

Janus Head

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Chasing After Nothingness—Reading Zhang Ailing Through Žižek's Interpretation of Lacan

Wei-Hsin Lin

Abstract

This article provides a Lacanian reading of one of the short stories of Zhang Ailing, a Chinese writer. It is intended to explore the possibility of employing Lacan's theory of the symbolic order to the interpretation of a Chinese text, as well as to broaden our understanding of Zhang's work and to unlock the potential of the applicability of Lacan's ideas. The final part of the article will draw on Žižek's interpretation of Lacan to illustrate how Zhang, unlike most of her contemporaries, is exempted from the obsession with China and how this obsession can lead us to the conclusion that whatever we chase obsessively in life is nothing but nothingness.

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Introduction

The aim of this article is to examine the symbolic worlds of Zhang Ailing and the character Pan Ruliang (潘汝良) in her short story "Nianqing de Shihou" 年輕的時後 (In the Years of Youth). It will

demonstrate how the tragedy that strikes Ruliang is a literary transformation and representation of the writer's own agony caused by disillusionment. In addition, the arguments will also explicate why the disillusionment can be regarded as the inevitable result of Zhang Ailing's obsession with China, which will be set against C.T. Hsia's essay, "Obsession with China: The Moral Burden of Modern Chinese Literature," to reach the conclusion that modern Chinese writers' obsession with China is actually the testament to their obsession with the West.

The article is divided into five sections. The first provides a summary of former psychoanalytical studies of Zhang Ailing's works. The second examines the relationship between fantasy and desires, expounding how fantasy makes symbolic order subjective. The discussion will be based on Lacan's theory about symbolic order and on Žižek's elaboration of the idea of "objectively subjective fantasy." Both of these will be applied to the studies of two autobiographic essays by Zhang in section three, and then to the understanding of "In the Years of Youth" in section four.

The final section will synthesize the arguments put forward in the previous sections to spell out the fantasies and desires that grip C.T. Hsia and the modern Chinese writers, whose obsession with China is chastised by Hsia. Moreover, by engaging Žižek in the conclusive part of this article, I also want to reason why the Žižekian analyses of Lacan can help bring another dimension to the reading of Zhang Ailing's writing and illustrate Zhang's notion that no matter how disillusioned we are, we will never stop chasing something that is never there.

The Tradition of Psychoanalytical Reading of Zhang Ailing's Work

The application of psychoanalytical theories to Zhang Ailing's works has been carried out by many researchers and its applicability is now well-established. Zhang Xiaohong adopts Freud's concept of fetishism to examine female protagonists' addition to clothes in Zhang Ailing's stories. Ray Chou applies the Negative Oedipus Complex to profile the masochist mothers Zhang Ailing portrayed. Likewise, Hu Jinyuan takes a Freudian approach to the understanding of the masochistic sides of these maternal characters. Li Zhuoxiong looks at the protagonists in Zhang's "Heart Sutra" and "Jasmine Tea" through the lens of Freud's ideas of narcissism and the Electra Complex, as well as Carl Jung's theory of persona.

Psychoanalytical studies of fantasy and desire represented in Zhang Ailing's works are also another common ground where many research papers converge. In Edward Gunn's book, the Freudian exegesis of the subconscious mind is employed to manifest how an impersonal force in the environment can act out the fantasies of Zhang Ailing's characters. Liao Xianhao connects Lacan's thoughts about the reality of our desires to the atmosphere of Shanghai-ness created in Zhang Ailing's writings. Chen Huiyang pursues Freud and Lacan's concepts to investigate the fantasy of the female spy in Zhang Ailing's later short story, "Lust, Caution."

These are just a few of the many works demonstrating the prevalence of psychoanalytical reading of Zhang Ailing's oeuvre. They offer us a window into a special affinity between her fictions and a psychoanalytical understanding of the world as the distress her characters suffering can be regarded as a display of their psychological states. Aware of the substantial research this academic territory has been irrigated with, I attempt to use Lacan's theories to forge the link between the author and her text, illustrating how Zhang Ailing adapted her personal trauma and reincarnated it in

her short story. Furthermore, to frame this article in a greater picture and also shed new light on C.T. Hsia's essay, I will argue how the obsession with the West portrayed in Zhang's two essays and this short story can be seen as parallel to the obsession with China amongst modern Chinese writers that C.T. Hsia observes, and how two kinds of obsession that are antithetical to each other can actually be equated through Žižek's interpretation of Lacan's views on the interactions between fantasy, desire, and the symbolic order. Finally, with all these discussions, I will locate the point where the philosophies of Lacan, Žižek and Zhang Ailing can converge.

A Symbolic Universe and Objectively Subjective Fantasy

Lacan's work formulates the idea that "to be fully human we are *subjected* to this symbolic order," and everything is "ordered, or structured, in accordance with these symbols and the laws of the symbolic, *including* the unconscious and human subjectivity"¹. Moreover, a speaker as a subject does not possess the signifier, but rather "it is the signifier that determines the subject"² [emphasis in the original]. In other words, one's subjectivity is defined by the signifier designated to him and, as Bruce Fink elaborates, the signifiers can be recognized as our names:

The empty set as the subject's place-holder within the symbolic order is not unrelated to the subject's proper name. That name, for example, is a signifier which has often been selected long before the child's birth, and which inscribes the child in the symbolic. A priori, this name has absolutely

¹ Homer 44

² Homer 47

nothing to do with the subject—it is as foreign to him or her as any other signifier. But in time this signifier—more, perhaps, than any other—will go to the root of his or her being and become inextricably tied to his or her subjectivity. It will become the signifier of his or her very absence as subject, standing in for him or her.³

Accordingly, the signifier becomes the representative of a subject. It describes the individuality of a person and “this is all the more necessary in that, before he disappears as subject beneath the signifier which he becomes, due to the simple fact that it addresses him, he is absolutely nothing.”⁴ Thus, in a symbolic world, a subject can be reduced “to being no more than a signifier.”⁵ As a result, “the signifier is what founds the subject—the signifier is what wields ontic clout, wresting existence from the real that it marks and annuls.”⁶ A signifier thus becomes “the founding word,’ statements that confer on a person some symbolic title and make him or her what they are proclaimed to be, constituting their symbolic identity.”⁷

The omnipresence of the symbolic order can be attested by Lacan’s words that “the human world, the world that we know and live, in the midst of which we orient ourselves, and without which we are absolutely unable to orientate ourselves, doesn’t only imply the existence of meanings, but the order of the signifiers as well.”⁸ Hence the laws and obligations of the symbolic order not only

³ Bruce Fink 80

⁴ Lacan qtd. in Richard, Fink and Jaanus 265

⁵ Lacan 207

⁶ Fink 80

⁷ Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* 45

⁸ Lacan 189

render us our symbolic identities, it also provides us with signifiers and symbols: the means through which we shape our desires and project our fantasies. Furthermore, when we examine the relation between fantasy and desire, “the first thing to note about fantasy is that it literally teaches us how to desire.”⁹ That is to say, we do not desire things we do not have. Instead, we fantasize about things we do not have and then we desire to have them. The latent peril of fantasy, however, is that it prompts us to crave things that not only do not belong to us but also do not exist at all. It is only when we conceptualize reality through the rose-colored glasses of fantasy do we merge reality with fantasy and entertain the illusion of procuring things that are not there.

Žižek’s discussion of the idea of fantasy as something “subjectively objective” illustrates the formation of this kind of illusion:

Fantasy rather belongs to the ‘bizarre category of the objectively subjective—the way things actually, objectively seem to you even if they don’t seem that way to you. When, for example, we claim that someone who is consciously well disposed towards Jews nonetheless harbours profound anti-Semitic prejudice he is not consciously aware of, do we not claim that (in so far as these prejudices do not render the way Jews really are, but the way they appear to him) *he is not aware how Jews really seem to him?*”¹⁰

Therefore, fantasy is assigned by Žižek to the category of “the unknown knowns’, things we don’t know that we know—which is

⁹ *How to Read Lacan* 47

¹⁰₁₀ *How to Read Lacan* 52

precisely the Freudian unconscious, the ‘knowledge that doesn’t know itself’, as Lacan used to say, the core of which is fantasy.”¹¹

The issue we should concern ourselves in this paper is: what is the “subjectively objective” fantasy, the “unknown knowns” of Zhang Ailing and Pan Ruliang? As will be illustrated in the following sections, the Western world they yearn for—the world which objectively seems perfectly agreeable to them—is where their fantasy anchors. However, what they are not aware of is the fact that it is the subjective nature of this fantasy that makes the West appear so alluring to them.

This “subjectively objective fantasy” that haunts Zhang and of which she reincarnates in the fantasy and disillusionment of Pan Ruliang will be the first focus of my analysis. What is equally critical in my argument is that the disillusionment that sears the hearts of the writer and her character demonstrates that they are disenchanted not only because their fantasies are shattered, but also because they pursue a reality that has never existed. In conclusion, I will demonstrate that it is the annulment of the magic of fantasy disguised as reality that exempts Zhang from being one of the modern Chinese writers whom Hsia considers to be obsessed with China and, consequently, we are able to reverse Hsia’s observation by claiming that at the core of these writers’ obsession with China is actually their obsession with the West.

The Objectively Subjective Fantasy in Zhang Ailing’s Life

The symbolic world created in Zhang’s short stories can be traced

¹¹ Žižek, *How To Read Lacan* 52

back to the symbolic order she was subjected to in her life. In her essay “Siyu” 私語 (Whispers), Zhang describes how her world is divided into two symbols of diametrical opposition, the one of brightness and the other of darkness. While her mother stands for the bright world, her father defines the antithetical one:

My mother was gone, but something of her atmosphere lingered in my aunt's house: an exquisitely carved table with an interlocking “puzzle-piece” mosaic on top, gentle pastel colors, wonderful people whose lives were beyond my ken constantly bustling in and out the front door. All the best things I knew, be they spiritual or material, were contained in those rooms [...].

On the other side was my father's house. I looked down on everything there: opium, the old tutor who taught my little brother to write his “Discourse on the First Emperor of the Han Dynasty,” old-style linked-chapter fiction, languorous, ashen, dust-laden living. Like a Persian worshipping at the altar of fire, I forcibly divided the world into two halves: bright and dark, good and evil, god and the devil. Whatever belonged to my father's side was bad.¹²

The world of Zhang's father is the epitome of the decadent life of people living in the early Republican years when China was too weak to defend against Western aggression. He symbolizes China at the turn of the century: lethargic and impotent, gloomy and bleak. Refusing to face reality, he idled his life away smoking opium. As a result, his room is characteristic of “clouds of opium smoke, hovering like a fog over an untidy room strewn with stacks of tabloids.” When Zhang “sat there for a long time,” she “would

¹² Zhang *Written on Water* 156

always feel that” she “was sinking deeper and deeper into its meshes.”¹³

However, the world that belongs to her mother is a total contrast. She represents the positive side of the West, a world of vitality and promises. She also lives up to Zhang’s imagination as a progressive free spirit when she divorces her father and goes to England to study, a decision that makes her a Chinese feminist vanguard much ahead of her time. Afraid that her future will be buried in her father’s house, Zhang stakes all the expectations for life on her fantasies about her mother’s world:

On the positive side, I was full of vast ambitions and expansive plans. After high school, I would go to England to study... I wanted to make an even bigger splash than Lin Yutang. I wanted to wear only the most exquisite and elegant clothing, to roam the world, to have my own house in Shanghai, to live a crisp and unfettered existence.¹⁴

The desire for a footloose and uninhibited life encourages Zhang to escape from her father’s house in order to start a new life with her mother. Entering the world of brightness, Zhang soon realizes the carefree and delightful western life her mother’s world is synonymous with is nothing but a delusion.

Zhang begins to be racked with the pain of disillusionment when she comes into conflict with her mother because of financial problems. To ask for an allowance from her mother becomes one of the most humiliating experiences in her life. In another essay, “Tongyan Wuji” 童言無忌 (From the Mouths of Babes), she gives

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

a poignant portrayal of the inevitable embarrassment incurred by the issue of money:

At first, the act of asking my mother for money had a fascinating, intimate charm. This was because I had always loved my mother with a passion bordering on the romantic. She was a beautiful and sensitive woman, and I had had very little opportunity to be with her because she had gone abroad when I was four, coming home only infrequently and going away again soon after each visit. Through a child's eyes, she seemed a distant and mysterious figure. There were a couple of times she took me out when, merely by taking my hand in hers as we crossed the street, she would send an unfamiliar thrill through my body. But later, despite the straits in which she found herself, I had to press her for money every second or third day. The torments I suffered on account of her temper and my own ingratitude little by little extinguished my love for her in a stream of petty mortifications, until nothing was left of it.¹⁵

The sporadic contacts with her mother in her childhood inspire Zhang to create a perfect image of her. Beautiful but distant and mysterious, the woman in Zhang's imagination smacks of the features of a movie star, a stranger whose occasional visits can gladden her heart. However, as she gets to know the real woman her mother is, her romantic fascination is also torn into pieces by the practical concern of money.

Toward the end of "Whispers," Zhang is flustered and puzzled by the looming fact that her mother and the Western world encoded

¹⁵ *Written on Water* 4

in her life are not what Zhang wants them to be:

I had grown used to being alone at my father's house, which produced in me an abrupt desire to grow up and be responsible for myself. To play the sheltered daughter in straitened circumstances seemed a terrible burden. At the same time, I could see that my mother had sacrificed quite a lot for me and that she doubted whether I was worth the sacrifice. I shared her doubts. I often went all alone to the top of the apartment building to take a solitary walk around the roof. The white stucco Spanish walls cut sharp lines across the blue of the sky, shearing the world into two. I would lift my face to the fierce sun above, standing exposed before the sky and its judgment and, like every confused adolescent, hang suspended between overweening pride and intense self-loathing.

It was from that time onward that my mother's house was no longer full of tenderness.¹⁶

When her ambitious plans for a prosperous future became lackluster, we see Zhang pacing back and forth on the roof of her apartment building, anxious and bewildered, wondering whether she was worth all the sacrifices her mother made. She fell prey to the sense of uncertainty when her mother's house was deprived of the warmth that once urged her to flee away from her father's world.

To identify the "objectively subjective fantasy" that Zhang regards as reality, we need to first take notice of how she engages her parents in the symbolic order by reducing them to two antithetical

¹⁶ *Written on Water* 161)

signifiers: her father, the murky languid and ghastly gloomy world of a Chinese opium addict, and her mother, a romantic adventure to the West where an uninhibited life has been promised. However, as people are proclaimed to be are not what they really are, the symbolic identities Zhang imposes on her parents, rather than reflecting their true natures, only reveal what she desires: a successful career accompanied by a fulfilling life that can only be realized in the West. What causes her disillusionment is the fact that the irritable and self-regarding mother she deals with is at variance with the charming, distant, and mysterious mother she imagines. By the same token, the ideal, superior Western world that Zhang considers as the objective reality is nothing but her subjective fantasy. The glamorous Westernized mother and her glorious Western life never exist, but Zhang does not know that it is her fantasy, something she should know is not real but illusionary, which projects a delusive reality she craves and strives for, until disillusionment sets in and the scales fall from her eyes.

The Objectively Subjective Fantasy of "In the Years of Youth"

In this story, the protagonist, Pan Ruliang, is also caught in the polarity between two worlds, one of which signifies the life of Ruliang's family, who are enmeshed in the spiral of spiritual stagnancy:

Ruliang was a patriotic boy, but he did not give much favour towards Chinese people. The foreigners he came to know were either movie stars or good looking and elegant models from cigarette or soap advertisements. The Chinese he was acquainted with were his family. His father was not a villain. Since he was occupied by his business all day long

and rarely stayed at home, Ruliang hardly met him. Thus, he was not averse to him. But, after dinner, his father always drank alone in the living room, with some fried peanuts. The wine made his face flush with a greasy shine, and then he looked like the boss of a small and shabby shop. He ran a soy sauce factory. Anyway, he was also a boss. However... as long as he was his father, he should be the distinguished one among others.¹⁷

The ambiguous feeling Ruliang experiences about his father is engendered by the fact that, though he does not detest him, he does not respect him because he is not outstanding. Not ambitious in his career, his father is content with a humdrum and petty life. The greasiness his face glows with becomes a symbol of a life that is too dirty and sticky to get rid of it. Ruliang's father stands for the squalid world that he wants to detach from. To reinforce this, Zhang pictures him adoring the foreigners who, showcasing their beauty in the movies or advertisements, are in sharp contrast to the mediocrity in Ruliang's *Chinese* family.

In addition, the image of the charming movie stars is associated with the beautiful but mysterious and distant mother Zhang describes in her essay. Again, the world outside China is designated the signifier of a noble and dignified life. Unlike Zhang, however, Ruliang's mother is also part of the world that drives him away. His mother and sisters only make him disparage his family even more:

As for his mother, she was an uneducated woman suffering from the repression of feudal morality. Her life was but a sacrifice [...]. When something distressed her, she did not

¹⁷ Zhang Ailing *Quanjì* 6, 184-85

cry. Instead, she found fault with her children and made them cry. When she was free, she would listen to Shaoxing opera or play mahjong. Ruliang had two elder sisters who were also college students. They loved wearing cosmetics. They were not pretty but did not resign themselves to their plain faces. Ruliang did not want women who were like his sisters.¹⁸

For Ruliang, the Shaoxing opera and mahjong characterize the vulgarity of the Chinese life. He disdains these types of entertainment because they expose the boorish nature of his mother. But when his sisters try to defend themselves from being ordinary by applying make-up, their efforts seem to him so futile and stupid, as if there is nothing they can do to change their mediocrity. It is not surprising that “what Ruliang despised most were his brothers and sisters. They were dirty, lazy, irresponsible, and immature.”¹⁹ His discontent with people living under the same roof with him gives birth to a signifier of an ordinary Chinese family blemished by its squalor and vulgarity.

Ruliang is infatuated with coffee and medicine, the representatives of the superiority of western civilization, by which he can distinguish himself from the Chinese philistines:

He had a religious belief in coffee, not because of its aroma, but because of the coffee pot, its complicated structure, its scientific silver colour, and its glittering glass lid. It was due to the same reason he chose to be a student of medicine, largely because medical equipment looked brand new, shiny and bright. Taken out from the suitcase one after another, they were cold metal products, delicate and omnipotent... When

¹⁸ *Zhang Ailing Quanjì* 6, 185)

¹⁹ *Zhang Ailing Quanjì* 6, 185

he became a doctor and put on the clean and sterilized white coat, the father drinking with fried peanuts, the mother listening to Shaoxing opera, and the tacky sisters, would all be kept away from him.

This was the kind of future Ruliang expected. Now, Cynthia was included in his future.²⁰

His desires for the silvery coffee pot and shiny medical equipment are passed on to the Russian girl he is enamored with: Cynthia 沁西亞, the ideal of the foreign woman, the signifier of the best possibilities of life outside China.

Ruliang feels he has known Cynthia even before they meet because her appearance resembles the profile of the face he is used to sketching in books because the profiles he draws never resemble the face of a Chinese. The fact that the profile does not look Chinese, on the one hand, confirms that Ruliang assuages his repulsion of his Chinese fellows by a deluge of fantasies about non-Chinese. On the other, it foretells his encounter with Cynthia, the embodiment of the profile he has been familiar with since his childhood.

Cynthia, the typist working for the principal, is reading a newspaper in the lounge of the school where Ruliang attends. Ruliang recognizes her at first sight:

When her face moved to the other side, all of a sudden, Ruliang was surprised. Her profile was exactly the same one he had been sketching since he was a child.

No wonder that when he registered at school, he felt the

²⁰ *Zhang Ailing Quanjì* 6, 190)

Russian woman looked familiar to him [...]. Her yellow hair lost its blonde beauty. Maybe there should be some sunlight to endow it with the pure goldenness belonging to the picture of Saint Mary.²¹

The color of her hair is not as attractively blonde as that of the holy goddess, which foreshadows incompatibility between what Ruliang wants Cynthia to be and what she really is. Ruliang is not aware of the difference yet, as he is overwhelmed by their unexpected encounter. He feels as if they have known each other for decades and their reunion elevates him.

They strike up a conversation when Cynthia notices the profiles on his book, which leads to her assuming that Ruliang has been in love with her for a long time and therefore kept sketching her. The possibility of love brings color to their faces. To develop their relationship, they promise to tutor each other in German and Chinese. The night before their first class, Ruliang soaks himself in the infatuation with Cynthia:

Ruliang did not fall asleep until very late that night. Cynthia... she thought he had a crush on her. It was a misunderstanding... She thought he loved her, and she gave him such a chance to be acquainted with her [...]. She was a capable girl. She worked in a foreign company in the daytime and also had a part-time job at a night school. She was just about the age of his sisters but she was not like them [...]. Maybe he really loved her but he was unaware of it. She had already known it—people said that women were more

²¹ *Zhang Ailing Quanjì* 6, 186

sensitive than men. He felt strange about their encounter. He never believed in destiny, but this was really unusual.²²

When compared with his sisters, Cynthia is obviously superior to them, the former being diligent and competent, the latter wasting their time on cosmetics. Not resorting to destiny, which might bring them together, Ruliang instead credits Cynthia's sensitivity for perceiving their love. The inexplicit feeling that Ruliang has toward Cynthia results from being unaware of the fact that he does not fall in love with Cynthia, but with the reflection of his desires for the foreigners in advertisements and for the scientific authority represented by the coffee pot and the medical equipment.

Ruliang arranges their first date. It is his first step into a world without Chinese. On a winter morning, he puts on his best suit and cycles to Cynthia's:

In Ruliang's belly was the warmly hot breakfast. In Ruliang's heart was overwhelming happiness. It happened quite often that he would feel happy for unknown reasons. But, today, he thought, it must be because of Cynthia. The dogs in the wilderness barked. The bell in the school rang. Strings of golden tinkling bells hung from the cloudless sky. Cynthia had curly yellow hair. Each curl of her hair was like a bell. Lovely Cynthia.²³

The parallel between the "warmly hot breakfast" and the "overwhelming happiness" communicates the physical and spiritual warmth that Ruliang experiences. The sounds of barks and bells prelude his first date with a beautiful foreign woman. The cloudless

²² *Zhang Ailing QuANJI* 6, 188-89

²³ *Zhang Ailing QuANJI* 6, 189

sky forecasts the sunny day in Ruliang's heart. The golden color of the strings is connected to the acoustic image of tinkling bells, which is then transformed into the visual of Cynthia's "curly yellow hair." On his way to Cynthia, the world around Ruliang becomes eminently satisfying. Ruliang garnishes his first date with fairy fantasies in which his happiness, the fair weather and the pleasant sounds of dogs and bells, are all awarded by Cynthia.

Out of surging eagerness and excitement, Riliang arrives early for their date. However, when he enters her office, his passions wane. His first sight triggers the collapse of his symbolic world:

He paused for a while—she seemed to be a little bit different from the person in his memory. As a matter of fact, he came to know her yesterday, and she should not already be in his memory. It was a short time since he knew her, but he had spent a long time missing her—he thought too much, and his thought became unrealistic. Now he saw a girl of no amazing beauty. Her hair was yellow, but not uniformly. One layer was dark yellow, the other was light yellow, and the one close to the scalp was the greasy colour of chestnut. Maybe she had just finished a simple lunch. When she saw him, she rubbed a paper bag into a ball and threw it to a wastebasket. While she was talking to him, she was also worried whether there were still crumbs on her lips. She kept wiping the corner of her mouth carefully, but was also afraid she would smear her lipstick. Her legs were hidden under the desk. She only wore a pair of flesh-coloured stockings. She took off her high heels, for the sake of comfort. Ruliang sat opposite to her. He would either kick her shoes or her legs, as if she was born with many legs.

He was annoyed, but he at once blamed himself. Why did he

feel dissatisfied with her? Because she took off her shoes in public? She had to sit at the desk for the whole day, and her legs must become numb. No wonder she needed some slovenly time. She was only flesh and blood. She was not the abstract and illusionary dream he dreamed of.²⁴

Cynthia's defects make Ruliang realize she is far from the perfect foreign woman he thirsts for. Not impressively beautiful, she is as plain as his sisters. Moreover, the color of her hair has a yellow tint of greasiness that connects Cynthia to Ruliang's father. The dirty and revolting world of greasiness Ruliang's family indicates overlaps with the orderly and tidy world Cynthia suggests and the gap between them is thus bridged. Throwing away the paper bag carelessly and laying her feet bare in public, Cynthia does not act in accordance with the demure grace that, as far as Ruliang's fantasy is concerned, is inherent in a foreigner's nature. He feels uneasy when sitting opposite to her, as he does not know how to avoid kicking her legs, which is, however, their first physical contact. To avoid being confronted by disillusionment, Ruliang tries to explain away Cynthia's bad manners. However, he cannot deny that she is only a human being. She is not the flawless incarnation of the profile he had created.

Though their first date is a disappointment, their relationship continues. The more Ruliang learns about Cynthia, the more he is disenchanted:

Now Ruliang understood Cynthia more. But he did not want to understand her, because once he knew what kind of person she was, he could not dream about her anymore.

²⁴ *Zhang Ailing Quanjia* 6, 191

One time, he brought her a box of snacks. She opened a book and used it as a plate. Pieces of crumbled sugar and walnuts scattered all over the page, but she cared nothing about the mess and just closed the book. He did not like her slovenliness. But he tried his best to ignore it. He would rather notice and memorize the more poetic part of her. He knew he did not love Cynthia. He fell in love for the sake of love.²⁵

Cynthia is no longer the lovely girl with curly hair who will bring into Ruliang's life the pleasant weather, the dulcet barks of dogs and the tinkling sounds of bells. Step by step, she drifts away from the signifier he originally reduced her to and unveils the sloppiness that is large to him but is imperceptible to her. Cynthia is on a par with Ruliang's family in terms of her mediocre appearance, her unrefined manners, and her sordid lifestyle. Although Ruliang indulges himself in the unrealistic part of her and consoles himself with the lingering romance of his fantasy, he cannot help but confess the harrowing truth to himself: he does not love Cynthia, only what she signifies. To be in love with a foreign woman allows him to embark on the fulfilment of his fantasies for an elite life outside China.

Before he proposes to Cynthia, Ruliang is informed of the news of her wedding. Dazed and dumbfounded for a moment, Ruliang still decides to attend the wedding, and get himself drunk in order to drown his sorrows. He cannot have guessed that there would be no wine at the ceremony. What he witnesses, instead, is the most relentless display of the disillusionment of a romantic wedding:

²⁵ *Zhang Ailing Quanjia* 6, 193

There were only a few people in the church, but the whole place reeked of rain shoes. A priest put on a cloak that looked like a golden stained carpet. His hair touched his shoulders. It flowed and almost merged with his golden beard. He could not stop sweating. Drops of sweat were dripping from the roots of his hair and beard. He was a tall and good-looking Russian. But his face blushed and swelled, as he could not quit drinking. He was an alcoholic, spoiled by women. He was so sleepy that he could hardly open his eyes. The leader of the chorus who stood beside the priest resembled him in his face and dress. But he was smaller. His voice, however, was loud. He sang and danced with excitement. He pulled his neck straight, the sweat flowing down along it. It was so hot that he had lost all his hair. A wedding assistant came out quietly from the back of the altar. His hands held a salver. He was a suntanned Chinese with a pockmarked face. Under the dark robe that the monks were often dressed in was a pair of white cloth slacks. On his bare feet was a pair of slippers. He also had long hair, dark and greasy. It hung over his cheeks and made him look like a ghost. He was not the ghost from the book of Chinese strange stories, *Liao Zhai*. He was the ghost appearing around the public burial-mounds where the termites crawled in and out.²⁶

Cynthia's world is no longer basked in cheerful charm. Her wedding is like a funeral that transforms the church into a gloomy tomb shrouded by the smell of damp, dirt and sweat. The poetry of the wedding is further devastated by the nonchalant and careless attitudes of the attendants. The priest and the chorus leader are

²⁶ *Zhang Ailing Quanjì* 6, 197-98

foreigners without the elegance that glamorizes the movie stars and the models in the advertisements. Moreover, their terrible perspiration fills the church with a sour and foul smell, contrary to the clean and sanitary atmosphere belonging to the silvery coffee pot and the medical equipment which had inspired Ruliang's fantasy about the West. The Chinese assistant has long, dirty, and greasy hair that covers his disgusting, pockmarked face. His appearance functions as a counterpart to the squalor of the priest and the chorus leader. Cynthia is unable to act out her symbolic identity as an impeccable foreign woman. In fact, she is swamped in the same sordidness that Ruliang's family signifies. The distinction between the foreigners and the Chinese disappears. Her wedding serves as an apocalypse that foretells the impending crushing disillusionment.

Shortly after her wedding, Cynthia, in financial straits, asks Ruliang to find some part-time jobs for her. But then she falls ill and just barely survives typhoid fever. When Ruliang comes to visit her, she lies in bed, half-conscious:

Her jaw and neck were thin to the extreme. They were like the pit of a candied date drained of juice. The pit was only clothed with a thin skin of pulp. But he could still recognize her profile. It did not change a lot. It was the same line from the corner of the forehead to the jaw, the line that Ruliang could draw by instinct. From then on, Ruliang never sketched in his books. Now, they were very clean all the time.²⁷

The final passage of the story reminds us of the beginning where

²⁷ *Zhang Ailing Quanjì* 6, 199

the profile drawn by Ruliang's left hand is described as looking like a person who has "just survived a severe illness."²⁸ In doing so, the story starts with an implicit foreshadowing of the disillusionment Ruliang will suffer when his dream for the foreign world that once enriched his life like a juicy fruit has shrunk into a pit.

In this story, as in two of Zhang's essays, there is an opposition between China and the West, respectively bearing the symbols of repulsive hopelessness and exhilarating hopefulness. In the knowledge that the factual existences of Ruliang's family and Cynthia become nothing other than the signifiers that found their subjectivities, we can then move on to identify Ruliang's "objectively subjective fantasy," which turns out to be similar to that of the author: life in a foreign land where he can be purged of vulgarity and mediocrity, realize his potential, and stand out as someone adorned with enviable eminence and achievement that his Chinese compatriots can never emulate. The world that boasts of its advanced science and medicine, no matter how objectively real it seems to Ruliang, is merely his wishful fantasy. The image of the emaciated Cynthia is an epiphany that discloses the plain truth that the angelic foreign woman who he hopes can levitate him to the splendid heaven Western civilization is bracketed with never exists. Nor does the better life he chases in the world outside of China. His incremental awareness of how he fantasizes reality finally leads him to disillusionment while it also exposes to us our "unknown knowns," "the disavowed beliefs and suppositions we are not even aware of adhering to ourselves, but which nonetheless determine our acts and feelings."²⁹ It is not the possibility of materializing what we fantasize that keeps our fantasies alive. On the contrary, it is exactly the nonexistence of what we fantasize that immortalizes

²⁸ *Zhang Ailing Quanjì* 6, 184

²⁹ *How to Read Lacan* 52

it. Only when our fantasies in no circumstances can be proved false can we continue to be deluded in an objectively subjective reality. It is this brutal confrontation with the “unknown knowns” that deprives Ruliang of the instinctive skill of sketching, his instinctive skill of fantasizing.

The study of the contrastive signifiers China and the West are conferred in Zhang’s autobiographical essays and in one of her short stories as well as the exploration of the “objectively subjective fantasy” Zhang and her character shares subsequently channel our attention to C.T. Hsia’s remarks about modern Chinese writers’ obsession with China where, again, we can tell that what China symbolizes is the inverse of the West.

Modern Chinese Writers’ Obsession with China

In his essay “Obsession with China: The Moral Burden of Modern Chinese Literature,” C. T. Hsia deals with the obsessive concerns about China that are ingrained in the works of most modern Chinese writers. He argues that all the major writers of this modern phase—between the traditional Chinese literature that precedes it and the Communist literature that immediately follows—“are enkindled with this patriotic passion,” which derives from their reflection of “China as a nation afflicted with a spiritual disease and therefore unable to strengthen itself or change its set ways of inhumanity.”³⁰ Accordingly, the obsession with China that haunts modern Chinese writers registers the Chinese intellectual’s worry about the decline of the nation, “a new self-awareness brought about by the long series of defeats and humiliations they have

³⁰ Hsia 533-34

suffered since the mid-nineteenth century.” Moreover, it also betrays their pressing attentions to humanitarianism as they denounce “the shame” that has been “visited upon” China due to its “moral bankruptcy, its callous unconcern with human dignity and human suffering.”³¹

Modern Chinese writers share the disgust of the degradation of their countries with their Western contemporaries. This does not put them “in the mainstream of modern literature,”³² because, as Hsia points out, the failure of the Chinese writers to earn international applause also hinges on their obsession with China. When the Western writer “automatically identifies the sick states of his country with the state of man in the modern world,” the Chinese writer, though also probing the “spiritual sickness” of his country, does not extend his vision beyond China. “The Chinese writer sees the conditions of China as peculiarly Chinese and not applicable elsewhere.”³³ The limit of his vision determines the limit of his achievements. Denied the laurel of universally renowned authors, the Chinese writer is also blamed for a conceptual mistake. While he “spares no pains to depict its squalor and corruption, [he] leaves the door open for hope, for the importation of modern Western or Soviet ideas and systems that would transform his country from its present state of decadence.”³⁴ In other words, his reluctance to “equate the Chinese scene with the condition of modern man”³⁵ is nourished by his fantasy about the power of Western civilization. Therefore, to repudiate the validity and efficaciousness of practicing the modern Western systems “would

³¹ Hsia 534

³² Hsia 536

³³ Hsia 536

³⁴ Hsia 536

³⁵ Hsia 536

have blotted out hope for the betterment of life, for restoration of human dignity." As a result, "the price he pays for his obsession with China is therefore a certain patriotic provinciality and a naiveté of faith with regard to better conditions elsewhere."³⁶

The obsession with China makes the hope for "a wealthy, strong, democratic, and technologically armed China"³⁷ surge in the heart of modern Chinese writers. The fear of the imminent downfall of China and the intense expectation for the improvement of the country through Western means cause Chinese writers from the late Qing period to the early Republican years to relentlessly expose and ruthlessly castigate the dark side of Chinese culture. Their burlesque stories that satirize and reproach the squalid Chinese and the rotten Chinese civilization are the "self-examination" of the "paralytic condition of China." Furthermore, they are suggestive of the writers' "passion for human dignity and freedom."³⁸ Their steadfast faith in humanity, on the one hand, allows modern Chinese writers to "partake of the modern spirit"³⁹ that accuses the modern world of its impersonal environment. On the other, it fortifies the "indictment," made by two of the most influential Chinese writers, Lu Xun 鲁迅 and Lao She 老舍, "of China as a cannibalistic society."⁴⁰ What is implied here is that the writer's quest and request for humanitarianism contribute to their literary accomplishments but also lead to their disdain and detestation of China.

If we examine Hsia's article further, we can find that his exegesis of

³⁶ Hsia 536

³⁷ Hsia 535

³⁸ Hsia 543

³⁹ Hsia 554

⁴⁰ Hsia 545

modern Chinese writers' obsession with China lays bare not only these writers' obsession with the West but, more significantly, his own obsession with the West. This frame of mind comes into being because they believe that the West is politically, economically, and intellectually superior to China. This is the "objectively subjective fantasy" that Hsia harbors and, ironically, accuses modern Chinese writers of harboring. Compared with the dilapidated and corrupted China, white supremacy rings objectively true to them. Hence, the hope for eradicating the disease of China is pinned on drawing on the experiences of Western modernization. In like manner, Hsia asserts that if modern Chinese writers dare to "equate the Chinese scene with the condition of modern man" and consume themselves "with the passion of Dostoevsky or Tolstoy, of Conrad or Mann, to probe the illness of modern civilization," they would have already "been in the mainstream of modern literature,"⁴¹ statements that set Western literature as good models for Chinese writers to copy.

But the antithesis between China and the West denotes more than just the habitual mind-set of Hsia and these modern Chinese writers when they evaluate China's success or failure by Western standards. It drives us to enquire: if the dominant status of Western ideas and systems is but another subjective fantasy, what are the "unknown knowns" they are reluctant to face? To answer this question, we need to discover what their "real" desires are. As Žižek comments:

However, the thing to add...is that the desire staged in fantasy is not the subject's own, but the *other's* desire, the desire of those around me with whom I interact: fantasy, the phantasmatic scene or scenario, is an answer to: 'You're saying

⁴¹ Hsia 536

this, but *what is it that you actually want by saying it?* The original question of desire is not directly ‘What do I want?’, but ‘What do *others* want from me? What do they see in me? What am I for those others?’...at its most fundamental, fantasy tells me what I am for my others.⁴² [emphasis in the original]

Accordingly, a person’s desire is defined in relation to the desire of people around him. However, if one thing must be defined by another, it does not have its own identity or substance. Therefore, when China, its glory or decadence, is defined by the Western standards, the Chinese-ness does not exist. By the same token, when the West is defined by the backwardness of China, its superiority and ascendancy never exist. On this account, what Hsia and the modern Chinese writers he denounces both yearn for can never be factual reality. It is merely nothingness. Nonetheless, Žižek’s words also make us realize that fantasy helps us form an identity that will make us the object of others’ desires. It is this point that unveils the “unknown knowns” of Hsia and the Chinese writers put on his list: they make themselves the object of the desire of the West by being ready to prostrate themselves to whatever the West signifies. Even if this delusive assumption of the West--instead of renovating China and steering Chinese literature to the world stage--might just justify the West’s desire for colonizing China geographically, and for colonizing the Chinese mentally, they cannot desist from desiring and fantasizing because no one can live without having something to be identified with in order to be desired.

If we go back to Zhang Ailing’s writing to reason why she falls

⁴² *How to Read Lacan* 48-9

outside of the category of Hsia's account, the answer we can come up with is that it is not because she has never been obsessed with the West but because she is able to debunk fantasy camouflaged as reality. Rarely evincing the "peculiar interest for [...] obsessive patriotism"⁴³ that motivates many of her contemporaries to lash out at the vileness of Chinese culture, Zhang often finds her works liable to criticism for being nothing more than exposés of the depravity of the Chinese. Her portrayal and mocking of the negative mentality of the Chinese does not induce her to dwell upon the promise of western civilization and take it as the panacea for China's spiritual illness. In Zhang's stories, the Oriental and the Occidental bear the same weight of deficiencies, absurdities, and frustrations. Impervious to the sentimental passion for patriotism and immune from the fanciful worship for Western civilization, Zhang matter-of-factly points out that not only are our desires not our own but that what our fantasies galvanize us to chase is simply a nonentity. It is this unyielding nihilism that enables Zhang to disenchant the Orient and the Occident to which we are allured by their fictitious luster.

But can we stop chasing nothingness? Again, Žižek's perception of Lacan comes to our assistance here. In his book, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture*, Žižek recites a story about how the mystery of a black house deeply enchanting to people in a small village is de-mythologized by a young engineer coming from outside. The story is how people react at the moment of disillusionment. After the engineer declares that the house is nothing but an ordinary ruin, the men in the village who harbor the fantasy for a long time feel irritated:

⁴³ Hsia 534

The men are horrified when the engineer begins to leave, one of them wildly attacks him. The engineer unfortunately falls to the ground and soon afterwards dies. Why were the men so horrified by the action of the newcomer? We can grasp their resentment by remarking the difference between reality and the “other scene” of the fantasy space: the “black house” was forbidden to the men because it functioned as an empty space wherein they could project their nostalgic desires, their distorted memories; by publicly stating that the “black house” was nothing but an old ruin, the young intruder reduced their fantasy space to everyday, common reality. He annulled the difference between reality and fantasy space, depriving the men of the place in which they were able to articulate their desires.⁴⁴

Denied access to playing out their fantasies, the men burst into a fit of indignation and murder the person who wakens them up from the dream that seems to them objectively real. The brutality conveys the message that, without fantasy, to witness “everyday, common reality” is so unbearable that it may instigate violence and crimes. To kill is better than to be deprived of “the very fundamental fantasy that regulate the universe of his (self-) experience.”⁴⁵ The kernel of fantasy is hope; it is the hope for something better than the present and hope for achieving it. No one can live without “the hopes that cut us off from life. We are both poisoned and nourished by the act of hope itself.”⁴⁶ This is how life mocks our hopes, because “one of the things that destroy” our “chances of happiness is” our “hopes of achieving it.” We all

⁴⁴ Žižek 8-9

⁴⁵ *How to Read Lacan* 53

⁴⁶ Frayn XVI

live in our “various hypothetical futures”⁴⁷ that consist of nothing but our delusive fantasies.

In one of her earliest published works, “Tiancai Meng” 天才夢 (Dream of Genius), Zhang gave birth to one of her most memorable sentences. When lamenting over the conflict between her talent in writing and her inefficiency in dealing with chores, she ends this short essay with the following witticism: “Life is a gorgeous gown, swarming with lice.”⁴⁸ Zhang’s precocious intelligence contributes to this augural remark of her lifelong struggles for reconciling the promises of life, materialized as “a gorgeous gown” that appeals to her with its sordid reality, insinuated by a swarm of lice that harrows her. Although the “lice” is used as a metaphor by Zhang to describe her ineptness of handling the most common daily trifles, I think we should allow a more liberal interpretation here. If “the gorgeous gown” is the emblem of the most exhilarating possibility of life fantasy entices us to entertain, the “lice” allude to the undertow of the intrinsic void of fantasy that counterbalances its bright promises. The paradoxical coexistence of “the gorgeous gown” and the “lice” represents the irresolvable contradiction between fantasy and its nothingness. This is Zhang Ailing’s way of telling us that if we do not want to sink into total despair as Ruliang does, we have to keep chasing a phantasmatic reality while struggling to stave off the lice that constantly gnaw at us to confront us with the eerie truth: what we persist in chasing during our lifetime is nothing but nothingness.

⁴⁷ Frayn XV

⁴⁸ Zhang Dream of Genius 27

Motivations and Causes of the Climax and Decline of Classical Music

Frederick Kraenzel

Abstract

Biological, social, and technical causes of the splendor and decline of classical music are examined and found insufficient. Evidence shows that music involves unconscious motivation. The classical summit predominantly included part of the German Awakening, showing that this motivation was, at least in part, collective.

The German Awakening was a phase of the Western turn from religion to a world view centered on conscious human experience and power. The decline of classical music parallels developments in literature, science, and history as this world view approaches a stage of exhaustion.

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I. Problem, Strategy, Approach

Why did Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, and Mendelssohn create a consistent, if developing, style from 1760 to 1840? Why are there so many great composers during these years? Besides those named, Rossini, Weber, and Gluck belong to the period and style

while Chopin belongs to the period. Many people prefer the Baroque period that came just before it, but they too will understand my theme. Consider Mozart's symphonies and concertos and Beethoven's sonatas and quartets. Run them over in your mind. You will be likely to do so more easily than with any other music except that of J. S. Bach. True, there are artistic techniques and moods of triumph and melancholy that nobody had used so much before. Sheer inspiration, however, is what makes the music great. This inspiration is often shared, or at least hinted at, by the contemporaries I named. Schumann, Mahler, Berlioz, Verdi, Brahms, Chaikovsky, and sometimes Wagner, are often attended by this splendid vision too, before it dies away into a squall of short-lived experiments. The inspiration is dying out already in Mendelssohn's brief last years.

How did this inspiration come about? This mystery is made clear by several other related questions: Why is music written before 1700 not as admired, as often played and heard, or as inspiring to audiences as music of the greatest composers who wrote between 1760 and 1840? Why did the efforts of the great composers from 1840 to 1915 achieve results that audiences find on the whole less inspiring, less transporting, and less beautiful than the work of the great masters of the classical summit? Why did the classical style collapse around the time of the First World War when Ravel lost his compositional powers, Strauss, Elgar, and Sibelius ceased to compose, and the success of Stravinsky went into eclipse? Although occasional works by Prokofiev, Bloch, Respighi, Arvo Pärt, and others show that it is possible to do so, why has music rarely been composed in the classical style since? Why have no composers and no styles of the twentieth century found lasting and widespread favor comparable with that of the great classical composers?

I shall consider several possible explanations imputing the preëminence of the summit—and the subsequent decline and fall—to features of the conscious mind, society, and biology. For each hypothesis, I give historical evidence showing that while it may explain something, it does not explain everything. I believe it will become obvious that not even all these hypotheses can collectively provide a persuasive answer to these questions. I offer evidence that the inspiration of the classical summit involved a movement of the collective unconscious. What motivated both conscious and unconscious spirit in this historic wave of creation? I note that the climax of classical music has connections with other contemporary waves of creation: the German Awakening, the Romantic and Victorian eras in British literature, the progress of science at the same time, and the entire modern movement from a religious world view founded on the Bible to a human-centered view founded on experience. Finally, I make a few suggestions as to how these cognate developments in the human spirit may have worked on each other and on classical music in particular.

I cannot speak about all these things as a specialist. My experience is as a general reader, philosopher, teacher of humanities, and long-time listener. But a generalist like this is likely to be better placed than a specialist to conceive this inquiry and suggest its direction. A generalist can perceive literary movements that a musicologist might miss, musical developments that a literary specialist might miss, and scientific and philosophical forces that either specialist might miss. At the same time, a generalist is unlikely to provide the evidence that will definitively answer the question. So I can go no further than suggestions. Both generalist scope and specialist depth are needed to prepare a high place of vision for thinking persons.

II. The Classical Summit Discloses a Collective, Unconscious Inspiration

The crudest common-sense proposal as to why the inspiration of classical music peaked between 1760 and 1840 is that a rare constellation of talented musicians happened to be born then. Robert Jourdain writes that Camille Saint-Saëns, by all educational measures, had more talent than any musician of the classical summit.⁴⁹ The reader may recall Saint-Saëns as the composer of *Samson and Delilah*, *Carnival of the Animals*, *Danse Macabre*, and other pieces, but he never rivalled Mozart, Beethoven, or Schubert. This fits the idea that great talent is far more widespread than the inspired use of it.

A more persuasive proposal is that colleagues inspire each other with new ideas and competitive emulation. Unfortunately, this mutual inspiration does not explain the quality of the summit. An example of such collective inspiration is the Paris musical scene of the Second Empire (1851-1870) where Saint-Saëns, Bizet, Gounod, Massenet, Delibes, Franck, Offenbach, and others competed to produce an effervescent—but not sublime—movement. Another is the collective inspiration of Microsoft, Apple, and Intel in modern times. A third example of collective inspiration is the Russian Revolution. Far above these collective comedies and tragedies are several waves of creation with power to inspire great parts of the world, or even the whole human world, for many centuries. Examples are the philosophy of 600 to 300 B.C. in Greece, China, and India; Christian and Muslim faith; Renaissance art; classical music; and modern Western science.

⁴⁹ Robert Jourdain, *Music, the Brain, and Ecstasy* (New York: Morrow, 1997).

More spiritual ages talked of divine inspiration. A secular age discusses something unexplained.

Perhaps historical conditions liberated pent-up talents, which are commonly condemned to live underground while patronage and attention go to a vast herd of Pharisees and scholastics. For instance, the heavy tread of Prussian authority rolled over Germany in the nineteenth century, driving Heine, Marx, and Nietzsche into exile. A similar political and doctrinal flat-ironing has taken place in North America in the twentieth century, leading to a huge intellectual establishment ruled by doctrinal fashion and government priorities. By contrast, Germany from the Peace of Augsburg (1555) to about 1800 had the advantages of the city-states of ancient Greece and Renaissance Italy. Central authority, in this case the Pope and Holy Roman Emperor, was in abeyance. The map was a jumble of little kingdoms, fiefdoms, and free cities, each run by the edicts of its lord or its citizens. This gave artists and thinkers an unusual range of authorities to whom they could appeal. Bach was prized by the musical Duke of Cöthen, Goethe and Schiller were taken under the Duke of Weimar's wing, Handel appealed to George I of England, and Beethoven was patronized by the Archduke Rudolf von Habsburg. In America, patronage is granted by selection committees; in Germany, a creative person more often sought the favor of a powerful individual.

While the extinction of individual patronage may help explain the flat-ironing of America, can it explain why France and Britain fell behind Germany in music and philosophy? At this time, Britain produced a collection of poets, novelists, painters, and political leaders while France yielded an equally brilliant crop of scientists, writers, painters, and entirely different kinds of political leaders. Though both these nations possessed an avid musical public that

contributed generously to the careers of Bach, Gluck, Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, Weber, and Mendelssohn, French and British composers produced little of note between the death of Rameau in 1764 and the arrival in Paris of the half-French Chopin from Warsaw in 1830. Patronage may help things happen, but it does not determine what will happen. Some other source of direction is at work here.

A more potent factor in the glory of the classical summit may be the availability of new and powerful musical forms. Polyphony culminated in the Baroque. Polyphony is a musical form that blends different, highly individual voices and affords unsurpassed beauties of pattern and harmony. Its besetting weakness is that the demands of detail jeopardize its unity. Bach has no rival in the control of polyphony; however, he and other Baroque masters often resort to homophony. Homophony achieves unity by subordinating other musical means to a single theme. Its problem is to develop larger forms without falling into repetition or fillers. The theme and variations form a way of generating meaningful variety while keeping thematic unity. A further development is the ruling form of the classical summit: sonata form. Here, thematic hegemony is extended through developing two, three, or more themes related in form, mood, and key. These forms are given a language by tonality, or the system of keys and their relations. Perfected in the Baroque, tonality made possible a richness of musical expression heard nowhere else in history. The classical summit would be unthinkable without it.

Do tonality and sonata form explain the greatness of the classical summit? A perfected tonality surely gave possibilities to Mozart and Beethoven that Palestrina and Schütz did not have, and the perfecting of sonata form gave them possibilities that Bach and

Handel lacked. But Mozart and Beethoven shared these possibilities with hundreds of other composers of their time whose music is charmless and forgotten. There is still something unexplained in musical greatness. Furthermore, it is a power that a person can lose, as Mendelssohn and Schumann progressively lost. Nevertheless, it might be argued that Mozart and Beethoven as creative persons were not greater than, say, Lully and Purcell; they simply had more powerful artistic means. Perhaps Mahler was right when he remarked of Haydn and Beethoven: "Looked at with a grain of salt, they were not such great scientists as Bach." To sum up Mahler's view, Beethoven did less than Bach to discover the aesthetics and invent the forms of the classical style, but Beethoven reached a higher artistic level, from his command of the style's mature resources.⁵⁰

This hypothesis of maturity in form and technique provides a persuasive explanation of the fact that music written before 1700 rarely has the quality of some music written in the following two centuries. As for the summit, decline, and fall of classical music, we can make a hypothesis based on form and technique. From their predecessors, Mozart and Beethoven inherited tonality and sonata form. They invented a technique of thematic and harmonic development that yielded emotion, mood, and drama as never before. Once they had carried this technique as far as it could go, it lost creativity. It became formulable, reducible to directions, and subject to imitation. Creative musicians found themselves in danger of becoming the slaves of conservatory professors. Perhaps even worse, writing in the classical style grew accustomed, rather than a voyage of discovery. .

⁵⁰. Ernst Dedjé, "Stunden mit Mahler," in *Die Musik* (August 1911). Quoted in Norman Lebrecht, *Mahler Remembered* (New York: Norton, 1987), 254.

This guess is illustrated and supported by the fact that naturalistic painting went into eclipse sometime around 1870. Nineteenth-century naturalist painters were able to render light, space, color, and texture far more evocatively than photography itself. Having been perfected, the art was rationalized and became the property of conservatories, with rules and standards. Creative artists rebelled, beginning with the Impressionists, opening a period of unfettered experiment. Curiously but naturally, now that “modern art” is academically *de rigueur*, creative painters have returned to naturalism.

The hypothesis that the greatness, decline, and fall of classical music is a natural process of growth, maturity, and aging in form and technique explains the gathering exhaustion of classical music in the later nineteenth century and the hectic search for novelty in the twentieth. But it fails to explain one important fact: the classical summit was dominated overwhelmingly by Germans. Of the ten composers I named who worked between 1760 and 1840, eight are ethnic Germans. By contrast, the great composers of the Baroque are about equally distributed among Germans, French, and Italians. The great classical composers after 1840 are a pan-European lot in which Germans form perhaps the largest national contingent, but share the art with geniuses of Russian, French, Italian, Czech, Hungarian, Norwegian, Finnish, and English nationality. Why the predominance of Germans in the summit period? The resources of mature tonality, polyphony, and sonata form were equally available to other European nationalities.

What about work ethic, dedication, self-sacrifice? We can safely say that the German work ethic of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries was more dedicated than today. But the German Awakening, as we may call the years from 1750 to 1900, did not

occur until these centuries were half-over. And here we find the one striking correlation in our whole survey. 1760 to 1840, the summit of classical music, is also the period when Goethe, Schiller, Lessing, Herder, Hölderlin, Eichendorff, Kleist, Büchner, and Heine wrote most of their work. Furthermore, it is the period when Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and the Humboldts worked out most of their thoughts. The summit of classical music is part of a vaster German spiritual tide that also ran high; however, not quite so high from 1840 until the early twentieth century. Germany led the world of the mind in these years. Since the mid-twentieth century, German genius has not distinguished itself beyond the genius of other nations.

Is the German Awakening simply a matter of individuals calling each other's attention to new possibilities? Paul Griffiths points out that Arnold Schoenberg taught harmony all his life, and what he taught was classical harmony. At the height of his creativity, Schoenberg wrote a treatise on harmony "where atonality appears only as a postscript."⁵¹ Schoenberg quoted Schopenhauer's description of artistic creation with enthusiasm, applying it to his own work "like a mesmerized somnambulist who reveals secrets about things that he knows nothing about when he is awake."⁵² This view of creativity has been reaffirmed by artists since it was put by that great dramatist of ideas, Plato, in the *Phaedrus*.⁵³

Much of creation gushes up from the unconscious. My contention is that this inspiration from the unconscious is not only individual but super-individual. It grows and breaks forth at certain times and

⁵¹. Paul Griffiths, *A Concise History of Avant-Garde Music* (Oxford University Press, 1978).

⁵². Ibid.

⁵³. Plato, *Phaedrus*, 244b-245b.

places, and at other times it recedes and yields no more in spite of what individuals struggle to achieve. When atonal music asserted itself through Schoenberg, it also did so through his pupils Berg and Webern. But at the same time, it asserted itself quite independently in the music of Americans such as Charles Ives, Carl Ruggles, and Henry Cowell.⁵⁴

Collective motivation may be largely conscious or largely unconscious. A largely conscious collective motivation might be shown by the competition of Microsoft, Apple, and Intel referred to earlier. This particular activity draws on market analyses, electronic and information theory, and experimentation. Applying this model to classical music, we would have Beethoven studying audience reactions and concluding that there is public demand for a symphony with a tragic first movement and a triumphant finale. He then gets out his composition textbooks and brushes up on tragic and triumphant intervals and tragic and triumphant harmonies, as well as tragic and triumphant modulations. Finally, he applies this learning to a number of experimental thematic lines. Music can be written in this way. However, its conscious method is bound to produce formulaic music, like most music from film and television sound tracks, if only because these conscious methods can be mastered by anyone with a little talent. In contrast, Beethoven seems rarely to have been guided by audience reactions and textbooks. He walked a great deal, often ignoring companions because he was developing music in his head.⁵⁵ Very often he wrote down passages, presumably in order to nail some form precisely, and then went on developing them in silent cogitation. (For example, compare the *Leonore Overtures* Nos. 2 and 3). His

⁵⁴. *Ibid.*, 34.

⁵⁵. Joseph Schmidt-Goerg and H. Schmidt, eds., *Ludwig van Beethoven* (Bonn, Bertelsmann, 1974).

methods had a great deal of conscious work in them, but the forms and aesthetics of his themes and their unique developments stem from the unconscious. Unconscious creation probably went further with Mozart than with Beethoven. Though Mozart's surviving manuscripts show sketching and development, testimony indicates that much music came to him unbidden, as if from outside.⁵⁶ Finally, the inimitable, unlearnable excellence of the greatest classical composers is evidence of unconscious creativity. The greatest classical composers were German speakers and partners in the German Awakening, showing that the inspiration was collective. In the summit of classical music, mature tonal technique and unconscious collective inspiration were both at work.

Can't individuals create consciously by drawing on what they know and feel, rather than by following prescribed rules? Yes, they can, but this creativity does not explain the transcendent excellence that appears at certain times and places. Philosophers, artists, and musicians are always at work and often come up with something new. This incessant individual creativity does not account for the quality of philosophy in Greece, China, and India from 600 to 300 B.C., for the inspiring power of Christian and Muslim religion, or for the wonderful appeal of European Renaissance art and classical music—particularly music composed by a few ethnic Germans between 1700 and 1900.

III. The Motivation of the Summit and Decline

If the inspiration of classical music was both individual and collective, as well as being both conscious and unconscious, what

⁵⁶. Robert Jourdain, *Music, the Brain, and Ecstasy* (New York: Morrow, 1997), 170, 178-81.

can we learn about the motivation of this inspiration? If it was part of a more general wave of creativity, what is this wave and why did it rise and subside? The German Awakening was the earth-shaking spiritual arising of a gifted nation that until then had largely been tossed in a spiritual slumber left over from the Middle Ages. Sparks of genius such as Luther, Paracelsus, Leibniz, and the generation of painters from Holbein the Elder to Holbein the Younger had flared up from time to time, but in the Awakening the sparks coalesced into a conflagration. Forceful individual patronage, concentrated work ethic, and advancing technique were part of the picture. The very terms that force themselves on us give a clue. It was a mental awakening of musicians, writers, philosophers, humanists, and finally, scientists. It was not a religious awakening like the birth of Christianity or a sensuous awakening like the French eighteenth century. This is why music was a privileged art, because classical music is as much architectural composition as it is sensuous response.

The German Awakening was tied in with a broader European awakening. What was their motivation? What did they have in common? The contemporary movement with the closest family resemblance to the German Awakening bears a double name: the Romantic and Victorian periods in British literature. The two British periods are organically one, the later a maturing of the earlier. What do they have in common with the German Awakening?

Both movements open with a new consciousness of undeveloped possibilities in regions such as reason, sexual love, national tradition, the rights of women, individual personality, the creativity of the unconscious (or, in the terminology of the times, the Transcendental). Romantics of both nations struggled to overthrow

inherited shackles: dogma, caste, materialism, and often sexual and marital discipline, but above all, the routine unconsciousness of ordinary life. "Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers."⁵⁷ However, Romantic sensibility and fervor lay waste a good deal too. After the Don Juanery of Byron, the suicide of Shelley's deserted first wife, the suicides of Kleist and Karolina von Gunderode, and all the alcohol, opium, and romantic early deaths, such things as discipline, traditional morality, faith, and utilitarianism began to take on some sense.

Many great Victorian writers—Browning, Tennyson, George Eliot, Hardy, to name a few—aspired to see life clearly and as a whole. This includes the mythic music in life. The point is to become aware of our possibilities, for good and evil, and of the order to which we belong. Knowing "what God and man is,"⁵⁸ we could have perhaps found a sure salvation in place of a precarious, obscurantist faith. But what we learn may also lead us to despair. Charlotte Brontë ran the gamut in her three novels published in her lifetime, beginning with the triumph of *Jane Eyre* and ending with the desolation of Lucy Snowe in *Villette*. Hardy, Conrad, and Virginia Woolf took a little longer.

One other contemporary movement must be looked at before we hazard a guess at what was going on in people's spirits. This is the progress of science. Early in the German Awakening, what was probably the most important scientific controversy concerned the history of the earth. Led by the German A. G. Werner, the catastrophists who backed a rapid, cataclysmic becoming lost out to the gradualists led by James Hutton and William Smith. About 1780, the great naturalist Buffon had estimated the age of the earth

⁵⁷. Wordsworth, "The World Is Too Much With Us."

⁵⁸. Tennyson, untitled verse beginning "Flower in the crannied wal," *The Princess*.

at seventy-five thousand years. An age of many millions of years was canonized in Sir Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* in 1830. Another chief development of this period was the foundation of paleontology by Cuvier and others. Geology and paleontology were foundations of Darwin's theory of evolution. These developments made Hegel's *Weltgeist* theory obsolete as a theory of universal order; what kind of spirit takes five hundred million years to develop its first conscious appearance in the higher animals and man? Schopenhauer's attempt to accommodate the world's will and idea to blind and unconscious nature was also outpaced. Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud concluded that God is dead, or a myth, or a childish illusion.

On the idealistic Victorians, the blow of evolution by natural selection fell even harder. Tennyson cried out under it (e.g., *In Memoriam A. H. H.* liv-lvi). We need not quote Matthew Arnold's melancholy, long withdrawing roar ("Dover Beach"). George Eliot's early fiction, such as *Janet's Repentance* and *Adam Bede*, imparts her belief that Christianity belongs to the balance of a complete English life; yet Christian faith fades in her later work and is replaced by faith in humanity, a pale creed wanting the conviction of the old one.

The German Awakening, the development of British literary vision in the same period, and the contemporary progress of science were all part of a more catholic motive in modern Western history. It was the process of discovering human power, which has carried on since the Renaissance, and of replacing a religious and Biblical world view with one based on human experience, inquiry and invention. In this process, physical science outstripped humanism for the simple reason that matter is more predictable than spirit. Science advanced most readily in the fields of regular and

predictable phenomena: astronomy, physics, chemistry, geology, and biology. In human affairs, economics has been amenable to some degree of scientific formulation and prediction, but history, politics, religion, values, art and personal psychology have stayed the property of humanistic interpretation. Since the sciences of matter made the best progress, the Western world turned to materialism, that is, the philosophical view that everything is the outcome of physical processes.

The victory of materialism and the reign of humanity cost us dearly. Scientific materialism deprived us of our confidence in spiritual providence and our hope of immortality. This is the meaning of the despair that ended the Victorian ambition to see life clearly and as a whole. The same despair informs the work of Hemingway, Camus, and Orwell. The battle with this despair is a main theme of twentieth-century literature: Kafka and Pasternak, Thomas Mann and Iris Murdoch, André Malraux and Flannery O'Connor, Heinrich Böll and Robertson Davies. But what has this to do with the glorious inspiration of classical music and its subsequent decline and fall?

During the 17th and 18th centuries, music sloughed off the patronage of the church. These centuries brought us opera, concerto and suite, sonata, and finally, symphony. The secular character of these forms disclosed vast new possibilities of feeling and pleasure beyond religious feeling. Liberated from religion, music developed splendid new possibilities until about 1840. But after that, splendor becomes more remote and harder to reach. As Yeats put it, "Things thought too long can be no longer thought, / For beauty dies of beauty, worth of worth."⁵⁹

⁵⁹. W. B. Yeats, "The Gyres," *Selected Poetry*, ed. Jeffares (London: Macmillan, 1963).

Our connection of this process with contemporary movements in literature and thought, embedded in the movement from religion to humanism and science, allows us to reach a suggestion. When science had disposed of God, literary idealism turned to despair. About the same time, the classical development of music became exhausted. In the political and social history that began at this time, it was as if humanity was learning to hate itself. Men were mowed down by advancing military technology; women and children were bombed, starved, shot, and gassed in the names of the “Master People” and the victory of the proletariat and other Big Lies. Philosophically, consciousness was dismissed as a mythical occult process, and mind was defined as a form of behavior. With consciousness reduced out of existence, the stage was set for technological artifacts to receive human rights, show their behavioral power, and inherit the earth. “I want robots to succeed us,” says Hans Moravec, a principal researcher at Carnegie Mellon. “Trying to prevent that is almost obscene in my mind.”⁶⁰

The confusion and struggle of the twentieth century are important to our attempt to understand the fall of classical music. Yet we must still search further to explain the inspiration abroad in Germany between 1760 and 1840. Our suggestion has been that when the religious conservatism of the Middle Ages finally lifted from Germany about 1700, human abilities were released to explore the possibilities of secular music, individual personality, and free philosophical thought. When these possibilities had been explored, the fire of creation died down. Hegel’s universal idealism could not meet the tests of advancing science. It was hard for

⁶⁰. *Maclean’s Magazine* (August 21, 2000), 21.

Keller, Fontane, and Storm to say something about the human condition that had not been said by Goethe, Schiller, or Heine.

Similar cases can be made about the Italian Renaissance, the Elizabethan and Jacobean Renaissance in England, and *le grand siècle* in France. In all these cases, the religious preoccupations of the Middle Ages or the Reformation had receded and human possibilities came to the fore: youth, love, reason, science, the Americas, the Indies, light, and perspective. But genius cannot keep on doing old things over again. Eventually all these possibilities were realized. To sum up our suggestion, religious inspiration became exhausted; and the inspiration of human experience has become exhausted in its turn.

Did the loss of faith in God contribute to the crash of classical music? It very probably contributed to the alienated and arbitrary quality of some twentieth-century attempts to create a new kind of music, such as Schoenberg's twelve-tone system, and to the careerism of others, such as John Cage's bag of tricks. What we believe is not fit to inspire us. Christianity produced inspiration for more than a thousand years, from St. Sophia to St. Matthew Passion. While I do not expect the resurrection of Christianity, I very much doubt whether any aesthetic can capture the world's love without a rediscovered connection with spirit beyond our conscious selves.

Why pick this spiritual, transcendental connection as crucial? The material and empirical factors preferred by historians for the past 200 years cannot explain why classical music climaxed along with philosophy and literature in the awakening of a nation. Nor can they explain why this climax died away along with faith in the universe and hope for humanity, in a cataclysmic historical rupture

with any spirit beyond ourselves. We have witnessed the rise and fall of an inspiration that is not fully accounted for by wealth, knowledge, or technical innovation, nor by mutual influence, hard work, or enlightened patronage, nor by all of these together.

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Musicography

Giving musical references to most of my readers would be carrying owls to Athens. To judge my judgements, one must consult his or her own wide musical experience. However, I give here a selection of musical works which I have listened to over the past sixty years and which have formed the view of the rise, decline and fall of classical music here expressed. As the works are available in many editions and recordings, I give enough information to identify each work; anything else is redundant.

Bach, Johann Sebastian. Brandenburg Concertos 1 to 6
 --. Goldberg Variations

- . Mass in B Minor
- . *The Passion According to St. John*
- . *The Passion According to St. Matthew*
- . *The Well-Tempered Clavier*

Bartok, Bela. Concerto for Orchestra

- . Concertos for piano and orchestra Nos. 1, 2, 3
- . Concerto for violin and orchestra No. 2

Beethoven, Ludwig van. Concertos for Piano and Orchestra Nos. 1 to 5

- . Diabelli Variations
- . *Fidelio*
- . Leonore Overtures Nos. 2 and 3
- . *Missa solemnis*
- . Sonatas for piano, especially Nos. 3, 4, 7, 8, 14, 21, 23, 29, 30, 31, 32
- . String quartets, especially Nos. 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14.
- . Symphonies, especially Nos. 3, 5, 6, 7, 9.

Bloch, Ernest. Avodath hakodesh

Boccherini, Luigi. Concerto for cello and orchestra in B flat

Brahms, Johannes. Concertos for piano and orchestra Nos. 1 and 2

- . Concerto for violin and orchestra
- . Concerto for violin, violoncello and orchestra
- . Ein deutsches Requiem
- . Symphonies Nos. 1 to 4.
- . *Variations on a Theme by Haydn*

Chaikovsky, Peter Ilyich. *Capriccio italien*

- . Concerto for piano and orchestra No. 2
- . Concerto for violin and orchestra
- . *Francesca da Rimini*
- . *The Nutcracker*
- . *Romeo and Juliet*
- . Symphonies Nos. 4, 5, 6

Elgar, Edward. Concerto for cello and orchestra in E minor, Op. 85

Handel, George Frederick. Concerti grossi in G, op. 6, no. 1; in A minor, op. 6, no. 4

--. Concerto for harp and orchestra, Op. 4 no. 6

--. *Israel in Egypt*

--. *The Messiah*

--. *Royal Fireworks Music*

--. *Royal Water Music*

--. Sonatas for flute and continuo

Haydn, Franz Josef. Concertos Nos. 1 and 2 for cello and orchestra

--. *Die Schöpfung*.

--. *Die vier Jahreszeiten*.

--. Symphonies Nos. 22, 26, 34, 39, 40, 50, 53, 88, 101, 102, 103, 104

Hindemith, Paul. *Symphonia Serena*

--. Symphony *Die Harmonie der Welt*

Holst, Gustav. *The Planets*

Mahler, Gustav. *Das Lied von der Erde*

--. *Kindertotenlieder*

--. Symphonies Nos. 4 and 5

Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, Felix. Concerto for violin and orchestra.

--. *The Hebrides* overture

--. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, incidental music

--. Symphonies Nos. 3, 4, 5

Mendelssohn-Henschel, Fanny. *Das Jahr*

Messaien, Olivier. Preludes for piano Nos. 1-8

--. *Quatre études de rythme*

Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus. Concerto for clarinet and orchestra, K. 626.

--. Concerto for flute, harp and orchestra

--. Concertos for piano and orchestra Nos. 4-27

--. Concertos for violin and orchestra K. 207, 211, 216, 218

--. *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*.

--. *Die Zauberflöte*.

- . *Don Giovanni*.
- . *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*.
- . *Ein musikalischer Spass*.
- . *Le Nozze di Figaro*.
- . *Requiem*
- . Sinfonia concertante, K. 364/320d
- . Symphonies, especially Nos. 31, 38, 39, 40, 41.
- . Sonatas for piano, especially K. 300d in A minor

Orff, Carl. *Carmina Burana*

Pärt, Arvo. *Berliner Messe*

- . *Magnificat*
- . *Te Deum*

Puccini, Giacomo. *La Bohème*

- . *La Tosca*
- . *Madama Butterfly*
- . *Turandot*

Respighi, Ottorino. *Antiche Danze ed Arie*, Suites 1-3

- . *Feste Romane*
- . *Fontane di Roma*
- . *Gli Uccelli*
- . *Pini di Roma*

Schubert, Franz. *Die schöne Müllerin*

- . *Moments musicales*.
- . Quartet No. 13, Op. 29
- . Quintet for piano and strings, Op. 114
- . Symphonies No. 8 and 9
- . Trios for piano, violin and cello, Ops. 99 and 100

Schumann, Robert. Concerto for cello ad orchestra in A major, Op. 129

- . Concerto for piano and orchestra
- . *Dichterleben und -liebe*
- . *Kinderszenen*
- . Symphonies Nos. 2, 3, 4

Stravinsky, Igor. *The Firebird*.

--. *Le baiser de la fée*.

--. *Petrouchka*.

--. *Pulcinella*.

--. *The Rite of Spring*.

--. *A Symphony of Psalms*.

Strauss, Richard. *Also sprach Zarathustra*

--. *Ein Heldenleben*

--. *Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche*

--. *Vier letzte Gesänge*

Tchaikovsky, Tschaikowsky, Ciaicovschi, see Chaikovsky

Verdi, Giuseppe. *Aïda*

--. *La Traviata*

--. *Otello*

--. *Rigoletto*

Wagner, Richard. *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*

--. *Der Ring des Nibelungen*

--. Overtures and orchestral music from *Rienzi*, *Der fliegende Holländer*, *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin*, *Tristan und Isolde*, *Parsifal*

Gilgamesh and Social Responsibility

Anthony F. Badalamenti

Abstract

This paper proposes that the Gilgamesh epic is constructed as an encoded expression of the wish of the people where it arose to have a more responsible king. The decoding builds to a deeply encoded structure, emerging as a precursor from which all other encodings are derived. Enkidu, Utnapishtim, and the episode of a spiny bush in the Great Deep decode as three assaults on the king's grandiose self-seeking, a character trait that supports his abuse and tyranny over Uruk's people. Shamhat, the priestess of Ishtar, decodes as the king's instrument with which to bring Enkidu under his own influence and to thwart Anu's reason for creating him—to balance the king. Ishtar decodes as one who creates indebtedness from the king to her in order to later express how the king defaults on his responsibilities. The subtlety of the encoding structure reflects the depth of anxiety in the people of the epic's time about their king sensing their anger, as well as the length of time over which the epic was elaborated.

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Introduction

The story of Gilgamesh is the world's oldest known epic, dating back to approximately 2750 BC when an actual King Gilgamesh ruled the great walled city of Uruk in Sumeria. The epic has gone through many transcriptions, witnessed by its many cuneiform versions found at a variety of sites. However, the emotionally charged elements of the story remain essentially intact from one version to another, giving some assurance that interpretive work can successfully identify them.

The richness and novelty of the story together with its fragmentary remains have resulted in a great deal of commentary. Such themes as man's struggle with ultimate death versus a longing for immortality have been presented by Heidel (1949), Kovacs (1989), Renger (1978), Ray (1996), and Abusch (1993). Renger also discusses the epic as didactic to its original culture; Ray, along similar lines, sees it as advocating for humanism; and Abusch (2001) sees it as a growth challenge, calling Gilgamesh to engage in the stages of life and become a functioning member of society, in some agreement with the present effort. Efforts of this kind have compelling support within the surface-story elements of the epic. Along other lines, Jung (1983), with interest in interpreting the unconscious, sees the figure of Enkidu as Gilgamesh's shadow. The present effort also interprets unconscious expression, using psychoanalytic decoding as a tool to identify latent unifying themes in the epic.

The next section decodes the eleven books in sequence without explicitly identifying which decodings are precursor versus derivative, although the narrative suggests the distinction. This is done to build to the section after it where the precursor structure is explicitly noted.

All quotations from the epic are referred to Mitchell's (2006) work, based on an eleven tablet version of the story.⁶¹

Decoding Book One (sixteen pages)

The epic begins with a twenty-two line prologue that announces the grandeur of Gilgamesh. Book One begins with more of his praises:⁶²

Surpassing all kings, powerful and tall
 Beyond all others, violent, splendid,
 A wild bull of a man, unvanquished leader,
 Hero in the front lines, beloved by his soldiers –
 Fortress they called him, *protector of the people*
raging flood that destroys all defenses –
 Two-thirds divine and one-third human,
 Son of King Lugalbanda who became
 a god, and of the goddess Ninsun,
 Ellipsis of six lines
 he brought back the ancient, forgotten rites,
 restoring the statues and sacraments
 for the welfare of the people and the sacred land.
 Who is like Gilgamesh? What other king
 has inspired such awe? Who else can say
 “I alone rule, supreme among mankind”?
 The goddess Aruru, mother of creation
 had designed his body, had made him the strongest

⁶¹ The twelfth tablet is not included because of evidence that it is a later addition, discontinuous with the story on the first eleven. In fact, Enkidu, whom the gods create to rectify Gilgamesh—who becomes his beloved friend—dies in the eleventh tablet story but reappears alive and well in the twelfth.

⁶² Italics not mine.

of men – huge, handsome, radiant, perfect.

These verses emphasize Gilgamesh's power, both as a king and as an individual; they also call attention to his being two-thirds divine. Regarding his power, Mitchell notes his omission of a fragment describing Gilgamesh as having legs six cubits long, making him roughly sixteen feet tall. He is called protector of the people and is credited with restorations that work for the welfare of the people. Book One continues, passing now from positive to negative:

The city is his possession, he struts
through it, arrogant, his head raised high,
trampling its citizens like a wild bull.
He is king, he does whatever he wants,
takes the son from his father and crushes him,
takes the girl from her mother and uses her,
the warrior's daughter, the young man's bride,
he uses her, no one dares to oppose him.
But the people of Uruk cried out to heaven
and their lamentation was heard, the gods
are not unfeeling, their hearts were touched
they went to Anu, father of them all,
protector of the realm of sacred Uruk,
and spoke to him on the people's behalf:
the people cry out...
"Is this how you want your king to rule?
Should a shepherd savage his own flock? Father,
do something, quickly, before the people
overwhelm heaven with their heartrending cries."

Although he is magnificent, Gilgamesh is a king who abuses his people, ignoring some of their basic rights and needs. From the

outset Gilgamesh is presented as a tyrant who abuses his people and acts so much against them that the people call upon the gods for help. The latter sets the stage for Enkidu, as shown in the next part of Book One:

Anu heard them, he nodded his head
then to the goddess, mother of creation,
he called out "Aruru, you are the one
who created humans. Now go and create
A double for Gilgamesh, his second self,
a man who equals his strength and courage,
a man who equals his stormy heart.
Create a new hero, let them balance each other
perfectly so that Uruk has peace."

The gods respond to Uruk's call for help by creating Enkidu, equal in strength to Gilgamesh but with a mission to end the king's tyranny by balancing him. Enkidu is wild like a forest animal and has yet to be awakened to man's culture. Enkidu is created psychologically below Gilgamesh.

Next, a trapper chances a view of Enkidu and, terrified of his immense strength and resentful that Enkidu has torn out his traps, goes to his father for advice. His father advises him to seek help from King Gilgamesh, "the strongest man in the world." The king directs the trapper to go to the temple of Ishtar to find the priestess Shamhat and bring her to Enkidu with the following plan:

The wild man will approach. Let her use her love-arts.
Nature will takes its course, and then
the animals who knew him in the wilderness
will be bewildered, and will leave him forever.

The story implies that Gilgamesh will foil Enkidu's mission by drawing Enkidu under his own spell, although first by Shamhat's. The story shows Gilgamesh taking measures to influence Enkidu. The next page of verse has Enkidu making love to Shamhat, staying erect for seven days; after this he finds that his approach to his creature friends is unwelcome. Making love for seven days encodes the idea of strong influence over Enkidu, a thing that repeats later when he meets Gilgamesh. The loss of his creature friends announces the onset of his humanization:

He turned back to Shamhat, and as he walked
he knew that his mind had somehow grown larger,
he knew things now that an animal can't know.

This refers to more than a literal sexual awakening because animals have innate sexual knowledge. It encodes the idea that Enkidu has begun to understand love as intimacy and personal connection. Shamhat uses this to work on Enkidu in the next verses:

Enkidu sat down at Shamhat's feet
He looked at her, and he understood
all the words she was speaking to him.
"Now, Enkidu, you know what it is
to be with a woman, to unite with her.
You are beautiful, you are like a god.
Why should you roam the wilderness
and live like an animal? Let me take you
to great walled Uruk, to the temple of Ishtar
to the palace of Gilgamesh the mighty king
who in his arrogance oppresses the people,
trampling upon them like a wild bull."

This forms a connecting link from Enkidu awakening to intimacy to the reason for his creation. The next half page has Enkidu feeling a longing for a “true friend,” but the context makes it clear that this does not refer to Shamhat. Instead Enkidu immediately asks her to take him with her to Uruk in order to see Gilgamesh and challenge him as to which of them is the greater. The side by side of wanting a true friend and having the drive to challenge prefigures what happens between Enkidu and Gilgamesh.

Shamhat now tells Enkidu of Uruk’s many delights, such as colorful clothing, singing and dancing in the streets, and open access to sexual joy. She tells Enkidu how handsome and virile Gilgamesh is—so full of energy that he does not even sleep. Then she urges, “Enkidu, put aside your aggression,” and tells him how well the gods Anu, Shamash, and Enlil regard the king. Shamhat plays the role of Gilgamesh’s agent by urging Enkidu to part with his aggression for Gilgamesh, hinting at the intimate friendship to come and working against the reason for Enkidu’s creation. She then tells him how Gilgamesh went to his mother, the goddess Ninsun, to learn the meaning of his dream about a huge boulder, too heavy to lift. Gilgamesh describes part of the dream:

A crowd of people gathered around me,
the people of Uruk pressed in to see it,
Like a little baby they kissed its feet.
This boulder, this star that had fallen to earth –
I took it in my arms. I embraced and caressed it
the way a man caresses his wife.

The implied comparison is that Enkidu is like a star come to Gilgamesh who will receive him with tender love. Shamhat now tells

Enkidu that Ninsun took the dream to refer to a great hero coming to Gilgamesh as a dear friend who would be his double and ever loyal to him. She continues to work influence on Enkidu that is contrary to the reason Anu had him created but faithful to Gilgamesh's intentions and needs. Book One ends with Enkidu again making love to Shamhat, working a final dose of influence on him.

Decoding Book Two (six pages)

Shamhat introduces Enkidu to the ways of man, bringing him to shepherds' huts so that he can see and learn human ways. He uses both sword and spear to guard the shepherds' flocks by night, while the shepherds sleep, encoding his socialization and identification with the rank and file. Shortly after this, Enkidu looks up from making love to Shamhat and notes a man passing by. They learn that he has prepared food for a wedding banquet in Uruk, and Enkidu, upon learning that Gilgamesh has the right of first night with all brides, becomes angry and exclaims,

"I will go to Uruk now,
To the palace of Gilgamesh the mighty king.
I will challenge him. I will shout to his face:
'I am the mightiest! I am the man
Who can make the world tremble. I am Supreme!'"

The story states that Gilgamesh has the right of first night by divine decree, encoding his view that he has the right to treat his people arbitrarily. Shamhat and Enkidu go to Uruk, Enkidu walking in front, indicating an imminent separation from Shamhat in favor of Gilgamesh. This is the last time that Shamhat appears in the story as well as the last time that the king's abuses and tyranny are noted. As

Enkidu enters Uruk, the people note his immense size, comparable to Gilgamesh's, and feel that the "wild man can rival the mightiest kings." The wedding indicated has now taken place, and the bride awaits Gilgamesh who, when he approaches the marriage house, finds Enkidu waiting. Gilgamesh goes into a rage and engages Enkidu. The fight is brief, taking up ten lines of verse, and concludes with Gilgamesh's anger dissipating and Enkidu honoring him as "unique among humans" and "destined to rule over men." With this they kiss and embrace and become "true friends." Gilgamesh now steps into Shamash's place, and Enkidu begins to move away from his purpose.

Decoding Book Three (fourteen pages)

This book opens with the lines,

Time passed quickly, Gilgamesh said.
"Now we must travel to the Cedar Forest,
where the fierce monster Humbaba lives.
We must kill him and drive out evil from the world."

Gilgamesh and Enkidu are now intimate friends, and it is clear that Enkidu will share Gilgamesh's ambitions. The quest to kill Humbaba has utterly no connection with the story thus far and arises solely from Gilgamesh's ambition.⁶³ He frames his ambition as an effort to drive evil from the world when the only evil the story has noted is his tyranny and abuse. This reveals his blindness to how his grandiose strivings are more important to him than his people.

⁶³ Contenau (1954) suggests that the lack of wood in Uruk and its surroundings motivated the interest in Humbaba. However, this does not alter the story as given.

Enkidu becomes teary eyed, and objects to the quest, citing difficulties he knows of firsthand. When Gilgamesh poo-poo's him, Enkidu cites yet more hazards of Humbaba and the fact that the god Enlil puts Humbaba in the Cedar Forest because it is sacred to him. Gilgamesh has already acted against the gods' will by drawing Enkidu to himself instead of Enkidu's mission, and now Enkidu reminds him that he is again acting against the gods' will. Gilgamesh reproaches Enkidu for his fearfulness in twenty-two lines of verse that end with (speaker is Gilgamesh):

But whether you come along or not,
I will cut down the tree. I will kill Humbaba.
I will make a lasting name for myself.
I will stamp my fame on men's minds forever.

Gilgamesh now presents his intentions to the people of Uruk—repeating the last two lines above—and to Uruk's young warriors, some of whom fought at his side. Enkidu again becomes teary eyed with anxiety over the quest to kill Humbaba and appeals to the elders of Uruk to persuade the king not to go. The elders take up Enkidu's plea and try to dissuade the king, encoding that the king is more concerned with his self-aggrandizement than with his people. Gilgamesh replies to this with laughter and then returns to cajoling Enkidu into joining him. After Enkidu agrees, they go hand in hand to the temple of Gilgamesh's mother (Ninsun) to ask her help, encoding that Enkidu is now so much a part of Gilgamesh that he shares kinship with him. Ninsun responds with sorrow to this request and turns to Shamash, asking, "Why have you burdened my son with a restless heart?" Here the lesser deity turns to a greater one to divest herself of blame for Gilgamesh's excessive self-interest. Ninsun asks Shamash several times to protect her son and one of these times she includes Enkidu, referring to the fusion of Gilgamesh

with Enkidu and the foiling of Enkidu's mission. Ninsun now says to Enkidu, "Dear child, you were not born from my womb, but now I adopt you as my son." This quote is followed by narrative on Gilgamesh and Enkidu, now as brothers, repeating the encoding.

The elders endorse the quest to kill Humbaba and ask Enkidu to walk ahead of Gilgamesh because he "knows the way to the Cedar Forest," and "he is tested in battle." The latter statement is not true because up to this point Enkidu has only lived wildly in the forest and has not engaged in any battles other than the brief one with Gilgamesh. The untrue statement encodes the idea that Enkidu can take the blame for Gilgamesh's ambitions, which, in fact, happens later.

Decoding Book Four (thirteen pages)

On their journey to the Cedar Forest, Gilgamesh prays to a mountain for a favorable dream, and Enkidu does a dream ritual. For the first time in the story, Gilgamesh falls asleep, but the narrative does not mention whether or not Enkidu slept, encoding that the deeper parts of Gilgamesh's nature are summoning him. At midnight Gilgamesh awakes and says to Enkidu,

"What happened? Did you touch me? Did a god pass by?
What makes my skin creep? Why am I cold?"

Gilgamesh awakes in an anxiety state and calls to Enkidu to tell him of a horrid dream in which they were walking in a gorge with a huge mountain looming before them that fell down upon them. When he asks Enkidu what it might mean, he ignores Gilgamesh's anxious state and interprets it positively, taking the mountain for Humbaba

and the fall to mean their victory over him. Gilgamesh responds with pleasure, and his anxiety passes. The imagery encodes unconscious, oppressive guilt anxiety in Gilgamesh.

This story element repeats four more times with only the dream content differing. In the first repetition, Gilgamesh reports “a dream more horrible than the first” in which a huge mountain throws him down and pins him by the feet, followed by a terrifying brightness that burns his eyes; at this point, a “shining and handsome” young man appears, pulls Gilgamesh out from under the mountain, and gives him water, calming the king. The terrifying brightness encodes the drive of unconscious insight into Gilgamesh’s self-absorption, attempting to reach his conscious personality. The handsome young man and his actions encode the more adaptive and less guilt-laden state that would result from a conscious assimilation. Enkidu assures Gilgamesh that the mountain refers to Humbaba’s inability to kill him and the young man refers to Lord Shamash, who will assure Gilgamesh’s safety and victory. The theme of unconscious recognition in Gilgamesh versus conscious denial, encouraged by Enkidu, surfaces at this point.

In the second repetition, Gilgamesh reports “a dream more horrible than both the others” in which

The heavens roared and the earth heaved,
then darkness, silence. Lightning flashed,
igniting the trees. By the time the flames
died out, the ground was covered with ash.

The heavens roaring and earth heaving encode the gods’ agreement that Uruk’s people, left behind, need help with Gilgamesh; darkness and silence refer to the king’s blindness to his abuse. The images of

lightning and flames refer to the king's destructiveness. Enkidu takes the fiery heavens to refer to Humbaba trying to kill the king and takes the failure to do so as proof that he and the king will succeed. Enkidu adds, again relieving the king, "We will kill Humbaba. Success is ours."

The third repetition has Gilgamesh telling Enkidu that he had "a dream more horrible than the three others" in which he saw a fierce eagle with a lion's head float down toward him, grimacing and shooting flames from its mouth. A young man with an unearthly glow appeared and seized the eagle, breaking its wings and wringing its neck. The eagle and flames encode the wrath of heaven with Gilgamesh. The young man who rescues him refers to his grandiosity (unearthly glow) opposing the will of heaven. Enkidu tells the king that the eagle is Humbaba again failing to harm him and that the young man is Shamash promising protection. His interpretation eases the king.

In the final repetition, Gilgamesh tells Enkidu that he had "a dream more horrible than all the others" in which he wrestled with a gigantic bull that pinned him down and crushed him. Just when he felt its breath on his face, a man pulled him up, put his arms around him, and gave him fresh water. This decodes as wordplay—the dream image telling Gilgamesh to deal with his bullying behavior. The man who rescues him encodes the increase in humanity that would result from such an act. Enkidu tells the king that the bull represents Shamash's protection and that the man who pulled him up was Lugulbanda, his personal god. He adds, "With his *help*, we will achieve a triumph greater than any man has achieved." This repetition does not conclude with the king showing relief at Enkidu's words. A menacing bull can hardly represent a protecting deity, and this time the empty basis for the king's relief in Enkidu's

interpretation is transparent. Enkidu is emerging as a promoter of the king's grandiosity, moving further away from his purpose.

Book Four concludes with Gilgamesh and Enkidu at the edge of the Cedar Forest, within earshot of Humbaba's roaring; the king is frightened, calling upon Shamash for protection, and Shamash responds with urges to attack.

Decoding Book Five (twelve pages)

From the forest edge, Gilgamesh and Enkidu see the Cedar Mountain—dwelling place of the gods and sacred to Ishtar—representing the idea that the gods are watching them. Enkidu is seized with fear and urges Gilgamesh to continue on alone. Gilgamesh reminds Enkidu that he cannot kill Humbaba alone, encoding that this act of destruction requires Enkidu to act against the reason for his creation. Enkidu now tells the king how terrifying Humbaba is and repeats his request that the king continue alone, setting up Enkidu's eventual role in the death of Humbaba. They continue into the Cedar Forest and, coming into view of Humbaba, both become terrified. Humbaba declares that he will kill only Gilgamesh, who is then overcome with dread. Enkidu now urges Gilgamesh on. When they arrive at Humbaba's den, Humbaba urges Gilgamesh to go away because there is no hope of overcoming him. He calls them madmen and berates Enkidu, stating that he won't kill him because he is too scrawny and won't even make a decent meal. The insults to Enkidu prefigure his role in killing Humbaba.

Gilgamesh again hesitates with fear, but Enkidu urges him on, and they charge at the monster. The god Shamash uses the four winds to pin down Humbaba and paralyze him, giving the king and Enkidu

their moment. This fulfills Enkidu's interpretation of Shamash's promise of protection—made in all but the third of five dreams—but their dire encodings are yet to happen. Gilgamesh sees that Humbaba is pinned and leaps upon him, holding a knife to his throat. Humbaba now begs Gilgamesh for mercy, promising him cedars for a temple to Shamash and a palace for himself. Enkidu now responds,

“Dear friend, don't listen
to anything that the monster says.
Kill him before you become confused.”

Enkidu is now acting wholly against his purpose, urging the king's grandiose and destructive tendencies. He speaks of the king becoming confused when his mission is to give the king balance, connecting with the following verses:

Humbaba said, “If any mortal
Enkidu, knows the rules of my forest,
It is you. You know that this is my place,
and that I am the forest's guarding. Enlil
put me here to terrify men
and I guard the forest as Enlil ordains.
If you kill me, you will call down the gods'
wrath, and their judgment will be severe.
I could have killed you at the forest's edge,
I could have hung you from a cedar and fed
your guts to the shrieking vultures and crows.
Now it is your turn to show me mercy.
Speak to him, beg him to spare my life.”

This is the last time the story calls Enkidu to honor his mission and to move out from under the spell of Gilgamesh. Enkidu urges Gilgamesh to kill Humbaba “before another moment goes by.” Enkidu makes a direct appeal to the king’s self-serving motives:

“Establish your fame, so that forever
Men will speak of brave Gilgamesh
Who killed Humbaba in the Cedar Forest.”

Humbaba now accepts that he is lost and curses both of them, wishing for Enkidu to die in great pain and for Gilgamesh to then become inconsolable—exactly what happens later. Gilgamesh responds to Humbaba’s words by dropping his axe, but Enkidu again urges him to kill Humbaba. Gilgamesh strikes three times at Humbaba’s neck, killing him. Enkidu now praises the king for his accomplishment, and together they cut down cedars. Enkidu says they will use them to build an immense door to a temple for Enlil, a temple that only gods, not men, will enter, implying a grand comparison of Gilgamesh to the gods. When he adds his hope that Enlil will delight in the temple, he expresses his own hope to be spared by the god who appointed Humbaba. They now return to Uruk, Gilgamesh carrying Humbaba’s head.

Decoding Book Six (eleven pages)

When Gilgamesh returns to Uruk, the goddess Ishtar finds him splendid and is smitten with him. She asks him to marry her and promises him abundance, wealth, success, and more. He responds by asking how he could repay her and what his fate will be when she loses interest in him. This connects with Gilgamesh being indebted to Ishtar; her priestess, Shamhat, prepared Enkidu to fall under the

king's spell by first awakening Enkidu and then compelling images of the king on him. Ishtar has helped Gilgamesh elude his balance by Enkidu in favor of his wishes and grandiose ambitions. Gilgamesh resents his indebtedness to Ishtar and expresses it with insulting verses that begin,

“Why would I want to be the lover
of a broken oven that fails in the cold,
a flimsy door that the wind blows through,
A palace that falls on its staunchest defenders”

The insults continue and build, the king reminding Ishtar, in a case by case way, how she tired of her prior lovers and destroyed them. Gilgamesh finishes, “If I too became your lover, you would treat me as cruelly as you treated them,” sending Ishtar into a rage. She goes directly to her father, Anu, and her mother, Antu, raging over how Gilgamesh has insulted her. Anu responds,

“But might you not have provoked this? Did you
try to seduce him? Or did he just start
Insulting you for no reason at all?”

These verses suggest that Anu knows that Ishtar is guilty of something, encoding the idea that Ishtar was an instrument, through Shamhat, of undoing her father's reason for having Enkidu created. Ishtar now asks Anu to let her use the Bull of Heaven to kill Gilgamesh and threatens, if refused, to release ghouls on Earth who will outnumber the living. Anu responds,

“But if I give you the Bull of Heaven,
Uruk will have famine for seven years.
Have you provided the people with grain

for seven years, and the cattle with fodder?”

Here at the midpoint of the epic, the story returns in encoded form to its opening theme of the king's irresponsibility to his people. Ishtar now replies that she has stored up enough grain for more than seven years, but she has not acted for the people so much as to secure her revenge on Gilgamesh. Anu agrees to give her the Bull of Heaven, encoding the idea that there is cause for anger with Gilgamesh.

Enkidu engages the bull, and Gilgamesh follows, killing it with a dagger thrust between its shoulder blades and horns. Ishtar responds from the great wall of Uruk, “Not only did Gilgamesh slander me – now he has killed his own punishment, the Bull of Heaven.” Ishtar's jealous rage about Gilgamesh getting his own way is an encoding of the king's self-absorption. Enkidu, upon hearing her, rips off one of the bull's thighs, throws it at her, and verbally abuses her. This encodes the right, in Enkidu's eyes, to be more important to the king than Ishtar. He sets the stage for his own death—not so much for abusing Ishtar as for urging Humbaba's death and acting against his mission. The killing of the bull itself encodes that Ishtar, as a guilty party in foiling Anu's reason for Enkidu's creation, has no right to revenge.

Gilgamesh and Enkidu go hand in hand to the palace amid cheers from the people, encoding the people's submission to the king's way. Gilgamesh calls to the singing girls of Uruk to identify the handsomest of men and bravest of heroes, cueing them to praise himself and Enkidu. He also mocks the fact that Ishtar has no one to avenge her. This is the climax of Gilgamesh's self-aggrandizement in the epic, revealed by Enkidu's dream of the same night that wakes him and leads him to ask the king, “Dear friend, why are the great gods assembled?”

Decoding Book Seven (ten pages)

Enkidu tells Gilgamesh that he dreamed they had offended the gods who then met in council, Anu citing the killing of Humbaba and the Bull of Heaven as major offenses. Anu adds that one of the two guilty must die, and it will be Enkidu. This begins the fulfillment of the encoded meanings of the five dreams that frightened Gilgamesh, and, therefore, Enkidu falls ill. When he tells the king that he knows this is his story's end, it encodes Enkidu's guilt for abandoning his mission and for supporting Gilgamesh's negative character traits. The king weeps for his friend's suffering and tries to comfort him by asking him how he knows the dream is not a favorable one. Enkidu does not reply but instead cites a second disturbing dream where he is attacked by an eagle-like creature with a lion's head that tramples his bones like a bull. He calls to Gilgamesh to be saved, but the king's fear keeps him from helping. The creature binds Enkidu's arms and takes him to the underworld. Here he sees piles of proud kings' crowns and images of other illustrious figures. The dream ends when Enkidu sees Ereshkigal, the queen of the underworld, who asks, "Who brought this new resident here?"

This is an anxiety dream expressing Enkidu's guilt for failing to act on his mission. The king's failure to save him encodes the mutual failure of both to engage in the primary goal of achieving balance. The crowns of proud kings and such in the underworld encode the destructiveness of the king's way that Enkidu failed to address. When Ereshkigal asks, "Who brought this new resident here?" the verses encode Enkidu's bewilderment over his own failure.

Gilgamesh tries to reassure Enkidu by telling him that the dream may be a good omen because the gods send dreams only to the healthy. He promises to pray to Shamash and other gods for Enkidu and to make a gold statue in Enkidu's image. This action encodes the king's guilt over drawing Enkidu away from his mission and merging him with his own grandiosity, represented by the gold statue. Enkidu replies, "There is no gold statue that can cure this illness" and states that Enlil has sealed his fate.

At the next dawn, Enkidu turns to Shamash because fate has turned against him. He curses the trapper who first found him and wishes that his life be destroyed since the trapper destroyed Enkidu's life. Enkidu curses Shamhat: "I curse you with the ultimate curse, may it seize you instantly as it leaves my mouth." To this he adds wishes that she never has a family or children—nor things to delight men, that she has wild dogs camp in her bedroom, that she has drunkard's vomit all over her, that she dresses in filthy underwear, that young men jeer her and more; she deserves all these consequences "for seducing me in the wilderness when I was strong and innocent and free." Enkidu's words encode his understanding that Shamhat was Gilgamesh's instrument to work him out of his mission and into the king's egocentric one, all building to Enkidu's ruin.

Shamash now asks Enkidu why he curses Shamhat. Shamhat gave him food fit for a god, splendid robes, and the intimate friendship of Gilgamesh, who will honor him in death and have the people of Uruk mourn him. Shamash adds, "and when you are gone he will roam the wilderness with matted hair, in a lion skin." Shamash's words ease Enkidu who now retracts his curses of Shamhat and wishes her essentially the opposites of his prior curses. Enkidu now shows himself capable of the positive change, which he was created to promote in Gilgamesh. The next four verses state,

Then Enkidu said to Gilgamesh,
“You who have walked beside me, steadfast
through so many dangers, remember me,
never forget what I have endured.”

This encodes Enkidu inviting Gilgamesh to be mindful of the change Enkidu was created to bring about in him. Enkidu expires after twelve days of being deathly sick but not before giving Gilgamesh the same invitation one last time:

“Have you abandoned me now dear friend?
You told me that you would come to help me
when I was afraid. But I cannot see you,
you have not come to fight off this danger.
Yet weren’t we to remain forever
inseparable, you and I?”

The first two lines encode Enkidu’s mission, the next two encode his failure to honor it, and the final two lines are his last invitation to Gilgamesh.

Decoding Book Eight (eight pages)

Gilgamesh is stricken with overwhelming grief and calls upon all of Uruk and nature to mourn the death of Enkidu. He calls to Enkidu, asking,

“O Enkidu, what is this sleep that has seized you,
that has darkened your face and stopped your breath?”

When Enkidu does not answer him, the king veils Enkidu's face, tears out clumps of his own hair, and rips his robes in grief. He calls upon his craftsmen to create a fine statue of Enkidu for princes and the people of Uruk to honor. The king offers precious gifts to the gods of the underworld for Enkidu's sake "so that Enkidu may not be sick at heart" in the afterlife. All of Book Eight is about Gilgamesh's overwhelming grief over the death of Enkidu and his struggle to come to terms with it. This encodes the beginning of the story's assault upon the king's grandiose self-absorption in favor of him living up to his responsibility to his people.

Decoding Book Nine (six pages)

As Shamash foretold, Gilgamesh roams the wilderness with matted hair, in a lion skin, expressing his identification with Enkidu's wild origin that serves to deny Enkidu's death. His grief soon turns to fear of his own mortality, and he seeks to outsmart death by seeking Utnapishtim, the only man who was ever made immortal. He travels eastward to ask Utnapishtim the secret of immortality, expressing an infantile reaction to the thought of his own eventual end.

He journeys to Twin Peaks and, at the entrance, encounters husband and wife scorpion people who guard the tunnel that the sun passes through overnight. They are people of terrifying appearance and fill Gilgamesh with dread. When the husband suggests that Gilgamesh must be a god, the wife identifies him as two-thirds god, suggesting a pun because of his wish to fully become an immortal god. The husband asks his name and inquires about his purpose because no mortal has ever made Gilgamesh's journey. The king replies that he is seeking his ancestor, Utnapishtim, to learn how to overcome death. To do this, Gilgamesh must cross the Twin Peaks, something

no one has done. The only route is through the completely dark tunnel of the sun. The scorpion woman urges her husband to show the king the way to Utnapishtim, and he tells the king that he has twelve hours to outrun the setting of the sun to reach safety at the edge of the world. At sunrise Gilgamesh begins his run, barely escaping the sun but emerging safely. He emerges in the garden of the gods “with gem trees of all colors, dazzling to see,” and he marvels at what he sees. The story is at pains to portray the king as one who will go to any length to secure his own interests. It expresses Gilgamesh’s grandiosity and self-absorption by placing him in the garden of the gods. The king’s flight through twelve hours of darkness may be taken as a pun on his failure to see his destructiveness and failure to his people.⁶⁴

Decoding Book Ten (fifteen pages)

Worn and weary, Gilgamesh next comes to the edge of the ocean and finds Shiduri, a tavern keeper. Taking him for a murderer, she locks her door and goes up to the roof of her house. The king threatens to break in if she won’t let him in. Shiduri tells him she locked the door because he looked so wild. The story returns in encoded form to the original complaint of the king: his abuse and tyranny; Shiduri asks who he is, and Gilgamesh identifies himself as the king of Uruk, the man who killed Humbaba and triumphed over the Bull of Heaven; he reaffirms himself as a powerful figure. When Shiduri asks why he looks so worn, the king narrates the loss of Enkidu and reveals his belief that if he mourns Enkidu enough, he

⁶⁴ Gilgamesh’s journey through the tunnel is often taken in the Jungian sense of descent into the unconscious. The problem with this interpretation, from the current perspective, is that he does not emerge healthier as a result. The story ends with the king back at Uruk but does not suggest that he has been transformed.

might return to life. This encodes an infantilism in the king because he behaves like a child who feels that enough pouting over a lost object can cajole its parents into restoring it.

Gilgamesh expresses his grief in a little more than a page that concludes, "And won't I too lie down in the dirt like him, and never arise again?" These words are spoken in the midst of his quest for immortality and encode that the king is more concerned with how things affect him than the loss of one he loved very deeply. Shiduri responds by discouraging the king to seek immortality but encouraging him to seek the ordinary pleasures of life, which works against his grandiosity and brings him to again voice his grief over Enkidu. His words end,

"Show me the road to Utnapishtim
I will cross the vast ocean if I can, If not
I will roam the wilderness in my grief."

Gilgamesh's thoughts of grief are inseparable from his quest to evade his own death, again encoding that the loss of Enkidu is more about the king's fear of death than about his love for Enkidu. Shiduri continues to remind the king that there is no way across the ocean, but Utnapishtim's boatman, Urshanabi, who has the Stone Men needed for the crossing, may be able to help him. Gilgamesh attacks and destroys the Stone Men. He finds Urshanabi, identifies himself as the king of Uruk, and demands to be shown the way to Utnapishtim. Urshanabi tells him that he has prevented what he wants by destroying the Stone Men who could survive the Waters of Death in the ocean crossing, dramatically encoding the self-destructive nature of Gilgamesh's ambition.

Urshanabi gives him hope by directing him to prepare three hundred poles, each one hundred feet long, to use for the crossing. When they come to the Waters of Death, the king uses and jettisons the poles one at a time—enabling him to avoid touching the water—and then uses Urshanabi's robe as a sail to complete the journey. The imagery puns on the king's fear of death by making him resort to the absurd gesture of using hundreds of long poles to avoid touching the Waters of Death. The punning continues a few verses later where Gilgamesh sees an old man, who is actually Utnapishtim, and asks him where he can find Utnapishtim, encoding the idea that the king is blind.

When Utnapishtim asks Gilgamesh why he looks so worn, he narrates on the loss of Enkidu and returns to his present concern with "And won't I too like down in the dirt like him, and never arise again?" Still not knowing to whom he speaks, he says, "That is why I must find Utnapishtim." He reviews his life's wanderings, asking what he has achieved, seeking now an end to his sorrows. Utnapishtim responds with compassion for Gilgamesh, reminding him how generous the gods were with him, making him a king, but that he is now only a day nearer to his end for all his exertions. He reminds the king that "the gods of heaven stay aware and watch us, unsleeping, undying," encoding that the king, though searching for immortality, can choose to learn a lesson about his role in this life. Utnapishtim repeats the lesson, reminding Gilgamesh of the brevity of life and adding, "The sleeper and the dead, how alike they are! Yet the sleeper awakes and opens his eyes, while no one returns from death." Utnapishtim, as an immortal, is the opposite of dead Enkidu; however, he is also like Enkidu because Utnapishtim offers the king wisdom for life.

Decoding Book Eleven (twenty pages)

Gilgamesh tells Utnapishtim that he expected him to look like a god, and he intended to fight him, but now he says, "I can't fight, something is holding me back." This encodes the king's hopeful identification with Utnapishtim, who is already immortal. Utnapishtim narrates how he found immortality by revealing that he was once king of Shuruppak on the Euphrates and when the gods⁶⁵ decided to send a flood, he was directed surreptitiously⁶⁶ by Ea to tear down his house and build a ship to function as Noah's ark in Genesis. When Utnapishtim asks how to respond to the people inquiring why he is building such a large ship, Ea responds, "Tell them that Enlil hates you." The story establishes lines of identity between Utnapishtim and Gilgamesh, both as kings of cities near the Euphrates and as kings hated by Enlil. Enlil hates Gilgamesh for killing the guardian Humbaba; Enlil's hatred for Utnapishtim becomes clear at a later point that will be noted. The idea of Utnapishtim demolishing his home and making a ship encodes the idea of creating a new being in Utnapishtim.

When the ship and its contents are assembled, Shamash directs Utnapishtim to launch, and Utnapishtim notes that he first gave his palace, contents and all, to the man who sealed the hatch. This encodes the idea of releasing prior attachment to the old self as part of opening to the creation of a new self, a key message for Gilgamesh.

⁶⁵ The decision is made in secret, and the five gods, Anu, Enlil, Ninurti, Ennugi and Ea, are bound by oath. Later in the epic, the major responsibility goes to Enlil.

⁶⁶ Surreptitious means that Ea whispers the secret of the impending flood, along with instructions on building a boat and so on, to a reed fence around Utnapishtim's house. Utnapishtim's effective action based on a whisper contrasts with Gilgamesh's lack of action even though "the people overwhelm heaven with their heartrending cries."

Utnapishtim describes a terrible storm flooding the earth for six days and seven nights, destroying the entire human race but for him and those in his ship. On the seventh day, his ship runs aground on Mount Nimush. He then sends out a dove that returns to the ship for want of land and then a swallow that does the same; finally he sends out a raven that does not return and concludes that the waters are receding. This is imagery for decompensation—the collapse of maladaptive psychic systems that clear the way for the generation of new and more adaptive ones—an essential message for the king. Thus, the imagery also represents that Utnapishtim is a second effort to correct Gilgamesh. Utnapishtim makes ritual offerings that draw the gods with emphasis on Aruru, lover to Anu, and creator of the human race with Ea. She says, referring to Utnapishtim's offerings,

“Let all the gods come to the sacrifice,
except for Enlil, because he recklessly
sent the Great Flood and destroyed my children.”

Enlil arrives, angry that Utnapishtim and those on his ship survived the flood,⁶⁷ and says to the other gods, “Wasn't the Flood supposed to destroy them all?” Ninurta replies that Ea made the survival of Utnapishtim and the others possible, setting up the motive for Enlil to hate Utnapishtim for foiling his designs. Ea inquires of Enlil why he so recklessly sought to destroy the human race, pointing out the injustice of all dying for the faults of a few. Ea suggests a lesser measure, such as decimating the race with lions, wolves, famine, or a plague, encoding that human nature, though flawed, is rectifiable

⁶⁷ Ea directs Utnapishtim to take his family, kinsfolk, craftsmen, and artisans, as well as examples of creatures with him on the ship.

and ought not to be destroyed en masse. There is hope for Gilgamesh. Enlil now confers immortality on Utnapishtim and his wife. Enlil begins with hate for the entire human race and for Gilgamesh who foiled him but arrives, with Ea's help, at the wise decision to give man another chance. Enlil rewards Utnapishtim with immortality because it is by his help that he sees the wisdom of a more reasonable use of aggression, the very thing Gilgamesh needs to learn. This encodes that Utnapishtim's real merit is for saving the race, hinting that Gilgamesh will become a more responsible king. The imagery also encodes honoring the hope of redeeming human nature through rebirth.

At the end of his story, Utnapishtim says to Gilgamesh "who will assemble the gods for *your* sake?" Utnapishtim asks the king by what merit he can claim immortality, encoding the story's concern with his failure to balance his personality as Enlil learned to do. He offers the king an opportunity to pass a test by staying awake for seven days saying, "Prevail against sleep, and perhaps you will prevail against death." The number seven represents purging the psyche of maladaptive parts and, therefore, Utnapishtim's request decodes as requiring Gilgamesh to show that he can commit to outgrowing his maladaptive parts.

Gilgamesh sits down against a wall and falls asleep at once, prompting Utnapishtim's comment to his wife about how quickly the king failed the test. When his wife urges him to send the king back safely to his own land, Utnapishtim exclaims, "All men are liars. When he wakes up, watch how he tries to deceive us." Gilgamesh triggers this statement because he shows no cause to merit the immortality he seeks. Utnapishtim tells his wife to bake a loaf of bread for each day the king sleeps and to make a mark on the wall for each loaf. Seven days pass and the first six loaves are in different

degrees of staleness. With the seventh loaf still on the coals, Utnapishtim awakens Gilgamesh who declares, "I was almost falling asleep when I felt your touch." This is the lie Utnapishtim was anticipating. He tells the king to note the six stale loaves made while he slept. The loaves and the number seven both encode a drive toward new and higher life in the psyche. The imagery expresses Gilgamesh's failure to have such a drive and achieve merit with which to make a claim for immortality. The king now expresses helplessness over what to do and states that he sees only death everywhere he looks. His helplessness and imagery of death encode the call to accept the necessary state of unknowing that accompanies parting with familiar but maladaptive ways, which precede the onset of actual growth.

Utnapishtim tells the boatman Urshanabi that this is his last voyage across the great ocean, encoding that Utnapishtim is Gilgamesh's second call to awaken, and it is now up to the king to do so. He notes that the king is filthy and tired, that animal skins obscure his beauty, and directs Urshanabi to restore Gilgamesh's appearance and "dress him in fine robes fit for a king." The cleansing and dressing of the king encodes encouragement to Gilgamesh to live up to his responsibilities as king so that he may be entitled to signs of rank and esteem.

As Gilgamesh and the boatman push off Utnapishtim's wife notes the king's hardships and asks Utnapishtim to give the king something for his journey home. The king returns the boat to shore, and Utnapishtim offers him a secret of the gods. He tells the king of a small, spiny bush found in the Great Deep, with sharp spikes like a rose's thorns; he adds that if the king finds it and brings it to the surface, he will then have found the secret of youth. The magical plant encodes the king's potential to become a wiser and more just

ruler. The thorns are a reminder of the growth pains involved in doing so, and the placement of the plant in the Deep locates human potential in the deep unconscious.

The king digs deeply into the shore and, weighing himself down with two stones, descends into the Deep and finds the magical plant. In the process of grasping the plant, it tears his hands, and they bleed, encoding his unwillingness to deal with the dark contents of his unconscious. He then shows the plant to Urshanabi and tells him that he will test its powers by first giving it to old men to eat. Gilgamesh adds, "If that succeeds, I will eat some myself and become a carefree young man again." These are fateful words from the king, encoding that he has little commitment to become a better king, mindful of his people.

On the journey back to Uruk, Gilgamesh comes upon a pond of cool water and leaves the plant behind to bathe in it. A snake smells the plant and takes off with it, casting off its skin in the process. The imagery addresses the king's need to cast off old ways to grow new ones, becoming more connected to his people and less to himself. This event brings him to tears, and he laments to Urshanabi that all his hardships have been for nothing:

"was it for this that my hands have labored,
was it for this that I gave my heart's blood?
I have gained no benefit for myself
but have lost the marvelous plant to a reptile."

Gilgamesh is confronted with how his grandiose self-seeking and indifference to his people fail to lead to fulfillment. After the death of Enkidu and his failure to find immortality with Utnapishtim, this is the third assault on his way of life, and the narrative implies that

he is beginning to question how he leads it. The epic ends with Gilgamesh repeating the words in the prologue in which he notes the magnificence of Uruk. At the epic's end Gilgamesh has come full circle with an element of hope, for he now questions his egocentric way and leaves open the prospect that he may come to accept the necessary challenge for growth that will make him a better king to his people.

An Encoded Structure

The decodings given divide into an encoded precursor structure for the story from which the many other encodings derive. The emotionally charged idea that drives the story is that king Gilgamesh of Uruk, although a grand figure who is two-thirds divine and a reliable protector, is also a king who abuses and tyrannizes his people to the point of their calling upon the gods for help. The story, as a whole, encodes the wish for the people, where the epic flourished, to have a more just and responsible king. The gods respond with the creation of Enkidu to balance the king. He is created wild to encode the hope that the king can evolve upward as Enkidu does early in the story. Shamhat, priestess to Ishtar, becomes the king's implied instrument to foil Enkidu's purpose and work Enkidu into the king's designs. Shamhat awakens Enkidu to human culture and love, preparing him to move from love with her to love with Gilgamesh. Shamhat's actions create indebtedness from the king to Ishtar.

Enkidu is initially angry at the king, but after a brief combat, Enkidu becomes his beloved friend and acolyte to his ambitions. The structurally encoded meaning is that Gilgamesh is too effective in acting out his grandiose self-seeking, a point quickly repeated with the king's intent to kill Humbaba, who poses no threat to Uruk.

Enkidu expresses anxiety about killing Humbaba, encoding that he still has some attachment to his purpose, but Gilgamesh wins him over. With the help of Shamash, Gilgamesh kills Humbaba, but he does so only with Enkidu's final urging, bringing the story to the peak of the king's egocentric success. This event, together with Gilgamesh's five anxiety dreams, encodes that lessons to the king are to follow.

When they return to Uruk, Ishtar calls off her debt to the king by asking him to marry her. He not only defaults by spurning her but insults her, encoding an arrogant grandiosity that is hurtful to his people. At the midpoint of the epic, Ishtar asks her father Anu for the Bull of Heaven to kill the king in revenge, but Anu first inquires if she has prepared to care for the people of Uruk in the seven years of famine to follow, encoding a repetition of the motive for the story. Gilgamesh and Enkidu kill the bull and then mock Ishtar. Later Enkidu has an anxiety dream of the gods assembled, encoding that assaults on the king's negative traits are about to begin.

In this dream, Anu states that either Gilgamesh or Enkidu must die for killing Humbaba, and it will be Enkidu, encoding the first blow to the king's ways that hurt his people. Gilgamesh is overwhelmed with grief from the death of his beloved Enkidu, and it soon transforms into fear of his own mortality, encoding the narcissistic presumption that stands between him and his people. The king decides to seek out his ancestor, Utnapishtim, the world's only male mortal, to learn the secret of immortality. This decision results in arduous journeys that the story uses, often with punning imagery, to encode how far Gilgamesh's grandiosity will take him to achieve his self-serving ends. The king finally finds Utnapishtim, who enters the story as a second effort to awaken the king. Enkidu was created wild, helped kill Humbaba, and is now dead, whereas Utnapishtim is a

former king of a city near Uruk, saved a remnant of the race, and is immortal. Events drive Enlil to hate Utnapishtim as he already hates Gilgamesh, encoding the hope that the nearness of Utnapishtim, a man of merit, to the king will awaken him. Enkidu represents an effort to awaken him from below and, since that fails, Utnapishtim represents an effort from above.

Gilgamesh fails to find a key to immortality despite his considerable exertions to find Utnapishtim, the second blow to his way of life. The story encodes that no amount of self-seeking that is unbalanced by his responsibility to his people will result in the king's increase. The third blow involves the small, spiny bush of the Great Deep that can confer youth, for Gilgamesh loses it to a snake, encoding that his presumption of getting his own way without regard for his people is unacceptable. The story ends as the king returns to Uruk and reveals what he has gained from his ways, encoding a hope in the people that he will become more responsible to them.

Discussion

The present decoding arrives at a deep encoded structure from which all other encodings derive, a highly subtle structure for a story, in the present view. This view fits the opening hypothesis that the story is an encoding of a people's wish for a more just and responsible king because the further the surface meaning from the encoded one, the less likely the encoded meaning is to be perceived and provoke an angry response. That is, the more anxious the people are about the encoded anger becoming apparent to the king, the greater the need is to disguise it in story images that encode it away from easy, conscious perception. This is likely why Gilgamesh, after being

presented in the story's opening verses as "powerful and tall beyond all others" has only one episode where people cower before him.

The Gilgamesh epic was elaborated over many centuries in a world that was more concerned with conquest and power struggles than human rights and needs. These many centuries are another source of the subtlety of the encoded structure, for within them, the social damage motivating the epic festered, and the people had ample time to make their angry expressions even more subtle.

The parent culture for the epic is a precursor for Judaism, one of whose themes is social justice. Since it appears that the Genesis story of the Flood has its roots in the Sumerian myths, it is consistent to regard the Gilgamesh epic as an encoded call to social justice that manifests more fully in the later Judaic culture. Finally, the idea that Gilgamesh addresses a basic social responsibility—in the most general sense, from those who govern to the governed—gives the epic another enduring interpretation.

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Subjects of Desire: Gaze and Voice in *Krapp's Last Tape*

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Abstract

In the latter period of his work, Samuel Beckett began to devote much of his writing to exploring the nature of the voice and the gaze. Even those works that directly concerned silence and blindness implicitly thematized the voice and the gaze by embodying their absence. With later works, Beckett began to call into question the way in which these phenomena contributed to the constitution of subjects, modes of self-identification, and their relation to chosen objects of desire. In the 1950s and 1960s, Beckett produced dozens of short pieces of prose and theatrical works that wholly dispensed with traditional plot and character in favor of a series of experimental reductions, for example, to breath and light (*Breath*), to a disembodied voice (*Company*, *Eh Joe*, *That Time*, *Cascando*), or to a mouth illuminated by a point of light (*Not I*). Jacques Lacan, who would come to secure the place of the voice and the gaze in the philosophical canon, wrote and lectured on these concepts at the same time. If brought into dialogue, the work of each thinker—each highly nuanced and complex in its own right—can serve as a hermeneutic tool for better elucidating the function of the voice and the gaze and the role that they play in the formation of subjects. A great deal of critics have erroneously

overlooked Lacan's insistence that when he invokes these concepts he is not speaking about the phenomenal voice or the gaze of perception as such; similarly, Beckett's work, though it directly thematizes their phenomenal aspects, treats these concepts in a thoroughly Lacanian manner.

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Any reading of Beckett's short play *Krapp's Last Tape* that does not take into account Lacan's conception of "the gaze and the voice as the two paramount embodiments of the object *a*," will certainly be deficient.⁶⁸ In the play, we are presented with a subject of representation whose desires and means of self-recognition are wholly constituted by the object *a* in its many manifestations, namely in those of the voice and the gaze. The work serves a quintessential exemplification of these concepts in their complex and ambiguous functions. We witness the manner in which the object voice of the Other functions to stand in for what is irretrievably lost, enveloping the void of being and determining the sublimations of meaning that constitute the subject's supplementary objects of desire, which impossibly serve to fill the lack of subject. In this work, Beckett experiments with mechanisms that serve as Lacanian screens illuminated by the point of light emanating from the outside gaze of the Other. Before these mediating screens, the subjects are presented with sublimated objects of desire that give rise to fantasies of wholeness, constructed retrospectively. It is in virtue of these fantasy narratives—linked by nodes of desired objects, projected from the voice and the gaze onto

⁶⁸ Mladen Dolar, "The Object Voice" in *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*, 13.

these subjects of representation—that retrospective identification is made possible, engendering the modes of self-recognition that are always those of misrecognition. Projecting an illusory sense of self-presence, the voice is at once the means to constructing a false sense of completion and an immediacy of self-recognition. At the same time, the voice produces a rupture in the fabric of presence that introduces the void in being, producing anxiety, isolation, and despair.

First we must recount how Lacan characterizes the voice and the gaze as objects *petit a*. Lacan adds the voice and the gaze to Freud's list of partial objects, such as breasts, feces, and phallus, which are "those parts of the body that *seem* to be attached to an organ or produced by an organ. But, in fact, they are perpetually detachable from the organ and from the body."⁶⁹ In this sense, the ambiguity of object *a* is figured in relation to the subject. It is both present to and absent from the subject; it is not being and yet it is not nothingness. However, it is not the partial object that is suspended from the subject, as this figure would suggest, but the reverse. Object *a* functions by "symbolizing the central lack of desire"⁷⁰ and "denoting both an empty *place* in being and body and the 'object' that one chooses to stop it up because this void place produces anxiety."⁷¹ The voice and the gaze are so powerful in this work of "covering over the void that resides in consciousness that Lacan describes the human subject as suspended from the gaze, 'in an

⁶⁹ Ellie Ragland, "The Relation between the Voice and the Gaze" in *Reading Seminar XI*, 188.

⁷⁰ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998), 105.

⁷¹ Ragland, *Reading Seminar*, 189.

essential vacillation.”⁷² Fantasies then are suspended from the subject, which is itself suspended from object *a*.

According to this schema, the “cut” that marks a loss in the life of the subject is sublimated into words and images (of fantasy) attaching loss to particular objects of the world.⁷³ The object *a*, then, is a fundamentally “lost Ur-object that resides at the center of the fantasies from which each person constructs desire around substitute objects that can never fill up a real void in being.”⁷⁴ Between this irretrievably lost Ur-object and the partial objects which, in symbolizing the former, cause desire, there are “lure objects we use in trying to concretize our desire by fetishizing things, people, or acts. Layer upon layer of heterogeneous associations build up sublimated meaning, ‘implicated assumptions’ about what will appease lack and fill void space.”⁷⁵ The voice and the gaze are partial objects that the subject takes for the lost object itself. These objects *a* then produce desire in subjects who wish to fill the lack or void from the loss of the “primordial object.” This is then directed toward various fetishized, lure objects each of which function as a veil or a stand-in for something else. Desire for Lacan is the desire to suture over this lack, to remedy the effects of loss, but this is never possible. Lacan argues that “where an object is sought,” breasts, a fetishized material object for example, “there is an empty place that ultimately cannot be filled, causing a dissatisfaction that is finally unappeasable.”⁷⁶ The structure of desire is such that these objects occupy an empty place that cannot be filled, as such there is already a gap between the object and its

⁷² Ibid., 194.

⁷³ Ibid., 189.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 188.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 197.

retrieval, one that is never necessarily diminished. This results in unappeasable dissatisfaction and anxiety in the subject.⁷⁷

In response to this, the partial objects of desire give rise to “the fantasy of oneness” that serves to constitute the subject’s self-apprehension as complete. Further, as objects *a* give rise to fantasy, it is the latter that gives direction to the drives. This endeavor to take stock of one’s wholeness, to put it simply, or the desire to apprehend whether or not one’s lack is covered over, can only be undertaken by the gaze or the voice. The subject must hear himself speaking (voice) or see himself looking (gaze) to assess its self-presence and wholeness; in this sense, these partial objects do not reside in the phenomenal senses of the body but outside, in the Other. Indeed, Lacan reiterates that “man’s desire is the desire of the Other.”⁷⁸ For Lacan consciousness is the illusion of total self-presence; the gaze and the voice are the ultimate figures that convey and enable this misrecognition. Our self-image, as unified and contained in an organic-cognitive whole, is constituted by the immediacy of hearing one’s own voice and of seeing one’s reflection. Lacan writes that the illusion of consciousness is “that form of vision that is satisfied with itself” and without lack.⁷⁹ But insofar as it is the object’s cause of desire, the voice and the gaze, which enable this faulty self-conception and fill the hole in being with objects of desire, “institute consciousness as desire.”⁸⁰ Therefore it is against the voice and the gaze of the Other that we constitute our self-image, one whose fallacious wholeness is predicated on the unending pursuit of symbolic objects of desire. It is in this sense that we are always subjects of representation whose

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 235.

⁷⁹ qtd. in Ragland, *Reading Seminar*, 193.

⁸⁰ Ragland, *Reading Seminar*, 197.

consciousness-as-desire is constituted by the voice of the Other. It is in virtue of the structure of the gaze that we misrecognize and idealize ourselves and “refuse to see ourselves as we are,” namely, fragmented, necessarily incomplete, and represented by the voice of the Other.⁸¹

Ellie Ragland explains, “the *truth* is that we lie, painting ourselves as we should be, not as we really are.”⁸² We see ourselves looking at ourselves, but the paradox is that we never look from the place in which we are seen. Desire mediates self-recognition, skewing the self-image that is seen by projecting a representation on the screen that elides reality—that is, what we see of ourselves (the place in which we are seen) is never who we really are (the place from which we look). It is in this sense that “we are seen, not seeing; objects not subjects of free will.”⁸³ What we see when we look at ourselves looking, what we hear when we hear ourselves speaking, is not the immediate mark of conscious self-presence but rather objects *a*—the voice and the gaze—and their supplementary fantasy objects of desire, which function to represent individuals, to allow them to imagine themselves as whole. The gaze then circumscribes us, making “us beings who are looked at, but without showing this [to us].”⁸⁴ For Lacan, as subjects of representation, we are constituted by the gaze of the Other insofar as our means of self-recognition is determined by the manner in which we see ourselves being seen within the web of signifiers that make up the symbolic order.

Beckett’s *Krapp’s Last Tape* takes this very process of constituting desirous subjects of representation via the retrospective and

⁸¹ Ibid., 193.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 195.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

prospective vectors of objects *a*, the voice and the gaze. *Krapp's Last Tape* depicts an old man who is engaged in the yearly compulsion that commemorates the "awful occasion" of his birthday.

Throughout the adult years of his life, he has observed the ritual of making tape recordings of monologues in which he reflects on the year's events, recounting the particularly affective moments and memories of the last year. In addition to this, he listens to tapes that he has made over the course of his life. Krapp not only attempts to concretize and make static the fragmentary events and stages of his life by creating an exhaustive, exterior archive of his life in the form of voice recordings, but he also keeps a meticulous ledger in which is set down the content of each reel and its place within a numerical organizing system that orders and hierarchizes the recordings. By doing this, Krapp attempts to construct a kind of acoustic mirror that will unify his life, one that can serve as an identical exterior embodiment of his consciousness where one can observe the holistic, logical narrative of his life. He constructs an exteriorized prosthetic memory so that particular fetishized events and narrated condensations of desire will "never be forgotten," protecting "the whole thing...against the day when my work will be done and perhaps no place left in my memory."⁸⁵ The evidence of desire here is for the total possession of himself and the ability to conveniently and immediately access the various memories, figures, and events that function as his fetishized objects of desire.

Initially contriving this project, Krapp reveals himself to be a subject who presupposes the veridicality of the metaphysics of presence. This narcissistic endeavor assumes that one's vocal reflection will yield an immediate self-presence, is a vocalic version of Lacan's mirror stage. Krapp's endeavor to *s'entendre parler*, to

⁸⁵ Samuel Beckett, *Collected Shorter Plays* (New York: Grove, 1984), 60.

hear himself speaking, is “an elementary formula of narcissism that is needed to produce a minimal form of a self.”⁸⁶ Krapp’s meticulous attention to detail in the way he organizes the recordings and makes a ritual of this process is his attempt to gain a comprehensive vocal reflection of his self, making a unified whole which is fundamentally a fragmented lack. Like Lacan’s mirror stage, here the acoustic mirror functions “to provide the minimal support needed to produce a self-recognition, the imaginary completion offered to the multiple body, . . . the constitution of an ‘I’ as well as the matrix of a relationship to one’s equals, the ambiguous source of love.”⁸⁷ This ritual for Krapp is an attempt to cover an implicitly felt lack, an attempt to recapture an impossible origin of completion. The voice in this instance acts as a supplement for Krapp through which he feels he can gain a substantive relationship to presence.⁸⁸

Paradoxically, this endeavor yields a “recognition that is intrinsically a misrecognition.”⁸⁹ In the first reel that Krapp listens to, we hear the “*rather pompous*” and “*strong voice*” of a younger Krapp that is radically distinct from his present “*cracked voice*” that possesses a “*distinctive intonation*.”⁹⁰ On this recording Krapp mocks the self-overheard in an even earlier reel: “the voice! . . . Hard to believe I was ever that young whelp.”⁹¹ When recording his tape in the present Krapp reflects on this derisive voice: “just been listening to that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago,

⁸⁶ Dolar, *Gaze and Voice*, 13.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 11.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 16.

⁹⁰ Beckett, *Collected Shorter Plays*, 55-57.

⁹¹ Ibid., 58.

hard to believe I was ever as bad as that.”⁹² Reflected on the screen of the recorder, rather than yielding a voice he identifies with himself, he hears instead the voice of the Other. Krapp, then, does not speak from the place in which he is heard. Mladen Dolar writes that when “there is a surface that returns the voice,” in this instance of reel to reel, “the voice acquires an autonomy of its own and enters into the dimension of the Other, it becomes a deferred voice.”⁹³ Here, the object *a*, the voice, at once “offers a *semblance* of [holistic] being that Krapp can identify with narcissistically, but at the same time, as the voice of the Other, it keeps Krapp from seeing himself as he truly is.”⁹⁴ Dolar explains that “the auto-affective voice of self-presence and self-mastery [is] constantly opposed by its reverse side, the intractable voice of the Other, the voice that one cannot control.”⁹⁵ Krapp’s phenomenal voice contains the object voice that ruptures presence, but the encounter that he has is ambiguous because the object *a* functions to cause desire in such a way to conceal this rupture in self-presence. Beckett adeptly represents the ambiguity of the voice; Krapp both recognizes the voice as his own, and refers to himself in the third person, conceding to the desire this voice causes: “Ah well, maybe he was right. Maybe he was right.”⁹⁶ Dolar explains that the object voice is never simply present nor absent but is “the pivotal point at the intersection” where one recognizes oneself “as the addressee of the voice of the Other as well as recognizing one’s own voice in a self-presence—but is at the same time what inherently lacks and disrupts any notion of full presence; it makes it a truncated

⁹² Ibid., 62.

⁹³ Dolar, *Gaze and Voice*, 14.

⁹⁴ Ragland, *Reading Seminar*, 200.

⁹⁵ Dolar, *Gaze and Voice*, 15.

⁹⁶ Beckett, *Collected Shorter Plays*, 62.

presence, which covers a lack.”⁹⁷ The voice of the Other here functions to perform in the pivotal intersection of the screen—the tape machine—the roles of both Narcissus and Echo, providing the illusory self-presence figured by the former and the fragmented signification of the latter, whose reverberant enunciations conceal a lack; taken together these functions serve to constitute Krapp’s self-image, representing both who he is in the present as well as the past. The voice as object *a* functions in a dual role; it both introduces “the rupture at the core of self-presence”⁹⁸ and serves as the means to suturing that tear by concealing it with lure objects, metonymies, which stand-in for the irretrievable lost presence at the heart of the subject, “enveloping the central void.”⁹⁹

Striking a very Lacanian figure, Krapp resides in a circular point of light that is surrounded by the void of darkness. Beckett’s stage directions read, “*table and immediate adjacent area in strong white light. Rest of stage in darkness.*”¹⁰⁰ The voice that emanates from one of the recordings indicates this is a preference of Krapp’s. He says, “with all this darkness around me I feel less alone...In a way...I love to get up and move about in it, then back here to...me.”¹⁰¹ Outside of the point of light, he loses his conception of self. It is only when he returns to the light that he can conceive of who he is, “back here to...me...Krapp.”¹⁰² It is within this point of light that Krapp is figured as a subject of representation whose present desires and self-image are wholly constituted by what he hears himself saying and through memories in which he sees himself looking at

⁹⁷ Dolar, *Gaze and Voice*, 27.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁰⁰ Beckett, *Collected Shorter Plays*, 55.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

the varying objects of desire that have defined the contours of his life. Ragland writes that “the voice enables us to call up the gaze against which we reconstitute ourselves in memory, the gaze of judgment and idealizations that gives us a place in our fantasies. There we are suspended from the gaze that functions as a marker in the real.”¹⁰³ Krapp’s self-identification occurs retrospectively. The voice of the Other constitutes the way Krapp perceives himself in the present as well as the way he recalls past events that have since taken on significance of fetish objects. The imagined repetition of past events or ideas are recounted and set down on the reels—imagined because he recounts them at years end, and as such, they are mediated by the gaze. Their auditory repetition through the years and the altered signification that accompanies Krapp’s method of selective listening becomes an exterior performance of the mythical echo’s alteration of meaning through fragmentary repetition. A series of concentric cuts are made with each recollection; on each birthday certain affective impressions are recalled and recorded. This is the cut (not the first, as many have been made since the initial experience) made at the moment of recording. His method of listening each year, his ability to literally edit memory on the outside, constitutes the subsequent cuts. In this way, Krapp is able to further alter memory in terms of present desire. His tendency to rewind and fast-forward the tapes, as well as his periodic exit from the stage recalls Freud’s *fort / da*, where his objects of desire are now present and absent. As an old man, he has become obsessed with particular moments and mnemonic objects of desire; the repetition of these memories becomes an annual compulsion. For Krapp, the reels are a material instantiation of his perceived self, and, by controlling the reverberant voice of memory and the imagined life that it recalls, old Krapp can retrospectively

¹⁰³ Ragland, *Reading Seminar*, 200.

formulate who he was and what he has become. It is in this way that his archived voice—and the fantasy echoes that it articulates—determine Krapp's conception of himself.

Lacan argues that the “the subject...is produced in the retrospective vector.”¹⁰⁴ We can observe how this functions by examining the retrospective vectors of *Krapp's Last Tape* and the way in which they produce the main character. For Krapp, the object voice, from the standpoint of the past, informs the present where he becomes a subject of representation by listening to himself (the self that is also Other) speak; at the same time, when he produces the new recording for the year, he is constituted by the object gaze of the Other insofar as he sees himself looking at himself from the future position of listening to come. The voice speaks from the past and the gaze looks back, retrospectively, from a future position. Perhaps we can envision a doubling of Lacan's graph of the gaze in which the subject, Krapp, is caught between emanations from the voice's point of light—projecting from the past onto the present—and those of the gaze—projecting from a future position onto the present; each contributes to the retrospective representation of the subject of desire. This may be what Žižek means when he claims that “gaze and voice relate to each other as life and death: voice vivifies, whereas gaze mortifies.”¹⁰⁵

The bulk of Beckett's short play consists of Krapp locating and listening to one particular reel. This reel is especially complicated because it contains the recapitulation of another older reel as well. This tape contains nested narratives that are corrupted and re-construed by subsequent experiences of listening. It is hard to say

¹⁰⁴ Dolar, *Gaze and Voice*, 11.

¹⁰⁵ Slavoj Žižek, “I Hear You with My Eyes; or, The Invisible Master” in *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*. (Durham: Duke UP, 1996), 94.

for how many years Krapp has listened to this old recording of his youthful voice before, in a sense rewriting it from the perspective that he now speaks from. The recording then contains a number of overlapping, echoic voices of the Other. This synthetic recording contains Krapp's memories of the death of both his parents as well as his relationships with a number of women. The fetishized objects of desire, which are symbolized here, function to constitute Krapp's self-representation in the present.

For Lacan, identification and constructions of the self are always retrospective, and the material for such reconstructions are the objects *a*. Joan Scott characterizes the process of retrospective identification as one of "fantasy echo." Scott's term names the process in which the remembered voices, images, events, and affects continue to reverberate in the mind; they become increasingly distorted in their anomalous, altering returns and constitute the protean material of our plagiarized selves. It is not so much that memory becomes corrupted or that its accuracy diminishes, causing our backwards glance to fall upon an inauthentic scene: rather, the basic condition of all rememberers is one of paramnesia, that is the "condition involving distorted memory or confusions of fact and fantasy."¹⁰⁶ Scott describes the retrospective identificatory process characterized by fantasy echo as one that enacts "the repetition of something imagined or an imagined repetition. In either case the repetition is not exact since an echo is an imperfect return of sound...Retrospective identifications, after all, are imagined repetitions *and* repetitions of imagined resemblances. The echo is a fantasy, the fantasy an echo; the two are inextricably intertwined."¹⁰⁷ Similarly, it would be fair to say that memory is a

¹⁰⁶ *Concise OED 11th Ed.*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), 1038.

¹⁰⁷ Joan Scott, "Fantasy Echo: History and the Construction of Identity" in *Critical Inquiry* 27, (2001), 287.

fantasy, fantasy a memory. Scott describes identification as a process “of writing oneself” according to the fantasized repetitions of memory and the imagined resemblances that we find between the self of the past and that of the present; perhaps it would be more accurate to understand this in light of Lacan’s object *a* as the construction of the self on the basis of desire that functions to cover the absence of the subject’s primordial completeness.

The figure of the echo is particularly helpful in developing our understanding of how memory, fantasy, repetition, and desire are employed by the voice and the gaze to construct the self. Scott writes, “Echoes are delayed returns of sound; they are incomplete reproductions” that create “gaps of meaning and intelligibility” and constitute an “incomplete, belated, and often contradictory kind of repetition.”¹⁰⁸ When Ovid’s Echo responds to the voice of Narcissus, her repetition of the latter’s words are fragmented, and stress is placed differently on his words, wholly altering their original meaning.

Like the interaction of remembered and perceived voices and images, “the melodic toll of bells can become cacophonous when echoes mingle with the original sound; when the sounds are words, the return of partial phrases alters the original sense and comments on it as well.”¹⁰⁹ The mental repetition of voice and image mingles memory of the past with the perceptions of the present. In this way, the self is constructed dialectically as the altered echoes of past voices affect our construal of the present, and present scenarios cause the past to be re-imagined. Scott claims, “In either case, repetition constitutes alteration. It is thus that echo undermines the

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 291.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

notion of enduring sameness that often attaches to identity.”¹¹⁰

Identity, like an echo, is protean in the sense that the meanings of memory’s voices become altered by fragmentary self-reference and fantasy echo; we self-identify on the basis of these meanings and their apparent relation to the self in the present. The repetitions of echoic object voice are the “processes by which subjects come into being as ‘a play of repetition and difference among signifiers.’”¹¹¹

Imagination and fantasy are inextricably linked to the workings of memory and retrospective identification. Active memory is both echoic and palimpsest; it is a circuit of writing and overwriting in which the traces of previous impressions are still apparent beneath the new impressions. The repetitions or echoes of the voices of memory are fantasies insofar as they are constructed, distorted, or narrated instantiations of previous experience. Scott explains that the act of fantasizing itself is not the “object of desire, but its setting. In fantasy the subject does not pursue the object or its sign: he appears caught up himself in the sequence of images.”¹¹²

Invoking Žižek, she writes, “fantasy operates as a (tightly condensed) narrative” in which “contradictory elements (or, for that matter, incoherent ones) are rearranged diachronically, becoming causes and effects.”¹¹³ Krapp’s memories, are then the “imagined repetitions” of previous experience and are constructed as tightly condensed narratives that rearrange contradictory elements into a coherent scene in which the rememberer gets “caught up...in a sequence of images.” Rather than being the resonance of one voice, a fantasy-memory is a conglomerate of a multiplicity of voices and images that are cut or edited to form an

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² qtd. in Ibid., 288.

¹¹³ Ibid., 289.

apparently logical narrative. To invert Gerard de Nerval's famous statement that "to create is to remember again," it is clear that to remember is to create again.

Krapp's tapes function to construct a fantasy narrative to encompass the whole of his life, but each of the mini-narratives that we are presented with (each serving to obviate a recognition of the void) are tightly composed layers of sublimated desire, where a variety of partial and lure objects are observably what structure Krapp's subjectivity. To begin with the lesser—though more obvious—of these, the scatological pun implied in the main character's name is not lost on any reader familiar with Beckett and is given further credence when we read that Krapp's "bowel condition," his "old weakness," is persistent enough to be addressed on multiple occasions. This is referenced in relation to another of the partial objects of Krapp's desire, namely bananas. He silently eats three at the outset of the play before he utters a word. We find that these are a veritable obsession for him when, "listening to an old year," we hear, "have just eaten I regret to say three bananas and only with difficulty refrained from a fourth. Fatal things for a man with my condition."¹¹⁴ Beckett constructs a web connected of partial objects: the voice, feces, and the banana, that we can perhaps, at least provisionally, associate with Lacan invocatory, anal, and oral drives. In a sense, Krapp is willing to obsessively eat shit even though, or perhaps because, it can lead to his death.

The more crucial objects of Krapp's desire are the various women that serve as markers in the fantasy narrative of his life: "the dark nurse," Bianca, Effie, "the punt," and his Mother. It seems that Krapp's life with Bianca is not associated with anything substantive

¹¹⁴ Beckett, *Collected Shorter Plays*, 57.

but only with fetishized objects and places, such as “Kedar Street,” a “shabby green coat,” and a “railway platform.”¹¹⁵ Recalling a previous recording, Krapp says, “not much about her, apart from a tribute to her eyes. Very warm. I suddenly saw them again. Incomparable! Ah well.” But if there isn’t much that is genuinely memorable about Bianca, then why continue to immortalize her in the grand narrative of his acoustic mirror? We find that what the important association is here when, referring to himself in the third person, Krapp states fragmentarily, “last illness of his father.”¹¹⁶ In accordance with the Lacanian structure, the desire of the Other (“*his* father”) determines the sublimated meaning here. The desire for his lost father—a desire which conceals a more primordial lack—is sublimated into the fetishized, warm, incomparable eyes of Bianca, a woman whose relationship with Krapp was otherwise unpleasant. The voice of the Other asks, “what remains of all that old misery? A girl in a shabby green coat, on a railway platform.”¹¹⁷ At this early stage in his life, the object *a*’s cause-of-desire sublimates a traumatic loss into the fetishized eyes of a woman which take on the significance of the Other’s gaze through which Krapp sees himself looking at himself in the moment of losing, in this instance, his father.

The next to become an object of Krapp’s desire is the woman who he simply refers to as “the dark nurse.” Refusing to sit at the bedside of his dying mother, Krapp chooses instead to sit on a “bench by the weir from where I could see her window...wishing she were gone.”¹¹⁸ The mother’s window is the point from which the gaze emits—for as we must remember the “gaze should not be subjectivized” but rather emanated from a kind of *a priori* blind

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 58.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 59.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

spot—and causes the assignation of the lure object of desire, the nurse. Krapp relates,

one dark young beauty I recollect particularly, all white and starch, incomparable bosom, with a big black hooded perambulator, most funereal thing. Whenever I looked in her direction she had her eyes on me. And yet when I was bold enough to speak to her...she threatened to call a policeman. As if I had designs on her virtue! The face she had! The eyes! Like...chrysolite! Ah well.¹¹⁹

As before, the loss of his mother is sublimated into a desire for this woman and affects the fetishized of her eyes. The felt gaze from the mother's window is reassigned to the nurse who "had her eyes on" him each time he looked at her. Through an associative sublimation, Beckett manages to represent both the way in which—given the nurse's reaction to Krapp's advances—"you never look at me from the place from which I see you," as well as the fact that "what I look at is never what I wish to see."¹²⁰ Tellingly, the nurse's breasts, a partial object like the voice and the gaze, are described using the exact same language as that used when Krapp refers to the fetishized eyes of Bianca; they are "incomparable." Again Beckett presents us with a web of associated signifiers, the networked meaning of which is lost on Krapp but is easy enough to map and be readily accessible to a reader or spectator. Here birth (the pram), sex (the nurse), shame (the policeman), and death (the "funereal...black hooded" pram) are intricately connected and determine the assignation of lure objects where desire is reallocated to compensate for the loss of the mother. Of course all of this occurs under the gaze of the hospital window.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 60.

¹²⁰ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 103.

The death of Krapp's mother is figured as a closing eye, as the secession of the gaze of the Other. He recounts,

I was there when the blind went down, one of those dirty brown roller affairs, throwing a ball for a little white dog as chance would have it. I happened to look up and there it was. All over and done with at last. I sat on for a few moments with the ball in my hand and the dog yelping and pawing at me. Moments. Her moments, my moments. The dog's moments. In the end I held it out to him and he took it in his mouth, gently, gently. A small, old, black, hard, solid rubber ball. I shall feel it, in my hand until my dying day. I might have kept it. But I gave it to the dog. Ah well.¹²¹

The figurative blinding of the gaze and the loss of the mother cause desire to be shifted to substitute lure objects—such as the ball, the dog, and its mouth—in which evanescent desire is concretized into something that can be literally grasped in one's hand in the effort to alleviate the tremendous feeling of anxiety that accompanies such a loss. We should recall that, for both Lacan and Beckett, the mother and the father are not the primordial objects of desire that ensure the fullness of being but are the paradigmatic stand-ins that conceal the real void in being. They cover over a lack, and with their death, the desire that veils that lack must be shifted elsewhere. In this case, it is shifted onto fetishized objects that, in their proximity to the scission caused by these deaths, become imbued with a great deal of significance. This is why Krapp continues to feel the ball in his hand and why he personifies it with adjectives he

¹²¹ Beckett, *Collected Shorter Plays*, 60.

might have used to describe his mother. The strange dog, oddly enough, becomes a major component of Krapp's life narrative when its "moments" mingle with his at this formative instant. The moment in which the void is revealed has a massive impact on the subject and serves to forever alter its constitution. Around these moments of traumatic loss, when the unappeasable nature of desire is revealed to the subject, "layers of heterogeneous associations build up sublimated meaning about what will appease lack and fill void space," causing lure objects—such as the ball and the eyes of women—to be imbued with life altering significance.¹²² The uniformity of language used to describe the fetishized objects of desire ("incomparable!"), along with the repeated refrain "ah well" at the end of each narrative account, serve to connect these processes of reassigned desire, the logical consistency of which remains unrecognized by Krapp.

These instances culminate in the memory of another of Krapp's lost loves, whom he only refers to as "the punt." The audience gets the unambiguous sense that all of the memories heard up to this point have been merely a preamble to this one, and yet we are not even given the name of this woman. Why? The significance of the memory has nothing to do with the person herself; she is merely a stand-in, a placeholder, and an object of desire that protects the subject from exposure to the void that is being. Moreover, it is a memory in which the subject is represented by being caught in the gaze of the Other, a moment that has become fetishized in order to be compulsively re-experienced through the constituting voice on the reel. He wishes to become a statically unified self by remaining in that moment. Krapp listens to the disembodied voice of the Other, who determines his desire and self-conception and recalls,

¹²² Ragland, *Reading Seminar*, 188.

She lay stretched out on the floorboards with her hands under her head and her eyes closed...I said again I thought it was hopeless and no good going on and she agreed, without opening her eyes. [*Pause.*] I asked her to look at me and after a few moments—[*Pause.*]—after a few moments she did, but the eyes just slits, because of the glare. I bent over her to get them in the shadow and they opened...I lay down across her with my face in her breasts and my hand on her.¹²³

In the present stage in his life, when he is “drowned in dreams and burning to be gone,” he would rather hear himself speaking this memory in order to be represented in the mode of this *regard*.¹²⁴ Though illusory, it represents for Krapp a rare moment of wholeness. In the absence of all other fetishized objects of desire, his recordings have taken their place and become a veritable archive of desire, his most loyal companion, in which the object *a* is reduced to the uncanny and autonomous voice of the Other.

But Krapp’s intent is not merely one of nostalgia; rather, he thinks that he can achieve a fullness of being, wholly filling the lack that causes his anxiety and dread, by preserving and re-experiencing those paradoxical instances when the ambiguity of the gaze and the voice simultaneously revealed and recovered the void in being by shifting desire into fetishized objects. The disembodied voice of a younger Krapp ponders, “perhaps the best years of my life are gone. When there was a chance for happiness. But I wouldn’t want them back.”¹²⁵ Now, reliving these years allows him to “lie propped up in

¹²³¹²³ Beckett, *Collected Shorter Plays*, 62.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 63.

the dark and wander. Be again in a dingle on a Christmas Eve...be again on Croghan on a Sunday morning."¹²⁶ To "be again, be again. All that old misery."¹²⁷ For "in the unconscious, in the realm of fantasy, one identifies...with the gaze that first structured one as a subject of desire;" Krapp seeks to retrieve what is to be represented in the light of that gaze, to retrieve that original desire, however miserable its possession.¹²⁸ He believes, as do all subjects of desire according to Beckett and Lacan, that only in doing so can he regain a fullness of being. The voice of the Other demands, "once wasn't enough for you. Lie down across her."¹²⁹

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¹²⁶ Ibid., 62.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 63.

¹²⁸ Ragland, *Reading Seminar*, 197.

¹²⁹ Beckett, *Collected Shorter Plays*, 63.

“The Doctor’s Dilemma” and Bioethics in Literature: An Interdisciplinary Approach

Pritha Kundu

Abstract

The interface between literature and medicine has long been an area of interest for researchers. It is difficult to conceptualize any singular methodological approach for such an interdisciplinary field. However, the theoretical developments in Bioethics are promising. Besides, literary texts representing medical themes and characters have created a cultural discourse of Bioethical problems in the modern world. Borrowing its title from Shaw’s famous medical satire, *The Doctor’s Dilemma*, the present paper aims at exploring how far a bioethical approach—with special reference to the doctor-figures represented in some twentieth century literary works—can be helpful in delineating the complexities involved in issues like the doctor-patient relationship, medical ethics and the rapidly growing technological orientations in the modern world.

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The Postmodernist turn in literature, culture, society and science in the 1950s and 60s has opened up several interdisciplinary possibilities. One such interdisciplinary discourses involving

Bioethics and literature has assumed a certain importance in the areas of Medical Humanities and Biomedical Ethics. In her essay contributed to the book, *Bioethics and Biolaw through Literature*, Mara Logaldo has discussed both the affinities and disparities between “Postmodernism” and “Bioethics.” In the 1970s, the emergence of the term “Bioethics” coincided with the foundation of the Kennedy Institute of Ethics in Wisconsin and Washington D. C., whereas “Postmodernism” took shape as a complex paradigm shift in literature, culture, discourse and epistemology throughout the 1950s, 60s and the ’70s. Both Bioethics and Postmodernism, however, share a distrust of the “grand narrative”—the former arose from a rejection of faith in a teleological and positivist science, and the latter took its turn in opposition to the progressive values and assumptions that dominated the West since the age of Enlightenment. “At the same time, they also rejected a theological view, preferring to it, at most, what has been defined as a “negative,” deconstructive, and eliminative theology.”

For Logaldo, both Postmodernism and Bioethics are thus engaged in a critique of man’s present position in the universe. However, the only aspect of Humanism that Bioethics retains in its modified terms, is the self-scrutiny of man as a biological, social and scientific being, maintaining a self-awareness, while Postmodernism—especially its literary aspect, has replaced the “self” with the auto-reflexivity of the text. Postmodernism aims at a decentralization of the human subject, whereas bioethical medicine tries to rethink the notions of safeguarding human life even against a hopeless and nihilistic universe, applying the social, cultural, political, and moral understandings of a composite and complex global situation. In their essay “From Literary Bioethics to Bioethical Literature” Sedova and Rymer have referred to George

Khushf's definition of bioethics as "a large, interdisciplinary field, with contributions from philosophy, theology, literature, history, law, sociology, anthropology, and the diverse health professions." On the other hand, Howard Brody, a physician and medical humanist, has defined bioethics and literature in terms of an unavoidable ambiguity—the goals of bioethical and literary representations of medical themes cannot be exactly the same. Elsewhere he also holds that, though the term "bioethics" in its present sense did not come to be used before the 1970s, what is now called bioethics is basically a recent revival of a modernist medical enterprise. As he continues:

The first target of postmodern criticism is, of course, modernist medicine, and bioethics comes in for its share of criticism as it is shown to have become an integral part of modernist medical enterprise and not, ... a critical attack upon and corrective of that medical system.

The understanding of bioethical literature in the modern period, then, becomes both a movement towards the opening of new vistas of understanding Medical Humanities in relation to life and at the same time, a problem to bring that understanding to a reality that replicates its anxieties, constantly forming new bioethical challenges. Within a Postmodernist culture, when the boundaries between epistemologies, disciplines, and discourses are constantly overlapping, the understanding of bioethical literature, then, becomes both a kind of "opening up" new vistas of understanding life and a problem to negotiate that understanding in reality.

Shifting our focus from Postmodernism and Bioethics in general to their specific literary representations and theoretical questions, we may realize that the very attempt to associate the literary and the

textual to the bioethical indicates a Postmodernist approach where everything can be considered a “text.” As Downie and McNaughton have also noted:

[T]he analysis of a poem is a highly skilled and complex matter, especially since poems are resonant with irony and ambiguity. Indeed, perhaps the diagnosis of a patient’s illness and the analysis of an ethical problem have this in common: each is more like the interpretation of a difficult text...

If the patient’s problem is to be interpreted as a “text,” so it is to be in case of “the doctor’s dilemma” as well. Like a postmodernist text that defies “meaning,” the bioethical “subject” is also denied any certitude of judgment. Borrowing its heading from Shaw’s evocative phrase, the present paper aims at a close literary analysis of some texts of the modern period—texts in which the doctor-patient relationship amounts to a bioethical problem. Terms like “literary bioethics” and “narrative bioethics” have indeed emerged in a postmodernist context of cultural studies. However, in order to trace the development of bioethical rationale in literature, one may go back to the nineteenth and twentieth century literary works involving medical themes and characters, concerning “doctor,” “disease” “cure” and “death.” In this regard, the changing discourse of representing the doctor-figure in modern literature can be appreciated from a bioethical point of view, through the lens of Postmodernist assumptions.

The traditional tripartite structure of the professional hierarchy in Victorian medicine gradually evolved into a more complex discourse involving the consultant and the General Practitioner. George Bernard Shaw’s 1906 play, *The Doctor’s Dilemma*, shows

how during the late nineteenth century the medical spectrum got complicated—with the professional elite in London, particularly around the “Harley Street” on the one hand, and the mediocre GP on the other. As Peterson observes, the prestige attached to this “small but dynamic” group of consultant elites derived not necessarily from their Aesculapian skill and knowledge, but rather, from the social status of the healing profession itself. In between there was a thriving politics in the medical market which was lucrative for the young practitioners. Getting an attachment with the public hospitals—St. Mary’s Hospital at Paddington, for instance—became one of the most prospective places for young socialist physicians. Earlier in the nineteenth century the fellows of the surgical and medical institutions were selected on the basis of social status, family connections, and sometimes, political affiliation.¹³⁰ As the century drew to its close and healthcare and health-policies became more complicated and mercantile, there was a change in the shaping criteria of bioethics. The consultant elite, achieved more power in a sense which was categorically Foucauldian. Peterson points out that this “power” rested not on the doctors’ capacity for curing and giving care, but rather on the dangerous propensity of the patients’ dependence on the consultants for their life and death at their disposal. It was less “the power to do, but the power to know, and therefore to judge.”

The power, authority, and ethical values of the late nineteenth doctors began to be questioned within a broad socio-economic scenario. George Bernard Shaw, being a member of the Fabian Society, figured as one of the most prominent critics of the medical

¹³⁰ For details, see E.A. Heaman, *St. Mary’s : The History of a London Teaching Hospital*, Montreal and Kingston, London, Ithaca: McGill University Press, 2003.

establishment. One junior doctor under Dr. Almoth Wright, the Head of Pathology in St. Mary's Hospital and Shaw's friend, complained that doctors often had to be selective about a certain number of patients, since the number of hospital beds was limited.¹³¹ Shaw often visited the Pathology department at St. Mary's and enjoyed informal conversation with physicians. It is probable that the basic ethical problem in *The Doctor's Dilemma* was partly derived from Shaw's interactions with Dr. Wright or his colleagues. In the play, Shaw portrays the situation of a poor General Practitioner who realizes the need of giving specialized treatment, but finds it practically impossible since his poor working class patients would not be able to pay for the proper measures of medication. Nor would they come to him if he prescribes such expensive measures. Dr. Blenkinsop, however, does all that he can for his poor patients, considering his own limited resources. On the other hand, the doctor has to make compromises with the demand of the large number of well-to-do patients, in order to live by pleasing as many as he can.

The central dilemma of Shaw's text is founded not only on medical ethics in an idealistic sense, but on the market-situation of the medical profession which creates a gap between supply and demand. Dr. Ridgeon in the play has discovered a remedy for tuberculosis, but the supply of material for vaccination being scarce, he can accommodate only ten patients—"chosen ones." It is clear that Ridgeon's selection of ten patients out of fifty, leaving the other forty to die, amounts to a serious bioethical inequity.

¹³¹ Roy Maxwell, "The Doctor's Dilemma: Clinical Governance and Medical Professionalism," *Ulster Medical Journal* 2011; 80(3), p 154.

Ridgeon finds that he must “consider, not only whether the man could be saved, but whether he was worth saving.” The first criterion measures the chances of success, whereas the second addresses the “quality” of a patient. This goes fundamentally against the principle of equality and impartiality which gives each patient equal right to be treated. When Mrs. Jennifer Dubedat persuades him to treat her husband, an artist, he says, “You are asking me to kill another man for his sake.” This notion of “saving” a patient at the cost of “killing” another almost raises Ridgeon to the level of a “saviour.” Ironically, this goes back to the ancient Greek concept of “pharmakon”—a singular term meaning both “elixir” and “poison”—bearing a terrible duality of connotation, which suggests “healing” as well as “killing.” The very sense in which Dr. Ridgeon assumes himself to have absolute power to “kill” and to “heal,” becomes his dilemma in terms of bioethics. The irony of Ridgeon’s situation becomes evident when another patient, a colleague in fact—Dr. Blenkinsop, reports that he has contracted tuberculosis. Being a poor GP, Blenkinsop knows that he cannot afford to bear treatment, so he does not ask Ridgeon for his therapy. But his position as a colleague and an honest—however poor—practitioner speaks for his case even if he does not demand consideration. When Blenkinsop has left, Dr. Cullen retorts to Ridgeon, “Well, Mr. Savior of Lives, which is it to be? That honest decent man Blenkinsop, or that rotten blackguard of an artist, eh?” The play critically asks whether the doctors’ claim to have power over the life and death of fellow human beings is compatible with any kind of value-judgement and how far they can be trusted with such power.

The Doctor’s Dilemma betrays Shaw’s bizarre attitude towards the medical profession. What appears to be even more grotesque is the doctors’ attitude to their own errors. No one seems to be the least

concerned about the harm he has done to some unfortunate patients. Dr. Walpole seems to take great amusement from his own fault, when he mentions jocularly how he once forgot to remove the sponges from a patient's body after surgery. B.B. shows a dangerously cavalier attitude to the use of anti-toxins, even knowing that they can be harmful at times. Ridgeon's final decision to cure Blenkinsop instead of Louis Dubedat is derived from no sudden awakening of fellow-feeling, professional ethics, and duty to a really worthy colleague. He is infatuated with Mrs. Dubedat and wishes to get rid of the artist, and cures Blenkinsop instead of Dubedat. Another doctor, B. B. takes interest in Dubedat's case and offers to treat him. Even then there is no sense of consolation and real hope. B.B. deliberately maintains that he is going to use Dubedat as an object for experiment:

To me you are simply a field of battle in which an invading army of tubercle bacilli struggles with a patriotic force of phagocytes... I will stimulate them. And I take no further responsibility.

Within the text, it is not clear whether this proposed mode of medical experiment could have been a successful alternative treatment of tuberculosis, for B.B. ultimately resorts to Ridgeon's method. He mishandles Ridgeon's method and fails—Dubedat dies. Later, when Ridgeon confesses to Jennifer that he loves her, and so he has indirectly "killed" her husband by referring him to B.B., Jennifer dismisses the infatuated doctor with a strong admonition: "Doctors think they hold the keys to life and death; but it is not their will that is fulfilled. I don't believe you made any difference at all." Her reproach to Ridgeon can be equally applied to any other elite and vain-glorious physician—none of them makes any difference. For Shaw, the medical profession is either

inefficient or dangerous, since it is corrupted by the doctors' self-serving will and misguided value-judgment. The concern is not merely of human consideration, it is rather a bioethical problem, asking how far the self-proclaimed specialist's "power to know" can be trusted to exercise a "power to judge" the values of life and death, and to determine one patient's "worth" over another.

The breach of trust between doctor and patient was a growing problem in the early twentieth century which showed little sign of improvement in the next two or three decades, including the inter-war period and afterwards. As Lawrence Rothfield observes, since by the end of the nineteenth century, capitalism began to co-opt professionalism, "the physician, who stood for an alternative to marketplace individualism in the earlier period... now can take on almost the opposite role, standing as the epitome of liberal individualism in an era of emerging corporate and international capitalism". The art of healing suffered a transformation from an progressive and authentic science to an auxiliary one, and from an ideal profession to a less significant social praxis—and this has found expression in a "new wave of antagonism against medicine and medical professionals."

With the modernization and rapid commercialization of the medical profession the idealistic figure of the Victorian GP or the good family physician was no longer the central consciousness in modern fiction dealing with medical concerns. In addition to the tension between the self-interest of the physician and the expectation the patients, a new tension grew up between the increasingly technological and biomedical focus on disease and care of the patient. The introduction of such new medical equipment as the compound microscope and X-rays by the late 1890s, electrocardiograph (ECG) in 1910 and the sphygmomanometer by

1912 transformed the very perception of disease and brought a mechanical efficiency in diagnosis. In view of such technological “revolution” in the medical field, the perception of the social history of medicine also underwent certain changes. In the West, the focus of medical history has largely been “iatrocentric”—oriented towards the quality of the medics and “matters internal to medicine rather than considering health care in a wider social context,” with the assumption that the profession is an institutionalized, “homogeneous body evolving towards scientific competence.” However, the notion of a “homogenous” body of scientific enterprises has now been highly debated, and the issue of social iatrogenesis has come to the fore. As Ivan Illich suggests, social iatrogenesis is often confused with the diagnostic authority of the healer. He insists on the “iatrogenic” (i.e., created by the medical system itself) conception of disease, suggesting that medicine tends to create illness as a social reality in order to prove its own authority. The changes in the medical scenario are “dependent variables of political and technological transformations, which in turn are reflected in what doctors do and say,” and medical intervention itself results in “an extending proportion of the *new* burden of disease... in favor of people who are or might become sick.” In that case, the respectable figure of the healer has been transformed into a bureaucratic agent of social and cultural “iatrogenesis,” legitimizing an ever-thriving population of patient consumerism.

In terms of bioethics, healthcare and wellbeing in human civilization is a pathological, social as well as moral enterprise and therefore, it has obvious ethical dynamics of doing good or evil. According to the Foucauldian scheme, clinical authority, like religion or state-laws, has a controlling power over what is considered normative, sane, orderly, and proper. So the physician,

like the governor or the priest, is also a judgmental authority on normativity, health and sickness. In modern societies, the medical enterprise has become a bureaucratic establishment, with a capital different in nature; despite its growing materialistic concern and exploitation of disease as an object, it was still believed to be based upon some abstract notion of trust and confidence. It is in this slippery ground of professional integrity that the question of bioethics creeps in. As to the literary representation of medical themes, one may ask what aspects of bioethics can make it possible to understand the figure of the doctor as a cultural manifestation of the changes in social history with the onset of the “modern period.”

From the perspective of literary Modernism, it has been a common critical consensus to associate the early decades of the twentieth century with a fragmented and distorted reality, and the depiction of the professional life of medics in modern literature also reflected this. The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 affected humanity with an irrecoverable damage of health and stability, resulting in a diseased condition of trauma. Jones and Wessely argue that the theoretical and technical developments in medical psychiatry by the time of the First World War were not enough to address the problems of the shell-shocked patients suffering from a post-traumatic neurosis¹³² Doctors interested in psychiatric care-giving were still a minority, and the patients were generally treated under the broad category of nervous disorder, which Sir William Bradshaw, the renowned nerve-specialist in *Mrs. Dalloway* calls “not having a sense of proportion.”

¹³² See Edgar Jones and Simon Wessely, *Shell Shock to PTSD: Military Psychiatry from 1900 to the Gulf War* (Hove, East Sussex: Psychiatry Press, 2005).

Literary representations of medics during and after the war, have been rather negative—a trend which reflects both the helplessness and ethical disintegration of the medical profession, facing a reality too bleak, diseased and hardly with prospects of doing something really good. Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* represents two different aspects of medical treatment given to the figure of the “broken man”—the shell-shocked soldier, a problem and threat for the post-war British masculinity, trying hard to recover its stability. The scathing medical satire focuses on the professional jealousy and narrow-mindedness of the doctors. Learning the GP Holmes' opinion on Warren Smith's case, the specialist Sir William retorts: “Those GPs...,” although in fact both doctors are equally mistaken in their views. The failure of the doctors to restore health to the war-victim Septimas Warren Smith has been associated with the author's own bitter experience of undergoing psychological treatment, resulting in her distrust in the unfeeling and dully authoritative nature of medical treatment¹³³ Dr. Holmes, the GP in *Mrs. Dalloway* does not believe in mental illness at all; and Sir William Bradshaw, the nerve specialist hypocritically avoids the word “madness,” whereas he blatantly refuses to hear and understand what the patient has to say and speedily prescribes complete seclusion and rest, before dismissing the Warren-Smiths. He considers mental illness a form of rebellion against the status quo, which must be brought into submission which he calls normality and “proportion.” Woolf does not hold her disgust when she sardonically portrays the doctor:

¹³³ Lyndall Gordon's *Virginia Woolf: A Writer's Life* relates Woolf's own mental trauma and the “hopeless meddling of doctors” to the role of doctors in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Relevant extracts from the work are included in *Mrs. Dalloway* (ed.) Brinda Bose, Delhi, Worldview Publications, 2012, 194-204.

To his patients he gave three quarters of an hour, and if in this exacting science which has to do with what, after all, we know nothing about—the nervous system, the human brain—a doctor loses his sense of proportion, as a doctor he fails. Health we must have, and health is proportion,; so that when a man... threatens, as they often do, to kill himself, you invoke proportion, order rest in bed, rest in solitude,... rest without friends, without books, without messages...

Septimas Warren Smith's suicide shows the ultimate collapse of the traditional and idealistic relationship between doctor and patient, which becomes rather a terrible enmity. The only person who tries to understand Septimas is his wife Rezia. Realizing that her husband is actually better and happy when he is not under a medical eye, she resists Dr. Holmes. The doctor authoritatively demands to see him, and Septimas, as if to protest against this disgracing medical network of power, throws himself out of the window. Even a few seconds before Dr. Holmes' entry, Septimas has not been thinking of death. It is the doctor who breaks into his private space, his otherwise smoothly running stream of consciousness, and compels him to commit suicide.

The failure of the doctor to "heal" and the tragic claim of the patient's voice to be heard and understood can be read against the theoretical framework of literary bioethics. Nancy Bretlinger points out that within literary bioethics, shifting importance to the patient's story, voice or point-of-view amounts to a narrative ethics¹³⁴ Viewing the patient as "a whole person," therefore,

¹³⁴ See Nancy Berlinger, "Preface," *After Harm: Medical Error and the Ethics of Forgiveness*, Baltimore and Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 2005.

amounts to a bioethical formulation, which, instead of focusing on symptoms, attempts to analyze the patient's problem in his own terms. In *Mrs. Dalloway* the doctors' dismissal of the traumatic patient's voice and the patient's self-destruction thereafter thus can be read as a bioethical failure—open to a postmodernist critique.

Woolf's "Dr. Chapter" has been a cult-narrative on the medical egotism and fallibility in post-war Britain. Besides, modern sensation novels, science fiction and mystery tales have often characterized doctors as embodying the "evil genius." Earlier in popular crime fiction, such as in the Sherlock Holmes casebooks and later, in Dorothy L. Seyer's detective novels throughout the late 1920s and '30s, doctor-figures have often been associated with medical criminality. Francis Iles' 1931 crime-fiction, *Malice Afterthought* details in clinical terms the sadomasochistic psychology of Dr. Bickleigh who murders his wife Julia in a planned way. If such popular mystery-stories or crime-fiction cannot be regarded as well-researched and organized critique of medical malpractice, there is no denying that they reflected the general suspicion and unease about the sinister nature of medical fraud and criminality. Developments in new forensic experiments, vaccination and vivisection and their misuse also fanned the popular fear about the dark character-type of malicious doctors.

These fears were reframed in terms of a dystopian worldview in Aldous Huxley's futuristic novel *Brave New World*, where medicine and biotechnology has taken the role of a totalitarian government. To many, Huxley's text anticipates the rise of Fascism and the atrocities perpetrated by Nazi doctors during the Second World War. The use of genetic engineering and pathogenics for evil and morbid purposes result in a destabilization of the traditional moral component in medical diagnosis and care-giving. The doctors,

scientists and experimentalists in *Brave New World* are part of a system in which medical science has become a relentless machinery without any kind of consideration for human individuality. In the imaginary “World State,” the Bloomsbury embryo centre, human cloning centres (“hatchery”) and human management institutes are strategically located in a futuristic London, constituting a “panopticon”-like structure, with the “eye of authority” active all the time, keeping individuals under constant surveillance¹³⁵ It foreshadows a strange dynamic in the doctor-patient relationship where both identities are deprived of subjective consciousness, not to say anything about the very existence of medical ethics.

Huxley’s *Brave New World* depicts a World state in which pharmacological governance controls the eugenic possibilities, where babies are “hatched” in bottles, and adults are brought into “order” by using a hallucinatory drug called “soma.” Describing the power of this medicine, Dr. Shaw uses the word “eternity” which only adds to the irony of the human race that is bound to commodification in the name of enjoying “eternity.” Through his doctor-figures in *Brave New World*, Huxley has deliberately parodied his famous predecessors—George Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells. Both were interested in a bioethical vision of eugenics: Shaw’s idea of “Life Force” gave way to his futuristic imagination in *Man and Superman* and *Back to Methuselah*, and H.G. Wells’ utopian vision in *Men Like God* evoked in Huxley’s mind “an almost pathological reaction in the direction of cynical anti-idealism.” Initially he intended to write a parody of Wells’ “too optimistic” utopia, but gradually the motivation took a life of its own; the idea became “so fascinatingly pregnant with so many

¹³⁵ Michel Foucault, “Panopticism,” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. by Paul Rabinow (United States: Penguin, 1984), pp. 206-214.

kinds of literary and psychological possibilities that [he] forgot *Men Like Gods* and addressed [him]self in all seriousness to the task of writing the book that was later to be known as *Brave New World*."

Huxley has not made any direct reference to the writings of Shaw and Wells, but he has given them the status of the physician: "Dr. Shaw" and "Dr. Wells" have become two fictional medics in the text. Dr. Shaw introduces the old and alcoholic Linda to the hallucinogenic drug "Soma," even knowing that its excessive intake can cause death. John's protest against the prescription brings out the doctor's view that it is better for Linda to die as quickly as possible since she is no longer productive and therefore, unworthy of living in the World State. Dr. Shaw dehumanizes the old woman and negates her right to life, and in turn, gets de-humanized himself, in a bioethical sense. Dr. Wells' role is that of a failed experimentalist who prescribes pregnancy substitutes and runs into an ectogenetic error, so that the whole experiment is reduced to futility. In his novel of ideas Huxley thus makes medicine, science and technology assume the authority in a totalitarian government and deliberately paints the doctor-figures in such a sinister and negative light. Such dehumanization of one doctor-character and representation of the other as a pastiche of the Victorian, research-minded and positivist medic is somewhat indicative of a postmodernist turn. This can also be read as a critique of the "grand narrative" of nineteenth century literature and medicine and the heroic status attributed, more often than not, to the professional medic.

In a postmodern context of medicine and biotechnology, Ivan Illyich has noted in 1975 that medical fraud, negligence and malpractice have been part of medical history, but the society at

large has long been absorbed in the utopian vision of "healing" until the mechanization and depersonalization of the medical profession became too prominent. He further adds that in the new age of highly mechanized biotechnology, the doctor has been transformed "from an artisan exercising a skill on personally known individuals into a technician applying scientific rules to classes of patients" and as a result of this, "malpractice acquired an anonymous, almost respectable status." The suggestion is obvious: medical fraud, negligence or fallibility, which was previously considered "an abuse of confidence and a moral fault," has now been subject to rationalization in terms of "random human error" or "system breakdown," where "callousness becomes "scientific detachment," and incompetence becomes "a lack of specialized equipment." Illich's view may appear too pessimistic: however, much of what is going on in our contemporary society in the name of healthcare, is not very different from Huxley's imagination of a system in which the concepts of care-giving, parenting, doctoring and nurturing human life no longer exist.

A historicized analysis of the degeneration of the "medical hero" in literary texts of the modern period shows that such decline was no simple matter of changing values with the shift in socio-economic and cultural standards. In the twentieth century medical capitalism made bioethics itself a problem under new and disturbing conditions of life, mortality and being—as realistically depicted in *The Doctor's Dilemma* or, anticipated with more morbid and futuristic imagination—as in *Brave New World*. The First World War which chronologically separates two such texts, made the problems all the more burning: the qualities of "health" and "sickness" were no longer simply pathological, mental or spiritual, they rather became existential. On the one hand, the value of medical science as a progressive and benevolent enterprise grew

problematic with the technological advances and its ill-uses—cell-theories and electrographic measuring instruments seemed to depersonalize and fragmentize the holistic concept of health. Moreover, this entails in the process of medical caregiving a kind of “motricity”—to use a term coined by Lyotard—which has posed further challenges to the humane qualities related to medical ethics.¹³⁶ The intriguing aspects of literary bioethics in the early decades of the twentieth century, have shown little signs of alleviation in the present era of evidence-based medicine and growing difficulties in bioethics. The present-day need to understand the moral and psychosocial dynamics about healthcare and the doctor-patient relationship can also help to create a renewed awareness in literary texts with bioethical themes, and the ambiguous position of the modern doctor-figure therein.

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¹³⁶ By “motricity of the modern world,” Lyotard means an auto-replicative technological advancement in which the machine has taken a life of its own—which postmodernism seeks to duplicate in an endless web of simulation.

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Who's Afraid of Birth? Exploring Mundane and Existential Affects with Heidegger

Tanja Staehler

Abstract

While certain levels of fear and anxiety seem quite appropriate to the experience of birth, it is detrimental if they become overwhelming. This article strives to understand birth-related affects more thoroughly by asking which affects are commonly involved, and how they come about. Martin Heidegger provides the most developed phenomenology of affects available to us. A phenomenological perspective proves useful because its close description allows categorising affects into mundane ones like fears—evoked by specific entities and circumstances—and existential ones like anxiety. Anxiety concerns our existence in its entirety and brings us face to face with the fact that we are finite beings in a groundless existence. Giving birth means needing to negotiate existential affects in a mundane situation. The birth-giving woman is dependent on others to take her seriously in her experience of affective turmoil in which anxiety and wonder, fears and anticipatory anxiousness come together.

I had no choice, needed to make no decision. I was moved because something was in preparation that was new and came from us, and because the world seemed to me to be waxing. Like the moon before which one is supposed to bow three times when it is new and stands tender and breath-coloured at the start of its course. [...] Now I trembled at the very thought.

Ingeborg Bachmann, "Everything"

When it comes to the emotions associated with the process of childbirth, fear and anxiety take priority. They hold a peculiar status because on the one hand, they seem a natural or normal emotional response and are expected to give way to relief and happiness later. On the other hand, they have detrimental effects if they become too strong or even get out of control. Martin Heidegger claims in his existential philosophy that fear and anxiety are not naming the same mood, but need to be distinguished. This article will take an existential-phenomenological approach to develop a more differentiated idea of the emotions or "affects" involved in the birth process and the conditions that evoke them. The term "affects" is chosen in accordance with the neutrality of the phenomenological perspective to describe how women are emotionally *affected* before and during the birth process.¹³⁷

¹³⁷ The decision to use the concept 'affect' for purposes of this article does not concern the difficult and ongoing discussion as to how the terms *Befindlichkeit* and *Stimmung* in Heidegger's work should be translated. Stambaugh suggests 'attunement' and 'mood', Macquarrie and Robinson use the rather unhelpful 'state-of-mind' and 'mood'. When citing from *Being and Time*, I give the translation that seems most convincing or provide my own, without specifically indicating. All page numbers refer to the German edition; they are provided as marginal numbers in both English translations.

Phenomenology of Affects

An initial definition of phenomenology can be provided by describing the focus of phenomenology as concerned not with *what* we perceive and experience, but *how* we perceive and experience it. Normally, we dwell in the world by attending to objects as well as tasks and states-of-affairs; in other words, we concentrate on *what* is to be done. Phenomenology requests for us to change this attitude, focussing away from everyday tasks and objects towards *how* we approach and experience world. In the case of birth, such a change of focus seems helpful since the experience is not really about objects, and what is crucial about it cannot be reduced to tasks or practices.

Because it is not about objects, phenomenology is particularly suited for an analysis of affects. The rather substantial topic of affects will be addressed here only in a preliminary fashion to prepare for the discussions of fear, anxiety, anticipatory anxiousness, and wonder below.

Firstly, the advantages of a phenomenological approach to affects will be outlined by mentioning briefly some shortcomings of the main alternatives. Secondly, we will provide a frame for Heidegger's discussion of affects, specifically fear and anxiety, by previewing it with the most common objections. In examining Heidegger's discussion of fear and anxiety, we can then immediately see to what extent he is vulnerable to these objections and to what extent our investigation of birth requires us to expand the framework provided by him. Let me respond to a potential discomfort from the beginning: it might appear surprising that we will follow Heidegger's analysis so closely, especially considering the substantial objections his analysis evokes. Yet we will see that his

account carries much further than it first seems. Even though there are a few moments at which we need to add to his elaborations, his analysis overall proves very resourceful for understanding the differences between the affects involved in birth, the reasons behind them, and the possibilities to create conditions that would facilitate a balance between the relevant affects and minimize the danger of detrimental anxiety and fear.

Concerning the philosophical history of approaching affects, Heidegger maintains that the “fundamental ontological interpretation of the affects has hardly been able to take one step worthy of mention since Aristotle.”¹³⁸ Furthermore, Heidegger praises Aristotle for realizing that affects are not as such a matter of psychology; Aristotle treats them in the *Rhetoric* and discusses how they relate to speech and speakers, and we will return to this important connection below.

Affects are undoubtedly difficult to describe in a fashion that moves beyond the merely subjective, and yet phenomenology is determined to accomplish such a move. Philosophers may have made little progress with the topic since Plato and Aristotle, but why not trust psychology as a discipline that focuses exactly on the soul (*psyche*) where already the Ancient Greeks located affects? In his critique of psychology as a science, Heidegger is mostly concerned with certain questionable metaphysical assumptions underlying psychology.¹³⁹ Traditional psychology, like other

¹³⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Albany: SUNY University Press (2010), 39.

¹³⁹ It seems that Heidegger might be more sympathetic to phenomenological psychology, as some psychologists developed it following Husserl's leads. Heidegger never states that psychology should be abandoned; he only points out that Daseinsontology precedes psychology and other sciences, and that the latter

sciences, treats human beings as if their mode of existence was equivalent to an object, that is, something merely present-at-hand (*vorhanden*), merely present in the physical way.¹⁴⁰ Biology and physics become paradigmatic sciences, and the relations between humans or the relation between a human being and his or her world are treated in terms of natural causality. An affect turns into a reaction that is caused by a specific object which can be quantified and, if so desired, removed. Once a quantitative framework with its behaviourist implications has been accepted, affects indeed appear alterable. Yet our experience shows that affects overcome us, and that we are more vulnerable to them than a traditional psychological account makes it seem.

What does a phenomenology of affects have to offer, in contrast? It investigates affects as phenomena arising out of being-in-the-world. Usually, we think of affects as something occasional, subjective, and unreliable. Yet affects do not just depend on the subject, on my personality and disposition; otherwise, my affective disposition would be much more stable, and I would not experience affects as linked to a certain object or situation. At the same time, affects are not merely object-dependent either: different people are affected differently by the same object or situation. Heidegger concludes that a mood “comes neither from ‘outside’ nor from ‘inside,’ but arises out of being-in-the-world.”¹⁴¹ Affects emerge from the interplay between inside and outside, or between Dasein and world.

remain groundless if they do not consider ontological issues while constantly making implicit claims about being.

¹⁴⁰ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 49.

¹⁴¹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 136.

We assume that we experience affects every so often, for example, when we are sad or happy. Heidegger emphasizes that we always have a mood, even if this mood is just indifference, and that it is a mistake to only focus on the extreme cases of moods. The fact that we are always in some mood also makes it easier to understand that we do not first perceive or know something to then develop an emotional approach in a second step; only by abstraction can affects be considered something secondary. Instead, we always already “turn toward or turn away.”¹⁴² If an investigation of affects requires an analysis of being-in-the-world, phenomenology emerges as the most suitable method.

Fear versus Anxiety

The significance of the concept of world makes it possible to distinguish between such affects which are concerned with entities in the world and those fundamental affects which concern everything there is, the whole, or the world. Heidegger explains this distinction in his famous analysis of the distinction between fear (*Furcht*) and anxiety (*Angst*). Before we attend to the relevant sections of *Being and Time*, let me outline two objections against Heidegger’s analysis which by now qualify as classic objections. This procedure will allow us to already read Heidegger’s account with the relevant objections in mind and consider to what extent the criticism is justified.

Firstly, it has been objected that Heidegger places too much emphasis on anxiety. Secondly, Heidegger has been accused especially by French phenomenologists (such as Jean-Paul Sartre,

¹⁴² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 135.

Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida) to not give sufficient attention to the Other, or the other person. These two objections have been combined into one by Klaus Held who argues that it is exactly the emphasis on anxiety that causes difficulties for Heidegger in addressing issues of intersubjectivity or being-with-one-another.¹⁴³ According to Held, the analyses presented in *Being and Time* are one-sided because they focus on anxiety at the expense of wonder and on death at the expense of birth¹⁴⁴. We will return to the connection between birth and wonder below.

Heidegger approaches fear and anxiety by asking specific questions which reveal the determining dimensions of affects, such as the “in the face of which (*Wovor*) we fear,” “fearing itself,” and “that which fear fears about (*Worum*).”¹⁴⁵ To prepare for the contrast to anxiety, Heidegger summarises his discussion of fear in the following way: “Our interpretation of fear as an affect has shown that in each case that of which we fear is a detrimental entity within-the-world which comes from some definite region but is close by and is bringing itself close, and yet might stay away.”¹⁴⁶ The detailed analysis leading up to this summarizing statement occurs in Section 30 where Heidegger explains how the object of fear is not yet close enough to be in our control, and how we do not quite know

¹⁴³ Held’s article (1993) is intended to contribute to the heated debates about the connection between Heidegger’s philosophy and his brief period of sympathy for National Socialism. This political dimension is not relevant for our purposes here. Nor will we attend to Held’s suggestion that love would provide a helpful supplement to the one-sided focus on anxiety. I have argued elsewhere that this proposal is questionable since love does not seem to fulfil the definition of a fundamental mood (see [removed for blind review]).

¹⁴⁴ Held points out that there are a few exceptions even within *Being and Time* (BT, 391, 373 f.) and especially in later texts (Held 1993, fn. 53).

¹⁴⁵ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 30.

¹⁴⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 185.

whether it will come closer or not, which increases rather than decreases the fear.¹⁴⁷

Especially the uncertainty as to when the entity might be coming close and the fact that this uncertainty (and even the possibility of “staying away”) enhances rather than decreases the fear is highly relevant for our case of birth. It is one of the most unsettling features of birth that it can begin to happen at an almost entirely unpredictable moment: as a premature, normal, or late birth; during night or day; while the pregnant woman is at home, in a public place, outdoors, etc. Although every pregnancy will lead to some birth such that birth will never entirely “stay away,” it is quite possible that the actual birth is so different from the anticipation that some of the feared elements might indeed never come about.¹⁴⁸

But does birth even fit the definition of “that in the face of which we fear”? Heidegger claims that fear always comes about through some “detrimental entity within-the-world.” More precisely, this entity can have the character of an object or of *Mitdasein*¹⁴⁹, that is, an entity whose mode of being is existence, like our own.¹⁵⁰ Yet when it comes to fear in the face of birth, what we fear are not objects, nor is it the infant to be born (*Mitdasein*), but the *event* of birth. An event is not an entity. What follows from this? Firstly,

¹⁴⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 140.

¹⁴⁸ E.g., in the case of a Caesarian. In turn, those women who fear a Caesarian most will normally indeed find themselves in a situation where what they fear might well pass them by.

¹⁴⁹ Heidegger introduces the term *Dasein* to avoid misleading understandings of the human being (like the ones to which traditional psychology ascribes, as outlined above). He explains the concept as follows: “This entity which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its being, we shall denote by the term ‘*Dasein*’” (*BT*, 27).

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

there is the possibility that Heidegger's statement might be wrong, and fear might not always be about an object or about *Mitdasein*. Yet we should only consider this option after giving Heidegger the reader's benefit of doubt and see whether the claim might still be defensible. Another possibility would be that birth is not something in the face of which we experience fear, but something which gives rise to anxiety. This possibility will now be explored because the contrast between fear and anxiety reveals both affects more clearly.

While we experience fear in the face of an innerworldly entity, anxiety is characterized exactly by the lack of such an entity. Because we cannot identify what is causing anxiety, we tend to be evasive and say that it is "nothing": no thing, nothing specific, no definite entity. Rather, everything becomes problematic. Nothing in the world can provide a hold, and in that sense, "the world has the character of completely lacking significance."¹⁵¹ The contrast to fear becomes more defined when returning to the dimensions Heidegger distinguishes. That in the face of which we fear is an innerworldly entity, and that which fear fears about is our existence to which this entity will be detrimental if it comes to hit us. For anxiety, that in the face of which (*Wovor*) we experience anxiety and that which we are anxious about (*Worum*) coincide. It is nothing specific that threatens us, but rather, our existence as a whole is revealed in its precariousness and vulnerability. For this reason, anxiety is not tied to any specific moments or experiences, but can arise in the "most harmless situations."¹⁵² In and through this experience, "being-anxious discloses, primordially and directly, the world as world"—although obviously not on the level of cognition, but on the level of affects.¹⁵³ As everything in the world

¹⁵¹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 186.

¹⁵² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 189.

¹⁵³ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 187.

becomes insignificant, we are made aware that we usually rely on a context of significance or a world which we take for granted and which seems to be our home, but which is on the most fundamental level uncanny.

Returning to the question of birth, we should now decide whether it causes fear or anxiety. Unfortunately, neither the description of fear nor the one of anxiety seem to entirely fit. For fear, we encounter the already mentioned problem that birth is an event and not an entity, and the fears involved in the event do not seem to be about specific entities either. Anxiety is a more fundamental mood, not tied to any particular events or experiences, but to our existence or world as a whole. To understand the elusive mood of anxiety better, interpreters tend to relate it to death, as Heidegger himself does at times. This is partly justified, partly problematic:

(1.) Death indeed plays a crucial role for anxiety because we do not know when it will happen, and the impact which this uncertainty has on anxiety is at least as effective as not knowing when the detrimental entity will confront us in the case of fear. In both instances, the uncertainty increases rather than decreases our fear/anxiety. Yet in the case of death, the situation is nonetheless different because it cannot “stay away” – even though, due to its elusiveness, we tend to presume exactly that, on an everyday level.

(2.) However, anxiety should not be exclusively linked to death, especially not to death as an event, but more generally to our finitude or mortality, and even more generally, to nothingness. *Being and Time* examines our existence and thus places particular weight on the nothingness of Dasein which is brought about by death. But there are moments in *Being and Time* which emphasize the significance of nothingness more generally, and the way in which it contributes to the world’s uncanniness.

The connection between anxiety and nothingness is helpful for our discussion because birth seems to evoke the kind of anxiousness – the term anxiousness is selected to avoid settling on either fear or anxiety for now – that is not related to death specifically, but indeed to our nature as finite beings with limited powers and capabilities. In other words, we are not usually afraid that we are actually going to die during the process of giving birth. Nowadays, this happens very rarely. Furthermore, whatever anxiousness we might have in that direction would not single out birth in relation to other bodily experiences such as, for example, small operations which usually carry a minimal chance of death (e.g., from anaesthesia) yet which do not normally make us anxious, or at least not in the same fashion as birth.

It thus seems more plausible that any anxiety before and around birth is not caused by anxiety before death as such, but by a wider ontological anxiety which birth can indeed invoke. This ontological anxiety is best described by way of questions about this incomprehensible event. How would one finite creature be able to release another finite creature from itself? Does not embodied existence seem too fragile to be capable of undergoing an event of such unimaginable dimensions? Is not the exposure of existence to nothingness such that we cannot possibly imagine ourselves emerging from such an experience unscathed, in one piece, still in the body from which we started? The body which I used to inhabit by myself but which has come to house another creature whom I have not yet seen, which adds to making the event more mysterious and unimaginable.

Yet at this stage, it should become obvious that in relation to birth in particular, but also in general, there is a counterpart to the nothingness that causes anxiety. The nothing is countered by the

“there is.” As Leibniz put it, the question, “why is there something rather than nothing?” creates a fundamental and irresolvable puzzle for us.¹⁵⁴ It is amazing that there is something rather than nothing; this amazement is usually referred to as awe or wonder. Birth is more obviously related to the “there is” than to the nothing that stands over against all things as their potential or actual end. Nonetheless, it is undoubtedly true that birth causes anxiousness, and although the anticipation of wonder might help to balance this anxiousness, it does not eliminate it. This is only appropriate, given the nature of wonder. What brings about wonder, in this instance, is exactly the fact that we do not yet know what will emerge and cannot even imagine it, and that we cannot ultimately imagine that there will indeed be a living creature.

When it comes to our objective of identifying the affects related to birth as fear or anxiety, it has thus emerged that anxiety as explained by Heidegger does not completely fit because the event of birth is not very closely connected to death or the nothing (except as its counter-pole, which is certainly not irrelevant). More importantly, Heidegger’s description of anxiety does not capture birth-related affects well because if asked what she was anxious about in relation to birth, the mother would not say that it was “nothing.” The indefinite character of anxiety and the fact that it can arise in any situation do not hold for birth. It is a specific event, an event that is coming close and yet will come about at an indefinite moment that is causing anxiousness. Nonetheless, it is not fear about a specific entity either.

At this moment, we may ask whether this is not rather a shortcoming of Heidegger’s analysis more generally: apart from the

¹⁵⁴ Leibniz “The Principles of Nature and of Grace, Based on Reason,” 527.

contrast between fear and anxiety, are there not several closely related affects that fall outside of this division, at least in the way Heidegger sets it up? If fear is about an entity in the world and anxiety is about nothing specific (but the nothing that threatens the “there is”), it would seem that his account fails to apply to any events (specific, but not entities). Furthermore, he appears to have omitted the temporal dimension quite relevant for birth and many other events. What is at stake for birth as well as several other events is something like anticipatory anxiousness. Given that Heidegger explains so well how the entity coming close which might also stay away gives rise to heightened fear and also given the title *Being and Time*, it would be quite surprising if time ended up being one of Heidegger’s blind spots.

Perhaps we need to expand Heidegger’s account and add new concepts aside from fear and anxiety to capture kindred affects? It turns out that Heidegger himself makes a suggestion in this direction at the end of Section 30; yet for him, this is a further specification within the category of fear: “thus various possibilities of fear result.”¹⁵⁵ When something threatening suddenly indeed comes about, “fear becomes alarm (*Erschrecken*)” (ibid.). Furthermore, “when what threatens has the character of the completely unfamiliar, fear becomes horror (*Grauen*).” And when these two come together, that is, when the unfamiliar and thus horrible comes so close that it is alarming, we experience “terror (*Entsetzen*).”¹⁵⁶

These distinctions are helpful for continuing our analysis of birth-related affects. In particular, the characterization of something “completely unfamiliar” is fitting and is indeed crucial to the

¹⁵⁵ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 142.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

experience. Birth is an event that qualifies as entirely extraordinary, that is, outside of the ordinary, and completely unlike our everyday experiences. It is indeed completely unfamiliar as an experience, and this unfamiliar nature of the event is a major factor in the anxiousness that it causes.¹⁵⁷ The unfamiliar nature of the event is linked to the fact that we cannot imagine the event, both because it is so unlike everything else and because as an event, it seems quite impossible. Every time that we try to imagine the event (and it is both useful as well as inevitable that we would try imagining it during pregnancy), this unfamiliar nature makes itself present and gives rise to what Heidegger calls horror. And once it becomes obvious that the process leading up to the event has suddenly begun and is in its early stages, such that birth is indeed coming close, there is alarm. This alarm combines with horror into terror – yet due to the anticipation of wonder, also a kind of excitement.

At the end of the analysis of fear, Heidegger thus provides us with further categories that help capture the affects related to birth. For Heidegger, terror is still a version of fear. Yet the character of what is threatening here, namely, being completely unfamiliar, moves beyond the category of innerworldly being. If the threatening is an innerworldly entity of complete unfamiliarity, we can no longer pinpoint it. It could thus be an event of sorts, with dimensions that are causing the fear without being clearly identified as such. Especially if we consider that the entities causing fear also include

¹⁵⁷ This characterisation is appropriate even for the case of multiple births, though it then obviously needs to be qualified. Firstly, there is normally indeed more anxiousness connected to the first time of giving birth. Secondly, there are still sufficiently many unknowns for all subsequent births to justify the characterisation (e.g., will it be similar to the first time or entirely different? Timing, location, and mode are again almost entirely unpredictable).

other people (*Mitdasein*), a number of exemplary fears can be described. The situation might not be quite right, or the place might feel wrong, or there might not be the right people in terms of the health professionals. Furthermore, we might fear that the person whose support we were hoping for would somehow fail to be there, or be prevented by external circumstances. A version of such fears might thus be at stake – yet they would not quite capture the deeper level anxiousness. Here, the distinction between fear and anxiety becomes relevant again which Heidegger introduces with the purpose of showing how anxiety is the more “fundamental” affect. Heidegger claims that anxiety “first makes fear possible” as it is the deeper affect that reveals the precarious nature of our existence to us.¹⁵⁸

We can conclude from our discussion that both fear and anxiety are involved in birth, in a peculiar combination. Birth brings us face to face with the nature of our existence that usually remains concealed. Our finitude is disclosed through the fact that we are not only mortal, but also come into the world in a way that we cannot grasp. Not only is it impossible for the creature who is being born to remember consciously how this happened, but even for the mother, the event is fundamentally unimaginable and ungraspable. It is an event of enormous existential and ontological magnitude, and nonetheless, the event must be negotiated within a very mundane situation. Because birth happens within the tension of fear (as terror) and anxiety, seemingly small disturbances of the mundane level concerning the situation or interpersonal communication can easily undermine the precarious equilibrium.

¹⁵⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 186.

So far, we have seen that the distinction between fear and anxiety is useful in relation to birth. But we have not yet seen whether the distinction is complete or whether other affects belonging to the general realm of anxiousness should be considered. Furthermore, the issue of temporality has arisen as relevant; our next topic will thus be anticipatory anxiousness.

Anticipatory Anxiousness

There is a difference between fears and anxiety that come about once the actual birth process begins, and anticipatory anxiousness that affects women during pregnancy. Upon closer examination, there are actually four kinds of birth-related anxiousness to be considered here:

Anticipatory anxiousness. Such anxiousness relates to anticipating the birth process, and it can emerge quite some time ahead of birth, during any moment of the pregnancy.

Terror, or the kind of fear that emerges when it is clear that the birth process has begun. Heidegger's term "terror" for describing the combination of alarm and horror seems indeed quite appropriate here. The experience of something radically unfamiliar and horrifying (already by virtue of its unimaginable nature) has suddenly come close, and it is only a matter of hours.

Anxiety. As discussed above, birth or the close prospect of it can well lead to moments of revelation and thus anxiety about our ontological situation as finite creatures. The world in which we dwell as finite creatures is itself a landscape in which the "there is" constantly stands over against the nothing.

Fears emerging during the actual process. As explained in the previous section, the need to undergo an unfamiliar and inconceivable process in a mundane situation, and thus the stark contrast between the weighty and the ordinary, can well give rise to and exacerbate various fears about this situation. These fears might under different circumstances appear trivial, but in the face of such an existentially volatile situation, they are not.

(2) is a version of (4), but nonetheless worth singling out for clarity. Yet what is the character of anticipatory anxiousness? It stands out in a number of ways. Firstly, it might seem that it should not be discussed in this article because it occurs during. However, it is clearly an anxiousness that is anticipatory of birth and thus relates to the close description of birth-related affects as undertaken here. Secondly, its character as anticipatory anxiousness involves a crucial temporal component which will provide an opportunity to examine the resources Heidegger provides in this respect. Thirdly, anticipatory anxiousness has a surprising empirical dimension which will be the starting point for our discussion.

From the perspective of empirical research in psychology, anticipatory anxiousness is peculiar because it stands in an unexpected correlation to the birth experience. Women who undergo anticipatory anxiousness are likely to fear that they might not cope very well with the actual birth process if already the prospect thereof is proving so unsettling. But there is unexpected good news: psychological research has proven that more anxiousness before birth correlates to a more positive birth experience. The article in which Crowe & von Baeyer present these findings concludes as follows: "This is the portrait of the woman who is most likely to have a positive childbirth experience: anxious and fearful (perhaps realistically so), yet competent in her

knowledge of the labour and delivery process and confident in her ability to control the pain associated with it.”¹⁵⁹ Women were asked about their levels of anxiety when attending pre-natal classes, and this was compared to findings up to 48 hours after birth. While high anxiety levels during birth correlate to high pain levels, there is the reverse relation between high anxiety around the time of pre-natal classes and the actual birth experience.

The procedure that yields these findings proves somewhat questionable from the phenomenological perspective. The authors state that their usage of self-report measures makes their results susceptible to distorting factors. From the phenomenological perspective, any attempt at quantitatively measuring anxiety and pain is questionable because subjects selecting numbers from a pre-given range to gage their anxiety creates a substantial element of interpretation which is then concealed behind the numbers that convey an impression of objectivity and precision. More refined measures like the McGill Pain Questionnaire which was applied in this study involve a combination of quantitative and qualitative measures since the subjects are asked to choose terms to describe their pain. Yet such questionnaires bring in a wide semantic range (e.g., “pain as bad as it could possibly be”)¹⁶⁰ that is neither explained nor explored, but simply translated into quantitative descriptors.

Despite these and similar hesitations, the result that is of interest to us here seems reliable and could have been yielded with a simplified interview mechanism. The reasons for the correlation between high

¹⁵⁹ Kathryn Crowe and Carl von Baeyer, “Predictors of a Positive Childbirth Experience,” *Birth* 16:2 (1989): 63.

¹⁶⁰ This is an interesting category since it involves the subject’s imaginative powers which have multiple dimensions, as introduced above.

anticipatory anxiousness and a positive birth experience, however, are not clear from the study. A phenomenological description allows understanding the result better since the description is closer to the explanation. Crowe & von Baeyer suggest that the correlation comes about because the women with higher anticipatory anxiety expected more pain and were thus positively surprised. But such an explanation would only be truly plausible if the pain experienced was of a definite level and independent of the expectation. Furthermore, the maxim “expect the worst and be positively surprised” can certainly not be applied as a mechanism for positively influencing experience in general. It may rather lead to discouragement which impacts negatively on the situation.

For birth in particular, the correlation previously mentioned between anxiety and fear during the process and a negative birth experience could be evoked by high anticipatory anxiousness. Why does this not happen? In their abstract, the authors suggest that this is because “women may have recognised and dealt with their concerns earlier.”¹⁶¹ Since the article concludes in general that knowledge, competence and confidence are factors contributing to a positive birth experience, the interpretation implies that it is because of their anticipatory anxiousness that women seek out information and prepare themselves better for the birth process. But anxiousness could also lead to repression, denial or a kind of debilitating nervousness that deters from mentally engaging with the process beforehand.

Why does anticipatory anxiousness as identified by the authors of the empirical article not lead to evasion and thus more likely to a negative birth experience? From the phenomenological perspective,

¹⁶¹ Crowe and von Bayer, “Predictors of a Positive Childbirth Experience,” 59.

it is relevant that these women report their anticipatory anxiousness. Admitting this anxiousness to an interviewer or questionnaire indicates the kind of awareness that points to a mental engagement with the process and affects involved in it. This also means that the “self-report measures” involved in this research which the authors consider a “limitation” of their research is indeed relevant: not as a limitation, but as a factor that picks out a specific affect which could be called “acknowledged anticipatory anxiousness.” In other words, those women who experience a debilitating level of nervousness are quite likely to not admit of it to themselves and others. But once anticipatory anxiousness has been identified and admitted, the authors’ suggestion that these women prepare themselves differently for the birth experience seems plausible.

However, to what extent is it even possible to prepare for a positive birth experience? What can anticipatory anxiousness motivate us to do? On the practical level, such preparation consists of various imaginative exercises which involve selecting place and circumstances for the birth (within certain limits of possibility), writing a birth plan, obtaining information about the process, possible remedies and interventions, etc. Why such mental exercises are helpful can be explained with the help of Heidegger’s philosophy, and moving to more general philosophical considerations at this point can also be helpful in terms of dealing with other events that cause anticipatory anxiousness which can be addressed in equivalent ways.

For Heidegger, the crucial event which gives rise to the most fundamental anticipatory anxiousness is death. What Heidegger describes as anxiety is, in fact, always related to the most fundamental form of anxiety which is anticipatory anxiousness

before death (though it has been emphasised above that anxiety must not be reduced to anxiety before death, but involves other phenomena related to nothingness and the overall groundless ontological scenario that we are facing). In his considerations on death, Heidegger presents the enigmatic notion of “anticipation of death (*Vorlaufen zum Tode*)” which sometimes leads to the distorted understanding that Heidegger encourages us to spend our existence reflecting on death. But he says explicitly that the idea of anticipating death does not mean “thinking about death,” let alone “brooding” over it.¹⁶² The point is not to think about death as death, but to grasp existence as something that always involves the possibility of death and is co-determined by this possibility. Death should be contemplated as a possibility, not in terms of its actuality. We relate “to something in its possibility by expecting it,” yet the difficulty consists in expecting it on the level of possibility rather than actualisation.¹⁶³ An anticipation of death or a perception of existence as involving the possibility of death means to understand my existence as very much mine, and thus my responsibility. Since nobody else can die for me (at least not in such a way as to make me immortal), death individualises – as does birth.

There are some crucial parallels as well as differences where the anticipation of death versus that of birth is concerned. While death is relevant exactly as a possibility, an anticipation of birth involves anticipating its actualisation. Birth will be actualised, around a certain “due date” or during several weeks before and up to two weeks after. When it comes to imagining birth as an encounter with the unfamiliar, it is an impending actuality that we imagine. However, there is an affinity between birth and death revealed by

¹⁶² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 261.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

these thought experiments in the sense that both are individualising. Just like death makes me aware of my existence as ownmost and my responsibility, there is also a realisation that giving birth is my responsibility. This is the case all the more so since such anticipatory engagements make me aware that the most vulnerable creature in the process is not me, but the infant. Hence, the connection to wonder. Wonder, however, here does not mean thinking about the "cute baby," but rather, astonishment that birth as an event is possible, and has been proven possible, by generations; yet it is one of the most ungraspable aspects of our existence. It is wonder as inextricably linked to anxiety, as will be discussed below.

Before exploring more closely what the imaginative engagement with birth can consist in, the nature of anticipatory anxiousness will be explored a bit further from a phenomenological perspective. This exploration also sheds more light on the character of birth since an affect is always linked to that in the face of which it arises. For anticipatory anxiousness, the "anticipatory" character appears crucial. It is an affect that is defined by its temporality as future-directed. Already in his initial analysis of fear, Heidegger places emphasis on the way in which that in the face of which we fear is "coming near," yet in such a way that it also "bears the revealed possibility of not happening and passing us by."¹⁶⁴ This possibility, Heidegger submits, "does not lessen or extinguish fearing, but enhances it."¹⁶⁵ A first reaction to this description might be that birth does not fit this characteristic since it is definitely going to happen once pregnancy has occurred. True, there might be the terrible event of a miscarriage or the medical event of a Caesarian section, but the latter is still a form of birth and will be discussed

¹⁶⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 141.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

below, and the former does not seem relevant to the experience of anticipatory anxiousness.¹⁶⁶ If we ask more closely why the possibility of not happening enhances the fear, it turns out that birth indeed exhibits the relevant characteristics described by Heidegger. The reason as to why the possibility of the fearsome passing us by enhances fear is not because we are somehow also afraid of the entity's staying away. Since the object or event is fearsome, its not-happening would be a cause for hope rather than fear. But since we do not know whether it will or will not come close, the uncertainty enhances the fear.

In other words, the uncertainties surrounding the fearsome are increasing the fear. Something is approaching, yet we do not know when it will occur, and not even whether it will definitely occur. Uncertainty is something with which we do not cope well because it makes us aware of our helplessness in relation to that which we fear. Taking appropriate measures, for example, it significantly more difficult if we do not know when and whether something will happen. In the case of birth, its not-happening is indeed only possible in certain abnormal ways. The possibility of a Caesarian, however, is one of the factors contributing to anticipatory anxiousness since it is itself a cause of fear, for many women, and at the same time, it would make some of the other fears irrelevant. Since a scheduled Caesarian is unusual and should in any case (due to the increased danger of medical complications) not be a response

¹⁶⁶ If we wanted to engage more closely with the possibility of miscarriage, it would actually confirm the Heideggerian characterisation since such a possibility indeed enhances rather than decreases fear. On a more general level, the possibility of premature birth can be a component of anticipatory anxiousness since one of the dimensions of the ungraspable character of birth might manifest by way of a sense of fearing for the infant to come out early. Yet this would not always be the case, and it thus still seems true that such events are irrelevant to the main characteristics and motivations of anticipatory anxiousness.

to anticipatory anxiousness, the uncertainty of a (non-scheduled) Caesarian only adds a dimension of unpredictability and thus increases rather than decreases fear. In general, the unpredictable character of birth regarding its “when” and “how” is one of the main factors causing us to fear it, and Heidegger’s analysis proves helpful in this respect.

Yet the temporal character of anticipatory anxiousness has so far only been a minor factor in the discussion, as one of several uncertainties surrounding birth. Given that Heidegger names his work *Being and Time*, we can rightfully expect time to be the focus. Heidegger states that the temporal dimension most relevant to affects is the past, or that which has been: “attunement temporalizes itself primarily in having-been.”¹⁶⁷ This is surprising and, given our concern with anticipatory anxiousness, unhelpful. Yet Heidegger thematises this very problem in relation to his analysis of fear. He plays devil’s advocate and raises the concern that fear emerged as related to a “coming evil (*malum futurum*).”¹⁶⁸ It is true that fear emerges in the face of something coming, yet the basic character of affects nonetheless connects us to the past because affects reveal our thrownness or the fact “that we are” without being able to grasp or even access our own ground.

The groundlessness of our existence relates exactly to the inaccessibility of our own having been born. Not only do we have no access, by way of memory, to our birth, but we were born as thrown into this world that we did not bring about and that is on a primordial level uncanny. We enter this world as entirely helpless creatures to whom birth is presumably even more alien of an experience than to birth-giving adult women. To be sure,

¹⁶⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 340.

¹⁶⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 341.

Heidegger does not usually discuss thrownness in terms of birth (and Hannah Arendt was the first of many to accuse him of this omission)¹⁶⁹, but given our emphasis in this study, it seems helpful to explain thrownness as revealed by affects in terms of birth, or having been born.

Yet even if affects reveal and originally emerge from our being thrown and thus our having been born before we ever engage with our existence, the relevance for anticipatory anxiousness still needs to be clarified. Firstly, anxiousness before birth brings us face to face with the inaccessibility of our own birth and thus connects us to our uncanny origins. This connection thus explains better why the prospect of birth is existentially so relevant and connects us to a level of our existence where anxiety resides, as evoked by the realisation that we *are*, yet as emerging from and being held out into the nothing, as Heidegger would put it. To exist means to exist (Latin *ex-sistere*), that is, to stand out (into). Secondly, Heidegger shows how the three dimensions of temporality – past, present, future – are much less separate than it usually seems. The past “does not follow after Dasein but always already goes ahead of it.”¹⁷⁰ Similarly, we are able to anticipate our future in the present, by way of our imagination. When it comes to birth, the intertwinement and mutual dependence of future and past creates special possibilities as well as a special weight. Birth is not just an event that happens at one definite moment in time, but an event that will accompany us, both infant and mother. The extreme case relevant to this realisation would be birth traumas which make it obvious that the impact of a terrifying birth experience has consequences for the long-term future.¹⁷¹ Yet it is the same

¹⁶⁹ Arendt 1999.

¹⁷⁰ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 20.

¹⁷¹ See Ayers, Eagle, Waring, 2006 and Thomson, Dykes, Downe, 2011.

interconnectedness that makes it possible to prepare for birth by way of the imagination, and to anticipate wonder.

Wonder

The parents' experience of the newly born infant is that of a stranger or alien – even more so for the father than for the mother, but ultimately, for both. Because birth turns out to be an encounter with the infant as a stranger, there is an emotion complimentary to anxiety involved in the experience which can best be designated as wonder. Wonder emerges in the encounter with something new and unexpected, or with that which we cannot reliably anticipate. When it comes to birth, wonder is certainly involved as an affect because there is suddenly a new creature, a new beginning, a new world.

We can thus return to the first of the two widespread objections against Heidegger's account as indicated above. Does the emphasis Heidegger places on anxiety make his account one-sided? The reason Heidegger focuses on the fear/anxiety contrast, as we have seen, lies in anxiety being a fundamental mood that has no specific object, but comes about by way of our being-in-the-world as such which is always threatened by nothingness. Fundamental affects are affects which determine our world as a whole, and when the affect is revealed to us, it reveals the world. We have now seen that there is at least one other such fundamental affect: wonder. Wonder emerges as a kind of counter-affect to anxiety, being invoked by the "there is" that stands over against the nothing. It is an affect relevant for our purposes because it is indeed an affect relevant to birth. Most of the interpreters who argue that Heidegger's account of moods in *Being and Time* is one-sided claim that it is the

emphasis on mortality rather than natality or death rather than birth that makes his account insufficient. Yet we have seen that anxiety also relates to birth.

As both a phenomenological analysis of fundamental affects in general and a closer description of affects involved in birth reveal, wonder is by no means a straightforward opposite of anxiety. The story "Everything" by Ingeborg Bachmann already implies this complexity since wonder comes to evoke a new level of anxiety, an other-related anxiety. In this instance, the anxiety relates to preserving and protecting the new beginning which can best be understood in its radical newness by describing it with the help of the concept of world. "He was the first human. Everything began with him, and it was not excluded that everything might become entirely different through him."¹⁷² We will return to this description; for now, the passage only serves to suggest that what is at stake are "existential" emotions, weighty ones of the order that belong to birth and death, old and new worlds, and the possibility of new beginnings.

The general affinity between wonder and anxiety is indicated by the way in which the "there is" and the nothing belong together. We would not be amazed about the fact that there is something if it was not for its contrast with the nothing that stands over against it and seems ontologically the more likely option. On the existential level, natality and mortality indeed signify our connectedness and exposure to the nothing. Our embodied existence exposes us to damage, injury, and accidents to such an extent that we have developed numerous mechanisms of ignoring and repressing these threats. This denial becomes habitual and contributes to our

¹⁷² Ingeborg Bachmann, "Everything," in *The Thirtieth Year*, (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1987), 64.

conviction that the death of others is an “undeniable ‘fact of experience’,” as Heidegger puts it but my own death is nonetheless inconceivable.¹⁷³

On the wider ontological level, the nothing makes itself manifest by way of decay and disappearance. Being is not static, but is coming to be and ceasing to be, by way of ongoing circles of life and materiality. In these ways, we encounter nature. Heidegger rightfully points out that we have started to misconceive nature in mechanistic and technological terms, as something to be “mastered and possessed”¹⁷⁴, and fail to see the original meaning of *physis* as “coming forth into itself.”¹⁷⁵ Wonder designates exactly this amazement at the fact that animate and inanimate nature comes forth by itself and yet always remains in threat of falling back into the nothing from which it emerged. Hence the close connection between wonder and anxiety as fundamental affects.

In response to the first objection, namely, that Heidegger places too much weight on anxiety at the expense of other fundamental affects, we can thus respond that his account is not one-sided since anxiety is intrinsically linked to its counter-affect, wonder. Overall, there is a very limited number of fundamental affects since they need to concern the world as a whole rather than individual entities in the world.¹⁷⁶ Furthermore, it can be argued with the help of Heidegger that the link between the “there is” and the nothing is so intricate that there is only one fundamental affect that presents

¹⁷³ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 257.

¹⁷⁴ As Descartes’s famous formulation of the “maîtres et possesseurs de la nature” has it (Descartes, *Discours de la méthode*, I, 6).

¹⁷⁵ Martin Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?” In *Basic Writings*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 21.

¹⁷⁶ Another one would be boredom (see Heidegger 1995).

itself differently (with more emphasis on the “there is” or more emphasis on nothingness).¹⁷⁷ Anxiety is the name for this fundamental mood as it shows itself when considering the nothing, and wonder is its name when it manifests by way of the “there is.”

The essential link between wonder and anxiety also becomes obvious in one particular feature of that in the face of which we experience this fundamental affect. That in the face of which we experience wonder or anxiety has a strong component of unfamiliarity. Wonder is related to the unfamiliar as surprising and new, anxiety to the unfamiliar as uncanny and threatening. Yet in their radical manifestations, namely, as radically unfamiliar, the completely new and the uncanny indeed coincide. Birth brings this to the fore in an exemplary fashion. On some level, it seems entirely predictable that a baby will emerge; yet who and how this baby is cannot be anticipated, and the encounter with this unforeseeable Other brings about the “trauma of wonder.”¹⁷⁸ The Other whom we encounter in the infant is alien, in a wondrous as well as in a traumatizing fashion. The alien infant thus becomes a most intriguing manifestation of nature, not in the sense of mere organism but in the sense which Heidegger has reminded us of: coming forth by itself. In all his or her complete vulnerability and helplessness, the infant is nonetheless very much a thing of its own, independent and willful.

¹⁷⁷ Heidegger makes this claim in his *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, but since the argument behind this suggestion is based on a framework of complex interconnected ideas beyond the scope of the current article, we will take the general ontological picture as indicative and Bachmann's story as exemplary.

¹⁷⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969),

It becomes tempting to hope for this entirely new creature to come into his or her own without any external influences or intervention. Yet the realization of such a desire can only lead to tragic consequences, as Bachmann's story shows to which we will now return. Fipps' father experiences his newly son as something new that could bring about an entirely different beginning: "Everything began with him, and it was not excluded that everything might not also become entirely different, through him. Should I not leave the world to him, blank and without meaning?"¹⁷⁹ If it were possible to let Fipps grow up without introducing him to this world of engrained prejudices and customs, he might be able to reveal the nature of the human. Fipps' father hopes for this nature to be something innocent and self-defined, something authentic, it seems.¹⁸⁰ Such a new and different creature might finally be able to bring about a new beginning rather than simply following the ways of others. The father hopes that Fipps would listen to that which usually gets ignored, such as shadows, or the language of leaves.¹⁸¹

Yet the hope is thwarted. Fipps' father identifies the cause of this failure: language. "And suddenly I knew, it is all a question of language and not merely of this one language of ours that was created with others in Babel to confuse the world."¹⁸² Indeed, the meaning of the world is conveyed to us through language, in the narrow and in the wide sense, and through linguistic products:

¹⁷⁹ Bachmann, "Everything," 64.

¹⁸⁰ Yet authenticity is itself a tricky concept, and the difficulties in understanding Heidegger's usage of it (German *Eigentlichkeit*) show that it is questionable whether we can ever bring about something truly authentic or be truly authentic, and if so, whether it would be possible to discern it as such. For a discussion of authenticity in Heidegger, see my [removed for blind review].

¹⁸¹ Bachmann, "Everything," 63.

¹⁸² Bachmann, "Everything," 61.

stories, songs, rhymes.¹⁸³ But would it be possible to present Fipps with a world that is “blank and without meaning”? No: this would be an isolated world, a world without others. The infant not only needs others (for comfort, support, food); he also wants others, is drawn by meaning, wants to participate in this world which seems exciting precisely because others have shaped it in multiple layers of meaning. Fipps becomes like the others, and his father cannot accept this. When Fipps is taken from this world through a school accident that is nobody’s fault, this event only serves as an external marker for a tragic development: the outcome of an experiment doomed to failure. Fipps’ father was right in sensing that birth shows how new beginnings and new worlds are possible -- but only on the basis of and in dialogue with the existent world. Without language which always bears traces of others, Fipps’ father cannot relate to Fipps and introduce him to this world which, despite the fact that “[h]ere, where we are standing, the world is the worst of all worlds, and no one has understood it up to now,” is still the only world we have and thus the starting point for everything else, including all new beginnings.¹⁸⁴

This world is a shared world, and we need the engagement with and relation to others. The infant exhibits this need in a primordial, immediate, unconditional fashion. Being the guide in somebody’s primal world encounter is an enormous opportunity and daunting responsibility. The event of birth is determined by a sense of this enormous responsibility. What does it mean to be the place where this impossible, incomprehensible, and entirely

¹⁸³ Just as Fipps mother, much to the father’s chagrin, seduces the son: “She stood unflinchingly bent over the nameless river and tried to draw him across, she walked up and down on our bank enticing him with chocolates and oranges, tops and teddy bears” (Bachmann 1987, 63).

¹⁸⁴ Bachmann, “Everything,” 61.

unfamiliar event is going to happen? How can we carry responsibility for another creature who is invisible up to birth and when visible, still unfamiliar and alien? Luckily, we do not need to find an answer to this question because we are always already carrying this responsibility, already during pregnancy. Over time, this realisation grows on us, naturally evoking wonder and anxiety.

Conclusion: Who's the Who?

The questions at the end of the last section returned us to the main findings from this article. Birth seems impossible and yet is happening all the time, with a necessity that can be intimidating as well as reassuring. Birth gives rise to existential affects where anxiety and wonder are closely related because our existence is determined by natality as well as mortality, and on the ontological level, the “there is” stands over against nothingness. In addition, the process of giving birth also evokes a variety of mundane affects, especially fears arising from the situation. These mundane fears can become volatile because they arise in conjunction with the weighty existential affects.

It is clear that it is me who is giving birth, and nobody else can do it for me. Nonetheless, the event and the affects involved are so complex that the “who” question is not a trivial one. Those who assist in the birth-giving (midwives, doctors, partners, doulas,...) should be aware of this complexity. It is due to the confrontation with weighty existential affects that seemingly small discordances on the mundane level can become quite disruptive. Being the one who gives birth means having to negotiate existential affects in a mundane situation and having to endure the tension between existential and mundane affects. Other people are a crucial

dimension of the mundane situation we find ourselves in, and they have an enormous impact on our affects. The second objection against Heidegger's phenomenology of affects as reported above has thus also proven misplaced. Even though Heidegger might not say much about the specific roles that others play in our lives, it is clear that the world in which we exist is essentially and through and through a world that we share with others. Furthermore, others are what affects us most, and by providing us with the most developed phenomenology of affects, Heidegger also gives us the resources to think about how others contribute to our affects, for better or worse. In sum, even though Heidegger does not elaborate in detail on the topic of the Other in *Being and Time*, his phenomenology of affects provides the condition for the possibility of reflecting on the role of others for our life, and this role cannot be overstated.

Especially our sense of self or of "who" we are is essentially determined by our relations to others. If the "who" is not taken seriously with her anxiety and fears, even those fears that might appear trivial, and if the body is treated like just a physical body, the "who" wants to withdraw. During the various stages of the birth process, the "who" of the experience can get so discouraged that there is no longer a "who." Yet this is detrimental because at the end, it has to be me who owns up to the responsibility. There has to be a "who" to pluck up the necessary strength and determination.

The process involves so much fragility, waiting, unpredictability, dependence on others, and confrontation with affects, that the "who" can easily get crushed. If there is no longer a "who" to respond to the "who's afraid" question, it becomes impossible to summon this "who" in the crucial moments. If all that is left are affects, that is, fears and anxiety, without a subject, medical

interventions become much more likely. This is detrimental for anybody involved, and most of all for the “who” to re-emerge. This “who” wants to be able to look back and be able to say, who gave birth? Me. The fact that this impossible event did happen is a cause for anxiety and wonder, and both are going to accompany the “who” in relation to the “to whom” for a long time to come.

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Madness as Prophecy in Dystopia: Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Nietzsche's Philosophy, and Heller's Satire of Wartime Insanity

Beverley Catlett

Abstract

Madness has long been an object of fascination in the Western cultural, literary, medical, and philosophical consciousness, and rightfully so; the human mind is the incredibly powerful, profoundly dynamic lens through which we inevitably perceive reality, and when that lens is corrupted by a defect of health or experience, the results are astounding. Illnesses such as schizophrenia continue to confound scientists to this day, whereas the cause-and-effect designs of other disorders such as PTSD are easily understood.

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Our literary relationship to madness has been as inconsistent as the phenomenon of insanity itself. Though it is impossible to sufficiently generalize literary representations of madness

by any singular categorical imperative, for the purposes of this study it is helpful to focus on one central division in the Western literary experience of insanity. There is, on the one hand, the continued representation of *genuine*, clinical insanity as it realistically exists; a longstanding tradition that dates back to the literature of the fifteenth century.

On the other hand, we have the emergence of a newer, archetypal literary tradition that treats madness as a *trope*. This tradition—the roots of which are identifiable in Renaissance theatre—adheres more closely to mythical narrative than to realistic representation. It takes fiction and drama as its representative modes, and irony as its aim. This experience of madness in what I call the “prophetic strain” at once departs from the seriousness of traditional representations of madness whilst simultaneously taking on a dramatic seriousness of its own. As Michel Foucault writes of this newer literary relationship to madness in *Madness and Civilization*, “If madness is the truth of knowledge, it is because knowledge itself is absurd, and instead of addressing itself to the great book of experience, it loses its way in the dust of books and in idle debate; learning becomes madness through the very excess of false learning”¹⁸⁵ (This is the experience of sanity—or, synonymously, “madness”—in dystopia: it is an experience that is necessarily tragic or absurd.)

¹⁸⁵ Foucault, 25

Starting with William Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, we see the birth of an enduring archetype the Western canon: the "madman" as a harbinger of truth to an environment permeated by lunacy and delusion. The scope of this literary tradition that emerges under the influence of *Hamlet* is, of course, enormous. Madness and prophetic knowledge become the codependent characteristics of that tradition, the archetypal narrative that takes as its internal fiction a dystopia revelatory of an external context that is chaotic or corrupt. For Harold Bloom, "our current preoccupations would have existed always and everywhere, under other names," and the tropes of great literature, "though immensely varied, undergo transmemberment and show up barely disguised in different contexts."¹⁸⁶ My aim is to triangulate, from the original archetype presented in *Hamlet*, a cross-textual topography broad enough to justify Hamlet's transcendent stature as the enduring literary model for representations of madness as the product of tragic insight. For the purpose of scope, I have chosen two modern "madmen" as exemplary recent renditions of Hamlet's original archetype, which amend Shakespeare's own contextual concerns to those of their epoch whilst maintaining the integrity of the literary model *Hamlet* provides: the "madman" of Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Gay Science*, and Yossarian of Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*.

As Michel Foucault writes of this newer literary relationship to madness in *Madness and Civilization*, "If madness is the

¹⁸⁶ Bloom, xi

truth of knowledge, it is because knowledge itself is absurd, and instead of addressing itself to the great book of experience, it loses its way in the dust of books and in idle debate; learning becomes madness through the very excess of false learning" (Foucault, 25). This is the experience of sanity—or, synonymously, "madness"—in dystopia: it is an experience that is necessarily tragic or absurd.

Hamlet's symbolic predicament does, after all, speak poignantly to the thematic concerns of twentieth-century literature, particularly in its concern with madness at the societal level. Stripped of their circumstantial and historical contexts, these three figures in the Western literary canon share the same basic story: that of the sane man's existence in a corrupt dystopian environment, catalyzed by his rare insight and enlightenment to an existence that is at once tragic, grotesque, and absurd. Hovering on the margin of a society with which he is irrevocably disillusioned, the madman's struggle is to reconcile his own existence with the overbearing burden of an *increased*—and possibly maddening—knowledge of reality.

As an audience attempting to make sense of Hamlet's opening act, we are given fragments of a fractured world as clues leading up to the ghost's revelation, which deals an irreparable blow to our perception of reality as a unified, consensual truth. Shattering like mirrored glass, day-to-day reality in Elsinore refracts upon Hamlet in problematic and distressing ways as the Prince himself writhes on the periphery

of a world in pieces. Hamlet's belief in divinity and an ordered, theocentric universe ceases to exist; his belief in the people and institutions that once gave his life meaning ceases to exist. Layer by layer, Hamlet attempts to peel away modes of perception in pursuit of truth. When he begins to doubt himself and, in that, the ghost—the driver of all action in the play who is, of course, seldom present and barely apprehensible—Hamlet attempts to reconstruct reality on his own terms, and finds himself unable to believe in any available version of it.

Long before Hamlet imports madness into the text as a motif, however, Shakespeare signals its inevitability by depriving his audience of an exposition. The lack of this comforting theatrical custom is palpably felt: this is the process whereby the “theater develops its truth, which is illusion. Which is, in the strict sense, madness.”¹⁸⁷ In the play's opening scene, Shakespeare establishes an atmospheric madness of fear, chaos, and confusion that will continue to complicate as his plot unfolds. *Hamlet* opens with an anonymous outcry of uncertainty—“Who's there?”—a question of identity in the interrogative mode¹⁸⁸. Kermode takes note of the distancing effect achieved by the rampant aposiopesis, paranoia, and anonymity of the play's first few lines: “The medieval custom of using direct address for simple exposition, of treating the spectators as part of the show, rapidly disappears; only the soliloquy survives, and we see how far even that is in *Hamlet*

¹⁸⁷ Foucault, 35

¹⁸⁸ I.i.1

from the tradition of direct explanation.”¹⁸⁹ In other words, what Shakespeare’s audience might expect from *any* opening theatrical scene is for the playwright to communicate, “who’s there.” Yet instead of providing answers, *Hamlet* parries its own questions back at its audience in newly duplicitous, astoundingly complicated forms. A maddening double entendre, Shakespeare makes the false reality he projects onstage uncertain, adding yet another dimension of illusion to the theatre itself. Hamlet is relentlessly meta-theatrical and constantly undermines its own legitimacy with self-conscious, backward references to its own status as a fictional creation. It is a play peppered with plays within plays, widespread delusion, miscomprehension, eavesdropping, and in particular, the sense of so many characters that possess a “secret” of some sort, and thereby have access to some enhanced or advantageous reality that is exclusively their own.

What Shakespeare effectively establishes is an environment wherein the consensual perception as to what is real is, as we learn, a delusion. Which is, quintessentially, madness. Hamlet’s environment is not just rancid, an “unweeded garden,” Elsinore is definitively *insane*. All of its inhabitants operate under the misconception that Claudius is the rightful heir to the throne, and that King Hamlet’s untimely death was an unfortunate natural accident. The fact that Claudius initially succeeds in a tripartite violation of cosmic proportions—fratricide, regicide, and incest—is in itself insane; not to mention the sheer temporal length for which

¹⁸⁹ Kermode, 1187

he maintains that success. As is clear from the unanimous lack of suspicion surrounding Claudius's accelerated rise to the throne, intelligent intuition in Elsinore is less than widespread. We as an audience are more or less alone with Hamlet in sensing the outrageously inappropriate nature of Claudius's first speech, which is a fairly obvious exhortation that everyone in Denmark join him in relentless self-interest and "with wisest sorrow think on [King Hamlet]/ Together with remembrance of ourselves."¹⁹⁰ Claudius's hasty nod to his late brother's memory is sweepingly insincere—incriminatingly so, to Hamlet and the suspicious reader—as his admission of a twofold violation of marriage and grieving rites is outrageously candid: "With mirth in funeral, and with dirge in marriage/ In equal scale weighing delight and dole."¹⁹¹ The truncation of marriage *or* funeral and grieving rites in Shakespearean drama bears implications of ominous and otherworldly significance. The simultaneous combination of the two in this text—omitted from the play, one of many significant omissions—is an omen of apocalyptic proportions, and ominously forebodes the disastrous ending toward which *Hamlet* hurtles recklessly from its first lines to its last.

The great irony of Hamlet's "madness" is that he is by far the sanest character in the play. Hamlet's madness is a façade that he develops to sustain survival in a lunatic world. In this ironic reversal, insanity becomes twofold, and, to use Foucault's terminology, the experiences of "Unreason"

¹⁹⁰ I.ii.1-7

¹⁹¹ I.ii.13-14

(genuine madness, in Ophelia's tragic strain) and "Reason-Madness" (knowledge-induced madness in the prophetic strain, of the archetypal tradition this play instigates) take distinctively separate paths in the development of the Western literary canon. The linkage between Hamlet's "madness" and his unique grasp of a higher truth marks a crucial split in the development of madness as a literary trope. With Ophelia as a critical foil and a gruesome reminder of what true madness or "Unreason" *is*, Hamlet becomes the archetypal madman-as-prophet, the sane exception to a lunatic majority, the Wise Fool. Hamlet, who has been called "the most intelligent figure ever represented in literature," is a young man mercilessly thrust into a world where he has no choice but to self-destruct. The Prince inherits the unfortunate role of the prophet in a fallen world of delusion and deceit.

Nonetheless, the terrible truth to which Hamlet is enlightened seems to be more or less inevitable: indeed it is unclear whether the ghost's revelation is in fact more of a *confirmation* for a young man who has already expressed the intuitions that his is a body politic as diseased as they come. In an introduction of the chilling theme that will shroud our protagonist from here on out, Horatio—who eventually becomes an archetype in his own right, that of the tragic hero's confidant—warns Hamlet the moment his father's apparition beckons the Prince to secrecy that it may very well "draw you into madness? Think of it."¹⁹² Hamlet, though he

¹⁹² I.iv.82-86

will “think of it” obsessively for the rest of the play, cannot at this moment heed Horatio’s good-natured advice: the Prince knows something is amiss in his universe and senses that there are epic injustices beneath the surface of the rancid environment that his former kingdom has become. Marcellus and Horatio recognize the cataclysmic potential of the ghost’s demand to speak with Hamlet in private. Horatio dismisses the mysterious beckoning as an ominously “courteous action” which “waves [Hamlet] to a more removed ground.”¹⁹³ And, of course, it does. Hamlet attains access to the supernatural, merely in conversing with the ghost; he attains the burdensome secret that he feigns insanity to protect; and he accesses the closest thing to a higher metaphysical truth that Elsinore, in its current state, has to offer. Horatio and Marcellus forewarn the prince quite adequately:

What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord
Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff
That beetles o’er his base into the sea,
And there might assume some other horrible form
Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason¹⁹⁴

The interruptive stress that falls upon the final syllable of “sovereignty” rightly stops a reader or listener in his place before comprehending its subject: reason. We assume that our capacity for reason operates more or less autonomously, and for most, it does. Hamlet, in accepting the ghost’s invitation

¹⁹³ I.IV.60-61

¹⁹⁴ I.IV.68-73

to separate from his fellow men and essentially wander into the realm of the metaphysical, lends his capacity for reason to a second authority. Yes, it compromises his “sovereignty” of reason in that it invites a secondary source to inform his worldview. Yet, is this not the process whereby, to borrow from Emily Dickinson, “much madness” becomes “divinest sense?”

Though his encounter with his father’s apparition certainly provides Hamlet with the motive and inescapable responsibility to murder his Uncle, it is difficult to say whether King Hamlet’s secret is truly a piece of “news” that Hamlet hasn’t intuitively sensed hitherto. Hamlet’s perception of Denmark as “an unweeded garden/ That grows to seed, things rank and gross in nature/ Possess it merely” is vividly prophetic: we first perceive his Fallen-world rhetoric as an attempt to describe Denmark as a paradise lost, a former Eden irreparably tainted. In his first soliloquy, Hamlet begins the strain of Genesis imagery that his Father’s apparition will continue to employ in revealing to his son the circumstances and implications of his murder. Certainly, the two figures—one a mere mortal, the other a manifestation of the supernatural—possess an understanding of the event that is more or less akin. Preceded only by a few vague words, Hamlet’s immediate outburst, “O, my prophetic soul!” in response to his father’s apparition solidifies his intuitive sense of the cloaked regicide all along. Hamlet truly *is* a “prophetic soul,” and in unwittingly interrupting the ghost’s speech, he contributes to the continuation of the aposiopesis that has

characterized the fragmentary nature of the discourse in the play thus far. His self-revelatory outburst also aligns with his later prophecies—particularly his inability to sleep aboard the ship on which he is deported to England, contrived from his incredible intuition that something is amiss. Even after the ghost has disappeared from the play altogether, Shakespeare remains persistent in the characterization of a young man with a remarkable intellect—one that makes existence in a lunatic environment all the more excruciating, and the impossibility of the questions to which it gives rise all the more infuriatingly painful.

Certainly, it is clear even in this early stage of the play that Hamlet has been nothing short of “prophetic” in speaking of his early sense of Elsinore as a fallen world and as an “unweeded garden,” entrenched in deep-seated evils: it seems more or less fated that these will become Hamlet’s unfortunate responsibility to unearth. Within the familiar Biblical frame of reference that Shakespeare constructs with imagistic allusions to Genesis (one of the rare occasions in which *Hamlet*’s audience is granted the luxury of a familiar narrative), *knowledge* itself is wrought with negative connotations. Just as Eve interacts with the scheming serpent in the Garden of Eden, Hamlet succumbs to the subtle ushering of an ambiguous figure and traverses a boundary of understanding into an otherworldly realm of knowledge from which he will never return. The ghost’s rhetorical portrait of Claudius as the predatory serpent in the garden signifies a violation of Biblical proportions: “but know, thou noble

youth,/ The serpent that did sting thy father's life/ Now wears his crown."¹⁹⁵ Like a parasite, Hamlet's burdensome secret leeches upon his mental faculties and becomes ensnared in a torturous battle with an independent intellect.

Oddly at play with Shakespeare's use of this imagery is the profound metaphysical skepticism that pervades *Hamlet*. Take, for example, the speculative world-weariness that characterizes Hamlet's first soliloquy: "How [weary], stale, flat, and unprofitable/ Seem to *me* [emphasis mine] all the uses of this world."¹⁹⁶ Hamlet is careful to establish that *emotion*—not yet reason—dictates his wish that "the Everlasting had not fix'd/ His canon 'gainst self-slaughter!"¹⁹⁷ Yet he also reveals his viscerally prophetic sense that "It is not, nor it cannot come to good,/ But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue."¹⁹⁸ Later, Hamlet becomes bitterly skeptical, and alongside Laertes and Ophelia, he is one of several young figures in this play to call upon the divine in a plea for intervention in a world that seems devoid of divine intervention, justice, or mercy. As Harold Bloom sympathetically concludes in regard to the apparent godlessness of Elsinore in his comprehensive *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, the questions of metaphysical injustice that *Hamlet* brings to light are as open-ended as any of the other inquiries over which our thoughtful protagonist is by nature inclined to obsess: "Whoever Shakespeare's God

¹⁹⁵ I.V.38-39

¹⁹⁶ I.ii.133-134

¹⁹⁷ I.ii.131-132

¹⁹⁸ I.ii.158-159

may have been, Hamlet's appears to be a writer of farces. . . . Hamlet, certainly an ironist, does not crave an ironical God, but Shakespeare allows him no other."¹⁹⁹

Perhaps the most unwittingly insightful summation of madness in the play is in Polonius's befuddled aside: "Though this be madness,/ There is but method to't."²⁰⁰ Hamlet's "madness" is, of course, meticulously methodological. The Prince's immediate resolution to "put an antic disposition on" to hide his newfound secret is cogent and appropriate, if not brilliant. And Hamlet continues to utilize his madness, for the time that it remains convincing, to numerous ends.

Rarely, Hamlet's madness serves as a source of source of much-needed comic relief in an otherwise overbearing dark tragedy. Hamlet controls irony with a masterful hand throughout the play; the only possible ironist to whom he could be second is Bloom's hypothetical "God" of Elsinore, if such a God exists. In his prolonged façade and his secret knowledge, which he shares only with his audience, Hamlet is the chief source of dramatic irony in his play, and rarely ever its subject. Polonius's less-than-subtle approach to test Hamlet's alleged insanity—"Do you know me, my lord?"²⁰¹—catalyzes a one-sided repartee on the part of the "madman," who relentlessly lampoons his intellectual inferior: "Excellent well, you are a fishmonger."²⁰² Appearing

¹⁹⁹ Bloom, 386

²⁰⁰ II.ii.195

²⁰¹ II.iii.172

²⁰² II.iii.173-174

distracted and absorbed in a book, Hamlet explains to the inquiring Polonius that he is reading “Words, words, words.”²⁰³ When asked to elaborate, he invents a context that gives him the opportunity to lampoon his interrogator:

Slanders, sir; for the satirical rogue says here that old men have grey beards, that their faces are wrinkled, their eyes purging thick amber and plumtree gum, and that they have a plentiful lack of wit, together with most weak hams; all of which, sir, though I most powerfully and potently believe, yet I hold it not honesty to have it thus set down, for yourself, sir, shall grow old as I am, if like a crab you could go backward.²⁰⁴

Polonius’s attempt to “test” Hamlet’s alleged insanity fails due to his clichéd and inadequate understanding of *what* insanity is: “How pregnant sometimes his replies are! A happiness that often madness hits on, which reason and sanity could not so prosperously be deliver’d of.”²⁰⁵ Hamlet’s replies *are* pregnant with meaning, but not meaning that gives Polonius any genuine insight as to his mental state; nor is it a *happiness* “[his madness] hits on, which reason and sanity could not be so prosperously deliver’d of.”²⁰⁶ Under the guise of madness, Hamlet is free to satirize, criticize, mock, and lampoon his fellow characters, and Hamlet exercises this

²⁰³ II.ii.92

²⁰⁴ II.ii.196-204

²⁰⁵ II.ii.208-211

²⁰⁶ II.ii.209-211

liberty to the fullest extent. Just as we join Hamlet in his existential distress with each tormented soliloquy that he delivers, we also join him in his “playacting” as he befuddles his fellow characters and confounds their attempts to make sense of what is, to them, a radical and unprecedented shift in demeanor: we share with Hamlet (at least at this early stage) the “secret” of his mad demeanor, which is for the time being mildly enjoyable. Hamlet’s improvisational performance in this early exchange is as brilliant as Polonius’s is dimwitted; his effortless parry of insane responses are too clever for Polonius to dissect, and too ironic for his audience to doubt that the Prince is sharp, alert, and searingly sane. The proficiency with which he does so is a reminder that Hamlet, irrational and distressed as he may become, is still razor-sharp, and that his “Reason-madness” is unlike any other form of insanity Elizabethan theatre had seen to date.

Ophelia’s madness, on the other hand, is a grisly reminder that “Unreason” is a dangerous alternative response to existence in a rancid dystopia. There is nothing humorous or witty about Ophelia’s reappearance, in a state of full-blown psychosis, toward the play’s conclusion. Shakespeare purposefully renders Ophelia’s death a casualty in the cold psychological warfare that constitutes the dynamics of the play at large. She appears before and after the ghost’s revelation, an event of enormous importance to the play (and, of course, to Hamlet); she interrupts Hamlet’s “To be or not to be” soliloquy and is verbally assaulted; she interprets this assault as evidence of Hamlet’s madness, and rather than

reacting with outrage, Ophelia places the blame for a “great mind o’erthrown” solely upon herself. This self-disparagement is the last we hear from Ophelia before she is wounded and slinks offstage. This, in turn, allows Shakespeare’s audience to shift their attention to Claudius and Polonius’s interpretation of what they have just witnessed: that Hamlet is obviously *not* mad for Ophelia’s love, which is in itself important because it propagates the King’s desperately defensive efforts to kill his nephew. In other words, Shakespeare lets us *forget* Ophelia, and he lets his characters forget her as well.

Thus Ophelia’s disturbing re-appearance in Act IV, stumbling back onstage in a lunatic state, is a brutal reminder that we are dealing with *human* lives and *human* minds here. If we ever for a moment doubted Hamlet’s sanity—some critics have gone so far as to contest that the Prince himself goes mad in prolonging his façade—Ophelia’s chilling psychosis is a bleak reminder that true madness is not, as it is to Hamlet, a game. Ophelia receives only fragments of Hamlet’s maddening insight through her emotional and textual connections to the Prince, as implied by the structural parallels in their respective subplots. Thus rather than growing nihilistic and numb in response to the universe she inhabits, as does Hamlet, Ophelia becomes increasingly aggravated. Her fatal flaw is action; as her world descends into tragic absurdity, Ophelia naively attempts to make sense of it. Yet Elsinore cannot be made sense of—sense, in the upside-down world of *Hamlet*, is a Catch-22.

On the contrary, Hamlet's outburst toward Ophelia, though excessively cruel, gives us a fleeting glimpse into the weighty psychological burden that he has carried with comparative grace throughout the play. That a mere offshoot of his own internal trauma sends Ophelia into a state of psychosis is a bitter reminder of Hamlet's relative psychological strength. Ophelia's death serves, in the damned world of Elsinore, as a bleak affirmation of the fact that Hamlet is indeed a great man. His madness serves to hide a "great mind" that is anything *but* "o'erthrown." In fact, while Ophelia is spewing songs of nonsense and tossing flowers in front of horrified bystanders in Elsinore, Hamlet, as we later learn, is on a voyage to England, intercepting invisible signals of treachery and quite literally re-writing his own fate.

In a revelation that is almost muted, we hear the incredible story of how Hamlet, sleepless, was stirred by a "kind of fighting [in his heart]" to find a letter from Claudius detailing arrangements for his murder: "Ah, royal knavery! . . . My head should be strook off."²⁰⁷ Hamlet's quick and tidy resolution is to rewrite his fate, quite literally "[devising] me a new commission, and wrote it fair." By what Hamlet purports to be "heaven ordainment," he switches out the commandments to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern ordering his death with a renewed document in his own hand, endorsed with the official stamp of Denmark: Hamlet carries his "father's signet" in his purse. Hamlet's prophetic brilliance is massively

²⁰⁷ V.ii.13-24

underscored with the omission of this dramatization, told rather than shown, whilst the Prince's own humility and sound sense of justice are illuminated.

Harold Bloom aptly identifies Hamlet's shift in demeanor in the second half of Act V as an indication of his self-restored autonomy and renewed self-motivation to carry out his final task:

We can forget Hamlet's "indecision" and his "duty" to kill the usurping king-uncle. Hamlet himself takes a while to forget all that, but by the start of act V he no longer needs to remember: the Ghost is gone, the mental image of the father has no power, and we come to see that hesitation and consciousness are synonyms in this vast play.²⁰⁸

Hamlet no longer longs for death as an excuse for inaction, or as a refuge from the suffering that earthly existence entails. Hamlet predicted and averted his own death in England, but not out of fear of death itself; this is a man who would not, for all the suffering in the world, allow Claudius's tyranny and his father's murder to go unpunished. If we ever doubted this, we are adamantly corrected with Hamlet's return to Denmark, where further arrangements for his murder are inevitably underway. Hamlet's newly motivated approach to his looming demise—which he accepts, but only on his own terms—is reflected in his bold agreement to a duel with

²⁰⁸ Bloom, 405

Laertes, despite Horatio's pleas that he refuse. Unmoved, Hamlet voices a new and profoundly stoic worldview:

Not a whit, we defy augury. There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, is not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come—the readiness is all. Since no man, of aught he leaves, knows what is't to leave betimes, let be.²⁰⁹

Indeed the view toward death expressed in this passage constitutes a radical shift from the nihilistic “longing for a world beyond death” expressed in Hamlet's famous “To be or not to be.” Hamlet is no longer lethargic or lachrymose; we know not the deity to whom he attributes the “special providence in the fall of a sparrow,” or if we are meant to believe that there is one, but Hamlet does believe that things are ready to unfold as they should. His ready agreement to the duel reflects an attitude toward death more in the spirit of “[taking] arms against a sea of troubles,” not to assuage his own pains, but to restore justice to his kingdom and avenge his father once and for all.

Hamlet enters the final duel with the courage of a warrior and the conduct of a gentleman. The presence of poison at the play's end represents yet another underhanded arrangement on Claudius's part to bend death to his own will; a right that no mere mortal deserves. Hamlet turns the king's devices

²⁰⁹ V.ii.219-224

against him as soon as he learns of the “villainy” and “Treachery!” that are here, too, present, and Shakespeare ensures that the experience of purgation at the end of this play is intense, confined, and complete. Hamlet’s realization that the long-permitted insanity of Elsinore is, at this very moment, confined to the room in which he stands, catalyzes his declaration that it be extinguished here and now, once and for all: “Ho, let the door be lock’d!” Gertrude is the first to fall, her fate arguably deserved. When Laertes then informs Hamlet “In thee there is not a half hour’s life,” Hamlet wastes no time philosophizing. To the contrary, the Prince seizes that “half hour’s life” to *ensure* the destruction of the tyrant.²¹⁰ Having done so, Hamlet bids Gertrude and Claudius a single, mutually damning farewell: “Here, thou incestuous, murd’rous, damned Dane,/ Drink off this potion! Is thy union here?/ Follow my mother!”²¹¹

Finally, after all other characters in the room have been slain, Hamlet bestows upon Horatio a dying wish of his own. Horatio is Hamlet’s only remaining confidant, and the only character that has remained loyal to the Prince over the course of the play. Hamlet at once takes on the commandeering air of the imperial authority he has earned; his final moments, though fleeting, will not go to waste. Hamlet forbids Horatio to end his life in suicide, prophesying the problematic misassumptions to which the discovery of the scene might lend itself. Like his father, Hamlet asks to be remembered:

²¹⁰ V.ii.315

²¹¹ V.ii.324-327

As th' art a man,
Give me the cup. Let go! By heaven, I'll ha't!
Things standing thus unknown, shall I leave behind
me!
If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
Absent thee from felicity a while,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
To tell my story.²¹²

With this, Hamlet solidifies his father's legacy and his own; he prescripts an explanation for the grisly scene the oncoming Fortinbras and his army are soon to discover. Hamlet rewrites his own fate until the moment of his own death, and as Bloom convincingly argues, he continues to do so thereafter:

In Act V, he is barely still in the play; like Whitman's "real me" or "me myself" the final Hamlet is both in and out of the game while watching and wondering at it. . . . Elsinore's disease is anywhere's, anytime's. Something is rotten in every state, and if your sensibility is like Hamlet's, then finally you will not tolerate it. Hamlet's tragedy is at last the tragedy of personality.²¹³

That the restoration of justice to Denmark is necessarily apocalyptic is unsurprising; it is clear from Ophelia's death

²¹² V.ii.342-349

²¹³ Bloom, 431

onward that none of the play's central characters needs or deserves to survive. Hamlet ensures that the sacrifices we have witnessed will not go to waste, and that the reality whose aftermath Fortinbras is about to discover is, *this* time around, correctly understood. Unified by name and immortalized by their untimely deaths, King and Prince Hamlet are finally restored the dignity they deserve. Horatio meets Fortinbras and his army with their story:

And let me speak to th' yet unknowing world
 How these things came about. So shall you hear
 Of carnal, bloody and unnatural acts,
 Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters,
 Of deaths put on by cunning and forc'd cause
 And in this upshot, purposes mistook
 Fall'n on th' inventors' heads: all this can I
 Truly deliver.²¹⁴

In response to Fortinbras's expression of his ambitions to inherit Denmark's empty throne, Horatio continues:

Of that I shall have also cause to speak,
 And from his mouth whose voice will draw on more
 But let this same be presently perform'd
 Even while men's minds are wild, lest more mischance
 On plots and errors happen.²¹⁵

²¹⁴ V.ii.378-380

²¹⁵ V.ii.391-394

This, as Nietzsche puts it in *The Birth of Tragedy*, “is the lesson of Hamlet.”²¹⁶ In the face of psychological suffering, men’s minds are inclined to become “wild,” their actions to result in “mischance.” But casualties and irrationalities aside, it is the actualization of the final cause which makes “plots and errors happen,” and which *should* solidify a great man’s legacy, no matter his missteps. Paired with Fortinbras’s likening of the scene to a battlefield—“Such a sight as this/ Becomes the field, but here shows much amiss”²¹⁷—Horatio’s emphasis upon Hamlet’s *mind* (like Ophelia’s) pays homage to the immense internal warfare the Prince endured.

In exerting control over his legacy and the discovery of his body post-mortem, Hamlet preserves his story from the easy categorization of a terrific tragedy, and instead insists that we internalize what Nietzsche would later coin as “the lesson of Hamlet.”²¹⁸ It is a lesson of Dionysiac insight into the “terrible truth of things,” conducive to a “gulf of oblivion that separates the worlds of everyday life and Dionysiac experience.”²¹⁹ Dionysiac wisdom is chaos, de-individuation, the evaporation of the illusion that individual life is anything more than a blip on the vast radar of oblivion that is truth, the universe, existence: “Once truth has been seen, the consciousness of it prompts man to see only what is terrible or absurd in existence, wherever he looks.”²²⁰

²¹⁶ Nietzsche, 40

²¹⁷ V.ii.401-402

²¹⁸ *The Birth of Tragedy*, 40

²¹⁹ Nietzsche, 40

²²⁰ Nietzsche, 40

This is the Hamlet-archetype, and in characteristic fashion, the play is self-conscious even of the literary lessons and legacies it will import. Fortinbras's euphemistic substitution of the word *death* with "passage" is appropriate and fitting for the nature of Hamlet's fate:

Bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage,
For he was likely, had he been put on,
To have prov'd most royal; and for his passage
The soldiers' music and the rite of war
Speak loudly for him.²²¹

Hamlet's inevitable demise is a worthy substitute for the possibility, "had he been put on, To have prov'd most royal." Hamlet's martyrdom is what elevates his tale from ordinary to extraordinary. His façade of "madness" is what makes his play magnificent, directly and indirectly, in the immediate sense as well as in contemporary consciousness. It makes us laugh; it separates motive and action, allowing Shakespeare to potentiate a simple revenge plot with poignant reflections on the human condition that remain relevant to this day; it allows Hamlet to transcend his rancid environment, and thereby survive the *true* madness that pervades Elsinore; and, of course, it gives Hamlet the opportunities to reflect on his own symbolic predicament in uttering forth the legendary soliloquies that ring in our ears to this day. For representation of madness in the Western canon henceforth, *The Tragedy of*

²²¹ V.ii.396-400

Hamlet marks the beginning of an archetypal narrative wherein the “madman” functions as a much-needed source of clarity, and “madness” emerges in the prophetic strain as a redemptive source of much-needed enlightenment. *That* is the lesson of Hamlet, and it is a lesson that literature will never forget.

The tale of the madman as the harbinger of truth to an environment of delusion did not die with Hamlet. Immortalized as a near-deity in the literary realm, Hamlet continues to resonate in the contemporary psyche, a man whose irresistibly symbolic predicament provided a model for writers of all ages to emulate in crafting the new, equally unconventional heroes of their own respective epochs. Hamlet’s “madness” proved too masterfully ironic and thematically rich *not* to develop into the archetype it has definitively become. The inherent insanity of the tragic hero’s environment is, of course, crucial to the chiasmic reversal of *madness* that occurs therein: its rancid conditions and affirmation of the absurd, chaotic cruelty of human life reflect a world that seems to refute the possibility of meaning or redemption. It is a world in which knowledge *is* madness, because knowledge in itself is insane. Ignorance is the only available outlet for reprieve, and while it suits Hamlet’s elders quite well, those who have attained the maddening knowledge of their own dystopias cannot return to a state of ignorance—and, with that, to a state of innocence.

There is a momentary gap in the continuation of the new literary conception of madness *Hamlet* unleashed during the 18th century, which Michel Foucault attributes to the establishment of the Hospital Generale in Paris, which would serve as a popular model for the establishment of similar asylums worldwide. By a “strange act of force,” Foucault writes, “the classical age [reduced] to silence the madness whose voices the Renaissance had just liberated, but whose violence it had already tamed.”²²² The power exercised in these wards was arbitrary, measures for imprisonment were often sweeping and unjustified, and eventually, society would recoil at the discovery of what were revealed to be the horrific conditions under which the prisoners of these structures were kept.

Regardless, Hamlet’s archetypal flame could not be extinguished, and with the dawn of the 19th century came the revival of the skepticism and interest in human psychology that would eventually lend itself to the reincarnation of the *Hamlet* archetype. Traditional European epistemology was beginning to show signs of weakness in the face of scientific advancement, which averted society’s gaze from the comfortable lens of Christianity, through which life had long been understood. *Knowledge* was now known to produce psychological distress on both the individual and cultural levels. Foucault offers a brief genealogy that summates the conditions under which Hamlet’s archetype made its triumphant return:

²²² Foucault, 38

In nineteenth-century evolutionism, madness is indeed a return, but along a chronological path; it is not the absolute collapse of time. It is a question of time turned back, not of repetition in the strict sense. Psychoanalysis, which has tried to confront madness and unreason again, has found itself faced with the problem of time; fixation, death-wish, collective unconscious, *archetype* define more or less happily this heterogeneity of two temporal structures: that which is proper to the experience of Unreason and the knowledge it envelops; [and] that which is proper to the knowledge of madness.²²³

This “heterogeneity” marks a definitive split in the experience of madness in the prophetic strain, as opposed to, say, the experience of madness in the unfortunate case of Ophelia. This is essential to the continuation of the recurrent archetype of the madman-as-prophet. Trauma and unreason neatly coagulate and lend themselves to psychoanalysis: these representations aspire to realism, in literature. Madness in the prophetic strain is necessarily intertwined with knowledge or higher insight: this literary narrative is of a strain closer to myth, a trope of surrealism, preeminent in fictional dystopia.

Hamlet’s archetypal flame could not be extinguished, particularly as the external contexts of literary production became as chaotic and confusing as the internal fiction of

²²³ Foucault, 297, n.9

Hamlet itself. “To be or not to be”—*that was the question* of nineteenth-century European nihilism and twentieth-century global disillusion, and it was also the question that plagued Shakespeare’s great tragic hero at the dawn of the seventeenth century. Tragic insight into the realities of a lunatic environment lead Hamlet not only to question himself, but to question God; though Shakespeare does not make any decisively anti-Christian statements in *Hamlet*; he creates a character who addresses the cleavages between Christian dogma and the harsh realities of everyday life.

And thus, in *Hamlet* we find the original questioner to whom philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche answered, two centuries later, “God is dead.”²²⁴ Nietzsche’s famous declaration became one of the defining statements of 19th century European nihilism. And in Nietzsche’s characteristically parabolic style, the groundbreaking statement emulates in *The Gay Science* not only from the pen of the philosopher himself, but also from the mouth of “The Madman.” The character runs up and down Nietzsche’s carefully paved allegorical streets in a frenzied state of existential vertigo:

The madman.—Haven’t you heard of that madman who in the bright morning lit a lantern and ran around the marketplace crying incessantly, “I’m looking for God! I’m looking for God!” Since many of those who did not believe in God were standing around together just then, he caused great laughter.

²²⁴ *The Gay Science*, 120

Has he been lost, then? asked one. Did he lose his way like a child? asked another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone to sea? Emigrated?—Thus they shouted and laughed, one interrupting the other.²²⁵

Within the cultural confines of his century, Hamlet cannot answer his own questions so boldly as Nietzsche's madman: "Where is God?" he cried; 'I'll tell you! *We have killed him*—you and I! . . . God is dead! God remains dead!"²²⁶ Hamlet's questions may never be answered—his existence spans a mere five acts, and suspends in utter and astounding neutrality his masterful manipulation of language and illimitable capacity for existential thought. And like Nietzsche's madman, Hamlet arrives too early:

Finally he threw his lantern on the ground so that it broke to pieces and went out. 'I come too early', he then said; 'my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightning and thunder need time; the light of the stars needs time; deeds need time even after they are done, in order to be seen and heard. This deed is still more remote to them than the remotest stars—and yet they have done it themselves.'²²⁷

²²⁵ Nietzsche, 119

²²⁶ Nietzsche, 120

²²⁷ Nietzsche, 120

Hamlet, then, preceded generations of questioners who were unsatisfied with the answers (or lack thereof) to which their questions gave rise. Hamlet is “the madman” of Elsinore. Which means, of course, that he is no madman—like Nietzsche’s, he is far from it. Both are prophetic souls in their own right, individuals disillusioned with a truth approaching like a tidal wave on the horizon, soon to disillusion a continent and then a globe. The madman’s prophecy sounds into Nietzsche’s allegorical abyss to reflect a culture in denial of its own psychological state: nihilism.

Nietzsche was one of many pre-modern thinkers who dealt, in varying ways, with the problematic psychological product of objective knowledge: nihilism. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche theorized an entirely new way of understanding the strain of madness Hamlet’s archetype represented. In this early example of Nietzsche’s work, published in 1872, the philosopher utilized the classical deity Dionysus to symbolize the chaotic, tragic truth that lends itself to madness in the prophetic strain. In that, Nietzsche also used Dionysus—and the more familiar example of *Hamlet*—to represent the psychological plight of the enlightened modern man. Nietzsche utilized the deity as a symbol to represent the sublime underlying truths of existence that had just barely begun to glimmer beneath the surface of 19th century European consciousness. Dionysus was merely a name, a symbol representative of a worldview distorted by truth—and unfamiliar as that name may now seem, the symbolism of the

Dionysian worldview remained very much intact into the century that followed.

Raymond Geuss, in an introduction to a 20th century edition of the now-canonized text, reflects retrospectively that “the idea specifically derived from *The Birth of Tragedy* which has become perhaps most influential in the twentieth century is the conception of the ‘Dionysiac’ and its role in human life, i.e. the view that destructive, primitively anarchic forces are a part of us,” and that “the pleasure we take in them is not to be denied.”²²⁸ Nietzsche himself, an outspoken admirer of Shakespeare and a studied classicist, immediately identified, in his first publication, the link between erratic or “mad” behavior and *truth* as the “lesson of *Hamlet*”:

In this sense Dionysiac man is similar to Hamlet: both have gazed into the true essence of things, they have acquired knowledge and they find action repulsive, for their actions can do nothing to change the eternal essence of things; they regard it as laughable or shameful that they should be expected to set to rights a world so out of joint. Knowledge kills action; action requires one to be shrouded in a veil of illusion—this is the lesson of Hamlet, not that cheap wisdom about Jack the Dreamer who does not get around to acting because he reflects too much, out of an excess of possibilities. No, it is not reflection, it is true knowledge, insight into the terrible truth, which

²²⁸ Geuss, *The Birth of Tragedy*, xxx

outweighs every motive for action, both in the case of Hamlet and in that of Dionysac man. . . . Once truth has been seen, the consciousness of it prompts man to see only what is terrible or absurd in existence wherever he looks; now he understands the symbolism of Ophelia's fate, [now he feels] revulsion.²²⁹

That same crucial link that Nietzsche draws between knowledge and paralysis ("madness," as it applies to Hamlet) perfectly summates the anti-heroism that Hamlet definitively exhibits throughout the first half of the play. As to the heroism Hamlet exhibits in Act V, we will see a later amendment of Nietzsche's views as to other possible byproducts of insight into the "terrible truth of things"—but we should freeze with this analysis in understanding Hamlet's proclivity to idleness and avert our gaze to the great, disillusioned, inactive anti-hero of the twentieth-century: Yossarian of Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*.

Largely unread during his own lifetime, Nietzsche is considered a characteristically twentieth-century philosopher. It was not until his death, at the turn of the century, that Nietzsche's work gained popular traction. Thus it is largely in the literature and philosophy of the 20th century that his hermeneutics are appreciated and his influence is felt. And Nietzsche's influence was transcontinental: M.H. Abrams, in his general introduction to the Modernist era in *The Norton*

²²⁹ *The Birth of Tragedy*, 40

Anthology of American Literature, readily cites Nietzsche as both an influence and an adversary to the authors who apprehended his striking proclamations in reverential vertigo:

For both anthropologists and modern writers,
Western religion was now decentered. . . . Furthering
this challenge to religious doctrine were the writings
of Friedrich Nietzsche, the nineteenth-century
German philosopher who declared the death of God,
repudiated Christianity, and offered instead a harshly
tragic conception of life: people look ‘deeply into the
true nature of things’ and realize ‘that no action of
theirs can work any chance,’ but they nevertheless
laugh and stoically affirm their faith.²³⁰

Though Abrams doesn’t acknowledge the context of his quotations—they do, after all, apply generally to the 20th century literary spirit with or without contextualization—they are in fact verbatim selections from Nietzsche’s description of Hamlet in *The Birth of Tragedy*: the plight of the psychologically modern man who knew too much, and knew too well. Thus we have both an obvious continuity as well as an affirmation of the archetype with which 20th century writers worked to create meaningful fiction that spoke to the predicaments of their age.

Madness takes on a new integrity, a symbolism of sorts, in the fiction of the twentieth century. And rightfully so: with onset

²³⁰ Abrams, 1889

of two World Wars came the mind-blowing realities of human death, destruction, and violence on massive and unprecedented scales. A collective psyche already damaged by “the Great War” was jarred once more by the horrific implications of World War II, and in post-modernist writing there is a palpable revulsion at the discovery of the atrocity of which mankind had proven himself capable. Existence itself came into question, and indeed many dismissed the possibility of meaning or redemption in viewing the state of mankind in the aftermath of grotesque and terrifying revelations. Universal feelings of alienation, detachment, and a sense of lost innocence were as pervasive as anger and blame: people turned against their own governments and others, with fears of communist and socialist regimes growing and the Cold War looming ominously overhead as an ever-present reminder of our newfound ability to turn the world into dust.

Had the world we lived in gone mad? Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22* couldn’t have posed the question more powerfully. His quintessentially antiheroic protagonist Yossarian tries time and again to feign insanity, seeing madness—as does Hamlet—as a reasonable human reaction to life in a lunatic environment permeated by devastating circumstances. Indeed, warfare, like Elsinore, makes madness reasonable. Unfortunately, the infuriatingly tyrannical bureaucracy to which Yossarian is by his own rare sanity inextricably bound, is slightly more savvy than, say, Polonius or Gertrude. American warfare bureaucracy outmaneuvers English

patriarchy in terms of devising loathsome precautionary measures to block all outlets for reprieve. For Yossarian's greatest enemy—greater than the Germans (who hardly appear over the course of the novel), greater than his lunatic comrades, greater than Colonel Cathcart, even—is a bureaucratic rule:

There was only one catch and that was Catch-22, which specified that a concern for one's own safety in the face of dangers that were real and immediate was the process of a rational mind. Orr was crazy and he could be grounded. All he had to do was ask; and as soon as he did, he would no longer be crazy and would have to fly more missions. Orr would be crazy to fly more missions and sane if he didn't, but if he was sane he had to fly them. If he flew them he was crazy and didn't have to; but if he didn't want to he was sane and had to. Yossarian was moved very deeply by the absolute simplicity of this clause and let out a respectful whistle.²³¹

What has now become a colloquialism in American dialect was originally Heller's rendering of the context for a mad world that was *too* real to any longer be tragic—perhaps a phrase like this was precisely what the world had been looking for to describe its present predicament. In one of the first prominent essays published on *Catch-22*, "The Logic of Survival in a Lunatic World," critic Robert Brustein points

²³¹ Heller, 46

out that “like all superlative works of comedy—and I am ready to argue that this is one of the most bitterly funny works in the language—*Catch-22* is based on an unconventional but utterly convincing internal logic.”²³²

Rather than follow the paths of so many World War II veterans who developed nonfictional, realistic renderings of their own warfare experiences, Heller broke with this tradition entirely. He turned not only to fiction, but also to black humor, satire, and the grotesque to render an absurd piece of literature that accurately reflected the insane logic of warfare itself. And, on a more general platitude, to reflect the predicament of modern man in a mad world—eerily similar to that of Hamlet. In another essay, “The Story of *Catch-22*,” Heller wrote in regard to the true, transcendent environmental madness that inspired his novel: “The book dealt instead with conflicts existing between a man and his own superiors, between him and his own institutions. The really difficult struggle happens when one does not even know who it is that’s threatening him, grinding him down—and yet one does know that there is a tension, an antagonist, a conflict with no conceivable end to it.”²³³ Thus we have the incubus of the madness that pervades *Catch-22*.

Nearly all of *Catch-22*’s commenting critics agree upon the fact that, as Anthony Burgess suggests, Heller’s ready inclination to satire as a potentially unexpected response to

²³²Brustein, 487

²³³ Heller, 474

the Second World War was in fact entirely appropriate to his retrospective subject, as well as to the novel's contemporary context. Burgess commends Heller for taking a bold and much-needed step to "accept wild comedy as the only possible literary response to a stupid and coldblooded military machine."²³⁴ Whereas we watch Hamlet work through existentialist questions as they arise, the majority of our exposure to Yossarian is to a man who has seen the madness and godlessness of his increasingly claustrophobic world and who wants to see no more of it. Yossarian is the "dangerously nihilistic" Hamlet who, in the wake of the ghost's revelation, fools with Polonius, frightens Ophelia, and can barely retain a moment's seriousness with Yorick's skull in his hand before guffawing at its smell and tossing it to the ground. The Yossarian we meet in the book's opening chapter—feigning "a liver pain just short of jaundice" and having "made up his mind to spend the rest of the war in the hospital"—is the great ironist who bides his time lampooning the absurdity of environment to which he is confined:

All the officer patients in the ward were forced to censor letters written by all the enlisted-men patients, who were kept in residence in wards of their own. It was a monotonous job, and Yossarian was disappointed to learn that the lives of enlisted men were only slightly more interesting than the lives of officers. After the first day he had no curiosity at all. To break the monotony he invented games. Death to

²³⁴ Burgess, 518

all modifiers, he declared one day, and out of every letter that passed through his hands went every adverb and every adjective. The next day he made war on articles. He reached a much higher plane of creativity the following day when he blacked out everything in the letters but a, an, and the.²³⁵

Thus we have an educated man who finds language as malleable as Hamlet but doesn't use it quite to the right purposes; whereas the letter-writing Hamlet is a hero rewriting his own fate, the Yossarian we meet here is a distinctive anti-hero toying with language as yet another blatant and useless inadequacy of human communicative ability during wartime. Free indirect discourse reigns in *Catch-22* as Yossarian's acidulous, dark narrative catches us by surprise time and time again—deeply bitter as he may be, he never fails to make us laugh: “When he had exhausted all possibilities in the letters, he began attacking the names and addresses on the envelopes, obliterating whole homes and streets, annihilating entire metropolises with careless flicks of his wrist as though he were God.”²³⁶

Perhaps no diagnosis better fits Yossarian's strain of madness than Dr. Sanderson's: “You think people are trying to harm you.’ ‘People are trying to harm me.’ ‘You see? You have no respect for excessive authority or obsolete traditions.’”²³⁷

²³⁵ Heller, 8

²³⁶ Heller, 8

²³⁷ Heller, 299

“You have a morbid aversion to dying. You probably resent the fact that you’re at war and might get your head blown off any second.”²³⁸ The “catch,” of course, to yet another spot-on diagnosis by Major Sanderson, is that these very rational conclusions function as diagnoses of insanity in Yossarian’s world. Yossarian’s fellow bombers are less eloquent, but respond to his emphatic concern for self-preservation and survival with a sweeping generalization that functions much to the same effect: “You’re crazy!”

Like Polonius, Sanderson has unwittingly identified the “method” to Yossarian’s “madness.” Of course, there is no method to Sanderson’s own, and the emphatic rage with which this intentionally diminutive diagnosis is proclaimed speaks adequately to the rationale of the higher authorities to whom Yossarian and his men are subject. Heller, of course, undermines the backward-correctness of this assumption with a lunatic solution to a nonexistent problem: “You’re dangerous and depraved and you ought to be taken outside and shot!”²³⁹

The sane enemy to a lunatic establishment, Yossarian clings to existence as a hovering commentator on the periphery of the mad world to which he is inextricably bound. Sanderson is an underappreciated battlefield psychologist; for Heller, he is an unwitting instrument of scathing satire, an exemplum of the inadequacy of wartime psychology and rationale. In a

²³⁸ Heller, 303

²³⁹ Heller, 299

painfully clichéd attempt at Freudian dream interpretation, the staff psychiatrist attempts to delve into Yossarian's mind, which is of course so sound that it refracts Sanderson's inquiries back upon him in a humiliating manner of which he is blithely unaware. Hilarity ensues in a modern-day rendering of Polonius's dim-witted attempt to coax an admission of insanity out of the razor-sharp Hamlet. Left with a lingering sense of who is *really* in need of psychological treatment between the two, we watch Major Sanderson maneuver his way into a much-anticipated Freudian trap, Yossarian bemusedly dangling the bait:

“My fish dream is a sex dream.”

“No, I mean real sex dreams—the kind where you grab some naked bitch by the neck and pinch her and punch her in the face until she's all bloody and then throw yourself down to ravish her and burst into tears because you love her and hate her so much you don't know what else to do. That's the kind of sex dreams I like to talk about. Don't you ever have sex dreams like that?”

Yossarian reflected a moment with a wise look.

“That's a fish dream,” he decided.²⁴⁰

When Yossarian isn't fearing for his life, he's devising methods to cure his boredom: freed under the pretense of insanity, he, too, finds his “fishmonger.” But Yossarian isn't the only character in the novel who invents games to bide the

²⁴⁰ Heller, 296

time—Chief White Halfoat also entertains himself quite adeptly between missions:

Captain Flume was obsessed with the idea that Chief White Halfoat would tiptoe up to his cot one night when he was sound asleep and slit his throat open for him from ear to ear. Captain Flume had obtained this idea from Chief White Halfoat himself, who did tiptoe up to his cot one night as he was dozing off, to hiss portentously that one night when he, Captain Flume, was sound asleep he, Chief White Halfoat, was going to slit his throat open for him from ear to ear. Captain Flume turned to ice, his eyes, flung open wide, staring directly up into Chief White Halfoat's, glinting drunkenly only inches away. 'Why?' Captain Flume managed to croak finally. 'Why not?' was Chief White Halfoat's answer.²⁴¹

Every time Yossarian's very reasonable concerns for self-preservation are met with allegations of insanity, Heller inserts an episode of this nature, as if to offer his readers a gentle and less-than-subtle reminder: *This* is crazy. In a semblance of the most bizarre, disturbing picaresque ever made, Heller strings together episodes of utter insanity that are on their surface entertaining and carry undertones of the assurance that *yes*, PTSD is real, and *no*, men who are exposed to the kind of violence these troops are made to bear cannot retain their composure during their off-hours. They either

²⁴¹ Heller, 56

become afraid and antiheroic, like Yossarian, become capital-hungry immoralists, like Milo, or go absolutely insane, like Chief White Halfoat and almost every other combat-seasoned member of the crew.

Another of Yossarian's fellow bombers—perhaps the most severely affected, though it's hard to say—is Hungry Joe. Early in the novel, Yossarian advises Hungry Joe to seek treatment for the dreams that cause him to scream in his sleep every night without fail. Hungry Joe sees nothing wrong with his present predicament, and phrases it so poignantly that we, amazingly enough, can't see anything wrong with it either—neither can Yossarian:

“There's nothing wrong with nightmares,” Hungry Joe answered. “Everybody has nightmares.”

Yossarian thought he had him. “Every night?” he asked.

“Why not every night?” Hungry Joe demanded.

And suddenly it all made sense. Why not every night, indeed? It made sense to cry out in pain every night.

It made more sense than Appleby, who was a stickler for regulations and had ordered Kraft to order Yossarian to take his Atabrine tablets after Yossarian and Appleby had stopped talking to each other.²⁴²

And thus we receive Heller's first hint toward what will slowly unravel and reveal itself as the Snowden episode: the episode

²⁴² Heller, 55

that unraveled Yossarian. Utilizing his anachronistic narrative to show the effects of trauma and memory on the human psyche, Heller gradually reveals that the anti-hero we meet in *Catch-22*'s opening chapter "was brave once." Heller's revelation that there is a knowledge or memory of some sort behind Yossarian's rampant concern for self-preservation is perfectly timed. Indeed, having delved into the absurdity of the lunatic manslaughtering machine Heller has created, even we begin to wonder: *is* this attitude of Yossarian's crazy? Why is he so vehemently preoccupied with self-preservation during wartime—is this not a bit of an oxymoron?

As it turns out, Yossarian's intrepid concern for self-preservation—that very quality which makes him the "madman" of his novel—is, as in Hamlet, tied to knowledge and tragic insight. The serious moments of *Catch-22* are outnumbered by the ridiculous, but when they do occur, they are grave and intense, and, as Heller reminds us, there is *nothing* humorous about these aspects of warfare. In a deliberately backward narrative fashion, Heller defies linearity and rearranges each episodic chapter to eventually build suspense, with increasing intensity and confusion, to the revelation of the Snowden episode. As it turns out, "[Avignon] was the mission on which Yossarian lost his nerve. Yossarian lost his nerve on the mission to Avignon because Snowden lost his guts, and Snowden lost his guts because the pilot that day was Huple, who was only fifteen years old."²⁴³

²⁴³ Heller, 225

And thus we have the recipe for disaster that unfolds in the novel's grotesque and disturbing climax:

"There, there," said Yossarian, with growing doubt and trepidation. "There, there. In a little while we'll be back on the ground and Doc Daneeka will take care of you." But Snowden kept shaking his head and pointed at last, with just the barest movement of his chin, down toward his armpit. Yossarian bent forward to peer and saw a strangely colored stain seeping through the coveralls just above the armhole of Snowden's flak suit. Yossarian felt his heart stop, then pound so violently he found it difficult to breathe. Snowden was wounded inside his flak suit. Yossarian ripped open the snaps of Snowden's flak suit and heard himself scream wildly as Snowden's insides slithered down to the floor in a soggy pile and just kept dripping out. . . . Here was God's plenty, all right, he thought bitterly as he stared – liver, lungs, kidneys, ribs, stomach and bits of the stewed tomatoes Snowden had eaten that day for lunch.²⁴⁴

In effect, the Snowden episode is a far grislier rendering of Hamlet's ephemeral realization, holding Yorick's skull, of death's visceral reality. In this novel, however, the implications of that realization are far more serious. Whereas *Hamlet* participates in the myth of death as an apotheosis of

²⁴⁴ Heller, 439 - 440

sorts, a “passage,” *Catch-22*’s sole (serious) objective is to debunk the war-myth, the selling-point of recruitment:

“Man was matter, that was Snowden’s secret. Drop him out a window and he’ll fall. Set fire to him and he’ll burn. Bury him and he’ll rot, like other kinds of garbage. The spirit gone, man is garbage. That was Snowden’s secret.”²⁴⁵

Dying, as it turns out, is man’s reduction to a pile of base matter, horrifyingly material and palpable. This is what Yossarian attempts (and fails) to communicate to his fellow men thereafter—that you *don’t* go down in history as a “hero” if you die in warfare, that your reduction to a pile of entrails is anything *but* glorious and heroic, and that your memory resonates not with your country or your superiors but with whoever had the good fortune of cleaning you up bit-by-bit. Is there any knowledge more dehumanizing than this?

The product of this unspeakably revolting incident is the vivid Biblical image of Yossarian, nude, perched the lowest branch of a tree. To reconcile the Bible and any of its claims to “forbidden knowledge” with the event that, chronologically, preceded this one, seems outrageous: where is *God* in all of this? In this profoundly vivid imagistic climax to an absurd and caustically satiric rendering of World War II, Heller utilizes the Genesis imagery we see implemented in *Hamlet* to write about one of the most Godless endeavors

²⁴⁵ Heller, 440

known to mankind. Here, forbidden knowledge exists not as the obscure, mythical knowledge Eve accrues when she eats the “forbidden fruit,” but in the visceral, corporal knowledge of manslaughter. In a final act of heroism shrouded by the horror of its circumstance, Yossarian carries his disemboweled comrade from the jet in a state of shock, bathed in Snowden’s entrails. He is immediately and repetitively sedated. When he awakens, and an inquiring hospital staff member attempts to determine his identity by asking Yossarian where he was born, he answers, “In a state of innocence.”

Yossarian has been effectively numbed by the time we encounter him nude on the low limb of a tree, “a small distance in the back of the quaint little military cemetery at which Snowden was being buried.”²⁴⁶ If we hadn’t grown accustomed enough to Heller’s caustic drawl, at this point, to understand that a word like “quaint” is fraught with diminutive irony in this novel, we might think this the ideal setting for some odd, dystopian pastoral elegy. Rather than a pensive poet gloomily reflecting on the universality of death, however, we receive an image of man reduced to a near-primitive state by trauma and disillusion:

Yossarian went about his business with no clothes on all the rest of that day and was still naked late the next morning when Milo, after hunting everywhere else, finally found him sitting up a tree a small distance in the back of the quaint little military cemetery at

²⁴⁶ Heller, 261

which Snowden was being buried. Milo was dressed in his customary business attire—olive-drab trousers, a fresh olive-drab shirt and tie, with one silver first lieutenant's bar gleaming on the collar, and a regulation dress cap with a stiff leather bill. "I've been looking all over for you," Milo called up to Yossarian from the ground reproachfully. . . . "Come on down and tell me if it's good. It's very important."²⁴⁷

Milo, the comic rendering of the serpent in this postmodern recreation of the Fall, is largely harmless in this scene (though his capitalist corporation, M & M Enterprises, resulted in the fatal bombing of his own squadron—"But everyone has a share!" Milo contests). The stark contrast between the nude Yossarian and the uniformed Milo freights the ironic dichotomy that Heller presents. Milo Minderbinder has utilized his own time between serving the American Army to network an enormous capitalist enterprise, having effectively created a transnational black market for his own benefit: he makes transactions with the enemy and sees no right or wrong in the continuation of his enterprise—the only thing that Milo can *see* at this point is capital profit, loss or gain.

Yossarian, desperately clinging to that last shred of human dignity indicated by his emotional reaction to human disembowelment—*that* is how low Heller sets the standards for human dignity in this novel—refuses to "Come down," and Milo is forced to climb up the tree instead:

²⁴⁷ Heller, 261

He sat nude on the lowest limb of the tree and balanced himself with both hands grasping the bough directly above. He refused to budge, and Milo had no choice but to stretch his arms about the trunk in a distasteful hug and start climbing. . . .Yossarian watched him impassively. Cautiously Milo worked himself around in a half circle so that he could face Yossarian.²⁴⁸

After quite literally slithering up the tree under Yossarian's "impassive" eye, Milo attempts again to offer his friend a piece of the chocolate-covered cotton and is rejected. Now that Milo is at his level of altitude, Yossarian attempts elevate his friend to his own newfound spiritual and prophetic heights, and reconcile what are, at present, two inherently oppositional worldviews: "Come on out here," Yossarian invited him. "You'll be much safer, and you can see everything."²⁴⁹

For a fleeting moment, we get the impression that perhaps Milo's ascension to Yossarian's limb of the tree of knowledge will have a mythical effect of the enlightening sort, and that Milo will, as Yossarian hopes, be able to "see everything": "This is a pretty good tree," [Milo] observed admiringly with proprietary gratitude. "It's the tree of life," Yossarian answered,

²⁴⁸ Heller, 261

²⁴⁹ Heller, 262

wagging his toes, ‘and of knowledge of good and evil, too.’”²⁵⁰

For Milo, “It’s a chestnut tree. I ought to know. I sell chestnuts.”²⁵¹ Constantly undermining the gravity of his own fiction, Heller rarely leaves an episode of truth or enlightenment standing without interweaving the inevitable undertones of absurd irony we’ve come to expect from the narrative as a whole. Yossarian is no longer naïve, and realizes that his friend—far gone in the throes of loss and profit, a soldier entrenched in a failing business enterprise—is irreconcilable: “Have it your way,” Yossarian blithely responds. Milo is interested in two things: first and foremost, whether he can convince Yossarian that his chocolate covered cotton is edible, which would provide Milo with a much needed impetus and boost in spirit in the self-delusion that he is not, in fact, on the brink of a massive material failure. Secondly, in spirit of eavesdropping that pervades *Hamlet*, Milo is curious as to whether Yossarian has, as people have said, “gone crazy”: “‘You don’t have any clothes on. I don’t want to butt in or anything, but I just want to know. Why aren’t you wearing your uniform?’ ‘I don’t want to.’” As we’ve seen, subtlety is not Milo’s greatest strength, and “[nodding] rapidly like a sparrow pecking,” Yossarian’s friend pretends to understand what he absolutely cannot: “I understand

²⁵⁰ Heller, 262

²⁵¹ Heller, 262

perfectly. I heard Appleby and Captain Black say you had gone crazy, and I just wanted to find out.”²⁵²

As Yossarian tells Milo dismissively in refuting his desperate hopes that his absurd bunk-delicacy is the solution to his financial problems, “‘They’ll never be able to swallow it.’”²⁵³ Just as the synthetic substance under the thin chocolate coating of Milo’s newest invention is humanly impossible to digest, Milo will “never be able to swallow” or intuitively understand, in full meaning, what Yossarian has just witnessed. Yossarian at present is attempting to digest a truth as unpalatable as Milo’s chocolate covered cotton, as indigestible as the very fabric of the symbolic, homogenizing uniform Yossarian has emphatically decided to renounce. To echo Nietzsche, writing of Hamlet, “he feels revulsion.” In this modern day re-rendering of the narrative myth, nothing seems justified: Yossarian is the portrait of a man whose sense of human integrity—integrity of the body, integrity of death, integrity of the soul—has been effectively undermined by the splitting open of a corpse wounded *under* its flak suit: not only is the human body destructible and material, but the artificial shells of protection with which combat fighters are provided have proven fallible as well. The war-myth coats horror with the promise of glory, disguises the threat of death with the notion of falling in honor: Milo disguises the threat of choking his friend to death with cotton with a thin layer of chocolate. All facades are deconstructed. All integrity is

²⁵² Heller, 262

²⁵³ Heller, 262

compromised: man is garbage. Yossarian won't be able to digest any of this: and thus we have the background for the disgusted nihilistic anti-hero we meet in the first chapter of the novel.

Certainly there is no end to madness—"Unreason," or *real* insanity, remains the baffling foe of psychoanalysis and contemporary psychotherapy. "Reason-Madness," or madness in the prophetic strain, meets its end only with the conclusion of the artistic venue to which it is confined: "There is no madness except as the final instant of the work of art—the work endlessly drives madness to its limits; *where there is a work of art, there is no madness*. . . . The moment when, together, the work of art and madness are born and fulfilled is the beginning of the time when the world finds itself arraigned by that work of art and responsible before it for what it is."²⁵⁴ In the recurrence of the Hamlet archetype, we see that prophetic madness has no end in the Western literary tradition; what it does have is a *method*, and those methods remain crucial to the perpetuation of archetypal madness in the prophetic strain.

One thing is certain—Western literature has continued to *need* its madmen, for better or for worse. To the legacy of *Hamlet*, the original drama of the human consciousness, we now have *five centuries* of unwavering and sustained fascination to attribute. According to Bloom, we are also indebted to *Hamlet* for embodying one of Shakespeare's

²⁵⁴ Foucault, 281

greatest inventions—the internalization of the self—the vast, illimitable, inwardly conscious self of Hamlet: “There is no ‘real’ Hamlet just as there is no ‘real’ Shakespeare: the character, like the writer, is a reflecting pool, a spacious mirror in which we needs must see ourselves.”²⁵⁵

Hamlet’s transcendent legacy has no foreseeable conclusion, nor does our complex and amorphous literary relationship with madness in the prophetic strain. For the purposes of this study, we can rest with what we’ve seen hitherto. From Shakespeare onward, to Nietzsche, Heller, and Foucault, devoted authors of the *consciousness* perpetuate a fascination with insanity as a trope. Disciples of the psyche and preachers of methods to madness in individuals bearing the burden of sanity in dystopia, these authors boldly continue the mission of their predecessors to preserve the longstanding literary symbolism of madness as a rare and sacred locus of truth.

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²⁵⁵ *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, 401

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The Religious and Philosophical Foundations of Freud's Tripartite Theory of Personality

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Abstract

In this paper, we examine similarities between Sigmund Freud's tripartite theory of personality to foundational works across various religious and philosophical movements. First, conceptual similarities to the id, ego, and superego are illustrated through scriptural verses and commentators of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Next, elements of the tripartite theory in the Eastern religions of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Sikhism are explored. Finally, this Freudian theory is viewed in relationship to various philosophical works from Ancient Greece to modern day. We suggest these earlier tripartite approaches emanating from diverse religious and philosophical movements emerge as a broader universal understanding of man from which Freud could have profited in developing one of his most seminal theories.

Keywords: Freud, tri-partite approach, religious thought, Western philosophy, personality theory

Sigmund Freud is widely acknowledged as not only the father of psychoanalysis, but also as a critical figure in the development of psychology and a tremendously influence on 20th century thought (As part of his legacy, he has contributed to how psychologists view personality, psychotherapy, sexual development, dream analysis, gender differences, and hypnosis cannot be understated.

Nonetheless, in Ecclesiastes it is written, "What has been, will be again; what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun."²⁵⁶ In this paper, we reflect on the religious and philosophical foundations of Freud's *tripartite theory of personality*, which hypothesized the existence and dynamics of the *id*, *ego*, and *superego*. Upon examination, aspects of the tripartite view of personality can be found in a wide variety of religions and philosophical works throughout various historical time periods, which stated similar explanations of the personality, mind, or soul of man. This article should not be viewed as a criticism of Sigmund Freud; it highlights the universality of this approach and the possible unconscious or conscious influence of these previous human thought systems on Freudian theory.

In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud explained that human personality can be broken down into three parts: (a) the *id*, (b) *superego*, and (c) *ego*.²⁵⁷ Together, these three aspects explain our character and decision-making. According to Freud, the *id* reflects the more irrational or impulsive side of humans and operates based on the *pleasure principle*, or instant gratification. The most base desires of

²⁵⁶ Ecc. 1:9. *New International Version*.

²⁵⁷ S. Freud, "The ego and the id," in *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* Vol. 19, 13-19, trans. and ed. J. Strachey. (London, UK: Hogarth Press, 1961).

humans comprise, and are governed by, the id. The second aspect of personality is the superego, which is tied to morality and one's ability to defer gratification. The superego operates antagonistically to the id due to its operating on the *ideal principle*. This is to say, the superego is the part of human personality providing feedback on whether we should or should not do something referenced by social norms or moral grounds. Due to the antagonistic nature of the id and superego, these personality components are in constant conflict. Fortunately, a third personality structure, or the ego, serves to resolve these conflicts. As a mediator, the ego balances desires of the id while being respectful of the values of the superego. The ego engages in decision-making and operates based on the *reality principle*, which is the drive to assess the reality of external world and act accordingly.

Before exploring similarities of this basic intrapersonal dynamic to religious and philosophical works, let us first elaborate how these components work together with an example. Reflect back to when you were six or seven years old and imagine yourself walking into the neighborhood corner store. Upon entry, you see your favorite candy bar. However, there is only one problem; you do not have any money. What does the id instruct you to do? It tells you to "steal it!" Immediately, the superego interjects and says, "you can't steal it, it's illegal," "it's immoral," or "you will get in trouble with your parents." In the classic cartoon fashion, you are pulled in opposite directions by the symbolic angel (i.e., superego) and devil (i.e., id) on your shoulder. What do you do? Fortunately, the ego offers you practical solutions: "ask your parents for money," "asks the storekeeper to give it to you for free," or "offer to help the storekeeper to earn the candy bar." In all three ego-based solutions, the drives of the id and the considerations of the superego are satisfied with a harmonious action.

Abrahamic Religious Foundations

Judaism

Prior to evaluating any verse, it is important to qualify that adherents of the Jewish faith believe every word in the Bible to be sacred and each verse carefully constructed to teach valuable lessons. With this in mind, the first reference to the human soul in the Bible can be found in Genesis, where it is written that “God **formed** [*yetzer*] man of the dust of the ground, and **breathed into his nostrils** [*ruach*] the **breath of life** [*neshamah*], and man became a **living soul** [*nefesh*].”²⁵⁸ Elaborations on these concepts are observed in Deuteronomy, which states “However, be strong not to eat the blood, for the blood is the *soul* [*nefesh*],”²⁵⁹ and Ecclesiastes 3:21, “Who knows that the **spirit** [*rauch*] of the children of men is that which ascends on high and the **spirit** [*rauch*] of the beast is that which descends below to the earth.”²⁶⁰ Although several other relevant verses were excluded here for brevity, these excerpts nonetheless provide a framework for understanding the three part soul in Judaism.

One might suggest the Genesis 2:7 verse to be both indirect and redundant, which could have simply said, “And God created man.” However, scholars and commentators have attempted to

²⁵⁸ Gen. 2:7.

²⁵⁹ Deut. 12:23.

²⁶⁰ Ecc. 3:21.

understand the deeper meanings in each aspect of this verse.²⁶¹ The *Midrash Rabbah* explains that the term *yetzer* [formed] is used to suggest that Man is formed with two inclinations: (a) *yetzer tov* [good inclination] and an (b) evil inclination *yetzer hara* [evil inclination]. Rashi, a medieval commentator, suggested this distinction indicated man was made of both heavenly and earthly matter, and more specifically, possesses a heavenly soul and material body. Thus, man possesses two conflicting natures, one force which pushes a person towards materialism and physicality (i.e., *yetzer hara*), and another force pushes this person towards spirituality (i.e., *yetzer tov*).²⁶² On its face, this concept appears to be a close approximation to the id and superego, and scholars have noted that Freud's understanding of these psychic elements may have been influenced by this aspect of Jewish philosophy.²⁶³

As highlighted in the verses above, the *nefesh*, *ruach*, and *neshamah* are the three primary parts of the human soul. The Kli Yakar, a 16th century commentator, noted that when the verse in Genesis 2:7 says "and man became a living soul," the Hebrew word used is *nefesh*. In Judaism, the *nefesh* reflects a general life force found in humans and other animals. The *nefesh* is also viewed as our life force because it is tied to the word blood as is implied in Deuteronomy, which says "blood is the soul."²⁶⁴ Reflecting our most base desires and physical needs, the *nefesh* appears most analogous to Freud's concept of the id. The Kli Yakar notes that

²⁶¹ J. Scofer, "The Redaction of Desire: Structure and Editing of Rabbinic Teachings Concerning Yeser ('Inclination')," *Journal of Jewish Thought & Philosophy*, 12:1 (2003): 19-53.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ D. M. Snyder, "Judaism and Freud: The inclinations to do good and evil," *Psychoanalysis & Contemporary Thought*, 16:1 (1993): 103-122.

²⁶⁴ Deut. 12:23.

the same verse in Genesis 2:7 includes the words “a living soul.” The Hebrew word *neshamah* is used in this context, because it is viewed as eternal and is spark of the Divine. The *neshamah* is viewed as the purest part of the soul and pushes a person towards righteousness and moral behavior, which makes it analogous to Freud’s view of the superego.

Lastly, the verse in Genesis also uses the language of “breathed into his nostrils.”²⁶⁵ In Hebrew, the word breath and soul is called *ruach* [spirit], which is the part of the soul responsible for emotions and thoughts and serves as a bridge between the *neshamah* and *nefesh*. This bridge can be seen in Ecclesiastes 3:21, which highlights the ascending (i.e., towards the *neshamah*) and descending nature (i.e., towards the *nefesh*) of the *ruach*, making it similar to Freud’s view of the ego as a mediator between the id and superego. Thus, according to the Kli Yakar, the verse in Genesis 2:7 is not redundant, but suggests that man has three parts of the soul, each with its drives and functions. In *Derech Hashem*, the 18th Century Kabbalist Ramchal discusses a battle of the soul that parallels the conflict of the id and superego when he states that the material needs of the bodily soul (i.e., *nefesh*), and the spiritual needs of the highest soul (i.e., *neshamah*) are in constant conflict with one another. The Ramchal suggests that this battle is caused by the antithetical nature of our bodily and spiritual needs, and if the spiritual side of a person prevails it will elevate both body and soul. However, if the bodily aspects of a person prevail, it debases both body and soul. As is evident from these scriptures and their interpretations from the Jewish tradition, the *nefesh*, *ruach*, and *neshamah* seem parallel Freud’s id, ego, and superego.

²⁶⁵ Gen. 2:7.

Christianity

Characteristics of Freud's id, ego, and superego are also evident in Christianity's *God-head*, comprised of God the Father, God the Son, and the Holy Spirit. While each aspect of the God-head is considered a manifestation of a singular deity, they serve unique purposes in the lives of devout Christians. God the Father, similar to the superego, reflects the purest of moral ideals. God the Son, in his bodily form, was designed to shed light on the base desires and physical side of human nature. The Holy Spirit, like the ego, serves as a mediator of these two, meant to operate as a force that helps us align with our divine purpose and not be governed exclusively by our base desires. In this section, we examine these parallels between Freud's tripartite theory and how it may relate, in some measure, to Christian thought.

God the Son and the id. According to Christian belief, Jesus was the one whom the apostle John was referring to when he said "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."²⁶⁶ The apostle Paul's letter to the Philippians notes that Jesus "made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in all human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!"²⁶⁷ Why might this have been necessary? The reason is explained by an unnamed author in his letter to Jews beset by ambivalence about converting:

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the

²⁶⁶ John 1:14.

²⁶⁷ Phil. 2:7-8.

power of death – that is, the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants. For this reason, he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.²⁶⁸

Delving deeper into scripture, one reads that Jesus revealed what temptations lay in the heart of man when saying “evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man ‘unclean.’”²⁶⁹ The evils delineated by Jesus are akin to the compulsions Freud asserted were generated by the id; that is, those desires driven by the pleasure principle and arising from animalistic survival instincts.

God the Father and the superego. “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy name” is the first verse of the Lord’s prayer as found in two New Testament sections, Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:1-4. Believers earnestly beseech the Supreme Father for guidance, protection, and comfort, which, much like the superego, is seen as the ultimate repository of wisdom and virtue. John testified during his last days in forced labor at the stony atoll of Patmos that “You [God] alone are holy.”²⁷⁰ Similarly, Jesus highlighted God’s perfection when saying “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”²⁷¹ Embodying such parental

²⁶⁸ Heb. 2:14-18.

²⁶⁹ Mark 7:20-23.

²⁷⁰ Rev. 15:3-4.

²⁷¹ Matt. 5:48.

perfection is the superego, which Freud believed extols morality and is the source of reflection, self-restraint, and supreme regulation.²⁷² The role of the superego is to selflessly, yet ardently police affects and impulses, much as the apostle Paul instructed the Romans by writing “We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.”²⁷³ The apostle Peter admonished “Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.”²⁷⁴ While Freud may have disavowed the beliefs of his Jewish ancestors in calling all religious concepts illusory and impervious to proof, it appeared he acknowledged the importance of religion to humanity.²⁷⁵ Freud wondered whether criminality would obliterate civility in the absence of an all-knowing, all-seeing God whose celestial arsenal included eternal damnation. In an attempt to replace religion with reason, it can be said that the superego was erected to assume the pivotal role of moral oversight.

The Holy Spirit and the ego. The role of the Holy Spirit is to make manifest the path of the righteous amidst the chaos and selfishness of this world; thus, one is no longer bound in conflict with the two, but free to proceed benevolently in accordance with his or her divine purpose. Paul said in his letter to the Corinthians, “whenever a man turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the

²⁷² S. Freud, “A difficulty in the path of psycho-analysis,” in *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* vol. 17, 135-144, trans. and ed. by J. Strachey, (London, UK: Hogarth Press, 1955).

²⁷³ Rom. 15:1.

²⁷⁴ 1 Pet. 3:9.

²⁷⁵ Freud, S. “The future of an illusion.” In *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* Vol. 21, 1-56. Translated and edited by J. Strachey. London, UK: Hogarth Press, 1961.

Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”²⁷⁶ Believers in Christ trust in the solace of the Holy Spirit and know that, even in the most confounding of times, they can turn to the Lord for “it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.”²⁷⁷ John 14:26 offered assurance, stating, “the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.” Paul consoled the Romans, saying “the Spirit helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groaning too deep for words.”²⁷⁸ Much in the same way, the ego, guided by the reality principle, strives to find balance between the insatiable desires of the id and the lofty ideals of the superego. Freud (1923/1961a) asserted “the ego represents what we call reason and sanity, in contrast to the id which contains the passions.”²⁷⁹ Thus, while the ego does not provide a pathway to eternal salvation, it indeed was created by Freud to operate similarly; in the theoretical realm between raucous reactions and reasoned responses.

Islam

In Arabic, the word *Islam* is classified as a verb referring to the action of submitting to the will of Allah.²⁸⁰ Islamic teachings advocate for the molding of *nafs*, a complex concept representing

²⁷⁶ Cor. 3:16-18.

²⁷⁷ Matt. 10:20.

²⁷⁸ Rom. 8:26.

²⁷⁹ S. Freud, “The ego and the id,” 24.

²⁸⁰ B. S. Nursi, *The word: the reconstruction of Islamic belief and thought*, trans. H. Akarsyu. (Somerset, NJ: The Light Inc., 2005).

the soul, through various stages toward the ideal spiritual state. In the *Qur'an*, Allah declares "I created *jinn* [angels] and mankind only to worship Me."²⁸¹ As submission to his will is the primary reason for creation, free will should be consciously employed towards being a faithful servant and recognizing the absolute divinity of Allah. However, humans are viewed as being born with basic tendencies that produce misguidance and destruction, creating a distance between themselves and the ideal state of all-encompassing love and servitude demanded by Allah. Achieving salvation requires a purification of *nafs*, with the concept *Jihad an Nafs* referring to the spiritual struggle with instincts, desires, and impulses that lead them astray. Through *Jihad an Nafs*, individuals can progress through the various stages of the self, bringing them closer to the ultimate servitude and love of God. This basic struggle between the desires and tendencies of man and the will of Allah as achieved and maintained through *Jihad an Nafs* draws parallels to the dynamics of the id, the superego, and the ego as conceptualized by Freud.

In the concept of *nafs*, the basic instincts of man such as those contained in the id are found, which are believed to be the source of evil and deviation from the will of Allah.²⁸² *Hawai nafs* [passions] is a term used to encompass the love for, and dependence on, the desire for the pleasures of the material world. In the Qu'ran, David is instructed, "Do not follow your **desires** [*hawa*], less they divert you from Allah's path: those who wander from His path will have a painful torment."²⁸³ *Hawai nafs* begets a material desire, described

²⁸¹ Qur'an 51:56.

²⁸² H. Aydin, "Concepts of the self in Islamic tradition and western psychology: A comparative analysis," *Studies in Islam and the Middle East* 7:1 (2010): 1-30.

²⁸³ Qur'an 38:30.

in the verse “The love of desirable things is made alluring for men—women, children, gold and silver treasures piled up high.”²⁸⁴ Allowing oneself to be guided by these aspects of *nafs* hinders the journey toward salvation and brings individuals to the lowest state of spiritual progression.²⁸⁵ This state, *Nafsi Ammar* [Commanding Self], can be seen in Joseph’s proclamation, “I do not pretend to be blameless, for man’s **very soul [*nafs*] incites him [*ammar*] to evil.”²⁸⁶ In addition to containing the sexual desires and material drives, a parallel to the id can be seen in desire stemming from *nafs* for power and immortality without regard for others or the will of Allah.²⁸⁷ While Freud suggested indulging in the desires of the id can lead to maladaptive outcomes through the disregard of social norms of conduct, these aspects of *nafs* in Islam represent a satisfaction of instincts without regard to morality or mortality.²⁸⁸**

While *hawai nafs* begets evil and distance from Allah, there also exists *nafs* with the tendency to recognize and push away evil.²⁸⁹ This tendency, or *lawwam* [blaming], emerges from *nafs* through Allah’s endowment of an awareness of wrong-doings and transgressions. Best exemplified in this description of creation, “[Allah] formed [the soul] and inspired it to know its own rebellion and piety! The one who purifies his soul succeeds and the one who corrupts it fails.”²⁹⁰ Through *lawwam*, a person deviating from servitude and love of Allah will come to feel guilt, shame, regret,

²⁸⁴ Qur’an 3:14.

²⁸⁵ Aydin, “Concepts of self in the Islamic tradition and western psychology.”

²⁸⁶ Qur’an 12:53.

²⁸⁷ Nursi, *The word: reconstruction of Islamic belief and thought*.”

²⁸⁸ S. Freud, “The dissection of the psychical personality,” in *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* Vol. 22, 57-80, trans. and ed. J. Strachey, (London, UK: Hogarth Press, 1964).

²⁸⁹ Aydin, “Concepts of the self in Islamic traditions and western psychology.”

²⁹⁰ Qur’an 91:7.

and embarrassment. Teachings of the prophets in the *Qur'an* and *Hadith* serve as examples as to how *nafs* can be molded by divine values and good character.²⁹¹ For example, "And they have been commanded no more than this: to worship God, offering Him sincere devotion, being true (in faith); to establish regular prayer; and to practice regular charity; and that is the Religion Right and Straight."²⁹² Thus, *lawwam* serves the function in the individual of psychologically rewarding good action and punishing bad action in striving toward an ideal. Similar to *lawwam*, Freud suggested it is within the nature of the superego to aspire for perfection in this relation to conceptions of morality and ethics, with each failure theoretically results in feelings of guilt.²⁹³

Finally, the battle between the id and superego can be seen in Islam with the struggle of the *ana* [self or I-ness] to manage the conflicting aspects of *nafs* such as *hawa* and *lawwam*.²⁹⁴ As with the different psychological outcomes due to various balances of the id and the superego, the *nafs* manifests in different forms based on this balance of *nafs*.

If one gives in to their desires and forgets Allah, they descend into impious states such as *Nafsi Ammar* [Commanding Self], characterized by evil and a lack of humanity. Thus, to achieve salvation and the ideal spiritual state, one must maintain a conscious awareness of the struggle against the self. In so doing, one must show good judgment, self-control and ultimately defend against the evil or impious desires of the *nafs*. The teachings of Islam aim to provide man, who begins with a raw and impure *nafs*,

²⁹¹ Nursi, *The word: reconstruction of Islamic belief and thought*.

²⁹² Qur'an 98:5.

²⁹³ Freud, "The dissection of the psychical personality."

²⁹⁴ Aydin, "Concepts of the self in Islamic tradition and western psychology."

a path to salvation and unity with Allah. The internal war advocated by Islam and fought to suppress and mold their nature, *Jihad an Nafs* [War on the Soul], mirrors the struggle of the ego to balance the id, or lower sexual and material desires, with the superego, or a concern with higher ideals.

Eastern Religious Foundations

Upon reading the paper heretofore, one might argue that observed similarities of the Abrahamic religious perspectives to the id, ego, and superego are contrived due to shared scriptural foundations and geographic proximity. For example, one could say that these are all faiths that developed out of the same region of the world. Moreover, an alternative interjection could be that Christianity acknowledges the veracity of the Old Testament and Islam acknowledges the Jewish prophets. As such, one might reasonably expect variations of the Abrahamic religious tradition to hold theological similarities. However, we believe these foundations of the tripartite approach to be part of a greater universality emerging in human thought. Providing support for this suggestion, the battle between the aspects of personality, or the soul, can also be observed in Eastern religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Sikhism, which are less directly connected to the previously explored Abrahamic religious traditions.

Buddhism

In Buddhism, the primary goals are to attain enlightenment, recognize the self, and cease suffering through the non-duality and balance between extreme austerity and indulgence (Braarvig, 1993).

The Buddha described the importance of this balance in saying “The mutual causation of the Way of dualities gives birth to the meaning of the Middle Way.”²⁹⁵ As will be shown in this section, this theme of the *Middle Way* is central to various Buddhist teachings and exhibit similarities to Freud’s tripartite theory. Concepts mirroring the superego play the role of the ideal, or something accessible and universal to all beings. On the other hand, concepts that reflect indulgence, or the id, tend to be individualized to each being. These two sides are balanced out by representations of the self, or the ego, that provide access to both the universal ideal and the individual selves. This basic pattern is best exemplified in two main Buddhist teachings; (a) the *Trikaya*, or the three bodies comprising the Buddha-nature, and (b) the Buddhist refuge in *The Three Jewels*, or important aspects of Buddhism in the path to enlightenment.

The Trikaya. Within *Mahayana* Buddhist doctrine, there are three bodies that comprise the Buddha-nature: the *dharmakaya* (truth-body), *sambhogakaya* (bliss-body), and the *nirmanakaya* (physical body). Within each person, these three bodies contribute to the *trikaya*, or one entity that is an “eternally abiding and unchanging” Buddha-nature.²⁹⁶ These three bodies can be understood as respectively representing concepts similar to the superego, the ego, and the id. Ultimately, one must recognize this Buddha-nature as the true self to attain enlightenment and free oneself from *samsara*, or the cycle of rebirth and suffering.²⁹⁷ However, this task proves difficult, as the opposing forces of enlightenment and *maya* (illusion) cause the self to become capricious. Therefore, even upon

²⁹⁵ Platform Sutra 10.

²⁹⁶ Mahaparinirvana Sutra 2

²⁹⁷ J. C. Cleary, “Trikaya and trinity: The mediation of the absolute,” *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 6 (1986): 66-63.

realizing the full Buddha-nature, one must maintain a balance between the three bodies. The *trikaya*, in essence, has access to enlightenment and the physical world, synthesizing information from both in order to create teachings. Likewise, people have access to their moral compass and duties through their superego, and their empathy for suffering through the id - all of which is balanced out in the ego.

The *dharmakaya*, or the truth-body, is considered the ultimate self, which acts as the *Absolute*, a representation of an ultimate being similar to the Christian God.²⁹⁸ The Absolute refers to one who has come to embody truth and the ultimate nature of the Buddha, transcending both physical and spiritual realms.²⁹⁹ This truth-body correlates with the superego from Freud's tripartite theory and represents enlightenment itself. Enlightenment provides knowledge of the objective truth; the way the superego houses a moral compass. Along with the physical body, the truth-body is one of the causes for discriminative thinking within the Buddha-nature, affecting the balance of the bliss-body. The truth-body produces all the *dharmas* [truths], which are clouded by illusions. According to the Buddha, "whoever sees the *Dhamma* (commonly referred to as dharma) sees me; whoever sees me sees the *Dhamma*."³⁰⁰ When the illusions dissipate the truth appears, allowing one to attain enlightenment.

The mediator between the truth-body and the physical body is the *sambhogakaya*, or the bliss-body. The bliss-body is considered the communion of ultimate truth and the physical body, as it experiences the reward of enlightenment. It is associated with

²⁹⁸ Cleary, "Trikaya and trinity."

²⁹⁹ Digha Kikaya 3:84

³⁰⁰ Samyutta Nikaya 22:87

discipline and communication, bridging the gap between truth and the physical realm. This body is attained through practice and its purpose is to benefit oneself and others by constantly maintaining good thoughts. By nature, the bliss-body is non-dual and ideally remains "undefiled by good or evil."³⁰¹ The truth-body and the physical body govern the bliss-body, bridging the gap between enlightenment and the physical realm as the ego mediates the relationship between the superego and the id.

The *nirmanakaya*, or the physical-body, is the only aspect of the Buddha-nature susceptible to the experience of suffering, caused by earthly desires but kept at bay by the guidance of truth. The physical-body is affected by illusions and can do either good or evil, but without full understanding provided by the truth-body and mediation by the bliss-body, it shifts between natures with every thought, as "one evil thought...destroys ten thousand eons' worth of good *karma*," and "one good thought...ends evils as numerous as the sand-grains in the Ganges River."³⁰² Similarly, the id, which is comprised of desires and impulses, is incapable of making moral judgments and is theoretically the only part of the psyche that is present from childbirth. There are thousands of examples of the transformation-body, but the most prominent example of a physical and historical manifestation of a Buddha is Siddharta Gautama, whose physical body was created out of compassion in order to provide a vessel for Buddhist teachings from the *sambhogakaya*.³⁰³

The Three Jewels. A second tripartite concept found in Buddhism is the Three Jewels, a concept that Buddhist teachings suggest

³⁰¹ Platform Sutra 6.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Cleary, "Trikaya and trinity."

individuals may take refuge in for enlightenment, consists of the *Buddha* [enlightened one], the *Dharma* [teachings], and the *Sangha* [community]. In the *Ratana Sutta* [Jewel Discourse], the Buddha delivers a series of teachings regarding Buddhist practitioners and other beings on the path to enlightenment. These teachings show how the Three Jewels guide one to enlightenment when we uphold Buddhahood as the ideal state of being, follow its teachings, and take refuge in the community of enlightened beings. This path to enlightenment through a balance of the Three Jewels can be shown to parallel the quest of the ego to balance action between the id and the superego to produce harmonious psychological states and adaptive functioning.

The *Buddha* is the First Jewel, representing the highest spiritual state of being, mirroring the *superego*'s role in maintaining ideals and principles. The Buddha himself stated, "whatever treasure there be either here or in the world beyond, whatever precious jewel there be in the heavenly worlds, there is not comparable to [the Buddha]." ³⁰⁴ However, there are various Buddhas, including the historical Siddharta Gautama, the Amitabha Buddha of the Pure Land, and the various *bodhisattvas* who stay on earth in order to help others achieve enlightenment. Thus, each person must take refuge within his or her own ideal Buddhahood instead of emulating the first Buddha. ³⁰⁵ Upholding the ideal self allows us to have reign over our own actions, providing us with a method to better ourselves. Similarly, the superego allows us to regulate our actions by providing us with a moral code, providing us with guidance as the Buddha does when we take refuge in him.

³⁰⁴ Ratana Sutta 3.

³⁰⁵ C. Bielefeldt, "The one vehicle and the three jewels: On Japanese sectarianism and some ecumenical beliefs," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 10 (1990): 5-16.

The Second Jewel is the *Dharma*, which consists of teachings and the Buddha's path to enlightenment, is described as "The Supreme Buddha extolled a path of purity (the Noble Eightfold Path), calling it the path which unfailingly brings concentration."³⁰⁶ The *Dharma* can be taught through chants and sutras, and acts as the guide individuals may utilize in order to reach Buddhahood. While the attainment of Buddhahood is individual to each person, the *Dharma* is invariable and standardized, providing us access to ideal state of being.³⁰⁷ Like the ego, which plays a mediating role to satisfy the principles of the superego and the drives of the id, the Dharma balances and provides a path between the Buddha and the Sangha, or the community of Buddha's disciples.

This community of Buddhists, or the *Sangha*, is the Third Jewel, encompassing the various disciples of Buddha's teachings such as nuns, monks, and laypeople. It is a group of individuals who act as a harmonious refuge for those who have attained enlightenment and those who wish to do so.³⁰⁸ "With a steadfast mind, and applying themselves well in the dispensation of the Buddha Gotama [the disciples of the Buddha] enjoy the peace of [Nirvana]."³⁰⁹ The *Sangha* is universal; anyone can be a member of the Sangha no matter how far along the path of enlightenment they are. Likewise, the id is also a universal; as the only part of the tripartite theory that is present from infancy, the id is present in everyone no matter how old they are.

³⁰⁶ Ratana Sutta 5.

³⁰⁷ W. W. Lai, "The predocetic 'finite Buddhakāya' in the 'lotus sutra:' In search of the illusive Dharmakaya therein," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 49:3 (1981): 447-469.

³⁰⁸ Bielefeldt, "The one vehicle and the three jewels."

³⁰⁹ Ratana Sutta 7.

Hinduism

In Hinduism, human beings are believed to reach a form of self-actualization when they realize their physical bodies are merely vessels that house the soul; this soul pervades the entire body and is indestructible.³¹⁰ The idea of separation between body and soul is crucial in Hindu philosophy, and the view of the human body in and of itself is one that connotes a hindrance to gaining spiritual fulfillment.³¹¹ The soul is on a journey to fulfill its *karmic* and *dharmic* duties before attaining *moksha*, or release from the cycle of rebirth. *Karma* refers to the universal principle of cause and effect (including consequence of action); whereas, *dharma* is an all-inclusive term used to mean righteousness, morality, religion, responsibility, and duty. Thus, the argument can be made that the physical self is a representation of the id, while the soul is the superego on its quest for moral fulfillment. Finally, the ego is designated as the whole individual, battling between the conflicting wants of the two primary components that comprise them.

This reflection of the id, ego, and superego can be found throughout Hindu literature depicting the dynamics of the *Devas*, or the Gods. The God Brahma is seen as the creator, Shiva is the destroyer, and Vishnu preserves and protects the universe (Brahma Purana). Vishnu acts as the ultimate representation of the ego in Hinduism by balancing the forces of good and evil on Earth: "Whenever the Sacred Law fails, and evil raises its head, I (Vishnu) take embodied birth. To guard the righteous, to root out sinners,

³¹⁰ Bhagavad Gita 2:17.

³¹¹ A. B. Creel, "The reexamination of 'dharma' in Hindu ethics," *Philosophy East and West* (1975): 161-173.

and to establish Sacred Law, I am born from age to age."³¹² The good is often represented as the *devas*, while evil is represented as *asuras*, or men who have strayed from the path of good and have fallen victim to the power of their lesser natures, or the id.³¹³

The *Mahabharata* is considered the quintessential fight between good, the superego, and evil, the id. One hundred Kaurava brothers and their allies, who exhibited malicious intent, waged the ultimate battle against the five Pandava brothers and their allies, who fought for justice. The Kauravas banished the Pandavas from their own kingdom through a game of dice that held unreasonable stakes. Eventually, the Kauravas refused to turn over the kingdom to their cousins after the period of exile had been served and war ensued. Krishna sided with the Pandavas, providing them with divine support and wisdom.³¹⁴ The paradigmatic conflict between good and evil is portrayed in the pivotal scene of Arjuna's approach into battle:

Arjuna, the most skilled of the Pandava brothers at warfare, faltered at the sight of his relatives and teachers, now his sworn enemies. He broke down and refused to fight. "How can any good come from killing one's own relatives? What value is victory if all our friends and loved ones are killed? ... We will be overcome by sin if we slay such aggressors. Our proper duty is surely to forgive them. Even if they have lost sight of *dharma* due to greed, we ourselves should not forget *dharma* in the same way."³¹⁵

³¹² Bhagavad Gita 4:6-8.

³¹³ Srimad-Bhagavatam 3:3:6

³¹⁴ R. Thapar, "War in the Mahabharata," *PMLA* 124:5 (2009): 1830-1833.

³¹⁵ R. C. Katz, *Arjuna in the Mahabharata: Where Krishna is, there is victory*, (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1989).

This passage shows Arjuna attempting to mediate between what he perceived to be inherently right or wrong courses of action. The aforementioned questions were directed to Krishna, who was serving as Arjuna's charioteer. Krishna's response is compiled as the Bhagavad Gita, which, along with the Ramayana, Vedas, and Mahabharata, is considered a core Hindu text. The Gita offers resolute moral direction for Hindus—guiding them towards righteous conduct.

As we have seen, Hindus are encouraged to behave in accordance with their dharma, or to behave like a virtuous person would act (Kemerling, 2011). As the Vedas parse it, "According as one acts, so does he become. One becomes virtuous by virtuous action, bad by bad action."³¹⁶ This idea implies that Hinduism holds valid the concept of human free will, to a partial level at the very least. One's actions will reap consequences, and these consequences will unfold and influence the karmic cycle. Punishment and redemption, which correspond to the id and superego, are thus mediated by the balancing act of moral decision-making and, in effect, karma as affected by dharma.

Sikhism

Lastly, the fundamental components that form the basis of Freud's tripartite theory of personality may also be found in various tenets of Sikhism. The central religious scripture of Sikhism, the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* (hereafter SGGS), contains the spiritual wisdom of the *Ten Sikh Gurus* (masters) and *Bhagats* (devotees) (Talib, 2011). While the ultimate purpose of life is to attain salvation through a

³¹⁶ Yajur Veda, Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4.4.5

spiritual union with God, the central cause of all evil, *haumai*, or selfishness and ego, emerges out of the separation of the self from the divine. Haumai is divided into *The Five Thieves*, which represent basic drives and motivations of the body and intellect. According to Guru Amar Das, the Third Guru of Sikhism, "Within [the] body dwell the five thieves: *Kaam* (sexual desire), *Krodh* (anger), *Lobh* (greed), *Moh* (emotional attachment), and *Ahankaar* (pride)."³¹⁷ While sexual desire is believed to supersede rational thinking, desecrate morality, and obstruct the union of self with God, anger is also condemned as an instinctual vice that drowns the voice of reason and steers the soul further apart from this union. Greed brings dissatisfaction with basic needs and a mounting desire to possess excessive amounts of food, power, and money, producing a state in which "the waves of greed rise within [man] and he does not remember God."³¹⁸ While emotional attachment, is encouraged in love for family, but excessive emotional attachments can develop into excessive attachment to wealth, property, and pleasure. The final evil of the five thieves is that of Ahankaar, which is hubristic pride, arrogance, narcissism, competitiveness, smugness, and self-conceit. Much like the id, these five vices are natural instincts striving for immediate gratification considered to be responsible for ensnaring the soul, or the self, in a labyrinth of the life pursuit of *maya*, the grand illusion of materialism.

To combat these five thieves, it is advised that individuals should commonly remember and recite *Naam*, or the name of God, in meditation and in extension encourages to "not meet with, or even approach those people, whose hearts are filled with horrible

³¹⁷ SGGS, trans. 1960: 600.

³¹⁸ SGGS, trans. 1960: 77.

anger.”³¹⁹ It is also imperative that one remembers the ultimate goal of salvation and not become overly attached to objects that will be left behind after earth. This is reflected in the words of Guru Amar Das, who said “egotism and anger are wiped away when the Name of God dwells within the mind. In addition to meditation and reciting Naam, Sikh gurus taught the practice of the *Five Virtues* in order to combat haumai and the Five Thieves. These virtues are comprised of *Sat* (truth), *Santokh* (contentment), *Daya* (compassion), *Nimrata* (humility), and *Pyar* (love). Followers of Sikhism are taught that God is the only truth and that they must “practice truth, contentment, and kindness, this is an excellent way of life.”³²⁰ Additionally, they are told to live with Santokh, being satisfied and content with their circumstances and keeping any selfish desires for materialistic substances at bay.

In these representations of the Five Thieves and the Five Virtues, we can see the basic struggle between lower desires and higher moral principles that Freud represented with the id and the superego. The Five Thieves represent the most basic drives and motivations of the human being, which like the id, are guided by the pleasure principle and the pursuit of immediate gratification. As Freud conceptualized the effect of an unrestricted id on human behavior, the teachings of Sikhism suggest these Five Thieves left to their own devices lead to destructive outcomes for both the individual and society. Conversely, the emphasis placed by Sikhism on a continued awareness of God and an adherence to the Five Virtues can be said to parallel the superego. The Five Virtues and the superego represent an awareness of higher moral principles existing to restrict or reduce negative outcomes arising from an unabated indulgence in pleasure, greed, and pride. The Five

³¹⁹ SGGS, trans. 1960: 40.

³²⁰ SGGS, trans. 1960: 51.

Virtues exist to discharge tension generated by instinctive forces and hold Sikhs to their sense of right and wrong. These virtues provide guidelines for making judgments and decisions that are not governed by natural instincts, and hence develop the ego by facilitating a balance between the id, the five thieves, and the superego, the five virtues.

Philosophical Foundations

In light of this emergence of the tripartite approach to the self among different Abrahamic and Eastern religions, it occurs that the universality of this approach is likely not limited to the religious realm. To provide evidence for this suggestion, one can turn to an examination of non-religious thought systems such as Western philosophy. It is well documented that Freud, a student of philosophy himself in his early years at the University of Vienna, was taught and mentored by the philosopher and early psychologist Franz Brentano.³²¹ While ultimately departing from these philosophical studies to pursue medicine, scholars emphasize Freud's exposure to philosophy through this relationship with Brentano as a critical factor in his intellectual development. Thus, it is possible Freud became learned in various philosophies that provided a theoretical background for the development of psychoanalysis. Unsurprisingly, an analysis of works of Western philosophical tradition beginning in Ancient Greece and extending through to 19th century Denmark reveals these hypothesized similarities.

³²¹ A. I. Tauber, "Freud's philosophical path: From a science of mind to a philosophy of human being," *The Scandinavian Psychoanalysis Review* 32 (2009): 32-43.

Ancient Philosophy

Plato. As a student of philosophy, Freud once listed a compilation detailing the Ancient Greek philosophers and their theories as one of his favorite pieces of literature.³²² Coincidentally, in one of the most renowned works from this period, *The Republic*, Plato posited a theory of the soul comprised of three interdependent components. Plato's theory suggested that the most basic and universal part of this soul was most aptly described as appetitive, concerning what he called the "most chief and powerful appetite [of man], because of the intensity of all the appetites connected with eating and drinking and sex and so on."³²³ What could be likened to Freud's conception of the id, Plato's appetitive soul is driven by the pleasure principle, or is "gain loving" and focuses completely on satisfying desires.³²⁴ The secondary aspect of the soul was what he called the 'spirited element', which "we think of as wholly bent upon winning power and victory and a good name. So we might call it honour-loving or ambitious."³²⁵ Paralleling the 'ego', the 'spirited element' of the soul molds the basic desire for pleasure into more realistic aims based on the external world, such as winning power and victory. Finally, Plato speaks of a third aspect of the soul that is "loving [of] knowledge and philosophic."³²⁶ While departing in certain ways from Freud's superego, it shares in

³²² R. Askay, & J. Farquhar, "Apprehending the inaccessible: Freudian psychoanalysis and existential phenomenology" *Existential Analysis*, 24:2 (2006): 369-371.

³²³ Plato, *The Republic*, trans. F. M. Cornford, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1955), 306.

³²⁴ Plato, *The Republic*, 307.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Ibid.

common a concern with morals and ethics that influences the direction of desires and behavior.

Aristotle. Despite taking a more naturalistic approach than Plato, Aristotle maintains a tripartite theory of soul. A main distinction was Aristotle's suggestion of the soul being composed of different of different degrees, or parts, particular to different life forms. Common to all life forms, the function of the first and most universal degree, the 'nutritive soul', was to achieve "reproduction and the use of food; [...] to produce another thing like themselves—in order that they may partake of the everlasting and the divine in so far as they can..."³²⁷ The second degree of soul is the 'sensitive soul', comprised of sense-perception which "consists in being moved and affected, as has been said, for it is thought to be a kind of alteration."³²⁸ Aristotle seems to suggest that learning through this 'sensitive' aspect of the soul can allow a person to be "altered through learning and frequent changes from an opposite disposition."³²⁹

Finally, the most unique part of the soul that makes us human is our faculty of reason, which in this theory was entitled the 'rational soul'. This 'rational soul' is characteristic of "men and anything else which is similar or superior to man, have that of thought and intellect."³³⁰ A crucial aspect of the 'rational soul' was the understanding of ethics and morality, in which it was believed the acquisition of thought "makes a difference in action; and his state,

³²⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean ethics*, trans., W. D. Ross, J. O. Urmson, & J. Barnes, in *A new Aristotle reader*, ed. J. L. Ackrill. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 171.

³²⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean ethics*, 175.

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean ethics*, 170.

while still like what it was, will then be excellence in the strict sense.”³³¹ While less clearly resembling the Freudian division of the mind than Plato’s theory of the human soul, at its most basic level this Aristotelian approach describes the intersection of three aspects of soul with separate functions converging to form the whole person.

Medieval Philosophy

Centuries after the time of Plato and Aristotle, the Christian theologian and early medieval philosopher Augustine of Hippo discussed the centrality of the internal conflicts man faces in experiencing life. In his *Handbook on Faith, Hope, and Love*, Augustine stated, “the cause of evil is the defection of the will of a being who is mutably good from the Good which Immutable.”³³² This excerpt seems to suggest that Augustine was of the opinion that humans, who have the potential for good but are not ‘immutably’ so, evil arises when they stray from the *Good*, or an objective morality and virtuosity. Elaborating further on this idea, Augustine followed with:

“This is the primal lapse of the rational creature, that is, his privation of the good. In train of this there crept in [...] ignorance of the right things to do and also an appetite for noxious things. And these brought along with them [...] error and misery.”³³³

³³¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean ethics*, 429.

³³² Augustine, *Enchiridion on faith, hope, and love*, trans. A. C. Outler, (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1955), 19.

³³³ Ibid.

Thus, when a man ignores or rejects morality and subsequently indulges their appetitive element, the individual becomes immoral and subject to suffering. Within the two excerpts above, an acknowledgement of three separate forces within the individual can be observed; the first two of which is the inherent capacity to desire *noxious things* and the second an awareness of the Good. Finally, there is volition within humans to align themselves with either of these two former elements. When they stray from the Good, a tendency toward indulging desires and pleasures occurs that brings about error and misery.

Freud and Augustine both acknowledge the struggle of man in managing the two separate forces within themselves, the first being concerned with seeking pleasure and the second with higher moral principles. Their views on the lower forces driving humans, what Augustine spoke of as “the desire for noxious things” and Freud as the “id,” appear to be quite similar. Although Augustine framed the pursuit of these pleasures more negatively as one part of what produces evil, both encompass the human drive to pursue and experience pleasure. Alternatively, they both acknowledged the existence of a higher aspect of humans concerning itself with morality; for Augustine this was the Good, and for Freud the superego. While Augustine suggested man’s struggle is being caught between this appetite of worldly things and the proclivity for a higher moral ruling, Freud’s ego acts as this mediator between the superego (i.e., rationality, morality) and the id (i.e., the appetitive element). Both approaches placed well-being as dependent upon the proper harmony between these two conflicting forces. As Freud suggests, the function of the superego is to regulate behavior by punishing deviance with feelings of anxiety. Although Augustine’s ‘Good’ differed in that it was not conceptualized as being a mental agent in itself, the departure of humans from their understanding

of the 'Good' and subsequent preoccupation with 'noxious things' lead to error, misery, and suffering.

Modern Philosophy

Arthur Schopenhauer. Further similarities in philosophy can be found in the work of Arthur Schopenhauer, a 19th century thinker noted for advancing an understanding of the unconscious mind.³³⁴ In his seminal work, *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer expounded a theory of the world as entirely composed of, and explained by, a duality of elements he entitled *Will* and *Representation*. The first element, Will, is an essential life force pervasive in everything in the world, which Schopenhauer describes as "the inmost nature, the kernel, of every particular thing..."³³⁵ This parallels Freud (1940/1989) in his belief that "the power of the id expresses the true purpose of the individual organism's life. This consists in the satisfaction of its innate needs."³³⁶ Further, Schopenhauer (1818/1969) felt that "no possible satisfaction in the world could suffice to still [Will's] longings, set a goal to its infinite cravings."³³⁷ This infinite craving seems to mirror the id as being driven by the pleasure principle, and similarities between the two even extend to how Schopenhauer and Freud believed these mental phenomena were directed.³³⁸ While Freud believed the id contained a powerful drive that

³³⁴ R. Askay, & J. Farquhar, "Apprehending the inaccessible."

³³⁵ A. Schopenhauer, *The world as will and representation*, trans., E. F. J. Payne, (New York, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1969), 143.

³³⁶ S. Freud, *An outline of psycho-analysis*, trans by J. Strachey (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), 17.

³³⁷ A. Schopenhauer, *The world as will and representation*, 382.

³³⁸ R. Gupta, "Freud and Schopenhauer," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 36:4 (1980): 721-728.

manifested in sexual impulses, Schopenhauer felt that “the will-to-live, expresses itself most strongly in the sexual impulse.”³³⁹ To claim this similarity as a novel observation would be disingenuous, as numerous philosophers and psychologists before us have alluded to similarities between the Schopenhauerian Will and the Freudian id since the advent of psychoanalysis.³⁴⁰

Drawing our attention to the other side of the duality, Schopenhauer claims that Representation is the collective knowledge attained about the world and causality. Schopenhauer stated “the motives [...] determining conduct, influence the character through the medium of knowledge” and “Will can be affected only by motives [...] Therefore instruction, improved knowledge and thus influence from without can teach the will that it erred in the means it employed.”³⁴¹ He further noted “outside influence can bring it about that the Will pursues the goal [...] in accordance with its inner nature, by quite a different path [...] from what it did previously.”³⁴² The dynamics of the id and ego can be observed within these three excerpts, in which the initial innate tendencies of a being that might be contextually inappropriate are sublimated into more effective or pragmatic expressions. These similarities between the Schopenhauerian duality and Freud’s tripartite theory of personality are difficult to ignore, and Freud himself once alluded to the connection in one of his own writings.³⁴³ In the essay “A Difficulty in the Path of Psycho-

³³⁹ A. Schopenhauer, *The world as will and representation*, 330.

³⁴⁰ R. Askay and J. Farquhar, “Apprehending the inaccessible.” R. Gupta, “Freud and Schopenhauer.”

³⁴¹ A. Schopenhauer, *The world as will and representation*.

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ A. Nicholls and M. Liebscher, *Thinking the unconscious: Nineteenth-century German thought* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

analysis,” Freud explicitly acknowledges that there are “famous philosophers who may be cited as forerunners – above all the great thinker Schopenhauer, whose unconscious ‘Will’ is equivalent to the mental instincts of psycho-analysis.”³⁴⁴

Søren Kierkegaard. Lastly, similarities can be found in the work of Søren Kierkegaard, a 19th century philosopher and theologian widely considered as the father of Existentialism.³⁴⁵ In what commonly characterizes the existentialists, Kierkegaard had an overt interest in the dynamics of the self and its interaction with the world. For Kierkegaard, the self was “essentially dialectical in character” in that it was behaving and responding in relation to itself.³⁴⁶ Although not as clearly elaborated, Kierkegaard’s dialectical view of man has a striking resemblance to the structure of Freud’s tripartite theory of personality. Kierkegaard believed that “man is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity.”³⁴⁷ Comprised of an *infinetizing impulse* and a *finitizing tendency*, the self is tasked with relating this infinitizing impulse to more realistic and finite ends.³⁴⁸ This infinitizing impulse, which Kierkegaard refers to as the *immediate self*, contains an element called *spirit* that later develops from sexual impulses into the *mediate self*. The third structure in the dialectic of man was the *theological self*, which he describes as

³⁴⁴ S. Freud, “A difficulty in the path of psycho-analysis,” in *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* Vol. 17, 135-144. trans. and ed. J. Strachey (London, UK: Hogarth Press, 1955), 143.

³⁴⁵ J. P. Cole, *The Problematic Self in Kierkegaard and Freud* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1971).

³⁴⁶ S. Kierkegaard, *Sickness unto death*, trans. W. Lowrie (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1941), 60.

³⁴⁷ S. Kierkegaard, *Sickness unto death*, 9.

³⁴⁸ J. P. Cole, *The Problematic Self in Kierkegaard and Freud*.

“man in the sight of god.”³⁴⁹ This theological self provides an outside perspective or standard by which the mediate self may understand itself, and serves as the way the self may judge, direct, and censor itself.

In this development of the mediate self from the immediate self, there is a clear parallel to Freud’s ego, suggested to be a mediator focusing on channeling impulses into acceptable action. As with the ego, the mediate self develops from sexual impulses of the immediate self as one matures. This parallel not only exists in the development of the mediate self from the immediate self, but also in Kierkegaard’s descriptions of external behaviors resulting from the corresponding balance between these two different selves. One such example would be when the immediate self or the infinitizing impulse, a function of which is imagination, was not in relation to the finitizing tendency. Through a lack of understanding of reality and possibility, man would ultimately become lost in fantasy. If the infinitizing impulse did not exist to be in relation to the self, then a man would be “lost in unimaginative immediacy.”³⁵⁰ With the first situation, we can relate this experience to a loss of contact with reality when the id and its libidinal impulses cannot be controlled by a weak-ego.

Final Thoughts on Freud’s Denial

Through the examination of different religious systems and philosophical works, we have shown the tripartite approach to the person emerges across the history of man. From the times of Moses to the Guru Nanak and Plato to Kierkegaard, similarities in various

³⁴⁹ S. Kierkegaard, *Sickness unto death*, 89.

³⁵⁰ J.P. Cole, *The Problematic Self in Kierkegaard in Freud*, 60.

philosophical and theological approaches illustrate Freud's tripartite theory of personality as a seemingly universal anthropological phenomenon. Although the theories and approaches we have reviewed contain important variation and nuances, it appears humans throughout history have consistently acknowledged the struggle to manage and integrate a duality of conflicting internal forces. Whether alternatively characterized as good versus evil, animalistic tendencies versus enlightened awareness, or physiological versus spiritual, man's centrality in synthesizing the balance between these conflicting forces remains the thematic commonality. Despite his early education in philosophy as well as his lifelong intellectual fascination with religion, it is curious that Freud often denied any connection of his approach to philosophy or theology.³⁵¹

Why might Sigmund Freud, once a young and passionate student of philosophy turned neurologist, ignore his possible roots in the works of thinkers such as the ones that we have been examining? Freud consistently asserted that he was strictly pursuing empirical science and following the positivist framework of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which suggests information derived from sensory experiences to be the only source of truth.³⁵² One hypothesis might be that, given the intellectual environment of his time and the possible desire for both legitimacy and respect, he sought to distance his views from any confusion with philosophical or theological approaches. Freud himself felt that philosophical methods erred by "over-estimating the epistemological value of our logical operations and by accepting other sources of knowledge

³⁵¹ A. I. Tauber, "Freud's philosophical path."

³⁵² Ibid.

such as tuition.”³⁵³ However, despite his inclination to cast down philosophy and religion, later in life he admitted the fire and longing for philosophical knowledge from his youth never fully escaped him.³⁵⁴ In light of the scholarly suggestion that philosophy influenced his development and admission of a continued passion for these subjects, it should not be altogether surprising that the basic elements of a core element of Freudian theory emerge in various thought systems in the history of man.

Although an emphasis was placed in this paper on specific religions and philosophers, it would be an injustice to ignore the plethora of others in history that have presented similar representations of the soul, the mind, and the self. Amongst others, scholars suggest that elements of the Freudian approach can also be found in the works of Empedocles of Agrigentum, Friedrich Nietzsche, Immanuel Kant, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and Friedrich Schiller amongst others.³⁵⁵ While a complete review of the possible philosophical and theological forerunners to the tripartite theory of personality go beyond the scope of this paper, we suspect that further investigation would reveal a wide range of examples such as those unearthed here. As this review of thought systems pre-dating psychoanalysis would suggest, it is our assertion that Sigmund Freud’s tripartite approach should rather be viewed as an instantiation of a universal human experience. This universality, which we have illustrated as emergent throughout the history of

³⁵³ S. Freud, “The question of a Weltanschauung,” in *New introductory lectures on psycho-analysis*, trans. and ed. J. Strachey (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990), 197.

³⁵⁴ A. I. Tauber, “Freud’s philosophical path.”

³⁵⁵ R. Askay and J. Farquhar, “Apprehending the inaccessible.” A. I. Tauber, “Freud’s philosophical path.”

man, is the awareness of our own conflicting inner forces and the struggle to manage these forces to adapt to our own existence.

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El Caiman

Antonio Reyes

 This story is true.
 While my uncle prepared nieve
 De nuez, over white, cold cream
 Of sugar, coconuts and almonds, he told
Us about El Caiman, el niño loco del barrio. The uncles, surrounding,
 Nodded in agreement, as if they were there, I was there.
 With my uncle's words, I saw El Caiman in the black window,
 And as dinner carried on with his tale, I became El Caiman.

Before the bus station became a neon supermarket,
Before el *Cine Reforma* became tienda *Del Sol*,
Before all these things out-populated the stone,
Carved cathedrals and poorly painted
Cantinas of Guanajuato,
In the San Javier neighborhood,
I was El Caiman.
To well-combed, uniform-wearing children,
To their mothers walking them to school,
To the tired officers directing lines of green taxis with weak, pointing
fingers,
To the holy sister staring at the dusty, leather-coat-wearing, mullet-
haircut, 1960s Rock 'n' Roll, head-banging banda known as Los
Zorrillos,
To those lonely workers, who've never met my mother or spent the
night briefly holding her,

To that shattered mundo, I was known as El Pinche Loco,
And I do not know why.

Every day I wore jeans that had a few
Tears around the knees and brown shirts
That used to be white like my mother.
My shirts were like my skin, bruised,
Brown, and dark enough to make boots.
When my lips cracked with the dry
Air, I would spit like a fountain
Until my mouth was soft and red.
When the pigeons or streets bored
Me, I would drum my alligator belly and sing
A song my father once taught me.
I do not know the words, I lacked diction,
The ability to properly pronounce, but that could
Not stop the beat a dead man taught me.

If my song was heard in the streets,
Children would laugh as my fingers flapped,
Some would clap, until tall grim shadows
Would walk and pull the children back
Into the crowd of disappointment and disgust.
They would trace me with the word
Loco and I did not know why. I would
Wave my fingers the same way my father
Waved his after a victorious cockfight.
I would try to say "hola" the same way
My brother met smiling girls, but they
Would stare, and my jeans would be wet
And I would walk home carrying Loco
On my shoulders.

Loco knows of the knife cuts the Zorrillos

Gave me outside the bar. Loco knows
Of the pushes I got from passengers
On the bus. Loco knows of my mother,
Her moans, and knows she wears
Lipstick at night. Loco knows
My father bet too big with his rooster
And lost against angry men in suits.
Loco knows he found me before dying.
Loco knows el mundo wants to prick him
Out of me like shanties
Near developing neighborhoods,
Loco knows how el mundo knows of him,
And ignoring is the world's gun against Loco.

I do not know why
I am El Pinche Loco.
One morning, before mass,
Before every church bell in San Javier
Woke the sleeping mundo, I joined
The barking dogs of San Javier,
Cold and free.
I stared at the world, while Loco
Waved with my wet clothes
On the clothesline. I danced
With the church bells and screamed
To the walkers while my own
Bells swayed. La fiesta, my only fiesta,
Fiesta de locos.

The gasping mothers crossed themselves
Like speeding taxis crossing streets
And gasped, *El Pinche Loco*,
The tired officer joined la fiesta
With his whistles and the children laughed.

Todos locos en la locura
Viendo el adios del Pinche loco,
I jumped to the sun and my skin blended
Perfectly with the morning shine over
The brown cerros.
I am El Caiman,
I died El Caiman.
Free like a caiman
In the swamps.

Drips of melted nieve streamed down his plastic cup,
as he explained how the newspaper printed in black,
he died, *un loco*. One uncle said he was shot
In the back by his mother.
We really did not know
El Caiman.

Verano Vida

Antonio Reyes

Me dieron razon que andavas en la tierra Michoacana
"Caminos de Michoacan"

Summer's sunlight over our Asian-crafted,
American-dreamt shoes. From the barred
Windows we see open land *For Sale*,
A soccer field for a moment, filled with wild
Elated escuincles. Some barefoot, toothless,
All drumming dust onto their dirty
Playeras. Flies swarming over their Copa
Mundial, annoyingly buzzing like vuvuzelas,
The swarms agitate the Jehovah and Sunday
School students entering the immortalized
Iglesias. Down the uneven Cuamio road,
A commotion of debates, cerveza
Tall tales and gossip take place outside
The small cantina. Some homeless rancheros
With cereza-like eyes sit inside the shaded
Room. Campesinos and farmers with leather
Skin and black pistols sit outside, underneath
Large umbrellas. The red *Sol* logo on the umbrella
Fades under the sun. A skinny horse next to the crowd
Defecates and stares at los niños,
Screaming, ¡*Gol, no fue falta, me la pelas,*
Penal, la tuya, and *huevos puto!* The locals
Pressing cold, sweaty Caguamas of *Indio, Victoria*

Or *Sol* onto their tired skin, laugh and converse
With deported Chicanos, the visiting
Chilangos, las Comadres returning
From Morelia with unsold mole powder,
Los Compadres returning from Uruapan
In their 90s pick-ups, Los Carteles,
Hidden among them, and the Cantineros
Cobrando past tabs and serving them all
Below a bright Coca-Cola billboard.
Fruitful moments blending with mariachi
And corridos de Michoacan ramps on,
Until a cool gust ends the joy,
And as the bright moonlight
Marches into the sky, the local patrol,
Young military and men dressed like agents
Fall in at various hours.
Never running into each other,
Unless they have to take down
Or pick up a body. By then most of los
Borrachos have left before the moon could
Hang over their laughs, mumbling songs and guilt.
The kids have left the field, groups of teenagers
Have set hut around the dusty ground.
A perfect cushion for couples to smoke,
Comadriar y andar de calientes.
Los sicarios are still in la cantina and running
Their endless tab. The bartender waits
For a heavy stare from them to know
When to close, serve another round
Or pay an illegal tax. The old men with their pistols
Are still in la cantina, drinking lemonade
Instead. They watch over the bartender
Like an angel, but like everyone sleeping
In their home tonight, they are scared. I left

Michoacan before I could hear their fear
From their beating hearts. I never stay to see
The moon over the monarch-filled hills
Of Michoacan because I am scared, too.

*But it is true,
I, too, was and was not
In Michoacan.*