to Saul Bellow's concern with 'actuality' and with all de-spirted conceptions of reality. Bech's thinking:

*[…] as Valery had predicted, did not come neatly, in chiming packets of language, but as slithering, overlapping sensations, micro-organisms of thought setting up in sum a panicked seat on Bech's palms and a palpable nausea behind his belt. (89).*

## Contemporary Modernism

### Rezzori's Novels*.*

#### Abel and Cain

*Abel and Cain* is a very long novel arising out of the 60s counterculture, but one that is pretty much nihilistic in comparison with the over-weaning seriousness of the leftist politics of its time. And it is not in any way a novel concerned with simply the end of the Austro-Hungarian empire and the rise of bourgeois mentality into cultural dominance in the 20th century. But a novel written by a Romanian-stateless orphan with a footloose, flailing, grasp on what might be termed national identity and loyalty. So, quite like Musil, but not; quite like Joyce, but not; and nothing like Proust.

But three or four key themes emerge in this long, highly (consciously) repetitious novel. One is, a concern with rationalism in its expression in the 20th century novel and other literary forms. This is particularly seen in his digs and longer forms of criticism of the writer Nagel, a popular but intellectual novelist, a character who is a little like Günter Grass (I'm guessing this is who Rezzori had in mind), but is also seen in his attitude to Freudian psychology, modern cinema, where they as texts concern themselves with Rezzori's own concerns with analysing the 20th century's cultural mind-set and the two world wars associated with it. In contrast to these, Rezzori pursues a form, an erotics, of what can be likened to a worried fretting intense condition of negation and repetition. Another theme is linked to this – a spasmodic style that conveys repeatability rather than narrative burdened with linearity, plot development.

This in turn is added to by Rezzori's adoption of a form of utopian modernist-form of urbanism where experience is seen as formed by the modern city. This is seen as having the potentiality to 'vaporize' 20th century manifestations of bourgeois tropes of self and identity. This resort to some type of location of experience, along with other essentializing ideas (a time, for example, when language was free of writing or scripts; an ideal Ur of un-regulated ego) lets the novel down – it fails in delivering to the reader an adequate sense of these ideals as achievable/recoverable.

Rezzori sets himself against conventional literary narrative because it is implicated in the 20th century's myth of rationality that pervades modern man's consciousness – what he calls 'our allegedly rationalist yet ardently myth-believing century' (509). He seems here to be with Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* and the problem of writing after Auschwitz, as well as the concerns of the Frankfurt School's *The Dialectic of*

*Enlightenment* where modernity is depicted as a socio-political tragedy. His anti-Freudianism comes through in the regular denigrations of bourgeois life and experience, culture, which itself is rationalizing and undermining of any hope of self-realization. This concern, in fact, seems more prescient of Deleuze than simply anti-Freud:

*It is ridiculous to hold fast to the old, out of date idea of action, to the obsession with activity or passivity vis-à-vis history – this world means something only if I had a history in the absolute sense, were allowed to have a history. This history would the skin, the solidifying envelope, of the person. It would give me contours – and thus form. What once held together my SELF (at least in my imagination), giving it distinguishable, recognizable form, was the notion of a personal history. But this now proves to be a typically subjectivist error, showing only my infantile limitation of vision; it is schizothymically autistic, correlating with my bourgeois worldview and leptosomic habitus: superreality enlightens me, makes me understand that my conception of self is completely out of proportion. 458*

In contrast, Rezzori (and the character(s) Subicz/Schwab) moves away from conventional literary form, seen as an abstraction, the form that the writer Nagel (Grass?) adopts - an explanatory, a comforting style which coincides with the way the bourgeoisie likes to form its self-image. Thus, in Uncle Ferdinand is:

*'a bizarre retro-morphosis occur(s), a development back into a species and genus, which makes the individual recede and the type come to the fore…' (153-4)*

Again, instead of narration there can only be repetition which is in contrast to Nagel's literary concern only to show, prove, the role of historical necessity, a 'final European attempt to insert an orderly structure into the absurdity of existence…' (352). Conventional writers, even radical ones like Nagel/Grass, are the 'clowns' of the bourgeoisie (656); entertainers of the dominant cultural class. Instead, like a phenomenologist who will not evaluate but just continually describe an object from multiple points of view and write these impressions down non-evaluatively, Subicz/Rezzori continually goes round and round the events of the Nazi annexation of Austria in 1938; of the introduction of the Deutschmark, of his failed marriage; of his affair with Stella; of the prostitute Gisela; the 'rubble murderer'; his Raskolnikov-like dream of murdering an old woman; of the old woman Viennese flower seller running to heil Hitler in the Anchlaus.

So Subicz's style is halting, recursive in its subject matter, or what he calls *spasmodic*, 'a style that has something nervous and spasmodic in its incessant changes of milieux and moods' (358). Subicz needs to engage with the element of 'quicksilver' (842) of the times. He wants to get away from unrepeatability, even to the very core of desire, to form a repetitive erotics of style and the self:

*Smash the fiction of bodies that imprison us and keep us locked apart; smash the fiction of woman that makes me the fiction of man; smash the fictions of solitude, uniqueness and unrepeatability which exclude us from the world, splice me away from oneness with God and His cosmos…333*

But Rezzori is no nihilist, as the final words of this quote suggest. Ultimately, he draws back from the absurd, from negation (negative dialectics) and clings to new old standards, like the city ('Anthropos') and nature. Subicz/Rezzori, in relation to his, continuously resorts to the sky as a kind of empyrean fixture- a standard:

*Under the sky, air, in whose moods and whims I am greeted again by all the promise of my childhood, all the delights I expected of the world… (81)*

The sky is glimpsed amidst the debauchery of a brothel, a glinting square between the dark buildings of Berlin or Paris. The sky is, however, seen in molecular forms, volatile, ether, but a refrain, a standard that may have mutations. So too this dynamic romanticism is linked to a type of Edenic era before the Fall of the invention of

*…the vice of writing abstracted even the absurdness into material that could be experienced at second and third hand: into book-page reality…306*

Similarly, the resort to the city, either the city of modernity that 'vaporizes' being but which, in avoiding it's 20th century manifestation in the American and Disneyland form, might offer 'a promise, you understand: the Jerusalem still to be built: ANTHROPOLIS' 402 Modernity held out the promise of Anthroplis but it was betrayed, essentially by a skewered, rationalized modernism that could not develop the imagination to realize it:

*I am a foundling of this myth, a latecomer to an era that had set out to dream the dream of man as a blissful inhabitant of the ANTHROPOLIS but was born into an age of maggots…369*

At places in this novel I was reminded of Sloterdijk's *Critique Cynical Reason*. Both texts are concerned with the betrayal of modernity, the 20th century's journey of western culture to Auschwitz and liberalism, fascism, communism. At one point Rezzori criticises modernist writers like Joyce and Proust for betraying critical reason, for becoming the modernity-betraying 'Eulenspiegals of our time' (656). And in post war states, it is a similar underlying cultural and rational-legalistic absurdism that put on trial Nazi leaders as war criminals 'on a very flimsy legal basis'. So, as the novel progresses this critique turns back itself onto Subicz:

*…is enjoying his role as the prankster Till Eulenspiegal, surely partly out of schoolboyish spirit of revenge against his one-time friend Nagel…821*

Rezzori realizes, doubts, and see the limits of his particular novelistic form of a critique of cynical reason, the danger of becoming the cultural clown rather than a critically aware Diogenes' cynic.

### Nostalgia and Language

There is much more to Rezzori, a writer who has been critically under-covered (pun intended) in literary studies of modernism. Take for instance, *Anecdotage*, its title

punning on the writing memoir in old age, a late work by Rezzori but has thematic continuities with his earliest novels, particularly *The Hussar* (also translated as *An Ermine in Czernopol*) and *Oedipus at Stalingrad*. Rezzori states that he is writing 'against the shadow-play of the present' (27), deploying in this his still keen weapons of scepticism, cynicism, irony and sarcasm - his unique voice. In *Anecdotage* Rezzori's scepticism is focussed on his (negative) experiences at the Sri Aurobindo ashram in India, but from this the memoir moves back and forth between his witnessing the Anschluss in Vienna; post-war Berlin 1947-8 (where he worked for a time in radio broadcasting); and his reflections on the Romanian revolution of 1989: the past, or a personal idea of the past, is always present in Rezzori's writing.

Rezzori describes himself as a 'Nineteenth Century man of letters at the threshold of the Twenty-First Century' (26), but his concern with what he calls the 'metasizing' (37) currents at play in European culture - arising from, principally, the mass-media - is very modern, perhaps, even, post-modern. Rezzori pits himself against mass society (something he has always done in his novels) arguing that he is a moralist because of his 'melancholic disposition' and having a choler that stems from his belief that the 'demonic' is always at work in, and may undermine, any culture, particularly mass culture. However, the demonic can be combatted by 'laughter' (115), irony and sarcasm. In confronting the demonic – be it fascism or the benighting populist trends of the mass-media - Rezzori counters with his own 'private mythologies': his love of the German language, and nostalgia for the landscape and culture of Czernopol/Bukovina (148).

*Anecdotage* may be a late work, and consciously autobiographical, but it develops themes found in Rezzori's early fiction. One example of this is his frustration with what he sees as the inherent inadequacy of written[1] language. Rezzori is frustrated by writing because of its inability to catch the multivalency of our thoughts, reflections, and it thus baffles the writer's urge to convey feelings and thoughts, meanings which seem to ricochet off obdurate words:

*For years now I've been trying to recapture that crucial moment when the verbal thought and sensation linked to it become like the two rails of a train track and meaning detaches itself from the word and then disintegrates altogether: transformed into images that possess their own pictographic syntax and grammar – and I tumble down the dark hole… (80)*

This theme is articulated by the narrator of *Oedipus at Stalingrad* when describing how the anti-hero, Baron Traugott, falteringly attempts to speak in defence of the 'honour' of the Vamp after a drunken bunch of habitues of Charley's Bar sexually assault her at a party:

[1] Written language, mainly, although Rezzori in his more postmodernist moods comes close to Derrida's (in *Grammatology*) refusal to allow any secure distinction between written and spoken language.

*What we are dealing with here is nothing less than the ultimate failure of language. Surely, Locke should have written more than a single chapter on the inadequacy of words: all the exalted platitudes that have been uttered in the course of the past five thousand years should have convinced us by now that what is most profound cannot be articulated. (37-8)*

It is interesting that Rezzori makes Traugott an advertising copywriter, which in the author's critical view of the demons of the 20th century must damn him. But Traugott's dubious baronetcy and ambition to join the ranks of the true aristos via his courtship of the 'Thoroughbred', makes him into a somewhat ridiculous (although always sympathetically so) throwback to the stilted mores of 19th century European society. As an advertising man, Traugott manipulates words for the advertorial work he does for the *Gentleman's Monthly* but even in this kind of literary endeavour his writer's block also relates to the problem of writing:

*…visions drift, dreamlike and melodiously enticing, like Rhine maidens on an opera stage, while beneath them the words, melted into raw bell meal, are rolled about by slowly undulating, constantly groping and testing tentacles*…114-5

In Rezzori's very early novel, *An Ermine in Czernopol*, the inadequacy of writing is related to the way nostalgia echoes in so much of what we wish to articulate, to write about:

*For years I wasn't able to pick up a book or look at a picture that I had studied then without feeling the vague stimulus of a deeper recognition, an impact that strikes the core of our being, the sense of déjà vu mingled with nostalgia that comes when we reencounter motifs from our childhood and we regret having lost the power to experience the world in a way that brought us closer to the essence of things.* 325

Rezzori often reflects on his early life in Czernopol and Bukovina – that area of eastern Europe which, in political terms, is nationally indistinct: tugged back and forth between Russia, Poland and Romania (or now, in 2022, between Ukraine and Russia). For Rezzori it is an example of how a particular place and time often serves to reflect on present experience, and in this acts as an antidote to the failure of writing[2]. The hybridity, or at least juxtaposition, of cultures in Czernopol/Bukovina is critical, there was an 'intermediate sphere of reality' (157) - that 'every language [there] was corrupted' (224). Rezzori's yearning for this intermediate realm of reality, is, however, not just of place and time but of signification, of a logogram:

*It was as if I had captured its essence in a kind of logogram, an equation elevated to a mathematical formula, and perhaps it is due to this abbreviation and abstraction of memory that today I no longer know whether the city of Czernopol existed in reality, or merely in one of my dreams of drafts.* 342

[2]I do not think Rezzori would deny that there were social and cultural strains in late-19th or early 20th century Czernopol, not least of antisemitism, class, the subordination of women.

Despite the pervasive cynicism in Rezzori's literary voice, either in fiction or memoir, it is generally a sympathetic voice, implicitly humanistic. It rejects the treacherous ideals of mass identities, nationalism, and the ersatz forms of identity pedalled by the mass media. The same voice is found in his late novel, *Orient Express* in which Aram, a millionaire businessman experiencing a life crisis (divorce etc.), derides the misappropriation of the past in the service of advertising represented by the Orient Express. Aram is described as having similar attitudes to those bluntly articulated by Rezzori in *Anecdotage*: cynicism (90), sarcasm (99) and is godless ('anything smacking of religion filled him with repugnance' 83).

The word Orient takes on wider metaphorical meanings – suggesting how western culture is disoriented, its late 20th century' generation being rootless denizens 'not able to live in their particular historical present'. Aram consoles himself with memories of being 'at home' – but in this novel Czernopol is replaced by other areas now in Romania, in Dobrudja and the resort Technirghiol. Like Czernopol, these places act, harking back to the metaphor in *Anecdotage* of how a perfect state of linguistic signification is like converging rails, as a critical point of reference to assess the present:

*He was travelling on two parallel lines, so to speak, on this Disney-land choo choo, in two adjacent, separate, realities that took turns pursuing one another: the one ahead looking back, the other falling further behind with its eyes facing the front. The actual present lay somewhere between, like a kind of relay station, a field of awareness on which the questing contacts met.* 125-6

Ideas of converging time and change are constantly at broached in this novel, marked early on when Aram loses his trusted Omega and ends up with a cheap digital watch, which he later throws into the English Channel. But in a kind of Proustian nod (but with a political edge) he argues that present time and feelings of nostalgia may be how different lines, of times, of writing, might meet:

*Just as in dreams two separate conditions often flow together into one, each transparently contained in the other, so too consciousness of illusion was contained in the momentarily recaptured world of that time, its breath of life suddenly wafted back and, with it, the knowledge of how he'd breathed it then.* 109

But Rezzori never provides a clear answer to the problem he felt in the inadequacy of writing, of being a writer. It is a problem that in one way or another a literary writer of any hue, realist or modernist, is always troubled by. Modern language philosophy, i.e. from Wittgenstein to Derrida, warns against the chimera of attaining perfect (or, Rezzori's more limited quest, *adequate*) linguistic meaning. By its very nature producing the ideal word, sentence, writing, is inevitably influenced by the conjuncture of many different lines ('or rails), not just one or two: by the time of the mind, of narrative time, of discursive time, the reader's time and, not least, by the political legacies that have manipulated and then pervaded a mother tongue and its

literature. In the end, Rezzori limited himself to a working solution by recourse to the time of his past experience, of writing mindful in that critical spirit.

## Marías' Faces Tomorrow: Time, Faces and Redemption

> 'Hyde explores the 'amnesic amnesty' that followed the death of Franco in Spain, and the informal pacto del olvido that allowed a traumatized society to postpone addressing the brutalities of the regime – even dismissing them (for a while) as a product of collective madness.' Review of Lewis Hyde's *A Primer for Forgetting* by Gavin Francis in *The Guardian 13 March 2023*

### Time

In the final volume of *Your Face Tomorrow: poison, shadow and farewell*, Marías' reflects on the nature of time and memory. He considers time in relation to society, personal time, and the narrative time of the novel. In relation to memory, Marías is something of a contra-Proustian because he stresses that so much of what we remember as individuals is fallible, either as a result of psychological processes of wilful forgetting or, as a result of political developments, is something prone to manipulation. The individual's event-horizon is also seen by Marías as phenomenologically short because the shadow of death or finitude produces in us a propensity to apathy:

*We know only that we will be replaced, on all occasions and in all circumstances and in every role […] with memories and thoughts and daydreams and with everything, and so we are all of us like snow on shoulders, slippery and docile, and the snow always stops…(232)*

Any personal experience of time is seen not so much as something moving forwards and settling any particular 'life story', but more as something moving and 'erasing', removal, that:

*…takes back, cancels, better to have never said anything, that's the world's ambition… (287)*

However, some of the more significant elements of what is past, of actions, of individual experience or a society, usually concern acts of violence of one form or another, and these are harder to erase or 'renounce' (233). That concern with the evidence of historical violence is symbolized at the start of the trilogy in volume 1 by the rim of a bloodstain remaining on the stairs of Wheeler's house.

Marías argues that memories of what *did not* happen in the past are as important, perhaps more so, than what *did* occur. And this impels a concern with tracing the missing centre of the outline stains of past violence, the missing content, the suppressed memory. For Marías this became one of his main tasks as a writer of fiction in the context of late 20th century' Spain. In his own family of Spanish republicans Marías saw the impact of the suppression of memory under fascist

violence. Factual truth, belief in facts established about the past, events generally agreed upon as fact are questioned by Marías' sceptical narrator Jacebo because they are the empty stains of what originally occurred, they contain negation:

*This isn't happening' is the constant litany that distorts the past, the future and the present, and thus nothing is ever fixed or intact, neither safe nor certain. Everything that exists also doesn't exist or carries within itself its own past and future non-existence..(103)*

In Marías' view it is in the political, psychological and social processes in the establishment of belief in the 'evidence' of time, that makes things deniable, makes the past. In his short story 'In uncertain time' Marías reflects on a situation in a football match when a forward dribbles past the goalkeeper and upon reaching the goal line rests his foot on top of the ball, teasing for a few seconds the expectation of the crowd that he will score, before actually going on to calmly roll the ball over the line. This:

*…points out the gulf between what is unavoidable and what has not been achieved, between the still future and what is already past (151)*

Marías' narrator goes on to relate this moment and the telling of the story, that:

*Perhaps there was a second when immanence was thwarted and time was marked and became uncertain. (155)*

This image, symbol, shows how Marías views established, historical, facts or events: that they are so often either side of the goal-line rather than in doubt, still on it. Regularly in the trilogy and in one or two of his other novels Marías consciously paces out time for the reader 'one, two, three..', directing our attention to the passing of time, but also that the action may still be in doubt, on the threshold of recording, writing, stating as past action. So what Marías is doing in his novels is to get us his readers to experience such teasing points, when what is past is once again unsteady, balancing on the line.

In his novel/memoir *Dark Back of Time* Marías, again stressing fatality, fears that in the tales told about us after we are dead:

*…we lose everything because everything remains except us. And therefore any form of posterity may be an afront, and perhaps any memory as well. (11)*

Once any life, any act is an event told, then it enters a zone of 'posterity'. Here time becomes subject to 'hindsight', the known end. In volume one of *Your Face Tomorrow* Jacebo reflects on the murder of his uncle Alfonso by Franco's fascists and considers:

*The form is one thing and quite another the actual ending, which is always known: just as time is one thing and its content another, never repeated, infinitely variable, while*

*time itself is homogeneous, unalterable. And it is the known ending which allows us to dub everyone ingenuous and futile…(180-1)*

In the second volume, *Dance and Dream*, Marías has Wheeler state that any 'life is not recountable' (135) and the verb is suitably portmanteau, giving ideas of narrative 'telling', *in time*, and of how issues of accountability inevitably are raised when the telling begins.

Marías views time then as something has to be re-verbalized: time is *passed*, actively, in the processes of its telling, in history, in the media. And thus memory permeated by tellings contains much that is denied, suppressed as that which may be 'recorded', which has attained consensus as fact. Tales, facts, indices of time and memory, need to have their hollow outlines filled in, Marías believes, and the onus is to reveal the fragile state, the unsecured, the vulnerable moments when events were, like the football, 'on the line'.

**The Face and Recognition**

Against this 'uncertain', treacherously manipulated, view of time and memory Marías also, however, clings to what might be termed historical accountability. Marías wants to re-establish points in time like when the football boot is poised holding the ball on the line, where an event is still in doubt, still has presence. But all events established as facts have trajectories (the ball is actually being dribbled past the goalie) but its future untold, insecure, free of intervening, evaluative words, stories told, full-stops. Unlike in Proust, for Marías the regaining of time is generally a retributive act, it is the time of true reckonings, cool, still, precise, a cataclysmic Judgement of History. This, Marías argues, can arise from re-establishing the still points when decisions were made, recognizing the trajectory and fault lines of what is considered 'the past', pointing to those involved, the culpable. Memory as fragile, as uncertain, that can be *critically* recognized again as something that has been subject to acts (political, social, personal and, particularly in Marías' novels like *When Bad Begins*, familial) of historical parenthesis. In *Dance and Dream* we find:

*…one assumes that on that final day, with all time and all space transformed into a madhouse and an uproar, as I had suggested to Wheeler - perhaps that day would already belong to eternity, and thus would have existence but not duration – the condemned and those who condemned them, the betrayed and their betrayers […] along with those who urged them on or issued the order, would also all meet up and gather together and once more see each other's faces as they stood before that Judge to whom no one lies (a judge lenient or wrathful, implacable or kindly, that is something no one knows). (123)*

Historical Judgemental Time is time made present again, 'without duration', given a face recognizable today. Such a face has presence as against the (paradoxical) pastness of faces tomorrow; it has the spotlight of historic vulnerability again so that it might be freed from the faces it acquired through the actions of dictators like

Franco or agents of the state like Tupra, by the portrayals disseminated by the mass media (Marías gives real-life examples like JFK and fictional ones like the actor 'Dick Dearlove' in vol. 1 *Fever and Spear*.)

The face of today is one that might be able to express 'regret' (for Marías this is something that is difficult to convey in Spanish which has no word equivalent to it – see *Dark Back of Time* 58). In another of Marías' stories, 'Everything Bad Comes Back', he has the tortured soul of Xavier (Marías' actual first name) seeing himself at such a still point, where accountability is free of the past, of the future, it is in a state of telling, a little like a word being in performative mode:

*At the present time, the maximum speed at which we are travelling towards the future remains insufficient and we grow old not with respect to the future but with respect to our past. My future perfect can't await to arrive, my past perfect is unstoppable. (When I was Mortal 69)*

Xavier is a melancholic, and that personality feature is inevitably part of his, any, experience of regret. Towards the end of *Berta Isla,* the British agent Tomás Nevinson regains his own 'presence', is stilled in present time, and emerges out of the face/identity as an IRA activist that had been imposed upon him by Tupra (in another manifestation of this character). Tomás, accounted as dead, about to stumble back into his wife Berta's life after many years, like Balzac's Colonel Chabert, is shocked in seeing his present face, it is one he doesn't recognize, but in this stilling it is now subject to critical reflection:

*Tomás Nevinson had changed far more, and not only because of the various masks he'd been obliged to improvise or accept during his years of role-playing and usurpation; he'd reached a point where had had no idea what his real faced looked like. (499)*

The redemptive role of recognition, of seeing a face for what it is, was, as a face today, can, however, sometimes be shown in a sinister light, as seen in Marías' early novel *The Man of Feeling*. Here the possessive banker Manur insists that his wife Natalie, love him or not, must not be allowed to leave him, that she be continually there to give him recognition:

*What I want there to be at the hour of my death, is the incarnation of my life – what that life has been – and in order for you to have been that too, you must have lived by my side from now to that final moment. (20)*

In *Tomorrow in the Battle Think on Me* Victor fails to recognize, and to be recognized by, his ex-wife Celia when he picks her up, apparently soliciting, one night in his car. Relating this sense of disregard (Marias cites the example of Shakespeare's *Henry V* when Hal/Henry refuses to recognize his old friend Falstaff) Victor states:

*Something similar happened to me one night some time ago…On that occasion, the denial was mutual, if that is what it was, if there was moment of recognition. (169)*

This act of denial of a ('your') face today is something we all do when meeting a face from our past, out of shyness, embarrassment, simple difficulty of taking up the train of a relationship again, of what was once 'true'. But this interpersonal process of denial (Goffman has much to say about this sociologically in his books like *The Presentation of Self*) is key to understanding historical revisionism, part of the 'dark back of time' that Marías writes about in his novel/memoir of that title. It is seen here in Victor's reflections in *Tomorrow in the Battle*:

*There's a very thin dividing line and everything is subject to vast upheavals – the reverse side of time, its dark back – you see it in life as well as in novels…(183)*

True recognition occurs in the present, it is the face of tomorrow that today must be given, by writing, by Judgement of History, present-ness again. The face of tomorrow is generally traitorous, or a face that has been betrayed by history:

*What a disgrace it is for me to remember your name, though I may not know your face tomorrow, the face that will one day cease to see will, meanwhile, betray itself and betray us in the time allotted to it…(168)*

Betray seems a harsh word in this, broader, context but it indicates how critically Marías views the dark back of time, the time when the Judgement of History is still in abeyance (the ball has, either, been seen over the line or is just being dribbled towards it). In *Thus Bad Begins* Marías describes how in post-Franco Spain there was a widespread diffusion of:

*…so many falsified biographies, embellished legends and deliberate or collective forgetting' (396)*

The face of tomorrow is, then, one treacherously drawn, as in the case of Jacebo's father described in volume 2 of *Your Face Tomorrow*. Jacebo recalls the stain he saw at Wheeler's in volume 1 and his reading of a history of the Spanish Civil War in Wheeler's library. Jacebo had found his father described there as a 'Red' propagandist, the writer essentially implicating him in Stalin's agents' betrayal of the Republican cause:

*…he had been accused of all those things, accusations dreamed up by his best friend whose face he had failed to recognize, the face of tomorrow that arrived all too soon…(119)*

Jacebo's father may not have recognized the face he acquired tomorrow - the face he had been given by Franco's agents, fellow-travellers, or historically-naive/careless historians - but he certainly had to live with it (even though, as we find in Volume 3, he retained the kernel of his true identity).

Another aspect of this is that throughout the trilogy and in many (most?) of the novels, Marías uses as an analogy the idea of the 'evil eye' (e.g., Vol.1 143). In *The Man of Feeling* the presence of evil is indicated by 'the turning of a blind eye' (24) and Dalo, Natalie's minder, is described as having 'one swift, bulging eye' (39). In

Vol.3 Marias sees the British as a one-eyed nation, perhaps due to the pervasiveness of surveillance in its state and ministries like MI5 and 6 and agents like Tupra (111). The paedophile actor Dick Dearlove, ever mindful of his reputation – his face tomorrow, is described as 'with one eye half-open he sees what's happening. With a quarter of his conscious mind he takes in the situation' (284). In *Dark Back of Time* Marías gives personal background to the regular appearance of this image in his novels when he describes that, as a child, he had to wear an eyepatch on his right eye to counteract the weakness of his left, the left one he believed in later life to be/represent the more trustworthy (299).

**Redemption: the facticity of fictional writing**

In Marías' novels there are scatterings of references to historical personages, Franco himself appears as a character and named Hollywood actors appear in *Thus Bad Begins*. Generally, these are secondary to the main storylines of betrayal and lies and there to give a sense of realism and taken by the reader as that. But occasionally, particularly in the trilogy, one isn't always sure if there isn't a large amount of biographical fact being relayed that seems core to the story: the trilogy's photographs of war heroes, of actual paintings, of uncle Alfonso, the numerous examples of 'Careless Talk' posters. Take the don Wheeler, for example - the detail of his biography makes him seem to be based on a real-life university don and MI6 'talent scout'. This suspicion, inkling about real personages masked in fictional clothing, makes Marías' readers perhaps suspect that the story has intervening in it large blocks of reportage.

But Marías is defensive when it is claimed that he has mixed fact and fiction in this novel (and, by implication, his other novels). In *Dark Back of Time* Marías enjoys himself pointing out how the more factual parts of *All Souls*, such as the life of the extraordinary novelist Gawsworth, were ironically seen as 'incredible' by its readers. But he ridicules the false 'recognitions' of real Oxford dons, booksellers and others who saw themselves in the characters in *All Souls*. The book is a rebuff of idle accusations of his writing being 'faction'. Recalling, also, the background to writing his short story 'Everything Bad Comes Back' he states that this is 'semi-fictional', but he 'never confused fiction with reality' (173). In *Dark Back of Time* he argues that the experience he had of going to the cinema as a child cultivated in him the soi-distance required to avoid confusing fictional representations from factual ones:

*…that is where I began, I imagine, to differentiate between reality and fiction, to learn that though they coexist and are not mutually exclusive, they do not intermix…(229)*

In *All Souls* we find Trevor its protagonist, the memoirist, reflecting that he is writing against oblivion:

*I am making this effort of memory and writing, because I know that otherwise it will all be obliterated. (55)*

Proto-existentialist concepts of oblivion and Death/eternity provide Marías with his ultimate motives for writing, for what he is writing for and against. His fiction, then, may not be the hybrid faction it sometimes appears to be, wearing the mask of fact, but it does have philosophic-didactic motives. Marías writes against falsity, of one-eyed accounts, of faces described tomorrow that falsely pervade society and polity. In *Dark Back of Time*, Marías regularly stresses that 'in fiction there is no consequence and ending' (233). Fictional writing, therefore, must necessarily be a somewhat fraught means of redemption, of addressing the philosophically-heavy themes of oblivion/Death/eternity. Marías goes on in this book to state that:

*Remembering and telling can become not only homage but affront. (180)*

This is because Marías recognizes how precarious it is, his pursuit of telling truth via fiction, of countering the shifting ground of facts and faces of today, yesterday and, particularly, those of tomorrow that have been 'thrown into the future'. We are back with Wheeler's thoughts, seen in vol. 2 of *Your Face* where he ruminates about the unaccountable fullness of any life lived, that which makes biographical truth something of an 'impossibility' – any individual life being 'not recountable' (135). But in *All Souls* Trevor reflects that the writing of memoir, rather than fiction, is a means of preserving time:

*That's why now I'm making this effort of memory and writing, because I know that otherwise it will all be obliterated, as well those who have died, those who make one half of our lives, the half who, together with the living, complete our lives, although, in fact, it isn't always easy to tell what separates and distinguishes one from the other, I mean what distinguishes the living from the dead whom we knew when alive. I would end up obliterating the dead of Oxford. My dead. My example. (55)*

There is irony here, of course, because Victor is a fictional character and *All Souls is* a novel – and is defended in *Dark Back of Time* by Marías as a novel. There is, therefore, this key role of fiction in redemption, otherwise why would Marías write or believe in what he was doing as a novelist so focussed on the repercussions of historical lies? And when he writes about relationships, fiction is also integral to the act, the belief, that characters have about being in or out of love, of being honest or being lied to. Marías thus sees that there is a necessarily imaginary nature involved in personal relationships, seen most clearly in novels like *The Man of Feeling*, or in *A Heart so White*. Writing in his own voice in the postface to *The Man of Feeling* Marías states:

*…love always has an imaginary side to it, however tangible or real we believe it to be at any given moment. It is always about to be fulfilled, it is the realm of what might be. Or, rather, of what might have been. (136)*

In the opening of this novel the narrator defends himself as a memoirist, stating:

*I am writing out of a particular form of timelessness – the place of my eternity - that has chosen me. (3)*

Again, the suppression of memory in Spain is the background these ideas, what the narrator calls the historical processes of 'atrophy' and 'habit' (8-9).

Although memory, personal or social, is fragile, Marías hints in vol.3 of *Your Face* that there is a hard kernel in the brain in which true memory lies waiting:

*And knowing that therein lies all help, that we possess a memory not shared by everyone, which, as far as I'm concerned is the past, but not truly so, not in the absolute sense. (256)*

For Marías the individual's mind is a fragile container of true memory which, if it escapes oblivion or effacement (of faces tomorrow), will provide seeds of redemption:

*Any scrap of information registered by the brain stays there until it achieves oblivion, that eternal, one-eyed oblivion, any story or fact and even the remotest possibility is recorded, and however much you clean and scrub and erase, that rim is the kind that will never come out…(371)*

If this deep-memory can be revived, as seen in Jacebo's efforts to 'reface' his father's memory and experience of political repression in Franco's Spain, then there might be a place upon which something like conscience can be found:

*The tendency nowadays is to believe that one is innocent, to find some immediate justification for everything, and not to feel one has to answer for one's actions […] of course, people nowadays can live with that and with far worse things. People whose consciences torment them are the exception… (402)*

Writing fiction for Marías is, therefore, redemptive in a way that memoir, reportage, historical writing were not, and from which he consciously distanced himself. Marías used his imagination as a novelist to enable us to experience the minutia involved in historical acts of betrayal. It is in reading Marías' novels, novels that are nearly all shadowed by the vile legacies of Franco's victory, betrayal and the historical misrecognition, that enables us as his readers to experience the engulfing symbolic and social-psychological consequences the state can have on personal life.

## Jelinek

In her interview, 'My Characters Live Only Insofar as they Speak' (2000), Jelinek identifies herself with the eastern part of Austria and urban Vienna rather than the western rural area. She describes Austrian identity as split, one side identifying with the rural, the 'lightness' whilst she associates herself with the urban:

*It is a very split identity: some look back to those times of glory, to culture, or rather, to that culture of lightness embodied by waltzes and savoir vivre, while others, I for one, believe that because of this association with lightness, Austria was much more readily allowed to become innocent again than Germany; and for that reason Austrian identity is in fact a non-identity, based on amnesia, so to speak. …Austria since then*

*has not been able like other countries, to identify with the great important figures of its past, its culture, or its history, and is stuck in the alternative lightness or mountains of corpses. (62)*

Later in the interview Jelinek contrasts her feminism and writing to that of Ingeborg Bachmann whom she describes as a writer of 'discretion'. Jelinek states she is, in contrast 'an author of the axe' (65). No one can deny the appropriateness of this metaphor to the sense of violence that permeates relations between the genders in her work. But Jelinek also brings the axe of her prose down on the Romantic tradition that is also a major part of the 'light' idea of Austrian national identity (i.e. seen in the film – but minus the *resistance* to fascism -*The Sound of Music*.)

So, instead of romantic images of mountains and country folk, Jelinek associates herself with a 'mountains of corpses' position. In place of pastoral romanticism she writes instead of deathly Darwinian struggle, a struggle between humans and fauna, the despoilation of nature by industrial pollution, and pervasive sexual and physical/Sadeian violence carried out by men on women (and emotional violence between women). Because women are romanticized in western culture, more associated with nature and the biological than men, they experience the heaviest burden of the inherent violence of this culture. Romanticism, coinciding with industrialization (and, maybe in the longer term, with capitalism) is an ideology that works by aestheticizing nature and obscuring the violence that is actually being carried out against it. But what Jelinek's novels achieve is to take the struggle against this ideology onto the very ground on which is operates – its aesthetic coding. Jelinek's work acts to underline the role of misogynistic violence shielded by romantic ideology. She often invokes the gamut of metaphors associated with romanticism in this project, so that metaphors that usually work to mantle and obscure violence against women are reconfigured as violent ones. Jelinek subverts these codes by re-presenting them in Darwinian and Sadeian clothes.

Jelinek's early novel *Women as Lovers* (1975) opens with reflections on the pollution of nature by industrialization. In the interview referred to above, Jelinek goes on to state that she was concerned to get away from 'small town' mittel-European fictional depictions of Austria seen, for example, in Bernard and Handke's novels. In this novel Austria's working class is the central concern. When one thinks of the novelists concerned with working class experience in the 20$^{th}$ century they are nearly all men writing about working class men. But Jelinek focuses on young working class women – Bridgette a factory worker, and Paula, a shop girl. Jelinek portrays these women's obsessions, almost entirely male-focussed, with marriage, domesticity and having children as being dependent on getting a man. Jelinek, though, also shows the fracturing of women as a gender by class in the figure of Susi - a 'refined' grammar school girl who competes with Brigette for the self-centred Heinze.

Throughout this novel, very much under the sway of 1970s concerns of industrial society, class war and a growing awareness of environmental issues (at that period

usually conceived in terms of *pollution* of natural habitats and water), Jelinek hacks away at romanticism in showing the feelings and attitudes of these women. Paula is constantly calculating her market value by the measure of who is at present interested in 'molesting her' (251). In this Darwinian scenario we find Bridgette's vagina being referred to as a 'snatch' (62) and like a vagina dentata it 'snaps' (44). The urine and sperm that the men produce are associated with industrial or chemical outfalls – they 'shoot', 'squirt' and 'discharge'. The women's wombs in turn are 'ravaged' by the 'slimy muck' (57) of male semen.

This violence is shown as marking generations of women in the figure of Paula's battered mother with her experience of traumatic pregnancy and abortion. Paula's mother doesn't hear the singing of a blackbird because of the cancer which 'saws and eats away at her' (57). When Paula entices Erich to have sex in (pointedly) a barn in the countryside, Jelinek's narrator intervenes with 'You cannot expect descriptions of nature for your money as well! This isn't the cinema after all!' (77). Any romanticized descriptions of nature transmute into Darwinian ones: the men are described as 'lock[ing] horns', who 'sow wild oats', whilst Paula is referred to as being 'so small' (84) against these 'laws of nature'.

In her next novel, *Wonderful, Wonderful Times* (1980), a novel set in the 1950s, the crisis years of the Austrian economy, these themes continue. The small, inchoate, group of students and revolutionaries seen here mark this novel as Jelinek's most consciously political. Rainer and Anna of the group articulate anti-romantic ideas. They 'hate the provinces' (29), the 'dismal sky' of the 'dreary landscape'. The 'light' idea of Vienna as the 'city of flowers' (78) is ridiculed and Stifner's descriptions of mittel-European landscape are derided by Rainer (54). Rainer is an existentialist anarchist who reads Camus' *The Stranger* and Sartre's *Nausea* and integrates the sexual violence of Bataille and de Sade into the group's thinking. Jelinek conveys the 'order of mutual violence' in the group (90) as much as that obtaining in bourgeois society. So the novel shows the contradictory political consciences of members of the group. Anna, for instance, doesn't want a life in which she would have to ride in trams, she wants a Mercedes.

The group's ideology is all over the place, so that Sophie is described as wanting Hans':

*…freedom to submit qua freedom. She knows she is causing him pain, but she is coercing that freedom by torturing him, as it were, into identifying of his own free will with the flesh that suffers the pain…' (213).*

Sophie is shown enjoying inflicting emotional violence on this timid, *soi-distant*, group member and quotes Musil to the effect that 'love's ecstasy is no more than ambition satisfied' (92). In turn, Anna uses her sexual attractiveness to distract groping male commuters on the trams so that her accomplices can pick their pockets. The social order shown is one steeped in violence, in particular this is embodied by Rainer and Sophie's father, an ex-Nazi who delights in physically and sexually abusing his wife

and daughter and photographing the results. Their mother's menstrual blood and blood from domestic and sexual violence is described as 'stinking', having dried on the marital bed mattress (31).

The atmosphere of sadistic violence permeating society, manifested in routine sexual and domestic violence is comprehensive in these two novels. But, overall, men are shown as the main agents of violence whilst women, nature, the biological are its objects. This dramatically changes in *The Piano Teacher* in which Erika is shown to be the instrument of an insinuating all-encompassing violence, physical and mental. This novel also extends Jelinek's anti-romantic metaphors, superficially in the association of the classical music she teaches, as well as in the naïve figure of Klemmer and his romantic idealization of Erika. But there are many anti-romantic metaphors. Erika is seen by Klemmer as a sweet meadow (69) and towards the climax of the novel (and of the breaking of this illusion) Jelinek piles on other metaphors: Klemmer 'offers nature to Erika' (238), their rural sexual encounter is described as a 'ramble' (243) whilst Erika is said to 'stink' and her skin is blood blistered as a result of open-air sex (249). Erika imagines her body as something to be 'grazed on' (224). When in bed with her mother she (like Paula's mother, above) finds the birdsong outside their window 'irksome' (236). Her mother is a 'malevolent plant' (277), art is a 'porno mag' (86) and human culture is 'gruel' (189) and a 'pitfall of scythes and sickles mounted in concrete' (194).

There is a somewhat discordant postmodernist stylistic quirkiness in Jelinek's later novels, particularly *Lust* and *Greed* and *Rheingold*, although this starts in *The Piano Teacher*. In *Wonderful Wonderful Times* the style is modernist – seen in the novel's multiple time frames, motivated objects a-la-Nabokov ('Go on, eat me, there may be worse times ahead', admonishes the spurned slice of bread and margarine' (170). But in *The Piano Teacher* it is as if Erika's own, violently self-harmed, body parts have independent status: 'She assigns difficult tasks for her body, increasing the difficulties by laying hidden traps wherever she likes.' (This is immediately complemented by an anti-romantic metaphor:

*She swears that anyone, even a primitive man, can pursue "the drive" if he is not afraid to bag it out in the open (111).*

Consciously mixed metaphors interrupt the narrative: an imagined predatory man in the woods is likened to big bad wolf and 'she will spot him from far away and catch the sound of skin being torn and flesh ripped. By then, it will be late in the evening. The event will loom from the fog of musical half-truths' (50). When the sound of Erika's piano recital reaches the outdoors, her mother and grandmother are said to 'bask in their own hubris' (37).

But it is the later novels that become more marked by postmodern play whilst still concerned with anti-romanticism. At many points in *Lust* Biblical vocabulary (i.e. 'verily', 'unto') and Old Testament phraseology are adopted. Off-the-cuff puns and ironicized mixed-metaphors like 'he tries out ever new positions to kick his cart down

his wife's quiet waters and start paddling like a maniac' (31) regularly clutter, pull-back the reader from conventional expectations of reading a novel. The narrator of this novel is leadenly interventionary and much less restrained than in earlier manifestations such as in *Women as Lovers*. In *Greed* these postmodern elements continue but Jelinek still continues in the anti-romantic vein. The murdering police officer Kurt Janisch's female victims are shown to have become cloned by the fads promoted by cosmetics and fashion industries that they all look alike, like dolls, a fact that serves to thwart detection of any particularities in their abduction. The postmodernism continues, here marked at many points by absurdist logic and surrealism, like a mix of Lewis Carroll and Dada:

*The woman has been warm all this time, for days now; yet as if out of embarrassment, to distract attention from herself by pointing at herself, she tumbles out of her container, meals would be astonished, for no other reason, than to be taken out and polished off (210).*

The later novel *Rheingold* and the dramatic monologue 'Shadow, Eurydice Says' are a difficult read, inchoate, allusive and highly metaphorical, but appropriate, perhaps when dealing with the meta-language of European myth. Both these works, however, are unsurprising developments when considered in the light of Jelinek's anti-romanticism. She reevokes these classical legends and figures, the Rhein Maidens and Eurydice, to suggest a lost feminist anti-romantic heritage. In *Rheingold* Jelinek's earth goddess Enra, in contrast to Wagner's redemptive figure, appears as a vengeful spirit. The Rheingold itself becomes a metaphor of the corruption of nature by money, capitalism, greed. Jelinek's Eurydice is a shadow that is also vengeful, associated with anti-romanticism ('nature will vanish after me') and who has 'no exchange value'. Eurydice rejects the aestheticized sign of the woman she has become in classical myth and talks of 'slits, not feelings'. Women will have to stop being shadows: 'little girls too are not seen but have to voice their desires'. And, if the 'female sex is everywhere – those girls in their slippery slits' are agents, 'pissers' who would 'love to have more orifices, so they can be wide open and ready.'

The later works continues Jelinek's very first concerns with taking an axe to the sexual violence and violence against nature hidden by the ideology of romanticism. But now the axe is honed, it cuts deeper into the historical oots of romanticism found in classical myth. The postmodern novels, particularly *Rheingold*, are difficult reads, and Jelinek's manner of telling acts, consciously, as a drag on the readers' eyes, slowing the flow, making us think, dwell, consider the legacy of romantic myth. But Jelinek's postmodernism, multiplying what were minor stylistic features of the early novels, still continues her feminist retelling of romantic myths long dominated in their telling by men.

## Annie Ernaux

Annie Ernaux's short yet complex memoirs are extremely vivid evocations of working class, white female experience in mid-late 20th century France. Ernaux has a very original voice which resonated with me even though my experience of women (and men) is as a man. As gendered, aged, 'raced', classed subjects we all suffer repression and oppression and the sting of painful experiences in our various unique ways. But when someone articulates an individual voice to such experience the telling by someone as skilled as Ernaux is always compelling. On the other hand, Ernaux's sociology is somewhat blunt, stereotypical, and her concern with class less precise than that of gender and old age. But her strength as a writer is in her themes of time and memory and how autobiography and memoir as narrative forms might remain truer to experience than the autobiographical fiction of writers like Proust and (in Ernaux's more direct criticisms) Marguerite Duras.

I was intrigued by Ernaux's reference in *The Years* to Poulet's historical and phenomenological book *Studies in Human Time*, something that seems to have been overlooked in academic studies of her work. *The Years* is a relatively late memoir by Ernaux and it is one in which she, not exactly programmatically, but consciously pulls together her mature thought on how the relationship between memory, time, and the form(s) of narrative might be deployed in order to reveal written truth to experience that lies inarticulate, intuitive, enshrouded in her/one's past.

Ernaux cites Poulet in the context of general academic influences on her in her years as a student, the citation very brief and transitory and no attempt is made by her to convey what Poulet's position in his study of human time actually is. But Poulet outlines major historical changes in literary and philosophical-theological formulations of time. He starts by noting, firstly, the medieval religio-social sense of time, 'Angelic time', a time when time wasn't thought of as moving progressively like it does in its modern sense as a type of medium. This was the time marked by waiting for the rebirth of Christ the Redeemer. Poulet quotes St Bonaventure who saw this time as one of 'Grace' in which: 'the permanent habitus dwells in the sanctified being' (24). Poulet then moves along a fairly conventional historiographic outline of major developments, perhaps we might call them epistemes or regimes, in human time - this approach reminded me greatly of Bakhtin's periodization of popular culture in his *Rabelais*.

So, the time of the Renaissance is depicted as marked by festival time and seasonal recurrence; then the Reformation and Calvinistic ideas of the time of predestination of souls; the Enlightenment and its consequent rationalising of time – this is the ego-centric time of the Cartesian cogito. The Enlightenment was also marked by a sense of time as chronological - something that passes forever and no longer has a redeemable nature either in the second coming of Christ or by seasonal rites and the anticipation of resurrection/recurrence. The 18th century is thus much marked by anxiety about time (and many other things), the start of Romanticism and highly ego-centric experiences of time (Poulet instances Condillac's idea of time 'as a

succession of instants of consciousness but also a consciousness whose interior progress constitutes a life and a history' (41).)

After this introduction, Poulet goes on to look at how such changes in these 'regimes' of human time are to be found in the literature of the eras. His chapter on Proust notes that the medieval idea of redemptive time is found in secular, quasi-romantic form in Proust's spontaneous, triggered, involuntary memory. Involuntary memory thus acts critically against more historically absolute conceptions of human time deriving from the Enlightenment, but it also has something of a redemptive character seen in medieval ideas of 'grace':

*[The Proustian] being [is] always recreated, always refound and always relost, as the human being is in all thought since Descartes, depending also on a precarious grace, as does the human being in all religious thought whether of the Reformation or of the Counter-Reformation, the Proustian being in the final count attains to this total structure of itself which human existence had lost after the Middle Ages. (339)*

I am guessing that Poulet's chapter on Proust would have been read by Ernaux when a student since she acknowledges Proust in many of her memoirs. Like Proust, Ernaux wants to evoke Truth, testimonial, where memory figures as redemptive act. Such capital-T True memory is an act of grace in contemporary-secular form, evoking past experience from loss or 'oblivion' (*Simple Passion* 30). However, Ernaux doesn't find redemption in an instant of recovered time, as Proust does, but rather in repetition resulting from a willed, conscious practice of *reversing* time by the act of writing - the actualization of memory in narrative, the willed pursuit of memory. Thus, in *Simple Passion* she thinks about returning physically to Venice in order to 'reverse time' and evoke past happiness of her, now over, affair:

*Sometimes the urge actually to return to Venice, to the same hotel, the same room. Throughout this period, all my thoughts and all my actions involved the repetition of history. I wanted to turn the present back to the past, opening on to happiness. (28)*

Chloe Taylor and Robin Tierney in separate studies note the relevance here of some of the ideas of post-structuralist theorists like Foucault on the confessional and Deleuze on Repetition. Taylor argues that Ernaux's hope to repeat experience, good or bad, is part of a more general institutionalization of repressive discourses in society (Taylor, 23). Tierney, in somewhat critical Foucaultian mode, notes that confession is not really subverting-of but intrinsic-to the operation of modern capillaries of power. Taylor is also critical some of the personal claims to Truth in Ernaux's memoirs, particularly when they attempt to make more general claims to Truth on the part of all women (11).

It is true that, generally, Ernaux engages with memoir as a literary form in order to produce historically-based Truth to past experience, particularly in relation to the major social categories of gender, class and age (i.e. her mother) underlying that experience. In *Simple Passion*, Ernaux directly states that she considers repetition as integral to re-finding time, a means to the reversing of it (28). Tierney and Taylor

object to the linkages made between the two sides – social and personal - of her 'acts' of memory. There is no doubt that Ernaux makes a claim to Truth for her work, its status as testimonial, in terms of revealing social conditions underlying individual experience: of the possibility of demonstrating these Truths via the narrative form of personal experience. This is underlined in her conscious distancing of her work from fictional representations of personal memory in writers like Proust or Duras. She states that Duras' novels 'save appearances' (*Simple Passion* 33), they are 'ironic' because they depart from facticity:

*I am merely listing the signs of a passion, wavering between the 'one day' and 'every day' as if this inventory could also be to grasp the reality of my passion. Naturally, in the listing and description of these facts, there is no irony or derision, which are ways of telling things to people or to oneself after the event, and not experiencing them at the time. (Simple Passion 18)*

In *Positions* Ernaux indeed identifies a paradox in her writing in that the more vivid her memories become the less sociological they are: this is a dilemma of truth derived from a subjective point of view (*Positions* 23). She goes on to state how *hard* it is intellectually to develop truth to experience in memoir as opposed to fictionalized form:

*I find it more difficult to dig up forgotten memories than it is to invent them. One's memory resists – I cannot rely on personal reminiscence. (Positions 46)*

In *Simple Passion* she argues for the need to suspend moral judgement in the writing of memoir (11), but in writing about one's past one has authority due to the distance in time in which to reflect honestly upon past events (23). Kawakami notes of *The Years* that it is Ernaux's desire to create a position of truth/honesty to (past) experience. Kawakami contrasts the concluding passage of *Remembrance of Things Past* which is in the 1st person conditional tense, and the conclusion of *The Years* which is in a 3rd-future tense. Kawakami states this contrast of preference for different pronouns show the temporal distinction between Proust's fictional voice(s) and that of Ernaux's which creates a more 'impersonal, and clearly less fictional space' (12). Taylor, similarly, argues that Ernaux's movement between different pronouns in *The Years*, sustains her claim of adopting/prioritizing a position of 'transpersonal-I' (11). She goes on to quote Ernaux on the "certainty of the *need* to write on the 'history of a woman in time and in History'". This can be seen in *Cleaned Out*, where Ernaux often argues that Truth is a categorical standard.

But I am not sure that Ernaux sustains, or even claims, a trans-historic or transpersonal position of Truth. Truth is never independent of personal experience of social conditions, or of its writing-discursive (re)construction. That is why repetition, her continual return to past experiences of abortion, of failed affairs, of aging parents, of class, in her memoirs is so marked. An idea of Truth is claimed in her work, but it is nearly always qualified, relativistic, depending on the quality, rigour

and recognizability of the evocation of personal experience, either of self, others or of social conditions.

Related to a more relativistic idea of truth in Ernaux is the part that embodiment plays in her thinking about truth to personal experience. Roland Champagne notes that Ernaux is concerned to find her 'internal time', embodied time, in distinction to what he calls 'monumental' or exterior regimes of time (4). Anyone reading Ernaux cannot fail to note how often bodily secretions, sweat, menstruation and pee (this later word figuring regularly, usually as a verb, and a somewhat strange preference for the childish 'pipi' in preference to a more adult-connoting (masculine?) 'pisser'). Champagne discusses this in terms of 'menstrual time' (3), and 'profane time' in Ernaux. The latter time is notable in *A Frozen Woman*:

*The church they sometimes take me to when there are grand processions is vast, dark, and I am alone. I feel like peeing in a nice way, tingling and sweat. I crouch at the foot of the flaming pulpit, and want to go so badly that it burns inside me, but it doesn't spurt out. Then I notice the priest staring at me…my desire becomes excruciating. (31)*

Similarly, in *I remain in Darkness*, Ernaux refers to Paul Eluard's poem 'Time is Overflowing' (42), and in *Happening* she writes of 'time flowing inside and outside of me' (19). In her memoir of abortion in *Happening* Ernaux's ideas come across in a memoir that is *embodied*, involving the extraction of, in this case, painful physically-embedded memory of abortion. But she is also aware that embodied memory is not a 'primitive memory' or something which 'choses to portray the past as a basic juxtaposition of light and shade, day and night' (47). Embodied memory is, ultimately, a type of pragmatic-discursive act, the evocation of deep bodily flows, or their stoppaging, is one of the more graphic tropes Ernaux uses to evoke her own past, and also act as an example of how anyone might want to make their past experience re-emerge.

As noted above, when Ernaux considered returning to Venice in order to evoke a happier time in her affair, she argues that physical, material spaces/places also embody time. In *The Years* she notes that her past 'selves…continue to exist in these places. In other words, past and future are reversed. The object of desire is not the future but the past…' (66). She comments that even if the back street abortionist's tenement building she went to has been gutted and redeveloped, nevertheless her past time continues to haunt the place. This is 'palimpsest' time (or materialized time – see *A Simple Passion* (18), a time found inscribed under layers of later experience (*The Years* 159).

Embodied time is marked in *A Simple Passion* where the 'outsidedness' of sexual intercourse to the absolute/monumental regime of time is 'meaningless and yet a reality' (34). Champagne notes this as a highly individualized time that is marked by moments of ecstasy or *jouissance* (10). But in these moments so thoroughly 'out of time' Ernaux does not find in them Proustian grace, or anything like Poulet's idea of

medieval Grace. Kawakami argues that Ernaux doesn't actually find either grace or 'joy' in involuntary memory, as in Proust. Instead, he sees in Ernaux a position in which any moments of *jouissance* are the conscious product of writing, a witness to the intense memory that 'actualizes' them (Champagne, 8). Thus, in her memoirs Ernaux wants to reevoke past time, to save past experience from 'oblivion'. But this is not redemptive, as Poulet thought of in relation to Proust, a past experience freed from some faded regime of time. Rather, surely, if anything it is an act of retribution.

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## Lucy Ellmann Ducks, Newburyport,

This is a strange novel which from the front cover onwards seems unsure of its status as a novel. Assuredly, yes, it appears to be a modernist novel, in style, and a contemporary novel in its concerns with American gun culture, male sexism, the position of women as housewives. But its literary and generic status? A brash front cover quote from *Cosmopolitan* states that '*Ulysses* has nothing on this' is probably ironic, particularly as it is counterpoised to one from the *Observer* which calls it, significantly, a '*wildly* [my emphasis] ambitious and righteously angry portrait of contemporary America'. It is a heavy, near 1000 pages, novel, but its modernism is light. It's shyness on this count can be seen in the often childlike tone of voice of the housewife narrator, and certain graphic features, like the map in the appendices which looks like one from *Swallows and Amazons* seem to confirm this. As a vaguely modernist novel the text, its graphic or *characterful* features are important and Ellmann includes the conventional ones of changes in font-size, bold, lists, etc. Perhaps her more innovative element in this is the relentless appearance of hundreds of acronyms throughout the text.

The woman's voice is often angry about the state of Trump's America (although, when Ellmann began writing this long novel would Trump actually have been on the

horizon? It is noticeable that she hasn't published for quite some time before this novel) but it is also a somewhat contradictory voice, quite simplistic in its concerns then fractured by abstruse knowledge of ecological and natural sciences. The voice is often witty in its conscious pursuing of the absurd connections between mundane, experiential knowledge but then it is often confoundingly abstract as abstruse knowledge appears.

The 'internal' monologue bundles up thoughts, ideas, but generally the associations between one or other concept of words dissipates quickly and defy rationality (for me, this is a good thing, but for other readers perhaps a majority?). The reader may think that this is just willful space-filling. At many places the reader is jarred by the intrusion of self-reflections on the part of the narrator, like on page 135 where she states wearily 'what is this with this constant monologue going on in my head'. Again, as I noted above, the voice is fractured by simple-mindedness and abstract knowledge and I think that rather than being at home with the modernist novel, a genre with its roots in the hierarchical compartmentalization of knowledge, this should have rooted itself in the post-modern stylistics of hypertextual lateral knowledge. This is a Google age novel because the lists, the chaotic logic of its chains of association, the mixing of abstract knowledge – superficially adopted – with the experiential knowledge of the narrator indicate that, this, time. I doubted, because of this, the authenticity of the voice of the character: but I don't think Ellmann intended it to be a postmodernly unreliable one.

But this potentially postmodern, ironic, novel of contemporary America is not one because it resorts, particularly towards its end, to a conventional drawing together its plots: it must conclude, a stopper must be put on the bottle, that recurring problem with even great modernist novels like *Ulysses*. The fragmentary experience of time, of the fluctuating nature of the internal time of the monologue, of compression and extension is betrayed by the relating of cause and effect, of the, for example, constant reflections on gun violence in America and its occurrence in the narrator's own life when the delivery man goes on a rampage in her kitchen. This event comes across as too melodramatic because the generally unconventional, internal-temporality of monologue in the novel is betrayed, short-circuited (in an earlier situation, when the narrator is trapped in her car by a snow storm, the resort to conventional caesura is avoided, not particularly well but at least less jarringly, by a four dot break after which the scene returns to the kitchen where an explanation follows of how she got out of the fix.)

## Zadie Smith

She is a novelist with an academic background that infiltrates her novels as much as the essays collected here. In this she reminds me of Saul Bellow, one who can discuss intellectual ideas through either comment or the mouths of characters as

much as formally in his essays (See the recent collection *There is Simply Too Much to Think About*.) She is a brilliantly, clinically, clear writer, yet her prose conveys character, her particular mix of gender, race and class consciousnesses coming through. But she moves around in her novels from one concern to another, I find it hard to think in general terms of 'a' Zadie Smith novel. However, I was drawn to this book by a review which picked out 'Meet Julian Bieber' for its discussion about the nature of social relationships in a celebrity-obsessed culture. Drawing out the common root of Bieber and Buber Smith contrasts Buber's ideas about the meaningful nature of other-relatedness in *I-Thou*. She argues that celebrity culture makes us turn people into objects rather than persons/beings, which Buber says depends on a much more moral grounding. But there is something rather dubious in Smith's elaborating her argument by analyzing the lyrics of 'Boyfriend', or even more morally dubiously referring to Bieber's leaked email/texts concerning his breakup with his girlfriend.

Smith is on stronger ground, though, when she writes about Kureishi's *Buddha of Suburbia*. She focuses on the ambiguity of life experience of 'second generation immigrants' (not her phrase, these are scare quotes) in contrast to the reductionist nature of political correctness in multicultural thinking. This novel is definitely not PC, but it's truth to the experience (I was going to write to the 'particularity of experience', but the sense of experience she is getting to is not *that* limited, in fact it is closer to being 'universal) of being subordinate to the dominant culture is not reducible to conceptions of that experience as a form of political identity. Universalists are on less contradictory, less hypocritical, grounds than cultural relativists, those who would stress the politics and experience of being as 'difference'. In the novel, as a form, we can understand, experience, this distinction, as it is best suited to working through, describing and developing, the nuts and bolts of human identity that are recognizably human. This is why the experience one gets from reading a novel is particular, literary, and in the best fiction, ethical. It is why, also, so often consciously political novels, think of soviet social realists like Sholokhov, or English equivalents like Richard Llewellyn, struggle in their attempt to convey class experience in this most bourgeois of literary form. Due to its profound individualism the novel demanded a literary public that was educated enough and able to experience it as individual readers. Smith recognizes this of *The Buddha*, a book which refuses to 'toe the party line' and 'received ideas about class and society are gleefully upended'. Smith's title, *Feel Free* summarizes exactly this position of the basic tenet for the novelist to break free from conventional expectations. Smith references in this way both Bellow (referred to as 'Bellow, Sam' in the index) and Philip Roth as Kureishi's companion writers, their writing made space for themselves to subordinate characters who are "Jewish" always to character – being politically correct about being Jewish is what they were revolting, writing against. One has only to look at the reaction within the Jewish community to the publication of *Portnoy's Complaint* and *Ghost* to see he was getting this right.

## Albinati's The Catholic School

This is a huge rambling novel, pretty much damned by Colm Toibin in a recent NYRB for its imprecision and sheer length. I found this book important because of what it conveys to the reader about western cultural, bourgeois, and general social conditions providing the grounds for rape and the deeply-ingrained misogynistic male mind-set underlying it. Although the nomination of the Catholic School in the title of the novel might suggest that this is the key institutional source for that culture of rape and violence towards women, it actually isn't key. Rather culture, psychology of the mid-20th century male and the bourgeois family, come across as the more significant sources - the actual 'schools' for rape.

At places in this novel, as it lumbers relentlessly along, Albinati's narrator, a writer and sometime prison lecturer, as if to remind *himself* stops and states what he thinks the novel is all about:
*"The story that his book is going to tell, alongside other stories, ought to show how, on at least one occasion, on the basis of groundwork laid long ago by numerous contributing factors, around the middle of the eighth decade of the last century - the 1970s - the priest's got their formula wrong."*

This might seem to suggest that rape culture is a question of schooling, pedagogy, particularly of the catholic school variety, a view that Toibin seems to follow when he blames the institution, comparing the Catholic school to the boarding school bullying in Musil's in *Young Torless*. But then:
*"The central story of this book will confirm that you can be obedient students by day and nevertheless go out to kidnap and rape underage girls by night."*

So, maybe we think this is going to be about conformity, like Moravia's *The Conformist*. No, or not really, although it is about rape culture. Then he says, again trying to keep a grip on his subject:
*"This book of mine also belongs to the genre of true crime exploitation, though at arms' length, as we'll see."*

But again, not really, or not so consciously as this suggests. So the writer/narrator's summary posts did not help this reader and their status is like that when at one point the narrator asks himself as he rambles on:
*"Does it have anything to do with the events described in this book? Yes and no."*

This is often the case, one has to plough on in the rambling reflections of the writer/narrator. But it is correct I think that that which ineluctably shapes the phenomenon of rape, is a shape which is complex, irregular, and just cannot be understood *pat*.

So the story of *The Catholic School* may seem to be about a single act - the notorious kidnapping and rape of two young girls and the murder of one of them. One might say agreeing with the narrator that this event is the 'axis' of the novel, appearing as it does well into it. This is the CR/M (the Circeo/Criminal rape and murder) that is constantly, fleetingly, referred to in the lead up and the aftermath sections of the novel/book (this seems to be Albinati's own ambivalence about the genre of *The Catholic School*). The CR/M is described as monstrous, a dreadful

assault, notorious and widely shocking late 1970s Italy, a huge event. But, strangely, when the event actually arrives and is described it is conveyed in prose and style that is almost pedestrian and the act seems ambiguous, non-specific in depiction. It is pretty anti-climatic and the reader feels something is missing. Certainly, by this stage any idea that the novel belongs to the genre of 'crime exploitation' goes totally out of the window because it isn't lurid or graphic.

I was puzzled by what Albinati was doing. He signalled that this is a novel about *the* real crime, that which all of Italy knew about, but 90% of the 1200 pages hardly touch the actual crime. And many of what are presented as integral dimensions of the CR/M are also never fully developed. One would think that maybe theological-ethical questions of sin and guilt might be integral, especially as many of the elements of the story seem to arise from the Catholic school and the behaviour fostered there either by the priest/teachers or by the particularities of the cohort that included the rapists or their associates. But sin is rarely mentioned as a concept in the novel - just 92 times in all (such counts being one of the benefits of reading this as an ebook, alongside not having a doorstopper in one's lap) and in nearly all senses is inconsequential when it does appear.

Similarly, porn, surely at its apogee in the 1970s, at least in terms of its crudest and casual forms of objectification of women and girls, although regularly addressed as an issue by the narrator, tends to take a secondary role. He notes the affinity press reporting and crime fiction, have in feeding on the porn industry:
*"…the flesh trade, continues to expand limitlessly until an unbroken pornographic continuum that takes in territories of crime reporting, given that these territories are where excitement runs most unbridled, expertly camouflaged behind the mortal condemnations that we customarily reserve for true sties and events…"*

Porn is thus seen as a reflection of the broader culture of abuse and hatred of women underlying the individual CR/M, but it isn't the essential issue (as, say, 1970s feminist writers like McKinnon had it) - it has only the status of being a reflection of a much broader, institutional, problem.

Also of really only secondary consideration is the role/legacy of Fascism in the broader 'field' of the crime (I use 'field' in the way Bourdieu uses it. At places Albinati seems to refer to Bourdieu's sociology. He talks, for instance, of intellectuals being the 'dominated fraction' of the dominant class, a phrase that echoes the French sociologist, and Albinati is very much a sociological novelist.) Fascism is discussed at some length around half-way through the novel. There seems to be an underlying epistemology at work here which privileges form over content, and in relation to fascism this is presented as:
*"Fascism in fact constitutes the dilemma of unrepresentability; and perhaps for that reason, it loved to depict itself in whole healthy forms. The specificity of fascism is that it is, as we say of certain diseases, non-specific, which means that it does not consist of its ideology, but rather the way it conducts around that ideology an action and an identity."*

This view of signfication, of significance of form over content, reveals much about how the writer sees the world. It also explains the sort of novel *The Catholic School* is: where any meaning of anything like the CR/M has to be situated in the widest of sociologically-understood landscapes.

So porn, fascism, sin/morality, seem to be only elements in this landscape or field of rape, rather than either central or critical figures that might explain it alone. But although the field of the CR/M is presented in the broadest, most rambling of terms, there are significant features in the field. As a sociological novel the characters are nearly all 'flat'. Plot is also substituted with the delay and then denouement of the actual CR/M. There are few topographical descriptions of place and little or any real feel for the flow of time. But Albinati states at one point "now we come to the bourgeois family that this book is about…" and what the novel is good at is in the analysis of the bourgeois family's role in the field of rape, its role in setting the behaviour marking male sexuality and sexual aggression. Even in Italy the 1970s was a time when society was becoming more permissive, but the consequences were ambiguous:
*"Free to do what? Many of us experienced scraps of old-style family oppression, hybridized or alternating with a permissiveness that was the product still of our parents' specific beliefs…"*

But this period is seen by the narrator as a time when fathers, 'sires' as he calls them, become something of a 'nullity', and compared to mothers in the novel, hardly figure except for (the Huck Finn' boy) Arbus's whose dad publicly in the Rome press announces his homosexuality and abandons his family for a gay lifestyle. Albinati develops this theme when he evokes Thomas Mann and Moravia in the sections on the role of the bourgeois family. From Mann, he argues our understanding of the centrality of the bourgeois family:
*"It is therefore a class that progresses by contradicting itself, that defines itself by its opposite. Perhaps that is why as…Thomas Mann maintains, it is the class with the greatest number of points of contact and things in common with the human race as a whole."*

An overstatement, but with some element of insight, at least in regard to white 1970s' European societies like Italy. In relation to Moravia, Albinati argues that, in fact, indifference is seen as part of the legacy of the 60s ("a new attitude surfaced in the history of family relations, namely indifference, a reluctance to interfere, to judge…") but it is not really as significant as Moravia made it out to be:
*"…if only the sin of the bourgeois was indifference…if only the Bourgeois really did let life slide off his back…Quite the contrary, there is no creature on earth more highly alert than he. His existence unfolds under the banner of an incessant comparison and measurement between himself ad others."*

The character of the male progeny of the bourgeois family, then, is located as a key factor configuring the wider culture/field of rape - this is the *class* figure seen by Albinati as the epicentre of the contemporary manifestation of rape as a social phenomenon. The bourgeois male is the one who is particularly 'fucked up' by the retrogression of father figures. So this is a very conservative position and feminist historians, analysers of patriarchy might have something to add or contest here. But, perhaps, it is balanced by the odd, strange, obsession in the novel, only indirectly addressed as a causal factor in rape culture (as is the case with most of Albinati's opinions.)

This is the figure of the bourgeois *mother* (again, and aside, it is strange that Toibin did not pick up on this in his NYRB's review, given his own perceptive work on the literary and other influences of mothers.)Throughout the novel many of the schoolboys' mums are depicted as being sexually attractive to the boys. The boys consciously note the way mums dress, their attractiveness, their sexual allure. The boy Max's mum is described as having "bronzed shoulders, her bronzed back, the neckline that revealed freckled flesh…". I found it hard to believe that real boys consider their own, or their mates' mothers in this way - surely they were more likely to see them as nonentities, like their fathers. Falling somewhat into cod-psychology Albinati directly evokes the figure of the mother as a deep psychological animus in the boys' sexuality:
*"It is the angry bite to the mother's breast. By brutalising that breast, we escape from the figure that dominated the most important years of our lives. We take vengeance on our mother by devastating the wombs of women…".*

So, related to this, we find that Stefano, one of the rapists, is reported to have had sex with the mother of one of the other boys. But the psychology here seems weak, a bit crass, a repercussion of the general flatness of characters in this novel. But in a surprising reversal the narrator states:
*"In the early years of psychoanalysis, people learned for the first time that many non-sexual acts had a hidden sexual source; now, in contrast, we realise that may sexual behaviours have a non-sexual motivation."*

But into this Freudianism gets mixed the underlying epistemology of form over content we have seen at work in the novel. So it is not the content, sexual gratification of any particular sexual form, but sex as a container for apparently non-sexual motivations. Sex between men and women is actually, then, a displacement of what Albinati calls 'penis embarrassment' - something that he sees as common to all (bourgeois) men. Women, in contrast, are seen by men as psychically-threatening because of they have no immediately visible sex organ. This absence is threatening to men whose sexuality is based fundamentally on symbolism that is phallic.

So the young men at the catholic school are shown to be, a little like Moravia's conformist, shy, burdened by the cultural demands associated with masculinity, fearful of being called, for example, 'queer' ('if anything what we did hate was the thought that we might be taken for queers…') because it is the form, here queerness, rather than the actuality which is the more significant, cultural, sociological, animus. So, when the narrator goes to high school he befriends a gym teacher who is also a painter of nudes, nicknamed Courbet because of his subject matter, the nude and female sexual organ (as in Courbet's 'Origin of the World'.) The female sexual organ is described, though, as a 'gross field of nothingness' and Courbet argues that all men are basically queer or half-queer and that when having sex with women they are really in auto-erotic stimulation. They also are seen as being/becoming androgynous:
*"…men who really like women sooner or later desire not only to have women, but also to* be *women…"*

In the Catholic school it was 'alright to be half-queers…but not an iota more'. If you were becoming identified there as a 'faggot', however, you had to find some other boy to bully and call a faggot.

These are some features of the cultural and social field that Albinati situates the singular act of rape and murder in the CR/M. The purported centrality of the Catholic school, given so much significance in the novel's title, is not really the key locus for understanding the crime. The crime itself is diminished, a mere cameo appearance in the much broader field of bourgeois culture, a culture marked by a warped form of male sexuality. The actual 'school', then, is not the Catholic SLM Institute, but the 'school' of a bourgeois familial culture that forms its young men into a perversely misogynistic mind-set, a warped psyche, a sexuality where rape and a murderous compulsion to dominate/deny women's own sexuality is inevitable.

Yet the figures of the priests at the school are interesting in so much as they seem to represent, consolidate or configure many of the factors of bourgeois toxic masculinity that the novel traces. If actual fathers are very much absent in the novel, the priests appear in the guise of old-fashioned, Thomas Mann' types of bourgeois respectable fathers (their tunics 'inspire[d] respect in me…'.) This is shown to be an illusion at the end of the novel when the narrator recalls what happened at a school camp and he reflects more broadly on the priests' 'mutilating' vow of celibacy:
*"what moral authority might I acknowledge, for what reason on earth should I allow myself to be guided, aided, instructed or even just advised by a man who has so horribly mutilated himself? By giving up the only thing that makes this beastly life worth living at all, namely, love?"*

He goes on:
*"This is not renunciation, c*ecil nest pas une pipe*: there are times when Catholicism appears to be a forerunner of surrealism."*

The pedagogy of the Catholic school is based fundamentally on type of muscular christianity. But this 'formula' is seen as wrong, and perhaps allied with the perversity of the priestly life, this much at least is a part of the 'story this book is [going] to tell…'

But sociologically the 'school' of rape is much larger than the school run by the priests - it is an entire social field, a moral field corrupted at its core - via the media, by salacious movies, the lurid sex-crime novel, 'then you can see that the degree of moral involvement can stretch out to touch the whole of society'. The issue, the moral issue of rape is made up of the 'absence' of women; either at the catholic school, the absence of female genitalia, the absence of wives for priests, absence of women in the army (a lot in this novel about rape as an act of war):
*"…in middle school it already starts to sound odd, it's becoming increasingly clear that half the world is missing in there, but the unhappiness of developing male bodies is still thus protected from all embarrassing comparisons and can be vented almost entirely in sports and fisticuffs…"*

Albinati offers no easy solutions - like a Bourdieusian (but passionate) sociologist he rather plots out the field of forces involved in the cultural, moral, political dimensions of rape culture. The contrast can be made to Ben Lerner's *Topeka School*, a novel with similar concerns to *The Catholic School.* A recent review in the NYRB describes when the character Adam, like an avenging Adam, knocks the phone from the hand of a man who'd been abusing his female partner: the reviewer noting that the novelist's position on western masculinity is captured in this action. But Albinati's

novel isn't conclusive in that kind of way: it simply fizzles out. But for me, having endured the long meandering journey into the school of rape, I feel I have experienced many of the dimensions that go into making the culture of rape.

And for me this is the reason why *The Catholic School* is an important novel, with an important moral purpose. Yet the actual language, diction and syntax, of the writing betrays the lesson. There are long sections, particularly in the last third of the novel, when the narrator describes his sexual affairs with women. The prose in these sections is unconsciously (?) objectifying of women:
*"I slid into her. She gasped. She held her breath. And with her voice in a falsetto she asked if it had excited me to hear about Romina, about the two of them together. Had she done it intentionally? 'Do you…do you want me to tell you more…?' 'No. Shut up now' - that wasn't why. But she went on talking. And I went on fucking her…"*

But maybe Albinati's approach, mainly sociological, falters when it comes to producing a counterpoint, an alternative discursive, linguistic-syntactic, an alternative *erotics* to convey his argument - we have to look elsewhere (Kristeva?) for that.